Unit 8: Rescuing Jews – Means and Obstacles Lesson 8.1: Rescue During the Holocaust

Background:

A small minority of non-Jews, when confronted with the disappearance of their Jewish neighbors, or upon witnessing the brutal treatment of Jewish children in the streets, chose to help. Thousands of people from all walks of life stepped forward. Despite the risk to their lives and the lives of their loved ones, in the midst of overwhelming indifference, these precious few acted against the Nazi goals of murdering every Jew. They saved lives. These brave men and women came from almost every German-occupied country.

Rescue often began as a seemingly simple act – a Jewish person asking a friend or even a stranger to stay for a night. That night could turn into weeks, months, or even years. In other instances, rescue was carried out in a bold, decisive move: stealing a Jewish child from a roundup headed for deportation. Sometimes individuals banded together to form rescue organizations – underground networks made up of Jews and Christians working together to find hiding places, secure false identification papers, and protect lives. Occasionally those in positions of power, such as diplomats, chose to use their influence to help Jews in peril.

Rescuers took on tremendous risk. The consequences for being caught helping a Jewish person varied by country. In Poland and Eastern Europe, if a non-Jewish person was caught assisting a Jew, the rescuer would be executed immediately, along with family and friends. During the war, rescuers faced practical hardships: how to feed an extra mouth when food was strictly rationed and scarce? Rescuers were amateurs, untrained in their clandestine work. Sometimes rescuers did not succeed, and in some cases, they and the Jews they tried to protect were killed. In a time of overwhelming death and destruction, rescuers did not stand by silently. They chose another way, and their bravery offers us a glimmer of hope.

Video Running Time: 16:35

Goal:

Explain the challenges and obstacles faced by those who risked their lives and often the lives of their family to save Jews during the Holocaust.

Essential Questions:

- Why was it difficult to rescue a Jewish person during the Holocaust?
- In what ways did individual actions and rescue networks save Jewish lives?
- What external factors and conditions assisted people in or prevented them from defying the Germans to rescue Jews?

Learning Goals:

- Explain how, despite extreme dangers and challenges of rescue attempts under German occupation, non-Jews could transcend everyday hardships and fear of German reprisal to help others.
- Students will recognize how the nature of German occupation in various nations influenced the possibilities and forms that rescue took.
- Students will discuss rescue and resistance as viable choices in the face of genocide and oppression.

Success Criteria:

- Students will define rescue as non-Jews (mainly Christians, some Muslims) who risked their lives and often the lives of their families to save Jewish friends, neighbors, relatives, and strangers from certain death.
- Students will analyze the motivations, organizations and outcomes of individual actions and rescue network efforts to save Jews.
- Students will evaluate the role that certain governmental representatives played in rescuing Jews.
- Students will explore the courage and determination necessary to become a rescuer.
- Students will investigate the ethics and morality that guided the actions of these rescuers.
- Students will identify the difficulties faced by rescuers in saving Jews.
- Students will explore why rescuers consider their deeds normal and not heroic.

Topics For Further Discussion:

- What was the significance of rescue networks and organizations and what was their impact?
- Are rescue and resistance viable choices in the face of genocide and oppression?
- How can the actions of rescuers serve as models of ethical behavior?
- Explore the concept of collective responsibility.
- Using The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous website (<u>www.jfr.org</u>), investigate individual stories of rescue.
- What external conditions and personal characteristics led some women and men to actively defy the evil surrounding them and save the lives of others?

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

Unit 8 – Lessons 8.1

Chapter 8

- Introduction to Chapter 8: Rescuing Jews Means and Obstacles
- "Collective Actions in Vivarais-Lignon" from *We Only Know Men* by Patrick Henry
- "American Inhibitions" from *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945* by Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut

Unit 8: Rescuing Jews – Means and Obstacles Lesson 8.1: Rescue During the Holocaust

| Question | |
|--|--|
| What forms did rescue take? | |
| | |
| Who were rescuers? | |
| | |
| In what countries did rescue take place? | |
| | |
| In what country did the majority of rescues occur? | |
| What is meant by "choiceless choices?" | |
| Who would try to pass as a non-Jew? | |
| What was collective responsibility? | |
| | |

Unit 8 / Lesson 8.1 / Video Note-taking Guide

| What were the penalties in Eastern Europe for saving or helping Jews? | |
|--|--|
| What were the penalties in Western Europe for saving or helping Jews? | |
| Was there a typical rescuer; describe some of the characteristics of rescuers? | |
| What are some examples of rescue activities undertaken on behalf of Jews? | |
| What did Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds do to save Jewish American GIs? | |
| What made it difficult for non-Jews to save Jews? | |
| Who are the Righteous Among the Nations? | |
| Why we will not know the actual number of rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust? | |

| Were there a large number of rescuers? | |
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| | |
| | |
| Why do rescuers offer a legacy of hope? | |
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| | |

| Answer | Key |
|--------|-----|
|--------|-----|

| Question | Possible Answers |
|---|--|
| What forms did rescue take? | Individuals acting alone |
| | • Families |
| | Organized groups |
| | Entire communities |
| | (Slide 3) |
| Who were rescuers? | • Courageous men and women who risked their lives and often the lives of their families to save Jewish friends, neighbors, relatives, and strangers from certain death (Slide 4) |
| In what countries did rescue take place? | • Every country occupied by the Germans (Slide 5) |
| In what country did the majority of rescues | Poland |
| occur? | (Slide 5) |
| What is meant by "choiceless choices?" | There were no good options |
| , | (Slide 6) |
| Who would try to "pass" as a non-Jew? | Someone young |
| | • Someone with no family responsibilities |
| | • Someone whose physical features would |
| | permit the person to "pass" as a non- |
| | Jewish person - perhaps having blond |
| | hair, blue eyes |
| | • Someone who could speak the national |
| | language |
| | (Slide 7) |
| What was collective responsibility? | • The idea that an entire family or |
| | community would be responsible for the |
| | acts of one individual, a terrifying reality |
| | during the Holocaust |
| What ware the populties in Eastern Europe for | (Slide 9) |
| What were the penalties in Eastern Europe for saving or helping Jews? | • In Eastern Europe, if someone was caught |
| saving of helping jews? | helping Jews, the person and the person's entire family would be killed along with |
| | the Jews being helped |
| | (Slide 9) |
| | |

| What were the penalties in Western Europe for saving or helping Jews? | In Western Europe, if someone was caught helping Jews, the person might be arrested and sent to a concentration camp, but death was not the penalty in Western Europe (Slide 9) |
|--|--|
| Was there a typical rescuer; describe some of the characteristics of rescuers? | There was no typical rescuer Rescuers came from all walks of life Rescuers have a variety of motivations Rescuers were rich and poor Rescuers were young and old Rescuers were educated and others were uneducated Some were religious and others were not (Slide 12) |
| What are some examples of rescue activities undertaken on behalf of Jews? | Rescuers helped Jews escape to safety Provided shelter Obtained false documents for Jews Helped Jews "pass" as non-Jews Provided food, medicine, and other essentials (Slide 13) |
| What did Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds do to save Jewish American GIs? | Master Sgt. Edmonds refused to identify the Jews in his command to the Germans (Slide 15) |
| What made it difficult for non-Jews to save Jews? | The nature of the German occupation The surrounding geographic environment The political conditions The prevalence of antisemitism in the country The extent of local collaboration Timing, what phase of war it was The consequences for the rescuer and the rescuer's family (Slide 16) |
| Who are the Righteous Among the Nations? | The official name used by Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Center, for non-Jews who rescued Jews (Slide 17) |

| Why we will not know the actual number of rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust? | Dependent on documentation provided to Yad Vashem primarily by Jewish Holocaust survivors Survivors may have passed away before they could submit materials to Yad Vashem Jewish Holocaust survivors may not have been aware of the program or were unable to apply on behalf of their rescuer Either the Jews and/or the rescuers were denounced and murdered by the Germans and the collaborators (Slide 17) |
|--|--|
| Were there a large number of rescuers? | No, rescuers were rare (Slide 18) |
| Why do rescuers offer a legacy of hope? | Saving one life is tantamount to saving the entire world Many worlds were saved by rescuers Anyone can make a difference There are alternatives to being a bystander Rescuers serve as role models Rescuers were the precious few Rescuers stepped up to help against tremendous odds when the vast majority did nothing (Slide 18, 19) |

Unit 8 / Lesson 8.1 / Lesson Script

Unit 8: Rescuing Jews – Means and Obstacles Lesson 8.1: Rescue During the Holocaust

Slide 1 – Rescue During the Holocaust

Welcome to Lesson 8.1 of *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers*TM, from The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. This presentation will give you an overview of "Rescue During the Holocaust." This lesson was prepared by Amy McDonald, who teaches US History and Holocaust Studies at Shades Valley High School in Birmingham, Alabama, and Stanlee Stahl, Executive Vice President, The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous.

Slide 2 – Rescue During the Holocaust

Throughout the course of World War II, the circumstances of the Holocaust were dominated by antisemitism, collaboration, abandonment, fear, or simply indifference. However, there were exceptions.

This photograph is of Jewish children who found refuge in the small village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, France. The Protestant villagers in Le Chambon hid and protected more than 3,500 Jews during the Holocaust, many of them children.

Slide 3 – Rescue

There were thousands of individuals throughout German-occupied Europe who risked their own lives and often the lives of their family to help Jews. Rescue took many forms. It involved individuals acting alone, families, organized groups, or even entire communities.

Raoul Wallenberg, seen here, a thirty-two-year-old businessman, was sent by the Swedish government to their embassy in Budapest, Hungary in July 1944, to see how he could help Hungarian Jews. Wallenberg and his diplomatic colleagues from other countries helped save thousands of Hungarian Jews by providing protective passports known as *Schutzpass*. These protective passports stated that the holder was under the protection of the government that issued the passports.

Slide 4 – Defining Rescue

During the Holocaust, thousands of non-Jews (mainly Christians, some Muslims) risked their lives and often the lives of their families to save Jewish friends, neighbors, relatives, and strangers from certain death.

They were men and women who had both the courage to care and the courage to act.

Slide 5 – Rescue Locations

Rescue took place in every country occupied by the Germans. Poland, with the largest number of Jews, was also the site of the majority of documented rescue.

German occupation created a climate of fear and violated civil rights; Jews were humiliated, removed from participating in civil life, and eventually removed from society altogether.

Slide 6 – "Choiceless Choices"

For a Jewish person during the Holocaust their options were limited – to go into the ghetto, to try to pass as a non-Jew, or to try to escape to another country. There were no good options.

Jews relied on their collective memory of previous times when they had been persecuted and eventually the persecution ended. As long as it was possible to go on hoping they would survive, many hoped this would be the case. Unfortunately, most Jews did not survive.

Slide 7 – Who Would Try to Pass as A Non-Jew?

If you did not want to go into a ghetto and you could not escape to another country or be sheltered by a non-Jew, the other option was to try to pass as a non-Jew. However, there were many obstacles to doing this. Let us consider some of them.

Did a person have family responsibilities, making it very difficult to leave parents and other family members in order to escape into the Christian world? Would one's physical features even allow one to pass as a non-Jew? This image is a Nazi propaganda poster featuring a young German girl, who personified the Aryan look.

How assimilated into the wider national culture was the Jewish person? Could limited familiarity with the national language – or even just an accent – betray one's origins? What language did the person speak? Many Jews in Poland did not speak Polish; they spoke Yiddish.

Slide 8 - Most Jews Had to Go Into Hiding as They Could Not Pass as Christians

Jews who did not speak the language of the country, were uneducated, or had no financial resources would find it difficult to pass as a non-Jew. This suggests that most Jews had to go into hiding, and in order to go into hiding, one needed the help of a non-Jewish person.

This photograph shows religious Jews at a resort in the Tatra Mountains. Their physical appearance and manner of dress would have clearly marked them apart from most of their fellow Polish citizens.

Slide 9 – Collective Responsibility

Collective responsibility, the idea that an entire family or community would be responsible for the acts of one individual, was a terrifying reality during the Holocaust.

Non-Jews in Eastern Europe knew only too well the penalty for helping a Jewish person; in Poland, Ukraine, or in Lithuania, it meant death to the rescuer, the rescuer's family, and the Jewish person or persons being helped. Despite this principle of collective responsibility, Christians with families still saved Jews. Most rescuers were married, many had children, but they still made this decision to act.

This German notice, in both German and Polish, informs Poles that death is the penalty for helping Jews. However, for denouncing a rescuer in Poland and Ukraine, one might receive a kilo of sugar and a liter of vodka, or perhaps a pair of boots. On the other hand, the penalty for a non-Jew caught helping a Jew in Western Europe was not necessarily death. The rescuer might be arrested or sent to a concentration camp.

Slide 10

The very act of surviving the Holocaust, outside of a ghetto, a concentration camp, or being with the partisans, meant that the Jewish person received help from a non-Jew, whether it was food, papers, shelter, transportation, or not being denounced. As insignificant as an act might seem, the absence of that act more often than not could be fatal.

To hide a Jewish person in Poland and Eastern Europe was a matter of life and death.

Slide 11 – Rescuers

These are faces of heroes – Nina from Kyiv, Ukraine, Ona, and her husband from Kovno, Lithuania, Abbé René de Naurois, a Catholic priest from France, and Paulina from Poland – each risked their life to save Jews, in many instances total strangers.

Slide 12 – Who Were Rescuers?

Rescuers came from all walks of life – they could be rich or poor, young or old, well-educated or not, religious or not. They had a variety of motivations. There was no typical rescuer; they were ordinary people making extraordinary choices. Rescuers chose not to be bystanders. Each chose to become involved and to help Jews at great personal risk.

Slide 13 - Range of Rescue Activities

Helping Jews covered a range of actions.

Some rescuers helped Jews escape to safety.

Others provided shelter. Provision of shelter was essential and perhaps the most common form of help offered. Securing a hiding place that could not be detected was vital. Hiding places included false closets, earthen bunkers, and spaces under floorboards.

Rescuers obtained false documents for Jews. Germans and their collaborators would stop citizens on the street and demand to inspect these documents.

Rescuers provided food, medicine, and other essentials to Jews they were hiding.

Hiding someone could also involve more than just provision of food and shelter. For example, how do you call for a doctor for someone who can't be seen to exist, or bury someone who dies in hiding? Rescuers secretly buried Jews who died in hiding and obtained medical care for Jews who became ill while in hiding.

Slide 14 – About Rescuers

At first, each decision to help may not have seemed dramatic. Most rescuers didn't consider themselves heroic, or special. Some were helping friends, others strangers, some were even known antisemites. Remember that when a Jewish person approached a non-Jew seeking help, neither knew how long the war would last. Survival was day to day.

Slide 15 – We Should Know About...

Let us look at these photographs of rescuers.

Alexander Roslan offered to save three young boys from the Warsaw ghetto on the eve of its destruction. Two of the boys survived the war and were reunited with their father in 1947. The youngest died while in hiding.

Pastor Andre Trocmé led an enclave of French Protestants in the Haute-Loire region of France, and was part of an underground network hiding refugees, saving approximately 5,000 people, around 3,500 of whom were Jewish.

Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds was an American soldier who was captured in the Battle of the Bulge. As the highest-ranking non-commissioned officer prisoner of war, he refused to identify the 200 Jewish soldiers in his regiment to the Germans, thus saving their lives.

Chiune Sugihara and Aristides de Sousa Mendes were diplomats. Sugihara from Japan and posted to Lithuania, and de Sousa Mendes from Portugal and posted to France. They defied the Germans and their respective governments by issuing passports and transit visas to Jews seeking to flee Europe; for their heroic acts they lost their positions and their pensions and were publicly humiliated. Their actions accounted for the rescue of more than 10,000 persecuted Jews.

Irena Sendler saved Jewish children in the Warsaw ghetto – she would go into the ghetto as a health worker and would smuggle out children, bringing them to Christian homes and convents.

Slide 16 – Difficulty of Helping

It was not easy for a non-Jewish person to save Jews; there were significant obstacles.

In what country did the rescuer live, and how harsh was the German occupation?

What was the surrounding geographic environment like; did the person live in a city or in the countryside, and was the area open farmland or heavily forested?

What were the prevailing political conditions?

What was the prevalence of antisemitism?

What was the extent of local collaboration?

Timing was also important; what was the phase of the war? Was the year 1940 or 1944? This made a difference.

There was also a moral aspect to consider. What would be the consequences for the rescuer and the rescuer's family?

Each of these was a powerful obstacle to rescuing Jews.

Slide 17 – Facts and Figures

Israel's World Holocaust Remembrance Center is called Yad Vashem and is located in Jerusalem. It is responsible for documenting the rescue of Jews by non-Jews. The official name used by Yad Vashem for those non-Jews who rescued Jews is "Righteous Among the Nations."

We will never know the actual number of rescuers. This is due to a variety of reasons. The recognition of non-Jews as Righteous Among the Nations is dependent on documentation provided to Yad Vashem primarily by Jewish Holocaust survivors. Survivors may have passed away before they could submit documentation. Jewish Holocaust survivors may not have been aware of the program or were unable to apply on behalf of their rescuer. This is especially true of survivors living in the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries during the years of Communist rule in these countries. Additionally, most rescuers who are recognized are those where both the Jews and the rescuers survived. There are cases where either the Jews and/or the rescuers were denounced and murdered by the Germans and their collaborators.

On this slide are highlighted the countries with the greatest number of rescuers recognized by Yad Vashem, but rescue occurred in every country occupied by the Germans.

Yad Vashem recognizes individuals, not groups, but there is one exception. At the request of the Danish resistance, individual resistance members were not recognized, but rather the group as a whole. This is why the number of Danish Righteous is relatively small. Currently 22 Danes are recognized in their own right, as their specific rescue activity was not part of the Danish resistance.

Each act of rescue was different, each story is unique. The fact that it occurred is important.

Slide 18 – What the Numbers Tell us...

There are no heroes without villains. But whatever the number of heroes, there were too few. Then again, there are always too few moral heroes in history.

Jewish tradition teaches that the saving of one life is tantamount to saving the entire world. Many worlds were saved by rescuers.

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Slide 19 – Rescue Offers a Legacy of Hope

Rescuers offer a legacy of hope, that everyone – anyone – can make a difference. The critical point is that there are alternatives to being a bystander.

Rescuers serve as role models for each of us. Rescuers were the precious few.

Slide 20 – Summary – Rescue During the Holocaust

In summary, when we look at rescue, we find that:

- Rescue took place in every country occupied by the Germans.
- Poland has the largest number of recognized rescuers.
- Most Jews were unable to pass as non-Jews and had to go into hiding.
- To go into hiding required the help of a non-Jewish person.
- Rescuers came from all walks of life.
- Non-Jews in Eastern Europe who were caught helping Jews were killed; this was not necessarily the case in Western Europe.
- There were many obstacles to helping Jews.
- Rescue was rare.

The rescue of Jews by non-Jews is part of the history of the Holocaust and it is important that we learn about rescuers and rescue.

Thank you for joining us today as we learned about "Rescue During the Holocaust." Please continue your educational journey with us. This concludes our presentation of Lesson 8.1 from *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers*TM. On behalf of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, thank you.

Unit 8 / Lesson 8.1 / Lesson Quiz

Unit 8: Rescuing Jews – Means and Obstacles Lesson 8.1: Rescue During the Holocaust

Circle the correct answers below.

- 1. What is not an example of help provided to Jews during the Holocaust?
 - a. Providing food to a Jewish person
 - b. Hiding a child in a home
 - c. Not pointing out a Jewish neighbor
 - d. Helping someone sew their yellow star on their coat
- 2. What is meant by "choiceless choices?"
 - a. There were no good options
 - b. You made the correct choice
 - c. There were only good options
 - d. You made the one wrong choice
- 3. Which of the following would be most helpful for a Jewish person trying to "pass" as a non-Jew?
 - a. Being male
 - b. Having blond hair and blue eyes
 - c. Speaking only Yiddish
 - d. Having no financial resources
- 4. What was a common punishment in Western Europe for saving or helping Jews?
 - a. The person would be killed
 - b. The entire family would be killed
 - c. The person might be sent to a concentration camp
 - d. The entire town or village would be punished
- 5. Why do rescuers offer a legacy of hope?
 - a. There were many rescuers
 - b. It makes it acceptable to be a bystander
 - c. It takes a person with special characteristics to be a rescuer
 - d. Because they existed

Unit 8 / Lesson 8.1 / Lesson Quiz

Unit 8: Rescuing Jews – Means and Obstacles Lesson 8.1: Rescue During the Holocaust

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/1oL7fKEhBSJ9Zzq1aGkwtTM585sGGr0_Qtv68cdPrMd4/copy

Unit 8 / Lesson 8.1 / Image Sources

Unit 8: Rescuing Jews – Means and Obstacles Lesson 8.1: Rescue During the Holocaust

Slide 1 - Yevgeny Khaldei via Getty Images

Slide 2 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Elizabeth Kaufmann Koenig

Slide 3 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 3A-D - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 3E - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Lena Kurtz Deutsch

Slide 4 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous – All images on Slide

Slide 5 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 6 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 7 - Bundesarchiv, Plak 003-011-019 / Grafiker(in): Witte, Hermann,

https://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/dba/en/search/?yearfrom=1935&yearto=1944&query=+Plak+ 003-011-019

Slide 8 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Norman Salsitz

Slide 9 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Slide 10 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 11 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous – All images on slide

Slide 12 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous – All images on slide

Slide 13 (Top Left) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Frihedsmuseet, Copenhagen

Slide 13 (Top Right) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Gift of the Katz Family

Slide 13 (Bottom Left) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Slide 13 (Bottom Right) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Lena Kurtz Deutsch

Slide 14 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous – All images on slide

Slide 15 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous – All images on slide

Slide 16 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 17 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 17A-I - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 18 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 19 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous – All images on slide