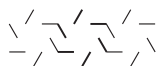


Study Guide

Tuvia Bielski: Rescue is Resistance



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Tuvia Bielski. Date unknown.
Source: *Novogrudok, The History of a Jewish Shtetl*, www.novogrudok.com.

Before his death in 1987, Tuvia Bielski told his wife, Lilka, "I will be famous when I am dead." Bielski and Lilka were living in Brooklyn, New York, where they seemed to be a typical immigrant family. Bielski, who spoke thickly accented English, worked as a truck driver delivering plastic materials to companies throughout the New York metropolitan area. Bielski was in reality the man who many consider among the greatest heroes of anti-German resistance in World War II—a man who master-minded and led one of the most significant Jewish rescue and resistance operations of the Holocaust.

It is a profound irony that he would be forced to wonder when he would get full credit for his achievements.

and the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In fact, their resistance was more successful than both the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the work of Schindler in both numbers of lives saved and numbers of Germans killed. Tuvia Bielski was a deeply complex man: cruel and tender, charismatic and profane, hotheaded and composed. But he was above all passionate and utterly determined, possessing a connection to the sufferings of the Jewish people that bordered on the mystical. Members of the partisan group remember him as super-human, riding atop a white horse in their forest enclave. "He was sent by God to save Jews," said Rabbi Beryl Chafetz, who as a rabbinical student took refuge in the Bielski camp. "He wasn't a man, he was an angel," said Isaac Mendelson.

During World War II, the majority of European Jews were deceived by the German's meticulous "disinformation" campaign. The Nazis detained millions of Jews and forced them into camps, promising them safety in exchange for their work. In reality, many of these "work camps" were death camps where men, women, and children were systematically murdered. Yet approximately 30,000 Jews, many of whom were teenagers, escaped the Nazis to form or join organized resistance groups. These Jews are known as the Jewish partisans, and they joined hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish partisans fighting against the enemy throughout much of Europe.

Sometimes they fought alongside non-Jewish partisan units. In some units they had to hide their Jewish identity, even though they shared a common enemy, the Germans. Many partisan units were so antisemitic that fighters of the same unit could not openly reveal that they were Jews. Other partisan units were purely Jewish. In the case of the Bielski's, they were composed not merely of fighters, but of women, children, and the elderly.



Teaching with 'Defiance'

This guide can be used with JPEF's multimedia curriculum for the film 'Defiance', starring Daniel Craig and Liev Schreiber. For additional resources and information, go to:

www.jewishpartisans.org/defiance

In its outlines, Tuvia Bielski's story sounds like the far-fetched creation of a Hollywood scriptwriter. From a small village in the country now called Belarus, Tuvia and his brothers Asael, Zus, and Aron escaped from invading Germans into a nearby forest and then created a refuge for other local Jews there. But the Bielskis did more than hide and save lives: periodically a group of them emerged from the trees on horseback, sub-machine guns strapped to their shoulders, to ambush the enemy. In time, the forest settlement became like a small town, complete with shoemakers and tailors, carpenters, and hat makers, a central square for social gatherings, a tannery that doubled as a synagogue, and even a theater troupe. Ultimately, the Bielski brothers saved the lives of 1,200 Jews and killed more than 300 enemy soldiers.

The Bielski partisans' achievement is on par with more famous acts of wartime courage such as those performed by Oskar Schindler

Jewish partisans blew up thousands of German supply trains, convoys, and bridges, making it



Conforms to Common Core Standards
jewishpartisans.org/standards



Members of the Bielski unit, on guard duty at an airstrip in the Naliboki Forest. Approximate date 1943-1944. Source USHMM.

harder for the Germans to fight the war. Partisans also destroyed German power plants and factories, focusing their attention on military and strategic targets, not on civilians. Most partisan units wanted young men who could fight to join their ranks, and many were hostile to Jews. Not the Bielskis, however. They took in hundreds of the elderly, ill, women, and children.

was thought by many that he was destined for great things.

Asael was the most reticent of the three older brothers. Hardworking and loyal, he enjoyed operating the family's business and planned eventually to take over his father's responsibilities at the mill. Zus was the brash one. He would throw punches first, ask questions later. His parents, it seemed, were always negotiating with the police to keep him out of trouble. Aron was a pre-teen when the war began. Still, he helped gather intelligence. His youth camouflaged his role as a partisan, and it made him an indispensable member of the group.

When the Germans arrived in western Belarus, then part of the Soviet Union, in June 1941, the four brothers were 35, 33, 29, and 12. In the first months of the occupation, Bielski family members avoided the German onslaught, but by December 1941 the invaders had captured and killed the brothers' parents and two of their younger siblings. Thousands of other Jews from the region were either killed by the Germans and their collaborators or forced to live in ghettos.

The brothers sought refuge in the woods where they had spent time as children. Asael and Zus, who were hiding together, set about finding safe homes for a dozen or so of their surviving

Additional Resources on the Bielski brothers and the film 'Defiance'

▼
Take the Teaching with the Film 'Defiance' videocourse:
www.jewishpartisans.org/elearning

▼
Download additional 'Defiance' curricula & other resources:
www.jewishpartisans.org/defiance

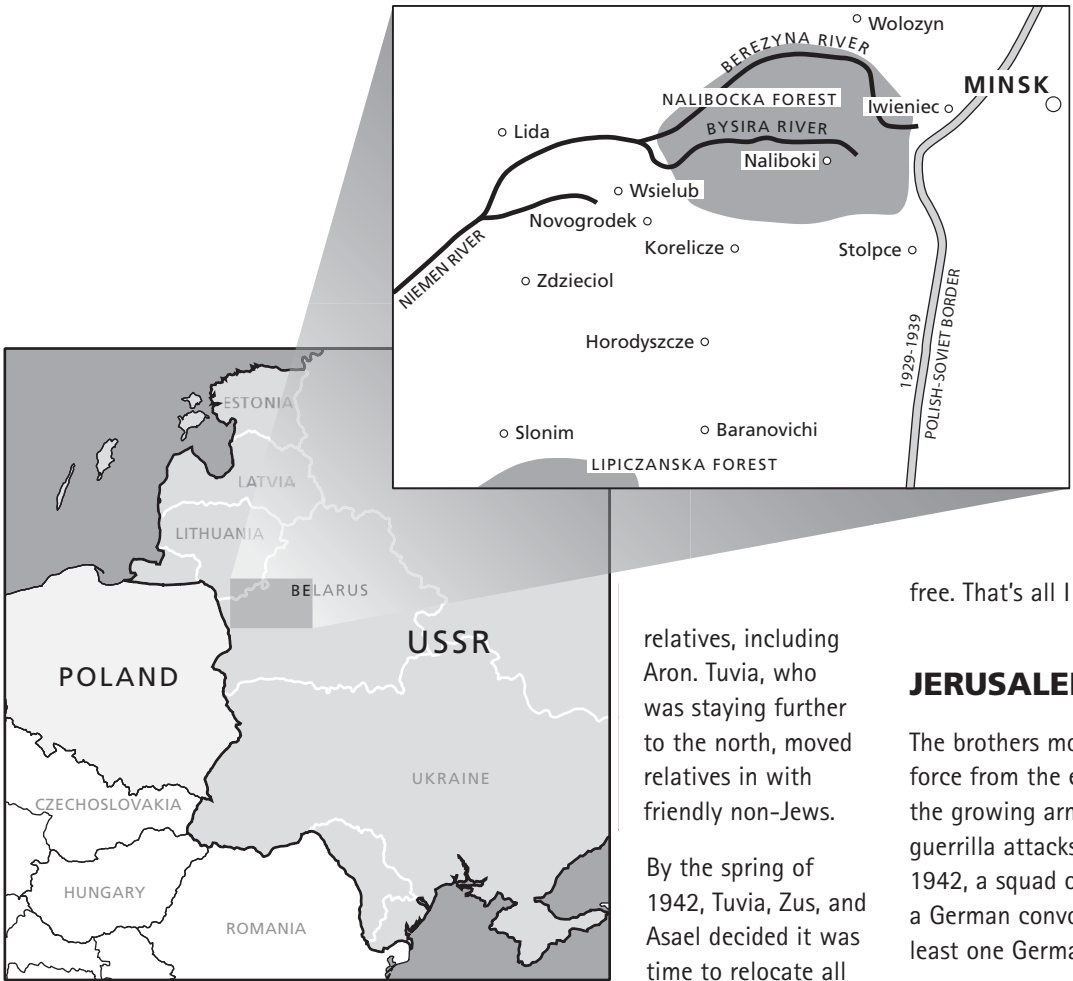
▼
See the Bielski partisans short film (video version of pages 2-3):
www.jewishpartisans.org/films

▼
Get the 'Defiance' Educator's DVD with 21 film excerpts and Bielski partisan testimonials:
dvd@jewishpartisans.org

IN THE WOODS, WE WERE FREE

Tuvia, Asael, Zus, and Aron Bielski were four of 12 children born to a miller and his wife in the rural village of Stankevich, near Novogrudok. The only Jews in a small community, they quickly learned how to look after themselves. Unlike their father, who had a conciliatory nature, the three oldest brothers wouldn't hesitate to fight to defend their family's honor. Their reputation was fearsome: it was rumored among the peasants that Asael and Zus had murdered a man.

The four brothers had four different personalities, but one common purpose. The brothers complemented each other's strengths and weaknesses. Tuvia was more refined than his younger brothers. A tall, dark-haired man known by neighbors as the "Clark Gable of the Bielskis," he was an avid reader who loved to recount religious stories to illustrate current dilemmas. It



MAP OF AREA: Approximate activity of Bielski partisans in Eastern Poland (now Belarus) during the war. Source: *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans*, by Nechama Tec. Oxford University Press, 1993.

single location in the woods. Many were wary of venturing into the wild, but the brothers were insistent. In a forest about a mile from the nearest road, they made an encampment where everyone slept under blankets propped up by tree branches. The brothers also sought to obtain weapons for the group's protection.

As the murders and torture of the Jews increased in the Novogrodek ghetto, and in others further away, Tuvia decided to expand the group beyond their relatives. Asael and Zus initially opposed the plan, thinking that it was best to keep the unit small and manageable. But Tuvia insisted. "I would rather save one old Jewish woman than kill 10 Nazi soldiers," he said. He argued that they couldn't sit idle while their people were being slaughtered.

"Asael and Zus would never have had the old people and women," Aron recalled. "They would have their wives and girlfriends, but no way in hell would they have chosen to take all those people." Emissaries were sent into the ghettos to retrieve Jews or urge them to leave; despite

the dangers, many were eager to risk flight. By the autumn of 1942, the Bielski group included nearly 100 members. "It seemed like a fantasy from another world," wrote one inhabitant after the war. "A kind of gay abandon filled the air; biting frank talk spiced with juicy curses; galloping horses and the laughter of children. Suddenly I saw myself as an extra in a Wild West movie."

"Compared to the ghettos, it felt like heaven," said Charles Bedzow. "In the woods, we were free. That's all I can tell you. We had freedom."

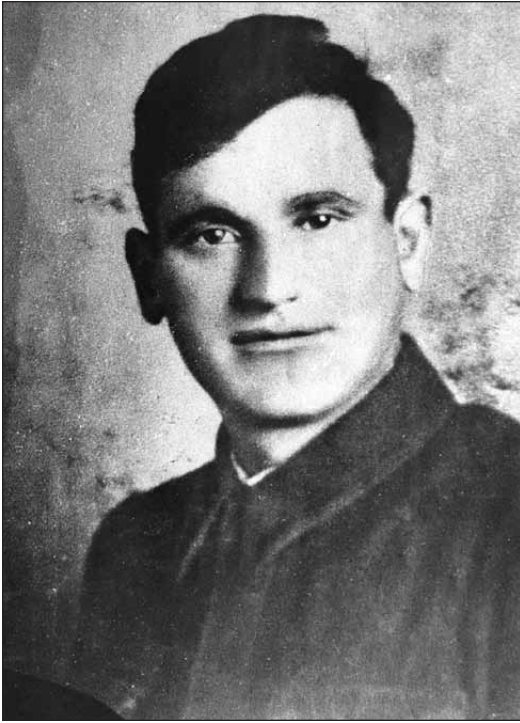
JERUSALEM IN THE FOREST

The brothers moved quickly to build a fighting force from the escapees, who joined forces with the growing army of Soviet partisans engaging in guerrilla attacks against the occupiers. In October 1942, a squad of Bielski and Soviet fighters raided a German convoy loaded with supplies, killing at least one German soldier.

"It was satisfying in a larger sense," Tuvia wrote of the first attack on Nazis in his 1955 Yiddish language memoir, "A real spiritual high point, that the world should know that there were still Jews alive, and especially Jewish partisans."

The strength and reputation of the brothers' unit—formed as a military outfit with Tuvia as commander, Asael as deputy commander, and Zus as chief of reconnaissance—grew throughout late 1942. The young fighting men, a minority of the overall Bielski population, spent long nights obtaining food from local peasants—sometimes stealing it—in order to feed the group. They also sought out and executed Nazi collaborators, including one man who lived in the Bielskis' boyhood village and was once close to the family. The brothers knew that the group needed to be feared if it had any chance of surviving in such a hostile environment. And it worked: the size of the unit increased, seemingly with every passing day.

With the arrival of the frigid Belarus winter, the brothers worried about the prospect of their people freezing to death. They organized the



Asael Bielski was killed during the battle of Koenigsberg in 1944 while fighting in the Red Army. Approximate date 1943-1944. Source: USHMM

construction of large wooden living quarters, known as *zemlyankas* in Russian. Built partially into the ground, the structures utilized earthen walls to contain as much heat as possible. The dank, dark spaces were far from luxurious, but they kept the large group protected from the bitter Belorussian winter. "It also helped if we had a little vodka," remembered one survivor.

The dropping temperatures brought an increase in enemy activity. One night, a unit of German-allied police rushed towards the camp and shot a guard. Alerted by the gunfire, the entire population fled

deeper into the woods to safety. Another time, 10 Jewish fighting men from the unit were killed by a troop of German gendarmes who were tipped off by two Belorussian collaborators. The Bielskis were incensed by the act, and Asael and a crew of fighters led a revenge attack, killing both the collaborators and several others. The questions of revenge and "an eye for an eye" made for long conversations within the group. Were the Bielskis going to ruthlessly kill others, inspired by acts of revenge? Or, were they going to be different?

The group grew again in the spring of 1943. A key factor in their success was that Tuvia, Zus, and Asael all had military experience prior to the German invasion; important training that only a small percentage of Jewish partisans had. The brothers were soon watching over nearly 800 Jews, constantly moving the ragged band to new locations, to keep one step ahead of the Nazis. It was clear that the local peasants knew where the Jews were hiding, and Tuvia was increasingly worried about the unit's safety.

He had reason to worry. On June 9, 1943, the Bielski camp was once again attacked. This time, 10 Jews lost their lives. The brothers decided to relocate once again, to the dense Naliboki forest, many miles from the village of their boyhood. After an exhausting march to the forest, which was home to many Soviet partisan units, the group suffered the biggest attack yet from the Nazis. They escaped by retreating to an island in

the middle of a swamp, and although the fighting lasted more than a week, only one partisan was lost.

In the weeks following the attack, the brothers located a dry spot in the dense forest and began work on a new camp. "It really was something special," said Jack Kagan, an escapee of the Novogrudek ghetto who emigrated to London after the war. Completed in October and November 1943, it had a large kitchen, a bathhouse, a blacksmith forge, a small horse-powered mill, a bakery, a tailor shop staffed by 18 men, a school for some 60 children, a gunsmith shop, and even a jail. It came to be called Jerusalem [see map on page 6].

"Everybody was gainfully employed and it was an embarrassment if you weren't working," Tuvia said in his 1946 book, *Yehudai Yaar [Jews of the Forest]*. "We spent many hours after work in small groups meeting in and around the camp. The younger people always gathered around the campfires, talking and singing. These were not official parties in the Soviet mold that we were forced by the few Communists among us to attend on occasion. Around the campfires we would sing songs in Yiddish, Hebrew and our conversations always gravitated to the present and future of Israel."



Zus Bielski after the War. Approximate date 1944-1945. Source: USHMM

Since the group was ostensibly a Soviet unit loyal to the Communist creed, outward displays of Jewish or Zionist¹ expression were to be avoided. But a profound Jewish spirit pervaded the community. "During Pesach, we prepared unleavened bread for those who wanted it," Tuvia said. "Most of the people preferred kosher² meat. Yeshiva student Avraham Shmuel Kaibovitz from Mir³ was appointed to oversee the laws of kashrut. Those people who wanted to observe the Sabbath were also excused from performing tasks, and in most cases their requests were granted, although there was no official reason for this."

For the inhabitants of the forest camp, Tuvia was a respected and beloved figure. He frequently gave speeches before the entire assembly, often breaking down in tears at the fate of the Jews. Zus and Asael, far from being idealistic visionaries, were more interested in leading military expeditions against the Germans and their allies. The relative safety of the new camp allowed them greater freedom to complete their tasks. For the next few months, they shot up military outposts, attacked convoys traveling between the cities, and mined rail tracks with improvised bombs.

In a typical incident, on April 29, 1944, a squad of eleven men led by Asael Bielski "blew up a German truck on the Lida-Novogrudok road", according to a report delivered to the Soviet command. According to the report, handwritten in the Russian language, Asael's fighters killed one German soldier and two Nazi-allied policemen and interrupted vehicular traffic on the road for ten hours. "There were no victims from our side and no spoils of war," the report said. In another incident, on May 20, 1944, Asael's squad attacked a unit of Polish partisans, killing six people and wounding several.

There were groups of antisemitic Polish partisans who hunted down and killed Jewish partisans—members of the Polish Home Army, or Army Krajowa. There were also other Polish partisans who were allied to the Germans and wanted the post-war Poland to be free of non-Catholics and fought against Jewish partisan groups as well. [For more information about antisemitism in the Jewish partisans see JPEF's study guide *Antisemitism in the Jewish Partisans*, written in partnership with the ADL. You can also watch a short film on the same subject, narrated by Larry King, at: www.jewishpartisans.org/films].

But there was also tension between the brothers. At one point Zus left the main Bielski camp to join a Soviet partisan brigade that was focused solely on fighting the Germans. Asael, Zus, and Tuvia often argued on which was the better way to survive: bringing as many Jews as possible to their camp, including people who could not fight, or using their finite resources to physically fight against the Germans.

LIBERATION

In July 1944 the Red Army was winning the war against Germany and arrived to liberate the woods where the Bielski camp was located. The Bielski brothers reported to the Soviets that their group included a total of 1,140 Jews. They also reported that their fighting forces, sometimes with Soviet partisans, had killed a total of 381 enemy fighters. But few of the survivors were willing to dwell on the successes: they emerged to find their homes ransacked, their families murdered, and their communities destroyed.

As for the brothers, Asael Bielski was conscripted into the Red Army and killed in battle in February 1945. Tuvia, Zus, and Aron emigrated to Israel, where they fought in the War of Independence. The brothers later emigrated to the United States. Zus, who died in 1995, operated a trucking and taxi company, while Tuvia, the great commander, toiled behind the wheel of a delivery truck. When he died in 1987, he was buried on Long Island. A year later, he was exhumed and given a state funeral with military honors in Jerusalem.

It is difficult to estimate how many people are alive today because of the actions of the Bielski brothers. Many of the twelve hundred people who walked out of the woods in the summer of 1944 have since died, but their children have borne children, who themselves have borne children. By some accounts, approximately ten thousand people currently alive owe their existence to the brothers' decision, at Tuvia's insistence, to shelter every Jew who arrived in the forest encampment. It is an achievement that is literally incalculable.

1. A Jewish movement that arose in the late 19th century in response to growing antisemitism and sought to reestablish a Jewish homeland in British mandated Palestine.
2. Food that conforms to Jewish dietary laws.
3. Prior to the Holocaust, the village of Mir (35 miles from Naliboki) was home to some 2,400 Jews and a famous *yeshiva* [Jewish religious school/university].

More Information on the Jewish Partisans

The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation recommends these resources for further information:

Films & Video

- To see videos of Aron Bell, the last surviving Bielski brother, please go to: www.jewishpartisans.org/partisans
- *Defiance*, directed by Ed Zwick. A Paramount Vantage release, available online and on DVD.
- *A Partisan Returns: The Legacy of Two Sisters* - former Bielski partisan Lisa Reibel journeys back to her home in Belarus for the first time after nearly 65 years: www.jewishpartisans.org/films
- *Introduction to the Bielski Partisans* - With archival images and rare WWII newsreel footage, narrated by Ed Asner: www.jewishpartisans.org/films

Books

- *The Bielski Brothers: The True Story of Three Men Who Defied the Nazis, Built a Village in the Forest, and Saved 1,200 Jews*, by Peter Duffy, Harper Collins, 2004.
- *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans*, by Nechama Tec. Oxford University Press, 1993.

Websites

- *Teaching with 'Defiance'* lesson plans, *Ethics and 'Defiance'* discussion guide and other Bielski partisans resources: www.jewishpartisans.org/defiance
- Novogrudok: History of a Jewish Shtetl: www.novogrudok.co.uk
- *Defiance* Film Website: www.paramount.com/movies/defiance

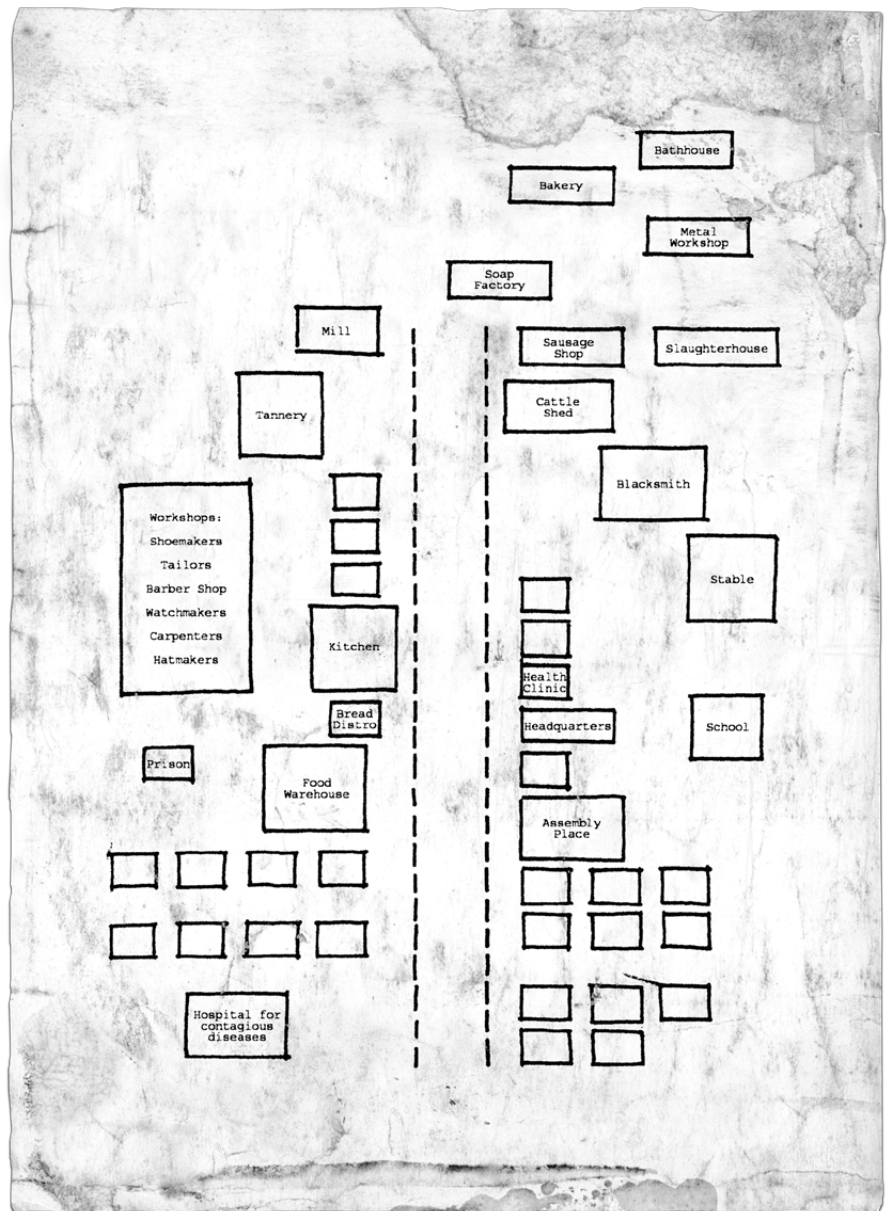
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Textual Analysis

1. "Jerusalem" provided essential services for local Soviet partisan units in the forests. How do you think this might have contributed to the Bielski unit's survival?
2. What do you understand about the relationship between the Bielski partisans and the Soviet partisan command? Between the Bielski and the Polish partisans? What evidence do you have from the text to support your understanding?

Ethics

1. The Bielski partisan unit was unique in that it readily accepted large numbers of non-fighters into its units. Do you think this enhanced or threatened their chances for survival (or both)? Explain your answer.
2. The Bielski partisans took severe measures against informants and collaborators. Often the collaborator and his entire family would be killed, and their home burned to the ground. Holocaust scholar Nechama Tec quotes Tuvia, explaining, "We could neither forgive nor forget. If we do not take revenge upon such collaborators, what would become of us? Every farmer would be free to inform." Do you agree with Tuvia's argument? Why or why not?
3. As commander of the unit, Tuvia insisted that all Jews be accepted and integrated into the camp. His brothers argued against this, fearing that large numbers of unarmed people would bring disaster to all. Do you agree with Tuvia's position? Why or why not? What is the argument for Tuvia's position? How would you counter the argument and press for his brothers' concept of their mission?
4. In order to feed such large numbers of people, armed partisans were required to raid neighboring farms and villages. Tuvia describes the situation, "The peasants were poor, yet we had to do it. We were in a predicament... sometimes we would take their last cow, their last horse." Is it permissible to put others' lives in jeopardy to save one's own?



Map of "Jerusalem", the Bielski camp in the Naliboki Forest. Fall 1943 - Summer 1944. The camp had a tannery, bakery, soap factory, hat maker, school, and tailor and approximately 1,200 inhabitants by the time of the German retreat from Poland.

THIS STUDY GUIDE MADE POSSIBLE BY THE CONFERENCE OF JEWISH MATERIAL CLAIMS AGAINST GERMANY-RABBI ISRAEL MILLER FUND FOR SHOAH RESEARCH, DOCUMENTATION AND EDUCATION, THE RICHARD AND RHODA GOLDMAN FUND, THE WALTER AND ELISE HAAS FUND, THE KORET FOUNDATION, THE JPEF GEVURAH SOCIETY, AND DIANE AND HOWARD WOHL.



Ethics and the Film *Defiance*

partisan: *n. a member of an organized body of fighters who attack or harass an enemy, especially within occupied territory; a guerrilla.*



Daniel Craig as Tuvia Bielski and Alexa Davalos as Lilka from *DEFIANCE*. Copyright: ©2009 by PARAMOUNT VANTAGE. All Rights Reserved.

INTRODUCTION TO GUIDE

The movie *Defiance* (2009) depicts the incredible but true story of the Bielski brothers, Tuvia, Zus, Asael, and Aron (played by Daniel Craig, Liev Schreiber, Jamie Bell, and George MacKay) who, against all odds during World War II, survived in the forest, fought the Germans, and saved approximately 1,200 Jewish lives.

The movie is rated R, mostly for violence. The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation (JPEF) recommends that parents, guardians, or educators view this movie with their teens and engage them in a discussion of the film, using this guide.

The Bielskis faced ethical decisions that would be unfathomable to us. They were forced to live in the forest at a time when the fabric of society—with all of its morality, ethics, and laws—had crumbled around them. They were forced to make difficult life and death decisions, and quickly—their own lives depended on it.

The questions posed in this guide are meant to provoke and facilitate discussion about difficult ethical dilemmas, to help teens process and better understand the film, and to engage them in critical thinking about the intricacies and nuances of some of the important issues that are raised in the film.

CONTEXT

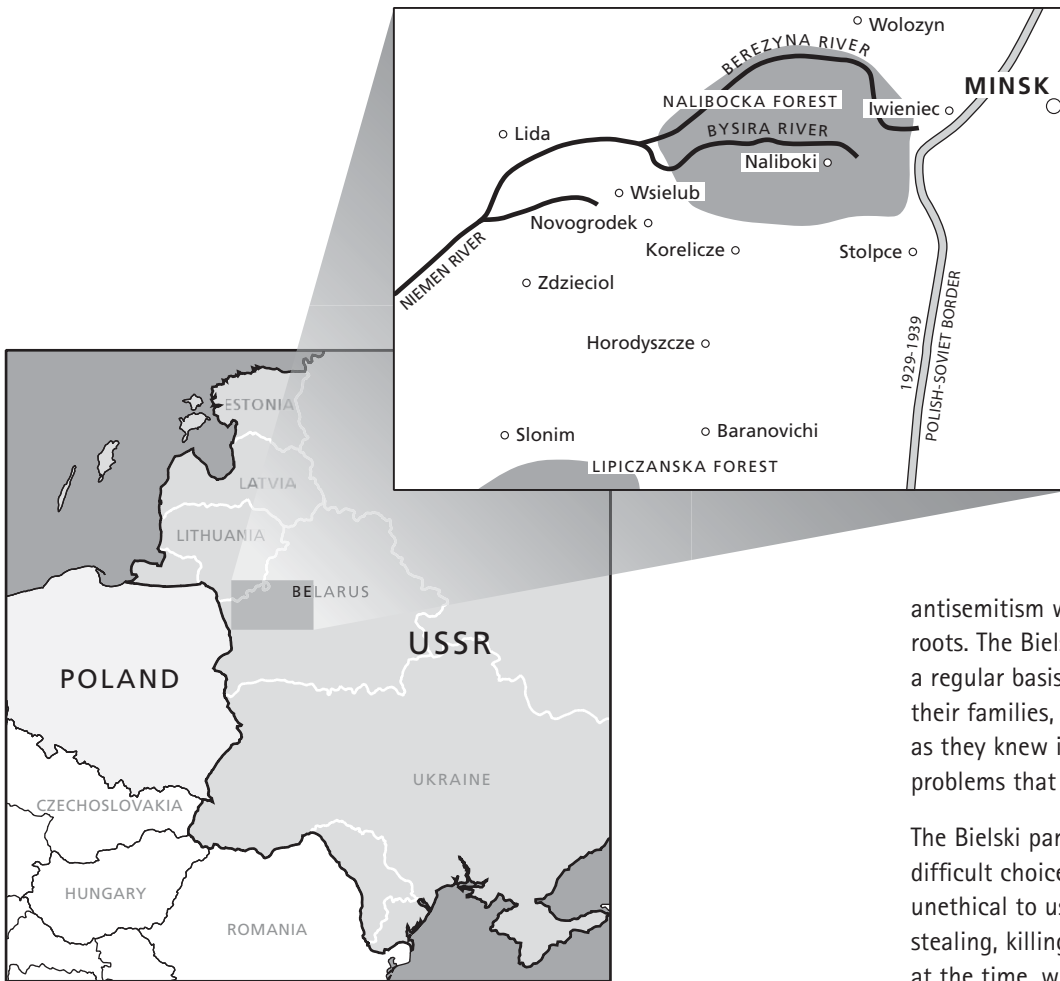
From a small village in what is now the Republic of Belarus, the Bielski brothers escaped the Germans, who murdered their family and most of the Jewish inhabitants in their village. They escaped to a nearby forest and created a refuge for other local Jews there. But the Bielskis did more than hide and save lives; they emerged from the trees on horseback, sub-machine guns strapped to their shoulders, attacking German soldiers and their collaborators. In time, the forest settlement became like a small town, complete with shoemakers and tailors, carpenters



Teaching with 'Defiance'

This guide can be used with JPEF's multimedia curriculum for the film 'Defiance', starring Daniel Craig and Liev Schreiber. For additional resources and information, go to:

www.jewishpartisans.org/defiance



MAP OF AREA: Approximate activity of Bielski partisans in Eastern Poland (now Belarus) during war. Source: *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans*, by Nechama Tec. Oxford University Press, 1993.

and hat makers. It became a central square for social gatherings, a tannery that doubled as a synagogue, and even a theater troupe. Ultimately, the Bielski brothers saved the lives of 1,200 Jews and killed more than 300 enemy soldiers.

The Bielskis were part of a larger military presence. There were hundreds of thousands of partisans all over Europe, fighting the Germans and their collaborators in at least ten occupied countries. Many partisans were former soldiers who escaped German camps, or civilians who took up arms against the enemy. In all, an estimated 30,000 Jews fought as partisans, the majority in Soviet-controlled areas during World War II.

The only way the Bielskis could survive was by making an alliance with the Soviet partisans who were also operating in the forests. Soviet partisan units were mainly comprised of Red Army soldiers who scattered in the wake of the June, 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union. It is important to note that the Bielskis were not just tough; they were also cunning. Along with a great deal of luck, these qualities enabled them not

only to survive, but to rescue others.

Defiance reveals the intricacies of the Bielskis' experience, and portrays the difficult ethical dilemmas the brothers struggled with on a daily basis in order to survive. It is important to remember that the Bielskis were living through a war and that they were on the front lines. Their lives were in constant danger every day—not just as partisans, but as the ongoing targets of a violent

antisemitism with hundreds of years of historical roots. The Bielski partisans struggled for food on a regular basis, and witnessed the destruction of their families, loved ones, and their entire lives as they knew it. They were constantly faced with problems that had no simple solution.

The Bielski partisans had to make incredibly difficult choices that would normally be seen as unethical to us during ordinary times—such as stealing, killing, and taking revenge—but which, at the time, were often necessary for their very survival.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The goal of this study guide is to give parents and educators a variety of tools to facilitate a discussion after watching the film, delving into the day-in, day-out moral dilemmas that the Bielskis faced in the forest, and analyzing how those ethical issues are relevant to our lives today.

The guide focuses on three critical actions taken by the Bielskis and thousands of other Jewish partisans throughout the war: Stealing, Killing, and Taking Revenge.

Each section is divided into four parts:

- **Introduction** - background on the issue
- **Discussion Questions** - to engage teens in thinking about the issue at hand
- **Text** - an excerpt from a religious or historical text which illuminates, complexifies, and contextualizes the issue
- **Descriptions** - further clarification and discussion of the issue, sometimes followed by more questions

A: STEALING

Introduction

Early in the film, there is a scene in which some of the Bielski partisans are in search of food. They find a milkman delivering several large containers of milk to the Germans. The partisans steal the milk for themselves, but decide not to take all of it, leaving the milkman with something to give the Germans so that he would not be punished.

Discussion Questions

- *Do you think the Bielskis were justified in stealing food from the milkman? Why or why not?*



Tuvia Bielski (played by Daniel Craig in *Defiance*). Date unknown. Source: Novogrudek, *The History of a Jewish Shtetl*, www.novogrudek.com.

Text

The *Torah* (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) has a general principle that frames many of Judaism's subsequent laws that relate to the ethics of war. This principle is called "pikuach nefesh"—the healing of the soul—and claims that the preservation of a human life is the most important law of all, and that almost any other law may be violated in order to ensure that life is preserved.

This concept is derived from two different verses in *Leviticus* (the third book of the *Torah*): "You shall keep my decrees and my laws that a person will do and live by them, I am G-d." (*Leviticus* 18:5) and "You shall

not stand by the blood of your fellow." (*Leviticus* 19:16).

The Rabbis from the *Talmud* (a compendium of centuries of Jewish law and thought) derive from these verses that one must do everything in one's power to save a life, even if it involves violation of one or more of the commandments. This would mean that while the Bible says that it is wrong to steal, if one is stealing to save a life, it is permissible.

Additional Discussion Questions

- *What do you think is the meaning of verse 19:16 in *Leviticus* "You shall not stand by the blood of your fellow"? Have you ever been in a situation*

in which you've seen something done to another person that made you uncomfortable? How did you react?

- *Is there a discrepancy between *Leviticus* 18:5 and *Leviticus* 19:16? What happens when there is a discrepancy between the law to live by G-d's decrees and the law of self-preservation? How would you decide when it is justifiable to take the law into your own hands?*
- *Do these verses change the way you feel about how the Bielskis treated the milkman? If so, how?*

Later in the film, the same milkman leads German soldiers to the Bielski partisans' secret location in the forest, forcing the camp to flee in terror.

- *Should the Bielskis have killed the milkman to prevent what happened? Why or why not? How do the verses from *Leviticus* (above) inform your opinion?*
- *It is not known whether or not the milkman was a willing Nazi collaborator or if he was forced to give them the location of the Bielskis' camp. Would knowing this influence your answer? How?*

B: KILLING

Introduction

Partisans had to kill their enemies and take responsibility for the related moral and practical issues surrounding this on a regular basis. Clayton Frohman, co-writer and co-producer of *Defiance*, worked closely with the film's director and co-writer Edward Zwick, and was on location in Lithuania throughout the filming, acted in the film, and participated in the film's editing process. Clayton answered some of JPEF's questions about the Bielskis and the making of *Defiance*.

Description

JPEF: How did the Bielski partisan unit treat their enemies—the Germans and their collaborators?

CLAYTON: We understand that the Bielskis regularly killed Germans and those who collaborated with them.

Their point was to discourage villagers from turning in Jews to the Nazis. Once they found a collaborator, they'd kill him, kill his entire family, burn his house, and put up a sign that read, "This is what happens to the collaborators."



Zus Bielski (played by Liev Schreiber in *Defiance*) after the War. Approximate date 1944-1945. Source: USHMM

CLAYTON: Their actions were sometimes as vicious as the Nazis and this actually attracted us, Edward [Zwick], and me, to them—this differentiated them from other groups of Jews during the Holocaust.

Six million Jews were murdered with the assistance of local Nazi collaborators. These locals were a key part of their strategy, and many participated with the Nazis in the murder of Jews, or provided the Nazis with critical information about their whereabouts. Locals, not Nazis, were responsible for the death of the Bielski's parents and family members. Not all locals worked with the Nazis, however; many helped the

partisans and many more were instrumental to the survival of countless Jews.

Text

The Talmud, in tractate Sanhedrin page 73a, states: "*Haba lehorgecha, hashkem lehorgo*"—if someone is coming to kill you, rise to kill them first.

From a Jewish perspective, you are OBLIGATED to defend yourself and protect your life if it is in danger. However, according to Jewish law-makers, led by the 12th century rabbi and philosopher Maimonides, if you kill someone who could have been stopped by lesser means then you are guilty of murder. Meaning, if someone is chasing you with a gun, and you could stop them and save your life by shooting them in the foot, then if you kill them, it is considered murder.

Discussion Questions

- Were the Bielskis justified in treating collaborators in the way they did? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about the assertion that the Bielskis were "sometimes as vicious as the Nazis?"
- Is there a difference between the word "kill" and the word "murder"?
- Does the context of wartime change how these texts on ethics can or should be understood? Should ethical laws be the same in war and peace?

Description (continued)

JPEF: How does *Defiance* portray the Bielskis' moral tension about taking lives?

CLAYTON: Tuvia's mantra is, "We will not become like them." Zus, his brother, says, "But we can kill like them."

The spine of the movie is this dialectic, this tension between them. Many of the ethical issues of the movie are—do we become as nasty, as vengeful, and as bloody as the Nazis. The Bielskis grappled with this notion of "we don't want to become them, and yet we have."

Text

President Barack Obama, in his 2009 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech said:

"Make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism—it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason."

And Simon Trakinski, a Jewish partisan from Lithuania that JPEF interviewed, said, "Evil only recognizes stronger evil."

Discussion Questions

- Contrast President Obama's statement with that of Simon Trakinski: How are they similar? How are they different?
- Do you think non-violent resistance could have stopped the Holocaust? Why or why not? Under what circumstances is armed resistance more appropriate than non-violent resistance (include examples of civil-rights struggles, wartime and genocide)
- Who do you agree with: Tuvia, who said, "We will not become like them" or Zus, who said, "But we can kill like them"? Why? Can the two statements be compatible with each other? In what ways?
- Clayton implies that the Bielskis may have survived because they responded with evil to evil, and in some way "became like them." Do you agree? Give an example from the movie that expresses this.

C: TAKING REVENGE

Introduction

The Bielskis witnessed the murder of their families and friends, and the destruction of their entire world. They killed Germans not only in self-defense or because they were fighting a war; but also as a result of raw emotion and revenge.



Asael Bielski (played by Jamie Bell in *Defiance*) was killed during the battle of Koenigsberg in 1944 while fighting in the Red Army. Approximate date 1943-1944. Source: USHMM

Text

There are conflicting ethical perspectives in various religious traditions and cultures regarding revenge.

The Jewish tradition seems to offer paradoxical perspectives. In Leviticus 19:18, the Torah states, "*You shall not take revenge or bear any grudge against the children of your people,*" arguing that revenge is wrong.

On the other hand, in Exodus (the second book of the Torah) 21:24, it says, "*An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.*" (Shemot 21:24). This verse seems to encourage revenge, though it is almost always

interpreted metaphorically by Jewish commentators (monetary compensation for a loss, rather than exact revenge).

A famous Christian perspective is found in the Gospel According to Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 38-42, quoting Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, saying: "*You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*"

Another perspective is elucidated by Jared Diamond, in his article in the *The New Yorker* magazine (April 21, 2008) about modern tribes in Papua New Guinea, in which he describes their culture of taking revenge. He quotes a New Guinean Highlander named Daniel, who takes

revenge on the man who killed his cousin, Soll. In describing why he took revenge, Daniel says, "I wanted to obtain vengeance myself, even if it were to cost me my own life. I had to ask myself, how could I live through my anger over Soll's death for the rest of my life? The answer was that the best way to deal with my anger was to exact the vengeance myself."

Discussion Questions

- *What is YOUR gut reaction about revenge? When is it right? When is it wrong?*
- *Put the four quotations above into your own words. Which resonate most with you? Why?*
- *What potential benefits does revenge have? What potential harm can it cause?*
- *Have you ever wanted to take revenge? Have you ever acted on it? What was the situation? In retrospect, was it "right"? How did it make you feel?*

Description

JPEF: How did you portray the Bielskis experience of revenge in the movie?

CLAYTON: We had a scene we wrote where they capture a scout with paperwork that the Germans were about to launch an assault into the forest, to root out the partisans and put an end to the partisan movement.

What happens in scene is this terrified Nazi scout is thrown into the camp, and a group of partisans surround him with rocks and guns and hatchets, and they taunt him.

The group is descending on the scout as Tuvia examines the documents, which inform him that the Germans will be leading a raid on their camp in two days.

It was a group effort, and the group, in full view of everyone else in the camp, took out all of their revenge and pain and anger on this scout. "This is for my mother. This is for my father. This is for my brother." He's beaten to death by the crowd.

There are moderates and hot-heads in the group. Some people ask Tuvia to intervene. The scout says, "I have a wife and kids," and one of the Jews says, "So did I."

CLAYTON: The partisans didn't let anyone go. What were they going to do, take them prisoner? Feed them when they could hardly feed themselves?

JPEF: What was it like for you to be an actor in that scene?

CLAYTON: I had a rifle—a rubberized one, which I was bringing down on the guy's neck. I felt that if I gave way to my own violence, I could break this guy's neck. But it's a movie. He's a stuntman. The level of violence that could be created as a group is astounding. Group behavior is different from individual behavior. Things you wouldn't do as an individual you could do in a group. I felt that.

Text

Irving Janis, a 20th century research psychologist famous for his theory "Groupthink," about the characteristics of group behavior, wrote in his book *Victims of Groupthink* that one of the eight characteristics of "groupthink" is: "An unquestioned belief in the group's inherent morality, inclining the members to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions."

Another characteristic of "groupthink" described by Janis is: "An illusion of invulnerability, shared by most or all the members, which creates excessive optimism and encourages taking extreme risks."

Discussion Questions

- What role does "groupthink" play in this scene described by writer Clayton Frohman?
- Do you think the scout would have been treated differently if only Tuvia had caught him? What about if Zus had caught him?
- How do you think that "groupthink" may have helped the Bielskis and the Partisans?

Description (continued)

JPEF: What role did the filmmaker's ethics play in shooting this scene?

CLAYTON: We'd filmed the scene a number of times, and, after a day of shooting this, we were all exhausted, and felt like we'd killed someone. So Edward said: "Let's shoot this again, and this time, once you've finished the frenzy of killing, come up out of circle of violence, and have a moment of guilt and remorse."

So we shot that moment of remorse and awareness.

Then we added a third element—Tuvia walks through the camp afterwards, and various people refuse to meet his eye. We were trying to portray a communal sense of guilt, and a feeling that Tuvia, our leader, did nothing to prevent this murder.

A movie is written three times—by the writer, by the director on the set, and by the editor in the editing room; the editor decides which take best communicates the intention. Steve Rosenblum, the editor of *Defiance*, said "Forget that remorse stuff. They'd kill him and forget about it and start eating."

Then we consulted with the real Bielskis—sons and daughters of Tuvia and Zus. Zvi Bielski, Zus's son, said, "There was no remorse. My father's only regret was that he didn't kill more Germans."

Discussion Questions

- Imagine that YOU are the editor of *Defiance*, creating a film that reflects your own ethics. How would you choose to portray this scene?
 - A. The group kills the scout and gets on with their lives afterwards
 - B. The group starts to beat him, and then stops itself before it is too late
 - C. The group starts to beat the scout, and then Tuvia stops them
 - D. The group kills the scout and then can't believe what it has done
 - E. The group kills the scout, and when Tuvia walks by they are angry at him for not stopping them
- Why would you portray that scene in the way that you've chosen? Why did you choose your answer over the other answers?
- Describe how your choice connects to your own personal sense of ethics.
- Describe how the ethics of the filmmakers can influence the telling of a historical situation. Is this a problem in filmmaking? If so, why?

Description (continued)

JPEF: What was the final decision in the editing room?

CLAYTON: As you see in the movie, that moment of remorse was cut. But there was a sense that something had happened to the group, and Tuvia hadn't prevented it.

This is what we dealt with. The movie has a lot of those moments. It's not black and white. It's not a film in which the Jews are good guys and the Germans bad guys all of the time—we wanted to portray that in any moment you could be a good or bad guy. We're all capable of all these things.

A Final Text

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of England, recounted the following story on November 8th, 2008, in his weekly thoughts on the Torah portion:

Judea Pearl, father of the murdered American journalist Daniel Pearl, was in London while these [recent antisemitic attacks on synagogues in England] were taking place.

His son had been brutally murdered in Karachi after confessing: "My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, and I am Jewish."



Daniel Pearl, journalist.
Date unknown

Judea has taken his son's death and turned it into a mission to perpetuate the values for which he lived. He has instituted scholarships to bring young Pakistani journalists to America. He has put together a marvelously affirmative book in which well-known Jews talk about what Judaism means to them.

And he has initiated a series of dialogues with the Islamic scholar Akbar Ahmed, in order to show that Jews and Muslims can live together in mutual respect. Why, I asked Judea, had he gone down this road of dialogue?

"I refuse," he said, "to give Daniel's killers a victory. If I were to repay evil with evil, hate with hate, I would be letting them make me a little like them. Only by repaying evil with good do we defeat it."

Discussion Questions

- *How is the context of Judea Pearl's experience of losing his son different to the Bielskis losing their parents?*
- *How is Judea Pearl's attitude different from that expressed by Simon Trakinski's when he stated that "evil only recognizes greater evil"? Which resonates with you?*
- *How do Judea Pearl's actions inform your understanding of and perspective about revenge?*
- *Do you think that the story of the Bielski brothers, and the excerpts and quotes you have read about taking revenge, will affect your life in any way? How might this story inform the choices you will be making throughout your own life?*
- *Why do you think the film (and the book it is based on) is called Defiance? How is 'defiance' different from 'vengeance'? How is it different from 'survival'? What acts of defiance can you point to in this film?*

SUMMARY

We hope that the texts and discussion questions in this guide have helped you to develop a more nuanced perspective on the difficult ethical dilemmas featured in the movie *Defiance*, and have led to discussions that enabled a deepened understanding about these issues, as well as the difficult choices that you will face in your own lives.

The Bielskis are featured on the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation's website, along with the stories of many other partisans. For more information, visit www.jewishpartisans.org.

This Discussion Guide written by Maya Bernstein, Director of Education and Leadership Initiatives at Upstart Bay Area; edited in consultation with David Monblatt.

More Information on the Jewish Partisans

The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation recommends these resources for further information:

Films & Video

- *Defiance*, directed by Edward Zwick. A Paramount Vantage release (2008), available online or on DVD.
- To see a video of Aron Bell, the last surviving Bielski brother, talking about his brother Tuvia, go to www.jewishpartisans.org/partisans
- *A Partisan Returns: The Legacy of Two Sisters*, directed by Mitch Braff (2008): www.jewishpartisans.org/films
- *The Partisans of Vilna*, directed by Joshua Waletzky (1987).

Books/Guides

- *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans*, by Nechama Tec. Oxford University Press, 1993.
- *The Bielski Brothers: The True Story of Three Men Who Defied the Nazis, Built a Village in the Forest, and Saved 1,200 Jews*, by Peter Duffy, Harper Collins, 2004.
- *Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance During the Holocaust*, by Yitzhak Mais (ed), Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2007.
- *Tuvia Bielski JPEF Study Guide*: www.jewishpartisans/resist

Websites

- *Teaching with 'Defiance' and Bielski Partisans Resource Page*: www.jewishpartisans.org/defiance
- *Defiance film official website*: www.paramount.com/movies/defiance
- *Novogrudok: History of a Jewish Shetel*: www.novogrudok.com



JEWISH PARTISAN
EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

WWW.JEWISHPARTISANS.ORG

TEACHING *with* **DEFIANCE**



HISTORY | ETHICS | LEADERSHIP | JEWISH VALUES

WRITTEN BY MAYA BERNSTEIN, EDITED IN CONSULTATION WITH MICHAEL BERENBAUM

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Lesson Overview

Use the film *Defiance*—starring Daniel Craig and Liev Schreiber—to inspire and engage your students with the true story of the Bielski partisans.

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Who Are the Jewish Partisans?

par-ti-san *noun*: a member of an organized body of fighters who attack or harass an enemy, especially within occupied territory; a guerrilla

During World War II, the majority of European Jews were deceived by a monstrous and meticulous disinformation campaign. The Germans and their collaborators isolated and imprisoned Jews in ghettos. Millions were deported into concentration camps or death camps—primarily by convincing them that they were being sent to labor camps instead. In reality, most Jews who entered these so-called “work camps” would be starved, murdered or worked to death. Yet approximately 30,000 Jews, many of whom were teenagers, escaped the Nazis to form or join organized resistance groups. These Jews are known as the Jewish partisans, and they joined hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish partisans who fought against the enemy throughout much of Europe.

What Did They Do?

Partisans were determined to do battle with the Germans. They were not powerful enough to attack them frontally; that was the task of the Allied armies. But partisans could use speed, surprise, mobility and full knowledge of the area to attack the Germans and then escape before their enemies had time to confront them. Jewish partisans blew up thousands of German supply trains, convoys, and bridges, making it harder for the Germans to fight the war. Partisans also destroyed power plants and factories, focusing their attention on military and strategic targets, not on civilians. Jewish partisans forced the Germans to expend massive amounts of resources on combating them, disrupting their focus from multiple fronts against the Allies. One German commander called the Jews a “dangerous element” for their participation in partisan units in Russia.¹ In Lithuania, where Jewish partisans made up approximately 10% of all partisan fighters, they were responsible for 79% of derailed German trains and injuring nearly 50% of all enemy soldiers.² Jewish partisans saved thousands of Jewish lives, in some cases literally breaking Jews out of the confines of well-guarded ghettos, and in at least one situation, digging a tunnel to free 250 people from a ghetto. It is important to note that many partisans credit three things for their survival—luck, knowledge, and opportunity—not heroism, courage, and bravery.

How Did Other Jews Resist?

Resistance against the Germans took many different forms. In addition to the physical resistance of the partisans and ghetto fighters, spiritual resistance took the form of prayer services, and teaching children to read Hebrew. Artistic resistance produced art and poetry in ghettos and camps. Without taking up arms, these Jews stood in defiance to the Nazis, who sought to strip Jews not only of their lives, but also of their dignity and self-respect in order to facilitate the killing process. Jews countered the Germans and their collaborators in still other ways. Smugglers sent children to safety and couriers carried messages between the ghettos. Forgers created documents to ensure Jews safe passage to non-occupied countries or create fake identity cards that allowed Jews to “pass” as non-Jews. Jews in the work camps also sabotaged guns and other products they were forced to make for the Germans.

Why Should We Learn About the Jewish Partisans?

Most students falsely believe that Jews went “like sheep to the slaughter”. They perceive the Holocaust as a piece of Jewish history only about victimization and the loss of hope. The experience of thousands of Jewish partisans who stood up to tyranny and oppression, fought courageously—and often successfully—against the Germans, and saved countless lives is an important part of Jewish history that few students are aware of. This information has the power to transform people’s perception of the Jewish experience during the Holocaust, providing a clearer picture of Jewish heroism and character. After learning about the partisans, non-Jewish teens acquire a greater understanding about the Jewish people, leading to interfaith dialog and tolerance, while many Jewish teenagers often feel empowered, developing a stronger sense of Jewish identity and pride. The story of the Jewish partisans is empowering, and demonstrates how young people can make a positive difference in the world.



A group of Jewish members of the Lenin battalion of the Lipczany forest. 1944. Location: Belorussia. Source: Museum of Jewish Heritage

Life Lessons of the Jewish Partisans

Most of the Jewish partisans that JPEF interviewed agreed that three important life lessons must be passed on to future generations:

- *Young people can make a difference*
- *Stand up to tyranny, oppression, and discrimination...early*
- *Never give up*

JPEF encourages educators to discuss these with their students throughout this lesson.

What is JPEF?

The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation develops and distributes effective educational materials about the Jewish partisans, bringing the celebration of heroic resistance against tyranny into educational and cultural organizations. JPEF produces lessons, study guides and films for 6th-12th grade History, English, Ethics, Leadership, Jewish Studies and more. JPEF educational materials are a key curriculum component in thousands of Jewish and secular schools worldwide.

1. Documents of the Holocaust, edited by Yitzhak Arad, Israel Gutman, and Abraham Margalio (Lincoln, The University of Nebraska Press, Jerusalem, Yad Vashem 1999), 441–444.

2. Fighting Back, Dov Levin, (New York, Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1985), 196.

Who Are the Bielski Partisans?

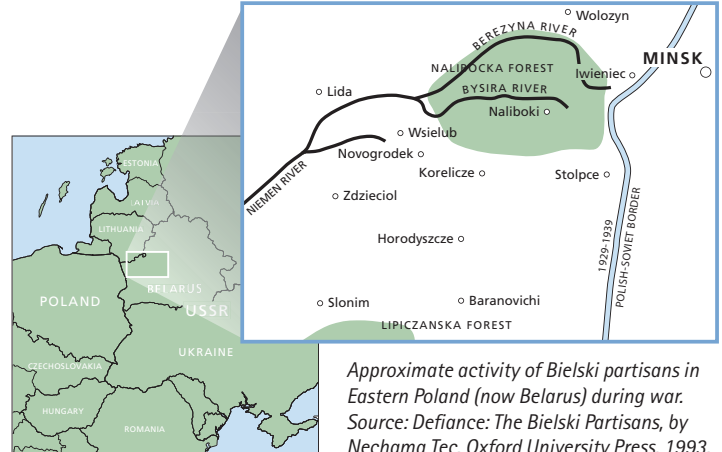
OPTIONAL: To play JPEF's seven-minute mini-documentary *Introduction to the Bielski Brothers* – instead of or in addition to reading this page in class – go to www.jewishpartisans.org/films or email dvd@jewishpartisans.org.

Paramount-Vintage's film *Defiance* (2009) depicts the incredible yet true story of the Bielski brothers: Tuvia, Zus, Asael, and Aron (played by Daniel Craig, Liev Schreiber, Jamie Bell, and George MacKay, respectively). Against all odds during World War II, the Bielskis survived in the forest, fought the Nazis, and saved over a thousand Jewish lives. The motion picture's availability on DVD allows educators and their students to explore the complexities of the history and ethical dilemmas faced by the Bielskis.

From the small village of Stankevich in Poland (now Belarus), the Bielski brothers escaped the Nazis, who murdered their family and most Jewish inhabitants of their village. The brothers hid in a nearby forest, and later created a refuge for other Jews to join them. Not only did the Bielskis hide and save lives, they also emerged from the trees on horseback, sub-machine guns strapped to their shoulders, to attack German soldiers and their collaborators. In time, their forest camp became like a small town, complete with shoemakers and tailors, carpenters, and hat makers, a central square for social gatherings, a tannery that doubled as a synagogue, and even a theater troupe. The actions of the brothers, led by the oldest, Tuvia, constitute the largest rescue of Jews by Jews during the Holocaust.

The Bielskis were part of a larger military presence; there were hundreds of thousands of partisans—armed guerilla fighters behind enemy lines—all over Europe, fighting the Germans and their collaborators. Many partisans were former soldiers who escaped Nazi camps, or civilians who took up arms against their enemy.

Approximately 30,000 Jews fought as partisans, many others took part in unarmed resistance (see [page 2](#) for more on *armed and unarmed Jewish resistance*). The majority of Jewish partisans fought in Poland, the Soviet Union (particularly Russia) and throughout the rest of Eastern Europe. Partisans also fought in many other European countries including Greece, Italy, France, and the former Yugoslavia. Jewish partisans fought mostly in non-Jewish partisan groups. Because of fierce antisemitism in many partisan groups, many had to hide their Jewish identity. There were a handful of all-Jewish groups, including the Bielskis. In these groups, Jews were relieved of the



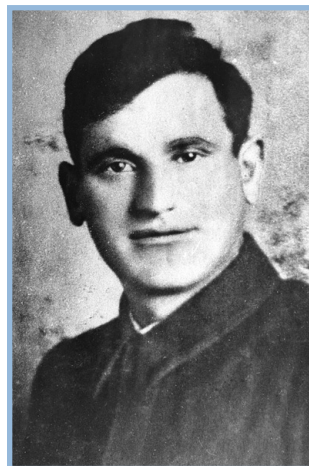
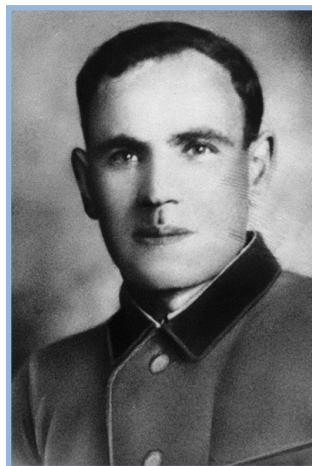
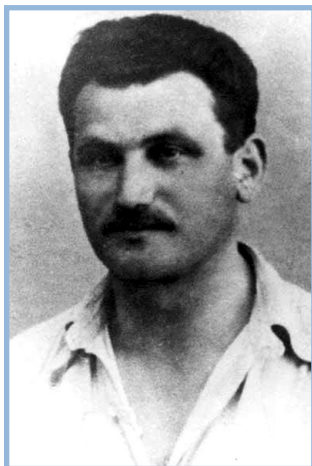
Approximate activity of Bielski partisans in Eastern Poland (now Belarus) during the war. Source: Defiance: The Bielski Partisans, by Nechama Tec. Oxford University Press, 1993.

constant fear of being killed or harassed by their fellow partisans.

In the forests, the only way many Jewish partisans like the Bielskis could survive was by forming an alliance with the Soviet partisans who were also operating in the forest.

The Soviet partisan units were comprised mostly of Red Army soldiers who fled and hid after Germany's invasion of Poland in June 1941. It is important to note that the Bielskis were not only tough; they were also shrewd. These qualities, along with a great deal of luck, allowed them to survive and to rescue others. Ultimately, the Bielski brothers saved the lives of 1,200 Jews, the largest rescue of Jews by Jews during the Holocaust. (For more information about the Bielskis, including videos from Alan Bell, the last surviving Bielski brother, go to jewishpartisans.org/tuviabbio).

The Bielskis faced decisions that are unfathomable to most people; they were living in the forest, without the protection of the morality, ethics, and laws of society. Every day, they were forced to quickly make difficult, life and death decisions. Using the motion picture *Defiance*—in whole or through select sequences—this curriculum can facilitate critical thinking and discussion to help your students absorb and better understand the film, its lessons, and to engage them in the intricacies and nuances of this complex period in history.



Left: Tuvia Bielski. Date unknown. Source: Novogrodek, The History of a Jewish Shtetl, www.novogrodek.com. Center: Zus Bielski after the War. Approximate date 1944–1945. Source: USHMM. Right: Asael Bielski was killed during the battle of Koenigsberg in 1944 while fighting in the Red Army. Approximate date 1943–1944. Source: USHMM

Introduction to This Curriculum

Teaching with Defiance is divided into five pedagogic units: History, Ethics, Leadership, Jewish Values, and Partisan Testimonials. Each unit is composed of four excerpts from the film—ranging from 40 seconds to three minutes—and discussion questions, some with passages from religious or philosophical texts to enhance discussion. Each excerpt and its ensuing conversation is designed to take 15–30 minutes of class time (depending on the number of questions used). Each unique pedagogic unit composes 60–120 minutes of material, and there is a total of four to eight hours of material in this guide, with additional resources provided. It is recommended that an hour-long class include no fewer than two, and no more than four excerpts, but an educator can easily develop a shorter lesson.



This guide assumes that students have basic knowledge of the Holocaust and World War II history. *This curriculum should not be a student's first exposure to this period in history*; the material is sophisticated and nuanced, and depends upon an awareness and understanding of the larger context in which Jewish partisans were functioning. Teachers should prepare both themselves and their classes for the discussion of excerpts from the film by becoming familiar with the resources on JPEF's website and the short films produced by JPEF on the *Teaching with Defiance DVD*.

For an educator and class not familiar with the Jewish partisans, specific resources that will be helpful are "Who Are the Jewish Partisans?" (page 2), the Tuvia Bielski mini-biography (www.jewishpartisans.org/tuviabbio) and at least one of the JPEF films—either on the above mentioned DVD, or the JPEF website (www.jewishpartisans.org/films).

When using this curriculum for the first time, JPEF recommends screening one of the JPEF introductory films on the *Teaching with Defiance DVD* that accompanies this curriculum, such as *Introduction to the Jewish Partisans*. The questions in this curriculum assume the basic foundation that these introductory films provide, and draw on students' familiarity with the general context in which the Bielskis operated.

The educator can then delve into any one of the five units on History, Ethics, Leadership, Jewish Values, or Partisan Testimonials.

Ideally, the class will view the entire *Defiance* feature, which runs two hours and 17 minutes (two hours and 10 minutes without credits). However, while viewing the entire film will give students a richer, more contextualized understanding, the curriculum is designed to rely on the film excerpts on the enclosed *Teaching with Defiance DVD*. The *Defiance* film trailer is also recommended for students not viewing the entire film which is also on the *Teaching with Defiance DVD*.

Screening each excerpt before engaging in conversation is highly recommended, *even if students have seen the entire film* to refresh the students' memory on specifics from the scene under discussion. The excerpts from the film in each unit build on each other, allowing students to explore a particular area in-depth.

If an educator would like to screen the film outside of the classroom for a larger community or parent audience, an appropriate license must be acquired by the non-theatrical distributor, Swank. Many schools already have existing licenses with Swank. Please check with school administrative staff for details. Page 31 of this guide has Swank's contact information and details about using this film outside of the classroom.

The film is rated "R" for violence. In this curriculum, you will find the abbreviation "MC" (for "mature content") beside several excerpts, with a brief description of why the scene is so labeled. These excerpts have been included because they raise important ethical and moral dilemmas, and because these excerpts, in particular, best encourage conversation and exploration. The design of the curriculum allows educators to choose whether or not they will use these excerpts. It is possible to use this curriculum successfully without showing any of the "MC" excerpts.

Overall Lesson Objectives

- **HISTORY:** Become familiar with a basic understanding of Jewish partisans in general, and the Bielskis in particular, during World War II
- **ETHICS:** Engage in discussion about the complex ethical issues the Bielskis faced
- **LEADERSHIP:** Differentiate between authority as a position and leadership as an activity
- **JEWISH VALUES:** Discover underlying Jewish values that may have informed the Bielskis' actions
- **PARTISAN TESTIMONIALS:** Explore primary sources and relate them to modern, historical, and personal issues

Guide

This curriculum comprises sixteen short excerpts from *Defiance* and five primary source testimonials from former Bielski partisans. Each pedagogic unit has four excerpts (five for the testimonials), with a minimum of fifteen minutes worth of discussion material. Each excerpt has its own lesson sheet in the Attachments section of this curriculum (pages 9–29), with context about the scene, a brief description of the scene and discussion questions. Where appropriate, supplementary texts with additional questions are included to add nuance and complexity to the discussion. Testimonials that complement specific excerpts are also pointed out.

The scene context is critically important. It helps set up the historical background necessary to understand the scene, and provides information about what has been happening in the film that precedes the section the students are about to watch. Teachers should ensure that students are familiar with the context before they engage with the questions.

Some of the scenes have supplementary texts attached to enhance the issues raised by the scene. Many of the texts included in this curriculum are from the Jewish tradition. Regardless of whether or not the Bielskis were familiar with these specific texts, the texts represent a body of literature, values, and traditions that formed Jewish culture during the Bielskis' time. The values of a culture are transmitted not only through formal study and knowledge of specific texts, but in the ethos of that culture that permeated the society in which they lived.

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

Leadership: Excerpt 3

A Baby is Born (1:27)
Defiance DVD Start 1:37:34

Scene Context

Women played a variety of roles in both Jewish and non-Jewish groups, but primarily their partisan activities were extensions of their traditional caretaker roles in 1930s European society. They were responsible for feeding their entire unit, nursing the wounded and the sick, setting up and breaking down camp, doing the laundry, and cleaning and carrying weapons—vital duties that ensured a camp's survival, safety, and ability to function.

Women made up 30 to 40 percent of the Bielski population—a significantly higher percentage than most non-Jewish units, which averaged less than 10 percent women. An estimated 60 percent of the adults in the Bielski partisan group lived as couples, and some of the relationships, like Tuvia's marriage to Lilka, lasted a lifetime.

Prior to this scene, Tuvia established a very clear order that it was forbidden to become pregnant and give birth to children; the unit simply could not accommodate the needs of an infant. Lilka, Tuvia's girlfriend, learns that her friend was raped by a German and is pregnant, and she helps her friend hide the pregnancy and have the baby. Tuvia hears the baby crying and finds out what has happened.

Scene Description

Lilka convinces Tuvia that the baby, born against his explicit orders, should live.

Questions for Scene

Suggested Technique: Discussion or Debate

- If Tuvia had decided to enforce the rule that pregnancies were forbidden, what do you think he would have done to the mother and baby? Do you ever think it is effective for a leader to break his own rules?
- Do you think that Lilka exerts leadership in this scene? Why or why not? Explore her use of language. How did she build an argument? How did she ultimately convince Tuvia?
- To what extent do you think Lilka manipulated her beauty and her relationship with Tuvia, to convince him to change his explicit order against babies being born in the unit? What is the difference between "influence" and "leadership"? Can the two be differentiated when husband and wife disagree?
- Do you agree with Tuvia's decision to let the baby live? What conflicting messages did it send to the camp? What was the underlying value that it reinforced?

Text

The following text is a commentary on one of the Jewish stories of humankind's creation. It addresses the question of why, in this story, the first human was created alone. The reason it provides is that each human being is unique—his or her own world—and that each life must be preserved and protected, and treated with as much love and care as if it were an entire world full of human beings.

Man was created alone to teach that anyone who destroys one life is regarded as if he or she had destroyed an entire world, and anyone who saves one life is regarded as if he or she had saved an entire world.
 —Mishnah Sanhedrin, Chapter 4, Mishnah 5*

Questions for Text

- Do you agree with this quote? Why or why not?
- What do you think the author of this text meant by the terms "destroy" and "save"? In this scene, Tuvia agrees to let the baby stay with the camp. Which worlds, other than the baby's, might have been destroyed had Tuvia decided otherwise? How? Draw a map of people the baby might have been connected to. How did Tuvia's decision "save" lives?
- Tuvia Bielski once said: "I would rather save one old Jewish woman than kill 10 Nazi soldiers." What does this text teach you about the values system that influenced his thinking and decision-making?

Recommended Testimonial / Resources

- Partisan Testimonial: Mira Skelub - Struggling to Survive (p. 27)
- For more on women in the partisans, view the JPEF short film, "Every Day the Impossible: Jewish Women in the Partisans" and accompanying study guide. See page 30 for details.

*The Mishnah is a seminal Jewish text that reflects debates on Jewish law, ethics, and philosophy, which took place between 70-200 CE by a group of rabbinic sages. It was put into writing by Rabbi Judah the Prince around 200 C.E., because the Jews were afraid that their oral tradition would be forgotten if it were not recorded.

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Pedagogic Methodologies

After the viewing of each excerpt (preceded by reading the context), teachers can choose one of four pedagogic methodologies to engage students in discussion. A teacher can mix and match the methodologies, or choose to use one methodology throughout the lesson.

- PAIRED LEARNING:** A traditional Jewish method of studying text (Hevruta), this is best to use for close text study. **Pair the students up** and **assign** two or more questions for each pair to discuss. One student **reads the text out-loud**; the other **reads the questions**. Both **respond to the questions** posed, and then can **pose their own questions**. Finally, the **teacher facilitates a group discussion**, asking each pair to **share one insight** they came up with during their discussion. This method is highly recommended for the Jewish Values unit.
- DEBATE:** After screening the excerpt, **split** the students into groups of 3 - 5, depending on class size. Have them **discuss** and **answer** the questions related to the excerpt. Then **select** one question for the students to debate. **Explain** to the class that they are going to have a debate. **Assign** each small group one side of the question. For example, in Ethics Unit 1, some groups will argue Tuvia's perspective, and other groups will argue Zus's perspective. Each group will have 4 minutes to **prepare** their arguments. Next **ask for two representatives** (one from each side of the debate) to present their case, with rebuttals if time allows. Afterwards, **encourage other students** to chime in with their arguments. **Decide as a class** which side made the strongest argument. This methodology is recommended for the Ethics and Leadership units.

Important: The purpose of the debate method is purely pedagogical. It should be made clear to the students that the goal of the debate is not to judge the characters, but to realize the ethical complexities behind their actions.

- GROUP DISCUSSION:** Screen the excerpt. If there are supplementary texts, **read them out-loud**. **Engage** the students in a class **discussion** (or several small group discussions that report back to the class) using the questions as a guideline. **Summarize** the main points on the board. This method is best for the History and Partisan Testimonials units.

JPEF Films

The *Teaching with Defiance DVD* includes ten short JPEF documentary films on the Jewish partisans, gathered from more than 50 original interviews with surviving partisans (see page 30 for film descriptions). These films can be used to introduce the students to the historical context of this curriculum. The JPEF website (www.jewishpartisans.org) has a wealth of additional material that the educator should explore before teaching this curriculum.

Setup

What You Will Need:

- DVD player and monitor
- *Teaching with Defiance Educator's DVD* (or *Defiance* motion Picture DVD and connection to www.jewishpartisans.org)
- Lesson sheet copies for each excerpt to be viewed (1 per student, from the Attachment Section, pages 9 - 29)
- *Optional: Defiance Motion Picture DVD* (if showing entire film)



Part of the Bielski unit towards the end of the War. Approximate date 1943-1944. Source USHMM.

Procedure

This curriculum uses a "view and discuss" format. Each excerpt—the viewing and discussion—should take between 15 - 20 minutes, divided into 2 - 4 minutes of introduction, 3 - 5 minutes of viewing, and 10 - 20 minutes of discussion.

A) Introduce the Jewish Partisans, *Defiance*, and the Bielskis:

1. **Show** the film "Introduction to the Partisans" on the *Teaching with Defiance DVD* (or online at www.jewishpartisans.org/films), if possible. If not, read-aloud "Who Are the Jewish Partisans?" on page 2 (students can take turns reading paragraphs).
2. **Introduce** the film *Defiance* as a story about the Bielskis, who enacted the largest rescue of Jews by Jews during the Holocaust. The Bielskis saved 1,200 people by the end of the war, and killed hundreds of Germans and their collaborators. The film stars Daniel Craig and Liev Schreiber as the eldest two brothers, at odds with each other. Tuvia, played by Craig, wants to bring as many people into the forest as possible, while Zus, played by Schreiber, believes they should use their resources to fight the Germans instead.
3. **Optional:** Play JPEF's seven-minute *Introduction to the Bielski Partisans* short film, available on the *Teaching with Defiance DVD* or at www.jewishpartisans.org/films.
4. **Show** the film *Defiance*, if possible. If not, show the trailer for the film on the *Teaching with Defiance Educator's DVD* (or online at www.paramount.com/movies/defiance).
5. **Explain** the focus of the class: History, Ethics, Leadership, Jewish Values, or Partisan Testimonials (primary sources). The class is an opportunity to learn more about the Bielskis and the Jewish partisans, and to explore the particular focus you have chosen.

B) View and Discuss Scenes from 'Defiance'

(*Important: choose and review excerpts before class time*):

1. **Hand out** attachments for each excerpt you decide to show
2. **Read-aloud** Scene Context (first section) from the attachment
3. **Show** the excerpt on the *Teaching with Defiance DVD* (or use the provided Testimonial URL or start time from the *Defiance DVD*)
4. **Engage** students in discussion using one of the three possible methods outlined in the "Guide" section: Paired Learning, Debate, or Group Discussion
5. **Write** concepts and points from the discussion on the board
6. **Summarize** key thoughts and **emphasize** complexity of issues

C) Conclude Lesson (after showing chosen scenes)

1. **Summarize** the main points, focusing on the History, Ethics, Leadership, or Jewish Values issues that were addressed, depending on your class's focus. Use the Objectives listed on pages 7-8 to inform your general summary.

Introduction to Units

History (pages 9-12)

This unit introduces students to basic information about the Jewish partisans, the Bielskis in particular, and larger partisan actions in general. It also explores the historical context in which they operated, to help students understand the issues raised by the film *Defiance*, and what makes the Bielski partisans' story unique.

Tuvia Bielski is quoted as saying, "I would rather save one old Jewish woman than kill ten Germans." Learning that such a choice was even available to the Bielskis and other Jews during the Holocaust can greatly change students' perceptions of the Jewish experience throughout World War II.

The Bielskis successfully battled the Germans and rescued over 1,200 Jews, eventually building an island village in a swamp inside German-controlled territory. In order to do so, they had to overcome a wide range of obstacles in addition to the vastly better-equipped German army: antisemitism (both historical and Nazi-influenced); lack of resources such as food, shelter and weapons; even competition with other partisan units. Not to mention the dangers to Jews attempting to escape to the ghettos and other areas in the first place.

This unit examines how these and other factors influenced the Bielskis' choices and tactics. It also encourages students to complicate their thinking around historical events such as the invasion of Poland and the establishment of the ghettos.

More information is available through JPEF's many short films—particularly "The Partisans Through the Eyes of the Soviet Newsreel" and "Antisemitism in the Partisans"—and accompanying study guides available at www.jewishpartisans.org/resist (see page 30 for more details).

History Objectives

- Become familiar with the role that the partisans, and Jewish partisans in particular, played during the Holocaust
- Explore the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish partisans
- Examine the role of antisemitism in the partisans
- Discuss the differences between the experience of Jews in the ghetto and those hiding in the forest

Ethics (pages 13-16)

The film *Defiance* portrays the difficult daily ethical challenges with which the brothers struggled in order to survive. It is important to remember that the Bielskis were living through a war, in fact two wars: the World War that was enveloping their country and the entire continent of Europe, and the German War Against the Jews, their unrelenting attempt to annihilate all Jews, everywhere.

The Bielskis and those within the camp were on the front lines; their lives were in constant danger every day, they struggled for food on a regular basis, had the Germans and local populations after them, and lived through the murder of their families, loved ones, and the destruction of their lives as they knew it. They were involved in situations that normally may seem unethical, such as stealing, killing, and taking revenge, but which, at the time, were often necessary for their very survival—and ultimately for the 1,200 people they saved. War is a fact of life for millions of people in the world, and the issues the Bielskis faced, and that are illustrated here, are very similar to ones that people deal with every day.

The purpose of this unit is to view the film through an ethical lens, and allow students the opportunity to dissect the moral complexities that were at play for the Bielskis, and that are at play when difficult ethical decisions are made in wartime.

For more information, review JPEF's "Ethics of War" and "Ethics and *Defiance* Discussion Guide", available at www.jewishpartisans.org/resist.

Ethics Objectives

- Explore the ethical tension between taking care of one's own needs, and taking care of the needs of others
- Explore the ethical tensions between creating a partisan unit, whose purpose is to fight the Germans, and a camp that offers refuge to all who can escape into the forest
- Discuss the concept of revenge
- Debate the way in which ethics and basic interpersonal behavior change during war-time
- Become familiar with the notion of "groupthink" and the way it affects behavior

Introduction to Units

Leadership (pages 17-20)

This unit introduces students to a distinction between the notions of 'leadership' and 'authority'. Leadership is defined as an action, not simply a static position, but the very act of leading. Anyone can exert leadership—a term that denotes the mobilization of a group of people to work together to achieve what is most productive and healthy for the group. 'Authority' is defined as a position of power with a certain set of responsibilities—protecting the group, quelling conflict, maintaining norms, etc.

Tuvia Bielski did not set out to become a leader. Rather, extraordinary circumstances forced him into positions in which he discovered his own potential to lead. Tuvia was a complex man: cruel and tender, charismatic and profane, hotheaded and composed. But he was above all passionate and utterly determined. Members of the partisan group remember him as super-human, riding atop a white horse in their forest enclave. "He was sent by God to save Jews," said Rabbi Beryl Chafetz, who as a rabbinical student took refuge in the Bielski camp. "He wasn't a man, he was an angel," said Isaac Mendelson. This unit explores Tuvia's leadership as the head of the Bielski unit, and also explores ways in which other members of the unit helped exert leadership to maintain the health and safety of the group.

For additional information, review JPEF's "Finding Leadership" curriculum at www.jewishpartisans.org/resist.

Leadership Objectives

- Understand the difference between leadership as an activity and authority as a position
- Explore the complexities of leadership during the extenuating circumstances of war-time
- Discuss the differences between influence and leadership
- Explore the relationship between leadership and group dynamics

Partisan Testimonials (pages 25-30)

This unit allows students to explore primary and secondary sources through video interviews with and mini-biographies of former Bielski partisans, including the only Bielski brother still alive as of 2009. The testimonials can be used by themselves, or in conjunction with excerpts from the film (specific recommendations are included for two excerpts from each of the other four units).

Each lesson sheet includes a brief biography with interview context and a transcript of the testimonial (it is recommended that students read the transcript after viewing each testimonial to ensure comprehension). Several general questions follow, supplemented by three in-depth questions geared for use with Social Studies, English, and Judaic Studies classes.

Jewish Values (pages 21-24)

The Bielskis were not religious Jews. In fact, as *Defiance* portrays, they never liked religious school, and felt alienated by the "malbushim," [roughly translated as the well dressed or the dress-ups] the Jews who lived in the cities, dressed in fancy clothing, and spent their time discussing ideas and religious texts. Despite this, they were informed by a set of values and morals that emerged from centuries of Jewish textual scholarship passed down to them not in study but in the entire context of the society in which they lived. Tuvia felt a deep connection to the sufferings of the Jewish people. These texts and values were part of the moral fabric that formed the Bielskis' culture, and played a role in their decision-making and ethical lives.

This unit introduces students to pivotal Jewish values, such as "choosing life," and the texts that inform them. The texts are culled from the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) from the Mishnah (the first written book of Jewish oral law, compiled by Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi around the year 200 C.E.) and the Talmud (a compilation of the Rabbis' questions and answers about the Mishnah, completed in the 5th century C.E.). Other materials—ethical statements, stories of the rabbis' daily lives, fantastic tales, speculations on the after-life, and even dream interpretation found their way into these texts as well.

Jewish Values Objectives

- Introduce texts and ideas that may have informed the Bielski's value system
- Explore the complex Jewish notion of "chosenness"
- Become familiar with the Passover story, and its resonance for the Jewish partisans
- Discuss the value of optimism and hope in a time of darkness

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

History: Excerpt 1

Opening: Germans Come / Hiding in the Forest (2:11)

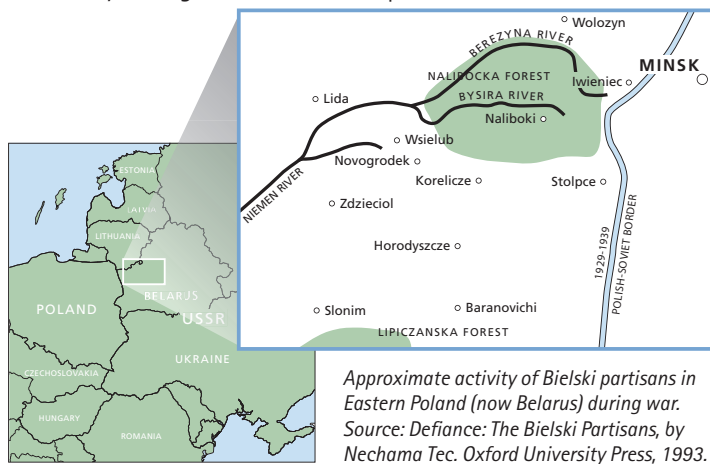
Defiance DVD Start 0:00:24

MC: Violence

Scene Context

During World War II, the majority of European Jews were deceived by a monstrous and meticulous disinformation campaign. The Nazis detained millions of Jews and forced them into camps, primarily under the pretense that they were going to work. In reality, many of these so-called "work camps" were actually *death camps*, where men, women, and children were systematically murdered.

Yet approximately 30,000 Jews, many of whom were teenagers, escaped the Nazis to form or join organized resistance groups. These Jews are known as Jewish partisans, and they joined hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish partisans fighting against the enemy throughout much of Europe.



When the Germans broke the non-aggression pact with the Soviets in 1941 and arrived near the town of Novogrodek in Eastern Poland (now Belarus), the three oldest brothers from the Bielski family of twelve, Tuvia, Zus, and Asael, were 35, 33, and 29. In the first months of the occupation, Bielski family members avoided the German onslaught against the Jewish population, but by December 1941 the invaders had captured and killed the brothers' parents and two of their younger siblings. Thousands of other Jews from the region were either killed by the Germans and their collaborators, or forced to live in the nearest ghetto. Tuvia, Zus, Asael and the youngest brother, Aron (age 12) sought refuge in the woods they knew since childhood.



Photo courtesy of © Paramount-Vantage, a division of Paramount Pictures.

Scene Description

This scene, which opens the movie, shows actual historical footage, filmed by the Germans, of Jews being rounded up and killed. This is blended with footage from the film, fading from black and white to color. As people are killed and taken away, the camera moves to the forest outside of the town where we see Zus and Asael watching from the safety of the trees.

Questions for Scene

Suggested Technique: Discussion

1. As mentioned above, the black and white footage at the beginning of this scene was actually filmed by the Germans. Why do you think they filmed these disturbing scenes?
2. Contrast the opening black and white footage in this scene with the short film "Introduction to the Partisans" from the *Teaching with Defiance DVD* (also online at www.jewishpartisans.org/films). In what ways are the two film selections different? Does hearing the story of the Jewish partisans change your view of Jews during the Holocaust? Why?
3. Why do you think the Bielski brothers hide in the woods? What does the forest offer them? What does the forest lack that they may need?
4. Discuss what you know about the German occupation of Eastern Europe. Did watching this scene bring up any new questions or thoughts for you?
5. What factors or circumstances might have made it possible for some Jews to escape the Nazis as the Bielski brothers did? What factors might have prevented many other Jews from escaping?

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

History: Excerpt 2

Meeting the Russian Partisans (2:25)

Defiance DVD Start 0:49:13

Scene Context

Jewish partisans blew up thousands of German supply trains, convoys, and bridges, making it harder for the Germans to fight the war. Partisans also destroyed German power plants and factories, focusing their attention on military and strategic targets, not on civilians.

Jewish partisans often allied with non-Jewish partisan units. In the area where the Bielskis were, it was impossible to survive in the forest without finding a way to work together with these extremely powerful fighters who literally controlled the forests and numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Most Jews joined non-Jewish groups, and many had to hide their identity because of fierce antisemitism. All-Jewish groups like the Bielskis were rare.

The Bielskis' unit was different from other partisan units in that it was composed not only of fighters, but also of women, children, and the elderly. Most other partisan units would not allow women, children, or the elderly, as these units were focused exclusively on combat and sabotage, and admitted only those whom they felt could carry out those dangerous missions. Thus the Bielskis had a double barrier to overcome in order to be accepted as legitimate fighters—antisemitism, and the perception by other partisans that their group was weak, that Jews would not fight.

In order to stay in the forest and share their meager food supplies with the Soviet partisans (frequently referred to as Russians), the Bielski partisans made themselves indispensable to the Soviet units. The Bielskis supplied them with tailors, locksmiths, bakers, shoemakers and other much needed artisans—services which the Soviet partisans did not otherwise have access to.

It is important to note that Communists championed the cause of socialism above all else. Their ideal was a society of equal proletarian workers. Officially, antisemitism was forbidden in the Soviet Union, but Jews faced 'unofficial' antisemitism even in this system. Jews were constantly blacklisted by the regime for suspicious "anti-communist" behavior, and Jewish leaders in the higher echelons of the Communist leadership hit a 'glass ceiling', above which they could not rise.

Scene Description

Tuvia and Zus meet the Soviet partisans, and Tuvia convinces their leader Victor Pachenko to allow some of the Bielski fighters to join the Soviet unit's forces.



Photo courtesy of © Paramount-Vantage, a division of Paramount Pictures.

Questions for Scene

Suggested Technique: Discussion

1. What were the similarities between the goals of the Bielskis and those of the Soviet partisans? What were the differences in their goals?
2. How is Pachenko's camp different from the Bielski camp? How is it similar?
3. Compare and contrast the partisans to a national army. Make a list of their similarities and differences in these three categories: location, resources, and ideology.
4. When the Soviet commander learns about the Bielski unit, he claims, "But Jews don't fight!" Tuvia responds, "These Jews fight." The stereotype of Jews was that they were bookish scholars, rather than fighters. How were the Bielskis different from the stereotype of Jews at the time? How could this particular stereotype be dangerous to Jews? How could it have become a self-fulfilling prophecy?
5. Have you ever been stereotyped? How did you react? Were you successful in changing the perception that others had of you based on the stereotype? How?

Recommended Testimonial / Resources

1. Partisan Testimonial A: Aron Bell - Thwarting the Nazi Effort (p. 25)

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

History: Excerpt 3

Antisemitism in the Russian Partisans (2:16)

Defiance DVD Start 1:27:13

MC: Language

Scene Context

During the Middle Ages, Jews were accused of being Christ-killers, child murderers, well-poisoners, devil's helpers, or devils themselves. Reviled and disdained, Jews in many countries were confined to ghettos and forced to wear specially marked clothes—patterns of oppression the Nazis would build on centuries later. Jews had even been excluded from certain professions and expelled from the countries simply for being Jewish. In pre-Soviet Russia and other countries during the 19th and early 20th centuries, pogroms (mob violence against Jews) were responsible for thousands of Jews being killed.

Despite this history, the antisemitism introduced by the Nazis was radically different. In Nazi antisemitism, being Jewish was considered a genetic defect, rather than simply a set of beliefs or practices. This allowed no possible escape for Jews. Hitler and many of his followers considered Jews subhuman, and their destruction was not only desirable, but necessary for the health of the German nation. These beliefs and attitudes spread beyond Germany to other German-occupied countries where antisemitic information and laws were propagated. German propaganda validated the anti-Jewish sentiments of many Europeans, and encouraged them toward antisemitic activities.

Many villages harbored Nazi sympathizers and were fiercely antisemitic. Turning in a Jew to the Germans could earn a villager a bag of sugar or a bottle of vodka. Some collaborators hated Jews so much they did not bother to collect their bonuses, shooting Jewish refugees on sight. In some partisan units, Jewish partisans had to hide their Jewish identity from their fellow partisans, even though they shared a common enemy, the Germans.

Prior to this scene, Zus leaves his unit, accompanied by some of the group's best fighters, after an argument with Tuvia, and finds that life with the Soviet partisans is more challenging than he expected.

Scene Description

Zus tries to defend a friend who was beaten up by a Soviet partisan because he was a Jew.



Photo courtesy of © Paramount-Vantage, a division of Paramount Pictures.

Questions for Scene

Suggested Technique: Discussion

1. How could antisemitism affect the Soviet partisan group's ability to fight the Germans?
2. Though antisemitism was officially "a violation of party discipline", such violations were rarely punished. In fact, Soviet policy was often highly antisemitic. How do you think this contradiction affected the Soviet soldiers and the decisions they made? What contradictions between stated and actual policy do you see in the world today? What do you think individuals can do about them?
3. What was Zus putting at risk when he stood up for his friend? What would he have risked by saying nothing?
4. What does Zus's choice tell you about his hierarchy of values? Make a list of three values that Zus probably held, based on his actions in this scene. Rank them in order of most important to least important.
5. Have you ever stood up for a friend who was in trouble? Have you ever risked something that was important to you for something else that was even more important to you? Share a story with the class.

Recommended Testimonial / Resources

1. Partisan Testimonial E: Rae Kushner - Being Hungry During Rosh HaShanah (p. 29)
2. For more information on antisemitism in the partisans, see JPEF's "Antisemitism in the Partisans" study guide and the JPEF short film of the same title. More details on page 30.

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

History: Excerpt 4

Rescuing Jews from the Ghetto (2:14)

Defiance DVD Start 0:58:03

Scene Context

Jewish partisans not only sheltered escapees from ghettos, some even covertly entered ghettos to smuggle food in and other Jews out. For this reason, some Jewish partisan groups tried to camp near the towns from which their members had escaped. "That was the original idea of running away from the ghetto," said Sam Lato of Belarus. "[The intention was to] join a Jewish partisan group, and then get out Jews from the ghetto." At the very least, it was important to be close by, Lato said, so that people who managed to slip out of the ghetto "had a place to run." (For more information about Sam Lato, go to www.jewishpartisans.org/samlbio)

The Bielskis did the same. As the torture and murder of Jews increased in the Novogrodek ghetto and elsewhere, Tuvia decided to expand his group to save more lives. Emissaries were sent into the ghettos to rescue Jews or urge them to escape; despite the dangers, many were eager to risk flight.

However, many Jews were reluctant to leave the ghetto for a variety of reasons. The Nazis had a policy of "collective responsibility" in the ghettos: if one Jew escaped, many others would be killed as punishment. Moreover, the administrative bodies that served as a liaison between the Nazis and the ghetto Jews, called the Judenrat, faced an impossible dilemma. They were used by the Germans as a means of controlling the ghetto and tried to alleviate the plight of the captive Jews. They attempted to enforce Nazi rule with the hope that it might save Jewish lives. Though they were members of the Jewish community, the Judenrat tried to prevent Jews from escaping from the ghetto, because they would be held accountable and killed if the Nazis discovered the escape.

Scene Description

Tuvia and Asael sneak into the ghetto to rescue a group of Jews who are willing to risk the escape from the ghetto and life in the forest.

Questions for Scene

Suggested Technique: Discussion

1. What personal decisions did Jews have to weigh when deciding between staying in the ghetto or risking flight to join the partisans? What communal decisions did they have to weigh?
2. The spokesman for the Jews in the ghetto claimed that the Soviets were as bad as the Germans, reminding Tuvia that he had not lived through the *pogroms* (mob violence against Jews). How does the spokesman's historical perspective influence his decision-making? How does Tuvia's lack of this perspective enable him to make the decisions he made?



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3. To prevent their resistance, the Germans mislead and manipulated the Jews in a variety of ways. The spokesman for the Jews says the Germans won't kill the Jews because they need them to work, a lie the Germans made sure the Jews believed. Explain other ways the Germans deterred the Jews from escaping.
4. The spokesman for the Jews responds to Tuvia's invitation to join the Bielskis in the forest by asking, "Can you tell me, with absolute certainty, that we are not just as likely to die out there with you in the woods with winter coming on?" What advantages did the ghetto have over the forest?
5. At the end of this scene, the Rabbi says that the Jews of the ghetto are, "waiting for God." How is his perspective different from Tuvia's? What philosophies does each man represent?
6. "Compared to the ghettos, [life in the forest] felt like heaven," said Charles Bedzow, a Bielski partisan. "In the woods, we were free. That's all I can tell you. We had freedom." Based on this quote, how would you define the term "freedom"? Do you think that the partisans actually were "free"? Why or why not?

Recommended Testimonial / Resources

1. Partisan Testimonial: Rae Kushner - Being Hungry During Rosh HaShanah (p. 29). Rae is also featured in JPEF's film "A Partisan Returns" (more information below).
2. For more information about the daring escape of 250 people through a tunnel from the Novogrodek ghetto, after which many escapees joined the Bielskis, view *A Partisan Returns: The Legacy of Two Sisters*. See page 30 for details.

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE***Ethics: Excerpt 1****“They’re Family” (1:24)***Defiance DVD Start 0:19:32***Scene Context:**

Given the complex demands facing the partisans, it was necessary to prioritize. While personal survival might seem the obvious top priority, in fact, Jewish partisans constantly put their own lives in jeopardy to save other Jews and fight the enemy. Their situation created a dilemma: should Jews play it as safe as possible—in reality they were never safe—and stay out of harm’s way in order to survive and ensure the future of the Jewish people, or should they fight the enemy, even at the cost of more Jewish lives?

Originally, the Bielski brothers hid together. Slowly, though, they realized that other Jews were hiding in the forest. These people needed food, shelter, and protection.

Asael, Zus, and Tuvia often argued about the best way to survive: bringing as many Jews as possible to their camp, including those who could not fight, or using their finite resources to fight the Germans. Asael and Zus initially opposed Tuvia’s plan to bring more people into their unit, thinking that it was best to keep the unit small and manageable. “Asael and Zus would never have had the old people and women,” said Aron Bell (Bielski), who was 11 at the time. Aron served as a scout for the Bielski unit and recalls that, “They would have their wives and girlfriends, but no way in hell would they have chosen to take all those people.” But Tuvia insisted.

Scene Description:

Zus and Tuvia argue about allowing more people into their group. Tuvia promises Zus not to take on any more people, and then comes back with a new group of refugees because, “they are family.”

Questions for Scene**Suggested Technique: Debate**

1. In this excerpt, Tuvia and Zus have differing opinions about inviting other people to join them in the forest. How would you summarize their two positions? Which do you agree with? Why? If you agree with Zus, give what you think Tuvia’s strongest argument might be to refute your position. If you agree with Tuvia, refute your position from Zus’s point of view (as you see it).
2. Do you think it matters if the people they invite to join them are family? What do you think the criteria should have been for who got to join the Bielski unit?
3. In his article on *Defiance* for the *New York Review of Books* on April 30, 2009, Timothy Snyder writes of Tuvia Bielski: “He might have undertaken either resistance or rescue; the essence of his moral achievement is that he favored the latter.” Do you agree that rescue is more “moral” than resistance? Why or why not?



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4. In their argument, both Zus and Tuvia want to save lives. Zus argues that they risk their own lives if they bring other people into the group, as there are not enough resources. Tuvia claims that they will be able to protect both themselves and others. Is Tuvia reckless in risking the safety of his own family to bring others in? Is Zus selfish for not wanting others to join them?

Text

There is a famous Jewish aphorism by Rabbi Hillel the Elder recorded in the Ethics of the Fathers* 1:14, and which states:

If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now—when?

Questions for Text

1. Rewrite this text in your own words. Feel free to change the text as much as you need in order to understand it more clearly.
2. How does the third part of the text—“If not now, when?”—relate to the first two?
3. If you could assign Tuvia and Zus a part of the text above that paraphrased their values, what would you assign them and why? How did their differing prioritization of values manifest itself in this scene?
4. Did you ever have a clash of values with someone in your family? Share an example with the class.

Recommended Testimonial / Resources

1. For more about the Bielski brothers’ conflict, see Partisan Testimonial B: Aron Bell – Saving Jewish Lives (p. 26)

* *Pirkei Avot* (The Ethics of the Fathers) is a compilation of the ethical teachings and maxims of Rabbis—Jewish scholars—who lived between 70 – 200 CE

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE***Ethics: Excerpt 2****Tuvia's Revenge (3:06)***Defiance* DVD Start 0:16:29**MC: Violence****Scene Context**

Tuvia, Asael, Zus, and Aron Bielski were four of 12 children born to a miller and his wife in the village of Stankevich, near Novogrodek, Poland (present day Belarus). They were the only Jews in a small community, but they quickly learned how to look after themselves. Unlike their father, who had a conciliatory nature, the brothers wouldn't hesitate to defend their family's honor. Their reputation was fearsome: it was rumored that Asael and Zus had murdered a man. Zus was the brash one. He would throw punches first and ask questions later. His parents, it seemed, were always negotiating with the police to keep him out of jail. During the war, the Bielskis sought out and executed Nazi collaborators, including a man in the Bielskis' boyhood village who was once close to the family. The brothers knew that their group must be feared to survive in such a hostile environment. Prior to this scene, Tuvia learns that the man he is about to visit has killed his parents and murdered several other Jews, and has even bragged about it. In fact, he is employed by the Germans to continue to hunt and kill Jews.

Scene Description

Tuvia enters the home of the man who has killed his parents and many other Jews. Tuvia confronts the man, and kills him and his two sons. He comes back to camp where Zus asks him how it felt.

Questions for Scene**Suggested Technique: Debate**

1. The director of *Defiance* chooses to begin this scene when the police captain is at home, having dinner with his family, in order to humanize him. The scene begins with his wife asking him not to work so hard. How would you have felt about the police captain and his family if this brief view of their lives was missing?
2. The sons draw their weapons on Tuvia first. Does this fact increase Tuvia's justification for killing them and the police captain? If that detail had been omitted from this scene, would it change the ethical implications of Tuvia's action?
3. Why do you think Tuvia refuses to kill the policeman's wife even though she begs to die?
4. How does Tuvia respond to what he has done? Did his response surprise you? Why?
5. Another Jewish partisan, Simon Trakinski, says about his experiences during the War, "Evil will only recognize a stronger evil." Do you agree or disagree with Simon's statement? Explain. For more information about Simon go to www.jewishpartisans.org/simontbio.



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Text

Mahatma Gandhi was the pre-eminent political and spiritual leader of the Indian independence movement. He lived from 1869 to 1948, and pioneered the notion of resistance to tyranny through mass civil disobedience, firmly founded upon a policy of non-violence—which led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. He said:

"I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent."

Questions for Text

1. Do you agree with Gandhi's statement? Why or why not?
2. What "good" do you think was done by Tuvia's act of revenge? What "evil" was done?
3. How does the context in which the Bielskis were operating complicate the relevance of Gandhi's statement in their case? Should ethics be the same during wartime and peacetime?
4. Should the same ethical standards apply to an enemy who recognizes the common humanity of both sides as with an enemy who does not?
5. Gandhi conceded many times throughout his life that "war may have to be resorted to as a necessary evil." Do you think that unarmed resistance is even an option during genocide? Do you think that Tuvia's act was "necessary?" Why or why not?

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE***Ethics: Excerpt 3****The Milkman (3:51)***Defiance DVD Start 0:39:26***Scene Context**

Of all the challenges faced by commanders of partisan units, perhaps the greatest was feeding their groups. Finding food depended on many factors: the proximity of friendly locals, the geography and nature of the country, and the size of the partisan unit. In areas free from direct German rule, and despite wartime shortages, anti-German townspeople and farmers could be relied upon to supply partisans with food and other necessities. In areas under German control or with pro-Nazi farmers, the search for food could end in death. Regardless of the sympathies of the locals, all locals had to supply the Germans with food and supplies or suffer harsh consequences. Usually, this was based on quotas that the locals had to fill regularly.

Jews faced an additional problem: many farmers who were anti-German were also antisemitic and thus unwilling to help Jews.

In the forests, the partisans lived under harsh conditions, and without the locals who gave them food and information, they would not have survived the war. Jewish partisans had a particularly difficult time because of the antisemitism that was rampant amongst the local population. Jews sometimes had to use force to get supplies, information, and food from locals. The Jewish partisans begged, borrowed, and stole when necessary to attain what they needed in order to survive. "The friendly Polish peasant provided food for us – and the unfriendly Polish peasant provided food for us as well," recalled former Bielski partisan Mira Shelub.

Prior to this scene, the Bielski unit is starving and miserable. The Bielskis decide on a system of taking food from local farmers so that they do not take too often from the same people, and take only from those who have food to spare. They agree that they will not kill the peasants, who may be innocent; nor will they take all of their food.

Scene Description

Zus and Asael are on a food mission, and encounter a Russian peasant on his way to make a delivery to the Germans. They spare the man's life, and take half his milk.

Questions for Scene**Suggested Technique: Debate**

1. We do not know if the Russian peasant was willingly bringing food to the Germans or not. Would it matter if he was supplying the Germans because he was coerced by threats to his family?
2. Is it possible to be both innocent and a collaborator? If so, how? Do you think this possibility should have affected how the partisans treated the milkman? Name another example of an 'innocent collaborator'.



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3. Do you think that the brothers should have killed the milkman? Why or why not? Do you think they should have let him live and taken all of his milk? Why or why not?
4. Later in the film, the milkman leads a group of Russian policemen to the Bielski's camp. Does his action change how you feel about the brothers' sparing his life?

Text

Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, said:

"A strict observance of the written laws is doubtless one of the high virtues of a good citizen, but it is not the highest. The laws of necessity, of self-preservation, of saving our country when in danger, are of higher obligation."

Questions for Text

1. Rewrite this statement in your own words.
2. How did you define the term "written law"? What is positive about observing this kind of law? What is potentially harmful about it?
3. How did you define the term "law of necessity"? What is positive about observing this kind of law? What is potentially harmful about it?
4. Do you agree with Jefferson's statement? Why or why not?
5. What was "in danger" for the Bielskis? Do you believe that because of this danger, they had a "higher obligation" which changed their ethical framework?

Recommended Testimonial / Resources

1. Partisan Testimonial E: Rae Kushner - Being Hungry During Rosh HaShanah (p. 29)
2. For more on the partisans' food challenges, view the JPEF short film, "Living and Surviving in the Partisans: Food" and accompanying study guide. See page 30 for details.

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

Ethics: Excerpt 4

The Messenger (2:31)*Defiance DVD Start 1:40:05***MC: Violence****Scene Context**

The Bielski group often debated acts of vengeance, or revenge. Should the Bielskis ruthlessly kill others inspired by feelings of revenge? In the film, Tuvia's insists that, "We will not become like them." Zus, his brother, replies, "But we can kill like them." This difference in ideologies is evident throughout the whole film, and is epitomized by this scene.

In this scene, the Bielski unit captures a German messenger who has valuable information about an upcoming raid on the partisans. The messenger is a young, powerless underling, not an officer or a member of the SS, and not likely to have been directly responsible for the killings of Jews. Most Germans who were drafted to fight were not members of the Nazi party.

While Tuvia and Asael are looking over the information, some members of the group surround the messenger, and, in an emotional frenzy, begin beating him, crying for "justice."

Scene Description

Members of the Bielski unit capture a German messenger and kill him.

Questions for Scene**Suggested Technique: Debate**

1. Do you think what the group did to the messenger was justified? Was this justice or vengeance? What is the difference? Explain.
2. What motivated the mob to act as they did? Make a list of the many emotions they may have been feeling, and the circumstances that contributed to those emotions. Discuss the various ways in which emotions can influence actions. Do you think this act achieved any purpose for the group? What?
3. Why do you think Tuvia chose not to intervene in this situation? Do you agree or disagree with his decision? Explain.
4. Think about a time when you wanted justice or revenge. What principles or guidelines (if any) did you use to decide how to act? Based on your experience, are there other principles / guidelines that might support you in future situations?



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Text

Irving Janis, a 20th century research psychologist famous for his theory "Groupthink," about the characteristics of group behavior, wrote in his book *Victims of Groupthink* that one of the eight characteristics of "groupthink" is: "An unquestioned belief in the group's inherent morality, inclining the members to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions."

Another characteristic of "groupthink" described by Janis is: "An illusion of invulnerability, shared by most or all the members, which creates excessive optimism and encourages taking extreme risks."

Questions for Text

1. What role does "groupthink" play in the scene with the German messenger?
2. How do you think that "groupthink" may have helped the Bielskis and the partisans? How could it have hindered them?

Recommended Resource

1. For more on this scene, and to hear from co-writer / co-producer Clayton Frohman on the ethical dilemmas the filmmakers grappled with while filming this scene, see page 5 of JPEF's *Ethics and 'Defiance' Discussion Guide*, available at www.jewishpartisans.org/resist

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

Leadership: Excerpt 1

Every Day is an Act of Faith (3:06)

Defiance DVD Start 0:32:21

Scene Context

The Bielski brothers have been joined by some of their family members, and other Jews hiding in the forest. They number a few dozen. They are all hungry, exhausted, and traumatized by recent events. They have no plan or direction.

Prior to this scene, Tuvia, Zus, Asael (*pronounced "uh-SOY-el" in this scene*), and others attacked a convoy of Nazis instead of foraging for food. They were unprepared for the Germans' counter-attack, and lost all of their supplies. Asael is missing, and they do not know if he is alive or dead. They return to their camp depressed, wounded, and hungry.

The rest of the group is upset to learn that they have no food, and distraught after a newcomer announces that family members in the town of Vilna are probably dead. This is one of the lowest points in the film. People are arguing and crying, and in the chaos Tuvia realizes that if they do not create a plan for food and security, they will not survive. He steps up to the task, telling the group: "We might be hunted like animals, but we will not become animals." He decides that they will take only from those who have food to spare, and inspires the group to join him, saying, "If we die while trying to live, at least we die like human beings."

Scene Description

The group has lost all hope, and has no direction. Tuvia assumes leadership, instills courage and hope in the group, and proposes a plan for the group's survival.

Questions for Scene

Suggested Techniques: Discussion or Debate

1. Tuvia tells the group: "Our revenge is to live," and claims: "We may be hunted like animals, but we will not become animals." How do these statements create a framework and direction for the group? Define three activities that a partisan group committed to "living" and "not becoming animals" might engage in.
2. What do you think the group needs in order to continue successfully? Make a list of all the group's NEEDS in this scene.
3. Often we think about leadership as a position—the person in charge is the "leader." Consider the idea that leadership is an *action* or a *series of actions*. Make a list of all of Tuvia's ACTIONS in this scene. Think about the actions that lie behind the words. For example—calming the group down, inspiring the group, etc.
4. Compare your list of the group's needs with your list of Tuvia's actions. Does he provide them with what they need? How?

5. Tuvia tells the group: "We have all chosen this—to live here free, as human beings, for as long as we can." Why do you think he reminds the group of this? To what extent does Tuvia place the responsibility of the success of the Bielski unit on the people who compose that unit? What does that teach you about the responsibilities of a leader?
6. Have you ever been in a situation where a group of people did not know what to do? What did it feel like? How did people act? Did anyone exert leadership? What did they do and what were the results?

Text

In his book *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, psychiatrist Ronald Heifetz, Director of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government's Center for Public Leadership writes:

"The task of leadership consists of choreographing and directing learning processes in an organization or community. Progress often demands new ideas and innovation. As well, it also demands changes in people's attitudes and behaviors."

Questions for Text

Suggested Technique: Group Discussion

1. Why do you think Heifetz uses the terms "choreographing" and "directing" to describe the work of leadership? Make a list of the associations you have with those words. How do those associations enhance your understanding of what leadership demands? Given this definition of leadership, do you think that Tuvia acted as a leader in this scene? Explain.
2. What did Tuvia do and say that was new in the Bielski partisan unit? What innovations did he introduce, and how did those innovations influence the group?
3. Was Tuvia successful in changing the group's attitude? Was he successful in changing the group's behavior? How?
4. How do you think Aron's comment—the first words he had spoken since finding his parents murdered at the beginning of the film—about the fact that his older brother Asael was missing, influenced what Tuvia said to the group? Was Aron teaching anything to Tuvia? How might Aron's comment have changed Tuvia's attitude? What does this tell you about the nature of leadership?

Leadership: Excerpt 2

Tuvia Exerts His Authority (3:14)

Defiance DVD Start 1:29:34

MC: Violence

Scene Context

In order for the Bielski unit to survive, all of its members, including women, children, and the elderly, work. Every individual does what he or she is capable of—sewing and repairing clothes for the Soviet unit, preparing and serving food, repairing weapons, building and caring for the camp. Those who could fight joined the Soviet partisans on dangerous missions to attack their enemies; they were also in charge of going on food missions. Tuvia had established a definite set of rules, which kept the unit functioning. These rules were, in essence, the 'government law' of the Bielski unit, and he, as the one who established the laws, had the greatest authority to enforce them. These laws included one which stated that everyone in the unit, no matter what their job, received the same amount of food. This was important for the emotional and social health of the unit; everybody felt needed, appreciated, and, therefore, gave their utmost to support the unit.

Previous to this scene, Tuvia comes down with a severe case of tuberculosis. He is sick and weak, and absent during critical moments. One of the partisan fighters, Arkady, has been bullying the women, trying to get more food for the fighters and those who go on the food missions because he insists that, "Those who risk their lives for the group" should get more food. Tuvia has intervened, reminding him that the rule is that everyone gets the same ration.

This is not the first time that Arkady—a valued fighter, but also feared as a bully—has challenged Tuvia's authority. Arkady is a possible threat not just to Tuvia, but to the camp as a whole.

Scene Description

Arkady has beaten up Asael, and his gang has taken all the food; Tuvia shoots him and re-establishes his power.

Questions for Scene

Suggested Techniques: Discussion or Debate

1. Do you think Arkady was wrong to want more food for the fighters? What was the basis of his claims and what were the values behind Tuvia's counter-claim for equality of distribution?
2. In your opinion, did Tuvia act like a leader in this scene? In what ways did he act—or fail to act—like a leader?
3. Describe a scenario that might have taken place in the group if Tuvia had allowed Arkady to take over as leader.
4. Describe a scenario that might have taken place if Tuvia had used a different way to oppose Arkady (other than killing him).

Text

According to Ronald Heifetz, in his book *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, there is a difference between 'leadership' and 'authority.' Leadership is an action that anyone can take, no matter what their position in the group, to help the group define and achieve its mission successfully. When individuals come together to form groups, they look towards one figure to stand at the helm, to provide direction and protection, and to ensure the group's functionality and order. 'Authority' is this position in the group.

The authority figure is responsible for the following aspects of group life:

1. **Orientation:** Clarifies the roles of the members of a group, and maintains organizational structures of accountability
2. **Direction:** Helps provide the group with direction
3. **Protection:** Protects the group from the external environment, managing the boundary between it and the outside world
4. **Maintaining Norms:** Sustains the group, suppressing deviance, providing solutions to problems that arise, and bolstering its norms
5. **Quelling Conflict:** Diminishes chaos in the group, and works to keep the group at the lowest possible level of tension

Questions for Text

1. Based on Heifetz's definition of an 'authority figure,' write a job description for Tuvia. What is he responsible for as the 'commander' of the Bielski unit?
2. Based on this definition, and the scene you just saw, was Tuvia 'fulfilling' his job description when he killed Arkady? Explain. Would there have been any other way for him to 'do his job'? Discuss.
3. Do you think Tuvia would have acted differently if he had not been sick? Might he have acted differently if it had not been the dead of winter? How did the myriad of external circumstances influence the way in which Tuvia exerted his authority? Do the circumstances affect the way you think about Tuvia's actions in this scene?

Recommended Testimonial / Resources

1. Partisan Testimonial D: Mira Shelub - A Sleeping Partisan is Punished (p. 28)
2. For more lessons and information on leadership and authority, download "Finding Leadership" at www.jewishpartisans.org/resist

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

Leadership: Excerpt 3

A Baby is Born (1:27)*Defiance DVD Start 1:37:34***Scene Context**

Women played a variety of roles in both Jewish and non-Jewish groups, but primarily their partisan activities were extensions of their traditional caretaker roles in 1930s European society. They were responsible for feeding their entire unit, nursing the wounded and the sick, setting up and breaking down camp, doing the laundry, and cleaning and carrying weapons—vital duties that ensured a camp's survival, safety, and ability to function.

Women made up 30 to 40 percent of the Bielski population—a significantly higher percentage than most non-Jewish units, which averaged less than 10 percent women. An estimated 60 percent of the adults in the Bielski partisan group lived as couples, and some of the relationships, like Tuvia's marriage to Lilka, lasted a lifetime.

Prior to this scene, Tuvia established a very clear order that it was forbidden to become pregnant and give birth to children; the unit simply could not accommodate the needs of an infant. Lilka, Tuvia's girlfriend, learns that her friend was raped by a German and is pregnant. Lilka helps her friend hide the pregnancy and have the baby. Tuvia hears the baby crying and finds out what has happened.

Scene Description

Lilka convinces Tuvia that the baby—who was conceived and born against Tuvia's explicit orders—should be allowed to live and to remain with the group.

Questions for Scene**Suggested Techniques: Discussion or Debate**

1. If Tuvia had decided to enforce the rule that pregnancies were forbidden, what do you think he would have done to the mother and baby? Do you think it is effective for a leader to break his own rules?
2. Do you think that Lilka exerts leadership in this scene? Why or why not? Explore her use of language. How did she build an argument? How did she ultimately convince Tuvia?
3. To what extent do you think Lilka manipulated her beauty, and her relationship with Tuvia, to convince him to change his explicit order against babies being born in the unit? What is the difference between influence and leadership? Can the two be differentiated when a couple disagrees?
4. Do you agree with Tuvia's decision to let the baby stay with the group? What conflicting messages did it send to the camp? What was the underlying value that it reinforced?



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Text

The following text is a commentary on one of the Jewish stories of humankind's creation. It addresses the question of why, in this story, the first human was created alone. The reason it provides is that each human being is unique—his or her own world—and that each life must be preserved and protected, and treated with as much love and care as if it were an entire world full of human beings.

Humanity was created alone to teach that anyone who destroys one life is regarded as if they had destroyed an entire world, and anyone who saves one life is regarded as if they had saved an entire world.

—Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5*

Questions for Text

1. Do you agree with this quote? Why or why not?
2. What do you think the author of this text meant by the terms "destroy" and "save?" In this scene, Tuvia agrees to let the baby stay with the camp. Which worlds, other than the baby's, might have been destroyed had Tuvia decided otherwise? How? Draw a map of people the baby might have been connected to. How did Tuvia's decision "save" lives?
3. Tuvia Bielski once said: "I would rather save one old Jewish woman than kill 10 Nazi soldiers." What does this text teach you about the values system that influenced his thinking and decision-making?

Recommended Testimonial / Resources

1. Partisan Testimonial: Mira Shelub - Struggling to Survive (p. 27)
2. For more on women in the partisans, view the JPEF short film, "Every Day the Impossible: Jewish Women in the Partisans" and accompanying study guide. See page 30 for details.

*The Mishnah is a seminal Jewish text that reflects debates on Jewish law, ethics, and philosophy, which took place between 70-200 CE by a group of rabbinic sages. It was put into writing by Rabbi Judah the Prince around 200 C.E., because the Jews were afraid that their oral tradition would be forgotten if it was not recorded.

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

Leadership: Excerpt 4

Asael's Moment (2:48)*Defiance DVD Start 1:52:28***Scene Context**

The Germans are launching a targeted attack on the partisans in the forest. The Bielski partisans have been packing up their camp, but the attack begins before they are ready to leave. The Germans drop bombs and then send in troops. The Jewish partisans run for their lives, taking whatever they can on their backs, leaving some fighters behind to delay the advancing troops. The Germans quickly defeat the fighters sent to delay them. The unit is stopped in its tracks when it faces a large wetland. With the Germans at their heels, and the swamp in front of them, they are terrified, and do not know what to do.

Tuvia had been slightly wounded during the initial attack, when a bomb exploded next to him. He is dazed and suffering from loss of hearing. He fears that all those who stayed behind to fight had been killed, including Asael, and feels responsible for those deaths, and unable to make a decision.

Scene Description

Tuvia is wounded and confused. Asael steps up and mobilizes the group to cross the water.

Questions for Scene**Suggested Techniques: Discussion or Debate**

1. Why did the group need leadership at this moment? What specifically did the group need to hear from its leader?
2. How does Asael convince the group to cross the water? What does he say, and what does he do, to mobilize the group into action?
3. Why do you think Asael is able to provide the leadership that Tuvia cannot? Make a list of the leadership qualities Asael displays.
4. Think of a time when you stepped into—or out of—leadership. What inspired you to take action?
5. Contrast how Asael takes leadership in this scene with how Arkady did in Leadership: Excerpt 2 (page 18). What makes for effective and ineffective leadership? How can you constructively take or support leadership in your classroom/peer group/family?



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Text

In his book *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Ronald Heifetz writes:

"The practice of leadership requires, perhaps first and foremost, a sense of purpose—the capacity to find the values that make risk-taking meaningful."

Questions for Text

1. The word *purpose* comes from the Indo-European word for "fire." In this scene, Asael helped to ignite the purpose of the Bielski unit. What values did Asael articulate that allowed the group to take the risk of forging ahead into the river?
2. What does this scene teach you about the challenges and opportunities of exerting leadership in a group when you are not the authority figure?
3. Have you ever been in a situation in which the head of a group has not known what to do? How did the group react? How did you react?

Recommended Testimonial / Resources

1. Partisan Testimonial C: Mira Shelub – Struggling to Survive (p. 27)

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

Jewish Values: Excerpt 1

Choosing Life (3:02)*Defiance DVD Start 1:07:38***Scene Context**

No matter the circumstances, Jewish partisans proved remarkably resilient, adapting and adopting coping strategies and tactics as they went along. Sonia Orbuch, a former Jewish partisan, said: "We knew we had our destiny in our own hands. We were free to smell the fresh air. But it was hard, let me tell you. It was a full-time job just to stay alive." For more info on Sonia, visit: www.jewishpartisans.org/soniaobio.

Many partisans took "forest husbands" or "forest wives" during the war. These were casual relationships which took advantage of the untraditional lifestyle the partisans were living, far from society and its confines. Though Asael could have formed such an informal relationship with Chaya, a young girl whose parents Asael had helped rescue from the ghetto, the couple instead decide to have a traditional wedding, and sanctify their union before the community. Asael and Chaya's marriage affects the whole group. All of the partisans were able to witness this life-affirming, hopeful, "normal" ritual, which stood out in stark contrast to their daily routine of hiding in the forest and fearing for their lives. Witnessing and celebrating this ritual instilled in them the desire to live, to persevere. Jewish partisan Norman Salsitz said that one of the reasons he stayed alive was to "tell the story for my mother." He wrote four books after the war on his experiences. For more info on Norman, visit: www.jewishpartisans.org/normansbio.

Prior to this scene in the film, Zus had decided, after a fight with Tuvia, to leave his brothers and the Bielski camp, and join the Soviet partisan unit. His decision to fight was strongly motivated by his desire to save lives; he believed that fighting the Germans was the most effective means of resistance.

Scene Description

Asael and Chaya are married in the forest. Simultaneously, Zus leads an ambush on a German troop truck with the Soviet partisans.

Questions for Scene**Suggested Technique: Paired Learning**

1. Why do you think that the filmmakers chose to juxtapose these two events in one scene? What issues are they raising with this juxtaposition?
2. In the Jewish tradition, a glass is broken at the end of a wedding ceremony as a symbol that even in the happiest of moments, it is important to remember that the world also contains tragedy. What underlying values does this tradition portray? How does Asael and Chaya's decision to get married reflect similar values?



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3. Do you think it was important for the Bielski partisans to witness Asael and Chaya's wedding? Why?
4. How did celebrating their marriage benefit the community? What were the possible downsides, or even dangers, of holding a wedding in the Bielski partisans' circumstances? What function do ceremonies—weddings, funerals, inaugurations, etc.—serve today?

Text

In the book of Deuteronomy,* the fifth book of the Torah, verse 30:19 says:

"I call heaven and earth to witness today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants."

Questions for Text

1. Rewrite the verse in your own words. What do you think the verse is trying to teach?
2. What do you think "choose life" meant to Asael and Chaya? What did you think it meant to Zus? What are the similarities and differences between their choices? What does it reveal to you about the way in which the same value can be interpreted and expressed in different ways?
3. What does it mean for "heaven and earth" to witness something? What is the role of a witness? How does having a witness at an event change that event?
4. Share another example of a value that can be expressed in multiple, even contradictory, ways.

Recommended Testimonial / Resources

1. Partisan Testimonial C: Mira Shelub - Struggling to Survive (p. 27)

*Deuteronomy is the last book of the Torah, the Hebrew Bible. It takes the form of a long speech, filled with advice, laws, and poetry that Moses gives to the Israelites before he dies in the desert, and they enter the Promised Land.

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

Jewish Values: Excerpt 2

Choose Another People (0:39)*Defiance DVD Start 1:23:49***Scene Context**

Many partisans died in battle, and often there was no time for burial or ceremony. In this scene, fighters in the Bielski unit have been killed in battle. The schoolteacher, Shimon Ha'Aretz, holds an impromptu burial ceremony for them. He evokes the Jewish notion of "chosenness"—the idea that the Jews have been chosen by God to be God's people. This idea has been discussed and debated throughout Jewish history. According to one view, the relationship between God and the Jews was established at Sinai, the site where God gave, and the Jewish people accepted, the set of beliefs and practices that compose the Jewish religion. In this view, "chosenness" merely reflects a covenantal relationship; God and the Jews have, so to speak, signed a contract, in which the Jews have agreed to follow a certain set of ethical laws and behaviors they believe to have been delineated by God. This notion of chosenness turns the traditional idea that God has chosen the Jews, on its head. It explains that in fact the opposite has occurred—the Jews have chosen to be in relationship with God by following a certain set of rules and adhering to a particular set of values.

Jews have been struggling with the notion of chosenness throughout history. In this scene, the schoolteacher evokes the idea and puts a different spin on the issue. He insinuates that God has indeed chosen the Jewish people—but has chosen them to be tortured and destroyed.

Scene Description

Shimon Ha'Aretz holds a burial ceremony for fallen Jewish partisans.

Questions for Scene**Suggested Technique: Paired Learning**

1. How do you understand the term "the chosen people?" How do you think Shimon is defining that term in this scene?
2. How do you think the concept of being "chosen" might have served the Jewish partisans, and in what ways might it have been a burden?
3. Instead of reciting the traditional Jewish funeral prayer—the Kaddish, which praises God — at this funeral Shimon appears to be challenging, and even criticizing God. Do you think that Shimon lost his faith? What indicates that he has? What indicates that he has not?
4. Many partisans were not religious in the traditional sense. How might they have responded to this type of funeral service? What is the role of a spiritual leader in a time of crisis? Do you think the teacher is meeting the needs of his community? In what ways?



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Text

One possible reason that the Shimon spoke as he did, challenging God directly, is that the Jewish tradition is full of examples of human beings challenging God. One of the most famous examples appears in the book of Genesis,* the first book of the Torah, in chapter 18: 23-25. In this story, Abraham, considered to be the first Jew, has learned that God is going to destroy the city of Sodom. He is surprised to learn that God is going to destroy an entire city because of the actions of a few evildoers. It reads:

And Abraham approached and he said—will you sweep up the righteous with the wicked? There may be fifty righteous men in the city—will you sweep up and not preserve for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in its midst? May it never be the case to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, making the righteous like the wicked—may it never happen—will the judge of all the land not do justice?

Questions for Text

1. How is the schoolteacher continuing in Abraham's tradition? How do they both "talk" to God? What is surprising about it?
2. How would you define the underlying values behind this kind of dialogue with God? Make a list of the possible values that emerge from this text and this scene.
3. The Jewish people are known as Am Yisrael, which can be translated as "nation of God-wrestlers." We may never know the answer, but do you think the concept of Jews as "God wrestlers" may have influenced Jewish partisans in any way? How?

*Genesis is the first book of the Torah, the Hebrew Bible. It recounts the story of the creation of the world, and stories about the forefathers and foremothers of the Jewish people.

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

Jewish Values: Excerpt 3

Passover in the Forest (0:56)

Defiance DVD Start 1:45:29

Scene Context

In this scene, German planes are flying over the forest, looking for the partisans. The Bielski unit is in imminent danger, and Tuvia is trying to decide what is best for the group to do. The Jewish holiday of Passover is also about to occur, and Shimon Ha'Aretz, the teacher, is explaining the significance of the holiday to a group of children in a makeshift classroom.

Tuvia was an avid reader who loved to recount religious stories to illustrate current dilemmas. The holiday of Passover, which recounts the ancient Israelite's escape from slavery in Egypt, and is celebrated by Jews around the world each Spring, during the season of renewal, was especially resonant for the Jewish partisans. The most obvious theme of the festival is redemption from slavery—both physical and spiritual. Tuvia may have decided to move the camp because it was around the time of Passover, and he was inspired by the story of the Jews' escape from Egypt, from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom.

Scene Description

Shimon Ha'Aretz teaches the partisan children about the Passover story.

Questions for Scene

Suggested Technique: Paired Learning

1. Do you think that the teaching of the Passover story in the middle of a forest, in the middle of a war, was valuable? Why or why not? In what ways could it be interpreted as a form of resistance? Name five other non-violent ways people could resist.
2. Name five challenges a teacher might face in setting up a school in wartime/refugee conditions. What burdens might such a school impose on the community? What might be the benefits?
3. Shimon shares that in the story of the Exodus from Egypt, Moses told the people: "Do not trust in me—trust in God." To what extent could this idea be harmful to the Jewish partisans at this particular moment, when the Germans were launching an attack on the forest? To what extent might it be helpful to them?
4. While Shimon is teaching the children, Tuvia decides to move the entire Bielski unit from their campsite, hoping to bring them to safety before the Germans attack. He precedes this decision by saying: "Tomorrow is Passover, yes? Moses, the Exodus..." How can stories influence the way we decide to act? Have you ever heard a story that shaped a decision you made?



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Text

Chapter 6, verses 6-7 in the book of Exodus,¹ which recounts the story of the ancient Israelite's slavery in Egypt, and ultimate redemption from that place, reads:

"I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments, and I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God..."

Each year, in order to commemorate this freedom from bondage, the Jews tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt, and also try to connect an experience in their own lives to the story, as it states in the Babylonian Talmud:²

"In every generation one must look upon himself as if he personally had gone out of Egypt." (Pesachim 116b).

Questions for Text

1. What purpose do you think this teaching from the Talmud serves? What benefits could it have on a personal level? On a cultural level?
2. Why do you think the verse from Exodus uses so many different verbs, which, ultimately, express the same thing? What does it teach us about the nature of moving from slavery to freedom?
3. Does your family or culture have a story about going from a difficult place to a place of hope? Share that story with the class or your study partner.

¹ The book of Exodus is the second book in the Torah, the Hebrew Bible. It recounts the story of the Israelite's bondage to the Egyptians, their redemption at the hands of God and Moses, and the beginning of their journey in the desert, on the way to the Land of Israel.

² The Babylonian Talmud, a 20-volume opus, is the written version of 600 years of rabbinic debate on Jewish law. The word *talmud* comes from the Hebrew word for teaching and learning. Tractate "Pesachim" recounts the laws and ideas surrounding the holiday of Passover.

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

Jewish Values: Excerpt 4

Building Community (1:20)

Defiance DVD Start 1:40:05

Scene Context

Jewish tradition has valued the notion of community since its inception. Most Jewish law is dependent upon community, and it is a wide-held Jewish belief that the individual can attain his or her full potential only when in relationship and dialogue with others. In Judaism, the concept of holiness is used almost exclusively in a public sense. The Jewish notion of community is intertwined with the notion of responsibility for repairing the world. In order to make the world a better place, individuals need to take care of each other, and realize that they are interconnected. The Jewish notion of community is not limited only to Jews; it is an open community, as a tenet of Jewish belief is that all human beings were created equal, in God's image, and must be treated with respect and dignity.

Prior to this scene, Tuvia and Asael had entered a ghetto and escaped back to their camp with a large number of Jews who had been trapped in the ghetto. The escapees are new to the forest and the partisans. This scene reveals Tuvia's deliberate attempt to build community amongst his partisans.

Scene Description

Tuvia welcomes the Jews who have just come from the ghetto to the Bielski unit.

Questions for Scene

Suggested Technique: Paired Learning

1. What do you think Tuvia's purposes are in making his speech? Does he achieve them?
2. What techniques does Tuvia use in his speech to try to achieve the purposes discussed above? How do you respond to leaders who use similar techniques? Name three leadership techniques you've used and describe what the results were.
3. Tuvia says, "This is the one place in all of Belarussia where a Jew could be free." What does that mean? What are they free to do? What are they free not to do? What are they free from?
4. At the end of this scene, a little boy turns to Lilka and asks about Tuvia: "Is he a Jew?" Why do you think he asked the question? What does it teach you about the type of community the Jews had in the ghetto?



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Text

Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Nazi death camps, Nobel Laureate, author of fifty-seven books, professor, and political activist, who has written prolifically about his experience during the Holocaust, has said:

A Jew cannot be a Jew on his own. A Jew needs to be part of a community.

Questions for Text

1. What do you think this text means? Re-write the text to reflect the value statement to which it is alluding.
2. Based on Tuvia's speech in this scene, make a list of the community values and characteristics that you think he was working to establish for the camp. Circle the characteristics and values that you think were pivotal for the Bielski unit's survival. Discuss the relationship between community and survival.
3. Make a list of all the communities of which you are a part—from the smallest groups to the largest. What role does each community play in your life? Name at least one way in which each of your communities influences you.

Recommended Testimonial / Resources

1. Partisan Testimonial B: Aron Bell – Saving Jewish Lives (p. 26)

Partisan Testimonial A: Aron Bell (Bielski)

Thwarting the Nazi Effort (0:47)

Online at www.jewishpartisans.org/aronbbio

Interview Context

Aron Bell—previously Aron Bielski—was the youngest of the Bielski brothers, and the last of the brothers still alive as of 2009. (He is played in the movie *Defiance* by George MacKay as the youngest brother, who holds silence for much of the film).



Aron escaped with his brothers into the Naliboki forest, and became a scout for their unit at the age of 11. He used his youth and appearance (appearing to be neither a fighter nor Jewish) to gather intelligence from local non-Jewish villagers. After the war, Aron traveled to Europe with other Jewish teens who had survived the Holocaust but lost their families. He smuggled himself into what was then Mandate Palestine (the future location for Israel) and eventually fought in the Israeli War of Independence.



Unlike most partisan groups, the Bielskis focused a great deal of their resources on rescue missions. The tactics they used, however, were identical to other partisans throughout World War II: avoiding open battle in favor of guerilla warfare, reconnaissance, sabotage and survival (obtaining food, shelter, etc.).

Scene Description

In this testimonial, Aron describes the sabotage tactics partisans used in their fight against the German army and their collaborators.

TRANSCRIPT

"Look, if you go from one city to the other; somewhere along the line there has to be a bridge, or a train, right? That the Nazis use. You go, you burn up the bridge; you go, you sabotage the railroad. Or if they were accumulating cows for their food; you'd go and burn up their food...hit and run. The partisans (not only the Jewish partisans, but also the Russian [Soviet] partisans)—they gave them a hell of a time, to the Nazis, absolutely. They [the Germans] could not roam around freely; they had to go in groups."

General Questions

1. What were the benefits to the partisans of engaging in sabotage tactics rather than open battle?

- Imagine that you were a member of a resistance group (armed or unarmed). What would be your top five priorities for your group? Which would be better served by battle? Which by sabotage? Which by diplomacy? Which by nonviolence? What other tactics can you think of?
- As time went on, the Bielski partisans gained a greater and greater reputation in their area for successfully fighting the Germans and their collaborators. How do you think this served their purposes, and how did it hinder them?
- Aron says that the partisans gave the Nazis, "a hell of a time." The German army never expected that they would have to fight hundreds of thousands of soldiers behind their own front lines. How do you think they responded to the partisans' actions, and how might those responses have affected other aspects of the German war effort?
- Many Jewish partisans were teenagers. Some of them, like Aron, were even younger. How do you feel when you think of young people like Aron going on partisan missions? Of going into battle? List some positive and negative consequences that these experiences could have had on their lives.

Additional Topics

Social Studies

What effect do you think the Bielskis' actions—as Jews, guerilla fighters, saboteurs and rescuers—had on the German army's morale and ability to operate in Belarus? On the outcome of the war as a whole?

English

Some Jewish partisan groups, such as those in the Minsk ghetto*, put out newsletters publicizing their action. Write a headline and a three sentence introduction to an article that they might have published about a successful Bielski mission (feel free to make up the details).

Write two more accounts of the same event: one from the point of view of the German military, and one from the Soviets (who were allied with the Bielskis). Make sure to include headlines.

Judaic Studies

The Bielskis are frequently compared to two other groups of Jewish revolutionaries—the Maccabees, and the Israelites who escaped Egypt. Which do you think they resemble, or can you think of a more accurate historical parallel? Explain your answer.

Recommended for Use With

- History: Excerpt 2 - Meeting the Russian Partisans (p. 10)

* For more details, see: www.ushmm.org/outreach/partchr.htm

Partisan Testimonial B: Aron Bell (Bielski)

Saving Jewish Lives (1:03)

Online at www.jewishpartisans.org/aronbbio

Interview Context

Aron Bell—previously Aron Bielski—was the youngest of the Bielski brothers, and the last of the brothers still alive as of 2009. (He is played in the movie *Defiance* by George MacKay as the youngest brother, who holds silence for much of the film).



Aron escaped with his brothers into the Naliboki forest, and became a scout for their unit at the age of 11. He used his youth and appearance (appearing to be neither a fighter nor Jewish) to gather intelligence from local non-Jewish villagers. After the war, Aron traveled to Europe with other Jewish teens who had survived the Holocaust but lost their families. He smuggled himself into what was then Mandate Palestine (the future location for Israel) and eventually fought in the Israeli War of Independence.



Unlike most partisan groups, the Bielskis focused a great deal of their resources on rescuing Jews. But there was hardly unanimous agreement on the decision to do so. Rescue missions were risky, they diverted resources from fighting the enemy, and there was the question of how to support the people they saved – particularly noncombatants who might put the rest of the group at risk.

Scene Description

As the youngest Bielski brother, Aron has a unique perspective on the choices his older brothers made in leading the group. In this testimonial, he describes how Tuvia was responsible for bringing more refugees into the group and why, in Aron's opinion, Zus and Asael disagreed with Tuvia's position.

TRANSCRIPT

"And he was actually the one, it was Tuvia's idea that if they could survive 20, 30 people, why couldn't 60 survive? And if there was food for 60, there will be enough food for 120. This was his idea to save Jews. Whether it's a woman, child, old man, young man, whomever. This was his idea. The other two brothers [Zus and Asael] would not: they would probably take their relatives out and they would have a small group of people. They would not undertake such a big responsibility. This comes the credit to the oldest, to Tuvia. That was his idea."

General Questions

1. What do you think Aron means by the phrase, to "undertake such a big responsibility"?
2. Do you agree with Tuvia's logic, that "if there was food for 60, there will be enough food for 120"? What did the Bielski partisans stand to lose from such a policy? What did they stand to gain?
3. What if the Bielskis had died because they tried to rescue too many people—would you still think that Tuvia made the right decision? What helps you make hard decisions when the outcome is hard to predict?
4. Describe one time when you took a risk that benefitted a group you belonged to. Describe a time when you served your group better by being cautious.
5. How do you think leaders balance their responsibilities to care for their immediate group with their responsibilities to help others? How do you?
6. As Tuvia's lieutenants, do you think Zus and Asael had a greater responsibility to support their brother's decisions, or to do what they thought was best for the group? What would you do if you were in a position of authority and disagreed with your group's leader?

Additional Questions

Social Studies

Make a list of groups (personal, ethnic, national, etc.) that the Bielski brothers belonged to. Make a list of groups you belong to or identify with. Which ones do you feel the greatest sense of responsibility towards? How does this influence your actions?

English

How do you think a partisan who disagreed with Tuvia would describe Tuvia's rationale for letting more people into the group? How do you think a refugee would describe Zus's rationale against letting more people in? Which do you agree with more? Why?

Judaic Studies

In the movie *Defiance*, the character Shimon (the schoolteacher) tells Tuvia, "The Talmud says if you save a life, you must take responsibility for it." Do you agree with this statement? What other values does this quote from the Talmud imply, and how do you think those values influenced Aron's perspective on Tuvia, Zus, and Asael's conflict regarding bringing more refugees into the camp?

Recommended for Use With

1. Ethics: Excerpt 1 - "They're Family" (p. 13)
2. Jewish Values: Excerpt 4 - Building Community (p. 24)

TEACHING WITH *DEFIANCE*

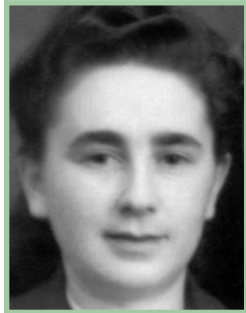
Partisan Testimonial C: Mira Shelub

Struggling to Survive (1:30)

Online at www.jewishpartisans.org/mirasbio

Interview Context

Faced with deadly antisemitism from non-Jewish members of her Polish partisan unit, 18-year-old Mira Shelub and about two-dozen other Jews escaped the group. Now classified as deserters, they hid with the Bielskis to avoid being shot for leaving her group. Three



weeks later, they received permission from the Soviet Partisan commanders to form their own all-Jewish detachment. After that, they left the Bielskis to conduct their own missions.

Like many female partisans who lived in a time where women had very distinct roles from men, Mira was not primarily a fighter. But she would sometimes join the soldiers on missions, carrying ammunition and providing other support. Women in the partisans were vulnerable to sexual harassment and worse from men in their unit, so they often would marry one of the men for protection—a marriage of convenience, not romance. Mira was luckier. She married Nochim, the leader of her group and, “I loved my husband and he loved me,” she recalls. “It was like a love affair in the forest. Can you ask for a better place?”



Scene Description

In this testimonial, Mira tells how she convinced her husband, Nochim—the leader of her partisan group—not to give up.

TRANSCRIPT

“There is nothing in the forest. I remember we were putting into swamps, pushing into swamps, and we tried to get out from the swamps and there, it was not just the young ones, but all the family, family people. We couldn’t get out. My husband, he was leading the group and I was near him and he carried a pistol in his hands and he says, he, first of all, the Germans all around us and we are just walking through the swamps, one foot in, one foot out, one foot in, one foot out and he, he wanted to kill himself. He said, “I just want to finished up. I had enough of it. Finish.” I said, “No, you are not going to do it. You are not going to do it. We’ll make it. We’ll make it.” Because you become so desperate when you go, you know, it’s swamps. One in, one—you don’t know when, how will it end? But we got out. We got out. We got out. So it’s a different life. It’s, it’s something entirely different. I always, I, I was dreaming that one day I’ll come out and I’ll have my little, my little boy and it’s huckle [sic]. My older son, our way. I, I always felt that we’ll survive. We’ll survive and I’ll have a little son.”

General Questions

For definitions of leadership and authority used in these questions, refer to Leadership Excerpt Two: Tuvia Exerts his Authority (page 18).

1. In this situation, Mira took leadership to save Nochim's life—and quite possibly the lives of her comrades, since Nochim was their commander. Who authorized her to take leadership? Where does authority come from?
2. What positions or relationships did Mira hold that gave her additional authority in this situation? How did she use them?
3. Make a list of actions that leaders can take to use their authority most effectively. Make a list of actions they can take to undermine their own authority. Do any items on the list overlap?
4. For someone who decides to take leadership in a situation, what advantages could there be to not having any explicit authority?
5. Describe or reenact a time when you convinced someone else to persevere. Does retelling the scene change your perspective on what happened or give you new insights?
6. What is the value, if any, of retelling personal history? How do the stories you grew up with affect the way you live today?

Additional Topics

Social Studies

Draw a diagram of how you think relationships, authority, and leadership influence each other—either in theory, or using an example from your life (your family, a group of friends, etc.).

English

Imagine it wasn't just Nochim who wanted to give up, but the rest of Mira's partisan group as well. Write (or perform) a speech in which Mira persuades her comrades to persevere. If you can, try to write in Mira's voice.

Judaic Studies

Refer to the text study on page 19 (Leadership: Excerpt 3): “...anyone who saves one life is regarded as if they had saved an entire world.” With this or other Jewish texts/traditions in mind, discuss what responsibility Mira had to take leadership in this situation.

Recommended for Use With

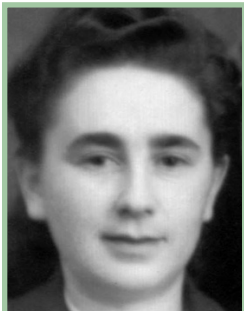
1. Leadership: Excerpt 4 - Asael's Moment (p. 20)
2. Jewish Values: Excerpt 1 - Choosing Life (p. 21)

Partisan Testimonial D: Mira Shelub

A Sleeping Partisan is Punished (1:20)

Online at www.jewishpartisans.org/mirasbio

Interview Context



Faced with deadly antisemitism from non-Jewish members of her Polish partisan unit, 18-year-old Mira Shelub and about two-dozen other Jews escaped the group. Now classified as deserters, they hid with the Bielskis to avoid being shot for leaving her group. Three weeks later, they received permission from the Soviet Partisan commanders to form their own all-Jewish detachment. After that, they left the Bielskis to conduct their own missions.



Approximately one quarter of Mira's unit were women—unusual for non-Jewish partisan units, but more common in Jewish groups where most everyone was allowed to join. Women cooked, maintained camp and provided other vital support, including taking active roles in missions at times, but sexism limited their opportunities. Mira herself

occasionally carried ammunition in her group's sabotage missions against the Nazis and their Polish collaborators.

Scene Description

In this testimonial Mira recounts how soldiers in her unit killed a fellow partisan for falling asleep while on guard duty.

TRANSCRIPT

"But once I remember, we stayed at one place and we had one partisan who was supposedly watching. We were all asleep. We were all asleep in the peasant's house and one Partisan was outside watching if the Germans don't approach us. It's actually not the Germans but the local police. The Germans were afraid to get into the forest because you have a feeling that each tree was shooting at you. But they're Polish police, so they attacked the house and then, and then we counterattack them and they, they ran away.

But the partisan who was guarding the house, they kill, they killed him, the leaders of the Partisans because how could he had knew that everybody was asleep and he supposedly was watching us, and he got into the house and he also was like that, you know, going to sleep a little bit."

General Questions

1. Why do you think the partisans killed the guard?
2. Do you think it was fair to kill the guard? What arguments could you make on either side?
3. Do you think the partisans had other options in this situation? What might have limited them from acting differently?
4. How does military justice differ from civilian justice? Do you think there should be a difference? Does it matter if it occurs during peacetime or during war?
5. Describe a time when you saw someone wrongly being punished – or escaping fair punishment. Did you say anything or hold silence? Knowing what you do now, would you act differently?

Additional Topics

Social Studies

Do you think that killing the guard was an effective tactic for protecting the group? If it was effective, does that justify the punishment?

English

Mira says that, "In the forest we did not only fight a physical battle, but also a spiritual battle. We were sitting around the fire, singing songs together, supporting each other and dreaming about better days and a better future...a better tomorrow."

How would you resolve the apparent conflict between this statement and the events Mira describes?

Judaic Studies

What Jewish ethical principles or proof texts could you use to support or argue against the partisans' actions?

Recommended for Use With

1. Leadership: Excerpt 2 - Tuvia Exerts His Authority (p. 18)

Partisan Testimonial E: Rae Kushner

Being Hungry During Rosh HaShanah (1:19)

Online at www.jewishpartisans.org/raekbio

Interview Context



At age 18, Rae Kushner and her family escaped the Novogrodek ghetto in Poland with 250 other Jews. Using improvised tools, they dug a 750-foot tunnel to freedom, hiding the dirt in the walls of their building to avoid detection. Unfortunately, once they emerged from the tunnel, their group was discovered and many of Rae's companions, including her brother, died in the attempt.



Rae, her father, and her sister Lisa survived, and were eventually found by the Bielskis. As a Bielski partisan, Rae regularly stood guard for the camp. She also was one of the cooks, often making variations on potatoes, soup, and small pieces of bread.

The period between her family's escape and their rescue by the Bielskis was one of Rae's most harrowing. They didn't

know the territory outside Novogrodek—where to hide, where to find food, or who they could trust. Fortunately, they found a friendly, young Polish farmer and convinced him to guide them through the countryside to shelter.

For more about Rae and Lisa's story, see the JPEF short film, "A Partisan Returns: The Legacy of Two Sisters" (on the Teaching with Defiance DVD or at www.jewishpartisans.org/films).

Scene Description

In this testimonial, Rae describes the reactions of two different (non-Jewish) peasants who her family and their guide turned to for help.

TRANSCRIPT

"I'll tell you the story with it, with food. And we were sitting. It was pouring from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur ten days and we were hungry and my sister got really tired, and she was a young girl. She's four years younger than me and she said, "Let's go to a gentile [non-Jewish person]. Let's ask for bread. Maybe they'll give us bread." So we went. I went with my sister, and my father was holding on to this guy, to the farmer boy, and we knocked on the door and he ran out with a big piece of wood, hit my sister over the head and he put out a dog, a big dog on us, and we were hungry again. Later on we walked further and we went into a woman. She knew us. She knew the Kushner family so she said to us, "I'll let you eat. I'll give you to eat. I'll let you sleep overnight in the stable." She had cows. "But I cannot let you stay here for longer." I don't blame her. You know why? But if they would find out that she's hiding the Jews, the Jews, she would be killed with our family."

General Questions

1. How did you feel listening to Rae's description of how her family was treated by the two townspeople they turned to for help?
2. Why do you think the two townspeople reacted differently? Make a list of five possible reasons why the man with the dog should NOT have helped Rae, and six possible reasons why the woman did.
3. What would you do if a family you knew came to your door asking for food and shelter? What if you didn't know them? Would you be more likely or less likely to help if they were in direct danger? What if you could be in danger for helping them?
4. Why do you think some people are willing to risk their lives in order to help others?
5. What are some resources (physical, social, financial, emotional, etc.) that support people when taking or choosing to take risks in order to help others? Name five resources you could rely on if you had to take a great risk in order to protect someone.

Additional Topics

Social Studies

Based on hearing Rae's experience and what you know about partisans in general, what insight or advice can you imagine a former Jewish partisan might have to share with someone facing the threat of genocide today?

English

Think about a story or article your class has read where someone was in danger. How might the story have changed if that person had one more friend or ally who could help them (either a personal friend or some person/group who was an ally to their people)? Imagine an alternate ending from this perspective, and rewrite the last page or paragraph to suit your new story.

Judaic Studies

Is there a difference in the heroism displayed by 'righteous gentiles'—non-Jewish people who saved Jews—and Jews who saved other Jews? Do you think that people who resisted the Nazis were ordinary people acting in extraordinary circumstances, or extraordinary people who would have behaved heroically in less extreme circumstances?

Recommended for Use With

1. History: Excerpt 3 - Antisemitism in the Russian Partisans (p. 11)
2. Ethics: Excerpt 3 - The Milkman (p. 15)

JPEF Films on the *Teaching with Defiance* DVD

All films can be viewed online at www.jewishpartisans.org/films, and feature primary-source material including interviews with former Jewish partisans plus archival photographs and film clips. Accompanying study guides available online at www.jewishpartisans.org/resist.

Introduction to the Jewish Partisans (6:37)

A brief introduction to the Jewish partisans. Showcases interviews with nine former partisans, as well as rare Soviet archival footage. The film documents a nearly forgotten side of the Jewish experience during the Holocaust, countering the myth that Jews went "like sheep to the slaughter." Ed Asner narrates.

Study Guide: "Introduction to the Jewish Partisans"

Living and Surviving in the Partisans: Food (4:14)

For the Jewish partisans, hunger was an ever-present companion. Some partisans were able to find sympathetic villagers who would give them food, some had to steal it, others survived on a handful of beans. Nine Jewish partisans describe what they ate and how it was obtained. Larry King narrates.

Study Guide: "Living and Surviving in the Partisans"

Living and Surviving in the Partisans: Winter (4:16)

Partisans were often ill equipped for the freezing cold and snow of winter. This film features eleven former partisans detailing the struggle to survive the harsh winter climate, as well as how they used it to their advantage. Larry King narrates.

Study Guide: "Living and Surviving in the Partisans"

Living and Surviving in the Partisans: Medicine (4:43)

With few doctors and no medical supplies, partisans suffered from many diseases. Wounds were frequently left untreated. Nine former partisans recount the lack of medical care, and the methods—often improvised—that were used to treat the sick and injured. Larry King narrates.

Study Guide: "Living and Surviving in the Partisans"

Living and Surviving in the Partisans: Shelter (4:40)

Partisans used a variety of methods to survive harsh weather and hide from the Nazis and their collaborators. Some stayed with sympathetic peasants. Others constructed underground huts in the forest. Eight partisans describe where they lived as well as the constant fear of detection. Larry King narrates.

Study Guide: "Living and Surviving in the Partisans"

The Partisans Through the Eyes of the Soviet Newsreel (3:30)

Primary-source footage of Soviet and Polish partisans carrying out sabotage and other guerilla activities during World War II. This film shows the many forms of resistance that Jewish and non-Jewish partisans employed, as well as a picture of their daily lives. Ed Asner narrates.

Study Guide: "Introduction to the Jewish Partisans"

Every Day the Impossible: Jewish Women in the Partisans (15:00)

Less than 10% of all partisans were women. In the all-Jewish units, however, this percentage was significantly higher. Some engaged in armed combat, other provided critical support including cooking, nursing, reconnaissance and weapons transport. Hear about their challenges and victories first-hand from eight Jewish women who fought back against the Germans. Tovah Feldshuh narrates.

Study Guide: "Jewish Women in the Partisans"

Additional resources at www.jewishpartisans.org/women



Frank Blaichman appears in several JPEF films including "Antisemitism in the Partisans," narrated by Larry King.

Antisemitism in the Partisans (11:25)

The Jewish partisans fought a war on three fronts, not only against the German army, but also local Nazi collaborators, and even other partisans sometimes within their own groups. Though they fought a common enemy, antisemitism forced many Jewish partisans to hide their identity from—and even fight against—their allies. Larry King narrates.

Study Guide: "Antisemitism in the Partisans"

A Partisan Returns: The Legacy of Two Sisters (21:00)

Former Bielski partisan Lisa Riebel journeys back to her home in Belarus for the first time after nearly 65 years. She escaped the Novogrodek ghetto with her sister and father through a 750-foot tunnel, and after days in the forest joined up with the Bielskis. Experience how her story of escape, struggle and success affects three generations of her family. Tovah Feldshuh narrates.

Study Guides: "Jewish Women in the Partisans" and "Tuvia Bielski: Rescue is Resistance."

Introduction to the Bielski Partisans (6:45)

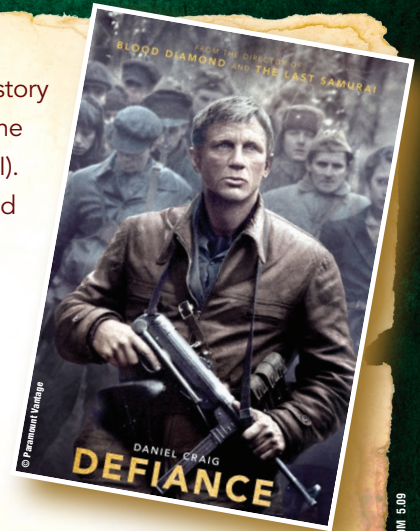
Based on JPEF's "Tuvia Bielski: Rescue is Resistance" study guide, this film gives students an overview of the Bielski partisans' history and accomplishments. Can be shown in class instead of reading page 3 of this guide, "Who Are the Bielskis?" Ed Asner narrates.

More 'Defiance' resources, including curricula, partisan profiles and video testimony available at: www.jewishpartisans.org/defiance

Public Performance Licensing of **DEFIANCE**

The Academy Award nominated picture, **DEFIANCE**, portrays the incredible story of Jewish brothers in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe on the run and hiding in the deep forests of the then German occupied Poland and Belorussia (World War II). These three Bielski brothers find the near impossible task of scrounging for food and weapons for their survival. The brothers' initial plan was to simply survive, however, the brothers soon start taking other families into their camp. Women and men of all ages, as well as children, are all hiding in hand-made substitute homes in the dark, cold and dangerous forests in the darkest times of German occupied Eastern Europe.

If you are interested in screening this Academy Award nominated picture at your school, you will need to obtain a Public Performance License. You may open it up to all students in your auditorium and spark a discussion with questions such as "Why isn't this compelling story as well known as Anne Frank", or "Why did the Forest Community create the term "Forest Wife"? With a Public Performance License, you may show the picture outside the classroom and open it up to **ALL** students. You may even already have one at your school! Check with your Administration or call Swank Motion Pictures directly to obtain a license.



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זכור אל תשכח

REMEMBER
DO NOT FORGET. זכור אל תשכח
(Deuteronomy 9:7)

A CALL TO ACTION
for *Yom HaShoah V'HaGevurah*

A phrase that once seemed redundant has taken on new meaning: Seventy years after the Shoah, the Holocaust, we must “remember not to forget.” Forgetting – which once seemed impossible – has become a harsh piece of our reality. We must now remember to remember.

Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, helps us remember the six million of our people who were tortured and murdered by the Nazis. We must never forget that each death put an end to a life as vibrant and significant as our own.

The full name of this Remembrance Day, and the way it is marked in Israel, is *Yom HaShoah v'HaGevurah* – Holocaust and Heroism day. The two are mentioned as one. What heroism – *gevurah* – are we referring to?

Consider the choice of dates for this commemoration: How did the Jewish people choose a single date to memorialize a series of events that took place over so many years? Murder occurred daily; each day on the calendar might have been appropriate as a memorial day. A prolonged debate ended in 1951 when Israel’s parliament chose the 27th of the month of Nissan because of its connection to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Why?

Because from its inception, the day was intended to recognize both martyrdom (all those who died at the hands of the Nazis) and *gevurah* (all those who resisted the Nazis).

We must
now
remember
to
remember.



זכור תשנה
אל

Today we know *gevurah* came in many forms – from the organized, armed actions of the partisans and ghetto fighters to the individuals who smuggled and shared food, from those who quieted babies during raids to those who recited the *Sh'ma* as a final act of faith. Struggling to stay alive another day was in and of itself a form of *gevurah*. And today, survivors who consent to share their stories continue to exhibit *gevurah* for their willingness to serve as witnesses and to relive their suffering – so that we never forget.

This year, we encourage you to observe this day as *Yom HaShoah v'HaGevurah*, in memory of all those who experienced the Shoah, to honor their lives and their courage. We must recommit ourselves to remember not to forget.

A reading for Yom HaShoah V'HaGevurah

בְּנֵי אָדָם יִשְׁבִי חֹשֶׁךְ וְצַלְמוֹת
וְהַשֵּׁם כְּגִבּוֹר עֲרִיץ עַל-כֵּן רָדְפֵי יִכְשְׁלוּ וְלֹא יִכְלוּ
בָּשׂוּ מֵאֵד כִּי לֹא הִשְׁפִּילוּ כְּלִמַּת עוֹלָם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח:
אַתָּה גִבּוֹר לְעוֹלָם אֲדֹנָי וּבְנֵי אָדָם בְּצֵל כְּנֶפֶד יִחְסִיוּ.

*Venei adam yoshvei choshech vetsalmavet
v'Hashem k'gibor aritz al kayn rod fay yikashlu velo yuchalu
b'shoo meod ki lo hiskilu klimat olam lo tishachayach.
Atah gibor l'olam Adonai uvnei adam b'tzel k'nafecha yechesayun.*

For human beings living in the darkness of the shadow of death, Hashem is manifest through the presence of those who show courage, those whose acts of resistance undermine persecutors and bring about their failure and eternal humiliation. Do not forget this. You are an eternal source of courage, Adonai, and as human beings we seek shelter in the span of your shadow.

(Inspired by verses from Psalms 36:8, 107:10, and Jeremiah 20:11)



JEWISH
PARTISAN
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For study guides, videos,
photographs, and testimonies
about the partisans – one
particular type of *gevurah* –
go to: www.jewishpartisans.org

This made possible by
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