

DIDACTIC UNIT 3

# Indifference

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## Indifference

**Gimnazjum nr 9 im. Jana Pawła II, Sosnowiec, Poland**

**2014-2017**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3. BIOGRAPHY RATIONALE</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>4. ACTIVITIES</b> .....	<b>10</b>
ACTIVITY 1:.....	10
ACTIVITY 2:.....	15
ACTIVITY 3:.....	15
ACTIVITY 4:.....	15
ACTIVITY 5:.....	16
ACTIVITY 6:.....	17
ACTIVITY 7:.....	17
ACTIVITY 8:.....	18
ACTIVITY 9:.....	19
<b>5. REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>20</b>
Bibliography and other resources.....	20
<b>6. AUTHORS</b> .....	<b>21</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Title

Indifference

### Age

Students from 14 to 16 years

### Duration

6 sessions of 45 min each

### Sources

“By the Railway Track” by Zofia Nałkowska, poem „Campo dei Fiori” by Czesław Miłosz, quotations about indifference (Appendix 1)

#### Appendix 1

“We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

Elie Wiesel

Retrieved on 17.06.2016 from: <http://www.wisdomquotes.com/topics/indifference/>

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

Edmund Burke

Retrieved on 17.06.2016 from: <http://www.wisdomquotes.com/topics/indifference/>

“Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted; the indifference of those who should have known better; the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most; that has made it possible for evil to triumph.”

Haile Selassie I

Retrieved on 17.06.2016 from: <http://www.wisdomquotes.com/topics/indifference/>

“Indifference is a paralysis of the soul, a premature death.”

Anton Chekhov, Selected Stories

Retrieved on 17.06.2016 from: <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/indifference>

“The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that's the essence of inhumanity.

George Bernard Shaw

Retrieved on 17.06.2016 from: <http://www.wisdomquotes.com/topics/indifference/>

“A man can be human only under human conditions and I believe that it is a fantastic nonsense to judge him by actions which he committed under inhuman conditions”.

Gustaw Herling-Grudziński 1996.

## Rationale

The lesson is based on the short story “By the Railway Track” by Zofia Nałkowska, because it was not possible to find a biography of an indifferent person. The story comes from the book “Medallions”, which was originally published in 1946, soon after the end of the World War II. Nałkowska was a member of a special committee for the investigation of Nazi crimes in Poland, therefore she had learned facts directly from the victims and witnesses. The story was chosen because it is written in a documentary-narrative form and describes facts.

## Aims

1. Students understand the term indifference
2. Students understand the attitudes of Poles towards Jews during German occupation
3. Students justify attitudes by finding and naming emotions
4. Students understand reasons for indifference during the II World War and consider consequences of indifference in the past and nowadays

## Methodology

- A drama technique called freeze –frame and thought tracking for presenting the story - biography. It consists in reading a part of the story and acting it out. The action is frozen at certain points and students discuss what they are doing and feeling. Then, students consider what is going to happen next, and refer back to the text to see what really happened. (Global Citizenship in the Classroom. Oxfam)

- Discussion
- Poem interpretation

### Other aspects

Classroom arrangement: Enough open space for drama activities

Groups Students: Group work and whole class work.

Equipment: Projector, computer and access to the Internet.

## 2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Students should be acknowledged with the history of the period at that time, if not PP Presentation “Sosnowiec under German occupation” from Resistance lesson can be used as well as timeline – Appendix 1 from Collaboration lesson.

## 3. BIOGRAPHY RATIONALE

### “By the Railway Track”

By Zofia Nałkowska from the book “Medallions” (1946)

Yet another person now belongs to the dead: the young woman by the railway track whose escape attempt failed.

One can make her acquaintance only through the tale of a man who had witnessed the incident but is unable to understand it. She lives on only in his memory.

Those who were being transported to extermination camps in the lead-sealed boxcars of the long trains would sometimes escape en route. Not many dared such a feat. The courage required was even greater than to go hopelessly, unresisting and meek, to a certain death.

Sometimes escape would succeed. The deafening clatter of the rushing boxcars prevented those on the outside from hearing what went on inside.

The only means of escape was by ripping up the floorboards. In the cramp of jammed-in, starved, foul-smelling, filthy people, it seemed an improbable gambit. Even to move was impossible. The beaten human mass, wriggling with the rushing rhythm of the train, reeled and rocked in the suffocating stench and gloom. Nevertheless, even those who, weak and fearful, would never dream of escaping, themselves understood their obligation to help others. They'd lean back, pressing against one another, and lift their shit-covered legs in order to open a way for freedom for others.

Successfully prying open one end of the floorboard raised a glimmer of hope. A collective effort was required to tear it up. It took hours. Then there remained still the second and the third boards.

Those closest would lean over the narrow aperture, then back away fearfully. Courage was called to crawl hand and foot through the chink into the din and crash of iron, into the gale of the smoking wind below, above the gliding bases, to reach the axle and, in this catch-hold, to crawl the spot from which jumping would guarantee the best chance at salvation. To drop somehow, some way, in between the rails or through the wheels. Then, to recover one's senses, roll down unseen from the mound, and escape into the strange, temptingly dark forest.

People would often fall under the wheels and be killed on the spot, struck by a protruding beam, the edge of a bar, thrown forcefully against a signal pole or roadside rock. Or they'd break their arms and legs, and be delivered thus unto the greater cruelty of the enemy.

Those who dared to step into the roaring, crashing, yawning mouth were aware of what they risked. Just as those who remained behind were, even though there was no possibility of looking out through the sealed doors or high-set windows.

The woman lying by the track belonged to those who dared. She was the third to step through the opening of the floor. A few others rolled down after her. At that moment a volley of shots rang out over the travelers' heads – an explosion on the roof of the boxcar. Suddenly the shots fell silent. The travelers could now regard the dark place left by the ripped-up boards as though it were the opening to a grave. And they could ride on calmly, ever closer to their own death, which awaited them at the crossroads.

The smoke and rattle of the train had long since disappeared into the darkness.

All that remained was the world.

The man, who can neither understand nor forget, relates his story once again.

When the new day broke, the woman was sitting on the dew-soaked grass by the side of the track. She was wounded in the knee. Some had succeeded in escaping. Further from the track, another lay motionless in the forest. A few had escaped. Two had died. She was the only one left like this, neither alive nor dead.

She was alone when he found her. But slowly people started to appear in that empty space, emerging from the brick kiln and village. Workers, women, and a boy stood fearful, watching her from a distance.

Every once in a while, a small chain of people would form. They'd cast their eyes about nervously and quickly depart. Others would approach, but wouldn't linger for long. They would whisper among themselves, sigh, and walk away.

The situation was clear. Her curly, raven hair was obviously disheveled, her too-dark eyes overflowed the lowered lids. No one uttered a word to her. It was she who asked if the ones in the forest were alive. She learned they weren't.

The day was white. The space open onto everything as far as the eye could see. People had already learned of the incident. It was a time of terror. Those who offered assistance or shelter were marked for death.

She begged one young man, who was standing for a while longer, then started to walk away, only to turn back, to bring her some Veronal from the pharmacy. She offered him money. He refused.

She lay back for a while, her eyes shut. Then she sat up again, shifted her leg, clasped it with both hands, and brushed her skirt from her knee. Her hands were bloodied. Her shattered knee a death sentence. She lay quietly for a long time, shutting her too-black eyes against the world.

When she finally opened them again, she noticed new faces hovering around her. The young man still lingered. So she asked him to buy her some vodka and cigarettes. He rendered her this service.

The gathering beside the mound attracted attention. Someone new would latch on. She lay among people but didn't count on anyone for help. She lay like an animal that had been wounded during a hunt but which the hunters had forgotten to kill off. She proceeded to get drunk. She dozed. The power that cut her off from all the others by forming a ring of fear was unbeatable.

Time passed. An old village woman, gasping for breath, returned and, drawing near, stole a tin cup of milk and some bread from beneath her kerchief. She bent over, furtively placed them in the wounded woman's hand, and left immediately, only to look on from a distance to check whether she would drink the milk. It was only when she noticed two policemen approaching from the village that she disappeared, drawing her scarf across her face.

The others dispersed, too. Only the slick, small-town guy who had bought her the vodka and cigarettes continued to keep her company. But she no longer wanted anything from him.

The police came to see what was going on. They quickly sized up the situation and deliberated how to handle it. She begged them to shoot her. In a low voice, she tried to negotiate with them, provided they keep the whole thing quiet. They were undecided.

They, too, left, conferred, stopped, and walked on further. What they would finally decide was not certain. In the end, however, they did not care to carry out her request. She noticed that the kind young man, who had lit her cigarettes with a lighter that didn't want't to light, followed after. She had told him that one of the two dead in the forest was her husband. That piece of news seemed to have caused him some unpleasantness.

She tried to swallow the milk but, preoccupied, set the cup down on the grass. A heavy, windy, spring day rolled over. It was cool. Beyond the empty field stood a couple of huts; at the other end, a few short, scrawny pines swept the sky with their branches. The forest, their destination, sprang up further from the railway. This emptiness was the whole of the world she saw.

The young man returned. She swallowed some more vodka and he lit her cigarette. A light dusk brushed across the sky from the east. To the west, skeins and smudges of clouds branched up sharply.

More people, on their way home from work, turned up and were told what happened. They spoke as though she couldn't hear them, as though she was no longer there.

"The dead one there's her husband," a woman's voice spoke up.

"They tried to escape from the train into the forest. But they shot at them with a rifle. They killed her husband, and she was left alone. Shot in the knee. She couldn't get any further..."

"From the forest she could easily have been taken somewhere. But here, with everyone watching, there's no way."

The old lady who returned for her tin cup said those words. Silently she watched as the milk soaked into the grass.

So no one would intercede by removing her before nightfall, or by calling a doctor, or by taking her to the station so she could get to a hospital. Nothing of the kind would happen. She could only die, one way or another.

When she opened her eyes at dusk, there was no one around except for the two policemen who had come back and the one who would no longer go away. Again she pleaded with them to kill her, but without any expectation that they would do so. She covered her eyes with her hands so as not to see anymore.

The policemen still hesitated about what to do. One tried to talk the other into doing it. The latter retorted, "You do it yourself."

Then she heard the young man's voice saying, "Well then give it to me."

Again they debated, quarreled. From beneath her lowered eyelids she watched the policeman take out his revolver and hand it to the stranger.

A small group of people standing further back watched as he bent over her. They heard the shot and turned away in disgust.

"They could at least have called in someone. Not do it like that. Like she was a dog."

When it grew dark, two people emerged from the forest to get her. They located the spot with a bit of difficulty. They assumed she was sleeping. But when one of them took her by the shoulder, he understood at once that he was dealing with a corpse.

She lay there all night and into the morning, until just before noon, when a bailiff arrived and ordered her buried together with the other two who had died by the railway tracks.

"Why he shot her isn't clear," the narrator said. "I couldn't understand it. Maybe he felt sorry for her..."

*Translated from the Polish by Diana Kuprel*

From :

Shawn, K., Goldfrad, K., Younglove, W. 2008. *The Call of Memory: Learning About the Holocaust Through Narrative*. An Anthology. Ben Yehuda Press, 181-186



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on 17.04.2016



## 4. ACTIVITIES

### ACTIVITY 1:

The technique which will be used is called freeze –frame and thought tracking. It consists in reading a part of the story and acting it out. The action is frozen at certain points and students discuss what they are doing and feeling. Next, students consider what is going to happen next, and refer back to the text to see what really happened. (Global Citizenship in the Classroom. Oxfam)

The teacher reads the first part of the story or, alternatively, students read the first part of the text, which introduces the context. It is assumed the students are acquainted with the topic through previous lessons. If not, materials from previous lessons can be used to introduce the most important facts – presentation Sosnowiec during II World War and timeline from Collaboration lesson.

#### **“By the Railway Track”**

By Zofia Nałkowska from the book “Medallions” (1946)

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One can make her acquaintance only through the tale of a man who had witnessed the incident but is unable to understand it. She lives on only in his memory.

Those who were being transported to extermination camps in the lead-sealed boxcars of the long trains would sometimes escape en route. Not many dared such a feat. The courage required was even greater than to go hopelessly, unresisting and meek, to a certain death.

Sometimes escape would succeed. The deafening clatter of the rushing boxcars prevented those on the outside from hearing what went on inside.

The only means of escape was by ripping up the floorboards. In the cramp of jammed-in, starved, foul-smelling, filthy people, it seemed an improbable gambit. Even to move was impossible. The beaten human mass, wriggling with the rushing rhythm of the train, reeled and rocked in the suffocating stench and gloom. Nevertheless, even those who, weak and fearful, would never dream of escaping, themselves understood their obligation to help others. They'd lean back, pressing against one another, and lift their shit-covered legs in order to open a way for freedom for others.

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Those closest would lean over the narrow aperture, then back away fearfully. Courage was called to crawl hand and foot through the chink into the din and crash of iron, into the gale of the smoking wind below, above the gliding bases, to reach the axle and, in this catch-hold, to crawl the spot from which jumping would guarantee the best chance at salvation. To drop somehow, some way, in between the rails or through the wheels. Then, to recover one's senses, roll down unseen from the mound, and escape into the strange, temptingly dark forest.

People would often fall under the wheels and be killed on the spot, struck by a protruding beam, the edge of a bar, thrown forcefully against a signal pole or roadside rock. Or they'd break their arms and legs, and be delivered thus unto the greater cruelty of the enemy.

Those who dared to step into the roaring, crashing, yawning mouth were aware of what they risked. Just as those who remained behind were, even though there was no possibility of looking out through the sealed doors or high-set windows.

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The smoke and rattle of the train had long since disappeared into the darkness.

All that remained was the world.

The man, who can neither understand nor forget, relates his story once again.

1. The teacher reads the next part, a group of students acts it out. After they finish they discuss the questions:

**Questions:**

- What are you doing?
- What are the characters feeling?
- What is going to happen next?

*Students answer the questions. After that the teacher reads another part of the story:*

When the new day broke, the woman was sitting on the dew-soaked grass by the side of the track. She was wounded in the knee. Some had succeeded in escaping. Further from

the track, another lay motionless in the forest. A few had escaped. Two had died. She was the only one left like this, neither alive nor dead.

She was alone when he found her. But slowly people started to appear in that empty space, emerging from the brick kiln and village. Workers, women, and a boy stood fearful, watching her from a distance.

Every once in a while, a small chain of people would form. They'd cast their eyes about nervously and quickly depart. Others would approach, but wouldn't linger for long. They would whisper among themselves, sigh, and walk away.

The situation was clear. Her curly, raven hair was obviously disheveled, her too-dark eyes overflowed the lowered lids. No one uttered a word to her. It was she who asked if the ones in the forest were alive. She learned they weren't.

The day was white. The space open onto everything as far as the eye could see. People had already learned of the incident. It was a time of terror. Those who offered assistance or shelter were marked for death.

She begged one young man, who was standing for a while longer, then started to walk away, only to turn back, to bring her some Veronal from the pharmacy. She offered him money. He refused.

2. The procedure is repeated with another group of students, so that as many students as possible are engaged at some point of the lesson.

### Questions:

- What are the characters feeling?
- What is going to happen next?
- Again, students consider what is going to happen next.

3. The teacher reads the next part. Students confront their ideas with the real story.

She lay back for a while, her eyes shut. Then she sat up again, shifted her leg, clasped it with both hands, and brushed her skirt from her knee. Her hands were bloodied. Her shattered knee a death sentence. She lay quietly for a long time, shutting her too-black eyes against the world.

When she finally opened them again, she noticed new faces hovering around her. The young man still lingered. So she asked him to buy her some vodka and cigarettes. He rendered her this service.

The gathering beside the mound attracted attention. Someone new would latch on. She lay among people but didn't count on anyone for help. She lay like an animal that had been wounded during a hunt but which the hunters had forgotten to kill off. She proceeded to get drunk. She dozed. The power that cut her off from all the others by forming a ring of fear was unbeatable.

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The others dispersed, too. Only the slick, small-town guy who had bought her the vodka and cigarettes continued to keep her company. But she no longer wanted anything from him.

The police came to see what was going on. They quickly sized up the situation and deliberated how to handle it. She begged them to shoot her. In a low voice, she tried to negotiate with them, provided they keep the whole thing quiet. They were undecided.

*Another group of students acts out the story*

### Questions:

- What are the characters feeling?
- What is going to happen next?

*Students think of what is going to happen next.*

4. The teacher reads out the next part. Another group of students acts it out.

They, too, left, conferred, stopped, and walked on further. What they would finally decide was not certain. In the end, however, they did not care to carry out her request. She noticed that the kind young man, who had lit her cigarettes with a lighter that didn't want to light, followed after. She had told him that one of the two dead in the forest was her husband. That piece of news seemed to have caused him some unpleasantness.

She tried to swallow the milk but, preoccupied, set the cup down on the grass. A heavy, windy, spring day rolled over. It was cool. Beyond the empty field stood a couple of huts; at the other end, a few short, scrawny pines swept the sky with their branches. The forest, their destination, sprang up further from the railway. This emptiness was the whole of the world she saw.

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"From the forest she could easily have been taken somewhere. But here, with everyone watching, there's no way."

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So no one would intercede by removing her before nightfall, or by calling a doctor, or by taking her to the station so she could get to a hospital. Nothing of the kind would happen. She could only die, one way or another.

When she opened her eyes at dusk, there was no one around except for the two policemen who had come back and the one who would no longer go away. Again she pleaded with them to kill her, but without any expectation that they would do so. She covered her eyes with her hands so as not to see anymore.

The policemen still hesitated about what to do. One tried to talk the other into doing it. The latter retorted, "You do it yourself."

### Questions:

- What are the characters feeling?
- What is going to happen next?

*Students think of what is going to happen next.*

5. The teacher reads out the last part. Another group of students acts it out.

Then she heard the young man's voice saying, "Well then give it to me."

Again they debated, quarreled. From beneath her lowered eyelids she watched the policeman take out his revolver and hand it to the stranger.

A small group of people standing further back watched as he bent over her. They heard the shot and turned away in disgust.

“They could at least have called in someone. Not do it like that. Like she was a dog.”

When it grew dark, two people emerged from the forest to get her. They located the spot with a bit of difficulty. They assumed she was sleeping. But when one of them took her by the shoulder, he understood at once that he was dealing with a corpse.

She lay there all night and into the morning, until just before noon, when a bailiff arrived and ordered her buried together with the other two who had died by the railway tracks.

“Why he shot her isn’t clear,” the narrator said. “I couldn’t understand it. Maybe he felt sorry for her...”

### Questions:

- What are the characters feeling?
- What is the narrator feeling?

### ACTIVITY 2:

The students are asked to write down the first thought that comes to their mind after reading the whole story. The students read out their sentences and discuss them.

### ACTIVITY 3:

Students work in groups and think of reasons why the characters remained indifferent. They write their ideas on the board.

### ACTIVITY 4:

Students work in groups. Each group receives a set of quotations (appendix 1). After discussion each group chooses a quotation which they identify with and justify their choice.



**ACTIVITY 5:**

The second part of the lesson is based on “Campo dei Fiori” by Czesław Miłosz.

The full text is available on the website:

[http://www.babelmatrix.org/works/pl/Mi%C5%82osz,\\_Czes%C5%82aw-1911/Campo\\_di\\_Fiori/en/6721-Campo\\_dei\\_Fiori](http://www.babelmatrix.org/works/pl/Mi%C5%82osz,_Czes%C5%82aw-1911/Campo_di_Fiori/en/6721-Campo_dei_Fiori)

Because of copyrights only excerpts are used in the lesson plan.

The students read the first four verses and answer the questions:

- What is described in the first four verses? What events do they relate to?

**For the teacher:** Verses 3 and 4 relate to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943.

Students may see the movie about the Uprising on:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bjY6L\\_MUkY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bjY6L_MUkY)

Czesław Miłosz

**Campo dei Fiori**

“In Rome, on Campo dei Fiori,  
baskets of olives and lemons  
cobblestones spattered with wine (...)  
Vendors cover the trestles  
with rose-pink fish;(...)

On this same square  
they burned Giordano Bruno(...)  
Before the flames had died  
the taverns were full again,  
baskets of olives and lemons  
again on the vendors' shoulders  
I thought of Campo dei Fiori  
in Warsaw by the sky-carrousel  
one clear spring evening (...)  
The bright melody drowned

the salvos from the ghetto wall,(...)

At times wind from the burning  
would drift dark kites along (...)

That same hot wind  
blew open the skirts of the girls  
and the crowds were laughing  
on the beautiful Warsaw Sunday.”

### ACTIVITY 6:

Students read the fifth verse and answer the questions:

“Someone will read a moral  
that the people of Rome and Warsaw  
haggle, laugh, make love  
as they pass by martyrs' pyres.  
Someone else will read  
of the passing of things human,  
of the oblivion  
born before the flames have died.”

- What does the first moral refer to? What feelings does it describe?
- What does the second moral refer to? What feelings does it describe?
- Are these morals still valid?

### ACTIVITY 7:

Students work in small groups and answer the questions:

- Imagine that the poem is not finished. Your task is to provide the poet with the ideas about the present for yet another verse, verse 5. What events could the poet describe today?
- What can we describe today as “martyrs’ pyres”?
- What do we want to forget about today?

- Students note down their reflections and later discuss their ideas in front of the class.

### ACTIVITY 8:

Students read the rest of the poem and answer the questions:

- What is the poet's role in the poem? Which of the three discussed attitudes does he represent? (indifference, resistance or collaboration)
- If the poem had never been written, do you think we would have discussed Giordano Bruno's death and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising?
- What is the moral for us today?

“But that day I thought only  
of the loneliness of the dying, (...)”

“Already they were back at their wine  
or peddled their white starfish,  
baskets of olives and lemons  
they had shouldered to the fair, (...)”

“Those dying here, the lonely  
forgotten by the world,  
our tongue becomes for them  
the language of an ancient planet.  
Until, when all is legend  
and many years have passed,  
on a new Campo dei Fiori  
rage will kindle at a poet's word.”

*Translated by Louis Irribarne and David Brooks*

Retrieved: 29.06.2016 from:

[http://www.babelmatrix.org/works/pl/Mi%C5%82osz,\\_Czes%C5%82aw-1911/Campo\\_di\\_Fiori/en/6721-Campo\\_dei\\_Fiori](http://www.babelmatrix.org/works/pl/Mi%C5%82osz,_Czes%C5%82aw-1911/Campo_di_Fiori/en/6721-Campo_dei_Fiori)

### ACTIVITY 9:

Students read the quotation and answer the questions:

- What is solidarity?
- Have you ever experienced solidarity?
- Do you think people and societies are able to show solidarity today?
- Do you agree with the author of the quotation?
- Is it difficult not to be indifferent?
- What can you do so as not to be indifferent?

“If we overtly renounce the participation in any kind of community, if we don’t feel solidarity with anything, we can live, but it will be a miserable and unhappy life and we cannot then expect solidarity or help from others in case of failure or misfortune, which can happen to anyone. Indifference towards others will be returned with indifference and we cannot complain”

*Leszek Kołakowski “O odpowiedzialności zbiorowej”/ “About shared responsibility”2009, translation: Joanna Janas-Sajdak*

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