

The Light of Days* - Extension Lesson*Essential Questions:**

- What factors influence decision-making in the face of injustice?
- What lessons can we learn from resisters during the Holocaust?
- How do the choices of upstanders, bystanders, and perpetrators shape historical events?
- Why is it important to critically examine these roles in understanding the Holocaust and its legacy?

Subjects

ELA
Social Studies

Grades

5-8

Lesson Objectives:

- Analyze themes of resistance, bravery, and resilience in *The Light of Days*.
- Analyze the complexities of historical memory and accountability.
- Debate the ethical implications of how history is remembered and legislated.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT FOR THIS LESSON

In 2018 Poland's Senate approved a controversial bill making it illegal to accuse the Polish nation or state of complicity in the Nazi Holocaust. According to the bill, "whoever accuses, publicly and against the facts, the Polish nation, or the Polish state, of being responsible or complicit in the Nazi crimes committed by the Third German Reich ... shall be subject to a fine or a penalty of imprisonment of up to three years". In the epilogue of *The Light of Days*, Judy Batalion discusses this law and its implications.

Phrases such as "Polish death camps", which suggest the Polish state in some way shared responsibility for camps such as Auschwitz, have long been denounced by the Polish government who correctly point out that the camps were built and operated by Nazi Germany after it invaded Poland in 1939. The main point of contention is whether the bill outlaws references to acts of *individual* complicity by Poles with the Nazis - something historians assert there is clear evidence of.

EXTERNAL LINKS

- USHMM [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#)
- Echoes and Reflections [Timeline of the Holocaust](#)

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. *The Light of Days Young Readers' Edition* by Judy Batalion - 2021

LESSON SEQUENCE

WARM UP

Discuss the terms *upstander*, *bystander*, and *perpetrator* in the context of the Holocaust:

- Upstander: Someone who actively helps victims or resists oppression.
- Bystander: Someone who witnesses events but does not take action.
- Perpetrator: Someone who actively participates in harm or persecution.

Ask students to come up with examples of each from *The Light of Days*. Make sure to explain to students that many individuals will not fit perfectly into one category - people may fit into different roles at different times.

SMALL GROUP WORK

Break students into small groups and assign each a set of passages from *Light of Days* where Polish citizens are interacting with Jewish resistance fighters.

Have students analyze the actions taken by the Polish citizens in these passages and decide whether they were acting as upstanders, bystanders, or perpetrators.

Have each group create a chart categorizing their assigned figures and justifying their choices with textual evidence.

WHOLE CLASS DISCUSSION

- Were there more upstanders or bystanders in the book?
- What motivated Polish citizens to act (or not act)?
- How does the book challenge or confirm what you previously knew about Polish involvement during the Holocaust?

MINI LESSON

Explain that in 2018, Poland passed a law criminalizing statements that attribute Holocaust crimes to the Polish nation. The law sparked controversy because many historians argue that while Poland was occupied by the Nazis, some Polish citizens collaborated in the persecution of Jews. This law, and the implications of it, are discussed in the epilogue.

Provide students with excerpts from the text of the 2018 law (simplified for comprehension) and news articles discussing the implications of the law.

- Why do you think the Polish government passed this law?
- How does the law affect historical scholarship and education?
- Does recognizing complicity take away from the suffering Poland endured under Nazi occupation?
- How does this law compare to other cases where governments try to control historical narratives?
- Should governments be able to criminalize discussions about history?

ASSESSMENT

Having looked at the roles Polish citizens took in *The Light of Days*, do you think the 2018 law is justified? Support your argument with evidence from the book, historical sources, and ethical reasoning.
