



Guilty of Righteousness

Grade Level: 9-12

Subjects: World History / Character Education

Categories: Immigration and Prejudice / History and Society / Italians and the Holocaust

Standards:

NJ Core Content Standards for Social Studies

- 6.2.12.D.4.i Compare and contrast the action of individuals as perpetrators, by standers, and rescuers during the events of persecution or genocide, and describe the long-term consequences of genocide for all involved.
- 6.2.12.C.4.d Analyze the ways in which new forms of communication, transportation, and weaponry affected relationships between governments and their citizens.
- 6.2.12.A.4.d Assess government responses to incidents of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and History

Writing Standards for History/Social Studies and Science – Grades 6-12

Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content they introduce a substantive claim, establish its significance, distinguish it from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization so that claims, reasons, data, and evidence are purposefully and logically sequenced.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. determine whether Giovanni Palatucci deserved to be executed according to Nazi laws.
2. determine whether Giovanni Palatucci was actually a hero unjustly sentenced to be executed by immoral Nazi law.

Abstract:

In this lesson students will learn about Italian citizens and public officials who ignored certain laws during the 1930's and 1940's to follow what they felt was a higher law. They took action to protect Jewish people from persecution under Nazi policies enacted in Italy as a result of Italy's alliance with Nazi Germany. Students will learn how Italians tended to be less supportive of the extreme measures taken against the Jews by the Nazis.

In the course of the lesson, they will also role-play a trial in which Giovanni Palatucci, an Italian policeman is tried for not cooperating with anti-Jewish persecutions. Students will be analyzing this case in some detail as they re-enact it. The irony of the situation should

also make this exercise something that students will long remember, especially since Palatucci ultimately dies at the hand of the Nazis as a result of his action.

Key Terms:

Concentration Camps	Labor and Death camps organized by the Nazis to concentrate slave labor and those destined for systematic execution.
Holocaust	The attempted extermination of the Jewish population and other “undesirables” in Europe by the German Nazis.
Nazi	The National Socialist German Workers’ Party in Germany under the leadership of Adolf Hitler. They ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945.
Righteousness	In accordance with virtue or morality.

Background:

After years of relative tolerance for Jewish Italians within the Italian government and within the Fascist Party, Benito Mussolini issued his anti-Jewish laws in 1938 to placate his new ally, Adolf Hitler. One Italian hero in particular, Giovanni Palatucci, ignored these laws and helped save as many as 5,000 Jews from almost certain death. Palatucci, a policeman in the port city Fiume, Italy (now Rijeka, Croatia), falsified travel documents of Eastern European Jews escaping persecution in Croatia and allowed them to settle in Fiume. He also helped many Jews escape to Palestine on ships that had originally left from the Italian port city. When the Italian Fascist government ordered Palatucci to send Italian Jews to Italian concentration (not death) camps, Palatucci made sure that they were sent to a large camp in Campania in southern Italy. His uncle, Bishop Giuseppe Maria Palatucci, had turned the camp into a refuge for Jews from Nazi and Fascist persecution. The Jews concentrated in Campania escaped the harsh conditions found in northern Italian concentration camps, and they were spared going to Nazi death camps, once the German Army had invaded the north in 1943.

After Italian partisans overthrew Benito Mussolini during the Allied invasion of Italy in 1943, Nazi Germany invaded northern Italy. They re-established a northern Italian Fascist puppet government. The German invaders quickly started to round up Italian Jews and sent them to Nazi death camps in Poland. Many Italians came to their fellow countrymen’s aid and worked to hide Jews or help them to escape to safer parts of Italy, under Allied control.

The Nazis ordered Palatucci to provide them with a list of all Jews in Fiume and in the nearby areas. Heroically, Palatucci ignored the Nazi orders and destroyed all of his records. The furious Nazis arrested Palatucci for conspiracy in September 1944 and sentenced him to death. The sentence was later commuted, and he was sent to the death camp at Dachau, where he died within a month.

Procedures:

- I. Divide students into two equal groups.
 - a. Prosecution team
 - b. Defense team

- II. Divide each team into sub groups
 - a. Research team
 - b. Writing team
 - c. Presenting team

- III. Over a three to five day period (in-class, as an out-of-class assignment, or both):
 - a. All students will research whether Giovanni Palatucci had violated Nazi laws and had indeed sacrificed his own safety and comfort to save Jews from Nazi persecution.
 - i. The prosecutors will record reasons why Giovanni Palatucci had indeed saved Jews from Nazi persecution, committed treason, and had violated Nazi law.
 - ii. The defense team will record reasons why Giovanni Palatucci had not violated Nazi law and was innocent; thus, he should not be punished.
 - b. The research team will organize all of the data so the writers and the orators can use the information in their presentations
 - c. The writers will organize the research data into a formal, five-page, double-spaced essay, (with citations) explaining their position.
 - d. The orators will organize their data into a speech to present at a fictitious Nazi court.

- IV. Hold a mock trial (debate) in the class.
 - a. Have the prosecutors offer written and oral arguments showing how Giovanni Palatucci had rescued Jews from Nazi persecution and how they had violated Nazi law.
 - i. Give the prosecutors fifteen minutes to offer their evidence.
 - 1. Allow the defense team to ask the prosecutors two questions.
 - 2. Allow the prosecutors one minute to answer each of the questions.
 - b. Have the defenders offer written and oral evidence to show that Giovanni Palatucci had not violated Nazi Law.
 - i. Give the defense fifteen minutes to offer their evidence.
 - 1. Allow the prosecutors to ask the defense two questions.
 - 2. Allow the defense team one minute to answer each of the questions.

- V. Homework
 - a. Have the students read copies of both presentations.
 - b. Have students write a paragraph explaining why they will vote to convict Palatucci or exonerate him according to Nazi law.

- VI. On the following day:
 - a. Have students vote whether Palatucci was guilty or not guilty of violating Nazi Law.
 - b. Once the vote has been recorded and reported, tell the students that the Nazis had tried Palatucci for treason and had sentenced him to death. The

sentence was commuted and Palatucci was sent to the Nazi death camp at Dachau, where he died within one month.

- i. Students have already been aware of the outcome from their report and research.
 1. Ask them whether this was a just verdict and sentence since they were in accordance to the Nazi law.
 - a. If they say yes, ask them whether the state's law is supreme and why that is so.
 2. If they say no, ask students to what law can they appeal to? What makes the verdict unjust? By what authority?

Homework:

Have students answer the following questions in paragraph form.

1. Does an individual have a moral obligation to ignore or violate an unjust law? Explain
2. How can one determine whether a law is unjust?
3. Must that authority that determines whether a law is just or not be greater than mere personal opinion or personal feelings? Explain
4. By what authority can one appeal to in order to violate an unjust national law that has been upheld by a national court and/or political system? Explain

Resources for Giovanni Palatucci:

Holocaust Survivors' Network

- http://isurvived.org/Righteous_Folder/Palatucci_Giovanni.html
Giovanni Palatucci, Policemen and Man of God
- <http://www.ewtn.com/vnews/getstory.asp?number=1947>

A Tribute to Giovanni Palatucci and Righteous Heroes of the Holocaust

- http://www.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/palatucci/
- Articles on Giovanni Palatucci on International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation
- <http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/?en/saviors/others/palatucci/>

Margherita Marchione. *Yours Is a Precious Witness: Memoirs of Jews and Catholics in Wartime Italy*, Paulist Press, 1997.