



RESCUE AND RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS

“You cannot help the whole world. But those that are within your reach, you can treat and respect as human beings.”

– RABBI BENT MELCHIOR, JEWISH SURVIVOR

PREPARING TO TEACH THIS UNIT

Below is information to keep in mind when teaching the content in this unit. This material is intended to help teachers consider the complexities of teaching about rescuers and aid providers and to deliver accurate and sensitive instruction.

- 1** It is important for students to understand that the rescuers they will learn about in this unit were the exception rather than the rule. During the Holocaust, six million Jews were murdered, among them 1.5 million children. It is unknown how many people managed to survive through the situations described in this unit, but it is known that they were only the fortunate few. While it is natural to relate to the inherent hope of successful rescue stories, students should be reminded that most rescue attempts failed and the victim, and in some cases both the rescuer and the victim, were murdered when they were caught.
- 2** Information about rescuers like the “Righteous Among the Nations” should be taught within the larger context of the Holocaust. Learning about rescuers without focusing on other aspects of the Holocaust might give students the impression that rescuers were the majority, when in fact they were a very small portion of the population. The Holocaust is a grim reminder of how indifference can become the norm. Reviewing rescue attempts in light of the millions of bystanders makes this unit even more important to study.
- 3** A rescuer might seem to students as a perfect person with “angelic” characteristics. This can cause students to feel distant from the rescuer’s acts. Discuss with students that those individuals identified as “Righteous Among the Nations” (e.g., Oskar Schindler) were “normal” people with human faults even though they performed “righteous acts.” In doing so, students can better relate to the rescuers and begin to see that ordinary people can perform extraordinary acts, and such actions can mean the difference between life and death.
- 4** Though there is no universal set of rescuer characteristics, research on the motivations of rescuers have pointed to some patterns. Rescuers were often raised by parents who taught acceptance, favored moral lessons over punishment, and modeled caring behavior. Interviews with hundreds of rescuers reveal that most were empathetic, independent thinkers, and followed their own values even when they conflicted with public opinion. These internal qualities were found to be more motivating than certain external factors, such as religion, profession, social class, or even prior experience with Jewish people. Though each rescuer was unique, their commonalities may be instructive for students by highlighting qualities that we are all capable of developing.

ABOUT THIS UNIT

INTRODUCTION

This unit provides students with an opportunity to learn about the types of rescue that occurred in Nazi-occupied Europe and to consider the moral and ethical choices that non-Jews made in order to help Jews survive. Students analyze visual history testimony, primary source material, and various texts in order to deepen their understanding of the factors that influenced individuals, groups, and societies to act on behalf of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Throughout the unit, students have an opportunity to consider the price of apathy and indifference in the face of injustice.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What difference can one person make in the lives of others?
- In what ways were rescuers both extraordinary and ordinary?
- How can studying the choices of rescuers during the Holocaust influence our choices today?
- What is the price to society of apathy and indifference in the face of injustice?

OBJECTIVES

Students will

- Identify forms of assistance provided to Jews by non-Jews during the Holocaust.
- Analyze the motivations of non-Jewish rescuers in their efforts to help Jews survive during the Holocaust.
- Evaluate the moral and ethical choices individuals and groups made when deciding whether or not to help Jews.
- Identify the risks involved when non-Jews helped Jews.
- Interpret visual history testimony and other primary source material to understand the factors that influenced rescuers.
- Discuss how commemorating the acts of Holocaust rescuers can counter complacency and hate in today's world.