



LESSON PLAN: Righteous Among the Nations

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students learn about the designation, “Righteous Among the Nations,” and its significance in the history of the Holocaust. Using visual history testimony, primary source documents, and other texts, students investigate the actions and impact of rescuers designated as “Righteous,” and inquire into the importance of their stories in today’s world.

PART 1: WHO ARE THE “RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS”?

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

1 Students write the term *selfless* in the middle of a sheet of paper. They engage in a brief free-write in response to the following questions: “What does it mean to do something truly *selfless*? Is it important to be recognized for selfless acts?” Students write narratively, free associate, and/or sketch their thoughts and then share with a partner. The class learns that they will be investigating Holocaust rescuers who have been recognized for their selfless acts with the designation, “Righteous Among the Nations.”

2 Students watch a testimony clip of a rescuer designated as “Righteous Among the Nations”: **Irene Gut-Opdyke**. As they watch the clip, students take notes on the *Testimony Reflections* handout.

3 After viewing the testimony clip, students journal or participate in a whole group discussion in response to some of the following questions:

- Though Irene appeared Aryan (with blonde hair, blue eyes, and the Germanic name, Gut), she was able to build trust with the Jewish people. What qualities in Irene do you think led them to trust her?
- What experiences did Irene have that led her to want to help the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution?
- What did the order to “thin them out” mean for the Jewish people in the ghetto? How did Irene respond when she overheard this information?
- What were the challenges and risks Irene faced as she established the “grapevine information center”?
- What emotions come through in this interview? How did Irene’s story and actions make you feel?

4 Students learn that Irene was designated as a “Righteous Among the Nations” and are provided with the following background information¹:

In 1953, the Knesset (Israeli parliament) passed the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority Law, which created Yad Vashem. The law mandated that Yad Vashem identify and recognize non-Jews who had risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews in countries that had been under Nazi rule or that had collaborated with the German regime. In order to recognize people as Righteous, Yad Vashem set up a public Commission, headed by a Supreme Court Justice, which examines each case and is responsible for granting the title. Those recognized receive a medal and a certificate of honor and their names are commemorated on the Mount of Remembrance in Jerusalem. The medal is inscribed with a phrase from the Talmud, a Jewish religious text, that says, “He who saves one life saves the world entire.” The historical account of the Holocaust would not be complete without the extraordinary stories of the “Righteous Among the Nations.”

5 In pairs, students discuss what they think the criteria should be for receiving the “Righteous” designation based on what they have learned about rescuers thus far. The handout, **Yad Vashem Criteria for “Righteous Among the Nations”** is then distributed and the class reviews together. Students discuss the following questions:

- Do you agree with the “Righteous Among the Nations” criteria? Is there anything you would add? Explain.
- Did you think the number of individuals identified as “Righteous Among the Nations” would be higher? Why?
- What surprises you about the information on the chart listing the “Righteous” by country? Does this data change your impression of certain nations or raise any questions for you?
- What does it mean to an individual to be acknowledged for selfless and life-savings acts? What does it mean for the community around that person? How does this relate to a community that you belong to or know about?
- What does the establishment of a project like this say about how victims of the Holocaust attempted to pay tribute to people who stood by their side at a time of persecution and tragedy?

PART 2: WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMEMORATING THE STORIES OF THE “RIGHTEOUS”?

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

6 Students learn that they will investigate a “Righteous Among the Nations” designee in detail, and create a “one-pager” reflecting their actions and impact. The “one-pager” is a physical or digital page on which students convey their unique understandings and insights in a creative fashion that incorporates textual and visual elements. The “one-pager” for this assignment:

¹ The following people and groups, featured in this unit, have also been designated as “Righteous Among the Nations”: Arie Van Mansum, Roddie Edmonds, Miep Gies, Oskar Schindler, Leopold Socha, and the Danish underground.

DEMONSTRATES:	INCORPORATES:	COMMUNICATES:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “Righteous” criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Active attempt to save a Jew – Mortal risk – Humanitarian motives • And, in addition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The impact of the actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quotes • Symbols, images, or illustrations • Text with key information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As interpretation rather than summary of events • Impressions, feelings, and original thoughts • Questions raised by the investigation

7 Students work on their investigations individually, in pairs, or small groups. They are assigned one of the options below – a class investigation of the same individual using the handouts provided or an independent investigation of different individuals using online resources.

- Class investigation of Raoul Wallenberg**, a Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Jews in German-occupied Hungary by issuing protective passports and sheltering them in buildings designated as Swedish territory:
 - Read the handout, *Budapest: Historical Background*
 - Read the handout, *A Swedish Rescuer in Budapest* and note the actions and impact of the subject as well as your reactions
 - View the **testimonies** of Vera Goodkin, who was saved by Wallenberg, and Per Anger, a Swedish diplomat who served with Wallenberg. Use the *Testimony Reflections* handout to record reactions and ideas.
- Independent investigation** of a subject from the “Righteous Among the Nations” **Featured Stories** page:
 - Choose a subject that includes a collection of photos, videos, and documents.
 - Read the story on the main page and note the actions and impact of the subject as well as your reactions.
 - Observe at least one photo and note what it reveals about the subject’s life or impact.
 - View at least one video and note what it reveals about the subject’s life or impact.
 - Analyze at least one document and note what it reveals about the actions and impact of the subject.

8 Students’ “one-pagers” are displayed in a gallery online or in the classroom. Half of the class stands (physically or virtually) by their work and provides a brief tour or explanation of their “one-pagers” to the other half of the class, who circulates and observes. Students then switch roles so that the tour guides become the observers. Students observe at least three of their classmates’ “one-pagers” in this way.

9 Following the gallery walk, the class debriefs using the following questions:

- Is the designation of “righteous” a useful one to bestow on certain people? Why?
- Are rescuers heroes or ordinary people who performed heroic acts? Is there a difference? Explain.
- How did rescuers make an impact beyond the individuals they helped directly?
- Do the “righteous” stories matter in today’s world? Explain.
- What is the importance of commemorating the stories of the “righteous” and other rescuers?

10 As a summative task, students respond to the Talmudic idea, “Whoever saves one life saves the world entire.” Using evidence from unit sources, they list at least five ways in which the behaviors of rescuers had an impact beyond the individuals whose lives they saved.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 60 MINUTES + TIME FOR RESEARCH PROJECT