

Lesson Title: Do the Right Thing

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Course: Any course (including Civic Education, Holocaust Studies, etc.)

Lesson Category: Ethics, Civic Education, Holocaust

Grade Level: 6-12

Required Time: Approximately 4 days

Lesson Summary: Students will read about a Holocaust survivor and the woman who helped her to survive. They will research individuals who have been named “Righteous Among the Nations” and create a presentation for the class. Then, they will read quotes from other famous “upstanders” and reflect on the qualities of individuals who made the decision to try to do the right thing in a difficult situation.

Background Information:

1. Context for Lesson--This lesson should be taught after students have a basic understanding of and knowledge about the Holocaust.
2. Enduring Understanding--Students will learn basic information about rescuers in the Holocaust, the qualities that prompted these individuals to try to rescue Jews, and other individuals who were “upstanders” in history.
3. Resources:
 - a. Internet access
 - b. Centropa [interview](#) of Apolonia Starzec
 - c. Yad Vashem [website](#) of Righteous Among the Nations
 - d. Quotes from famous “upstanders”
 - e. Access to presentation software (iMovie, Prezi, PowerPoint, etc.)

The Lesson:

Day 1:

1. 5 minutes--Students are asked to write a short journal entry:
 - a. There are many difficult decisions in daily life that test your personal ethics--cheating on a test, lying to your parents, telling an authority figure about something your best friend has done that is inappropriate, etc.
 - b. Give an example of a time in your life when you were faced with a difficult decision and made a positive decision. Consider why you made this decision. What were your motivations?
 - c. Give an example of a time in your life when you were faced with a difficult decision and made a negative decision. Consider why you made this decision. What were your motivations?
2. 10-15 minutes--Class discussion about the students’ writing. Have students volunteer to share their decisions (positive or negative) and discuss their motivations.
3. 30 minutes--Read the excerpt from Apolonia Starzec’s interview from the Centropa website. In groups of 2, discuss Apolonia’s relationship with Irena Solska.

Another important person was Irena Solska [real name Karolina Flora Sosnowska (1875-1958): renowned Polish actress]. There was that action, a trap set up for Jews on the Aryan side, the so-called Hotel Polski [36]. It was a provocation, they took money from people, promising them safe passage to the States or elsewhere [Editor’s note: the travel documents were issued for neutral countries, chiefly in South America,

as well as Palestine]. I was already visiting Samsonowicz, receiving money that we distributed as allowance among people [the money came from the Zegota]. I remember I had no job. I had already placed my sister in a safe place. Now, to be okay with my kenkarta, I needed an address.

I met an acquaintance from Nowolipie, she asks me what's up. 'I'm looking for a place, have you heard of something?' 'I'm vacating a room in Mokotow, because I've signed up for emigration, at the Hotel Polski, you know. It costs a lot but I hope it'll work.' I don't remember her name. I don't even remember her face anymore. She gave me Irena Solska's address. 'I have a place but the sofa there has been borrowed from Irena Solska. You have to sleep on something. Here's her address - tell her I sent you and ask whether you can continue using the sofa.'

It was then that I heard about the Hotel Polski. I hurried to Ignacy Samsonowicz and I tell him, 'Tell me, what's this Hotel Polski because I have no means of providing for myself on the Aryan side, and a sister to pay for...' We paid that janitor; he needed money to get by too. And I had no prospects for a job of any kind. I tell him, 'Perhaps I could sign up for the thing too, what do you think, are there any possibilities? I have no money.' And he says, 'Listen, darling, it'll be easier to jump into the Vistula from the Poniatowskiego bridge. Don't try that, it's a dirty business.'

And so I went to Irena Solska and I found a way [to survive]. I didn't know Solska before the war. I only knew she was a renowned theater actress. An artist. I went to her, there was a cosmetics store in the front, and she lived on the first floor at the back. I say 'A lady such-and-such has sent me and can I keep the borrowed sofa because I need a place to stay?' And she starts telling me, in an utterly theatrical voice, the old dramatic school, Nina Andrycz [born 1915, Polish theater and movie actress] style, 'I receive wool here that needs to be taken to the clients...' And she trembled, it was advanced Parkinson, she was already old. 'Your job is to take the material to the clients, pick up the money, the pay is so and so, breakfast and dinner included.' I'm waiting for an answer about the sofa and she's telling me all that in that theatrical voice of hers! I ask, 'But, madam... are you making this offer to me?' 'Yes, I am.' 'Do you know who you're talking to?' 'I do.' 'But I can be stopped with the material and the money and never return, because I'm a Jew.' 'I can tell. But I trust nothing bad will happen to you, I believe in what my intuition tells me.' And it was like being on cloud nine. I had a way to earn my living, to have a place to stay, money, and even to pay for my sister. 'Nothing bad will happen to you with me.'

And I worked for her right until the [Warsaw] uprising. I carried the wool, all day long in the streetcars, riding in the 'grape clusters' [vernacular for streetcars so full that people rode outside, clinging on to the car in an image of a cluster of grapes], my kenkarta was stolen, I had trouble. The clients I delivered the wool to were wives of pre-war officers now interned in POW camps. Officers' wives, in Ochota [a Warsaw neighborhood] and in the army houses in Aleje Niepodleglosci. They had looms and weaved on them. One time I crossed the Kierbedzia Bridge, going from Praga to Warsaw, and right in front of Miodowa there was a blockade. And I had a package with wool. I was going to clients in Ochota. I ask someone if it's a roundup again. Because sometimes they were stopping the streetcars, throwing everyone out, frisking. And me with that package, it was worth a lot of money. And someone answers me, 'Don't you see? They're burning the kikes in the ghetto.' I saw flames over the ghetto... [It was the beginning of the Ghetto Uprising].

And then I had my encounter with a szmalcownik [37]. A navy-blue policeman [38]. I was unable to keep a brave face. Terrible anxiety, and what to do? I arrive in Ochota, at Narutowicza Square a navy-blue policeman gets off with me and stops me, 'Your kenkarta, please.' He had been following me, must have [found out] from my reaction to the words about 'burning the kikes in the ghetto.' I say, 'I won't go with you, I have some business to do around here.' 'Okay, I'll go with you.' And he did.

I went to two clients with him. I didn't care, I knew he wanted money, but I didn't give him anything even though I had some on me. But, on the other hand - my sister... I called in an apartment at Filtrowa, left a package... but I won't call Solska because I would compromise her. I left him, I'm coming back, he sits and waits for me in the gateway. I say, 'There's one more person I have to visit.' And he obediently follows me, my kenkarta in his hand.

Finally, when I was to go to the third of my contacts, I tell him, 'Okay, I'll go with you now, what do you want to do?' 'I'll take you to the station here.' 'Why do you want to take me to the station? Do you think I'm Jewish?' And at those words he trembled. [The underground Polish organizations] had been issuing death sentences against the szmalcowniks, and he must have thought, 'She goes from one place to another, perhaps she's told them about me?' He was quite simply afraid. He actually kissed me on the hand, apologized. And went away, I didn't even know in which direction.

All trembling, I boarded a streetcar and went to Solska, told her the whole story. It was her who told me then that the Polish underground organizations had been passing death sentences on the blackmailers. 'And he got frightened,' she told me. 'Calm now. It's good it ended like that.' And that was my encounter with the burning ghetto. Solska soothed me then, she was a wonderful person.

4. Day 1 Homework--Research an assigned individual (one of the following or choose another from the Yad Vashem database) who has been named "Righteous Among the Nations." Come to class with notes of background information about the person and how s/he saved Jews during the Holocaust.
 - a. Chiune Sugihara
 - b. Raoul Wallenberg
 - c. Oskar Schindler
 - d. Martin Niemoller
 - e. Irena Sendler

Day 2:

1. 45-60 minutes--Groups use their research to create presentations about their assigned individual.
2. Day 2 Homework--Finish presentations, if necessary.

Day 3:

1. 50-60 minutes--Groups present their information on their assigned individuals (roughly 5 minutes per presentation and 5 minutes for questions).

Day 4:

1. 15 minutes--Discuss qualifications from Yad Vashem for an individual to be named "Righteous Among the Nations."
 - a. What are the qualifications?
 - b. Do you feel these are appropriate? Why or why not?
2. 15-20 minutes--Discuss the motivations (based on research) that led individuals to rescue Jews during the Holocaust.
3. 45-60 minutes--Read and discuss quotes from other "upstanders" about activism, choosing the right path in the face of difficulty, etc. (including Martin Luther King, Jr., Malala, Yitzhak Rabin, Willy Brandt, etc.).

Possible Extensions:

1. Have students create and display an art project including their selected quote from an "upstander."
2. Have students participate in a community service project to help the needy, elderly, etc., in their community.