



LESSON PLAN: Case Study – Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students investigate the Warsaw ghetto as a site of resistance. They explore the factors leading to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and its significance to Jewish residents of Warsaw. Using texts, video, and visual history testimony, students examine other examples of spiritual, cultural, and armed resistance and consider how these forms of resistance were interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

PART 1: WHAT WERE JEWISH PEOPLE FIGHTING FOR IN THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING?

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

1 Prior to learning about resistance efforts in the Warsaw Ghetto, students share their prior knowledge about the formation of and conditions in the ghetto. **The Warsaw Ghetto** handout is either projected or distributed, and the class reviews this brief background. Students learn that they will study the Warsaw ghetto as a site of resistance, and examine some of the many ways in which the Jewish residents fought for their dignity and their lives¹.

2 The handout **Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto** is distributed. Students watch the Video Toolbox segment on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, from 7:52-13:50. As they view, students add notes to the handout. Following the video, the class discusses some of the following questions.

- What factors led to the understanding among ghetto residents that death was certain?
- How was the deportation of July 1942 a turning point? How did it change those who remained in the ghetto?
- Sol Liber quotes an underground leader as saying, “I know we’re not going to win, but we’re not going to go anymore.” If the Jews knew winning was impossible, what were they fighting for?
- The narrator asks if the youth movements had the right to decide the fate of all ghetto residents by choosing to fight. How would you answer this question?
- What was the “choiceless choice” that ghetto residents faced?
- What was your reaction to the description of the girl throwing grenades and Molotov cocktails from the roof? What feelings do you think actions like this inspired in ghetto residents?
- What was the significance of the Polish and Jewish flags being raised in the ghetto?
- What was destroyed along with the Great Synagogue on May 16, 1943?

OPTION: Instead of or in addition to the Video Toolbox, students read the handout **Armed Resistance in the Ghettos and Camps**².

¹ It is recommended that Unit 4, *The Ghettos*, be taught prior to this lesson so that students have a context for the brutal repression and severe conditions that gave rise to different forms of resistance.

² It is important to note that most Jews – children, caretakers of children, the aged, the sick, the injured, and the multitudes who had already been murdered – could not take part in this type of uprising. During the Holocaust, spiritual resistance was often the only possible way to oppose Nazi tyranny.

PART 2: HOW WERE DIFFERENT FORMS OF RESISTANCE IN THE WARSAW GHETTO LIKE LINKS IN A CHAIN?

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

- 3** Students continue to investigate examples of resistance in the Warsaw ghetto. Stations are set up as indicated in the **Warsaw Ghetto Stations** handout and a copy of the handout is placed in each area for student reference. In small groups, students visit at least two stations. For each, they fill out the **Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto** handout.
- 4** New small groups are formed that contain a mix of students who visited different stations. In those groups, students share highlights and insights from their investigation, and discuss the following questions:
 - What drove the Jewish people of Warsaw to resist?
 - What did you find to be most extraordinary about these resistance efforts? Explain your reaction.
- 5** As a summative task, students reflect on Vladka Meed’s quote in the handout **A Chain of Resistance**. The handout is projected and read aloud. Individually, students journal in response to the following prompt: “What is the relationship between physical and spiritual resistance? How are they connected like links in a chain?” Students draw upon lesson sources as evidence for their ideas. As time allows, students share and discuss their reflections in pairs, groups, or as a class³.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 120 MINUTES

³ Teachers may utilize a clip (13:54-15:12) of the video toolbox with this article.