Lesson plan suggestions for using

IN DEFIANCE OF HITLER:

THE SECRET MISSION OF VARIAN FRY

By

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Elementary School, Middle School and High School

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

**SOCIAL STUDIES**

Discuss what makes someone a hero.

Have each student write a report on someone they consider to be a hero. Plan a special week to discuss different heroes.

Create a bulletin board just for the student’s heroes.

Have a hero celebration day and allow students to dress like their hero.

[www.myhero.com](http://www.myhero.com) an interactive educational web site devoted to thinking about and studying the impact of heroes. It is filled with lesson plans of all types.

Make two lists: cause and effect. List decisions made by Hitler in his rise to power on the cause side; list how those decisions changed the lives of others including Jews, German citizens, and people in other countries such as Britain and America.

Discuss the role that languages play in this book.

Discuss the differences and similarities of different people in the book.

Identify ways the different ethnic cultures played a part in the events of the book.

What does citizenship mean?

What does it mean to be a good citizen?

Describe the key ideas for a democratic form of government?

Apply the concept of supply and demand to the events of this book.

Contrast and compare how laws are changed in a democracy and in a dictatorship.

Describe various cultural characteristics by their customs, music and art.

Describe immigration.

Describe the role of various leaders in our country, such as mayor, governor, senator, president.

Discuss the different modes of transportation used in the book and how they have changed through the years

Study and report about what was happening in the United States throughout the 1930s.

**GEOGRAPHY**

The main setting for this book is Europe. On a map, have students label the countries involved. Then add mountain ranges to indicate the terrain where refugees climbed. Indicate the route most refugees took Marseilles to Lisbon.

Analyze geographic locations mentioned in the book by using books, newspapers, periodicals, and computer sources.

Log on to Google earth and look at satellite images of the mountains in the south of France including the border area between France and Spain to get a sense of the difficulty of crossing the mountains.

Study both political and topological maps of Europe. Compare maps from 1940 and today. What has changed and what has stayed the same?

Create a fact sheet about France, Germany, Spain and Portugal that focuses on their political leaders of the past 100 years.

**SCIENCE**

One of the people Varian Fry assisted was Otto Meyerhof, a Nobel Prize winner. Research Dr. Meyerhof.

Research the background of the Nobel Prize. How many different categories are there?

**LITERATURE**

Discuss the differences of fiction and nonfiction. Reinforce the concept that this really happened to people.

Discuss the difference between an autobiography and a biography.

Discuss the importance of biographies in literature.

**MATH**

Count how many different documents were needed for a refugee to get from France to Lisbon, Portugal. Figure out how many documents were needed for a family of three, four and five.

Using items like French Fries and French Toast, convert U.S. dollars into euros to determine how much these same items would cost in Marseilles, France.

Find out how much time difference there is between your area and western Europe, and calculate different times in different counties.

Estimate the amount of miles or kilometers between each city in the path taken by some of the refugees.

Calculate how long it would take to go from New York to Lisbon if you were traveling at 300 miles and hour, 400 miles an hour etc. Do this between cities of Europe also.

**DISCUSSION**

What was your favorite part of the book and why?

What does it mean to be a refugee?

Discuss how it might have felt to leave your home and everything in it, with only a small suitcase of your belongings?

If you had to pack only one suitcase and flee your home, what would you take?

Discuss what it means to have civil rights taken from certain groups of people.

Give students a chance to describe a time in their lives when they helped someone else.

MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL

**SOCIAL STUDIES**

After reading the opening scene of the book: discuss what happened. Who were the victims? Who was in the mob? What was the feeling in the crowd? What damage did they do? Why did they do it?

Consider the photo on page 5 and discuss the swastika flag. What was the historic meaning of this symbol? Discuss the meanings of the Nazi salute. Research the use of flags through the ages. Find other photographs from this time period that prominently displayed the Nazi flag. Research the lesser known branch of the Nazi regime called the Schutzstaffel (SA), known as brown shirts, or storm troopers.

Discuss what Hitler meant by the “Jewish problem.”

Research the Nuremberg Laws and list the rights which were taken away from German Jews.

Discuss the erroneous theory of the “Aryan race.”

Consider the photos on page 8 and discuss questions it might raise. What is propaganda? Why do you think the Germans boycotted Jewish businesses? Why do you think the Germans burned what they considered anti-German books? Find others sources for additional images of German book burnings. Discuss other groups of people the Nazis targeted, in addition to Jews.

Explain what is meant by the Vichy government. What is an armistice agreement? What were the details of the armistice between France and Germany? What did it mean for Jewish people and anti-Nazis?

Discuss why the Emergency Rescue Committee was created. Write an essay of one of the refugees listed here. Explain why each of these people were considered by the ERC to be in danger. Why did Varian Fry volunteer to go to France?

From the text, what sort of boy was Varian Fry? Can you see anything in his youth that indicates that he might be able to do courageous things in the future? How did he feel about his name?

Research the unusual boat plane, the Pan American Clipper, that carried Varian Fry across the Atlantic. Research advances in aviation through the years.

Discuss the various documents a traveler needed in Europe to go from country to country.

Consider and contrast the freedom of travel we enjoy today with the tight controls of 1940.

Why did the refugees gather at the visa division of the American Embassy and what were they seeking?

Varian Fry helped some famous writers of his day. Write an essay on one of these authors mentioned in the text. Though they were famous people in their day, many today do not know them—this could generate a discussion of what it means to have fame, famous people of today, what sort of legacy do famous people leave, what sort of legacy would the students hope to leave.

Compare the conditions of a concentration camp in 1940 with a concentration camp in 1944. What were the similarities? What were the differences? Who was sent to concentration camps and why?

Discuss the photo on page 40. Why was there a gasoline shortage? How did these charcoal burners work? Do further research on alternate methods of fueling vehicles.

Write a description of the members of Fry’s team and note where they were from, and whether or not each of them was in danger from the Nazis.

Why did each of them want to help Fry with his work?

Why did Varian Fry and his team need to interview the refugees who came to him?

Discuss the primary method of communication of the day—telegrams. Research the development of the cable system. Write a report on communication methods through the ages.

Research the Nazi Gestapo. Why did the sight of Gestapo instill fear in people?

Discuss the dangers of a refugee who crossed the border from France to Spain. What were the variables? What might happen?

Discuss whether or not Varian Fry was breaking the law. This should generate discussion on moral responsibility.

Why did Varian Fry feel that he could not leave the work in Marseilles?

Research the lives and work of Lisa and Hans Fittko.

Describe different methods of escape used by refugees.

Study the work of some of the artists who either lived in or visited Villa Air-Bel.

Consider the photo on page 111. What do you think life was like for children inside a concentration camp?

Why was there not enough food or supplies for the people in France?

Contrast and compare Varian Fry to Jay Allen. Why do you think Varian refused to leave?

Why was Varian Fry forced out of France?

How did Varian Fry’s experiences change him?

What sort of recognition did Fry receive during his lifetime? What sort since his death?

Create a timeline of events that happened in Europe between the end of World War I and the early days of World War II.

Discuss how World War I influenced the beginning of World War II.

Make a timeline and lists the rights that were taken away from Jewish citizens in Germany

Discuss the role that languages play in this book.

Discuss the differences and similarities of the different groups of people in the book.

Identify ways the different ethnic cultures played a part in the events of the book.

Discuss how it might have felt to be a Jewish German whose citizenship was suddenly taken away.

Describe the role of international relief organizations. Research the history of well known groups. Where do they get their money? Who works for them? Where do they go?

Study and compare different forms of governments and political systems.

Make a chart to contrast a democratic leader and a dictator.

What role did an average German citizen play during World War II?

What role did an average French citizen play during World War II?

What role did an average American citizen play during World War II?

Contrast and compare the government of the United States with that of other countries around the world.

Find out how many countries around the world have a democratic form of government and indicate on a world map.

Consider how economic changes affect civil unrest.

Apply the concept of supply and demand to the events of this book.

What is the impact of immigrants on a culture.

Discuss the use of immigration quotas.

To encourage discussion of immigration issues, make a case “for” immigration into this country—then make a case “against” it.

Discuss cultural diversity and the need for tolerance.

Discuss places in the world today where cultural discrimination continues to happen.

Discuss the role of a Foreign Embassy, Consulates, and visas.

In a timeline, track the fall of European countries to Hitler’s domination.

Write an essay contrasting Adolf Hitler and Franklin Roosevelt.

If you were forced to leave your home with only one suitcase, what would you pack and why?

Discuss the difference between illegal immigrants and legal immigrants.

**GEOGRAPHY**

Track the German takeover of much of Europe, country by country and make a timeline. Find historical documentation of photographs and video of these events.

Consider a map of Europe, and discuss why so many refugees had arrived in Marseilles, France. Why were there many soldiers traveling through the city when Fry arrived?

Log on to Google earth and look at satellite images of the mountains in the south of France including the border area between France and Spain to get a sense of the difficulty of crossing the mountains.

Why was it necessary for some of the refugees to walk over the Pyrenees Mountains? Study maps of the region around the south of France and the border between Spain and France. What are the physical details of the area?

Study both political and topological maps of Europe.

**SCIENCE**

Research the development of communication by cable. Who developed it? How was it achieved?

Make timeline of the development of communication methods

How has communication changed since 1940?

Has communication made life easier, or more difficult?

Varian Fry flew to Europe in 1940 in a huge boat plane called the Pan American Dixie Clipper. Do a report on the development of transatlantic flights.

**LITERATURE**

Read and discuss books written by Holocaust survivors.

**ART**

Discuss the influence the arts has on society.

Research the artists Varian Fry rescued from Europe.

Find examples of art and books which were created or written after refugees were rescued by Varian Fry.

Learn about the lives and work of the modern artists mentioned in the book.

Discuss how movies set during the day of World War II have shaped your knowledge of the times. Are the “facts” you learned from movies accurate? In the book In Defiance of Hitler: The Secret Mission of Varian Fry, many refugees who were fleeing the Nazis did in fact cross the Pyrenees mountains on foot. Contrast this fact with the fictionalized version of an escape as shown in The Sound of Music, the von Trapp family planned to secretly escape by walking over the Alps to Switzerland—which is complete fiction. In reality, the family did not flee in secret, the entire family boarded openly boarded a train for Italy. See the web site: <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2005/winter/von-trapps.html>

**DISCUSSION**

What would it be like if your civil rights were suddenly taken away?

Discuss mob mentality as shown in the opening scene of In Defiance of Hitler: The Secret Mission of Varian Fry.

In what ways did Varian Fry sacrifice to help refugees escape Europe?

What makes a hero?

Who are your heroes?

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