

# Lesson Plan – Differing forms of Resistance

## Introduction

Student age range: 14-16

Subject: History

Time required: 50 minutes

## Overview:

Resistance took many different forms. Physical resistance was present in ghettos and camps, in spite of the difficulties in organising and arming resistance groups. Religious resistance saw Jews continuing to practise their faith even when it was illegal to do so. And spiritual resistance is a term that covers all attempts to maintain humanity in the face of the Nazis' campaign of dehumanisation.

## Essential questions:

- Did Jews resist during the Holocaust?
- What sort of resistance existed during the Holocaust?

## Learning Objectives

- Students will learn that resistance was present during the Holocaust, in many different forms.
- Students will consider the concept of contestability in relation to resistance during the Holocaust

## Key issues/concepts:

- Contestability

## Materials:

Whiteboard and markers

Pens and paper

Computers or tablets for online research

**Worksheet – Differing forms of Resistance** - optional in Step Two

## Teaching notes:

The issue of contestability is an important historical concept. Teachers should explore the notion of different historians' perspectives, while avoiding any implication that historians are or were 'wrong'.

## Glossary:

- Bar mitzvah / bat mitzvah
- Partisan
- Ghetto
- Crematorium

## Lesson Instructions

### ONE – Hook activity (5 minutes)

Teacher displays the quote: “To resist is to live.”

Class discussion about what the quote means.

### TWO – Forms of resistance (15 minutes)

Teacher asks: “What different forms could resistance take during the Holocaust?”

Discussion should include active and passive efforts to resist Nazi policies. Teacher lists three categories of resistance on the board:

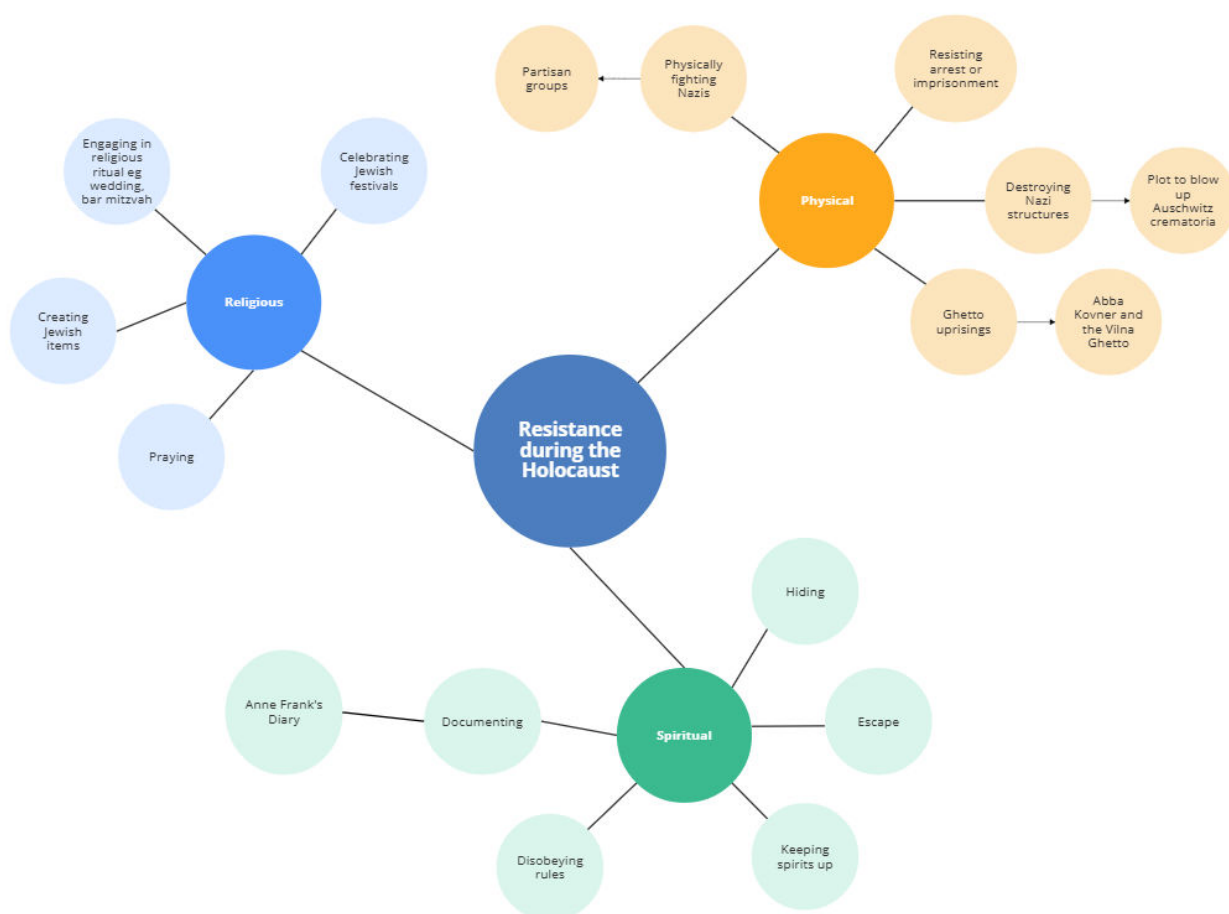
- Physical resistance
- Spiritual resistance
- Religious resistance

Students use those three categories to make a mindmap, stemming from the central the idea of 'resistance', and going to specific examples of resistance. Below is an example of what such a mindmap may look like.

**Modification:** If students have insufficient background knowledge to create a detailed mind map, teacher can provide a list of topics and ask students to add them to the right place in the mindmap. Teachers may create their own lists, or use the one below, which is available as [Worksheet – Differing forms of Resistance](#).

- Keeping spirits up
- Resisting arrest or imprisonment
- Ghetto uprisings
  - Abba Kovner and the Vilna Ghetto
- Praying
- Hiding

- Disobeying rules
- Destroying Nazi structures
  - Plot to blow up Auschwitz crematoria
- Celebrating Jewish festivals
- Escape
- Documenting
  - Anne Frank’s diary
- Creating Jewish items
- Physically fighting Nazis
  - Partisan groups
- Engaging in religious ritual eg wedding, bar mitzvah



### THREE – Source hunt (20 minutes)

Students choose one element of the mindmap, then conduct online research to find an artefact or source relating to that theme.

eg. If a student chooses ‘Creating Jewish items’, they might find a candelabra used by Jews in a ghetto.

If a student chooses ‘Partisan groups’, they may find survivor testimony from a partisan. If a student chooses ‘Ghetto uprisings’, they may find a copy of the Abba Kovner’s manifesto.

After finding their chosen source, students write a short paragraph using these sentence starters: “Source A is [*insert description of the source*]. It is evidence of resistance during the Holocaust because...”

Some students are chosen to present their sources to the class.

NB: If planning to teach the lesson called ‘Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto’, teacher should request that students do not explore the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising or the Emanuel Ringelblum Archive in this activity.

## FOUR – Contestability (10 minutes)

Teacher explains that shortly after the Holocaust, historians claimed that the Jewish response during the Holocaust was marked by a lack of resistance.

Teacher leads class discussion based on these questions:

- Why would historians say there was no resistance?
  - *Because they saw 6 million killed and this looked like a complete failure by Jews to defend themselves.*
  - *Because evidence wasn’t available yet – survivors weren’t sharing their stories very widely at this time.*
  - *Because they might have a limited definition of resistance as being only physical resistance.*
- Why might this offend Jewish survivors?
  - *Because it doesn’t recognise the many different types of resistance that did occur.*
  - *Because it casts Jews as passive victims, with no agency in their own stories.*
  - *Because it characterises Jews as weak.*
- How and why do you think historians changed from denying resistance to recognising many forms of resistance and respecting the amount of resistance that existed?
  - *Because more information became available.*
  - *Because the true nature of the Holocaust became more widely known, including the power imbalance and the Nazi strategies that made resistance almost impossible.*

## FINISHING UP

Exit slip prompt: “One thing I learned about resistance during the Holocaust today is...”

### Modifications:

See the instructions in Step Two for a modification to the mindmap task.

## Related lessons

Teachers may choose to follow this lesson with a case study of resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto. You can view that and other Holocaust lesson plans, at [this link](#).

You can also see a suggested plan for teaching a full unit about the Holocaust at [this link](#).