



Lesson Plan: Standing Up to Injustice and Cruelty

OVERVIEW

This lesson plan is designed to be used with the film, **Inheritance**, which illustrates the lasting effects of the Holocaust from the perspectives of both a victim of Nazi war crimes and the child of a perpetrator. Classrooms can use this lesson to explore the responsibility of standing up to injustice and cruelty.

Note: This film contains sensitive content related to the genocide of Europe's Jews during World War II. In addition to verbal descriptions of abuses, the complete film includes disturbing concentration camp images, footage of the execution of a war criminal by hanging, and clips from the movie *Schindler's List* that contain profanity and show the shooting of a Jewish woman. Please preview before using the film in its entirety in the classroom. The clips for this lesson plan, however, are less graphic and contain primarily verbal descriptions of cruelty.

P.O.V. documentaries can be recorded off the air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE!

Please visit our Film Library at http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_filmlibrary.php to find other films suitable for classroom use or to make this film a part of your school's permanent collection.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Write about a time when they or someone else stood up for a person or persons who were being treated unjustly.
- Discuss how the choices we make when confronted with injustice and cruelty have a lasting impact on ourselves, our families and society.
- Use viewing skills and note-taking strategies to understand and interpret a video clip.
- Contribute to a chart that illustrates the possible choices and consequences of a witness to human suffering.
- Read and interpret a passage of text on what it is like to grow up as the child of a Holocaust survivor.
- Post online their analysis of complex questions related to bystanders.

GRADE LEVELS

6–12

SUBJECTS

World History, Geography, U.S. History, Civics, English

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Method (varies by school) of showing the class an online video clip
- Computers with access to the Internet
- A map that shows the location of Krakow, Poland
- Handout: [Study Guide](#) (PDF file)

ESTIMATED TIME OF COMPLETION

One 50-minute class period

SUGGESTED CLIPS

Clip 1: Commander of Camp Plaszow (length: 4:08)

The clip begins at 8:06 with the quote “My father was the commander of Plaszow concentration camp” and ends at 12:14 with the quote “Unfortunately, I was one of them.”

Clip 2: Returning to the Villa (length: 5:02)

The clip begins at 46:48 “I have been to Plaszow before, but never to the villa” and ends at 52:50 with the quote “Do you know how many thousands of people died?”

Clip 3: Death of Ruth (length: 1:43)

The clip begins at 1:01:20 with the quote “Before my mother died, she said she didn’t do enough for the Jews” and ends at 1:03:03 with the quote “Under the picture of Amon. That was all.”

BACKGROUND

In 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Initially, the Jewish population in the city of Krakow was about 56,000, but these numbers swelled to between 60,000 and 80,000 as refugees and deportees arrived from western Poland. Over time, a segregated ghetto was set up for Jews in Krakow, and eventually, all Jewish residents were either sent to the gas chambers or to forced labor camps. Before the Nazis were defeated in 1945, they had killed at least 9 million people — 6 million of which were Jews.

The Plaszow Concentration Camp near the city of Krakow was both a forced labor camp and a concentration camp during World War II. The German industrialist Oskar Schindler employed prisoners at Plaszow in his enamelware factory and acted on behalf of his workers to protect them from extermination. At its peak, Plaszow had 20,000 prisoners. Conditions were bleak, and mass killings became routine. More than 8,000 people were murdered there, mostly shot to death by Nazi soldiers. Plaszow was presided over by Amon Goeth, who was known for his extreme cruelty. (Read this brief [biography of Goeth](http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ghettos/krakow/amongoth.html) [http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ghettos/krakow/amongoth.html] for examples of the atrocities he committed.) Goeth and the Plaszow camp were featured in the 1993 Steven Spielberg film *Schindler’s List*.

Born in Vienna in 1908, Amon Goeth was a committed anti-Semite and early supporter of Hitler, having joined the Nazi cause in 1932. He later served in the SS. Goeth’s first major command centered on the removal of the remaining Jewish population of Krakow, Poland. In 1943, he became the commandant of the Plaszow Concentration Camp, where he lived in a villa with Ruth, Monika’s mother. Amid the overarching brutality of the Holocaust, Goeth was noted for wanton acts of cruelty. Survivors of Plaszow describe Goeth as particularly brutal, routinely committing needless acts of cruelty and abuse, even shooting prisoners at random from the balcony of his villa.

After the war ended, Goeth was tried in Poland and found guilty of murdering tens of thousands of people. He was executed on September 13, 1946.

When she was 11 years old, Monika Hertwig learned that her father had been executed for his role in the extermination of Jews. She didn’t fully recognize the power of that truth until

she saw her father's cruelty depicted in *Schindler's List*. To better come to terms with her parents' role in the Holocaust, she contacted Helen Jonas, who had been forced to work as a domestic in Goeth's villa at Plaszow. ***Inheritance*** tells the story of how Helen and Monika met at Plaszow, looked back on the events that took place there, and reflected on the impact the Holocaust has had on both of their lives.

Students participating in this lesson will have greater insights in their writing and in class discussions if they already have a background on World War II and the full scope of the Holocaust. This prior knowledge isn't required, however.

ACTIVITY

1. Before the lesson, create a class blog that students can use to respond online to questions later in this activity. At one of the free blog sites, like Blogger.com, setting up a blog takes only a few minutes. Easy instructions are provided at the site to guide you through the process. **Note:** You can limit the accessibility by listing the email addresses of those allowed to see it. Alternatively, you can make your blog accessible to the public, but make sure students use first names only and don't provide any personal details that would make them easy to identify.
2. For a warm-up activity, ask students to write about the following topic (allot 5 minutes for this step of the activity): Describe a time when you or someone else stood up for a person or persons who were being treated unjustly. If students aren't able to draw from their personal experiences, they can cite an example from their studies of history or from current events.
3. Have students share their writing with a partner, then ask a few volunteers to talk with the class about what they've written.
4. Ask students to consider the people who stood up for others in these examples. What personal characteristics did their actions demonstrate (e.g., courage, compassion)? What would have happened in each situation if the person hadn't done anything? Then ask students to think honestly for a moment about what they might have done in the same situation.
5. Explain that the choices we make when confronted with injustice and cruelty have a lasting impact on ourselves, our families and society. Tell the class that you are going to use an example from the Holocaust to illustrate this point. Depending on the needs of your class, provide information from the "Background" section to set up the video clips from the film. Be sure to also point out the location of Krakow, Poland, on a map. Then distribute the Study Guide and show the clips back to back. Students should take notes in the first four sections of the Study Guide as they watch.
6. Ask students if they think bystanders, like Ruth, should be held accountable in any way for the crimes they witnessed but did not themselves commit. Have students justify their responses.
7. Helen said that Ruth once told her that if she could help Helen, she would, but she couldn't. Discuss what choices were open to Ruth. What might have happened if she would have made different choices? What would some of the consequences have been? Capture student responses in a choice/consequence chart on the board. Emphasize that people always have a choice.

8. Ask students why they think Ruth chose not to help Helen or any of the other Jews at the camp. What does Ruth's lack of action reveal about her? What impact do you think her choice had on Monika? on Helen? on Helen's daughter, Vivian? on what happened at Plaszow? Given the consequences that Ruth would face for speaking out against the cruelties she witnessed, what would students have done in her situation?

9. Have students read the feature

(http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2008/inheritance/special_survivor.html) on the P.O.V. website in which Vivian discusses her experience growing up as the child of a Holocaust survivor. They should also complete sections 5 and 6 of the Study Guide. Discuss the impact the Holocaust had on Vivian's life even though she didn't experience it firsthand. Ask students to summarize why it is important for people to stand up to the perpetrators of injustice and cruelty.

10. For homework, have students post thoughtful comments to your class blog in reaction to the discussion starter(s) you post there. In addition to sharing their own ideas, encourage students to agree or disagree with the points that classmates have made on the blog. Some possible discussion starters to post include:

- Name a modern-day example of cruelty in which some people choose not to get involved (e.g., social cruelty at school, neighborhood crime, human rights abuses around the world). What do you think can and should be done in these situations?
- Consider this quote by Cynthia Ozick: "Indifference is not so much a gesture of looking away — of choosing to be passive — as it is an active disinclination to feel. Indifference shuts down the humane, and does it deliberately, with all the strength deliberateness demands. Indifference is as determined — and as forcefully muscular — as any blow." In other words, Ozick believes that bystanders choose their role and are not simply unaware. Do you agree or disagree with her position? Justify your response.
- What role does remembering past events like the Holocaust play in preventing future atrocities?
- Should students care about the violation of basic human rights in distant places? Why or why not?
- Is it your civic responsibility to acknowledge the suffering of others and do whatever you can to stop that suffering? Why or why not?

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS

Students can be assessed on:

- Completion of the warm-up activity and study guide.
- Participation in class discussions.
- Posting thoughtful comments on the class blog that refer to the writings of classmates.

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

- Debate whether Amon Goeth should have received the death penalty as a punishment for his crimes. Afterward, point out that the first international war crimes tribunals, created in the aftermath of World War II, made widespread use of capital punishment, but that such tribunals in modern times prohibit it. Wrap up the activity by having students write a position paper explaining their ideas on this issue.
- Provide deeper context for this lesson by examining the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish people in Poland both before and during World War II. The P.O.V. lesson plan “[Hiding and Seeking: Communities of Caring](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/hidingandseeking/for_02.html)” (http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/hidingandseeking/for_02.html) explores these relationships and compares them with groups of people for whom students feel most and least responsible.
- Have each student create a *tsava*, an ethical will, that describes the most important life lessons he or she would want to pass on to his or her children. Guidance for this activity is provided in the P.O.V. lesson plan “[Hiding and Seeking: Reconciling with the Past](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/hidingandseeking/for_04.html)” (http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/hidingandseeking/for_04.html). Compare and contrast student *tsavas* with the life lessons that Vivian (daughter of Helen Jonas) and Monika (daughter of Amon Goeth) gleaned from their parents.
- Study how hate and genocide have affected lives in more recent times. The film *New Year Baby* (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newyearbaby/>) addresses the Cambodian genocide carried out by the Khmer Rouge, and *Not in Our Town* (<http://www.pbs.org/niot/>) explains how residents of Billings, Montana, responded when hate groups targeted members of the community. Both films have discussion guides that can be used to explore key themes in the classroom.
- Examine “Eight Stages of Genocide” (<http://www.genocidewatch.org/aboutgenocide/8stagesofgenocide.html>), a report by Gregory H. Stanton, president of Genocide Watch. Divide the class into small groups and assign them a case of genocide (e.g., the Holocaust, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur) to research and analyze, using the eight stages as a framework. Did each of these stages exist in these examples? How can understanding these stages prevent future genocides?

RESOURCES

Amon Goeth

http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206310.pdf

Yad Vashem provides a brief biography of Goeth and his role in the Holocaust. You can also visit the Holocaust Research Project’s website to access a Plaszow photo gallery with images of the camp, Jews at Plaszow, Amon Goeth, Ruth, Oskar Schindler and several maps:

<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/othercamps/galleries/plaszowperiod/index1.html>

Facing History and Ourselves

<http://www.facinghistory.org/>

This organization is dedicated to helping educators connect history to moral choices and the responsibility to act in the face of human rights violations. Among their many resources is the acclaimed book *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*.

Schindler's List Study Guide

<http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/publications/schindlers-list>

This free companion guide to Steven Spielberg's landmark film provides a rich compilation of readings for students that address both the history and the moral issues associated with the Holocaust.

Timeline for Krakow and Plaszow, 1939–1946

http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/media_cm.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005301&MediaId=1588

This timeline details events from the German occupation of Krakow to the trial and execution of Amon Goeth.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org>

The website for this museum has an in-depth collection of Holocaust information, survivor stories and media, including a photo gallery of Plaszow images (http://www.ushmm.org/uia-cgi/uia_query/photos?hr=null&query=kw111066). It also contains educator materials, including 10 must-read guidelines for teaching the Holocaust in a thought-provoking and responsible way (<http://www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/guideline/>).

The Virtual Jewish History Tour: Poland

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Poland.html>

The Jewish Virtual Library provides a history of Jews in Poland from the Middle Ages to the present day.

World War II on PBS

<http://www.pbs.org/wwii/holocaust.html>

This page aggregates a wealth of PBS resources on Nazis and the Holocaust, including sections on Auschwitz and Dachau and a number of educator guides.

STANDARDS

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K–12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

Civics

Standard 22: Understands how the world is organized politically into nation-states, how nation-states interact with one another and issues surrounding U.S. foreign policy.

Standard 27: Understands how certain character traits enhance citizens' ability to fulfill personal and civic responsibilities.

Geography

Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

Historical Understanding

Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective.

Language Arts

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

U.S. History

Standard 25: Understands the causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs.

World History

Standard 41: Understands the causes and global consequences of World War II.

Standard 44: Understands the search for community, stability and peace in an interdependent world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Background Sources

"Goeth, Amon Leopold," Yad Vashem, http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206310.pdf;
Inheritance by James Moll; "Plaszow," Holocaust Encyclopedia, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, www.ushmm.org/.