

Lesson Title: The Bystanders

Prepared by: Katerina Boutsia

Recommended Level of Instruction

This lesson plan wishes to

- facilitate participants become aware of the role of bystanders during critical times of history, and
- explore the circumstances that encourage or discourage bystanders' active participation or passivity.

This lesson can be used by college teachers in the fields of (but not limited to) Humanities, Law, Social and Political Sciences and incorporated in classes dealing with topics such as Citizenship, History, Religion, Language, Philosophy. It could also be used as part of teacher training courses.

Keywords

Social Inclusion, Anti-Racism, Intercultural Learning, European Citizenship, Religion

Learning Objectives

- Develop sense of empathy, solidarity and personal responsibility
- Understand the impact of active participation and passivity

Reading(s)/Material(s)

Centropa Interview of "Albertos Beraha, Athens Greece"

(free access on <http://www.centropa.org/biography/albertos-beraha>)

Recommended Background Information

Prior knowledge of the Holocaust as a historic moment and its relevance to World War II is very helpful.

Discussion Questions/Activity

As a warm-up (optional) the trainer presents a couple of short controversial quotes regarding bystanders in critical times of history and encourages the expression of different opinions about their meaning, collecting (without commenting) all sort of different viewpoints coming from participants. Such quotes could be sentences like: "Bystanders should never interfere in a moment of crisis because they will end up risking their lives", "Bystanders should always cooperate with authorities", "Bystanders cannot show empathy for victims", "Bystanders have a choice whether to protect someone or not". The trainer can improvise according to the intended audience; the target is to initiate thought and discussion.

Albertos Beraha Interview (approx 30 min):

Participants are asked to form groups and read the interview by Albertos Beraha. As

the interview is quite long, perhaps it could be assigned as a reading before coming to class. However, in class they are asked to focus on a specific part of the interview titled “During the War”. The groups are asked to read this excerpt that describes incidents during the war and identify non-Jewish persons and their role in different parts of the story, either they have a name (i.e. Faidon Kontopoulos, Giannis Hatzithomas) or they are delineated (i.e. the girlfriend of uncle Elias). Once group work finishes, all the results of the teams are gathered on a list/board/flipchart recording the impact of the role or function of these people in Albertos’ story and life.

Bystanders Interviews (approx 45 minutes):

Each group chooses one of the characters recorded in the list above (the trainer makes sure each team works on a different profile) and constructs a story around this person. They are invited to imagine what their life would have been like before and after interacting with the Beraha family, how they met them, how they interacted with them etc. Once the character is constructed, a spokesperson from each group takes turns and sits in a chair taking up a role and giving voice to the character their team focused on. The other participants ask questions regarding the bystanders ‘personal story’ and point of view, including questions regarding their relationship with the Berahas (neighbor, partner or acquaintance), the reason they decided to help or decided to take no action etc.

Alternative exercise: (Re-) Moulding Sculptures

The participants divide in two big groups sitting in opposite sides of the room. The participants on the one side are asked to move to the centre of the room and take up a sculpture posture (freeze-frame) trying to depict a bystander’s moment or incident in Thessaloniki in the years of the war. They stay still while the rest of the participants are guided by the trainer to reflect on each sculpture’s posture (guess the context, the feelings etc). For instance, the trainer can walk with the group through the sculptures and stop briefly in each of them asking prompting questions like: “How do you think this sculpture feels? Why do you think s/he has turned her/his eyes to that direction? Is s/he looking forward to something? What do you think might be causing the smile/hope/pain on this sculpture’s face? How could that change?”. After thoughtful examination of the sculptures, participants are allowed to go towards any sculpture they wish and make a change on it explaining why (for instance turn the direction of their face, make them smile or hug etc). After some time, the role between sculptures and acting spectators is reversed.

As a close-up (optional) there can be a reflection in plenary form facilitated by the trainer. Participants discuss their impressions and feelings created by the overall session, mentioning things that caused them surprise, things they didn’t know or hadn’t thought of before.