



LESSON PLAN: The Decision to Rescue

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students investigate different ways in which non-Jews intervened to save the lives of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Through case studies, survivor testimony, and analysis of texts, students identify the various factors that influenced rescuers to act and explore the moral complexities of their behavior.

PART 1: WHAT LED SOME PEOPLE TO RESCUE JEWISH PEOPLE DURING THE HOLOCAUST?

Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.

1 In small groups, students explore one of the case studies below, which all highlight a pivotal moment in the lives of ordinary individuals faced with the decision to help Jewish victims of the Holocaust or remain uninvolved. Groups discuss the situation and record their thoughts in response to the questions at the bottom of the handout.

- *Case Study: Arie Van Mansum*
- *Case Study: Renee Scott*
- *Case Study: Roddie Edmonds*

2 The class gathers and discusses their reactions to the case studies, especially the factors that might have led each individual to help or remain uninvolved.

3 Students watch testimony clips and review the biographical information of the individuals profiled in the case studies, who all made the decision to come to the rescue of Jewish people: **Arie Van Mansum**, **Renee Scott**, and **Roddie Edmonds (bio only)**. As they watch and review, students take notes on the **Testimony Reflections** handout, found at the beginning of this unit¹.

4 After viewing the testimony clips and reading the bios, students journal and/or participate in a whole group discussion in response to some of the following questions:

- What motivated each individual to help? What personal values or other factors led them to take action?
- Did each of these individuals set out to help Jewish people prior to their involvement? How did their participation evolve?
- What were the risks involved in each person's decision to help? What do you think enabled them to take such great risks?
- What consequences did Arie and Renee suffer for their rescue efforts? Do they seem to regret or feel right about the choices they made? What do you take away from this?
- How have the stories of these individuals and the choices they made affected you?

¹ *It is often beneficial for students to watch each clip twice, completing the **Testimony Reflections** handout during the second viewing.*

5 The handout, *Those Who Dared to Rescue*, is distributed. Individually or in pairs, students read and annotate the handout by highlighting examples of factors that influenced rescuers and jotting their reactions in the margins. The class then discusses some of the following questions:

- What were some of the conditions that made rescue so rare and exceptional during the Holocaust?
- What forms did rescue take during the Holocaust? Did any of these types of rescue surprise you? Explain.
- What were the motivations of the rescuers profiled in the handout?
- What risks did rescuers face? How did they manage these risks?
- What are some of the basic human needs that rescuers needed to provide for Jewish victims? What difficulties did this present to rescuers?
- In the handout, Elie Wiesel is quoted as saying, “The gates of compassion seem to have been closed...the outside world adopted an attitude of either complicity or indifference.” What led some to overcome indifference and act with compassion?
- Would you characterize those who rescued Jews as heroes? Why?

PART 2: WERE RESCUERS ORDINARY PEOPLE OR EXTRAORDINARY HEROES?

Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.

6 Students continue to think about the motivations of rescuers and the notion of heroism by analyzing a speech by Miep Gies, one of Anne Frank’s rescuers. The handout *Anne Frank’s Legacy* is distributed and students read it individually or as a class. Students then conduct a “one-question interview” using the following process:

- a) In small groups, students identify a central theme in the speech and encapsulate it in a word (e.g., heroism, empathy, indifference, othering, risk, remorse).
- b) Groups generate one question related to their theme to pose to others. The question should have a direct connection to the reading. (E.g., Miep says she was not a hero, just a very common person. What do you think?)
- c) Students write their question at the top of a sheet of paper. They circulate around the room and find a partner (not from their small group). Partners interview one another by posing their question and recording a summary of the response. Students repeat this process until they have interviewed at least three peers.
- d) Students return to their small groups and discuss the responses they received to their questions. At the bottom of the page on which they took notes, students write a brief reflection on the conclusions they can draw from their interviews.

7 The class gathers to discuss the conclusions they drew from their one-person interviews and the insights they took away from Miep Gies’ speech.

8 Students are assigned one of the following exercises in order to deepen their understanding that rescuers were ordinary people with human faults even though they performed extraordinary acts.

- a) **IWitness – Oskar Schindler: A Flawed Hero:** In this web-based activity, students investigate the ethical complexity of Schindler by analyzing testimony, engaging in written reflection, and developing a word cloud representing what they have learned².

² To use *IWitness* activities, teachers must set up a class within the system and assign work to students, who then create their own account to access the assignment.

b) **Leopold Socha**³: Socha was a sewer worker in Lwów (pronounced Lvov), then in Poland, who hid and cared for a group of Jewish people in the sewers beneath the city streets. Though he engaged in illegal activity during his lifetime and held some antisemitic views, Socha evolved to care deeply about the people in his charge. Students follow the steps below to investigate Socha’s story⁴.

- Watch the testimony clip and read the biography of **Kristine Keren**, who was 8 years old when she hid with her family in Lwów’s sewers. Fill in the **Testimony Reflections** handout as you view.
- Move around the room and read the excerpts from **The Girl in the Green Sweater** by Krystyna Chiger (Kristine Keren). As you read each, participate in a “group annotation” by attaching a sticky note with your reaction to the passage and/or your classmates’ comments.
- Divide into small groups and discuss some of the following questions:
 - i. Did Socha’s troubled background surprise you? How did this affect your perception of this particular rescuer and rescuers in general?
 - ii. What is redemption and what role did it play in Socha’s decisions? Do you believe that people can transform over time? Explain.
 - iii. How did Krystyna’s parents know that Socha saw them as “human beings instead of a group of desperate Jews”? How does this relate to other rescuers you have learned about?
 - iv. Rescuers are often described as selfless (concerned more with others’ needs than one’s own). Would you characterize Socha as selfless? Why?

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As a summative task, students create a “3 x 3” journal addressing the question below, posed by Elie Wiesel in one of the unit readings. The journal is a grid that includes the names of three rescuers about whom students have learned in the first column, and unique qualities or motivations for each in the other columns. Students cite evidence from unit sources to support their ideas.

“Only a few had the courage to care – these few men and women were vulnerable, afraid, helpless. What made them different from their fellow citizens?”

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 120 - 150 MINUTES

³ In preparation for this activity, the excerpts from the handout, **The Girl in the Green Sweater**, are enlarged and posted at four different stations.

⁴ Students may wonder what happened to Socha after WWII. Shortly after the war ended, in 1946, Socha and his daughter were riding their bicycles when a Soviet military truck came careening toward them. He steered his bicycle in her direction to knock her out of the way. He managed to save his daughter but he was killed in the accident. This final act of rescue is truly reflective of Socha’s character.