

# COULD YOU BE RIGHTEOUS?

**Author:**

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**Courses:**

Psychology

**Primary category:**

Theory of morality, The Holocaust,

**Grade level:**

High school students of third and fourth year (aged 17-18)

**Total required time to teach lesson:**

5 classes (5x45 minutes)

**Summary:**

Students will understand who were Righteous Among the Nations – people who not only saved Jews but risked their lives while doing that. They will be introduced to the basic stages in the development of moral reasoning (Kohlberg's interpretation). Holocaust dilemmas will help students understand the challenges that non-Jews have been faced with. They will understand the circumstances in which people lived during World War II through personal stories from 3 Centropa's films as well as through research and analysis on the Righteous from Kruševac. In the end, they will have a task to write an essay outlining their thoughts on the ability of a person to react fairly in life-threatening situations.

## Background information

**Context for Lesson:**

Righteous Among the Nation

## **Enduring Understanding**

For the development of the society of justice requires the individualization of each person. Those who do not see themselves as individuals will be the ones who will most resist the change in the society that goes in that direction so that everyone takes responsibility for its functioning.

Unfortunately, it is much easier for many people to shift their responsibility upwards, to an authority that will tell them what and how to do and they will not feel overly responsible for their actions.

The warnings of a horrible crimes throughout the last century, and especially the diversity of people and nations who have committed these crimes, warn us that no matter how desirable the obedient citizens may seem to every government, every now and then insisting on obedience will backfire on us. The right way to go towards the future of a such society is teaching the children from a young age where the boundaries of obedience are and when it is moral, necessary and above all human to say NO.

## **Goals/objectives:**

### **Knowledge gained:**

Students will know:

- Who are Righteous Among the Nation?
- What are the basic criteria for awarding the title of Righteous?
- Identify the levels of moral development in a specific example

### **Skills acquired:**

- They will develop critical thinking

### **Behavior affected:**

- This lesson will help students authentically to understand the ethical challenges faced by non-Jewish citizens of Europe during the period of the Holocaust who were asked to risk so much to save the lives of others and also to recognize the importance of individual impact in the society

**Required materials:****Centropa films:**

1. Matilda Kalef - Three promises  
duration: 18:36
2. Hana Gasic – My spanish bosnian life  
duration: 14:40
3. Survival in Sarajevo  
duration: 11:41

**Other materials:**

Document 1: Kohlberg dilemma

Document 2: Holocaust dilemma

Research on families Tatjacak (Document 3: Tatjacak), and Novakovic (Dokument 4: Krsta Novakovic) and their photographs

**Background skills:**

Students will need a working knowledge of the events of World War II and the Holocaust

## THE LESSON

Motivating the students:

- Righteous among the nations – definition
- Pictures of the Garden of the Righteous in Yad Vashem

**Class 1 and 2:**

### ➤ **Kohlberg**

Students should:

- Get to know the basic stages in the development of moral reasoning (Kohlberg's interpretation) - students need to make differences between the so-called heteronomous morality, which is based on external authorities and autonomous morality, where an assessment of what is moral and what is immoral is made based on their own (adopted) moral standards.
- Read Heinz's dilemma.
- After that, they analyze the stages in the development of a moral judgment through the example of Heinz's dilemma.
- Form six groups of students. Each group should present (through examples and answering 10 questions) one stage in the development of moral judgment (three levels and six stages of moral judgment). It is important to note the differences in moral judgment that occur at each higher level of moral judgment.

### ➤ **Holocaust dilemma**

- Read Holocaust dilemma
- Form three group of students. They need to put themselves in that time, and at that place, and imagine that this is their decision. Explain the students that they will face difficult decisions and with each one there will be serious consequences – short term and long term. It is important for them to know that there is no correct answer. They need to answer the following questions:
  - a. What is your decision?
  - b. Why? What things did you consider?
  - c. Under what circumstances would you put the safety of your family in jeopardy?
  - d. What will be the result of your decision?
- Each group should present its decision to the rest of the class.

Conclusion: an explanation of how great and unique is to be declared Righteous among the nations

### **Class 3 and 4:**

This part includes watching three Centropa's films.

All students watch 3 films.

Students are divided into three groups, each answering questions about one film.

Each group presents one film in front of everyone.

#### Film 1: Three promises

Where and when the film takes place?

What are the three promises?

Where did Matilda and Breda (Rahela) spent the war?

Who helped them and why?

#### Film 2: My spanish bosnian life

Where and when the film takes place?

Explain the actions of:

- rescuers from the film
- bystanders
- perpetrators

#### Film 3: Survival in Sarajevo

Where and when the film takes place?

What is La Benevolencija, what is its significance?

Who are Zejneba Bahardika, Denis and Rašo?

Conclusion:

Question for all - How the Righteous in these films affected the main protagonists of the story?

Homework for the next class

## **Class 5:**

A lecture about the Jews in Krusevac, Tatjacak family and Mayor Krsta Novakovic (students already have photos because they were obliged to get them from the library for homework)

Students are divided into two groups.

The first group – they have the task to draw a family tree of Tatjacak and to put their photos on the board

The second group - they have the task to draw a family tree of Novakovic, as well as to put their photos and the photos of the righteous medals on the board.

Then both groups should answer the questions:

What did Krsta do and how much did he risk?

How did Krsta's reaction affect the life of a Tatjacak family?

They will make difference between bystanders and rescuers.

Then they need to feedback their group decision to the class.

The ending includes short conversation and an essay for homework on the topic: Could you be Righteous (explain what motivates some people to help others and what prevents others from doing so)?

## **Reflection**

Many students, as well as colleagues, equated the notion of morality and concrete action of the Righteous with empathy. Empathy has its good points when it emerges as a feeling of pity, morality or love. But, when we think that we have the same experience as others and close people, when we look at the world from their angle, when we feel their pain, our feelings are usually very narrow. We are born to feel empathy for people in our close environment and the people we know, which is actually a big problem because it first spreads to people of our skin color, religion and nation. So, because of empathy towards our own, we then produce antipathy toward others. The solution would be compassion and understanding. Compassion is when our feelings for the emotions of another person include the desire to help. Then, understanding, which involves information, facts, and rational analysis, despite feelings. So it would be useful to clarify this concern in class.

Furthermore, in the case of the Holocaust dilemma, students should have put themselves in a situation to save the family, which from a child's point of view is really too much of an obligation. More specifically it would be that they should save their peers and that everything depends on them but I think it would cause a lot of stress and would only be achievable if we had more classes available. So, for now, this is the farthest I would go.