

Teens Against Hitler

The inspiring story of a young partisan during the Holocaust

Preview: In 1940, 19-year-old Ben Kamm escaped the Warsaw ghetto and joined a group of partisans in their fight against the Nazis. His story, both tragic and inspiring, is sure to move your students.

Learning Objective: to summarize Ben Kamm's experience during the Holocaust; to draw and support conclusions about why he should be remembered

Key Skills: author's craft, inference, key ideas and details, text features, central ideas



Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1 Preparing to Read

Preview vocabulary

(5 minutes, activity sheets online)

Project or distribute our **Vocabulary Words and Definitions** for students to refer to as they read.

Highlighted words: *annihilation, bigotry, deplorable, Holocaust, persecuted, sabotaged, scapegoat, vandalized.*

2 Reading the Article

(45 minutes, activity sheets online)

- Read aloud the “As You Read” box on page 6.
- Read the article once as a class. Skip, for now, the diary excerpt on page 9.
- Discuss the following questions as a class.

Close-Reading Questions

(10 minutes, activity sheets online)

▶ **According to the article, how was Hitler able to gain so much support for his hateful ideas and beliefs?** (key ideas and details) *According to the article,*

Hitler took advantage of the humiliation, fatigue, and bitterness that Germans felt after being defeated in World War I. He told Germans that they were superior to everyone else—a message they were no doubt eager to hear. Hitler also took advantage of the anti-Semitism that had long existed in Europe and offered the Jews as a scapegoat for all of Germany's problems.

▶ **Empathy is the feeling that you understand and share another person's experiences and emotions.**

How does Lauren Tarshis create empathy for Ben Kamm? (author's craft) *Tarshis begins the article, “You probably know a kid like Ben Kamm . . .” She then describes his personality and appearance, noting that his clothes are “rumpled from wrestling with his little brothers.” This approach helps the reader identify with Ben and feel as if he is a friend. Later, Tarshis creates empathy by describing Ben's emotions: She relates his “fear and resentment” as he is marched through the streets of Warsaw and explains that “for the rest of his life, Ben would break down in tears when he recalled the moment he left to rejoin the partisans.”*

▶ Tarshis writes that stories about the partisans offered a “glint of hope” to boys like Ben in the Warsaw ghetto. Why would stories about the partisans give such boys hope? (inference)

Hearing about the partisans would have made those in the ghetto realize that the Nazis' power was not as absolute as it seemed. The partisans had the ability to interfere with Nazi operations, and they also showed that it was possible to survive or, if not, to go down fighting.

- As a class, read the diary entry on page 9 and respond to the following.

▶ Answer the question on page 9: What does the journal entry help you understand about the partisans' experience? (text features; central ideas) *The journal entry helps you understand how exhausting, dangerous, and frightening it was to be a partisan. The writer describes having to be on the move to avoid a German assault; he describes partisans trekking through the forest with all of their belongings in the middle of a rainy, windy night, wondering if they would die as so many others had.*

- Have students discuss the following in groups.

Critical-Thinking Questions

(5 minutes, activity sheet online)

▶ What risks did Ben Kamm take in joining the partisans? Why do you think he decided to take those risks? Support your ideas with details from the text. *Though staying in the ghetto was by no means safe, Ben put himself in immediate danger by joining the partisans. He risked being caught and killed by Nazis or Polish police officers, or turned in by a Polish citizen. He also risked his safety by participating in dangerous missions, such as blowing up German supply trains. And, Ben risked being separated from his family. Maybe Ben decided to take these risks because in the ghetto, there was, as Tarshis writes, nothing for him to do but wait for death. Although being a partisan was dangerous, it gave him an opportunity to do something, to fight back and act on some of the rage he felt.*

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Why is it important to learn about the Holocaust?
.....

How can we develop tolerance?
.....

Why is it important to speak up?

▶ On page 10, Tarshis describes Kamm in 2010. She writes that his face is “shockingly free of bitterness.” How is it possible to avoid feeling bitter when something horrible has been done to you? Do you think it's important to avoid

feelings of bitterness? *Answers will vary.*

A possible response is that overcoming bitterness requires a determined effort to focus on the positive and cultivate gratitude for what you have. This effort is worth it because if you are overcome by bitterness, you rob yourself of the opportunity for joy, and you stay stuck in the past.

▶ Tarshis writes, “The Nazis and their sympathizers, [Ben] realized, did not see [the Jews] as humans. He felt like an animal—a helpless animal.” To treat someone as though he or she is not human is to *dehumanize* that person. How can stories like “Teens Against Hitler” reverse or fight dehumanization? *Answers will vary. When we read about people's lives and personalities, and when we learn about their suffering, we develop empathy for them, and it becomes impossible to think of them as just numbers or part of a group; they come alive to us, and we see them for what they are: fellow human beings who have friends and families and hopes and dreams just like we do.*

3 Skill Focus: Supporting Conclusions

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

Distribute the activity sheet **Remembering Ben Kamm** for students to complete as homework. This activity will prepare them to respond to the writing prompt on page 10.

DIG DEEPER

Students can listen to Ben Kamm speaking about the experiences described in the article in video clips created by the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation. Find a link on our website.

Differentiation

For Struggling Readers

Write a paragraph describing Ben Kamm. What kind of person was he? Support your ideas with details from the text.

For Advanced Readers

A statue is being put up to honor Ben Kamm. Write a speech to be read when the statue is unveiled to the public. Explain who Kamm was and why we should remember him, as well as the role the partisans played during the war. Support your ideas with details from “Teens Against Hitler” and one additional source.

Complexity Factors

See how these texts will challenge your students.

Purpose: “Teens Against Hitler” provides information about the Holocaust by describing one young man’s experience in Poland during World War II.

Structure: The text includes narrative and informational passages, as well as shifts in tense and point of view, and features a diary excerpt. Readers must recognize the connection between the texts.

Language ConventionalitY and Clarity:

- **Vocabulary:** challenging domain-specific words (e.g., *bigotry*, *annihilation*, *persecuted*)
- **Figurative language:** similes, metaphors, rhetorical questions

Knowledge Demands: Familiarity with key concepts (World War I, the Soviet army, gas chambers) will be helpful.

Lexile: 1000L

Literature Connections

Other texts about young people and the Holocaust:

- *Friedrich* by Hans Peter Richter (novel)
- *Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler’s Shadow* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti (nonfiction)
- *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children’s Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp 1942–1944* by Hana Volavkova (primary documents)

ONLINE RESOURCES

AUDIO: Hear the article read aloud.

ACTIVITIES TO PRINT OR PROJECT:

- Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions*
- Vocabulary*
- Remembering Ben Kamm*
- Read, Think, Explain: Identifying Nonfiction Elements (two levels)
- Quiz (two levels)
- Guided Research Task
- Contest Entry Form
- Core Skill: Summarizing (two levels)
- Core Skill: Text Features

*Supports the lesson plan

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