

Spiritual Resistance

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is spiritual resistance?
- How have people resisted oppression throughout history?
- What is the relationship between resistance and human dignity?
- What types of resistance to oppression do you see today?

Overview

This activity engages students with the topic of spiritual resistance during the Holocaust. Students begin by using a brainstorming activity to develop a working definition of spiritual resistance, which will then be compared to Yad Vashem's definition of spiritual resistance in the context of the Holocaust. Students will then learn about examples of spiritual resistance during the Holocaust through studying testimonies from survivors of the Holocaust. Students will then learn about examples of spiritual resistance during the Holocaust through studying testimonies and completing a primary source inquiry activity designed to help students understand how spirituality was used as a form of resistance to injustice and oppression. Finally, students will apply their understanding of spiritual resistance by researching and creating a product to promote how spiritual resistance is used by groups that experience oppression and injustice today.

Target Audience

Grades 6–8

Activity Duration

Two 45–60 minute sessions

Enduring Understandings

- During the Holocaust, civilians demonstrated strength and human dignity by resisting oppression, injustice, and hate through acts in opposition to the policies, actions, or authority of those in power.
- Spiritual resistance is one of many forms of resistance to oppression, injustice, and hate.
- When faced with overwhelming adversity, individuals find ways to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others.

Materials

- Brainstorming Spiritual Resistance Handout (1 per student)
- Modified Testimony as Primary Source Analysis Chart (4 per student)
- Inquiry Activity Graphic Organizer (maximum of 7 per student at teacher discretion)
- Spiritual Resistance Personal Reflection Handout (1 per student)

Historical Background for Educator

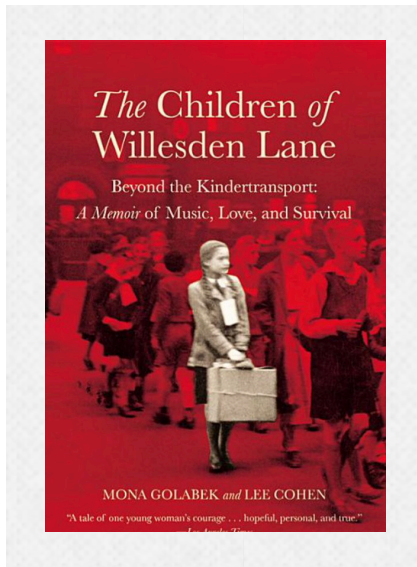
Resistance movements throughout history have emerged during mass atrocities and genocides as individuals and groups worked together to find ways to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others in the face of oppression. Spiritual resistance is one of the many forms of resistance to oppression. Spiritual resistance is a diverse form of unarmed resistance through which individuals strive to maintain their humanity and core values in the face of violence and oppression. Spiritual resistance might include but is limited to creating music, writing, creating works of art, as well as spiritual actions such as prayer, refusing to adopt new religious beliefs, or providing sanctuary in places of worship. By studying the stories of survivors of the Holocaust, students can learn the importance of spiritual resistance to hatred and oppression throughout history.

In 1932, Adolf Hitler, the leader of the nationalist, antisemitic, and racist National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party), was elected to the German Reichstag (Parliament). The Nazis established a single-party dictatorship referred to as the Third Reich. From 1933 until 1939, the Nazi government enacted hundreds of increasingly restrictive and discriminatory laws and decrees that banned Jews from all aspects of German public life.

During World War II, the Nazis systematically targeted Jews in Nazi-occupied territories. Jews were forced to wear identifying symbols, relocate to heavily crowded ghettos, and participate in forced labor. Millions of Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. The Nazis also targeted racial, political, or ideological groups deemed "inferior" or "undesirable"—Roma (Gypsies), homosexuals, Slavic peoples, the mentally and physically disabled, Socialists, Communists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Even when their defeat was imminent, the Nazi leadership committed resources to the destruction of Europe's Jewish population. Prisoners were forced to evacuate in what are now known as *death marches*.

Sources

- <https://vhap.usc.edu/vhap.iwitness.appdata/historicalcontext/en/Holocaust.pdf>
- <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/teaching-about-refugees.html>



Procedure

Ask

- 1** Begin the activity by having students independently brainstorm a working definition of spiritual resistance in the context of the Holocaust by using the *Brainstorming Spiritual Resistance Handout*.
 - During their independent brainstorming time, students will also consider an initial response to the central question: How do individuals use spiritual resistance to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others when faced with adversity?
 - Students may need additional support in creating an initial response to the central question. To help students get started, you may wish to share with students that the Cambridge English Dictionary defines resistance, as “the act of fighting against something that is attacking you, or refusing to accept something” and defines agency as, “the ability to take action or to choose what action to take.”
- 2** After developing their independent definition of spiritual resistance and drafting an initial response to the central question, students will then participate in a whole-class discussion in which they compare their individual working definition of spiritual resistance to the [Yad Vashem definition](#) of spiritual resistance.
 - Yad Vashem Definition: "Spiritual resistance refers to attempts by individuals to maintain their humanity and core values in spite of Nazi dehumanization and degradation. Such unarmed resistance came in many forms, religious and non-religious, cultural, and educational."
- 3** After sharing the Yad Vashem definition of spiritual resistance with the students, the teacher will then facilitate a brief discussion to compare the students' responses with the Yad Vashem definition. The teacher may use the following questions to structure the discussion:
 - How is your definition of spiritual resistance similar to the Yad Vashem definition?
 - How is your definition of spiritual resistance different

from the Yad Vashem definition?

- If you were to revise your definition at this point, what new concept(s) might you include in your definition?
- How can the Yad Vashem definition help you further develop your initial response to the central question: How do individuals use spiritual resistance to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others when faced with adversity?

4 As this discussion progresses, the teacher may need to broaden the scope of individual student definitions beyond just religious spirituality to also include concepts of values and the human spirit.

Analyze

5 Next, students will analyze the concept of spiritual resistance during the Holocaust through testimonies using the modified *Testimony as Primary Source Analysis Handout*.

- The Testimony as Primary Source Analysis handout will be modified to orient students back to the central question and concept of spiritual resistance: "How did these individuals use spiritual resistance to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others when faced with overwhelming adversity during the Holocaust?"

6 As students prepare to view the following testimonies, help students understand the importance of:

- paying attention to the speaker's tone of voice and body language;
- considering the context and perspectives of the witness; and
- focusing on the personal story of the testimony as opposed to facts and figures.

7 When viewing testimony, help strengthen the experience by:

- providing students with the biographies of the survivors providing testimony;
- pausing clips to allow time for students to reflect, record thoughts, questions, and ideas;
- engaging students in investigations using active inquiry;
- promoting interdisciplinary thinking and learning through common, recurring themes; and
- creating connections to their own lives and personal experiences.

8 Testimonies for Analysis:

- [Frieda Aaron](#)—(2:55) Frieda describes the cultural resistance and education that took place in the Warsaw Ghetto. This testimony can help students further develop their definition of spiritual resistance as Frieda defines spiritual resistance at 1:33.
- [Ellen Brandt](#)—(1:35) Ellen describes how she joined a Jewish youth movement organization that would organize resistance activities such as marches and singing Jewish songs instead of songs like the Nazi national anthem.

- [Erno Abelesz](#)—(0:44) Erno provides a brief description of how he views the resilience of the Jewish people and their willingness to hold to their faith through the Holocaust as a permanent victory over the Nazis.
- [Itka Zygmuntowicz](#)—(3:17) Itka's testimony provides a detailed overview of an event that shaped her understanding of spiritual resistance and how resistance is more than just armed or physical resistance. She describes the brutal beatings her mother received for refusing to give information about a Jewish man in their town.

- 9 Upon conclusion of the testimony analysis, students will discuss the reflective prompts from the *Testimony as Primary Source Analysis Handout* and share important facts, emotions, and quotes from the testimonies that resonated with them. Students will continue to consider how these individuals used spiritual resistance to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others when faced with overwhelming adversity during the Holocaust.

Apply

- 10 Students will apply what they have learned about spiritual resistance during the Holocaust as they participate in a primary source inquiry activity using a SOAPStone strategy to analyze primary source excerpts provided through [Echoes & Reflections Cultural and Spiritual Resistance Handout](#).
- 11 The Echoes & Reflections Cultural and Spiritual Resistance Handout contains seven primary source examples, and bibliographic information for each excerpt is provided to support student analysis using the SOAPStone strategy.
- 12 The teacher may structure this as an individual activity, partner activity, station activity, or JIGSAW small group activity to encourage student engagement with the diary excerpts, and the teacher may decide whether to use all or specifically selected content from the provided excerpts.
- If selecting an individual activity, the teacher can provide each student with one *Inquiry Activity Graphic Organizer Handout* and assign each student one excerpt to analyze independently, which will then be shared collectively with the other students after the activity.
 - If selecting a partner activity, the teacher can pair each student with one partner and assign each pair either one or multiple excerpts to analyze together using the *Inquiry Activity Graphic Organizer Handout*, which will then be shared with other groups after the activity.
 - If selecting a station activity, the students can rotate through each excerpt provided as a station, working with a small group of peers to complete an *Inquiry Activity Graphic Organizer Handout* for each excerpt at each station.
 - If selecting a JIGSAW activity, the teacher can create small teams of seven students, and each student within the team can be assigned their own excerpt. Each group member will complete an *Inquiry Activity Graphic Organizer Handout* for their assigned excerpt, then share their findings with their assigned small group.

- 13 As students complete the inquiry activity, provide them with support by encouraging them to connect the evidence from the excerpts with the testimonies shared earlier.
- Questions teachers may use to support student connections to spiritual resistance can include:
 - What are the similarities between your excerpt and the survivor testimonies?
 - What are the differences between your excerpt and the survivor testimonies?
 - How can these similarities and differences help you better understand spiritual resistance during the Holocaust?
- 14 The guiding questions on the *Inquiry Activity Graphic Organizer* are structured to support students in eventually answering the driving question for this inquiry activity: “How did individuals use spiritual resistance to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others when faced with adversity during the Holocaust?”

Act

- 15 Then, using the *Spiritual Resistance Personal Reflection Handout*, students will further explore examples of spiritual resistance and the theme of human dignity.
- 16 Students will begin by identifying and researching modern examples of spiritual resistance around the world and/or close to home.
- 17 Using the definition of spiritual resistance from Yad Vashem provided above, students will create a product of artistic expression like a digital poster, social media post, video, or other product that leads with the theme of “Spiritual resistance looks like...” and then share how people around the world are exhibiting spiritual resistance.
- 18 Through this activity, students will explore issues that affect them, their community, and others around the world. This exercise draws upon student interest while meeting them where their skills/interests intersect, and it also provides an opportunity for students to share their work with a broader audience than their peers in class and take action on contemporary issues related to spiritual resistance.

Connections

Connection to Student Lives	Connection to Contemporary Events	Connection to the Future
Students will develop their knowledge of the concept of spiritual resistance to oppression and injustice and identify the relationship between resistance, strength, and human dignity.	Students will analyze examples of spiritual resistance in the past to discover for themselves how they can use spiritual resistance to resist or help others resist current-day oppression or injustice.	Students can use their knowledge of spiritual resistance and the relationship between resistance, strength, and human dignity to inform future student advocacy in supporting resistance efforts.

Clips of Testimony

- **Frieda Aaron**, a Jewish survivor, describes the cultural resistance and education that took place in the Warsaw Ghetto.
- **Ellen Brandt**, a Jewish survivor, describes how she joined a Jewish youth movement organization that would organize resistance activities such as marches and singing Jewish songs instead of songs like the Nazi national anthem.
- **Erno Abelesz**, a Jewish survivor, provides a brief description of how he views the resilience of the Jewish people and their willingness to hold to their faith through the Holocaust as a permanent victory over the Nazis.
- **Itka Zygmuntowicz**, a Jewish survivor, provides a detailed overview of an event that shaped her understanding of spiritual resistance and how resistance is more than just armed or physical resistance. She describes the brutal beatings her mother received for refusing to give information about a Jewish man in their town.

National Standards and Frameworks

C3 Framework

D2.His.4.6-8. Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D3.1.6-8. Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

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.

D4.8.6-8. 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 ELA

SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.8.2 Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

SL.8.4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

CASEL's SEL Framework

SOCIAL AWARENESS: The ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts. This includes the capacity to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports. Such as:

- Recognizing strengths in others
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Showing concern for the feelings of others

The Willesden Project is a global initiative that expands the reach of Lisa Jura's story of survival, resilience, and triumph as she struggles to come of age separated from her family during World War II, as originally shared by her daughter, author and concert pianist Mona Golabek, in *The Children of Willesden Lane* books and musical performances. [Learn more at The Willesden Project.](#)

Survivor and Witness Biographies



STUDENT HANDOUT

Frieda Aaron

Frieda Aaron, born on January 4th, 1928, to a middle-class family in Warsaw, Poland, was only eleven and a half when she attended a clandestine school in the Warsaw ghetto. Frieda describes being keenly aware of the anti-Semitism she faced during this time as she had to run to and from school to escape stones being thrown at her. In 1939, Frieda lived with her family in an underground bunker. Upon the discovery of her family's bunker that same year, Frieda was then forced through a succession of concentration camps including Majdanek, Skarzysko-Kamienna, and Tschenstochau until being liberated by the Soviets in 1945. Frieda was interviewed on February 5th, 1995, in her home in Belle Harbor, New York.

Ellen Brandt

Ellen Brandt, born on May 10th, 1922, in Mannheim, Germany, was the only child of Mathilda and Guido Friedsam. Ellen's father served in the German military and was a decorated World War I veteran. When Ellen was six months old, the family moved to Munich where her father bought a paper factory. Foreseeing Hitler's rise to power, Ellen's father thought it dangerous to continue to own a business. Therefore, in early 1933, less than a month before Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany, the family moved to Berlin where Ellen's father ran a factory owned by non-Jews. Her father felt this new position offered his family greater anonymity and safety. In Berlin, Ellen became keenly aware of increasingly limited basic rights for the Jewish community and described the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 as a life-altering event. She remembered witnessing Jews being beaten to death on the streets and seeing others rounded up and taken away. In 1936, she began to be shunned at school when her school teachers were no longer allowed to speak to Jewish children, and Jewish students were forbidden from interacting with non-Jewish schoolmates. Ellen's parents eventually removed her from that school, and before the outbreak of the war, a relative living in the United States provided Ellen's family with affidavits to flee Germany. Ellen's father was able to expedite the family's departure within twenty-four hours due to his status as a decorated veteran. On April 6th, 1938, the family arrived in New York City. Ellen's family eventually moved to Toledo, Ohio, where she attended college. At the time of the interview in 1996, Ellen had a daughter, Jody (Grotzinger); a son, Geoffrey; and two grandchildren.

Erno Abelesz

Erno Abelesz was born July 5th, 1930, in Kapuvar, Hungary, to Dawid Abelesz and Helen Hofman. Erno had five brothers and one sister. His father owned a grocery shop, and his family members were businesspeople in Kapuvar. He describes his family as being "very close, very loving," and one of the largest families in the town. His family was Orthodox, and his parents sent him to Cheder after school hours where he learned Hebrew. Erno recounted that there was not much segregation between Jews and non-Jews in his town. He primarily experienced anti-Semitism from other school children who called him names. Erno and his family were sent to a Jewish ghetto in Sopron, Hungary, in 1944 before being transported to Auschwitz shortly after. Erno survived Auschwitz, and with Soviet forces approaching, Erno and others were forced on a death march to Althammer, where he would be liberated by the Soviets in 1945. Erno was interviewed in his home in London in 1995.

Itka Zygmuntowicz

Itka Zygmuntowicz, the eldest of three siblings, was born on April 15th, 1926, in Ciechanow, Poland, to Eljo and Simo Frajman. She had a brother, Srulek, and a sister, Zysl. Two years after the German invasion of Poland, Itka and her family were deported to the Nowe Miasto ghetto, and in 1942, they were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Upon arrival at the extermination camp, Itka was separated from her family and never saw her parents or siblings again. At the camp, she was assigned to sort the clothing from arriving transports and

Survivor and Witness Biographies



STUDENT HANDOUT

prepare it for shipment to Germany. As an act of resistance, Itka purposely damaged the clothing whenever she could. With the Soviet forces rapidly approaching, on January 18th, 1945, Itka and other prisoners were forced on a death march to the Ravensbruck concentration camp in Germany. She was then transferred to the Malchow concentration camp where she was liberated on Passover, April 26th, 1945, by the Swedish Red Cross who sent her to a hospital in Lund, Sweden, to recover. Itka was later moved to a refugee center, and from there, together with friends Bina and Regina, she went to work in a children's hospital in a small Swedish village. Later, Itka moved to the city of Boras, where she found work in a dress shop. Shortly thereafter, she and her friends were reunited. Itka and Rachmil immigrated to the United States on February 15th, 1953, and settled in Pennsylvania with their two sons, Erland and Jerry. Their sons Samuel and Michael were born in Philadelphia. At the time of her interview in 1996, Itka had three grandchildren.

Brainstorming Spiritual Resistance Handout



Directions: First, begin by brainstorming and recording your working definition of spiritual resistance, then draft an initial response to the central question below. **Note:** *Your working definition and initial response are just a first draft and will likely change as you learn more about spiritual resistance through this activity.*

Prompt:	Your Response:
Define spiritual resistance	
Central question: How do individuals use spiritual resistance to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others when faced with adversity?	

After you have concluded your responses above, your instructor will share Yad Vashem's definition of spiritual resistance with the whole class. Compare your responses above to the Yad Vashem definition by using the reflection prompts below.

How is your definition similar to the Yad Vashem definition?	
How is your definition different from the Yad Vashem definition?	
If you were to revise your definition at this point, what new concept(s) might you include in your new definition?	
If you were to revise your initial response to the central question, how would you revise it? <i>"How do individuals use spiritual resistance to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others when faced with adversity?"</i>	

Modified Testimony as Primary Source Analysis Chart



STUDENT HANDOUT

Bio Interviewee Name: _____ Experience Group: _____

Birth Date and Place: _____

Additional Relevant Info: _____

Directions: As you watch the clip of testimony, write facts that are presented in the left column. Use the right column to note emotions the interviewee demonstrates.

Facts: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How List the topic, dates, event details, location (city, region, country), and names/groups.	Emotions: What emotions did you notice? Notice facial and body expressions, tone of voice, pauses, and word choice.
Reflection Prompts (After viewing the testimony clip)	
What event is this person recalling? How do they feel about the event?	
What role does spiritual resistance play in the event this person is describing? Who/what did they resist?	
How did this individual use spiritual resistance to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others when faced with overwhelming adversity during the Holocaust?	

Inquiry Activity Graphic Organizer



STUDENT HANDOUT

Directions: Use the following graphic organizer to support your analysis of the Echoes & Reflections Cultural and Spiritual Resistance primary source excerpt(s).

<p>Speaker—Identify the speaker's name, DOB, and other relevant information. What is their experience with spiritual resistance?</p>	
<p>Occasion—What may have prompted the speaker to share their story? What perspective or bias might the speaker bring because of their experience or situation?</p>	
<p>Audience—Who is the speaker trying to address? To whom may they be speaking?</p>	
<p>Purpose—In what way does the speaker convey the message? What does the speaker hope to accomplish?</p>	
<p>Subject—On what topic is the speaker focusing?</p>	
<p>Tone—What is the speaker's attitude toward the subject? What word choices provide clues to their viewpoint?</p>	
<p>Reflect—How was spiritual resistance reflected in your excerpt? How did individuals use spiritual resistance to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others when faced with adversity during the Holocaust?</p>	

Spiritual Resistance Personal Reflection Handout



Directions: Identify one group that is using spiritual resistance to resist oppression or injustice around the world today. Use that selected group for the rest of this activity.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Who is your group?■ Where are they located?■ What form(s) of oppression is this group facing today?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ How is your group resisting the oppression they face?■ What role does spiritual resistance play in the resistance your group has demonstrated?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ How is the resistance of your group similar to the resistance shown in the testimony activity?■ How does the resistance of your group differ from the resistance shown in the testimony activity?

Create: Create an artistic product such as a digital poster, social media post, video, or other product of your choice that calls attention to the resistance efforts of your focus group. In your creative product, include examples of how your group is resisting oppression today and how this resistance relates to strength and human dignity. Begin creating your product with the theme “Spiritual resistance looks like...” and then share the story.