

RESISTANCE

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Teacher's Discussion Guide

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

World War Two began on September 1, 1939, when the German army launched a massive attack, or *Blitzkrieg*, against the neighboring country of Poland. Although Poland attempted to defend itself, the country formally surrendered on September 27, only twenty-six days after the war began.

The Germans shifted the capital of their General Government from Warsaw, Poland down to Krakow, and thus wanted to make Krakow *Judenfrei* (free of Jews). Fifteen thousand Jewish people were allowed to remain, though they would be forced to move within the Podgorze Ghetto of Krakow, an area that would soon become sealed off – no Jewish people were allowed to enter or leave without permission.

The rest of the people were supposed to be expelled from Krakow. Among those sent away were many of the teenagers, those who were old enough to take care of themselves but not old enough to deserve the few jobs needed by the adults.

These teenagers found themselves in the Polish countryside, now surrounded by a largely anti-Semitic population and occupied by Nazi troops. Many of them found their way to the nearby village of Kopaliny, where their former scout leaders, Shimshon and Gusta Draenger, maintained a small farm.

The Draengers took the teenagers in and for a while they were relatively sheltered from the war. Gradually, they began to hear of what was happening to their families back in the ghettos – of the *aktions*, the resettlements, and the death camps. One evening, the Draengers and a few other adults, sat down with the teenagers and asked them to make a decision.

Either way they answered, the teens were warned they would most likely die. If they did nothing, eventually their farm would be raided and the teenagers would die on their knees to the Nazis. Or, they could fight back.

Their decision was unanimous. Calling themselves Akiva after a famous Rabbi, one focus of this new resistance movement was to break through the isolation of the ghettos. A few specially chosen people who could pass as Polish would have to approach the Nazi officer at the gate and find a way inside.

But who could you use for such a dangerous task? No males – because of the circumcision, it was too easy to identify them as Jewish. No mothers – they had work duties or children to care for. It left only one demographic: teenage girls.

With false Polish papers, these girls, known as couriers, would smuggle into the ghettos food, money, information and weapons. Once inside, they must convince their people that they are Jewish, because they would often smuggle someone out to a safehouse. These girls knew they would likely be caught one day and when they were, they were sworn never to reveal any information about the resistance, no matter what happened to them.

RESISTANCE spends most of its time in three ghettos. The first is Podgorze Ghetto in Krakow. This was sealed off in early 1941 and liquidated two years later, in March 1943.

Second is Lodz Ghetto in Lodz, Poland. The head of the Judenrat there, Chaim Rumkowski, believed the way to preserve his people the longest was to make it an efficient work camp. To that end, he made arrangements for the children to be deported so that resources could be focused on work duties. Lodz was sealed on May 1, 1940. It was liberated by the Soviets on January 9, 1945. Only 877 Jewish people remained from the 250,000 who had been there since its opening in 1939.

Third was the largest ghetto in Poland, the Warsaw Ghetto. On January 18, 1943, German soldiers entered with the intention of removing 8,000 Jewish people to the death camps. The Jewish resistance in the ghetto fought back and the Germans left, but everyone knew they would return, and with force.

Although a few different resistance groups participated in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the 750 fighters were coordinated and led by Mordechai Anielewicz, a twenty-four-year old man whose job prior to the war had been as a job counselor. The goal of the uprising never was to defeat the Nazis. The fighters hoped to draw the world's attention to their plight and to spawn other uprisings throughout the war torn countries, in ghettos, work and death camps, and among the civilian populations.

The Uprising began on the night before Passover, April 19, 1943. It lasted for twenty-eight days, longer than the entire country of Poland held out against the Nazis. The Uprising also met its goal. Not long after, other uprisings were seen in Treblinka, Sobibor, and elsewhere. Most importantly, it proved to the world that the Jewish people fought for their lives.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Cyganeria: SIGH-gan-air-ee-a

Akiva: ah-KEE-va

Bedzin: BED-zin

Bialystok: BEE-al-ee-stock

Treblinka: Tre-BLINK-a

Sobibor: sew-bib-ore

Auschwitz: OWSH-vitz

Chaya: HI-ya (guttural on the first syllable)

Aharon “Dolek” Liebeskind: ah-ha-RONE DO-lek LEEB-is-kin-d

Justyna “Gusta” Draenger: just-EE-na GOO-sta DRAIN-ger

Shimshon Draenger: SHIM-shon DRAIN-ger

Kopaliny Farm: COPE-a-lin-ee

Mordecai Anielewicz: MORE-de-hai an-YELL-o-vich

Mila Street: MEE-la

VOCABULARY WORDS

Holocaust (n): The state-sponsored, systemic persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and those who cooperated with it.

Part 1

Isolation (n): A place or situation where one is cut off from others.

Courier (n): A messenger who carries and delivers items or documents.

Slaughter (v): A cruel means of killing, usually in large numbers.

Exterminate (v): To completely destroy.

Meticulous (adj): Showing precise and careful attention to details.

Contempt (n): A feeling of extreme disrespect of another person, feeling they are worthless.

Gangly (adj): A person who is tall, thin, and sometimes awkward in movement.

Inevitable (adj): Cannot be avoided.

Formidable (adj): Large or powerful enough to inspire respect, or even fear.

Annihilation (n): Complete destruction.

Part 2

Exuberant (adj): Great energy and enthusiasm.

Skirmish (n): Usually a fight between a small group of people, at an unplanned time and place.

Cynical (adj): A negative, distrustful, or doubtful opinion of others.

Allotment (n): A person's share or allowance.

Coy (adj): Pretending to be shy or quiet as a means of attracting someone.

Dingy (adj): Dull, somber, and gloomy. Often describes a place.

Translucent (adj): Slightly see-through.

Rickety (adj): A structure that is likely to collapse.

Contraband (n): Items that are illegal.

Quell (v): To end something, often by use of force.

Part 3

Aversion (n): A strong dislike or desire to avoid.

Matzos (n): A thin, crisp bread without leavening, traditionally part of the Jewish Passover.

Pummel (v): To strike repeatedly with force.

Dilapidated (adj): Run down or in a state of ruin due to neglect.

Audible (adj): Can be heard.

Uninhabitable (adj): A place where a person can not or should not live.

Threadbare (adj): Clothing that has aged and become thin and ragged.

Atrocities (n): Acts of extreme evil, usually involving violence.

Fetid (adj): An extremely unpleasant smell.

Elude (v): The skillful act of escaping or avoiding danger, or another person.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part 1

1. When we first meet Chaya, she is trying to smuggle food into the Tarnow Ghetto. She describes some of her rules for smuggling, such as never hiding anything in her sleeves. What other rules do you think would be important?
2. In Chapter Three, Chaya and the other teens at Kopaliny Farm have to make a decision about whether to form a resistance movement. What are the reasons for and against each choice? How would you have voted?
3. Do you believe the attack on the Cyganeria Café was a success or a failure for the Akiva Resistance group?

Part 2

1. After they escape from the train, Esther reminds Chaya that those who hate the Jewish people are not only the Nazi soldiers, but sometimes it was people in their own country. Esther believes the hatred must first be stopped closer to home. What can young people do today to stop hatred in our own cities and states?
2. In the Lodz Ghetto, Chaya and Esther meet Avraham and other teenagers who resist the Nazis in a very different way. What do you believe their resistance is? Was their form of resistance equally important to what Chaya and Ester were doing?
3. On the road to Warsaw, Chaya and Esther meet a kind Polish man named Wit who offers them a loaf of bread and protection on his farm. Wit explains that many people like him cannot fully understand what is happening to the Jews because it was not happening to them. What are some examples in your life of trying to understand a problem that is happening to someone else?

Part 3

1. By part three of the book, we begin to see that Esther is a much stronger person than we originally believed. Where do we see indications of her strength?
2. Yitzhak tells Chaya that part of the reason he sings is because art proves he is human. What did he mean by that and why was it important for him to think of himself that way?
3. Even though the Jewish fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto knew how their story would end, they considered themselves free. Why do you think that was?
4. What do you think Chaya will do after the book ends?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Make a map of Poland identifying the major ghettos and camps. Include the dates when each was established, and when each was either liquidated or liberated.
2. Learn more about any of the people or groups briefly mentioned in the book, such as Dolek Liebeskind, Shimshon and Gusta Draenger, The White Rose Movement, Mordechai Aniel_, etc. What qualities did all of these people have in common?
3. Make a timeline of World War 2 highlighting the events that most interest you.
4. Make a list of the many different types of resistance described in the book, including those of both Jewish and Polish persons. Let each member of your class or book group discuss which type of resistance they would feel best suited for.
5. Create a piece of art that illustrates your favorite scene in the book, or what you consider the book's most important scene. Why did you choose this particular scene?

DID YOU KNOW?*

- It is estimated that 6 million Jews were killed during the Holocaust. Additionally, many mentally or physically handicapped people, homosexuals, and Roma (gypsy) people were killed.
- Approximately 91% of the Jewish population in Poland was killed during the Holocaust, and about 1/3 of all Jews worldwide.
- A few of the famous Jewish people to have survived the Holocaust, or to have escaped Europe before the Holocaust include physicist Albert Einstein, actress Audrey Hepburn, and Margret and H.A. Rey, authors of the *Curious George* books.
- There are still some people today who attempt to deny the Holocaust ever happened, despite overwhelming evidence and personal testimony of the survivors.
- Germany surrendered to the Western Allies on May 7, 1945, and to the Soviet Union on May 9, 1945. Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945, ending World War Two.

*Sources: *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Biography.com*

OTHER TEACHING RESOURCES

<https://www.ushmm.org/educators/lesson-plans>

<http://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans.html>

<http://remember.org/educate>