

Historical Investigation
The Legacy of Jan Karski's Life

Unit: THE UNITED STATES IN A TIME OF CRISIS (1929-1945)

High School United States History

“Polish Diplomat Jan Karski Brings Evidence of German Atrocities to the World’s Attention”

U.S. History State Curriculum:

5.3.2.e Investigate the response of the United States government to the discovery of the Holocaust and immigration policies with respect to refugees.

C3 Frameworks:

CIVICS

D2.Civ.5.9-12. Evaluate citizens and institutions effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.

HISTORY

D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras

D2.His.11.9-12. Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose

D2.His.11.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past

EVALUATING SOURCES AND USING EVIDENCE

D3.1.9-12. Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views, while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

D3.4. 9-12. Refine claims and counterclaims attending to precision, significance, and knowledge conveyed through the claim while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both.

Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies:

Reading

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

RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to address a question or solve a problem.

RH. 11-12.8 Evaluate an author’s premises, claims and evidence by corroborating them or challenging them with other information.

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.

Writing

WHST.11-12.1 Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

WHST. 11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate;

synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

WHST.11-12.8

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the specific task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

WHST.11-12.9

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research

I. Engage the Students

Unit: 20th Century US/World History – World War II

Provide the students with the following background information:

Before the outbreak of World War II, Jan Karski was a Polish reserve officer and a junior diplomat with large ambitions and a bright future. But on September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland from the west and on September 17, 1939, Soviet forces invaded his country from the east, casting Karski's future into a new direction. Escaping certain death at the hands of the Soviets, Karski fled to the German occupied part of Poland.

Karski soon became a courier for the [Polish Underground](#), where he played a critical function in the struggle for his country, despite frequently risking his life. Despite being captured and tortured by the German occupiers, he continued his mission of smuggling information out of Poland to the Polish government-in-exile, initially in France and later in England and return with orders and [information](#) for the Underground authorities. Karski's photographic memory allowed him to deliver the Polish government-in-exile's orders to merge the Underground state with its strong military resistance.

Announce to the students that today, they will conduct an investigation centered on this compelling question:

What was the legacy of Jan Karski's life?

Read and discuss Document 1 with the students:

“Telephonogram from the Chief of the Main Security Bureau of the Third Reich, Rudolph Heydrich, to the heads of Security Police operations about the subsequent stages and methods of the "final solution to the Jewish question," Berlin, September 21, 1939. “

Teachers can show a map of the German occupied areas of Poland to which this directive applies:

http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning_environments/sites_map.asp

or

http://karski.muzhp.pl/karski_en/wojna_agresja_niemiecka.html

Be sure to keep the discussion focused on the idea that Jews were singled out for especially abusive treatment

Conduct the Investigation

- *Teachers and/or students collect relevant and sometimes conflicting primary sources that provide intrigue.*
- *Students do an initial read and analysis individually and prepare notes and evidence for discussions in small groups.*
- *The following questions can be used:*

Sourcing

- What is the text?
- Who created it and when?

Close Reading and Asking Supporting Questions

- What does the text say explicitly?
- What claim does the author/creator make?
- What evidence does the author/creator make?
- What is the author's/creator's perspective?
- What is its purpose?
- Does this text seem credible? Why or why not?

Contextualizing

- What else was going on at the historic time this source was created?
- What else was going on during this time (historic setting)?
- How did the historic setting influence the creation of the text?

Corroborating

- Where do the multiple texts agree and disagree?
- Which texts are more reliable?
- Which are the best texts for answering the compelling question?

Students should individually generate interpretations of the documents based on the compelling question. Teacher and or students may construct supporting questions.

III. Discussions

- Students will work together in small groups and share their interpretations of the compelling question citing documents as evidence. Supportive questions may be addressed at this time.
- Multiple interpretations can emerge and may or may not be accepted by all.

IV. Report Findings

Formulate an argument/opinion that answers the compelling question citing evidence from the sources:

When you write an opinion piece/argument, remember:

- Reasoning used in building an argument should be logical and clear.
- Arguments should have a beginning, middle, and end; beginning with author's claim.
- Cite evidence from multiple sources.
- Some arguments can include an opposing or alternative opinion (elementary students will need support to identify this element).