



LAST STOP BEFORE THE LAST STOP

INTELLECTUAL RESISTANCE

In this lesson students will define intellectual resistance and discern its importance at Terezín by studying and discussing different artifacts. Students will wrap up the lesson by pondering the relevance of intellectual resistance and its efficacy.



Essential Questions:

- What is intellectual resistance?
- How are reading and writing a form of intellectual resistance?
- Is intellectual resistance effective in helping someone both escape reality and face it?
- What role did intellectual resistance play in Terezín?
- How did it work as a shield against Nazism?
- What does intellectual resistance achieve, if anything?
- Can intellectual resistance effectuate change?

Subjects:

Social Studies
ELA

Grades:

9-12

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Lesson Objectives:

- Intellectual resistance helped the prisoners maintain their dignity and a piece of themselves.
- Intellectual resistance enabled prisoners to escape reality at the same time that they were facing it on a daily basis.
- The act of reading and/or writing was a form of rebellion in that it defied the Nazi mission for complete control and dehumanization of their captives.

EXTERNAL LINKS 

- [Leo Baeck Institute](#)
- [The Defiant Requiem Foundation - Education](#)
- Yad Vashem [Artists of Terezin: Guidelines for Educators](#)
- USHMM [Path to Nazi Genocide](#)
- USHMM [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#)
- Echoes and Reflections [Timeline of the Holocaust](#)
- Facing History and Ourselves [Preparing Students for Difficult Conversations](#)

Cover image:
Fleischmann, Karel.
Cultural Lecture. 1943.
coloured pen and India ink
Jewish Museum in Prague

CONTEXT FOR THIS LESSON

Terezín was opened in 1941 and called Theresienstadt by the Nazi occupiers, who had first entered the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia in Summer 1938. They then occupied the region of Bohemia & Moravia in March 1939. As the occupation progressed into a wartime environment, they sought to emulate the ghettos being created in Eastern Europe, in Czechoslovakia with a specific goal of creating a “show” ghetto/camp that could be leveraged for propaganda purposes if and when that was needed.

Individuals deported to Terezín were typically Western European Jews from affluent backgrounds. Many families deported to Terezín included children. Of the estimated 15,000 children who passed through the gates of Terezin, only approximately 200 survived. The vast majority either died in Terezín or were deported to the death camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau or Treblinka.

According to Miriam Intrator, “prisoners in ghettos and concentration camps took advantage of everything at their disposal to avert and resist Nazi attempts to humiliate and dehumanize them. Having continued access to books, no matter how limited or dangerous, constituted an extremely powerful exercise in freedom. Maintaining the desire to pursue the reading of particular books as well as the ability to conscientiously select what to read, even while subject to the worst of human cruelty, provides proof of the resilience of the human mind and the perseverance of the human spirit. Using reading as an avenue of escape, Jews imprisoned and dying at the hands of the Nazis, uncovered suppressed feelings of peace, strength and hope”

Miriam Intrator, The Theresienstadt Ghetto Central Library, Books and Reading: Intellectual Resistance and Escape During the Holocaust, *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, Volume 50, Issue 1, January 2005.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Laptop, tablet, or other device that can be used to access materials digitally
- Copy of poem by Hanuš Hachenburg with analysis questions
- Copy of *The Visit* by Charlotte Buresova with analysis questions
- Copy of poem from Elsa Oestreicher's diary with analysis questions
- Copy of excerpt from pages 18-19 in *The Theresienstadt Ghetto Central Library, Books and Reading: Intellectual Resistance and Escape during the Holocaust*, Miriam Intrator with analysis questions
- Access to [digital issues of Vedem](#) with analysis questions
- Copies of Final Analysis Response Sheet

LESSON SEQUENCE

WARM-UP

Give half the class the word *intellectual* to define. Give the other half *resistance*. Have them report back to the whole group. Then, have them join the words together and decide on a definition for intellectual resistance.

Make sure that students understand that intellectual resistance comes in several forms: reading, writing, painting, sculpting, acting, music, etc.

PARTNER WORK

Share the following quote with students:

“The Second World War and the Nazi formation of Jewish ghettos and concentration camps throughout Eastern and Central Europe created an unprecedented situation of dehumanization, “unfreedom” and death, which resulted in the suffering populations desperately seeking means of not only physical, but also mental, escape and resistance. Considering the misery, fear, and horror that existed in the ghettos and concentration camps, it is remarkable that there were some Jews doing everything in their power to continue reading and sharing books, knowledge, and ideas ... acquiring and retaining books was extremely problematic ... To smuggle items is meant to risk one’s life, and yet Jews, by doing so, not only sought sustenance for their bodies, but also nourishment for their minds, hearts and souls.”

Miriam Intrator, *The Theresienstadt Ghetto Central Library, Books and Reading: Intellectual Resistance and Escape During the Holocaust*, *The Leo*

Baeck Institute Year Book, Volume 50, Issue 1, January 2005, Page 3.

Allow students 10 minutes to discuss the quote and answer the questions:

1. To what form of intellectual resistance is this excerpt referring?
2. How do you think reading and writing could help alleviate a situation of “dehumanization, ‘unfreedom’ and death”?

Debrief students' responses as a whole class.

JIGSAW ACTIVITY - STAGE 1

Establish that we will be discussing reading and writing as forms of intellectual resistance.

Split students up into five groups.

Distribute an artifact to each of the “expert” groups and give them time to evaluate the materials. Each group of artifacts has an accompanying handout to help students identify the type of information they are supposed to present to their peers.

***Note for teachers** - although *Vedem* is not in English, students should have the opportunity to view the original digital version and analyze the physical structure of the magazine, artwork incorporated into the magazine and experience the length and density of submissions.

JIGSAW ACTIVITY - STAGE 2

Once students have finished analyzing their artifacts in their small groups, students will jigsaw and present their artifacts to their classmates. Students will share their analysis of their assigned artifact.

The other students should listen carefully, take notes, and ask clarifying questions.

FINAL REFLECTION

While in their new groups, students will answer the final questions.

- How are reading and writing, which are mostly private endeavors, a form of resistance?
- How effective do you think this type of resistance is in effectuating any change?

KEY TERMS / VOCABULARY**DEHUMANIZATION**

The process of depriving a person or group of positive human qualities, personality, or dignity

INTELLECTUAL

Relating to the capacity for rational or intelligent thought especially when highly developed; a person who has understood something, and ideally will share his or her insight with others, serving as a moral authority to them

INTELLECTUAL RESISTANCE

Resistance through culture. A form of nonconformism. It is not open dissent, but a discreet stance. A well educated person for whom engagement with ideas is an important part of life; likewise, "resistance" designates a stand against a political movement as a matter of principle and practice which is likely to put the welfare and interests of an individual at risk

RESISTANCE

The power to exert oneself so as to counteract or defeat/ to withstand the force or effect of

TEREZÍN

A fortress town 30 miles north of Prague; This "camp-ghetto" existed for three and a half years, between November 24, 1941 and May 9, 1945. It was first used as a ghetto for Jews of Central and Western Europe, but its functions evolved into that of a concentration/transit camp.

THERESIENSTADT

German name for Terezín (see above).

UNFREEDOM

Lacking freedom, enslavement, subjugation, imprisonment, captivity. Ivan Klima, Theresienstadt survivor, uses the term to describe a time of being "bombarded by lies, when it seemed that everything real, everything that aimed higher than man, did not in fact exist and was condemned to nothingness and forgetting".

ARTIFACT 1 "FIVE" - HANUŠ HACHENBURG

Hanuš Hachenburg was thirteen or fourteen when he wrote the poem "Five". He compares books to Terezín prisoners, both become abandoned as a result of terrible circumstances. Here he is responding to the idea that books are nothing but empty words on a page unless someone is reading them and thus infusing them with meaning. The reader gives life to the book just as the book can in turn affirm life in its reader. The two need each other in order to survive. Hanuš died in Auschwitz at the age of fourteen.

"Five"

By Hanuš Hachenburg

This morning at seven, so bright and so early
Five novels lay there, sewn up in a sack
Sewn up in a sack, like all of our lives,
They lay there, so silent, so silent all five.
Five books that flung back the curtain of silence,
Calling for freedom, and not for the world,
They're somebody's novels, someone who loves them...
They called out, they cried, they shed tears, and they pleaded
That they hadn't been finished, the pitiful five.
They declared to the world that the state trades in bodies
Then slowly they vanished and went out of sight.
They kept their eyes open, they looked for the world
But nothing they found. They were silent all five.

1. What is the writer comparing the books to?
2. What is he saying about books? What is their mission? Why are the books silent?
3. How is this poem an example of intellectual resistance?

ARTIFACT 2 *THE VISIT*

In 1942, Charlotte Burešová was transported to the Terezín ghetto. Under orders, she created greeting cards and later worked in the artists' workshop. After liberation, Burešová returned to Prague and continued painting.



Charlotte Buresova (1904–1983), *The Visit*, 1942–1945. India ink, wash, gouache and pencil on paper.

1. Describe what you see in this drawing. This includes people, the setting, actions, etc.
2. How does this drawing make you feel?
3. What form of intellectual resistance does this drawing depict?

ARTIFACT 3

THERESIENSTADT

Elsa Oestreicher was deported to Terezín on November 4, 1942. In Terezín, Oestreicher worked as a cook, a cooking instructor and as head of the soup-kitchen. The poem below is an excerpt from her diary on June 25, 1945.

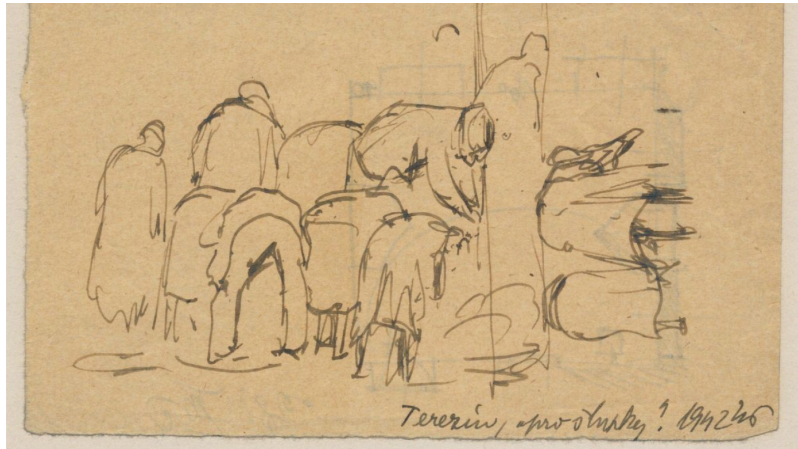
It's morning. Time to wake up. Quarrels and arguments.
 No joy, no laughter; resentment and jealousy.
 Line up for breakfast. Colorless, tasteless coffee.
 Theresienstadt!
 Off to work! What a relief,
 Since it stops me from thinking and helps pass the time.
 It really has no meaning for us.
 Theresienstadt!
 Twelve o'clock. Lunchtime. Tasteless and meager.
 And, as usual, the siren announces another air raid.
 Save your bread, even though you are still hungry.
 Theresienstadt!
 In the afternoon, back to the grindstone.
 Work in the morning was so much easier.
 When evening finally comes, you're tired, completely spent.
 Theresienstadt!

And you crawl into bed, your heart heavy, all alone.
 Your bed. A substitute for the home you once had.
 Theresienstadt!
 And you weep and you sigh, as you pour out your lot,
 You think about the children, your house, the place you called home.
 And you feel sorry for yourself for all you have lost.
 Theresienstadt!
 And you pray to G'd and ask him to turn your suffering
 Back to happy times and hopes that he pities all His children
 And leads them out of –
 Theresienstadt!
 Eyes full of tears! Suffering without end! It goes on forever!
 Theresienstadt!

1. What does this poem describe?
2. What is the tone of this poem?
3. How is this poem a form of intellectual resistance?

ARTIFACT 4 **EXCERPT**

We had to bring the old men food, read to them—from novels and religious books; and all these old people were so touched by this that they wept, and very often it happened that in the midst of this reading these sick and old people would die—the boy would sit and read and the old man would die.” Hannah Steiner



Excerpt from:

Miriam Intrator, The Theresienstadt Ghetto Central Library, Books and Reading: Intellectual Resistance and Escape During the Holocaust, *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, Volume 50, Issue 1, January 2005, Pages 18-19.

Drawing: Troller, Norbert. *Terezin : [Starving People]*. (1942). Print.

1. What is the context of this quote?
2. Who is the “we” in the quote referring to?
3. How does this quote describe a form of intellectual resistance?

ARTIFACT 5 VEDEM

Vedem was a secret magazine created by a group of 13 to 16 year old boys who were imprisoned in Terezín. The boys, aged 13 to 16, wrote poems and essays, and drew illustrations and comics. They described life in Terezín and recalled their lives in their hometowns before the war. Some poems are about events the boys witnessed—people dying, families being separated—and others are about things they experienced, fears and worries, and hopes and dreams.

Vedem managed to last from 1942 to 1944, making it the longest running underground magazine in a Nazi camp to be regularly produced by its prisoners. The first 30 issues of Vedem used a stolen typewriter until the ribbon dried up. Undeterred, the boys wrote the remaining editions by hand. A single copy was produced each Friday night and circulated among the inmates with a system of hand signals to evade the guards.

The boys used pseudonyms in the magazine—aliases that would help protect their identities if the Nazi authorities discovered the magazine. The magazine's editor was Petr Ginz. Petr was fourteen years old when he was taken from his family in Prague and sent to Terezín. Like most of the children and adults in Terezín, Petr was eventually sent to a Nazi extermination camp. He died at age 16 in Auschwitz. Of the boys who created Vedem, only one, Sidney Taussig, stayed in Terezín until the camp's liberation in 1945. Sidney buried the magazine's 800 pages in a metal container, and returned later to recover them.

You can access digitized copies of Vedem [here!](#)

1. What was *Vedem* and how was the publication of the magazine an act of defiance?
2. How were the boys who contributed to *Vedem* “rebels who refused to be victims”?
3. How was *Vedem* a form of intellectual resistance?

FINAL ANALYSIS REFLECTING ON RESISTANCE

It has been written that it is difficult to give a solid or fixed definition to the word *resistance*. The term is often synonymous with words that have a violent connotation such as *rebellion*, *revolt*, or *revolution*. As a result, we often think about any resistance to an oppressive regime as combative. Keeping this in mind, answer the questions below:

1. How are reading and writing, which are mostly private endeavors, a form of resistance?
2. How effective do you think this type of resistance is in effectuating any change?
3. Describe a modern day situation in which young people have rebelled against oppression. What methods were used to accomplish the rebellion? Describe the act of defiance and its rationale. Describe the consequences, if any.

Consider the following excerpt from *Fortress of my Youth: Memoir of a Terezín Survivor* by Jana Renee Friesova in which she tells the story of Karel Svenk, a Czech artist who was assigned to a transport east from Terezín. He could take almost nothing with him and so he chose just one book.

Under his arm he carried a large book. From time to time, when the SS guard was out of sight, he took the book in both hands and as if performing a sacrament he raised it before the eyes of those already in the wagons. The book was Dumas' Three Musketeers. It was an old edition and on the cover was a lithograph of 'three men without fear or blemish.' Three invincible men who triumphed on every occasion.

4. What message was Svenk trying to send?
5. How did this help anyone in the wagons?
6. How does this story illustrate intellectual resistance?