

## Unit 5 / Lesson 5.3 / Overview

### Unit 5: Jews in the Nazi Grip

#### Lesson 5.3: Resistance

##### **Background:**

In each country occupied by the Germans, the Germans and their collaborators took away the rights of Jews and isolated them from the economic, political, and cultural life of society. The Germans and their collaborators based their actions on a set of ideas that defined the Jews as an inferior race who posed a serious threat to society and who needed to be isolated, removed, and finally, annihilated. In Germany, the rights of the Jews were slowly taken away in a series of steps over several years. Elsewhere, such as in Poland, the persecution, isolation, and removal of the Jews from society was quick and immediate. In each country the Germans occupied, Jews were identified, and with the exception of Denmark, were forced to wear badges or armbands displaying a Star of David. Their property, businesses, and jobs were taken away; they were isolated from the non-Jewish population, and they were deported and murdered. The Germans and their collaborators used different ways of removing Jews from society as persecution became more intense. In Western Europe, Jews were often arrested and deported to transit camps or other holding centers. In Eastern Europe, for example in Poland, Jews were forced to leave their homes and move into ghettos (small sections of cities and towns where they were imprisoned and kept apart from the non-Jewish population). In both Western and Eastern Europe, Jews were then sent to killing centers and death camps.

Jews who were forced to live in ghettos tried to preserve a normal life and carry on with basic tasks, but living conditions were terrible. Most ghettos were surrounded by walls or barbed-wire fences, and overcrowding, disease, and starvation were common. To keep control and to carry out their policies, the Germans established a Jewish Council (*Judenrat*) in most ghettos. In some places, the Jews selected the leaders and members of the councils, while in other areas, the Germans selected the Jews for the councils. The councils were responsible for the day-to-day running of the ghetto; but had no real power. Council leaders chose different ways to cooperate with the Germans. While the Jewish Council tried to help the Jews survive in the ghetto, their efforts failed.

Despite the horrible circumstances of ghetto life, Jews carried out acts of cultural, spiritual, and armed resistance. Those forced to live in the ghetto held musical performances and religious services, often in secret, and they established underground schools. Some chronicled their experiences in journals. Others, such as the Warsaw ghetto fighters, took up arms to fight. With each kind of resistance, Jews tried to hold on to their dignity in the face of dehumanization and persecution. In this unit, you will learn the range of challenges Jews faced living under German occupation and the ways in which they responded.

**Video Running Time: 13:51**

##### **Goal:**

Examine different aspects of Jewish resistance: spiritual, cultural, and armed.

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### Essential Questions:

- What were the obstacles to Jewish resistance?
- What forms did Jewish resistance take?

### Learning Goals:

- Students will define spiritual and cultural resistance as individuals and groups attempting to maintain their ways of life with dignity and humanity despite facing persecution and constant fear.
- Students will explore how Jews were able to gather arms and training to resist the Nazis.
- Students will examine the role of partisans in resistance to the Nazis.

### Success Criteria:

- Students will give specific examples of spiritual and cultural resistance.
- Students will illustrate how Jews in ghettos and camps documented daily life.
- Students will give examples of how Jews acquired or made weaponry to resist the Nazis.
- Students will give examples of how partisans resisted.

### Topic For Further Discussion:

- Explore the difficulties Jews faced when trying to resist both spiritually and with arms.

### Recommended Background Reading from *How Was It Possible? A Holocaust Reader*

#### Unit 5 – Lesson 5.3

##### Chapter 5

- Introduction to **Chapter 5: Jews in the Nazi Grip**
- “Indirect Rule” from *Judenrat* by Isaiah Trunk
- “Leaving a Record” from *Who Will Write Our History?* by Samuel D. Kassow

## Unit 5 / Lesson 5.3 / Video Note-taking Guide

### Unit 5: Jews in the Nazi Grip Lesson 5.3: Resistance

Question	
What are some forms of spiritual and cultural resistance?	
What was the Ringelblum Archive?	
Why is the Ringelblum Archive important?	
What were the obstacles to armed resistance?	
What happened during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising?	
Why was the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising important?	
What advantage did partisans have over the Germans?	

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What did the FPO Partisans in Vilna do?	
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### Answer Key

Question	Possible Answers
What are some forms of spiritual and cultural resistance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orchestras</li> <li>• Soup kitchens were opened</li> <li>• Orphanages were set up</li> <li>• Smuggled food</li> <li>• Youth groups functioned</li> <li>• Political parties functioned</li> <li>• Prayer services were held</li> <li>• Schools and libraries were established</li> <li>• Newspapers were published</li> <li>• Theater performances and poetry readings were held</li> </ul> (Slide 3, 4)
What was the Ringelblum Archive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Largest secret archive in German-occupied Poland</li> <li>• Included Jews from all walks of life in the Warsaw ghetto who wrote about Jewish life under Nazi occupation</li> <li>• Documented daily ghetto life through articles, artwork, candy wrappers, tram tickets, ration cards, theater posters, poems, songs, stories, journals, invitations to concerts and children's performances, and last wills and testaments</li> <li>• Collected an enormous range of material to document daily ghetto life</li> </ul> (Slide 5)
Why is the Ringelblum Archive important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The residents of the Warsaw ghetto wrote their own history, not one defined by perpetrators</li> </ul> (Slide 5)
What were the obstacles to armed resistance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of weapons and training</li> <li>• Fighting against a much larger and better-equipped enemy</li> <li>• Agonizing decision of leaving family members and loved ones</li> </ul> (Slide 6)

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<p>What happened during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Armed resistance unit known as the Jewish Combat Organization or ŻOB planned to resist future German deportations</li> <li>• April 19, 1943, thousands of well-armed German soldiers entered the ghetto and were met with armed resistance from the ŻOB</li> <li>• ŻOB fighters and commanders were in their teens and early twenties</li> <li>• ŻOB had few weapons, smuggled in pistols, grenades, and small amounts of automatic weapons</li> <li>• Main weapon was homemade Molotov cocktails</li> <li>• Germans were forced to burn the ghetto to the ground to force those hiding in bunkers to surrender because of lack of air</li> <li>• Held back the Germans for a month</li> <li>• Jews captured during the uprising were sent to Auschwitz and other camps</li> </ul> <p>(Slide 7)</p>
<p>Why was the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was the largest, symbolically most important Jewish uprising in German-occupied Europe</li> <li>• Inspired other uprisings in ghettos, camps, and killing centers</li> </ul> <p>(Slide 7)</p>
<p>What advantage did partisans have over the Germans?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The partisans used guerrilla warfare tactics</li> </ul> <p>(Slide 8)</p>

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What did the FPO Partisans in Vilna do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Left the ghetto on sabotage missions</li><li>• Manufactured bombs</li><li>• Trained fighters</li><li>• Smuggled weapons into the ghetto</li><li>• When the Germans liquidated the Vilna ghetto in September 1943, the remaining partisan fighters escaped to the Rudnicki Forest</li><li>• Known as the "Avengers," the partisan fighters destroyed train tracks, train cars, and bridges</li><li>• They fought, killed enemy soldiers, and rescued Jews</li><li>• Kovner and the partisans returned to Vilna with the Soviet army in July 1944, and helped recapture the city from the Germans</li></ul> <p>(Slide 12)</p>
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# Unit 5 / Lesson 5.3 / Lesson Script

## Unit 5: Jews in the Nazi Grip

### Lesson 5.3: Resistance

#### Slide 1 – Resistance

Welcome to Lesson 5.3 of *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers™*, from The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. This presentation will give you an overview of “Resistance.” This lesson was prepared by Amy McDonald, who teaches US History and Holocaust Studies at Shades Valley High School in Birmingham, Alabama.

#### Slide 2 – Resistance

A common question when studying the Holocaust is, “Why didn’t the Jews resist?” The answer to that question is, they did. The real question should be, “How was it even possible for them to resist?” How was it possible for the Jews, weak from disease, starvation, and cruelty, to find the strength and the will to resist?

In this photograph, you see a Jewish partisan unit in the forest in Poland. Partisans are groups of resistance fighters operating outside of official military units, usually to fight an occupying military force.

#### Slide 3 – Spiritual & Cultural Resistance

In the face of persecution and mass murder, Jews in ghettos and camps throughout Germany and German-occupied Europe resisted and fought back in a number of ways. Not all resistance was armed resistance; some of it was spiritual and cultural.

This photograph is of the ghetto orchestra in the Łódź ghetto in Łódź, Poland.

#### Slide 4 – Spiritual & Cultural Resistance

What exactly is spiritual and cultural resistance? It is when individuals and groups attempt to maintain their ways of life with dignity and humanity, despite facing persecution and constant fear. In ghettos and concentration camps throughout German-occupied territory, Jews engaged in many forms of unarmed resistance.

For example, in the Warsaw ghetto, Jewish self-help agencies formed soup kitchens and orphanages. Apartment buildings formed their own house committees to try to provide for their residents. Children and adults smuggled food and other items into and out of the ghetto. Youth groups and political parties continued to meet. When synagogues were prohibited, secret prayer services were held in basements. There were secret schools, libraries, and newspapers. Theater performances, orchestras, and poetry readings were held.

This photograph shows Jewish smugglers on a ladder at the top of the Warsaw ghetto wall.

As Holocaust survivor Roman Kent said, “Resistance does not have to be with a gun and a bullet.”



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### **Slide 5 – Ringelblum Archive – Warsaw Ghetto**

One of the best-known examples of cultural and spiritual resistance was the Ringelblum Archive, also known as the *Oneg Shabbat* Archive, in the Warsaw ghetto. It was the largest secret archive in German-occupied Poland, but it wasn't the only one.

Polish Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum began keeping a journal after the Germans invaded Poland in 1939. After the ghetto was established, Ringelblum recruited Jews from all walks of life in the Warsaw ghetto to write about Jewish life under Nazi occupation. The archive grew into an organized underground operation and collected an enormous range of material to document daily ghetto life.

Inside the archive were articles from the underground press, artwork, candy wrappers, tram tickets, ration cards, theater posters, poems, songs, stories, and journals. There were invitations to concerts and children's performances. There were also last wills and testaments. The archives were buried in metal boxes and milk cans in three parts. After the war, two of the three caches of documents were recovered. The third cache has never been found.

In this photograph, you see one of the actual milk cans that was used to bury parts of the archive. One of these milk cans is now on display at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

Without the Ringelblum Archive, the world would have known very little about Jewish life in Warsaw and the brave spiritual and cultural resistance in the Warsaw ghetto. In this way, the Jews in Warsaw wrote their own history, and not one defined by the perpetrators.

### **Slide 6 – Armed Resistance**

In addition to cultural and spiritual resistance, there was also Jewish armed resistance throughout German-occupied Europe.

There were many obstacles to armed resistance. There were overwhelming challenges such as a lack of weapons and training, fighting against a much larger and better-equipped enemy, and the agonizing decisions to leave family members and loved ones.

This photograph is of a female partisan fighter named Faye Shulman. Shulman fought in the forests of Eastern Europe for nearly two years. Her main weapons against the Germans were her rifle and her camera, which she used to record partisan activity and life under German occupation in Eastern Europe.

### **Slide 7 – Warsaw Ghetto Uprising**

Reports of mass murder of Jews had begun to filter into the Warsaw ghetto. Many Jews began to realize it was only a matter of time before mass murder reached the ghetto.

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On July 22, 1942, what became known as the Great Deportation began in the Warsaw ghetto. Jews were ordered to report for “resettlement in the east,” which was a lie and really meant deportation to the Treblinka killing center. Between July and September 1942, 300,000 Jews were deported from the Warsaw ghetto and murdered in the gas chambers of Treblinka. Thousands more were killed in the violence of the deportations.

The deportations were a turning point for the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto. In response to the deportations, several Jewish underground organizations created an armed resistance unit known as the Jewish Combat Organization or ŻOB. The leader of the ŻOB was Mordecai Anielewicz. The ŻOB and other groups began planning to resist future deportations.

Most of the fighters and commanders were in their teens and early twenties. They had few weapons, but in time they smuggled in pistols, grenades, and small amounts of automatic weapons. Their main weapon was homemade Molotov cocktails.

The armed resistance that came to be known as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began on April 19, 1943.

Thousands of well-armed German soldiers entered the ghetto with tanks and cannons. ŻOB fighters stunned the Germans on the first day of fighting and forced the German troops to retreat.

The ghetto fighters and the remaining ghetto population held the Germans back for nearly a month. The uprising lasted 27 days. In the end, the Germans were forced to burn the ghetto to the ground. Jews hiding in underground bunkers were forced to surrender because of lack of air.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising ended on May 16, 1943.

This uprising lasted longer than some entire countries had held out before surrendering to the Germans.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was the largest, symbolically most important Jewish uprising in German-occupied Europe and inspired other uprisings in ghettos and killing centers.

### **Slide 8 – Partisans**

Another example of armed resistance was the partisans. Partisans were members of an organized group of fighters who attacked the German army, German officials, and collaborators.

The partisans used guerrilla warfare tactics. Compared to the Germans, they had few weapons and little ammunition.

The partisans lived under harsh conditions, such as sub-freezing temperatures and snowstorms in the winter, rain, or extreme heat during the summer. Food and medical supplies were always scarce.

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Partisan activity occurred in both Eastern and Western Europe. This photograph is of French Jewish partisan fighters dressed in military uniforms.

### **Slide 9 – Bielski Partisans**

A well-known example of Jewish partisan fighters was the Bielski Partisans. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the Germans occupied western Belorussia (modern-day Belarus).

After the Germans killed their parents and two brothers in December 1941, four surviving brothers of the Bielski family established a Jewish partisan group called the Bielski Otriad or brigade.

The Bielskis encouraged Jews in nearby ghettos to escape and join them in the forest. Almost every other partisan group wouldn't take in women, children, and the elderly because they weren't fighters. But the Bielskis never turned anyone away and created a mobile "family camp" of men, women, and children, a Jewish community, in the forest.

### **Slide 10 – Bielski Partisans**

The Bielski Partisans also went on food raids and combat missions. They blew up German trains and railroad tracks, destroyed bridges, and attacked German soldiers. They attacked police officials and others who collaborated with the Germans. The Bielski fighters often joined with Soviet partisan groups fighting against the Germans. By the summer of 1944, the Bielski group had grown to approximately 1,200 people. More than 70 percent were women, elderly, and children, who otherwise would have perished under German occupation.

In this photograph you see members of the Bielski partisan group, including women and children.

The Bielski partisans were one of the most significant Jewish resistance efforts against Nazi Germany during World War II.

### **Slide 11 – Abba Kovner – Vilna Ghetto**

Three days after Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the German army occupied Vilna, Lithuania.

The Germans established two ghettos in Vilna – ghetto # 1 and ghetto # 2. Jews considered incapable of work were put in ghetto # 2. One month later, German *Einsatzgruppen*, mobile killing squads, and Lithuanian police murdered the Jews in ghetto #2 in the Ponar Forest, located eight miles outside Vilna. By the end of 1941, the *Einsatzgruppen* had murdered about 40,000 Jews in the Ponar Forest.

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The Vilna ghetto had a significant Jewish resistance movement. The leader of one of the youth groups in Vilna was Abba Kovner. When Kovner and members of his youth group heard the rumors of killings and mass graves in the Ponar Forest, they formed a partisan group.

Kovner understood that the Germans intended to murder all the Jews of Europe, and he called on the youth to take responsibility.

On December 31, 1941, Kovner inspired and challenged the divided groups in the Vilna ghetto to join together and fight back against the Germans. He said, "Jewish youth! Do not trust those who are trying to deceive you. Hitler plans to destroy all the Jews of Europe... We will not be led like sheep to the slaughter! Arise! Arise with your last breath!"

### **Slide 12 – Abba Kovner**

Three weeks later, the FPO (United Partisan Organization) was born, and Abba Kovner was its commander. The FPO partisans snuck out of the ghetto on sabotage missions, manufactured bombs, trained fighters, and smuggled weapons into the ghetto. When the Germans liquidated the Vilna ghetto in September 1943, Kovner led the remaining partisan fighters to the Rudnicki Forest. Known as the "Avengers," the partisan fighters destroyed train tracks, train cars, and bridges. They fought and killed enemy soldiers and rescued Jews. Kovner refused to allow the FPO to join other Soviet or Lithuanian partisan groups because he was determined for the FPO to be a Jewish partisan group. Kovner and the partisans returned to Vilna with the Soviet army in July 1944, and helped recapture the city from the Germans.

### **Slide 13 – Summary – Resistance**

This lesson explored different forms of resistance – spiritual and cultural as well as armed resistance. Jews resisted German oppression both collectively and individually in a variety of ways to preserve a sense of human dignity and the continuity of Jewish life.

Thank you for joining us today as we learned about “Resistance.” Please continue your educational journey with us. This concludes our presentation of Lesson 5.3 from *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers*™. On behalf of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, thank you.

## Unit 5 / Lesson 5.3 / Lesson Quiz

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Circle the correct answers below.

1. Which was not a form of resistance?
  - a. Armed resistance
  - b. Resettlement in the East
  - c. Cultural resistance
  - d. Spiritual resistance
2. What is spiritual and cultural resistance?
  - a. Maintaining one's way of life with dignity and humanity
  - b. Partisan efforts
  - c. Talking to the Nazis about the culture of the Jews
  - d. Talking to Germans about the religion of the Jews
3. Why was the Ringelblum Archive so important?
  - a. The materials were secondary sources
  - b. Nazis helped write the history found in the archive
  - c. The archive influenced others in ghettos to create their own archives
  - d. The world would have known very little about Jewish life and resistance in Warsaw and the Warsaw ghetto
4. What advantage did partisans have over the Germans?
  - a. Partisans had more weapons and ammunition
  - b. Partisans were more organized than the Germans
  - c. Partisans knew the lay of the land and how to use the terrain to their advantage
  - d. Partisans only were active in Eastern Europe
5. Which statement is false regarding resistance?
  - a. There were many forms of resistance
  - b. The only right form of resistance was spiritual
  - c. Armed resistance had many obstacles but saved lives
  - d. Spiritual resistance, like archives, provides us with knowledge about life in the ghettos

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### Unit 5: Jews in the Nazi Grip

#### Lesson 5.3: Resistance

#### Lesson Quiz with Answers Highlighted and Bolded

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#### Link to Google Form Quiz (Instructions Available in the Appendix)

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1UtaarCYQosHlCqkZ97dE9cEAfp8o7xS4Tc0VSnHy0JI/copy>



## Unit 5 / Lesson 5.3 / Image Sources

### Unit 5: Jews in the Nazi Grip

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**Slide 1** - Yevgeny Khaldei via Getty Images

**Slide 2** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Samuel Gruber

**Slide 3** - Yad Vashem, Photo Archive, Jerusalem

**Slide 4** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Jan Kostanski

**Slide 5** - From the collections of the E. Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute

**Slide 5A** - "File:EmanuelRingelblum 1900-1944.jpg." Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository. 1 Jan 2023, 08:17 UTC. 18 June 2023, 16:53

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:EmanuelRingelblum\\_1900-1944.jpg&oldid=721725810](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:EmanuelRingelblum_1900-1944.jpg&oldid=721725810).

**Slide 6** - JPEF/A Partisan's Memoir, Second Story Press, p. 115

**Slide 7** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Louis Gonda

**Slide 8** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Arnold Einhorn

**Slide 9** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Moshe Kaganovich

**Slide 10** - Yad Vashem, Photo Archive, Jerusalem

**Slide 11** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Vitka Kempner Kovner

**Slide 12** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Vitka Kempner Kovner