

ALBA Lesson Plan – Social Studies

Title: Identity and Commitment: Jewish Volunteers in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War

Subject: U.S. History, World History, European History, Civics, Government

Grades: 9-12

Standards: [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4](#), [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6](#), [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9](#)

Key words/phrases: Fascism, Nazism, Hitler, Mussolini, Holocaust

Essential Questions: How do the written and oral testimonies and personal letters of individuals give us insight into motivation? Why do people take extraordinary, life threatening risks? Why did so many Jews, in a time of personal crisis, choose to risk their lives in a foreign war?

Synopsis: By examining case studies of individuals who joined the International Brigades, this lesson can be used to frame further investigations into the Spanish Civil War and World War II, including the role of 8,000 Jews who volunteered during an era of crisis.

Standard Alignment Used: English Language Arts Common Core (reading historical sources)

Recommended Teacher Background: Teachers should watch the 10- or 40-minute introduction to the Spanish Civil War among the ALBA teacher resources, as well as the ALBA online lesson, “Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War.”

Connections to other disciplines: English Language Arts, U.S. Government, Civics

Number of Class Periods: 3-5 days.

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6	Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1	Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9	Integrate information from diverse sources, both

	primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.
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Primary Sources:

- Letter from Jewish volunteer Hyman Katz (see Appendix 2)

Procedures

1. Lead-In/Hook:

- Ask students what it means to volunteer. For what do people volunteer, and why do they do it? Ask students to write a short paragraph with the following prompt: *Describe an instance in which you volunteered for something. How did it feel to volunteer? Under what conditions, if any, would you decline an opportunity to volunteer? Why?*
- Students may discuss their responses in a small-group setting.
- Bring the whole class together, and explain that they will now investigate the stories of several young people who became volunteers in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. Depending on the class, and the existing level of knowledge about the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigades, the “Internationalism & the Spanish Civil War” section of the ALBA website can be used to provide some historical background.

2. Pre-assessment and activation of prior knowledge: Review the terms fascism, Nazism, isolationism, interventionism.

3. Step by Step:

- a. After reviewing the terms above, begin an investigation of four selected volunteers by first dividing the class into four equal sized groups. Each group will focus on one of the following individuals: *(Please Note: Individual or small-group access to the Internet will be required to do this lesson as it is described, including software that will play m4v format. Otherwise, adaptations may be necessary.)*
 - **Hyman Katz:** Read [Jewish volunteers in the Spanish Civil War](#), focusing on the description of Katz. Read Katz’s [letter](#) to his mother (follow the link or reprint the letter from Appendix 2 of this lesson).
 - **Ed Balchowsky:** Read [Anti-Semitism in the 1920’s and 1930’s](#), beginning with a short biography of Balchowsky. Watch his [video](#).
 - **Al Tanz:** Read [Jewish Spanish Civil War Veterans during World War II](#). Read the [biography of Tanz](#). Additional information can be found in *The Volunteer*, Volume XXIII, Number 5, p. 12 ([Winter 2001](#)).
 - **Yekhiel Shulevitch:** Read [Internationalism & the Spanish Civil War](#) for background. Watch his [video](#).

- b. Each group will examine the existing primary and secondary source materials available for their assigned volunteer. In some cases, there may be less available information than for other volunteers. Working together, each group should address the following themes and questions:
 - **Origins:** Where was this person from? What was his identity, i.e. how might he have perceived himself, and how might others have perceived him? How might these questions of identity have influenced his decision to join the International Brigades?
 - **Motivations:** From what you can find out about this person, why do you think he volunteered for the International Brigades? What risks did he take by doing so?
 - **Experiences:** What happened to this person during the war? How did these experiences change his self-image, as well as his outlook on society and politics?
 - Each team should generate a list questions they have regarding their person's experiences and his motivations for joining the International Brigades.
 - (Instructors can also tailor the lesson to the Common Core standards listed above adding components including: Developing understanding of political vocabulary, specifically “fascism” and “Nazism”; noting how the different sources are similar and dissimilar in their treatment of the vocabulary or the issue of motivation to volunteer.)
 - c. Introduce the idea of a "life map" to students by asking them to consider how the paths of their own lives can be described graphically as a map or journey. Invite a student to volunteer to sketch his or her own life map for the whole class, or construct your own and present it to students. (Links to descriptions of Life Maps can be found in the Appendix 1.)
4. Closure: As a concluding activity, students will create a life map for one of the individuals explored in this lesson. Students could either collaborate on the person they studied, or be divided into pairs to explore the lives of individuals studied by other student groups. Alternatively, individual students could construct life maps for individuals referenced elsewhere in the ALBA site.
 - Students, using paper and markers, draw out the journey of their selected person, starting with birth showing the significant people, events, experiences, etc. of their life.
 - Have students revisit the questions (from the bullet points in section 3.b.) in creating the life maps.

Differentiation:

- Auditory learners could include in their project an analysis of the song Jarama Valley (a version of song and lyrics by Woody Guthrie, for example, are found online), as another form of insight into motivation to participate in an international brigade.

Assessment:

As a group, in pairs, or as individuals, students will present their completed life maps, projecting images, text and video resources from the ALBA site. The grading rubric for these presentations should include how well students answered the bullet-pointed questions from section 3.b. and connections to the Common Core standards.

Appendix 1:

Links to Descriptions of Life Map Activities:

- [readwritethink](#)
- [Scholastic](#)
- [Student Activity Toolkit](#)

Appendix 2:

Excerpts of a Letter from Hyman Katz

11/25/37

Dear Ma,

It's quite difficult for me to write this letter, but it must be done; Claire writes me that you know I'm in Spain. Of course, you know that the reason I didn't tell you where I was, is that I didn't want to hurt you. I realize that I was foolish for not understanding that you would have to find out.

I came to Spain because I felt I had to. Look at the world situation. We didn't worry when Mussolini came to power in Italy. We felt bad when Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, but what could we do? We felt--though we tried to help and sympathize--that it was their problem and wouldn't affect us. Then the fascist governments sent out agents and began to gain power in other countries. Remember the anti-Semitic troubles in Austria only about a year ago. Look at what is happening in Poland; and see how the fascists are increasing their power in the Balkans--and Greece--and how the Italians are trying to play up to the Arab leaders.

Seeing all these things--how fascism is grasping power in many countries (including the U.S., where there are many Nazi organizations and Nazi agents and spies)--can't you see that fascism is our problem--that it may come to us as it came in other countries? And don't you realize that we Jews will be the first to suffer if fascism comes?

But if we didn't see clearly the hand of Mussolini and Hitler in all these countries, in Spain we can't help seeing it. Together with their agent, Franco, they are trying to set up the same anti-progressive, anti-Semitic regime in Spain, as they have in Italy and Germany.

If we sit by and let them grow stronger by taking Spain, they will move on to France and will not stop there; and it won't be long before they get to America. Realizing this, can I sit by and wait until the beasts get to my very door--until it is too late, and there is no one I can call on for help? And would I even deserve help from others when the trouble comes upon me, if I were to refuse help to those who need it today? If I permitted such a time to come--as a Jew and a progressive, I would be among the first to fall under the axe of the fascists;--all I could do then would be to curse myself and say, "Why didn't I wake up when the alarm-clock rang?"

But then it would be too late--just as it was too late for the Jews in Germany to find out in 1933 that they were wrong in believing that Hitler would never rule Germany.

I know that you are worried about me; but how often is the operation which worries us, most necessary to save us? Many mothers here, in places not close to the battle-front, would not let their children go to fight, until the fascist bombing planes came along; and then it was too late. Many mothers here have been crippled or killed, or their husbands and children maimed or killed; yet some of these mothers did not want to send their sons and husbands to the war, until the fascist bombs taught them in such a horrible manner--what common sense could not teach them.

Yes, Ma, this is a case where sons must go against their mothers' wishes for the sake of their mothers themselves. So I took up arms against the persecutors of my people--the Jews--and my class--the Oppressed. I am fighting against those who establish an inquisition like that of their ideological ancestors several centuries ago, in Spain. Are these traits which you admire so much in a Prophet Jeremiah or a Judas Maccabeus, bad when your son exhibits them? Of course, I am not a Jeremiah or a Judas; but I'm trying with my own meager capabilities, to do what they did with their great capabilities, in the struggle for Liberty, well-being, and Peace....

Lovingly,
Chaim