

# Righteous Among the Nations

“About the Righteous”

Attitudes towards the Jews during the Holocaust mostly ranged from **indifference** to hostility. The mainstream watched as their former neighbors were rounded up and killed; some collaborated with the perpetrators; many benefited from the expropriation of the Jews' property. In a world of total moral collapse, there was a small minority who **mustered** extraordinary courage to uphold human values. These were the Righteous Among the Nations.

In many cases it was the Jews who turned to the non-Jew for help. It was not only the rescuers who demonstrated resourcefulness and courage, but also the Jews who fought for their survival. Faced with Jews knocking on their door, **bystanders** were faced with the need to make an instant decision. This was usually an instinctive human gesture, taken on the spur of the moment and only then to be followed by a moral choice. Often it was a gradual process, with the rescuers becoming increasingly involved in helping the persecuted Jews. Agreeing to hide someone during a raid or roundup - to provide shelter for a day or two until something else could be found – would evolve into a rescue that lasted months and years.

The price that rescuers had to pay for their action differed from one country to another. In Eastern Europe, the Germans executed not only the people who sheltered Jews, but their entire family as well. Notices warning the population against helping the Jews were posted everywhere. Generally speaking punishment was less severe in Western Europe, although there too the consequences could be **formidable** – and some of the Righteous Among the Nations were incarcerated in camps and killed. Moreover, people must have feared that they would suffer greatly if they attempted to help the persecuted. In consequence, rescuers and rescued lived under constant fear of being caught; there was always the danger of denunciation by neighbors or collaborators. This increased the risk and made it more difficult for ordinary people to defy the conventions and rules. Those who decided to shelter Jews had to sacrifice their normal lives and to embark upon a **clandestine** existence – often against the accepted norms of the society in which they lived, in fear of their neighbors and friends – and to accept a life ruled by dread of denunciation and capture.

Most rescuers were ordinary people. In many cases they never planned to become rescuers and were totally unprepared for the moment in which they had to make such a far-reaching decision. They were ordinary human beings, and it is precisely their humanity that touches us and should serve as a model. The Righteous come from all walks of life; highly educated people as well as illiterate peasants; public figures as well as people from society's margins; city dwellers and farmers from the remotest corners of Europe; university professors, teachers, physicians, clergy, nuns, diplomats, simple workers, servants, resistance fighters, policemen, peasants, fishermen, a zoo director, a circus owner, and many more.

There were different degrees of help: some people gave food to Jews, thrusting an apple into their pocket or leaving food where they would pass on their way to work. Others directed Jews to people who could help them; some sheltered Jews for one night and told them they would have to leave in the morning. Only few assumed the entire responsibility for the Jews' survival.

However difficult and frightening, the fact that some found the courage to become rescuers demonstrates that some freedom of choice existed, and that saving Jews was not beyond the capacity of ordinary people throughout occupied Europe. The Righteous Among the Nations teach us that every person can make a difference.

Resource: Yad Vashem - The World Holocaust Remembrance Center  
<https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/about-the-righteous.html>

Name:

Date:

Righteous Among the Nations Research

Define the following words from the article:

indifference:

PREVIEW

mustered:

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

bystanders:

formidable:

PREVIEW

clandestine:

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

**Despite all the horrendous and vile acts that took place during the Holocaust, there were some people who stood up for what they knew was right. Instead of focusing on the evil of humankind, we are going to study the brave and honorable people that tried to make a difference.**

**In groups of 2-3, you will be assigned to research one of the following people:**

(Note: Not everyone on this list is officially considered one of the "righteous" but were somehow helpful to the liberation or protection of Jews and those being persecuted.)

Armin T. Wegner  
Oskar Schindler  
Freddie Oversteegen  
Irena Sendler  
Nicholas Winton

Leopold & Magdalena Socha  
Wilhelm Hosenfeld  
Jan and Antonina Zabinski  
Raoul Wallenberg  
Frank Foley

Alan Turing  
Jane Haining  
Simon Wiesenthal  
Claus von Stauffenberg  
Maria Tribbioli

**Assignment:**

In your groups, research the person you've been assigned. Create a Google slideshow to teach the class about the person you've researched.

- Make sure you include who they are, why they are important to history, how they helped during/after the Holocaust, and why they should be remembered.
- Use a minimum of 2 images and 6 slides.
- One slide should include the websites you used (use at least two different websites).
- Be prepared to share your information with the class tomorrow. Good luck!

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