

**Breaking the Myth: How Jews Resisted During the Holocaust**  
**An Inquiry Lesson**  
**Educator Guide**

**Lesson Context/Overview:**

Students tend to ask the question, “Why didn’t Jews resist?” In truth they did resist in many ways. In the aftermath of the Holocaust Jews were cast in the role of victims of Nazi atrocities and a myth developed that they had gone to their deaths “like sheep to slaughter.” This myth has been dispelled as Jews did resistance in various ways. As Elie Wiesel wrote. “The question is not why all the Jews did not fight, but how so many of them did. Tormented, beaten, starved, where did they find the strength spiritual and physical to resist? “

During the Holocaust Jewish resistance was both violent and non-violent. This lesson will dispel the myth by:

1. Defining resistance
2. Identifying and examining the forms of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust (armed, unarmed, and spiritual)
3. Understanding what was needed to resist and what the obstacles to resistance were
4. Learning about local survivors who resisted during the Holocaust
5. Connecting the history of Jewish resistance to inspire action today

**Materials:**

- Teacher PowerPoint
- Student Graphic Organizer
- Mordechai Anielewicz letter
- Survivor Bios
- Testimony transcripts (if needed)

**Timing:** 1 regular class period

**Suggested Grade Level:** 9-10 grade

**Lesson Structure:**

*This lesson utilizes video testimony of local survivors to discuss various forms of resistance. This lesson can be teacher led with the entire class watching the video testimonies together as a group. Or, the teacher could assign the testimonies for students to watch individually.*

1. Introduce the lesson topic and objectives.
2. Slide #2 - **Warm Up:** Ask students to answer *warm up questions #1 & #2* and debrief.
  - a. Click to project Elie Wiesel & Werner Coppel’s quotes on slide #2 and read them aloud to the group.
  - b. Ask students to answer *warm up question #3* and debrief.
  - c. Reinforce Wiesel’s sentiment by telling students that there is a common myth that Jews didn’t resist during the Holocaust and went to their deaths like “sheep to the slaughter.” Tell students that today we are going to explore the myth of non-resistance and the question: *How did Jews resist?* (slide #3)
3. Project slide #4 and ask students: *What is resistance? What does resistance look like to them?*
  - a. Most students will probably talk about armed resistance.

- b. Click to allow the explanation to appear on the slide and reinforce that resistance takes many forms: armed, nonviolent, spiritual, etc.
4. Proceed to slide #5 and ask students to complete *brainstorm question #1* on their worksheets (what is needed to resist?) and debrief with them.
  - a. After students have offered some ideas, click to reveal what might be needed to resist
5. Now, go to slide #6 and ask students to complete *brainstorm question #2* on their worksheets (what were the obstacles to resistance?). Debrief with them.
  - a. After students have offered some ideas, click to reveal the obstacles.
6. Project the quote by Vladka Meed on the slide #7 and briefly [explain who she was](#). You can also explain that one of the most famous examples of armed resistance is the [Warsaw Ghetto Uprising](#), which started on April 19, 1943.
7. *Transition: Many Jews resisted despite knowing that they would not overcome the Germans. So, why resist at all? To explore this question, we're going to look at a letter by [Mordecai Anielewicz](#), the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. (slide #8)*
  - a. Pass out the **Letter by Mordecai Anielewicz** to students & read the background information together. Have students answer questions 1 & 2 on their worksheet.
  - b. Then, have students read the letter independently and answer questions 3 & 4.
  - c. Debrief with students.
8. Tell students that we're going to look at four different video testimonies from **local** survivors who are featured in the Holocaust & Humanity Center's museum to answer the question: *How did Jews resist?* (Slide #9)
9. Distribute the **Survivor Bios sheet** to students.
10. Have students read the bio for each survivor and fill in that portion of the graphic organizer **before** they watch the testimony. After students have watched each testimony, they should fill in the last two boxes on their graphic organizer (*According to this source, how did Jews resist?* and identifying the *Type of Resistance*).
11. **Survivor Testimonies** (Slides 10-16):
  - a. [Sam Boymel](#) (**armed resistance**): Highlight the definition of "partisan" that is outlined in Sam Boymel's bio for students. After the testimony has played, note that it was not easy to become a Partisan if you were Jewish as many of them were antisemitic and did not take in Jews. Show the map of partisan activity in Europe during WW2 on slide #11.
  - b. [Lusia Hornstein](#) (**unarmed resistance**): Read Lusia's quote on slide #12 and underscore how awful the living conditions in ghettos were. Explain that Lusia participated in acts of resistance while in the ghetto and after she escaped. Show the map on slide #13 that shows instances of resistances in ghettos and camps across Europe. After students have read Lusia's bio and watched her testimony, reinforce that Lusia was part of the Polish Underground resistance in Warsaw and took part in the [Warsaw Uprising of 1944](#) (*this is different from the [Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943](#)*).
  - c. [Bella Oziel](#) (**spiritual resistance**)
  - d. [Roma Kaltman](#) (**spiritual resistance or "other"**): Students may classify Roma's resistance as "other." Roma is resisting by maintaining her humanity as she continues to pursue her personal interests (reading) instead of working.
12. **Summary Question** – ask students to answer the summary question and debrief as a class.
13. **Current Day Connection**: If time permits, brainstorm as a class to identify current-day acts of resistance in the United States and around the world. Prompt students to make historical connections to Jewish resistance during the Holocaust.