



LESSON PLAN: Partisans and Armed Resistance

1 Begin this lesson by reviewing the definitions of spiritual and armed resistance and provide examples of each.

2 Introduce students to **Mira Shelub (bio)** and **Sol Liber (bio)** and then show their clips of testimony. Follow with a discussion using the questions below.

- Were you surprised to learn that there were female partisans? Why or why not?
- What do you learn about the partisans from Mira Shelub’s testimony?
- What does Mira say was the goal of the partisans?
- What do you learn about armed resistance in the Warsaw ghetto from Sol Liber’s testimony?
- Both Mira and Sol give insight into how resistance during the Holocaust didn’t mean “winning,” but each and every act remained significant. How were the acts of resistance that Mira and Sol describe “significant”?

3 Prepare students for the material on partisans by asking the questions below.

- What visual image do you have when you hear the word “forest¹”?
- Is a forest a protected or an exposed place?
- What are some possible dangers and difficulties that someone would face if he or she were to survive for any length of time in a forest?

4 Distribute the **Partisans** handout and instruct students to read the material and identify textual evidence to support their responses to the questions below.

- What dilemmas did a Jewish person face when thinking about whether he or she should flee to the forest?
- What were the main differences between a Jewish partisan and a non-Jewish partisan?

¹ Having maps and photographs of the forests of Eastern Europe available for students to see will enhance their understanding of the partisans’ struggle. It is important that students understand that the European forests that the partisans faced are probably very unlike forests that they know. These large, dense woodlands and swamps cover thousands of square miles, and because of the harsh and extreme climate in the winter, there are no edible plants.

- According to information provided in the text, why was it so difficult for people to flee to the forest? Why was it impossible for most Jews to flee to the forest?
- Why did partisans feel it necessary to keep their location secret—even from local farmers and peasants?

5 Distribute or show students the **Pronouncement by Abba Kovner** handout, a pronouncement written and read by Kovner at a meeting in Vilna on January 1, 1942. To provide context, explain that Abba Kovner was a young Lithuanian Jew who was a leader of a youth movement that hoped to take part in building a Jewish state in Israel. A young activist in the ghetto, he eventually became the leader of an armed underground. After a wave of murder during the second half of 1941, in which 2/3 of the Jews of Vilna were killed, Kovner was convinced that the Germans had a plan to murder all Jews everywhere. He had no real solid proof, but a strong feeling based on the events that had occurred in Vilna. Thus, the underground members decided to enter the ghetto and when it was about to be liquidated, they hoped to lead an armed uprising². After reading the pronouncement together, have a discussion based on the following questions:

- To whom is Abba Kovner directing his message? What specific words in the text support your answer? Explain why you think this was his audience.
- What are Kovner’s arguments in favor of resistance?
- Analyze the following statement from the text: “It is better to die as free fighters than to live at the mercy of murderers.” What was Kovner’s central argument?
- Why do you think that most Jews who participated in the revolts were youth?

6 Explain to students that, in addition to the underground partisan resistance that occurred in the villages and countryside of Nazi-occupied territories, there were forms of active resistance including armed revolts that were organized in the ghettos, concentration camps, and even extermination camps during the Holocaust. Stress that it was very difficult for Jews to conduct armed resistance, and have students brainstorm possible conditions or other factors that made armed resistance so difficult. To help put this in context, tell students that the German army in World War II was a very powerful army, and it took nearly six years from the start of the war and an effort unparalleled in history to defeat it.

7 Distribute the **Armed Resistance in the Ghettos and Camps** handout. Have students read the information aloud or in small groups. Discuss the reading with emphasis on the following questions:

- What motivated Jews to fight the Nazis?
- How were their motives similar or different from other examples of resistance that you know about?
- What does it mean to “offer resistance for its own sake”?

² Make sure that students understand that most of the Jewish population—parents of children, the children themselves, the elderly, the sick, and the millions who were murdered before conditions became ripe for revolt—could not take part in the armed uprising.



After a general discussion of resistance in the camps and ghettos, distribute the **Personal Testimonies** handout. After the class has read the handout (either in groups, individually, aloud, or for homework), have them respond to the following questions, citing specific information and examples from the text to support their answers whenever possible.

- What difficulties and dilemmas did the fighters face in obtaining weapons?
- What expressions does Mordechai Anielewicz use to describe the revolt?
- To whom does Anielewicz address his message? Why do you think this is his audience?
- Why do you think it was important to Anielewicz that news of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising be broadcast over the underground radio?
- What descriptive word or term would you use to describe this revolt?
- Why was it important for Zalman Gradowski to leave written testimonies behind?
- How would you title the Zalman Gradowski passage?
- What, in your opinion, makes someone a hero? Based on your definition of “hero,” is the man who wrote these lines a hero?
- Antek Zuckerman said about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: “If there’s a school to study the human spirit, there it [the Uprising] should be a major subject.” From the statement, what importance does Zuckerman assign to the Uprising? Cite other examples studied in this lesson that could also be used to support the statement.



Assign students the writing prompt below as a culminating activity for this lesson or unit.

PROMPT: Sometimes people who have not studied the Holocaust will ask, “Why didn’t Jews fight back?” In his testimony, Roman Kent addresses this very question when he says, “I’ve heard so many times [it] being said that Jews didn’t do anything, that they went like sheep to the ovens, but it’s not true...”

Based on materials studied in this lesson, prepare a written argument to support the claim that Jews did resist the Nazi regime in a variety of ways. The argument should introduce the topic, establish the significance of the claim, and provide relevant and sufficient evidence from primary and secondary sources to support your argument.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 60-90 MINUTES