



**Centropa Lesson**  
**Righteous Remembrances**  
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**2015 Wolf Prize Winner**

**Overview Information:**

- School: US public high school
- Course: Holocaust Studies, Civics
- Lesson Category: Holocaust, Civics
- Grade Level: 10-12 grade
- Total Time: 20-30 minutes during one class period each week

**Author Info:** Rachel Shepherd teaches AP US History, AP Human Geography, American History, Civics, and Holocaust Studies, mostly in grades 11-12 at a very rural high school in the mountains of North Carolina. She discovered Centropa while attending a teacher workshop on the Holocaust and has attended two professional development offerings by Centropa since.

**Lesson Summary:** This lesson stresses the importance of individual responsibility and accountability in the face of difficult choices. Students will learn about individuals during the Holocaust who, in the face of incredible uncertainty and personal risk, chose to do the right thing and protect those who were being persecuted. Students then have the opportunity for real-world application of their knowledge by recognizing individuals in their community who are making an effort to improve the lives of those around them. This lesson utilizes the Centropa film "Survival in Sarajevo," as well as biography information from Yad Vashem and other YouTube videos.

**Background Information**

**Context for Lesson:** While a course in Holocaust Studies involves the in-depth study of the event and its repercussions, it also provides an opportunity for students to learn about the consequences of inaction in the face of adversity and to become more aware of their own responsibility to speak for those who are oppressed. I was very concerned that my Holocaust Studies course might become overwhelming for students who were faced with the depravity and inhumanity in one of history's darkest periods, and I wanted to be very conscious of highlighting those individuals who, often at potentially great personal cost, risked everything to do what was right.

**Enduring Understanding:** Every individual must make the decision to do the right thing when confronted with injustice. Even in the face of hardship, it is a personal, conscious decision to take a stand for goodness and justice.

**Goals/Objectives:**

1. Students will learn about individuals who have been named Righteous Among the Nations and celebrate their actions.
2. Students will find examples of individuals in their daily lives who are promoting kindness for others and recognize it anonymously.

**Centropa Resources:**

*Survival in Sarajevo* —

[http://www.centropa.org/upload/centropasarajevo/Centropa.org\\_Sarajevo/Multimedia\\_film.html](http://www.centropa.org/upload/centropasarajevo/Centropa.org_Sarajevo/Multimedia_film.html)

**Other Resources:**

\*List of Righteous Among the Nations from Yad Vashem--  
<http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/search.html?language=en>

\*Blank cards

\*Various YouTube (or other source) videos that highlight actions of Righteous Among the Nations

**The Lesson:**

1. **Motivating the Students:** As part of an introductory project for the course, students create an autobiographical presentation to introduce themselves, ending with their own experiences with persecution (including experiences as a persecutor and a victim, if they are willing to share these). As a group, students discuss examples in their own lives when they have witnessed persecution (i.e. bullying, etc.).
2. **Lesson Activities:**
  - a. **5 minutes**--After group discussion above, the teacher will explain the "Righteous Remembrances" assignment. Ideally, this assignment will be given on Monday and submitted by students and discussed on Friday of the same week. The first week's assigned Righteous Remembrance will be Zeyneba Hardaga. The link to her bio from YadVashem:  
<http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4038777>
  - b. **The Assignment:**
    - For homework, students will read the bio of one individual who has been named Righteous Among the Nations.
    - Students will write a reflective journal entry, reacting to the individual's actions and offering their own thoughts.
    - Students will also look for individuals in their school or community who are helping others, "paying it forward," etc. Students will write a short description of the individual's actions and their effect on the school or community as a whole.

- c. **30 minutes**--At the beginning of Friday's class, students will share their reactions to the weekly Righteous Remembrance and, if they choose, their local recognition. Students will be given a blank card to write a short, anonymous "Thank You" to this individual. This encourages students to see the positive in their school or community and offers words of encouragement to those who are engaging in these actions.
  - d. **20 minutes**--At the end of the first week's discussion of Righteous Remembrances, students will view the film "Survival in Sarajevo" and discuss how Milton Wolf and the people of La Benevolecija reflected the kind of selfless kindness that they have witnessed from Zeyneba Hardaga's story and the individuals they highlighted during the week.
  - e. **20 minutes**--To conclude this activity (as a semester-long culmination), students will write a reflection on the impact the activity has had on their own life and actions and any reactions they have seen from individuals who received the anonymous cards.
3. **Other Recognitions:** A list of other individuals who could be used for subsequent weeks include, among others:
  - Raoul Wallenberg
  - Varian Fry
  - Oskar Schindler
  - Nicholas Winton
  - Irena Sendler
  - Jan Karski
  - The village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon
  - Chiune Sugihara
  - Carl Lutz
4. **Reflection:** This has been one of the most rewarding activities in my Holocaust Studies course. My students have remarked that they started to actively seek out individuals in their school or community who were helping others, no matter how large or small the gesture. They have also remarked that it has made them more conscious of their own actions and the impact that a single decision can have. Many times during discussion of some of the more horrific aspects of the Holocaust, my students have remarked, "I wish there had been more people like \_\_\_\_." I wanted them to see that there were individuals, no matter how few, during the Holocaust who helped others despite the risks and that they can do the same thing for others around them.

The next time I teach this course, I would like for students to create their own cards (rather than purchasing pre-made). I feel that this will give students more ownership of this particular aspect of the lesson and make it more meaningful. I would also like to expand this activity to include students in my Civics course, as I believe this type of activity speaks to civic involvement and awareness and, with greater participation, can foster a much more positive school-wide atmosphere.

