



# Study Guide

## Living and Surviving as a Partisan

*"It was a full-time job to stay alive." —Eta Wrobel, Jewish partisan*

### LIVING AND SURVIVING AS A PARTISAN

During World War II, approximately 30,000 Jewish men and women fought back against the Germans in organized, armed resistance units. They established secret encampments deep in the forests and mountains and hid beneath straw in barns provided by friendly farmers. They scrounged for food to eat and clothes and fuel to keep them warm in the brutal Polish and Russian winters or the cold and wet climates farther west. Despite these hardships, they found ways to hit back at their would-be killers, interrupting food deliveries, sabotaging power plants and factories, and blowing up enemy trains.



"The Search for Food". Sketch by Italian Jewish partisan Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi, 1944. Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation archives.

These brave men and women were known as partisans, Jewish partisans. Most were civilians. Many were young, and many had left their homes behind. Being young freed them from the responsibilities that tormented those with small children or elderly parents in the besieged ghettos. Their struggle to survive against an enemy whose goal was to wipe them from the face of the earth is a little-known part of Holocaust history.

Jewish partisans could be found in every Nazi-occupied country in Europe. Most joined existing non-Jewish partisan groups. In Lithuania, for example, Jews made up approximately ten percent of the partisan units. Jews also joined the French Resistance, known as the *Maquis*, and fought alongside fellow resisters in Greece and Italy.

Jewish partisans faced numerous obstacles. The German army occupied much of Europe and local police forces were under their control. What's more, enemies of the Nazis were not necessarily friends of the Jews. Antisemitism and hatred of Jews was widespread, particularly in rural areas of Eastern Europe. Traditional dress or accents often made it difficult for Jews to blend in. Jewish men, unlike many of their non-Jewish male counterparts, were almost always circumcised and therefore could be easily identified. Many villages harbored Nazi sympathizers. Turning in a Jew could earn a villager a bag of sugar or a bottle of vodka. Some collaborators hated Jews so much that they did not bother to collect their bonuses, shooting them on sight. Even in their own units, Jewish partisans were often forced to conceal their identity lest they be subject to the antisemitism of their partisan comrades. Because of these dangers, Jewish partisans sometimes formed all-Jewish resistance units.

### FOOD

Of all the challenges faced by commanders of partisan units, perhaps the greatest was feeding their fighters. Finding food depended on many factors: the proximity of friendly locals, the geography and nature of the country, the size of the partisan unit. Despite wartime shortages in areas free from direct German rule, sympathetic townspeople and farmers could be relied upon to supply partisans with food and other necessities. In areas under German control or unsympathetic farmers, the search for food could end in death.

To procure food, partisans sometimes had to resort to force. "The friendly Polish peasant provided food for us—and the unfriendly Polish peasant provided food for us as well," recalled Mira Shelub. Shelub was seventeen when she and her sister escaped to the forests to join the partisans. "When unfriendly villagers prepared food for the German occupiers, we took the food and left a receipt. The receipt said: 'The partisans were here.'" More than a jab at enemy forces, the receipts were meant to save the lives of farmers whose food fed the partisans rather than the

Germans. With both sides taking food at gunpoint and threatening to punish those who supported their enemies, local farmers were often between a rock and a hard place, no matter who they truly sided with.

Another source of food was storehouses hurriedly abandoned by retreating Germans. But this, too, brought its share of danger. "The Germans left mines and hidden bombs behind when they retreated," remembered Leon Idas, a Greek-born Jewish partisan. "We saw a nice meal in front of us, and we were hungry, but couldn't touch it."

In order to survive, many Jewish partisans put aside traditional dietary restrictions. Gertrude Boyarski found herself doing exactly that after six days of eating only snow with fourteen other partisans. "We found some potato peels with worms in them, and the head of a pig. We shared this between us. And I was crying as I was eating it, but we had gone days without food.

It was a treasure."

As the war ground on, some partisan groups began receiving much-needed supplies. In Eastern Europe, the Soviet government supplied Russian and Polish partisans from the sky, airdropping ammunition, counterfeit money—and occasionally vodka and chocolate! The British did the same for the Greek and Italian partisans in the Mediterranean theater of war.

Most partisan groups, however, were quite cut off from the world, and the difficulty of feeding their troops was a constant problem for the commanders. A case in point was the all-Jewish partisan unit led by Frank Blaichman, who recalls:

"We went into a Polish grocery, we were polite, we said 'Good evening. Please, we would like to buy bread, butter, some chicken.' They chased us away with axes and pitchforks... Later, when we acquired firearms we returned. We did not point them at anyone, but they could see we were armed. They said 'Gentlemen, how can we help you?' Suddenly we were 'gentlemen'. And they gave us whatever we wanted. And it was, you know, a difference between day and night.

Here we were called dirty Jews; with money we couldn't [buy] anything. And here he gave us anything that we wanted." The shopkeeper subsequently turned down Frank's offer of payment.

## THE SKY ABOVE, THE GROUND BELOW

In constant fear of discovery, partisans were always on the move. Eastern Europe's vast and dense forests seemed to have been specifically designed for partisan fighting. Many Jewish partisans who were local to the area knew these forests intimately. The Germans did not, and avoided them whenever possible—unfamiliar soldiers could get lost, be surrounded, and killed.

The forests also concealed so-called "family camps" where Jewish escapees from the German camps or ghettos—many of whom were too young or too old to fight—hoped to wait out the war, sometimes shielded by Jewish fighting groups or their allies.

Establishing a camp was no easy task. Location was all-important, as was the size of the unit. Partisan camps had to be remote, yet close enough to a village or town to secure the necessities of life. Some partisan units were small, numbering dozens; others ran into the thousands. Large or small, all faced the problems of providing life's basic necessities, food and shelter, to say nothing of protection from the enemy soldiers and civilians who hunted them.

In the larger units, everyone had a specific task. Some foraged for food, some did the cooking, others stood guard or went on fighting missions. There were bakers, weapon cleaners, tailors, and shoemakers. The bakers and cooks needed firewood year-round. Large stores of firewood had to be laid in for warmth in winter. Both were jobs for the wood gatherers. In the quest for survival, no skill or talent was left untapped.

In summer, warm weather allowed partisan groups in Eastern Europe to survive with minimal shelter. "The trees, the sky, the pine needle ground were our summer home," recalled Mira Shelub.

In France, Italy and Greece, three factors greatly helped the partisans in their search for food and shelter: the climate was temperate, the local population tended to be more sympathetic to their cause, and antisemitism was less pronounced.

Winter, however, showed an altogether different face. Freezing cold temperatures held sway in



Jewish partisans in front of their shelter in the forest, 1944. Courtesy of USHMM and the Ghetto Fighters' House.

### Additional Resources on This Subject



Take the *Living and Surviving in the Partisans* videocourse:

[www.jewishpartisans.org/elearning](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/elearning)



Watch short films on *Food, Shelter, Medicine, and Winter and Night*:

[www.jewishpartisans.org/films](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/films)



Download *Activity Sheets* - video stations, Bielski camp, and virtual zemlyanka:

[www.jewishpartisans.org/resist](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/resist)

much of Europe. Added to the threat of death by German bullet, was the threat of death from exposure. Yet partisans found a way to cope. From their Soviet counterparts, they learned to build underground bunkers called zemlyankas, a Russian word meaning "dugout". Zemlyankas took many forms—some even held small stoves—but all were thoroughly camouflaged on the outside (See photo on page 5). The zemlyankas were key to partisan survival in the winter months. Mira Shelub, who spent her first winter in such an



Soviet partisans from the Shish detachment of the Molotov partisan brigade. Source unknown.

underground hut at the age of 17 called it "our winter home."

Abandoned homes and barns could also serve as refuges. Sympathetic farmers gave what help they could, often at the risk of their own lives. Sometimes partisan units would plant their fighters in different parts of a village. If one party were caught, the others would live to fight another day. Says Shelub, "We would take over a town. We slept three in one house, three in another, and so on."

## COATS AT GUNPOINT

Most Jewish partisans who fled the ghettos and camps did so with nothing more than the clothes on their backs. As with food, clothing was a scarce and valuable commodity. "I had a pair of boots that a friend found for me," recollected Polish-Jewish partisan Sonia Orbuch, "but they were too small. My blisters were as big as a fist. But I had to keep wearing them. They were all I had."

Orbuch was lucky to have shoes at all. Shoeless partisans were known to resort to extreme

measures to protect their feet, especially in winter. Some partisans, for example, made their own footwear by wrapping their bare feet in strips of cloth and soaking their swaddled feet in water until their "boots" froze solid.

What clothes partisans possessed often were reduced to rags through constant wear. Any opportunity to acquire better clothing—a coat, heavy boots, anything with fur to keep out the cold—was fair game. If villagers or farmers proved

uncooperative, the partisans "organized" (that is, stole) the warm clothes they needed, at gunpoint, if necessary. Sometimes clothing was taken from the corpses of fallen comrades-in-arms.

Enemy dead likewise might yield winter coats and boots. German uniforms were particularly prized trophies: they

were warm and served as disguises for future missions. A single item of clothing could make a world of difference, like the wool blanket Greek partisan Leon Idas gained after a successful skirmish with German soldiers. "That was the best present I ever had," Leon recalls.

## BLANKETS OF SNOW

One has to go back one hundred years to find a winter as cold as the one that descended on Northern Europe in 1942. Large areas of Poland and the Soviet Union shivered in temperatures that dropped to -40 degrees Fahrenheit and lower. For partisans, the record-cold temperatures proved to be both a blessing and a curse. They helped slow down the German army's progress, as equipment broke down and supply lines snapped, stranding troops in uniforms that could not stand up to the cold. But the snow did more than that. It also helped them track down the enemy, and its brightness showed approaching figures from great distances. As Norman Salsitz recalled, "The night, the blizzard, the heavy rain, the heavy snow—these were our friends. The worse conditions were, the better it was for us."

## Textual Analysis

**1.** Norman Salsitz recalls that, "The night, the blizzard, the heavy rain, the heavy snow—these were our friends." Why was weather an ally for the partisans? In what ways was it an enemy for them?

**2.** What were the advantages for Jewish partisans in joining larger units? What could these groups offer? What were the disadvantages? Dangers?

## Critical Thinking Questions

**1.** Many Jewish partisans were teenagers when they joined the resistance. Do you think that being young was an asset or a hindrance?

Make a list of possible assets and hindrances. What character traits do you think were necessary for someone to survive as a partisan?

**2.** Mira Shelub said, "The friendly Polish peasant provided food for us—and the unfriendly Polish peasant provided food for us as well."

What constituted "friendly" or "unfriendly" persons and why? What tactics might partisans have needed to use in dealing with these different kinds of civilians? What might be the risks and benefits in each case?

**3.** In many cases Jewish partisans didn't know whether the locals were hostile to Jews, sympathetic to their plight, or had yet to choose sides. Yet, the partisans' survival required them to engage with the local people.

Sometimes we all face choices involving people whose motives we aren't sure of. What makes it possible for people to cooperate with people they don't trust? What cues can help you make a decision?

But what held for Germans also held for partisans. Footprints in the snow could give away their location. To prevent discovery, partisans would return to camp taking different routes. Some, like Jewish partisan Romi Cohn, even mastered the skill of walking backwards to avoid being tracked.

Exposure to extreme temperatures could have disastrous, even fatal, consequences. Polish partisan Sonia Orbuch's frost-bitten legs were badly burned when she sat too close to a fire that her numbed feet could not feel. Daniel Katz ran between five and seven miles each night in the Russian forest to keep from freezing to death. Partisans living in barns found an additional source of warmth in the body heat of animals. The unseasonably cold temperatures created other problems as well—fingers froze on weapons, guns jammed, and the smoke from even small fires could be seen for miles around.

Where safe shelters were at a premium, Jewish



A wounded partisan is treated in a field hospital by a partisan nurse (left) and the brigade's physician (second from right). 1942-1944, Pinsk, Belarus. Courtesy of USHMM.

partisans slept outside on the ground, huddled close together for warmth. Frank Blaichman remembered the winter as follows: "We slept in the forest, in the freezing rain and snow. Sometimes for several days we were wet, and hungry, and still we didn't give up. We were hardened, not softened."

## FIELD MEDICINE

The missions Jewish partisans undertook—sabotaging German forces and supplies, handling explosives, disrupting communications—were fraught with danger. Many fell ill, many were wounded and maimed, many paid with their lives. Medical care was in short supply. Sonia Orbuch

was attached to a large unit of Soviet partisans and worked alongside the unit's doctors, caring for sick and injured fighters. She recalls, "I did whatever I could for them—bring them food, give them medicine, change their bandages. There was no means of sterilization. When someone got better, we took their bandages and washed them, to use again."

Sonia also recalled doctors scouring forest floors for herbs to supplement what medical supplies were available in nearby villages or stolen from the Germans. The most common illness was typhoid, a disease carried by lice. Because soap was scarce, partisans killed lice by boiling their clothes. But often, this was not enough. The lice spread more quickly than they could be killed and the diseases they transmitted took a heavy toll.

Most partisan groups had no doctor and treated the wounded themselves, turning to village doctors only as a last resort. Doctors, like other local residents, might betray injured partisans or even kill them, as Norman Salsitz discovered in the nick of time. Wounded in a shootout with German collaborators, Salsitz went to the house of the only available physician, a Nazi sympathizer. Salsitz pretended to be a non-Jew, and the doctor willingly treated him. But when the doctor asked him to drop his pants for an injection, Salsitz realized his life lay in the balance, for circumcision identified him as a Jew. Pulling a grenade from his pocket, he told the doctor, "If you do anything, we will both die. Just give me the shot and let me go." The doctor complied and Salsitz escaped.

Eta Wrobel survived a different challenge. Shot in the leg in the course of a mission, she went to see, "a Polish doctor who was friendly to us." The bullet had been lodged in her leg for months, causing pain and swelling. "I would go when his wife was not there," she recalled, "because he said he didn't trust her. He gave me a knife and a bottle of *spiritus* [alcohol]. I removed the bullet myself. What choice did I have?" Later, Wrobel would use her hard-won expertise to remove bullets from the bodies of fellow partisans.

**4.** In your opinion, what was the role of pure "luck" in partisan survival? Provide examples from the study guide to prove your case.

**5.** If non-Jews were caught aiding Jews, they and their families could be killed. Yet some non-Jews did help. This led to a society where people were forced to lie to and deceive one another, even to those who were closest to them. Find an example from the reading that demonstrates this. What does this tell you about what life was like for those under Nazi occupation?

## Virtual Zemlyanka

Find out what partisan bunkers looked like on the inside, see videos on how they were built, and hear Jewish partisan Shalom Yoran's descriptions of life in the zemlyanka from *The Defiant* (read by Larry King) at [www.jewishpartisans.org/bunker](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/bunker)

## Video Station and Activity Worksheets

Worksheets and other activities designed to complement JPEF's four *Living and Surviving in the Partisans* films can be downloaded from [www.jewishpartisans.org/resist](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/resist)

TO COMPLEMENT THIS STUDY GUIDE, SEE JPEF'S FILM SERIES "LIVING AND SURVIVING IN THE PARTISANS: FOOD, WINTER, MEDICINE AND SHELTER", NARRATED BY LARRY KING AT: [www.jewishpartisans.org/films](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/films)

## ZEMLYANKAS

What would you do if you had to survive a freezing winter in the woods, with no special tools or materials for building a shelter? What if you didn't want anyone to find you? How would you make your shelter without attracting attention, and then, once you'd built it, how would you disguise it?

Partisans hiding in the forests of Eastern Europe faced these dilemmas. They made shelters they called *zemlyankas*, from the Russian word for "dugout." Their building materials were taken from the forest itself and, whenever possible, from nearby villages. Careful to hide any evidence of their location, they usually did this work at night.

Eta Wrobel tells how her unit made *zemlyankas*: "We removed the earth and carried it many kilometers away. Then we would steal the doors to a barn, to make the door. We even moved trees onto the top. If anyone saw us, we had to start again."

Everyone pitched in, racing against time to get the shelters ready. Simon Trakinski recalls: "One time we built a camp from nothing in three days," making bunkers for his group of 200 people. This work had to be done over and over again, as partisans kept moving, one step ahead of their enemies.



Re-creation of a *zemlyanka*, open air museum, Bryansk, Russia

Inside the dark bunkers, the hours passed slowly. Simon Trakinski remembers that the only light came from little sticks of burning wood stuck into the earthen walls. The smoke stung his eyes and those of his comrades and soot coated their faces. Eta Wrobel couldn't forget how hard it

was to sleep. Ten or twelve people lay side by side, fully clothed and closely packed to keep warm. "When one person turned, everybody had to turn," she recalled.

Sometimes the discomfort and, particularly, the fear of being closed in was more overpowering than the cold. After Jews who were staying inside a *zemlyanka* had been murdered by Polish collaborators, Norman Salsitz resolved to never sleep in a *zemlyanka* again. "I decided I was not going to go in a bunker... because you couldn't even stand up, you were laying there—and the lice!" Instead, he slept outside, burrowed in the snow for warmth.

For most partisans, the *zemlyanka* was considered a place of refuge from the brutal cold. It was rough and cramped, but it kept them alive. The *zemlyanka* was, "as comfortable as possible under the circumstances," says Trakinski. "It could be quite cozy when it was thirty five degrees below zero." As Wrobel says: "We were glad to have some place to go to."

## For more Information on the Jewish Partisans

*The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation recommends these resources for further information.*

### Books

- *We Fought Back: Teen Resisters of the Holocaust*, Allan Zulo, Scholastic Books, 2012 ([rif.scholastic.com/we-fought-back.html](http://rif.scholastic.com/we-fought-back.html))
- *The Defiant*, Shalom Yoran, Square One Publishers, 1966 (hear Larry King read excerpts at [www.jewishpartisans.org/defiantaudio](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/defiantaudio))

### Films

Please see JPEF's accompanying short films: *Living and Surviving in the Partisans*:

- *Food*
- *Medicine*
- *Winter and Night*
- *Shelter*

For more information please contact:

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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  
וְהָשֵׁם כְּגִבּוֹר עָרִיץ 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 rodfay 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  
EDUCATIONAL  
FOUNDATION

For study guides, videos,  
photographs, and testimonies  
about the partisans – one  
particular type of *gevurah* –  
go to: [www.jewishpartisans.org](http://www.jewishpartisans.org)

This made possible by  
the Conference on Jewish  
Material Claims Against  
Germany – Rabbi Israel Miller  
Fund for Shoah Research,  
Documentation & Education,  
the Richard & Rhoda Goldman  
Fund & Rita J. & Stanley H.  
Kaplan Foundation, Inc.

# Choosing Life – Rescue and Resistance during the Shoah

## בחרתה בחיים

8<sup>th</sup> Grade JSS – HaMorah Nance

**Enduring Understanding:** Rescue and resistance are as much a part of the Shoah narrative as the murder of six million Jews, and 11 million innocent overall, by the Nazis. These stories can inspire us to be Upstanders.

### Essential Questions:

What is resistance?

When have I resisted or protested something that I felt was unacceptable?

Why did non-Jews risk their lives to rescue Jews?

Who supported rescue and resistance and made it possible?

What gave people the strength and courage to resist or rescue?

How can I use these lessons as models in my life?

### Notes to Teachers

This project is part of a larger unit on spiritual/unarmed and armed resistance by Jews during World War II and about rescue of Jews by non-Jews. Students will have learned about unarmed resistance in the camps and ghettos prior to this project and will learn about Righteous Gentiles using the Yad Vashem website after this project. The entire unit is taught using primary resources from a variety of sources. The section on armed resistance begins with a video from Centropa.org about two Jewish Partisans from Macedonia ([http://www.centropa.org/centropa-cinema/beno-and-roza-kamhi-years-make-their-own?subtitle\\_language=](http://www.centropa.org/centropa-cinema/beno-and-roza-kamhi-years-make-their-own?subtitle_language=)) and with materials from Echoes and Reflections on the topic.

I introduce the project with a video from the Jewish Partisan Education Foundation (JPEF) website called “Introduction to Jewish Partisans” [http://www.jewishpartisans.org/films#node-media\\_film-846](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/films#node-media_film-846) I give the students an overview of the JPEF website prior to having them begin their work so they know how to find the materials on their partisan and additional materials, such as a separate lesson on women in the partisans, on the site.

Lesson intro and project take 5-6 50 minute periods. Introduction and choosing of partisans is one period, 2-3 work periods and, depending on class size, two periods to share out. I have included the final reflection here. Though it is for the whole armed resistance portion of the larger unit, and not just this project, most of what they write comes from this project. It can be done as homework, though I usually give one work period in class and then it is homework.



## **Jewish Partisans Project**

### **Project Goals:**

You will get to know the story of one Jewish Partisan on a personal level.

You will learn about the experiences of other Jewish Partisans during World War 2 from your classmates.

You will be able to compare/contrast the experiences of Jewish Partisans during WW II.

### **Materials Needed**

Computer and internet access

PowerPoint software

Links to Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation and Jewish Women's Archive websites

List of Partisans for students to select their choice (on JPEF website)

Examples from past years as mentor texts (see resources)

Student handout with instructions (see resources)

Rubric for the assignment (see resources)

Grid for recording information about all of the partisans during presentations (see resources)

### **Steps to the Project**

1. Choose a partisan
2. Go to the information page about your partisan and begin your study
3. Using the videos and personal interviews, learn as much as you can about your partisan's life prior to and experience during the War.
4. Write up, in first person (from their point of view) the story of their life through World War 2. If they survived, you can say briefly what they did after the war but the main focus is before and during the war.
5. Present, as your partisan, their story to the class in an engaging and educational format.
6. Learn about other partisans and be able to compare and contrast their experiences.
7. Write a reflective essay about our learning on resistance and on the specific partisans.
8. Learn Zog Nit Keynmol and have your band of partisans sing it together! (optional)

You will be responsible for taking notes during the presentations so that you can complete an activity comparing the various Partisan activities and experiences. You will be given a grid to assist in this note taking.

### Resources for Research

We will be using the primary source material on the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation website (<http://www.jewishpartisans.org>) as our main reference. Some of the female partisans may also be found on the JWA.org website. You may use other reference materials, but these websites should have all you need to complete this assignment.

### Pieces of Information to be sure you include in your presentation

Where they lived prior to war  
Some information about their family or life prior to the war  
How/when/why they get involved with Partisans  
Which Partisan group they were with (Soviet, Bielski, French Underground, Tito...)  
What they did as a Partisan –what was their job, example of them doing it  
How the war ended for them  
A great quote or two from their video would be super!

You are allowed to quote freely - I know your resource and you are speaking as that person so it is appropriate.

Your presentation should be no more than 5 minutes – a short PowerPoint (2-3 slides) with your quote, **a photo**, and **names of places** and other required info on it would be helpful to your classmates.

### Presentations

Students present as the partisan – like they are a speaker visiting the class. I video tape these and post them on a class YouTube channel. Students take notes on each other's presentations using the grid. This grid is turned in with their reflective essay and should be used in the writing of it. Students record where the partisan was located, what their job was and a quote or interesting fact.

### Armed Resistance Reflective Essay

Write a short reflective essay (2-3 substantial paragraphs) about your thoughts on armed resistance during the Shoah. What surprised you? What story did you most connect with or find inspiring? What questions do you still have? Please share any other thoughts or feelings about the Partisans and others who fought **unofficially** to stop the Nazis. You may use anything we learned in this unit so far and should use your info grid from the presentations to give specifics about the Partisans.

**Please turn in your completed grid with your essay – you should have all lines filled except for your person.**

**Suggested topics for good depth –**

Compare jobs

Compare men's experiences to women's

Discuss where they were from

Which partisans were most inspiring? Why? What quotes from a partisan were inspiring?

How did their quotes and stories make you feel?

How did the fact that they could fight make these Jews feel? How does it make you feel?

**Optional Post Unit Activity**

Hirsh Glik, a 22 year old resident of the Vilna Ghetto, wrote *Zog Nit Keynmol* – The Jewish Partisans Song. This moving song was sung by Jewish Partisans during WW II to inspire resistance and strength in the face of overwhelming odds. It became part of the Jewish world after the war and was learned in many languages in Europe, particularly in the Soviet Union, as well as in Hebrew in Israel. Having your students, in character as their partisan, get together and sing this song is a powerful way to end this unit. It can be learned in the original Yiddish, in English, Hebrew or a host of other languages. Learning the first verse/refrain in Yiddish is very powerful and then learning the rest in your language can be one way to do the project. All of the necessary resources are available thanks to the work of Eli Rabinowitz and can be found on his website dedicated to spreading awareness of this powerful song. <http://elirab.me/znk/> is the link to the site and the various translations. There is also a sound file of the tune on his site. Here are links to my students singing it on Masada. <https://youtu.be/NZRH7aq-N3I> Eli would love to have you share a recording of your students singing the song to add to his page. Contact information is on the website.



HISTORY LEADERSHIP ETHICS JEWISH VALUES

## EIGHT DEGREES OF *GEVURAH*

A 45-60 minute activity for 6th – 9th grade students

*Photo: A partisan feeding his wounded comrade in a Soviet partisan camp in a forest. Photographed by Yakov Davidson.  
Date unknown. Source: Ghetto Fighter's House.*



### CONTENTS

- 1 Who Are the Jewish Partisans?
- 2 How to Use This Lesson
- 3 Overview
- 4 Guide
- 5 Setup
- 6 Procedure
- 7 - 9 Attachments

### Lesson Overview

Help students discover that anyone has the potential to become a hero—and that *Tzedakah* is much more than charity—through a study of Maimonides' Ladder and inspiring stories of Jewish partisans who pursued justice by helping others.



Conforms to Common Core Standards  
[jewishpartisans.org/standards](http://jewishpartisans.org/standards)

# 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 detained millions of Jews and forced them into camps, primarily by convincing them that they were going there to work. 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 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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, or 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 Margalit (Lincoln, The University of Nebraska Press, Jerusalem, Yad Vashem 1999), 441–444.
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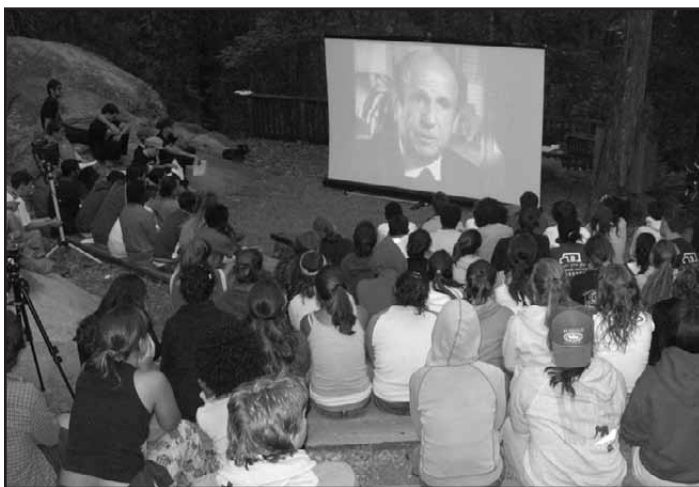
# How To Use This Lesson

The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation has produced a comprehensive and thought-provoking new curriculum called RESIST. The lessons of RESIST transmit values and enduring understandings arising from the stories of the Jewish partisans.

This RESIST lesson is divided into five sections. These sections provide teachers and instructors with an overview of the lesson, a guide containing background information on the subjects at hand, instructions on how to prepare for the lesson, an easy-to-follow lesson procedure, materials and attachments necessary to conduct the lesson, and an evaluation component that gives teachers and instructors the ability to assess the effectiveness and impact of the lesson. The following is a list of these five sections.



*Recreation of how partisans laid explosives on train tracks. Location: Lithuania. Date unknown. Source: Ghetto Fighter's House*



*JPEF presentation at Camp Tawonga. 2005. Source: JPEF Archives*

### **Overview**

Contains a summary of the lesson and learning objectives.

### **Guide**

Provides additional information for the teacher/instructor about the topics at hand.

### **Setup**

Lists the materials and space necessary to carry out the lesson and explains how to prepare for the lesson.

### **Procedure**

Lists step-by-step instructions for running the lesson. Action words are boldfaced.

### **Attachments**

The worksheets, forms, and other materials needed to complete a particular lesson.

# Overview

### Lesson Summary

Who is a hero? We often think of them as individuals who possess incredible gifts and who are confronted with extraordinary circumstances – the ballplayer that hit the game-winning home run in the playoffs, the firefighter that helped to evacuate the Twin Towers, or even the Jewish partisan that rescued fellow Jews from a Nazi work camp. It would seem that heroes are far removed from our own lives and that heroism is a idea reserved for others, not ourselves.

In this lesson, *Eight Degrees of Gevurah*, students will explore the question "who is a hero?" and will discover various ways in which they can act heroically in their own lives. In defining heroism as possible and accessible, we bring together two frameworks, one from the Jewish tradition and another from history. The value of *tzedakah*, often thought of as 'charity', but also meaning justice or righteousness, will be explored through a study of "Maimonides' Ladder," a graded hierarchy of *tzedakah* which ranks the various ways of giving, taking into account the effects on the recipient and donor alike.

Heroic action will also be exemplified through the stories of Jewish partisans, many of whom were teenagers when they joined organized resistance groups to fight against the Nazis in World War II. This powerful juxtaposition of *tzedakah* and acts of heroism will help students to recognize their own roles in working for social justice and to discover that anyone has the potential to become a hero.

The stories and images of the Jewish partisans provide particularly dramatic examples of resistance heroism during the Holocaust, but they are hardly the only Jewish heroes. In fact, there were millions of acts of Jewish heroism every day of the Holocaust, ordinary people doing whatever they could to help each other survive and retain their humanity in circumstances we can read about, but hardly imagine the reality of. To quote Jewish partisan Sonia Orbuch, "People were fighting back every which way they can,"—mostly through unarmed resistance.

To honor the memory of all who perished and survived, it is crucial to approach this lesson with the understanding that the vast majority of Jews who suffered during the Holocaust were not just victims, but heroes as well. Those who had the opportunity to fight back with weapons were not braver, nobler or more heroic; they were luckier, and had opportunities or knowledge unavailable to others.



*A group of Greek partisans who are serving in the ELAS-EAM resistance movement walk along the street. Among those pictures are two Greek Jews: Louis Cohen (left) and David Broudo (far right). Date: 1943. Location: Greece. Source: JPEF Archives.*

### Lesson Objectives

- Define the words: גבור (hero), גבורה (strength/might), צדקה (charity), and צדק (justice/righteousness)
- Investigate the heroic actions of selected Jewish partisans
- Apply the heroic actions of selected Jewish partisans to the degrees of *tzedakah* on Maimonides' Ladder
- Identify with the heroic actions taken by various Jewish partisans
- Express the relationship between giving and acting heroically
- Recognize various ways in which anyone has the potential to become a hero

# Guide

### **Gevurah...**

can be defined as "strength" or "might" and is the source of accomplishment, creativity, and self-preservation. *Gevurah* is primarily an act of constraint and restraint. According to Jewish mysticism, the primary force in the world is *chesed* (kindness). It is a manifestation of G-d's desire to give humanity whatever possible. The second force, *gevurah*, restrains the first basic force of Divine Providence and bids G-d *not* to give. Imagine a parent watching a toddler struggle to walk. As the toddler falls again and again, the parent must muster every ounce of strength *not* to extend a hand. This is *gevurah* at its most powerful.

We are most familiar with *gevurah* from our liturgy:

*"Eternal is your might, O G-d" - Gevurot, the Amidah*

*"Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts." - Zechariah 4:6*

*"Who is strong? One who is able to overcome his evil inclination." - Pirkei Avot 4:1*

*Gevurah* (גבורה) is not about military might, physical prowess, or winning. Rather, it is about spirit, using strength to do good, and overcoming our own impulses. These attributes and actions are crucial to becoming a גבור (gibor)—a hero—the Hebrew word for which comes from the same root as *gevurah*.

### **Tzedakah...**

is the Hebrew word for the acts that we call "charity" in English: giving aid, assistance, and money to those in need. However, the nature of *tzedakah* is very different from the idea of charity. The word "charity" suggests benevolence and generosity, a magnanimous act by the wealthy and powerful for the benefit of the poor and needy. The word "*tzedakah*" (צדקה) is derived from the Hebrew root: צדק (*tzedek*: justice or righteousness). In Judaism, giving to the poor is not viewed as a generous, magnanimous act. It is simply an act of justice and righteousness, the performance of a duty, giving the poor their due. Some sages have said that *tzedakah* is the highest of all commandments, equal to all of them combined.

### **Maimonides...**

or Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, known as the Rambam, was born in Spain, and learned mathematics, astronomy and philosophy

as well as more traditional Jewish subjects from his father. Maimonides taught himself medicine and was so renowned that the sultan Saladin appointed him court physician. His great love of detail and of exposition led him to write extensively, and he is well known for his lists: 13 Principles of Faith (a Jewish catechism), the *Mishneh Torah* (an annotated list of all the legal decisions of the *Talmud*, the basis for Jewish religious and community law), and the Eight Degrees of *Tzedakah*, a guide to charitable action, which is used in this lesson. Although some of his works were banned at the time, Maimonides has become one of the preeminent contributors to Jewish law and thought.

### **The Film...**

is entitled *Introduction to the Jewish Partisans*. It is 7 minutes long and can be viewed as a part of this lesson (See Procedure: Step A-19). The film gives students the opportunity to meet some of the approximately 30,000 Jews who committed thousands of acts of sabotage against the Nazis during World War II. They destroyed trains, bridges, convoys, and power plants. These brave men and women, many of them teenagers, saved thousands of Jews from ghettos and work camps. They fought as guerrilla fighters—partisans—all throughout Western and Eastern Europe and their story is hardly known.

The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation produced this film after interviewing over 50 surviving partisans. Narrated by Ed Asner, it includes rare stock footage and photographs of partisans in action. The film can be ordered through JPEF by emailing [dvd@jewishpartisans.org](mailto:dvd@jewishpartisans.org) or calling (415) 563-2244. The film can also be viewed at [www.jewishpartisans.org/films](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/films).

### **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 develops curricula for 6th-12th grade classes on History, Leadership, Ethics and Jewish Values. JPEF educational materials are a key component to curricula in Jewish and secular schools worldwide.

For more information about the Jewish partisans, please visit: [www.jewishpartisans.org](http://www.jewishpartisans.org) where you can view additional films, partisan profiles (with video testimonials, photographs and mini-bios), maps, and other resources about the Jewish partisans.



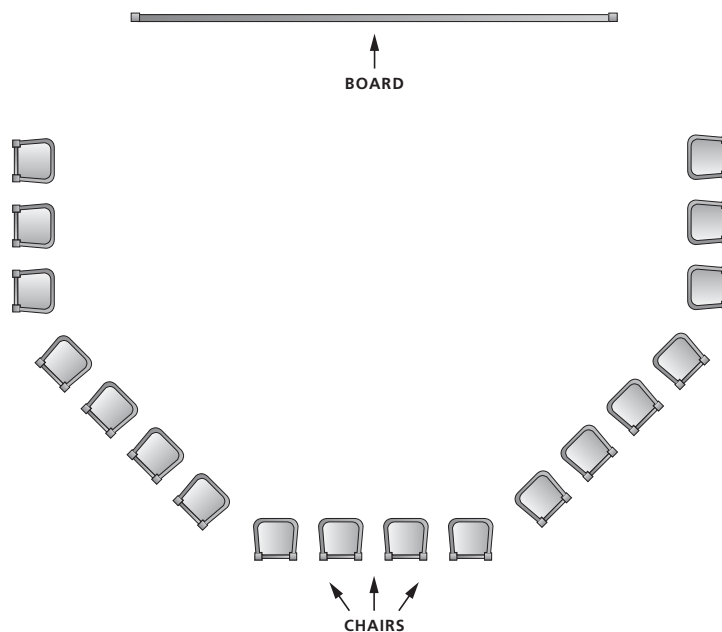
# Setup

### What You Will Need

- Pens and writing surface for each student
- Chalkboard with chalk or a dry erase board with dry erase markers
- The film that can be utilized for this lesson, *INTRODUCTION TO THE JEWISH PARTISANS* is 7 minutes long and can be viewed on a computer with internet access. A computer projector is helpful for presenting this film. The film can be viewed at: [www.jewishpartisans.org/films](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/films). You can also contact [dvd@jewishpartisans.org](mailto:dvd@jewishpartisans.org) for a DVD of this and other films.
- If you are not able to show the film, hand out copies of *WHO ARE THE JEWISH PARTISANS?* on page 1 of this lesson plan.
- *LESSON PROCEDURE* printout (page 6)
- 1 *MAIMONIDES' LADDER* printout for each student (page 7)
- 1 *GEVURAH STRIPS* printout per team of 3-5 students, pre-cut into 8 strips along the dotted lines (page 8)
- 1 uncut copy of the *GEVURAH STRIPS* printout for your own use (page 8)
- 1 *POWER SHEET* printout for each student (page 9)

This activity should take place in a large multi-purpose or classroom. Chairs should be placed in a semi-circle in the center of the room. In addition, this activity requires a chalkboard and chalk or a dry-erase board with markers. Refer to the illustration below for a suggested room setup. The space should also be conducive to presenting a DVD presentation if possible.

### Suggested Setup



# Procedure

### A) Introduction – 15 minutes

1. Seat students in a circle.
2. Write or display the Hebrew word "נבור" in front of students. If you prefer to use English, you may write "GIBOR."
3. Ask: "Does anyone know the meaning of this word?" Field responses.
4. Inform students that the word "נבור" is most often defined as a "hero."
5. Write or display the Hebrew word "נבורה" in front of students. If you prefer to use English, you may write "GEVURAH."
6. Ask: "Does anyone know the meaning of this word?" Field responses. Hint that this word has the same root as the word "נבור."
7. Inform students that the word "נבורה" literally means "strength" or "might."
8. Ask: "Why might the word for 'hero' come from the same Hebrew root word for strength or might?" Field responses.
9. Ask: "Does one have to be strong or mighty to be considered a hero? Why or why not?" Field responses.
10. Write or display the word "צדקה" in front of students. If you prefer to use English, you may write "TZEDAKAH."
11. Ask: "Does anyone know the meaning of this word?" Field responses.
12. Inform students that the word "צדקה" is most often defined as "charity."
13. Write or display the Hebrew word "צדק" in front of students. If you prefer to use English, you may write "TZEDEK."
14. Ask: "Does anyone know the meaning of this word?" Field responses. Hint that this word has the same root as the word "צדקה."
15. Inform students that the word "צדק" literally means "justice" or "righteousness."
16. Ask: "Why might the word for "charity" come from the same Hebrew root word for justice or righteousness?" Field responses.
17. Ask: "Do you think there is a connection between being a נבור (hero) and giving צדקה (charity)?" Field responses and take notes on them.
18. Ask: "Is there a connection between נבורה (strength or might) and צדק (justice or righteousness)?" Field responses.
19. Present the short film: *Introduction to the Jewish Partisans* (6:37). If the film cannot be shown, read aloud WHO ARE THE JEWISH PARTISANS? (page 1)

### B) Maimonides' Ladder – 5 minutes

1. Distribute sheet: MAIMONIDES' LADDER to each student.
2. Ask: "Has anyone ever heard of "Maimonides' Ladder" before?" Field responses.
3. Explain: "Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides, was a great rabbi and philosopher who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century C.E. He was an expert in Jewish law and organized Judaism's many insights and directives into an ingenious hierarchy of *tzedakah*, commonly referred to as "Maimonides' Ladder." Within this "ladder," Maimonides ranked the ways of giving charity, taking into account the effects on the recipient and donor alike.
4. Choose a student to read the highest degree of *tzedakah* on Maimonides' Ladder.
5. Ask: "What types of actions could fulfill this degree of *tzedakah*?" Field responses and take notes on them.

### C) Eight Degrees of *Gevurah* – 25 minutes

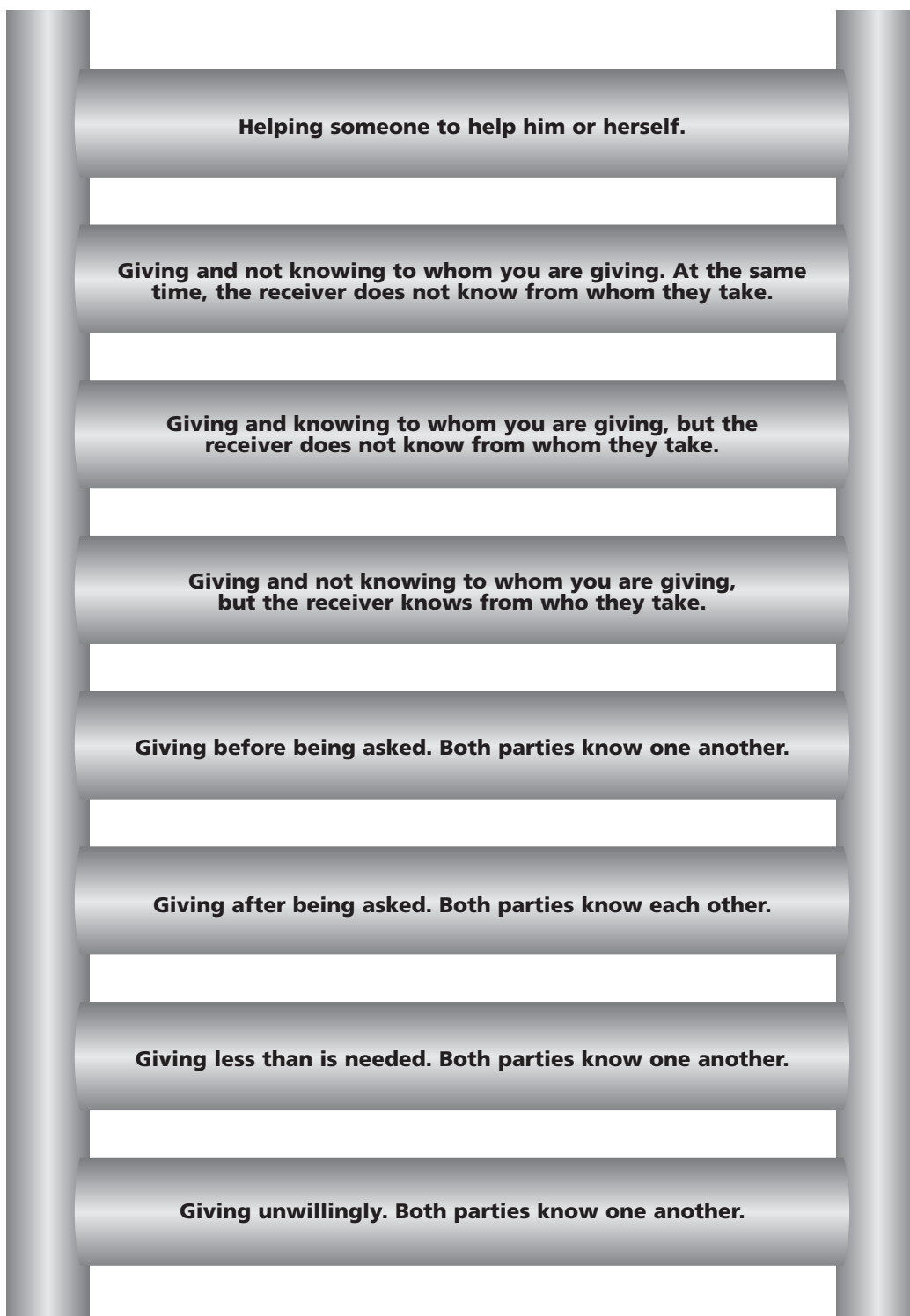
1. Divide students into teams. An ideal team would consist of three to five participants, but could work with more. Teams should go to their own section of the room, away from other teams.
2. Distribute a set of the 8 *GEVURAH STRIPS* to each team.
3. Explain: "Every team has received one set of *Gevurah Strips*. A *Gevurah Strip* is a strip of paper that features a specific action taken by a Jewish partisan. Your team's mission will be to put these rectangular strips in the same order that Maimonides would have, according to the 8 degrees of giving *tzedakah*.
4. Allow participants 8-10 minutes to complete this task.
5. Ask teams to present their answers in reverse order from lowest to highest, similar to the reading of a "top ten" list, saving #1 (top of the ladder) for last. Alternate with the other teams and call on different participants to explain each rung of their team's ladder. As you go, ask if teams agree on the placement of each partisan action. Compare to the order on your copy of the *GEVURAH STRIPS* sheet.

### D) WRAP-UP – 15 minutes

1. Distribute one POWER SHEET to each student.
2. Review the instructions with the class and allow students up to 7 minutes to complete their answers.
3. Review and discuss the answers to this sheet as a class.
4. Conclude by challenging students to think of ways they can use Maimonides' Ladder of Tzedakah as a guide not just for giving charity, but for taking righteous action in their own lives. If time allows, field answers in this or next class.

# Maimonides' Ladder

Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides, was a great rabbi and philosopher who lived in the 12th century C.E. He was an expert in Jewish law and organized Judaism's many insights and directives into an ingenious graded hierarchy of *tzedakah*, commonly referred to as "Maimonides' Ladder." Within this 'ladder', Maimonides ranked the ways of giving charity, taking into account the effects on the recipient and donor alike.



## ***Gevurah* Strips**

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**When Joe Kubryk's partisan unit turned away Jews who wanted to join because they had no weapons, Joe and his friends began hiding guns they captured from enemy soldiers. Joe would give the weapons to other Jews, allowing them to join the safety of his unit, defend themselves, and start fighting back.**

---

**Simon Trakinski's partisan unit destroyed many Nazi railroad lines to disrupt German transportation. Simon understood that the people who benefited most from his actions were unknown to him: Allied soldiers that were fighting the Nazis.**

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**When Martin Petrasek was a partisan, he pretended to be a non-Jew to protect himself. As a partisan, Martin went out of his way to help families he knew to be Jewish. He knew that he was aiding his people, while never revealing his true identity.**

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**Tuvia Bielski established a partisan unit that consisted of 1,200 partisans. Though Tuvia did not necessarily know everyone that his group helped, everyone knew that it was Tuvia and the Bielski Brigade that saved them.**

---

**Sonia Orbuch volunteered to join the partisans as a medic, risking her life at the Battle of Kovel. She worked non-stop for 10 days: barely eating or resting while under attack from enemy planes and artillery. Many of the injured partisans she treated were conscious enough to know she helped them.**

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**After narrowly escaping capture by the Nazis, Harry Burger was living in a barn when a partisan group discovered him. In order to survive, Harry asked if he could join them. The group took him in and he was issued a rifle on the spot.**

---

**Ben Kamm's partisan unit successfully liberated 600 Jews from a forced labor camp. However, the partisan unit was unable to provide the appropriate medical attention, food, or shelter necessary for their survival. Many of the liberated Jews died outside of the camp or were recaptured by the Nazis.**

---

**When partisan commander Zus Bielski ordered several partisans to find a missing woman, they refused his order on the grounds that the mission was too dangerous. Zus threatened to kill any partisan that did not follow his orders and the partisans complied, finding the missing woman.**

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# Power Sheet



NAME(S):

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1) What is the Hebrew word for HERO?

---

2) What is the Hebrew word for STRENGTH or MIGHT?

---

3) What is the Hebrew word for CHARITY?

---

4) What is the Hebrew word for JUSTICE or RIGHTEOUSNESS?

---

5) Which of the actions taken by a Jewish partisan resonated with you the most? Why?

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6) What do you think there is the connection, if any, between giving and acting heroically? Please explain.

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7) In what ways could you act as a hero in your own community?

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HISTORY

ENGLISH

LEADERSHIP

ETHICS

JEWISH VALUES

## STRENGTHENING JEWISH PRIDE

a 45-60 minute activity for 6th – 12th grade students

*Photo: Simchat Torah celebration in the Lodz Ghetto. Members of the Zionist Youth Front (Hanoar Hatzioni) dance with Torah scrolls in celebration of the Jewish holiday. Lodz, Poland, 1943. Courtesy of Yad VaShem.*



**RESIST**  
CURRICULUM

### CONTENTS

- 1 Who are the Jewish Partisans?
- 2 How to Use This Lesson
- 3 Overview
- 4 Guide
- 5 Setup
- 6 Procedure
- 7 - 11 Appendix

### Lesson Overview

Transform student perceptions and foster a more positive sense of Jewish identity through the history of Jewish armed and unarmed resistance – in as little as 30 minutes. Easily integrates into nearly any Jewish context, including history, holidays, b'nai mitzvah and youth group programs.



**COMMON CORE**  
STATE STANDARDS INITIATIVE  
PREPARING AMERICA'S STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE & CAREER

Conforms to Common Core Standards  
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## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

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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.

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

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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.

# How to Use This Lesson

The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation has produced a comprehensive and thought-provoking new curriculum called RESIST. The lessons of RESIST transmit values and enduring understandings arising from the stories of the Jewish partisans.

Every RESIST lesson is divided into six sections. These sections provide teachers and instructors with an overview of the lesson, a guide containing background information on the subjects at hand, instructions on how to prepare for the lesson, an easy-to-follow lesson procedure, materials and attachments necessary to conduct the lesson, and an evaluation component that gives teachers and instructors the ability to assess the effectiveness and impact of the lesson. The following is a list of these six sections.



*Recreation of how partisans laid explosives on train tracks. Location: Lithuania. Source: Ghetto Fighter's House*



*JPEF presentation at Camp Tawonga. 2005. Source: JPEF Archives*

## Overview

Contains a summary of the lesson and learning objectives.

## Guide

Provides additional information for the teacher/instructor about the topics at hand.

## Setup

Lists the materials and space necessary to carry out the lesson and explains how to prepare for the lesson.

## Procedure

Lists step-by-step instructions for running the lesson. Action words are boldfaced.

## Attachments

The worksheets, forms, and other materials needed to complete a particular lesson.

## Appendix

Provides additional materials for extending this lesson and integrating with the rest of your curriculum.



# Overview

**This lesson is targeted for 6th – 12th grade Jewish students and takes 30 minutes as a stand-alone unit.**

**You can also integrate this lesson with other JPEF materials and most any of your own activities and lessons.**

**See the Appendix on page 7 for more information.**

## Lesson Summary

The little-known history of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust is a rich source of Jewish pride. These stories of strength, determination and courage in the face of incredible adversity capture students' imaginations, providing a unique opportunity to foster a stronger, more positive sense of Jewish identity.

Teaching about Jewish resistance shatters the myth of Jewish passivity and weakness during the Holocaust, transforming internalized misperceptions that weigh heavily on the minds of Jewish youth.

Because these effects are already so pervasive among Jewish youth, this lesson is specifically designed so that **no specialized knowledge or previous lessons about the Holocaust are required.** That said, the content may raise questions among students who have not previously studied this subject. We encourage you to address these issues during or after the lesson.

*Strengthening Jewish Pride* can be taught as a stand-alone unit in as little as half an hour. You can easily integrate it into your current curriculum, enhancing virtually any other subject you teach, including other JPEF materials.

## Lesson Objectives

- Increase Jewish pride among teenagers to create a more positive sense of Jewish identity
- Talk about the complexity of their feelings about being Jewish in light of stories they have heard about the Holocaust
- Shatter the myth of Jewish passivity during the Holocaust
- Replace that myth with a narrative of Jewish empowerment
- Appreciate the diverse spectrum of Jewish resistance
- Inspire students to effect social change in their own communities and encourage them to share the transformative stories of Jewish resistance



*Portrait of Jewish partisan Sara Ginate at the liberation of Vilna in 1944. The photograph was taken by a Jewish Soviet officer who was surprised to see a Jewish woman standing guard. Source: USHMM*

# Guide

### Jewish Pride...

Teaching about Jewish resistance naturally fosters a greater sense of Jewish pride among teens. Jewish students consistently report that they feel "prouder" or "stronger" about their Jewish identity after learning about the partisans.

Because so many Jewish resisters were teenagers themselves, your own students can easily identify with their stories and see that they share many of the same positive qualities. Realizing these commonalities, teens are encouraged to take pride in both the history of Jewish resistance, and in their own selves as part of the Jewish people.

The goal of this lesson is not to increase Jewish pride for its own sake, but to foster a more positive sense of Jewish identity in your teens, encouraging them to realize the Jewish value of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) and their own capacities to help make the world a better place.

### Teaching Resistance...

The stories and images of the Jewish partisans provide particularly dramatic examples of Jewish armed *and* unarmed resistance. It is important to emphasize that theirs were only a few of the millions of daily acts of Jewish resistance.

Nearly every Jew who had the ability to resist did so to the best of their ability and most did so non-violently. As Holocaust historian Sir Martin Gilbert pointed out in *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy*:

*In every ghetto, in every deportation train, in every labor camp, even in the death camps, the will to resist was strong, and took many forms. Fighting with the few weapons that would be found, individual acts of defiance and protest, the courage of obtaining food and water under the threat of death, the superiority of refusing to allow the Germans their final wish to gloat over panic and despair.*

*Even passivity was a form of resistance. To die with dignity was a form of resistance. To resist the demoralizing, brutalizing force of evil ... merely to give a witness of these events in testimony was, in the end, a contribution to victory. Simply to survive was a victory of the human spirit.*

See the *Tactics List* on page 12 for more examples of Jewish resistance, contrasted with a list of aggression tactics used by the Germans and their collaborators.



*Channukah: Kiel Germany, 1932. Rachel Posner, wife of Rabbi Dr. Akiva Posner, took this photo just before lighting the candles for Channukah and Shabbat.*

*Source: Posner family/USHMM.*

### Integrating With Your Curriculum...

You will find resources in the Appendix to help you integrate this lesson into the subjects you already teach. You'll find a list of suggested approaches for a wide variety of topics and situations, from leadership and Jewish ethics, to history, holidays and Tefillah.

There is also an *Index* of recommended JPEF materials for various topics and contexts, including other JPEF lessons, study guides, films and the JPEF website. A call-out box in the procedure indicates where and how to make this transition.

**Strengthening Jewish Pride** can be taught as a stand-alone unit in as little as half an hour. You can easily integrate it into your current curriculum, enhancing virtually any other subject you teach, including other JPEF materials.

### The Film...

*Introduction to the Jewish Partisans* is 7 minutes long and can be viewed as a part of this lesson (see Procedure, page 7). The film gives crucial background to students about the approximately 30,000 Jews – many of them teens – who fought back against the Germans and their collaborators in armed resistance groups.

### The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation...

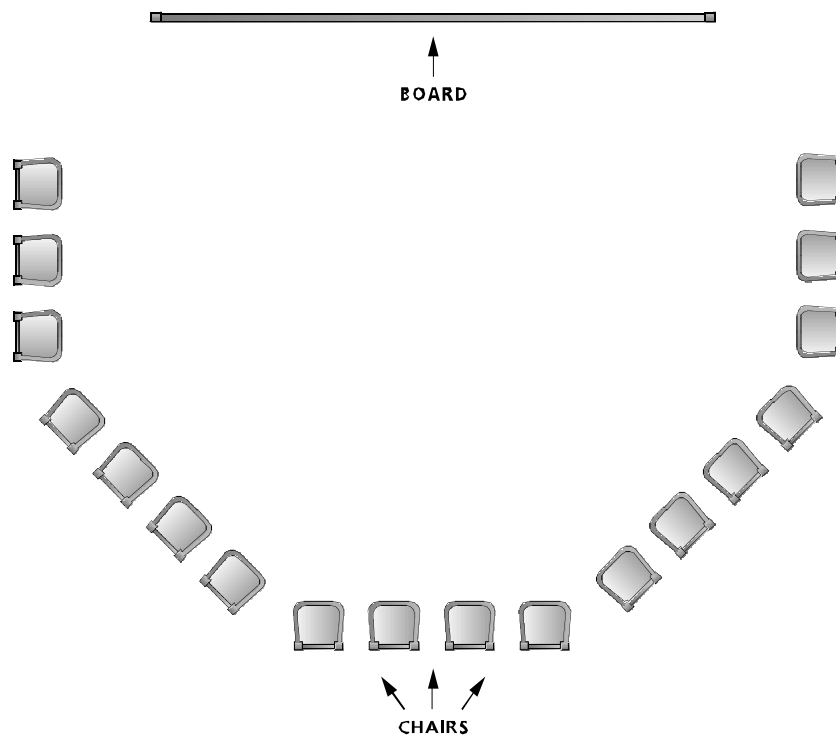
We produced the film used in this lesson after interviewing over 40 surviving partisans. Narrated by Ed Asner, it includes rare stock footage and photographs of partisans in action. The film can be ordered through JPEF by calling (415) 563-2244 or emailing [dvd@jewishpartisans.org](mailto:dvd@jewishpartisans.org). For more about the Jewish partisans, please visit [www.jewishpartisans.org](http://www.jewishpartisans.org).

# Setup

### What You Will Need

- A classroom or multi-purpose space
- A chalkboard with chalk or a dry erase board with dry erase markers
- The film that can be utilized for this lesson, INTRODUCTION TO THE JEWISH PARTISANS is 7 minutes long and can be viewed on a computer with internet access. A computer projector is helpful for presenting this film. The film can be viewed at: [www.jewishpartisans.org/films](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/films). You can also contact [dvd@jewishpartisans.org](mailto:dvd@jewishpartisans.org) for a DVD of this and other films.
- If you are not able to show the film, hand out copies of WHO ARE THE JEWISH PARTISANS? on page 1 of this lesson plan.
- This activity should take place in a large multi-purpose room or classroom. Chairs should be placed in a semi-circle in the center of the room. You will also need **room for students to stand comfortably in a circle.**

### Suggested Setup



# Procedure

YOU CAN TEACH THIS LESSON AS A *STAND-ALONE UNIT OR INTEGRATED* WITH YOUR CURRICULUM/OTHER JPEF MATERIALS.

SEE THE APPENDIX FOR INSTRUCTIONS AND A LIST OF SUGGESTED OPENINGS.

### A) SHARING – 10-12 minutes

1. Introduce the lesson with your selected opening (see Appendix) –or– the standard opening below:

*"The Jewish people have been around for over 3,500 years and we are considered one of the oldest continuous cultures in the world. Our history is filled with amazing spiritual and cultural moments: some joyous, some tragic. I want to talk to you today about Jewish pride, particularly taking pride in one of our most tragic moments."*

2. Ask: "What images come to mind when I say the word 'Holocaust'?" Keep students to brief descriptions of images (or sounds, smells, etc.) – not stories.
3. Echo responses back, asking clarifying questions to set context and correct misperceptions as needed. (Example: if a student says, "I see fire," say, "Did you know the Holocaust literally means an all-consuming fire? In Hebrew it's *Shoah* – 'catastrophe' or 'whirlwind of destruction.'")
4. Stand students into a circle and explain that because the Holocaust can bring up many difficult feelings, it's helpful to talk about them and see that we are not alone in how it affects us.
5. Ask students how talking about the Holocaust makes them feel. Invite everyone who has ever felt the same way to step into the circle. Have students step back out, and repeat four to six times. (Note: if students need prompting, say: "Take two steps in if you feel sad when you think about the Holocaust. Frightened? Angry? What else?")
6. Validate their concerns, emphasizing that feelings of sadness, anger, shame, etc. are common responses. For example:

*"When I first learned about the Holocaust, I felt the same way. All I learned about were the mass graves and death camps, the images you talked about."*

*"Yes all those horrible things happened. But if we were to focus only on the suffering, on the sadness or fear, we'd be giving Hitler a victory. I'd like you to watch a short video that shows an important side of the Holocaust that most people have never heard about."*

### B) TEACHING JEWISH RESISTANCE – 10 minutes

1. Show *Introduction to the Jewish Partisans* film or read "Who Are the Jewish Partisans?" on page 1.
2. Say: "Some people say that the Jews did not stand up for themselves, that we went willingly to our deaths. As you can see, that is not true."

*"In fact, there were literally millions of acts of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, most of them non-violent. Do you remember in the film how Sonia Orbuch said that 'people were fighting back every which way they can'?"*

*"A small number like Sonia had the rare opportunity to take up arms. But for millions, fighting back meant unarmed resistance: spiritual, political, artistic – a vast number of ways both large and small. Nearly everyone who could resist, did resist, to the best of their abilities."*
3. Ask for other examples of Jewish resistance, emphasizing NON-VIOLENT tactics (refer to the Tactics List in the Appendix for examples, if needed). Field responses, write on board, and validate their answers.

IF INTEGRATING OTHER JPEF LESSONS/MATERIALS, DO SO NOW. WHEN FINISHED, CONTINUE WITH STEP C, BELOW. SEE APPENDIX FOR FURTHER GUIDANCE.

### C) TYING IT TOGETHER – 6-8 minutes

1. Ask students to list positive qualities of Jews displayed in resisting the Holocaust that they can take pride in.
2. Ask which attributes they would like to bring into their lives, and why.
3. Inform students that they already possess the same qualities that Jewish resisters did (to at least some degree). The only difference is that these people lived in extraordinary times, and rose to the occasion.

*Optional:* Inform students that many partisans went on to help found the State of Israel after the war; some even helped smuggle fellow Jews into mandate Palestine or fought in the Israeli War of Independence.
4. Conclude with the following:

*"G-d willing, you will never be forced into a similar position. But there's no reason to wait for an extraordinary moment to make a difference."*

*"So I ask you to go home and think about a difficult situation in your life, and how you can use the skills and abilities you possess to make a difference. As Rabbi Hillel the Elder said: 'If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?'"*

*"One last thing, something you can do right away: tell your family, tell your friends, tell your enemies: We are strong, we are tenacious, and we are here."*

# Appendix

### Integrating With Your Curriculum

Strengthening Jewish Pride can be taught as a stand-alone unit in as little as half an hour. You can also easily integrate it into your current curriculum, enhancing virtually any other subject you teach, including other JPEF materials, such as *Finding Leadership* or *Eight Degrees of Gevurah* (see below).

Use this three-step process for integrating with other curricula:

- 1) In Step One of Activity A (*Sharing*): Replace stand-alone opening statement with one of the opening activities below.
- 2) At the end of the Activity B (*Teaching Jewish Resistance*): Transition back to your main topic or selected JPEF materials. You will find suggestions for modifying recommended JPEF lessons and other materials below.
- 3) Return to *Strengthening Jewish Pride*, Activity C (*Tying It All Together*) to conclude the lesson.

### Sample Opening Statements and Recommended JPEF Materials (materials available at [www.jewishpartisans.org/resist](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/resist))

#### Leadership

**Opening Activity – Engage** the students by asking them: "Who were some of the Jewish leaders during the Holocaust and why do we know so few of them?" **Field** answers and write on board. **Say**: "I want to talk about Jewish pride as it relates to leadership through some little-known examples from one of our people's most tragic moments."

**Recommended JPEF Lesson: Finding Leadership – Explain** that you want to use what they've learned about Jewish resistance to study the nature of leadership and authority. **Ask** your students if, in light of what they learned about the Jewish resistance, they can name more Jewish leaders or types of leaders from Holocaust. **Proceed** to step one of *Finding Leadership* (asking them to name other types of historical and modern-day leaders) and **continue** with rest of the lesson, then **return** to the final activity of *Strengthening Jewish Pride*.

#### Jewish Values

**Opening Activity: Engage** the students by asking them: "The Jewish people have a proud history of overcoming adversity. What are some Jewish values which have helped our people survive and thrive for the past 5,000 years?" **Field** answers and write on board. **Say**: "Let's take a look at how we can take pride in how our people relied on Jewish values through some little-known examples from one of our people's most tragic moments."

**Recommended JPEF Lesson: Eight Degrees of Gevurah – Tell** students that you want to look at some of the positive attributes that Jewish resistors displayed during the Holocaust. **Proceed** to the Introduction of *Eight Degrees of Gevurah* (definitions of the qualities of *gibor*, *gevurah*, *tzedekah* and *tzedek*). After defining each term (steps 4, 7, 12, and 15), **ask** for examples of these qualities that Jewish resistors displayed. **Continue** with rest of the lesson, then **return** to the final activity of *Strengthening Jewish Pride*.

#### Holidays – Tu B'Shvat

**Opening Activity: Ask** students about the importance of trees in Jewish tradition. **Field** answers and provide additional information as needed. **Say**: "I want to take this opportunity to talk about Jewish pride by introducing you to a little-known group of Jews who relied on the forests to help them survive and fight back against their oppressors during one of our people's most tragic moments."

**Recommended JPEF Study Guide: Living and Surviving in the Partisans – Tell** students that you want to go into more depth about the Jewish partisans and how they relied on the forests, swamps, and mountains of Europe to continue their fight against the Nazis. **Show** the films *Living and Surviving: Winter* and *Shelter* ([www.jewishpartisans.org/films](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/films)) or have students read JPEF's *Living and Surviving* study guide. **Discuss** questions 1, 3 and 4 from the study guide. **Ask** students to talk about how learning about the partisans might help redefine how we think about our people's connection to nature. When completed, **return** to the final activity of *Strengthening Jewish Pride*.

### Additional Openings and Activity Ideas at [www.jewishpartisans.org/pride](http://www.jewishpartisans.org/pride)

# Appendix

## Index: Recommended JPEF Materials by

<b>Recommendations by Venue/Context</b>	Youth Groups	B'nai Mitzvah	Supplementary Schools	Day Schools	Summer Camps	Midrashot
<b>Lesson Plans</b>						
<b>Finding Leadership</b> <i>Examining the difference between leadership and authority and encouraging students to make a positive difference without waiting to be told to take action.</i>	•		•	•	•	•
<b>Eight Degrees of Gevurah</b> <i>Maimonides ladder of Tzedakah: putting the tzedek (justice) back in tzedakah through real-life examples of Jewish partisans helping other Jews.</i>		•	•	•		•
<b>Ethics of War</b> <i>Engaging short play that can be read with no preparation. Introduces Pikuach Nefesh (guarding a life) and obligations to protect self and others.</i>	•				•	•
<b>Teaching with the Film 'Defiance'</b> <i>(Use with JPEF Educator's DVD of classroom excerpts or two-hour film) History, Ethics, Leadership and Jewish Values through true story of three brothers who rescued 1,200 Jews and formed the largest all-Jewish partisan unit. Short lessons for 20 minutes to one week's worth of activities.</i>	•	•	•	•	•	•
<b>Study Guides and Films</b>						
<b>Women in the Partisans</b> <i>Jewish women who fought back: Inspiring role models of Jewish women who overcame gender barriers and sexism to make a positive difference.</i>	•	•	•	•		•
<b>Living and Surviving in the Jewish Partisans</b> <i>What did Jewish partisans eat? Where did they live? How did they survive the brutal winters? Answers these and other frequently-asked questions.</i>	•				•	
<b>Putting the Gevurah Back in Yom HaShoah</b> <i>One-page supplement for Holocaust Memorial services. Includes prayer for the remembrance of Jewish resisters.</i>	•		•	•		•
<b>Website</b>						
<b>Partisan Profiles (<a href="http://www.jewishpartisans.org/partisans">www.jewishpartisans.org/partisans</a>)</b> <i>Biographies, video interviews and archival photos.</i>				•		
<b>Someone Like Me (<a href="http://www.jewishpartisans.org/likeme">www.jewishpartisans.org/likeme</a>)</b> <i>Find partisans from similar background to your teens that students can identify with.</i>				•		

# Appendix

## Index: Recommended JPEF Materials

<b>Recommendations by Subject</b>	Leadership	History	Heroes	Jewish Ethics / Values	Holidays	Tefillah
<b>Lesson Plans</b>						
<b>Finding Leadership</b> <i>Examining the difference between leadership and authority and encouraging students to make a positive difference without waiting to be told to take action.</i>	•					
<b>Eight Degrees of Gevurah</b> <i>Maimonides ladder of Tzedakah: putting the tzedek (justice) back in tzedakah through real-life examples of Jewish partisans helping other Jews.</i>			•	•		•
<b>Ethics of War</b> <i>Engaging short play that can be read with no preparation. Introduces Pikuach Nefesh (guarding a life) and obligations to protect self and others.</i>		•		•		•
<b>Teaching with the Film 'Defiance'</b> <i>(Use with JPEF Educator's DVD of classroom excerpts or two-hour film) History, Ethics, Leadership and Jewish Values through true story of three brothers who rescued 1,200 Jews and formed the largest all-Jewish partisan. Short lessons for 20 minutes to one week's worth of activities.</i>	•	•	•	•		
<b>Study Guides and Films</b>						
<b>Women in the Partisans</b> <i>Jewish women who fought back. Inspiring role models of Jewish women who overcame gender barriers and sexism to make a positive difference.</i>	•	•	•			
<b>Living and Surviving in the Jewish Partisans</b> <i>What did Jewish partisans eat? Where did they live? How did they survive the brutal winters? Answers these and other frequently asked questions.</i>		•			•	
<b>Putting the Gevurah Back in Yom HaShoah</b> <i>One-page supplement for Holocaust Memorial services. Includes prayer for the remembrance of Jewish resisters.</i>						•
<b>Website</b>						
<b>Partisan Profiles (<a href="http://www.jewishpartisans.org/partisans">www.jewishpartisans.org/partisans</a>)</b> <i>Biographies, video interviews and archival photos.</i>		•		•		
<b>Someone Like Me (<a href="http://www.jewishpartisans.org/likeme">www.jewishpartisans.org/likeme</a>)</b> <i>Find partisans from similar background to your teens that students can identify with.</i>		•		•		

# Appendix

## Tactics List of Jewish Resistance and German Aggression During the Holocaust



### **AGGRESSION**

#### **DISCRIMINATION**

*Violence and inhumane acts carried out against large numbers of people.*

- Unfair Treatment
- Stereotyping
- Segregation
- Restricting Employment & Trade
- Institutionalized Racism
- Rumors / Propaganda
- Inciting Violence

#### **DEPRIVATION & THEFT**

*Stealing property (through law or force) and preventing access to basic needs*

- Confiscation (stealing)
- Isolation / Ghettoization
- Travel Restrictions
- Confiscating Businesses
- Outlawing Religious Practice
- Blocking Communication
- Limiting Access to Food and Water

#### **VIOLENCE**

*Physically or psychologically harming individuals*

- Desecration
- Separating Families
- Intimidation
- Unjust Arrests and Incarceration
- Murder / Executions
- Torture
- Rape

#### **MASS VIOLENCE**

*Violence and inhumane acts carried out against large numbers of people.*

- Starvation
- Slavery (labor camps)
- Mass murder
- Death camps
- War / Invasion
- Genocide

### **RESISTANCE**

#### **NON-CONFRONTATIONAL NON-VIOLENCE**

*Peaceful acts that do not directly involve the aggressor (often done in secret)*

- Spiritual / Religious
- Artistic
- Jokes
- Documentation / Reporting
- Sharing Food and Information
- Forbidden Commerce / Black Market
- Non-Cooperation (secret)
- Hiding and Escaping
- Smuggling (people & goods)
- Retaining Their Humanity
- Helping Each Other
- Simply Surviving

#### **CONFRONTATIONAL NON-VIOLENCE**

*Directly opposing or publicly defying the aggressor (also known as direct action)*

- Speaking Up
- Giving False Information
- Arguing / Negotiating / Legal Action
- Publishing / Propaganda
- Non-Cooperation / Openly Disobeying Laws
- Work Stoppages / Strikes
- Civil Disobedience
- Stealing Food
- Sabotage

#### **VIOLENT/ARMED**

*Physically attacking the aggressor or their allies/assets*

- Fighting
- Property Destruction & Sabotage
- Bombing Trains / Destroying Bridges
- Punishing / Killing Collaborators
- Intimidation
- Partisan warfare (*military targets and collaborators*)
- Conventional Warfare