



**Remember the Children** exhibit at the Museum of Tolerance which features writings of Anne Frank, Bella Blitz, Abram Cytryn and others

## RESISTING INJUSTICES THROUGH THE POWER OF WRITING

learn from the past   engage the present   shape the future

## LESSON: RESISTING INJUSTICES THROUGH THE POWER OF WRITING

### RELATED EXHIBIT: REMEMBER THE CHILDREN

#### OVERVIEW

The *Remember the Children* exhibit in the Museum of Tolerance features many unique artifacts relating to children's experiences in the Holocaust. This lesson focuses on those that involve writing. Through reading the Bella Blitz letter, a notebook by Abram Cytryn, and excerpts from the Anne Frank diary, students will see that writing, organizing, telling, and documenting are forms of resistance.



#### OBJECTIVES

- Given adolescent writings from the Holocaust, the students will be able to identify accurately the type of resistance represented by the author and explain his or her decision.
- Given four forms of resistance (writing, organizing, telling, and documenting), the student will be able to identify contemporary examples of each form of resistance.

#### ENDURING UNDERSTANDING(S)

Students will take away some of the following enduring understandings:

- Jewish people did not go like “lambs to the slaughter” during the Holocaust. Thousands resisted the Nazis with weapons and many more actively resisted by whatever means they could.
- People of all ages were a part of the Holocaust and this included many teenagers the same age as students.
- There are many forms of resistance used during the Holocaust and many are the same that are used today.
- Language, writing, organizing, telling, and documenting are forms of resistance.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S)

- What role did teenagers play during the Holocaust?
- Can academic skills like writing and/or creative skills like scrapbooking and documenting make a difference in history?

#### KEY ISSUES / CONCEPTS

- The power of words and images
- Ordinary people
- Courage
- Speaking up, taking a stand, and taking action

For additional definitions related to this lesson see Glossary of Terms, Places, and Personalities at: [www.museumoftolerance.com/assets/documents/glossary-of-terms.pdf](http://www.museumoftolerance.com/assets/documents/glossary-of-terms.pdf)

#### SUBJECT AREA / CONTENT AREA CONNECTIONS

Social Studies, U.S. History, World History, Civics, Government, Politics, Global Studies, English

## TIME/MATERIALS

- One period to do the lesson, two-or-more if the Resistance Project is done
- Copies of *The Bella Letter Handout*, the *Jewish Study Group Timeline*, the *Abram Cytryn Handout*, the *Anne Frank Handout*, and the *Resistance Handout* for each student
- Have the Malcom London TED talk and/or the Genocide in Rwanda video cued and ready to play

## RESOURCES/LINKS

- More information about the artifacts featured in this lesson can be found at the Simon Wiesenthal Center Digital Archives <https://www.wiesenthal.com/about/library-and-archives/>
- *Unlikely Heroes: A Salute to Personal Acts of Resistance Against Evil* documents unknown stories of resistance during WWII. This film is distributed to California educators in the Tools for Tolerance® for Educators programs. It is also available through the MOT Online Store [www.https://www.moriahfilms.com/](http://www.moriahfilms.com/)
- Valuable resources on teaching the Holocaust can be found in the Teacher’s Guide on the Museum of Tolerance website [www.museumoftolerance.com/teachersguide](http://www.museumoftolerance.com/teachersguide)

## PROCESS

### STEP 1: Jewish Resistance During The Holocaust

Not all Jewish people submitted to the Nazis as “sheep to the slaughter.” There are many examples of resistance to the horrors of the Holocaust. The Warsaw ghetto uprising in Poland, where surviving Jews fought against the well-trained German soldiers and held them off for a month before being defeated, is an example of **armed resistance**. Friedl Dicker Brandeis, an artist who taught children in the Terezin concentration camp, had the young Jewish children she taught draw self-portraits and put their names on their drawings as **an act of resistance to the dehumanization** of being assigned a number instead of a name in the camps. Some people used **forgery as a form of resistance** and created fake documents like passports so that Jews could escape Nazi territories. Some prisoners in the camp, like Robert Clary (who later became a famous actor and whose story is featured in *Unlikely Heroes*), used their **gifts of music and song** to combat the systematic strategies that the Nazis used to dehumanize the Jews.

## STEP 2: CONTEXTUALIZING THE ARTIFACTS OF *REMEMBER THE CHILDREN*

Explain to students that they'll be given three transcripts from the *Remember the Children* exhibit at The Museum of Tolerance. Each of these three transcripts are from teenagers the same age as they are who found themselves caught up in the war. The teacher can contextualize each of the children with the following biographical pieces.

### CONTEXTUALIZE THE BELLA LETTER

On one of the transports to the death camps, Bella Blitz, the teenaged secretary of the "Jewish Student Group" in Brussels, Belgium, wrote this 2-page letter to her friend, Henri. Before throwing it through the barred windows of the cattle car packed with Belgian Jews, Bella enclosed her photograph, dedicated to Henri, September 27, 1942. Henri's vacant house was used by the Jewish Student Group as a "safe house" and a base for communication. Miraculously, the letter reached its destination in time to warn Bella's young friends about the Nazi deportations. Bella Blitz perished in Auschwitz Concentration Camp in 1942.

Bella Blitz



### CONTEXTUALIZE THE NOTEBOOKS OF ABRAM CYTRYN

Abram Cytryn lived with his family in Łódź, Poland. Abram's father, Jakub, was a successful industrialist who owned and operated two factories. This allowed Jakub to provide his family with an affluent and privileged life. On September 8, 1939, the Germans occupied Łódź, and established a ghetto in order to isolate the Jewish residents of the city. The Cytryn family, together with the rest of the Jewish community, was forced to leave their homes and move into the sealed ghetto. Living conditions in the ghetto were unimaginable; disease was rampant due to the lack of running water and sanitation, and a shortage of food and fuel caused mass starvation and severe cold. With approximately 204,000 people the Łódź ghetto also suffered from extreme overcrowding. In 1942, Abram's father died of hunger and exhaustion leaving Abram, then 16, struggling to survive in the ghetto with his mother, Genia, and older sister, Lucie.

Abram Cytryn



### CONTEXTUALIZE THE EXCERPTS FROM THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK

Most students are going to know who Anne Frank is, but contextualizing her story and diary is as important as contextualizing the stories of Bella Blitz and Abram Cytryn. Anne Frank was a Jewish girl who had to go into hiding during the Second World War to escape the Nazis. She and seven others hid in the secret annex and, just over two years in hiding, they were betrayed and deported to concentration camps. Otto Frank, Anne's father, was the only survivor of the secret annex. After her death, Anne became famous world wide because of the diary she wrote while in hiding.

Anne Frank



### STEP 3: FORMS OF RESISTANCE

Using the Resistance Handout, go over with students the forms of resistance that align with the artifacts. Mention, of course, that there were many forms of resistance like **information gathering, sabotage, armed resistance, spiritual resistance, forgery, assisting and rescuing, compassion**, and many others. For this lesson, though, students will be focusing on these four forms of resistance as they relate to the *Remember the Children* exhibit: (1) Writing as Resistance, (2) Secret Political Organizations as Resistance, (3) Telling The World as Resistance, and (4) Documenting as Resistance.

After reading each one of the compelling documents, have students discuss in small groups which form of resistance they believe those involved were implementing and why.

### STEP 4: CONTEMPORARY RESISTANCE

Have students consider how they specifically see writing today as an act of resistance. Do they know of any underground newspapers, Blogs, or websites? What are they about? What are they resisting? Do they know of any organizations dedicated to resistance? What or who are they? Are there individuals today who are telling stories so that the world knows more about a topic that some would rather keep silent? Who are they? What are the stories about? Who is silencing people?

There are, indeed, many forms of resistance based around writing, documenting, and organizing for resistance. Students may or may not be aware of them so providing some examples helps them to see writing in another powerful way. Here are a few examples:

- Young poet Malcom London performs a stirring poem about life in high school in this marvelous TED talk. [http://www.ted.com/talks/malcolm\\_london\\_high\\_school\\_training\\_ground](http://www.ted.com/talks/malcolm_london_high_school_training_ground)
- Have students listen to oral histories recorded by The Shoah Foundation Institute regarding Genocide in Rwanda. <https://sfi.usc.edu/collections/rwandan>

**NOTE:** Be cautious that the students do not conflate and equate resistance during genocide (both the Holocaust and Rwanda) with resistance in other contemporary life experiences. There is a danger in this as it can be a way to diminish the horrors of genocide. Be explicit with students that they are not comparing any contemporary injustice to the Holocaust or other unique genocides, but are instead using strategies of resistance that have been used throughout history in vastly different situations and experiences, and applying them to contemporary issues.

### STEP 5: REFLECTION/RESISTANCE PROJECT

*“Sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressed, but rather restorers of the humanity of both.”*

- Paulo Freire, Educator

Share the Freire quote with students and ask them what it means to them. Brainstorm with students a list of issues they might address in writing, organizing, telling, and documenting. Develop an assignment around critical literacy where students write for real change.

## STEP 6: EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

The particular archive materials chosen for this lesson plan lend themselves well to speaking to students about journaling. It is well known that journaling can have a tremendous impact on students suffering from depression and other issues. Have discussions around the process of journaling with your students using the following ideas below.

People keep a diary or journal for different reasons. Here are a few of those reasons:

- A diary can help you have better connections to your goals, emotions, and values. When you write things down and ponder them, it brings clarity to your life.
- A diary can help you solve problems. The number one reason people write in a diary is so that they can figure out how to solve a problem in their lives.
- A diary gives you new insights. Since a diary is a kind of dialogue with the self it draws out insights you might miss otherwise.
- A diary is a record of your development. You can see how you've changed and grown (or not grown) over time.

Abram wanted to keep a diary because he wanted to record what was happening to him and his family during the Holocaust. Anne wanted to write in a diary because she wanted to bring out that which was buried deep inside her. Why else might someone want to record his/her life – page-by-page – in a diary? Why would you want to keep a record of your life? Use one of the following prompts below to begin writing:

- "I would want to write in a diary because..."
- "Writing down things that happen every day would be..."
- The thing I wonder about writing a diary is..."

Saturday, September 27, 1942

Dear Henri,

*I am writing to you from the train to Louvain.*

*As I predicted, my parents, my brother and I were caught in the raid. On Thursday night, the Gestapo came to our house; they opened and broke through the front door of the house next to ours and they entered our house through the roof. This done, they gave us ten minutes to pack our bags.*

*Once we got to Malines, we noticed that we were missing many things. On the other hand, for bread, we had only one half loaf for four people; we had forgotten the rest on the table at home which shows you how upset we were. What atrocities at Malines! Children, from four months old to all ages, were crying. They are given only a little milk each day. The adults are starving to death. A quarter of a loaf of bread for the whole day and a little black coffee at morning and at night. At noon they give us some soup, but what a soup! Since I hadn't eaten anything all day long I had a few spoonfulls. But I had such a stomachache from it that I suffered all night long and the next day also.*

*I arrived at Malines at six in the morning. They searched us, and took everything: money, passports, and pocketknives. At that time, there were only 180 people in the barracks. Then, every half hour, cars came with people from Liege, Brussels...then at night, a large group came from Antwerp. We thought that we were going to stay until noon, so we asked to be able to write to people to bring us some bread, but unfortunately we left the next day at four in the morning. On Thursday, there were 180 people in the convoy; on Saturday, 3,000. Rachel is here with us.*

*We don't know where we are going.*

*In any case, we have been traveling for four days, and for this journey received only one loaf of bread – just enough not to starve. The little children cry all day long. People caught Friday in the street don't even have a spare shirt – nothing at all. They were going to receive packages, but we left too soon. I heard that they were going to deport all Jews from Belgium. So, be careful and hide well so that they don't catch you. I'm sending you my most recent photo; I hope you'll print it and distribute it to the people I know. I'm throwing this letter out of the window in the hopes that it will reach its destination. Think sometimes of your friend Bella. Greetings to everybody.*

*Bella*

**1940** Germany invades Belgium in May. ————— **1941**

In the fall, Nazis banned Jewish students from attending schools. Teenage friends Marcel Sobolski and Henri Zylbermenc form the Jewish Student Group and become President and VP, respectively. Bella Blitz, 14, is elected Secretary. The group gathered in a secret place in the forest. They met twice a week to discuss current events, socialize, laugh and feel united.

**1942** summer

In the summer many Jews ignored Nazi orders to report for work at factories in the city of Malines (Mechelen), but then Nazis started rounding up Jews against their will. Henri's cousin, Paula, was caught in one of these "round ups" and taken to Malines. Malines was a camp in which the Jews were held for processing before deportation. Nazis wanted Jews outside the camp to believe Malines was a work camp, so they encouraged inmates to write home and talk about working. Additionally, Nazis used the addresses on the postcards to locate other Jews. Paula sent Henri a postcard on September 14th and Henri thought she might be attempting to send a clue that something bad was going to happen to her. It proved to be the last message she sent. The next day she was deported to Auschwitz Concentration Camp in occupied Poland, where she perished.

**1942** fall

In the fall of this year, Nazi raids were increasing, so group officers Marcel, Henri, and Bella decided it was no longer safe to meet in public. Henri and his brother, Jack, kept their home as a "safe house" and base of communication. To avoid raids, Henri and Jack never stayed in one place long; they slept under bridges and bunked with non-Jewish friends, making only brief stops at the "safe house." Nazis rarely raided homes in Henri's neighborhood because the King's residence was also located nearby. Students, therefore, could safely convey messages to others by sending mail to Henri's address.

**1942**

Another group member named Mirjam had immigrated to Belgium from Germany and joined the Jewish Student Group to meet children her own age. In October, the Gestapo broke into Mirjam's home and took her family. She hid until the Gestapo left and then ran to the "safe House." Using underground contacts, Henri found a home and job for Mirjam as a teacher in a Jewish orphanage. A month or two later, the Jewish underground learned of Nazi plans to raid the orphanage and Mirjam volunteered to smuggle 12 orphans into Switzerland. That was the last Henri knew of Mirjam.

**1942**

Group Secretary Bella and her family were taken by the Nazis in the fall, and were then loaded into cattle cars bound for Auschwitz. In a desperate attempt to reach Henri and warn the group, Bella wrote her letter and threw it out the barred window of the cattle car. Miraculously, the letter was found and someone secretly sent it to the "safe house," where Henri found it in late October among a stack of other messages. Bella's letter confirmed that Malines wasn't a work camp, but a place where the Nazis processed Jews for deportation to Auschwitz. As Bella knew they would, Henri and the others warned other group members about the danger. Bella's transport arrived at the gates of Auschwitz. She was never heard from again. Henri once wrote of Bella saying, "In the most horrible days of her life, she still thinks of others. I must save this letter for posterity." Henri survived the Holocaust, married, and moved to America. He saved group member photos and letters and donated them to The Museum of Tolerance, where he volunteered until his death in 2011.



Abram wrote poems from the age of eight. When he was in the Łódź ghetto, he continued to write poems and stories that recorded what life was like in the ghetto. He wrote, “Living in the hell of the ghetto and having watched the innocent blood of my brethren, I decided to pour these thoughts and ideas onto paper...”

In his story titled “A Mother’s Sacrifice,” Abram described the food ration line in the ghetto: “Whether your face is totally without expression or in utter despair, Ewa the canteen boss remains impassive. She is the mistress of the cauldron, and sometimes a slight movement of the ladle can soften your existence.”

Abram often incorporated his own experiences of life within the ghetto into his writing. An example of this is the young boy in Abram’s story titled “Josek,” who takes the initiative to better his situation by asking the Chairman of the ghetto for a job in the kitchen:

“So you really want to work in the kitchen?”

“Yes, I do, Mr. Chairman,” Josek replied with a slight tremble in his voice. The old man walked to his desk, pulled out a notepad, dipped his pen in the inkpot and began to write: “To the Kitchen Department. Please employ this boy in the kitchen without delay.”

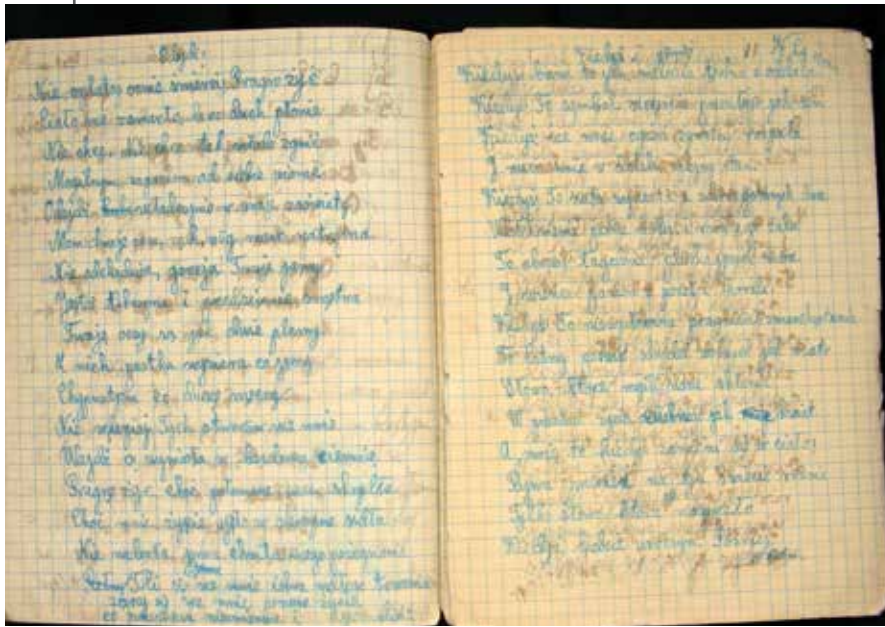
In reality, Abram was able to convince Jewish Council Chairman Rumkowski to issue a Kitchen Work Permit to his mother, Genia.

From a young age Abram wanted to write instead of work in the family factory. He believed writers were “doctors of the soul.” While in the ghetto, Abram filled and re-used the pages of many notebooks to record his poetry, short stories, and novels. Abram’s fictional stories allowed him to express his true feelings about his own experiences during his time in the ghetto.

“...Right are the dwellers of hell in their saying, that no one can ever describe the depths of their torture. Yet I would like, at least to some extent, to slowly guide the reader through [the]...confused and absurd aspects of life in the ghetto...”

In May of 1944, the Nazis began to liquidate the Łódź ghetto. Abram, then 17, and his mother and sister, were on the last transport out of the Łódź ghetto in August. Abram had not eaten in days when he arrived in Auschwitz, and therefore decided to join a group of children who had been guaranteed food by the Nazis. Unfortunately, the promise of food was only a ruse, and instead of a meal the Nazis corralled the children, including Abram, into the gas chambers and murdered them.

Lucie, Abram’s sister, survived the war. She found Abram’s notebooks, gathered them and took them with her to her new home in Paris. Lucie donated them to the Simon Wiesenthal Center Archives.

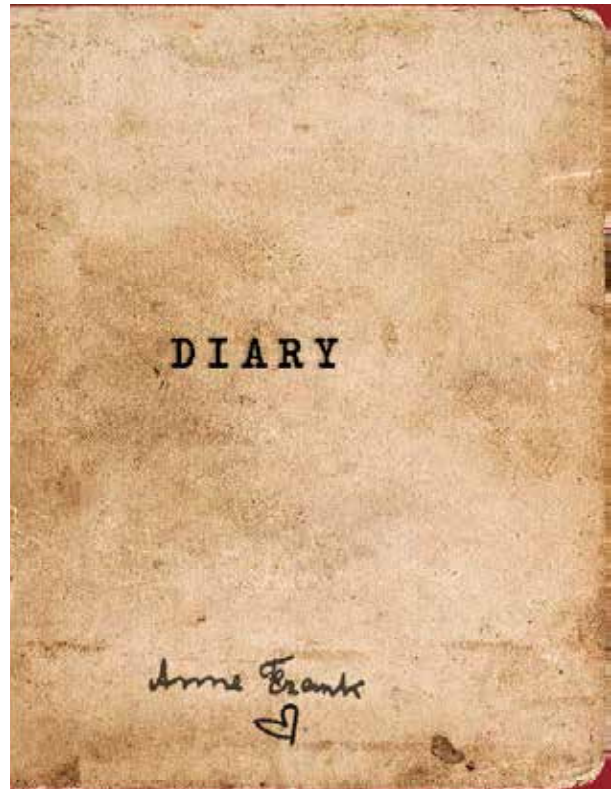


“DEPART” BY ABRAM CYTRYN English translation

Do not entangle me death, I want to live.  
 My body may have withered, but my spirit burns.  
 Not yet. I do not want to die yet.  
 You bear the odor of graves.  
 Depart o empress into your beyond  
 For I still have two eyes, two hands and two legs  
 You do not leave, your wounds ablaze  
 You are appalling and strangely gloomy  
 Your eyes like two blots, through which emptiness moans  
 and hypnotism which wearies down the soul  
 Do not fix those holes on me  
 Depart o conceited into ceaseless darkness.  
 I want to live although my wings are broken  
 Though life has caught me in horrible snare  
 My moment of farewell has yet to come  
 A spark of dull being still smolders inside  
 The gray life is still aglow in me  
 Continuing invariably and monotonously.

*Saturday, 20 June, 1942*

*I haven't written for a few days, because I wanted first of all to think about my diary. It's an odd idea for someone like me to keep a diary; not only because I have never done so before, but because it seems to me that neither I – nor for that matter anyone else – will be interested in the unbosomings of a thirteen-year-old school girl. Still, what does that matter? I want to write, but more than that, I want to bring out all kinds of things that lie buried deep in my heart. There is a saying that "paper is more patient than man"...*



*Wednesday, 8 July, 1942*

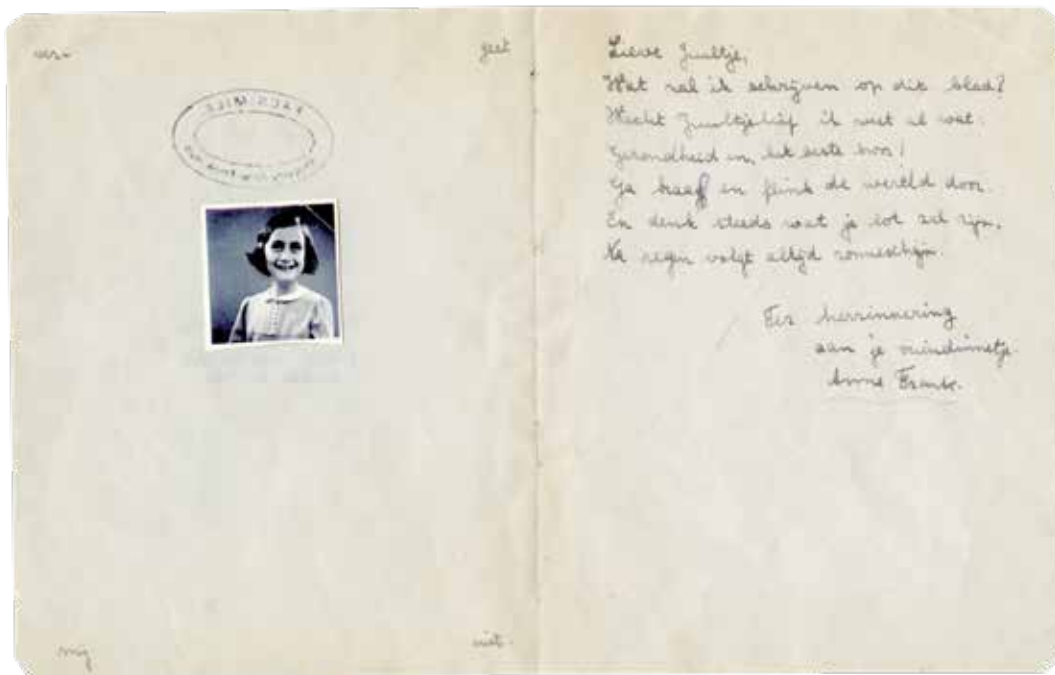
*Dear Kitty,*

*Years seem to have passed between Sunday and now. So much has happened, it is just as if the whole world had turned upside down. But I am still alive, Kitty, and that is the main thing, Daddy says...*

*...Into hiding – where would we go, in a town or the country, in a house or a cottage, when, how, where...?*

*These were questions I was not allowed to ask, but I couldn't get them out of my mind. Margot and I began to pack some of our most vital belongings into a school satchel. The first thing I put in was this diary, then hair curlers, handkerchiefs, schoolbooks, a comb, old letters; I put in the craziest things with the idea that we were going into hiding. But I'm not sorry, memories mean more to me than dresses...*

*Yours, Anne*



**Thursday, 9 July, 1942**

**Dear Kitty,**

**So we walked in the pouring rain, Daddy, Mummy, and I, each with a school satchel and shopping bag filled to the brim with all kinds of things thrown together anyhow.**

**We got sympathetic looks from people on their way to work. You could see by their faces how sorry they were they couldn't offer us a lift; the gaudy yellow star spoke for itself...**

**Yours, Anne**

## re·sist·ance / Noun

1. The refusal to accept or comply with something.
2. The attempt to prevent something by action or argument.
3. A force that opposes or works against the motion of another.
4. An underground organization that leads the struggle for national liberation in a country under the control of military forces or oppressive governments.

There were many forms of resistance against Nazi evil during the Holocaust. The following are a few examples of forms of resistance:

- **Writing as Resistance:** Most underground resistance groups published illegal newspapers and bulletins to keep people informed and to keep up morale.
- **Secret Political Organizations as Resistance:** Secret resistance groups formed outside and inside of the concentration camps. They met to support each other, to strategize, and share information about the war.
- **Telling The World as Resistance:** There were many efforts in concentration camps that focused on informing the world about the brutality and cruelty of the Nazis and the systematic annihilation of Jews.
- **Documenting as Resistance:** The Nazis were famous for the efforts to hide the truth about what they were doing to the Jews. Another form of resistance had Jews gathering documentary evidence of what was happening around them. Groups in many ghettos established secret archives and wrote about their experiences.

Put a check mark in the box if the form of resistance matches the individual's story.

Form of Resistance:	Bella Blitz	Abram Cytryn	Anne Frank	Explain why you think this.
Writing				
Organizing				
Telling				
Documenting				

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS CORRELATION

The content provided in this lesson supports the goals and objectives of the Common Core State Standards across multiple content areas. Since *Resisting Injustices Through The Power Of Writing* is written for middle and high school students, we provide CCSS that span 6th-grade to 12th-grade.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS-READING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; 7.1; 8.1; 9-10.1; 11-12.1

Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2; 7.2; 8.2; 9-10.2; 11-12.2

Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; 7.3; 8.3; 9-10.3; 11-12.3

Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6; 7.6; 8.6; 9-10.6; 11-12.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

If you like this lesson, check out similar resources on our Museum of Tolerance site:

Children of the Holocaust

<http://www.museumoftolerance.com/education/teacher-resources/holocaust-resources/children-of-the-holocaust/>

MOT Partnership with Go For Broke Foundation

<http://www.museumoftolerance.com/education/teacher-resources/mot-partnership-with-go-for-broke-foundation/>

The Camera as Weapon: Documentary Photography and the Holocaust

<http://www.museumoftolerance.com/education/archives-and-reference-library/online-resources/simon-wiesenthal-center-annual-volume-1/annual-1-chapter-3.html>

Life Story Writing Group: The MOT invites you to read poignant stories from a group of community members who meet weekly to write their own life stories and those of their family.

<http://www.museumoftolerance.com/education/lifelong-learning/life-story-writing-group.html>