

DIDACTIC UNIT 2

# Difficult decisions

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## Collaboration

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

**2014-2017**

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# **INTRODUCTION**

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## **Title**

Difficult decisions.

## **Age**

15 – 17 years old.

## **Duration**

The amount of time will depend on the engagement of students, their knowledge and time available.

## **Sources**

The biography of Moses Merin – a PowerPoint Presentation, a timeline of events leading to Jewish extermination – appendix 1, questions for the biography – appendix 2, a decision tree – appendix 3, definitions of attitudes – appendix 4.

- **Appendix 1**

### **Timeline**

**1933** – As a result of economic crisis in the years 1929-1933, high level of unemployment and general disappointment with democracy in the face of crisis National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) wins democratic Reichstag elections, Adolf Hitler is appointed German Chancellor.

**1934** – After the death of President Paul von Hindenburg, Hitler becomes the President with the support of German armed forces. In the same year he abolishes the office of president and declares himself Führer of the German Reich and people. The event coincides with the end of the economic crisis.

**1935** – The Nuremberg Race Laws are passed by the German parliament. These laws provided legal framework for the systematic persecution of Jews in Germany.

**1938** – Pogroms of German and Austrian Jews during the Kristallnacht.

**January 1939** - Hitler declares that the war would mean the end of European Jewry.

**September 1939** – Germany invades Poland, initiating World War II in Europe. Special German troops kill Poles and Jews. German use propaganda and administrative means to antagonize Poles and Jews in Poland.

**21 September 1939** – Reinhard Heydrich issues an instruction for Security Police that Polish Jews should be concentrated in major cities near major railway lines.

**26 October 1939** – Governon General of occupied Poland, Hans Frank issues an order introducing forced labour for Jewish people. Jews from the age 14 (later from 12) till 60 are forced to hard physical work. Poles are also ordered to perform forced labour but from the age of 16.

**1 December 1939** – All Jews above 10 years of age living within the General Gouvernment territory are ordered to wear an identifying Jewish Badge.

- Jews are deprived of their property.
- Jews are forbidden to change the place of living, stay in some parts of the cities, use public transport.
- Jewish communities are forced to pay special contributions.

**The turn of 1939 and 1940** – Concentration of Jews in ghettos on the occupied territories. When creating ghettos the Nazis referred to the old tradition of the Jewish ghettos functioning in the cities in the Middle Ages. The purpose of ghettos was to isolate Jews from the Arian race. From the beginning of the German occupation ghettos constituted one of the main means of annihilation of the Jewish people. In order to ensure the isolation the Nazi established a system of repressions: Jews caught outside the ghetto without a permission were killed, Poles caught providing any help for Jews were killed too.

**Since Autumn 1941** – the Germans start deportations of Jews from western Europe to General Government. Most of the deported Jews were killed short after arrival.

**September 1941** – the Nazis use lorries with gas chambers to annihilate Jewish people. Chambers were more effective and cheaper than shooting and unlike shooting they didn't require direct contact of German soldiers with the victims, which made killing less traumatic for German soldiers.

**Autumn 1941** – decision about final solution is made

**Turn of 1941 and 1942** – creation of death camps in Chełmno, Treblinka, Sobibór, Belżec, Auschwitz II – Birkenau and Majdanek in Lublin.

**20 January 1942** – the Wannsee Conference – plans to coordinate a European-wide “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” is presented. The decisions constituted basis for mass deportations of Jews to death camps and further development of the genocide machine.

**Spring 1942-Autumn 1943** – “Operation Reinhardt” – German name for the operation of liquidation of ghettos and deportation of Polish Jews from the General Government to death camps.

### **Judenräte**

These were widely used administrative agencies imposed by Nazi Germany during World War II, predominantly within the ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe, and the Jewish ghettos in German-occupied Poland. The Nazi German administration required Jews to form a Judenrat in every community across the occupied territories. The order from 21<sup>st</sup> September 1939 clearly stated the character and the level of authority of Jewish councils in ghettos. The guidelines stipulated that the Jewish Council would be fully responsible for the implementation of German policy regarding the Jews and would be made up of influential people and rabbis. The inclusion of prominent personalities in the Jewish council had a dual purpose to ensure that German orders were implemented in full and to discredit Jewish leadership in the eyes of the Jewish population.

### **Functions of Judenräte**

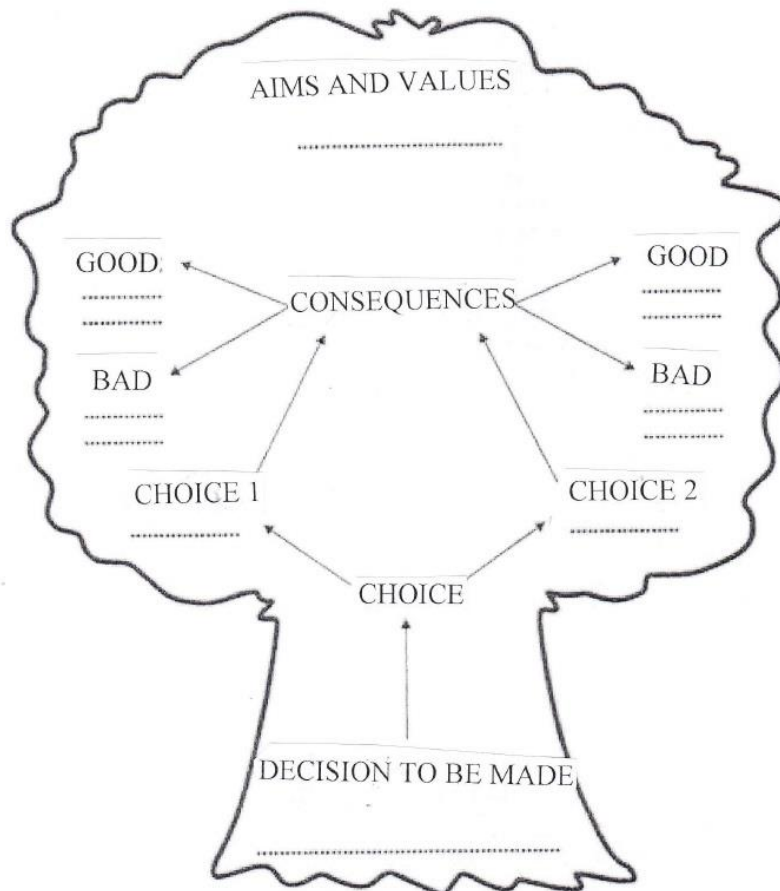
- Responsible for implementation of German orders.
- Taking a census of the Jewish population.
- Evacuation of Jews from the country.
- Providing Jews from the country with a place to live.
- Feeding Jews during transportations to the cities.
- Paying fines, taxes and ransoms.

- Providing welfare – hospitals, canteens, orphanages, old people’s homes.
  - Drafting people for forced labour.
  - Organization of Jewish Police, which was responsible for carrying out orders of the Judenrat, maintaining order, bringing Jews for deportations.
- **Appendix 2**

### Questions for the biography

1. How is the character presented?
2. What language is used to describe the character and how does it influence your perception of the character?
3. How the choice of information influences your perception of the character?
4. How the witnesses’ testimonies influence your perception of the character/
5. Whose point of view is present in the biography?
6. How does your background influence your perception of the character?
7. How the historical context influences the interpretation of the events?
8. What was the author’s aim?
9. How else could this biography have been written? How would it influence your perception of the character?
10. Does the biography present enough information to allow an opinion about the character’s conduct?
11. What can you do to broaden your knowledge about the topic?

▪ **Appendix 3**



Adapted from: <http://www.magor.republika.pl/publikacje2.html>

▪ **Appendix 4**

**DEFINITIONS**

- **Victims** were millions of people the Nazis deemed undesirable. Some people were undesirable by Nazi standards because of *who they were*. Others were Nazi victims because of *what they did*.
- **Perpetrators** of Nazi crimes during II World War are those who carried out or enabled the persecution or killing. Adolf Hitler is seen as the chief perpetrator, but there were many others from all walks of life. Not all were ethnic Germans and not all were registered members of the Nazi party. Perpetrators committed crimes against Jews and other undesirables for many reasons.

- **Bystanders** may have remained unaware, or perhaps were aware of victimization going on around them, but, being fearful of the consequences, chose not to take risk to help Nazi victims.
- **A resister** is someone who tried to fight back against the Nazis and their helpers. Other people engaged in passive, unarmed, resistance –using study, smuggling, and even the very act of survival as a means of resistance.
- **Rescuers** are those who, at great personal risk, actively helped members of persecuted groups, primarily Jews, during the Holocaust in defiance of Third Reich policy. They were ordinary people who became extraordinary people because they acted in accordance with their own belief systems while living in immoral society.
- **A collaborator** is someone who aided the perpetrators. These included government who were allied or dependent on the Third Reich, as well as private citizens who acted independently or part of groups.

From the Jewish Galicia Museum materials.

### Aims

1. Students know the facts concerning the Nazi policy against Jews during the II World war.
2. Students listen attentively to others and respond to what has been said.
3. Students respect the opinions of others.
4. Students provide arguments for their views appropriate to the situation.
5. Students don't take statements at their face value.
6. Students interpret the text critically.
7. Students look for and select information.
8. Students ask questions related to the discussed issues.
9. Students are aware of the moral dilemmas and decisions, that people had to face during the II World War.



## Methodology

The aim of the project is to create lesson plans, which will teach students to think critically. One of the elements of gaining knowledge about the world is reading texts, where the text itself is broadly understood and includes media, spoken texts, graphics. At a time of easy access to many different sources of information, it is important that students approach the information in a critical way. Therefore, developing the ability of critical reading and critical literacy seems an important element of developing the skill of critical thinking. The critical approach assumes that the reader will become an active participant in the process of reading, will question the text, will be aware of the influence that the text may have and of the power relations presented. In the case of critical reading we assume that the reality is available, but often falsely interpreted. In the case of critical literacy we assume that the reality is not available, but we only have access to its partial interpretations created by means of a language.(Molden, K.,”Connecting Practise and Research.”)

In this lesson plan some elements of ‘open space’ and “open space for dialogue and enquiry” (OSDE) methodology will be used, such as: rules for discussion, an attempt to engage all participants in the discussion, type of questions. (<http://www.osdemethodology.org.uk/>). The method allows for a free and safe expression of views by the students and helps to develop ability to formulate and express opinions and critically analyze views of others.

- Creating a safe space, where students can express their opinions without fear of being laughed at. It is useful to establish a set of rules of discussion.
- We assume that every participant has some knowledge about the discussed topic, irrespective of the age, education, background etc.
- The aim of the discussion is to listen to others’ views in order to better understand them and question the basis of our own views. It rejects competitiveness, understood as discussing things in order to reach “the best answer”.
- The discussion does not have to lead to a consensus or solving a problem.
- If the group is close to reach a consensus, the teacher should provoke students to express various views.
- The teacher’s role is to moderate the discussion.

- The teacher should inform students when the open space is opened and closed.

The method seems useful while discussing difficult questions, related to moral and ethical issues in situations when it's not possible to talk about a single correct way of conduct.

*(Jasikowska, K., Klarenbach, M., Lipska-Badoti, G., Łuczak, R. ORE „Edukacja globalna. Poradnik metodyczny dla nauczycieli II, III i IV etapu edukacyjnego.”, Global Citizenship Guides. Teaching Controversial Issues, 2006, Oxfam, [http://www.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/Education/Teacher%20Support/Free%20Guides/teaching\\_controversial\\_issues.ashx](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/Education/Teacher%20Support/Free%20Guides/teaching_controversial_issues.ashx)*

[www.osdemethodology.org.uk](http://www.osdemethodology.org.uk))

Other methods used:

lecture – presentation of the biography

A decision tree - it is important to stick to appropriate order of activities when using the decision tree method:

- *Formulate the problem that needs the decision.*
- *Establish the aim and values that seem to be the most important from the person's point of view (Merin's point of view in this case).*
- *Find as many possible solutions as possible. The number of branches depends on the number of alternatives taken into account.*
- *Find positive and negative consequences of each possible choice.*
- *Make the decision taking into account aims and values established in the beginning.*

Philosophy for children method in the open space –

- Students sit in a circle. The teacher asks students a question related to moral issues. Each student should come up with at least one.
- Students have time to think and then ask their questions. All questions are written down on the board.
- Students vote for the most important/interesting question to discuss.

- Students discuss the question in the open space.

### Other aspects

- **Classroom arrangements.** For some activities students sit in a circle, for others they should be provided with a space enabling working in groups.
- **Groups.** Group work and whole class.
- **Equipment.** Projector to present the biography, photocopiable material.

## **BIOGRAPHY RATIONALE**

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Collaboration is a very delicate issue and one has to be very careful not to accuse somebody without providing the necessary evidence. There were two reasons to choose the biography of Moses Merin for this lesson. The aim of this project was to find biographies of the people who lived in the local community - Moses Merin lived in Sosnowiec and is a person best described in documents and books. Secondly, his story is not straightforward and raises many questions about people's decisions at the difficult time of the II World War. Even people who knew him had conflicted memories of his deeds. As such, Merin's biography perfectly suited the aims of this particular lesson.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

In this lesson it is important that students know the facts concerning the Nazi policy towards Jews during the II World War, including the facts about Judenräte. If the students are knowledgeable about the topic the teacher may brainstorm the students and write down the most important facts. If it isn't the case, the teacher may use Appendix 1 and present it to students or ask students before the lesson to find all the necessary information and then brainstorm them. If students haven't seen "Sosnowiec during German occupation" presentation yet from the "Resistance" lesson plan, the teacher may also present slides 38-44.

# **BIOGRAPHY**

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The biography is presented with a PowerPoint presentation.

# ACTIVITIES

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## Activity 1

- I. The teacher informs the students that they are going to create a safe space for discussion and asks students for help. The teacher presents the rules of discussion:
  - All participants must be respected
  - Only one person speaks at a time
  - Opinions are discussed, not people who express them
  - Every participant expresses their views
  - We try to understand other's points of view
  - Everyone justifies their opinions

The rules can be written on the board or on a big piece of paper. Students can their own rules provided they are accepted by all participants. The teacher informs that the aim of the discussion is not to reach the "right answer", but to think over and express one's views. There are no good or bad answers, it is important that all participants express their views.

- II. Students sit in a circle. The teacher writes the following statements on the board:

*At a time of life hazard the aim justifies the means.*

*The good of the whole society is more important than the good of the individual.*

*The decision to collaborate is an easier choice.*

- III. Students have 5-10 minutes to think the statements over, write down their opinion on each statement and justify it. All students present their opinions with the justification.
- IV. At the end the teacher asks students if they happened to change their mind after listening to others.
- V. The teacher asks students to keep the pieces of paper with their opinions.

## Activity 2

- I. The teacher informs students that they are going to see the presentation about Mose Merin (a PowerPoint presentation - biography) who lived in Sosnowiec during II World War. The teacher hands out questions to the biography (appendix 2) and asks students to be able to answer the questions afterwards.
- II. The teacher presents the biography.
- III. Students think about the questions individually. Later, they discuss the questions in pairs and finally present the answers to the whole class.
  - *How is the character presented?*
  - *What language is used to describe the character and how does it influence your perception of the character?*
  - *How the choice of information influences your perception of the character?*
  - *How the witnesses' testimonies influence your perception of the character/*
  - *Whose point of view is present in the biography?*
  - *How does your background influence your perception of the character?*
  - *How the historical context influences the interpretation of the events?*
  - *What was the author's aim?*
  - *How else could this biography have been written? How would it influence your perception of the character?*
  - *Does the biography present enough information to allow an opinion about the character's conduct?*
  - *What can you do to broaden your knowledge about the topic?*
- IV. The teacher sums up the lesson by asking questions:
  - *Do you ever consider similar questions to those you have just answered when reading something?*



- *Did anything surprise you in the biography? If yes, what?*
- *What do you find the most interesting?*
- *What have you learnt in this lesson?*
- *How and where can you use the new knowledge?*

### Activity 3

This lesson is optional. If it is possible to use the classroom with access to computers and the internet, the students look for further information concerning the topic of Judenräte and the situation of Jews in the occupied Poland. If there is no such possibility, the teacher can assign the search for information as homework or prepare printed materials and hand them out to students.

#### **Suggested websites in English:**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judenrat>

[http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0011\\_0\\_10457.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0011_0_10457.html)

<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ghettos/judenrat.html>

[http://www.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203862.pdf](http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203862.pdf)

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005265>

#### **Suggested websites in Polish:**

<https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judenrat>

<http://www.unic.un.org.pl/holokaust/pytanie29.php>

<http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Judenrat>

[http://www.sztetl.org.pl/pl/term/65.judenrat/?qclid=CL-lwb\\_bksoCFYXOcgodroAB8w](http://www.sztetl.org.pl/pl/term/65.judenrat/?qclid=CL-lwb_bksoCFYXOcgodroAB8w)

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Students work in groups and prepare short presentations about their findings. The information will be used during following lesson. If the search was assigned as homework, students present their findings at the beginning of the following lesson as introduction.

### Activity 4

- I. The teacher asks students to think of a situation when they had to make an important decision and recollect what things they took into consideration when making it.
- II. The teacher informs students that they are going to analyze the process of decision making by people in difficult situation during the II World War and dilemmas related to the process taking Mose Merin's biography as an example.

The teacher introduces the decision tree method – students are going to consider all the possible options Mose Merin had when making the decision to collaborate with the Germans. The teacher presents the model of the decision tree (Appendix 3). It is important to stick to appropriate order of activities when using the decision tree method:

- *Formulate the problem that needs the decision.*
  - *Establish the aim and values, that seem to be the most important from the person's point of view (Merin's point of view in this case).*
  - *Find as many possible solutions as possible. The number of branches depends on the number of alternatives taken into account.*
  - *Find positive and negative consequences of each possible choice.*
  - *Make the decision taking into account aims and values established in the beginning.*
- III. The teacher divides students into groups and gives each group a large piece of paper.
  - IV. Students work in groups and make their decision trees.
  - V. All groups present their trees.
  - VI. The teacher asks questions:
    - *What did you find most difficult when making the decision?*

- *What decision would you make if you were Merin?*

VII. The teacher writes on the board the possible attitudes of people towards the Holocaust: *victims, perpetrators, bystander, resister, rescuer, collaborator* and asks students to provide definitions and examples of these attitudes. (definitions – Appendix 4).

VIII. The teacher asks students the question:

*Which category does Merin fall into? Consider all the circumstances.*

Students discuss the question in pairs and then present their opinions to the whole class.

IX. The teacher asks students to take out pieces of papers with their opinions to the three statements and ask:

*Has anything changed about your views after these couple of lessons?*

All students in turn answer the question and justify their answer considering the new knowledge.

## Activity 5

Discussion:

- *Mose Merin made decisions which influenced other people. Do the decisions you make everyday influence other people in your community or the world? How?*
- *What decisions do today's leaders face?*

## Activity 6

This lesson uses philosophy for children method in the open space.

- Students sit in a circle. The teacher asks students:

*What questions come to your mind after the lessons about Merin?*

Each student should come up with at least one.

## Difficult decisions

Collaboration

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- Students have time to think and then ask their questions. All questions are written down on the board.
- Students vote for the most important/interesting question to discuss.
- Students discuss the question in the open space.

## REFERENCES

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### Bibliography and other resources

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<http://p4c.com/teachers-guide>

<http://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/1939-1941>

## **AUTHORS**

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- Anna Walas: **PowerPoint presentation.**