

## MUSIC AND ART: RESISTING OPPRESSION

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### **Resisting Oppression: The Arts and Creativity in Terezín**

In this module, students will consider the story of conductor Rafael Schächter and his chorus in the context of other musical, artistic, theatrical and intellectual efforts in the Terezín ghetto. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to the material, students will learn about a variety of artists working in different media and consider the significance and meaning of their work in that unique context.



PEDRO SEIDEMANN  
TEREZÍN CHORUS SURVIVOR

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# Lesson Overview

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Why are we driven to create art? What purpose does it serve?
- How might its purpose change under conditions of war or oppression?
- Is creating art a meaningful form of resistance?

## OBJECTIVE

Students will develop an understanding of creative resistance by examining artistic work made under oppressive conditions in order to determine if they believe creating art is a meaningful form of resistance.

## STANDARDS ALIGNMENT: NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

[Anchor Standard #7](#): Perceive and analyze artistic work.

[Anchor Standard #8](#): Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

[Anchor Standard #11](#): Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

# Getting Started

**Module 4 (The Arts) aligns well with the following subjects/themes:**

- Visual and Performing Arts: Exemplars of forms of creative expression during or in response to social injustice, political conflict, war, or mass atrocity.
- Social Studies: Teaching resistance (spiritual or armed) during World War II and/or the Holocaust. This could also amplify the study of resistance during other wars or mass atrocities.
- English Language and Literary Arts: Reading memoirs or novels with themes of resistance to social injustice, political conflict, war, or mass atrocity.

## Pre-teaching recommendations

Since this module is designed for visual and performing arts students, we recognize that many of them may not have knowledge of Holocaust history. The module should not require extensive background in Holocaust history. We believe that basic contextual information is provided in the film *Defiant Requiem* which you will screen as part of the lesson.

If you wish to provide your students with additional pre-teaching resources about basic Holocaust history, you can use this short film and worksheet.

- [Path to Nazi Genocide](#) Film (USHMM)
- [Path to Nazi Genocide worksheet](#) and [answer key](#)

For a basic overview of the role of ghettos within the Holocaust, you can use all or part of this lesson:

- [The Ghettos](#) (Echoes and Reflections)

For resistance during the Holocaust:

- [Jewish Resistance](#) (Echoes and Reflections)

For definitions of Holocaust terms, please visit [Echoes and Reflections Audio Glossary](#)

**For a complete list of resources related to *Defiant Requiem*, please visit the [Resources](#) page.**

## Quick History Facts

- Established in November 1941, Terezín was, like all Nazi-run ghettos, a concentration point where Nazis gathered Jews, isolated them, exploited them for labor, and ultimately shipped them to killing centers in the East. \*Note that the names Terezín and Theresienstadt refer to the same ghetto and can be used interchangeably.
- It was the primary collection point for Jews of the Czech lands but also, after January 1942, housed elderly Jews from Germany and Austria. Shortly thereafter, the Nazis began sending so-called “prominent” Jews (well-known artists, scholars, politicians, and veterans of WWI) to Terezín.
- Living conditions in the ghetto were terrible: there was rampant overcrowding, filth, hunger, and epidemic disease. More than 33,000 Jews died as a result of the inhuman conditions there.
- The Nazis deported Jews from Terezín to the killing centers at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka among other destinations. More than 88,000 Jews were deported from the camp, the vast majority of whom perished. This included many thousands of children.
- Against this backdrop, Jewish artists, musicians, and intellectuals created an extraordinarily vibrant cultural life in the ghetto where they produced art, music, plays, operas, literature, and scholarship on a dizzying array of topics.

# Lesson Materials

## Gallery Walk

- [Defiant Requiem](#) on Vimeo (use password: survivingevil)
- Recommended short videos related to module topic:
  - ❖ [Pink on Ellen](#)
  - ❖ [The Banksy of Syria](#)
  - ❖ [Hula is More Than a Dance](#)
  - ❖ [Dance as Protest During Apartheid](#)
  - ❖ [Using Art to disrupt systems of oppression](#)
- [Quotes about Art](#)
- [Purpose of Art Graphic Organizer](#)
- [Gallery Walk](#)
- [Gallery Walk Guiding Questions](#)

## LESSON SEQUENCE: PART I

1. Begin by engaging students on the question of what motivates people to create art. They can choose from three options.
  - A. Write or speak about why they create art.
  - B. View one or more of the following film clips and discuss:
    - ❖ [Pink on Ellen](#) in which she describes how personal or emotional pain can be a motivator for art. (The YouTube video can be stopped at the two-minute mark.)
    - ❖ [The Banksy of Syria](#) Abu Malek al Shami, a self-taught artist, tells the story and impact of the Syrian war.
    - ❖ [Hula is More Than a Dance](#) The 'heartbeat of the Hawaiian people', hula keeps the stories of an oppressed culture alive through ancient tradition.

- ❖ [Dance as Protest During Apartheid](#) Originating in South Africa, pantsula was created as protest during a time when many forms of expression were restricted. Dancers like Star are breaking down barriers and keeping the culture and history of pantsula alive today.
  - ❖ [Using Art to disrupt systems of oppression](#) with contemporary artist and scholar, B. Stephen Carpenter II, describing how intentionally disruptive practice can produce social change.
- C. Share the [Quotes About Art](#). Ask them to respond to the one that most speaks to them.
2. Explain to students that they will be viewing a documentary film called *Defiant Requiem* which tells the story of a group of prisoners in a ghetto called Terezín during the Holocaust. The film shows how some of these prisoners used music – learning to sing Verdi’s *Requiem* – to respond to their oppressive circumstances. View [Defiant Requiem](#). (Password: survivingevil)
  3. Instruct students to use the first two parts of the [Purpose of Art graphic organizer](#) to capture information about two different Terezín prisoners and what singing the Verdi *Requiem* meant to them. After viewing the film, allow students to share the information they recorded.
  4. Ask students to answer the third and fourth questions on the [Purpose of Art graphic organizer](#) in light of what they learned from watching the film. Ask them to reflect on whether they think art serves a unique purpose when it is made under circumstances of oppression and whether their thoughts on this subject have been confirmed, challenged, or changed by watching the film *Defiant Requiem*.



## PART II

Prior to beginning this part of the lesson, determine whether students will participate in a gallery walk to explore creative life in Terezín in print form or if you will project the images digitally.

1. Have students explore art and scholarship made in Terezín using the following [Gallery Walk](#).

Ask students to choose one artifact to examine closely. Have them complete the [Gallery Walk Guiding Questions](#) for the artifact they chose.

2. Allow students to share the information recorded on their [Gallery Walk Guiding Questions](#). Once they have had the opportunity to share their responses to the final question, engage students in a discussion on one or more of the following questions:
  - What did you discover about the relationship between creating art and maintaining one's humanity? Do such acts count as a form of resistance?
  - What do you think art as a form of resistance means for the people creating it? What does it mean for audiences experiencing it?
  - Does creative resistance matter if it has no effect on the outcome or a person's fate?
  - Is creative resistance a worthwhile endeavor if it endangers people or threatens survival?

Students should provide examples and details from *Defiant Requiem* and refer to the items from the Gallery Walk as they thoughtfully respond to these questions in small or whole group discussions. You may also encourage them to make connections to other forms of art and creative resistance that they know of from history or the present day.

## ASSESSMENT

Using what they've learned from *Defiant Requiem* and other examples of creative resistance, have students respond in one or more of the following ways below. They may consider and integrate points explored throughout the lesson in developing their creative responses.

- Explore [Automatic Drawing in the style of Andre Masson](#).
- Create a poem or spoken word response.
- Write a song or choreograph a dance.
- Create a digital or mixed media artwork.
- Design a mural or collaborative exhibit for your school or community.
- Curate a playlist of songs.
- Write an essay, monologue, or piece of prose.
- Research a contemporary artist or piece of art that is representative of oppression and creative resistance.
- Develop and present a performance piece incorporating any combination of the aesthetic responses above.