Four Corners Lesson

By Amanda Solomon, Manager of Museum and Holocaust Education
Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education

Objective: Students will be able to understand why single identifiers are problematic and articulate some factors that contextualize and complicate an identity.

Materials:
1. Powerpoint
2. Rescuer, Perpetrator, Collaborator, and Bystander signs
3. Bio Packet

Lesson (30 minutes)
1. Explain the activity (four corners) and define the four categories.

2. Show photo and brief bio of SS Officer Rugemer. Instruct participants to pick a corner that best describes SS Officer Rugemer. Follow by asking why they went to the corner they did.

3. Repeat activity for Calel Perechodnik, Oscar Schindler, Blue Police Officer, and Kazimierz Sakowicz.

4. Return to seats.

5. Show side by side bios of brief and redacted bio for Schindler on Powerpoint.

6. Hand out Bio Packet with brief and extended bios of all the other names. Give 5 minutes to read. Open up for discussion of how this complicates their narrative. Does it change how they view and understand them?

7. Human behavior is shaped and influenced by many factors at many levels. In looking at the Holocaust, how can we contextualize the narratives to include, individual, instructional/organizational, and political/social/national factors?
a. Use example of the Polish police officer (perpetrator/rescuer)
   i. What are examples of individual factors?
      1. Temperament, personality, history, prejudice, etc.
   ii. What are examples of institutional/organizational factors?
      1. Deindividuation, training, career incentives or sanctions, routinization, compartmentalization, etc.
   iii. What are examples of national/political/social factors?
      1. Wars, economic problems, political leadership and movements, religious beliefs, historical events, cultural values, etc.

8. Exit Ticket – Why is placing a person into one category problematic? Provide an example of a person or event that is more complicated than the narrative we tell?

Supplemental Reading Materials

* Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* by James Waller
* Ponary Diary 1941-1943: A Bystander’s Account of a Mass Murder* by Kazimierz Sakowicz
* In the Shadow of Death: Living Outside the Gates of Mauthausen* by Gordon J. Horwitz
* In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer* by Irene Gut Opdyke
* War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* by Doris L. Bergen

Recommended Online Resources

Facing History and Ourselves ([https://www.facinghistory.org/](https://www.facinghistory.org/))
Teaching Tolerance ([https://www.tolerance.org/](https://www.tolerance.org/))
Echoes and Reflections ([https://echoesandreflections.org/](https://echoesandreflections.org/))
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum ([https://www.ushmm.org/](https://www.ushmm.org/))
Yad Vashem ([https://www.yadvashem.org/](https://www.yadvashem.org/))
Four Corners Lesson Biography Packet
Compiled by Amanda Solomon, Manager of Museum and Holocaust Education
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Short Bio

Oskar Schindler

Oskar Schindler was born on April 28th, 1908, in Zvittau, Czechoslovakia to a prominent family. Schindler took control of a Jewish-owned enameled-goods factory, Deutsch Emailwaren Fabrik, close to the Jewish ghetto, where he principally employed Jewish workers. He came to see the Jews as mothers, fathers, and children, exposed to ruthless slaughter. He decided to risk everything in desperate attempts to save “his” 1200 Schindler Jews from certain death in the hell of the death camps. Thanks to massive bribery, he saved his workers. In 1963, the Israeli government names him Righteous Among the Nations. Oskar Schindler died in 1974 and is buried in Jerusalem in Mount Zion.

Long Bio

Oskar Schindler

Oskar Schindler was born on April 28th, 1908, in Zvittau, Czechoslovakia to a prominent family. After the deep economic depression of the 1930s, the family firm became bankrupt. Now without employment, Schindler joined the Nazi party. He quickly got on good terms with the local Gestapo chiefs and was later recruited by the German Intelligence Agency to collect information about Poles. He was highly esteemed for his efforts. Eventually Schindler moved to Crakow, where he took over a Jewish family’s apartment. After bringing Nazi officials with money and illegal black market goods, Schindler took control of a Jewish-owned enameled-goods factory, Deutsch Emailwaren Fabrik, close to the Jewish ghetto, where he principally employed Jewish workers, presumably because they were the cheapest labor. Over time, he came to see the Jews not only as cheap labor, but also as mothers, fathers, and children, exposed to ruthless slaughter. He decided to risk everything in desperate attempts to save “his” 1200 Schindler Jews from certain death in the hell of the death camps. Thanks to massive bribery and his connections from the German Intelligence Agency, he saved his workers. However, by July 1944, Germany was losing the war and closing down the easternmost concentration camps, deporting the remaining prisoners westward or sending them to their deaths at Auschwitz. Schindler convinced the commandant of the Krakow-Plaszow concentration camp to allow him to move his factory to Brünnlitz in the Sudetenland, almost certainly sparing his workers from death in the gas chambers. A list of 1,200 Jewish names was compiled and they travelled to Brünnlitz in October 1944. Schindler continued to bribe SS officials to prevent the execution of his workers until the end of World War II in Europe in May 1945, by which time he had spent his entire fortune on bribes and black market purchases of supplies for his workers. After the war, Schindler was supported by assistance payments from Jewish relief organizations. He moved to Argentina, went bankrupt in 1958, and returned to Germany, where he failed at several business ventures and relied on support from “Schindler Jews.” In 1963, the Israeli government names him Righteous Among the Nations. Oskar Schindler died in 1974 and is buried in Jerusalem in Mount Zion. He is the only member of the Nazi party to be honored this way.
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Short Bio
Karol Stachak and the Blue Police

Established on December 17, 1939 of Polish police officers, the Blue Police were placed under the supervision of the German Order Police. During the Holocaust, the Blue Police were most active searching for escaped Jews immediately after deportations from ghettos and in the subsequent “Jew hunts” from mid-1942 – mid-1944.

Karol Stachak was the commandant of the Czudec Polish Police unit. As a valued member of the Home Army, he executed informers, bandits, and other people deemed dangerous to the organization and local population. In the spring of 1943, locals brought a Jewish man to the police station who during his interrogation allegedly listed the names of eight families, who had given him shelter. Stachak shot the Jew behind the police station. The courts sentenced him to death.

Long Bio
Karol Stachak and the Blue Police

Established on December 17, 1939 of Polish police officers, the Blue Police were placed under the supervision of the German Order Police. The Polish government in-exile encouraged the policemen to return to service in order to mitigate German brutality and gather intelligence. Following the invasion of Poland, many Polish police officers were killed during fighting, executed in camps, or sent to various prisons in western Ukraine and Belorussia. Originally, the role of the Blue Police was to maintain law and order, but as the war continued, their duties expanded to include assisting in the collection of food and labor quotas as well as anti-partisan and anti-Jewish activities. At the same time, the Polish resistance continued to fight against German police structures, sometimes via collaboration with the Blue Police. During the Holocaust, the Blue Police were most active searching for escaped Jews immediately after deportations from ghettos and in the subsequent “Jew hunts” from mid-1942 – mid-1944.

Karol Stachak was the commandant of the Czudec Polish Police unit. As a valued member of the Home Army, he executed informers, bandits, and other people deemed dangerous to the organization and local population. However, he also hid a Jewish boy in his home and looked the other way when locals sheltered Jews and Soviet POWs. In the spring of 1943, locals brought a Jewish man to the police station who during his interrogation allegedly listed the names of eight families, who had given him shelter. Stachak believed that handing him over to the Germans would result in the murder of these families and made the decision to shoot the man behind the police station. His cover was eventually blown in May 1944 and as a result, he was placed under arrest for ties to the underground and later imprisoned. The courts eventually sentenced him to death.
Kazimierz Sakowicz

Kazimierz Sakowicz was a Polish journalist who moved to Ponary, Lithuania. During the war, he kept a detailed journal citing that documented the crimes and atrocities happening outside him home, often distinguishing between Jewish, Polish, and Communist victims. He died in 1944.

Long Bio

Kazimierz Sakowicz

Kazimierz Sakowicz was a Polish journalist who moved to Ponary, Lithuania. During the war, he kept a detailed journal that documented the crimes and atrocities happening outside him home, often distinguishing between Jewish, Polish, and Communist victims. Sakowicz took a grave risk in committing to paper his meticulous chronicle of the unspeakable crimes he witnessed: the genocide being perpetrated by the Germans and their Lithuanian collaborators. In order to continue writing, Sakowicz needed to act normally among his neighbors and in front of soldiers. Discovery of his diary would have cost him, and perhaps his family, their lives. His last known entry is November 6, 1943, but he died in 1944.
Calel Perechodnik

Calel Perechodnik was born September 8, 1916 to an Orthodox Jewish family. He and his wife, Anka, and their daughter, Alinka, lived in the town of Otwock, near Warsaw. On September 19, 1942, his wife and daughter were deported to the death camp of Treblinka. In late August 1942, Perechodnik escaped the Otwock ghetto to Warsaw where he joined the Polish underground and participated in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. He died age 27 either during or in the immediate aftermath of the uprising.

Calel Perechodnik

Calel Perechodnik was born September 8, 1916 to an Orthodox Jewish family. He and his wife, Anka, and their daughter, Alinka, lived in the town of Otwock, near Warsaw. Shortly after being forced into the ghetto Calel joined the Ghetto police. Organized by the local Judenrat (Jewish Council), the Ghetto police were comprised of Jews who helped round up fellow Jews for death through shootings and deportation to death camps. On September 19, 1942, Calel and his fellow officers brought their families to the central square after being told that their families would be spared deportation. But their families were not spared and they were deported to the death camp of Treblinka. After recognizing that they had been deceived, some Jewish police officers removed their armbands and joined their families, but most did not. In his memoir Am I a Murderer, Calel describes how he and other Ghetto police would guard Jews in the ghetto who were slated to be shot in mass killing aktions or how he sometimes would arrest and escort Jews to execution. In late August 1942, Perechodnik escaped the Otwock ghetto to Warsaw where he joined the Polish underground and participated in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. He died age 27 either during or in the immediate aftermath of the uprising.
Short Bio

Eduard Rügemer

Eduard Rügemer was born March 27, 1883 in Nuremberg, Germany 1916. He served as a Major in the Germany army on the Eastern Front and achieved the rank of Major. He was stationed in the Ukrainian city of Tarnopol and during his time there, executions of Poles and Jews were common, although he was not in command of those units. He survived the war and died in Germany in 1955.

Long Bio

Eduard Rügemer

Eduard Rügemer was born March 27, 1883 in Nuremberg, Germany 1916. He served as a Major in the German army on the Eastern Front and achieved the rank of Major. He was stationed in the eastern Ukrainian city of Tarnopol. While there he saw a young 19 year old Polish woman faint while working in a munitions factory. The 60 year old Rügemer took pity on the young blond girl, who also spoke excellent German and arranged a job for her in a dining room for military officers. She also became his housekeeper. Her name was Irene Gut and she also smuggled 12 Jews into the large house occupied by Major Rügemer. During the day, Irene would lock the front door and the 12 would come out to help Irene do her chores. When the Major returned at night, they would hide in the basement. One day, while in town, she and other pedestrians were forced into a large square by the Germans and watched the hanging execution of a Jewish family and the Christian family that had been hiding them. She was so upset that she forgot to lock the door when she returned. Major Rügemer came home unexpectedly and walked in on everybody and realized that she had been hiding Jews in his home. Instead of turning her in, however, he made a deal. The price of his silence would be that she would become his mistress. Irene and those she hid survived the war as did Rügemer. Rejected by his family for the affair for being complicit in hiding Jews, he was taken in by Ida and Lazar Haller, two of the Jews who had been hiding in his home. Rügemer even became the godfather of their son, Roman, who had been conceived during their time in hiding. Roman called him "Zeyde," yiddish for grandpa. Rugemer lived with the Hallers for eight years before his death in 1955. Yad Vashem recognized him in 2012 as a Righteous Among the Nations.