

## Do Not Stand Idly By

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What human rights should be guaranteed to all people?
- Who is responsible for protecting human rights?
- How can individuals and groups protect others' human rights?

### Overview

This lesson will prompt students to consider the proper roles of individuals and world governments in defending the human rights of other people, as well as the moral courage necessary to take action. Students will brainstorm basic rights that they believe should be guaranteed to all human beings before viewing oral history testimonies that reveal many instances in which various groups of people have been deprived of those very rights, from the Holocaust to the Rwandan Genocide. Students will then consider what it takes to intervene on behalf of another's human rights and how they themselves can help protect the fundamental rights of all people.

### Target Audience

Middle School U.S. or World History

### Activity Duration

Two 45–60 minutes class periods

### Enduring Understandings

- All people everywhere have certain basic human rights.
- Throughout history and around the world, governments and groups have denied other groups and individuals these basic rights.
- It takes special courage to intervene to help persecuted people, but inaction and apathy on the part of witnesses allow injustices to happen.

### Key Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain the concept of human rights and provide examples
- Describe how Nazi Germany deprived Jews of basic human rights
- Develop an evidence-based opinion about individuals' responsibilities to take action if they witness human rights abuses

### Background Information/Links

The Enlightenment era ushered in an enduring belief, especially among Western civilizations, that all human beings are “endowed by their Creator” with certain basic human rights. The United States’ founding documents, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and Bill of Rights, enshrine these rights as the cornerstone of American government and society. Beginning in 1948, the United Nations made the protection of basic rights a priority for its members with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Modern world history is rife, however, with instances of governments trampling on the human rights of individuals and groups, even in the twentieth century and beyond. In every case, at least a few courageous individuals have stood up for the rights of the persecuted people. During World War II, industrialist Oskar Schindler and diplomat Raoul Wallenberg risked their lives to aid persecuted Jews in Nazi Europe. During the Rwandan Genocide of the 1990s, men like Romeo Dallaire tried to protect the Tutsi people from violence. The actions of such individuals required tremendous personal moral courage.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of people merely stood by, not wanting to get involved. During the Holocaust, many German citizens witnessed the suffering of their Jewish neighbors and felt sympathy but took no action, likely due to fear. National governments have also been reluctant or outright refused to intervene in international conflicts to protect human rights, despite their political philosophies and statements. During the World War II era, for example, the United States and British governments were aware of Nazi Germany’s persecution of Jews as early as the mid-1930s and its mass murder of Jews as early as 1942. Still, they took no action directly aimed at ending these atrocities. As a result of individual and global inaction in all these cases, persecuted people suffered for far too long.

For additional information:

- United Nations Refugee Agency  
<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/>
- Council on Foreign Relations  
“The Dilemma of Humanitarian Intervention”  
<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/dilemma-humanitarian-intervention>

### MATERIALS

- Computer with Internet connection and a projector
- If available, devices with internet access, one per student or student group
- Handouts, one per student
  - Human Rights Abuses
  - How Can We Help?
  - Summary of Basic Rights and Freedoms Guaranteed by the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights
- Ideally, the teacher will have curated the eye witness clips in a location accessible to students prior to the lesson.

- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
“Bystanders”  
<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10008207>
- BBC News

### Procedure

#### Consider

- 1 In groups of three, students will brainstorm a list of basic rights guaranteed to Americans. The teacher may wish to project or provide copies of the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights for students to consult.
- 2 The teacher will facilitate a discussion of students’ suggestions.
- 3 The teacher will ask: “Who is responsible for protecting these rights?” It is anticipated that students will respond that it is the government’s responsibility. In that case, the teacher should direct students to key phrases in the Declaration (“governments are instituted among men”) and Constitution (“We the People”) to help them understand that ultimately it is citizens—the people—who must protect these rights.
- 4 The teacher will ask: “Are these rights universal to all people everywhere?”
- 5 The teacher will introduce the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and project and/or distribute a summary of the rights guaranteed in the document

#### Collect

- 6 The teacher will explain that throughout history, some governments have deprived their citizens of basic human rights. The teacher may ask whether students can name any of these events and will state that students will be analyzing how Nazi Germany deprived Jews and many other groups of human rights in the 1930s and 1940s.
- 7 Individually, in small groups, or as a class (depending upon the availability of technology), students will view several eye witness clips and fill in an organizer, “Human Rights Abuses,” to identify which rights were violated, how rights were violated, and (when possible) what the public response was.

To determine which rights were violated, students should refer to the Summary of Basic Rights and Freedoms Guaranteed by the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights.

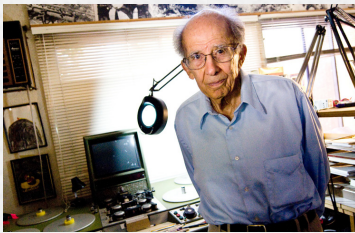
- 8 The teacher will facilitate a discussion to debrief students' findings.



### Construct

- 9 The teacher will present students with the following quote from Holocaust survivor and Human Rights activist Elie Wiesel, delivered at the 2012 ceremony during which he received the LBJ Moral Courage Award:
  - ❑ “What is moral courage? Does it mean simply to have the audacity to say no? Absolutely. Just to say no. But isn’t that the definition of civilization? Just the ability and conviction that there are limits. You cannot go beyond that limit, that frontier, and still be part of humanity.”
  - ❑ The teacher will facilitate a discussion of Wiesel’s meaning and whether students agree.
    - What does Wiesel mean by “civilization”? (The teacher should relate “civilization” to back to the discussion of the rights guaranteed to Americans that limit what governments can do.)
    - What does Wiesel suggest people should do if governments cross those limits and infringe on human rights? (The teacher should introduce the idea that “civilization” brings certain responsibilities along with rights.)
- 10 The teacher will present students with an additional quote from Elie Wiesel:
  - ❑ “I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings enduring suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim.”
  - ❑ The teacher will facilitate a discussion of the meaning of this quote and whether students agree.
    - How did onlookers choose sides in the eye witness clips? Provide examples.
    - Why does Wiesel believe people must always take sides?

- Does Wiesel place limits on where and when witnesses should take action?
- What impacts did the inaction of individuals and nations, including the U.S., have on the victims of persecution whose testimonies we heard?
- What impacts did the courageous actions of aid-givers have on victims?



## Communicate

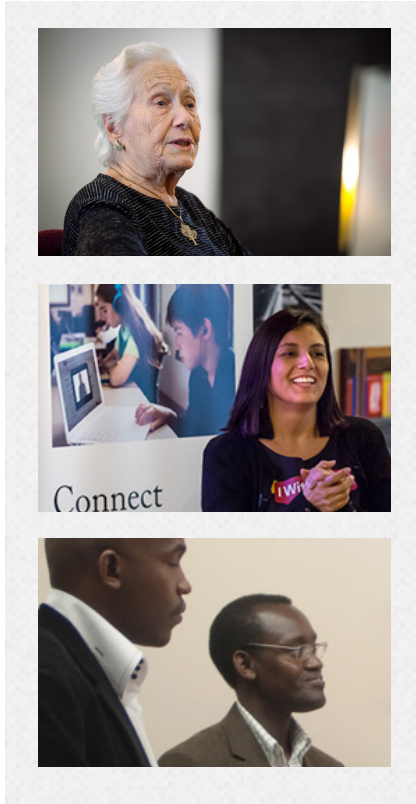
- 11 Students will work in their original groups of three to revise their lists of what they consider basic human rights.
- 12 The teacher will present the following imaginary scenario: “There is a nation in which a minority group is being oppressed by the majority group and the national government. Persecuted people have been forced to flee their homes to find safety in remote areas. The government has confiscated people’s property and businesses. Young people are not allowed to attend school, and men and women are forced to perform hard work for the government without pay. Members of the majority group regularly inflict violence on the minority.”
- 13 Students will then work in their groups to develop a list of ways that nations and individuals can protect the rights of the minority in that imaginary nation. They will record their ideas on the worksheet titled “Ways We Can Help.” The teacher should encourage students to consider international law, international organizations, individual protest, individual aid, etc.

## Connections

Connect to Student Lives	Connect to Contemporary Events	Connect to the Future
Students will draw on their own understandings of personal freedoms and individual rights.	Students can relate what they learn to present-day humanitarian crises in places like Syria and Myanmar.	Students will think about what they can do to help persecuted people in future humanitarian crises.

## Clips of Testimony

### Collect: Witness Actions



■ **Edith Reiss**

She describes an incident in which she helped a man being beaten by Nazis while others refused to do so.

■ **John Damski**

He explains how he was reported by community members and beaten and arrested by Nazis for speaking to a Jewish woman and walking her home. His boss intervened on his behalf to secure his release.

■ **Rita Kuhn**

She explains that her family was always hungry because they were paid so little for their forced labor. Her father's co-workers "looked the other way" when he stole food from work for his family.

■ **Hela (Ella) Blumenthal**

She describes living in the ghetto which was sealed to prevent travel into the main part of the city. She also discusses the Nazis' confiscation of Jewish personal property and former friends' hostility toward her family.

■ **Zuzana Adam**

She explains that, when the Nazis invaded Hungary, all Jews were expelled from school and were forced to wear the Jewish Star-of-David insignia. Her Christian classmates did not socialize with Jewish girls. Around the same time, her father—a city leader—was arbitrarily arrested.

■ **Zvi Michaeli**

He recounts how, as a large group of Jews was being marched to an execution site, local peasants looked on with pleasure, knowing the Jews were going to their deaths.

■ **Tamara Branitsky**

She expresses anger that the world did not intervene to stop the killing of Jews.

# Summary of the Basic Rights and Freedoms Guaranteed by the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights



## Fundamental Principles:

- All people are free and equal.
- Everyone has the right to life, freedom, and personal safety.
- Everyone is entitled to all human rights regardless of race, sex, language, religion, ethnicity, etc.
- Everyone should be recognized as a person by the law and be given equal protection under the law.

## Right to:

- A fair trial
- Travel freely to, from, and within his/her country
- Seek refuge from persecution in other countries
- Marry as s/he chooses and have a family
- Own property, land and personal belongings
- Freedom of thought, speech, and religion
- Gather in groups peacefully
- A government based on the will of the people
- Work and fair pay
- Rest and leisure time
- A free, high-quality education

## Freedom from:

- Slavery
- Torture and cruel punishments
- Arrest or punishment without good reason
- Poverty and hunger

# Human Rights Abuses



STUDENT HANDOUT

Individual	What Human Rights were Denied? How?	How did Onlookers React?
Edith Reiss		
John Damski		
Rita Kuhn		
Hela Blumenthal		
Zuzana Adam		
Zvi Michaeli		
Tamara Branitsky		



# How We Can Help



STUDENT HANDOUT

Imagine that there is a nation in which a minority group is being oppressed by the majority group and the national government. Persecuted people have been forced to flee their homes to find safety in remote areas. The government has confiscated people's property and businesses. Young people are not allowed to attend school, and men and women are forced to perform hard work for the government without pay. Members of the majority group regularly inflict violence on the minority.

How can we help? Brainstorm possible ways that various individuals and nations can help the persecuted minority group in this scenario. Put a star next to the action in each column that you believe would be most helpful.

<b>Individuals Living In or Near the Places Where Persecution Is Occurring</b>	<b>Individuals Living Far From the Region</b>	<b>Governments of Foreign Nations</b>

# Survivor and Witness Biographies



STUDENT HANDOUT

**Edith Reiss** was born in Bolton, England in 1916, the second of four daughters. She was raised by a working mother and a father who had been blinded by a work accident. She learned about the world's troubles at a young age as her father had her read the daily newspaper to him. She had a knack for language and learned German in school. When unrest began on the continent, she worked to settle German-Jewish refugees in her home town. Edith went to university in London to study physiology, but her studies were soon disrupted by the war. She took a class trip to Germany in 1939, and was horrified by the treatment of the Jews. Only three days after she returned to England, war broke out. Edith was trained as a Welfare Officer in the British army, and stationed in a British Military Hospital in Rome. She treated both wounded Allied soldiers as well as German prisoners of war, who expressed gratitude for her kind treatment of them. As the war came to a close, Edith's story was far from over. She witnessed the hanging of Mussolini in Milan, and soon after she was sent to Dachau to help liberate the camp survivors. Her day at the camp marked her forever. On her way back through Rome, she had the chance to meet the Pope, and she shared her experience in the camp with him. Before returning to England, she spent time helping recovering soldiers, and there she met an American army doctor who would become her husband. She moved to the United States to be with him soon after they were married. In the United States, she finally finished her bachelor's and went on to get a master's in Gerontology. After her retirement, she became involved in a Holocaust memorial foundation where she shared her war experience with students. Her interview took place in Coral Gables, Florida on May 22, 1998.

**John Damski** was born on October 11, 1914, in Duisburg, Germany. After World War I, he and his parents, two brothers, and sister returned to Poland. John and his family were Roman Catholic. They did not like the Antisemitism they saw in Poland. John joined the Polish army and was taken as a

prisoner of war in 1939. When he was let go in 1940, he moved to a small town where he found work helping to build an airfield as the chief electrician. As the right-hand man for the well-respected owner of the construction company, John developed some contacts that he used to help as many Jewish people as he could. He helped several escape the Warsaw Ghetto, helped many with false identity papers and travel arrangements, and helped Sara Rozen and her mother hide for many years. John helped Sara get identity papers that showed she was his wife named Christine Damski. John spent the rest of the war as a "German businessman" with his Polish wife. Eventually, John and Sara—now Christine—married for real. Later, they discovered their opportunities in Poland were limited, and they emigrated to the United States and settled in Detroit working for a car manufacturer. After several years, John and Christine moved to California where they raised their family. John gave his testimony on December 20, 1994, in Van Nuys, California.

**Rita Kuhn** was born in Berlin, Germany, on November 29, 1927. Her father, Fritz, was Jewish, but her mother, Frieda, converted to Judaism only after marrying her father. Under the Nuremberg Laws, the Nazi government classified Rita and her younger brother, Hans, to be "Jewish by law," and her mother as an Aryan, despite her conversion. By 1939, Antisemitism was becoming increasingly aggressive and violent. Rita's parents discussed emigrating, but the family had little money and few connections outside of Nazi-controlled territory. They were stuck. Rita's parents encouraged the children to convert to Protestantism for their own protection, but Rita considered it a betrayal of her Jewish identity. However, she did as her parents asked and began attending Sunday School and was eventually baptized. In February 1943, the SS began arresting all Jews in the city. They picked up Rita at the ammunition plant where she was forced to make munitions for the German army. Rita was released, but her father was arrested and held in a building at Rosenstrasse. In early March,

# Survivor and Witness Biographies



STUDENT HANDOUT

the Nazi government released the men after their non-Jewish wives openly protested the arrests. Rita and her family were liberated when the Soviet Army invaded Berlin. After the war, she moved to America. She earned a doctorate in comparative literature from UC Berkeley. She had four children with her husband, but raised them as a single mother after their divorce. Until 1985, Rita was reluctant to speak about her past. With encouragement from her children, she began to recount her experiences. She was interviewed in Berkeley, California on August 7, 1989.

**Hela Blumenthal** was born in Warsaw, Poland, on August 15, 1921. Growing up, she had six brothers and sisters, and her father was a very successful businessman. They were a very religious family, and Hela went to the Jewish school. Her family was forced into the Warsaw Ghetto where they lived in one room. Her family was there during the uprising and until Hela was sent to Majdanek Concentration Camp with her father and niece, Roma. Hela watched as her father was led away to the gas chambers. Later, Hela and Roma were transported to Auschwitz II-Birkenau Concentration Camp. The girls were transferred to Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp on what she describes as the only transport to ever leave Auschwitz II-Birkenau. When the British liberated the camp, Hela returned to Poland to look for her family. Roma was granted a visa and was reunited with her father in British Mandate Palestine. Eventually, Hela was able to emigrate to Palestine to join her brother-in-law and niece and lived under false papers. She met and married her husband, Isaac, in Tel Aviv, and they returned to his home in Johannesburg, South Africa. She worked with her husband for 38 years, and they had four children. Hela gave her testimony in Sea Point, Western Cape, South Africa, on June 9, 1996.

**Zuzana Adams** was born to traditional Jewish parents, Vilmos and Erszsebet Klein, in Miskolc, Hungary, on June 2nd, 1925. Zuzana escaped from a ghetto in Miskolc, concealed her identity through obtaining false documents, and hid in Budapest.

She was eventually liberated by the Soviet armed forces. Zuzana married Jan Adam, and moved to Prague, Czechoslovakia. She had two daughters: Alena and Julie. Alena tragically passed away in 1953. Zuzana moved to Montreal, Quebec, Canada on October 13th, 1968, with Jan and Julie. In June of 1969, her family moved to Calgary, Alberta, Canada. She was a researcher, writer, editor, and teacher, and her husband was an economics professor at the University of Calgary. Zuzana was interviewed in Calgary, Alberta, Canada on April 30th, 1996.

**Zvi Michaeli** was born Zvi Michalowski on May 15, 1925 in Ejszyszki, Poland to an Orthodox Jewish family. As a young man, he studied Jewish studies at yeshiva. During the German occupation, although he was only 16 years old, Zvi performed forced labor in lieu of his father. Zvi's father saved his life by pushing him into a firing squad's mass grave. He was a member of a Soviet resistance group that operated covertly in Poland's Rudnicka Forest. Zvi was liberated from the forest by a civilian in 1944. He lived in Israel for 18 years before immigrating to the United States. This interview took place on February 5, 1996 in Hallendale, Florida, USA.

**Tamara Branitsky** was born in Lwow, Poland, on January 30, 1922. Her father died shortly after she was born and her mother had to go to work. In September 1939, the Soviet Army occupied her town and, instead of going to the university, Tamara got a job to help her mother. The Germans invaded Poland, and on July 1, 1941, they entered Lwow. After hiding out with false papers for a time, Tamara ended up in the Krakow Ghetto and put in prison. From there she was sent to Krakow-Plaszow Concentration Camp. Here Tamara was held as a political prisoner due to connections she had made while she was in hiding. Later, Tamara was transferred to Skarzysko-Kamienna Concentration Camp and then to Leipzig Concentration Camp. As the Allies were closing in, April 1945, Tamara and the other prisoners from Leipzig were taken from camp on a Death March. Tamara and her friend Wanda ran away and hid in a nearby barn whose

## Survivor and Witness Biographies



STUDENT HANDOUT

owner fed them and sent them to a safe place to hide. The Russian army liberated her there. Tamara eventually married one of the Polish men serving in the Russian army, Leopold Branitsky. In 1952, they emigrated to Canada. Tamara worked for the Canadian government for many years and had two children and five grandchildren. The interview with Tamara took place on April 24, 2001, in Toronto, Canada.

## National Standards

### College, Career & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards

D2.Civ.7.6-8 Apply civic virtues and democratic principles in school and community settings.

D2.Civ.8.6-8 Analyze ideas and principles contained in the founding documents of the United States, and explain how they influence the social and political system.

D2.Civ.10.6-8 Explain the relevance of personal interests and perspectives, civic virtues, and democratic principles when people address issues and problems in government and civil society.

D4.2.6-8 Construct explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples and details with relevant information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations.

D4.4.6-8 Draw on multiple disciplinary lenses to analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at local, regional, and global levels over time, identifying its characteristics and causes, and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem.

D4.7.6-8 Assess their individual and collective capacities to take action to address local, regional, and global problems, taking into account a range of possible levers of power, strategies, and potential outcomes.

D4.8.6-8 Apply a range of deliberative and democratic procedures to make decisions and take action in their classrooms and schools, and in out-of-school civic contexts.

### Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

RI.8.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

W.8.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.