Life Under Guard

Daily life and resistance at Auschwitz-Birkenau

SS24.HOS.15b "Describe daily life in the camps, including means of resistance."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that describe prisoners' daily conditions, and circle examples of resistance. Look for how each act of resistance responded to life in the camp.

Daily Life and Resistance at Auschwitz-Birkenau

1 At Auschwitz-Birkenau, a Nazi camp complex in occupied Poland, daily life depended partly on where a prisoner was held and assigned to work. Many Jews sent there were murdered soon after arrival; this account describes those imprisoned in the camp. Prisoners rose before dawn, stood for roll call in all weather, and worked long hours under guard. Some carried heavy materials, while others worked in workshops. Meals were too small to sustain health. Crowded barracks, thin clothing, disease, and violence made rest and survival difficult. Guards could punish prisoners for breaking rules or simply to terrorize them.

2 Within this routine, prisoners sometimes resisted by helping one another survive. A prisoner might share part of a scarce ration or quietly help a sick bunkmate get through roll call. Such acts risked punishment and could not undo the camp's brutality, but they challenged the Nazis' attempt to isolate prisoners. Some prisoners kept forbidden records of what they saw or passed along secret messages. Writing down names and events preserved evidence that the perpetrators wanted hidden. Secretly practicing a forbidden religious tradition could also help protect a sense of identity, though opportunities differed across the camp.

3 Other resistance was organized and armed, though it was rare and extremely dangerous. At Auschwitz-Birkenau, members of the Sonderkommando, prisoners forced to work near the gas chambers, organized a revolt in October 1944. With explosives smuggled by women prisoners from a camp munitions factory, they damaged a crematorium. The SS crushed the revolt and killed many participants. This action did not stop the camp's killing, but it showed that prisoners could act together even under intense surveillance. These forms of resistance, from secret records to revolt, unfolded alongside hunger, forced labor, and constant danger. Resistance was not possible for everyone, and failure to resist never meant consent.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did sharing food or helping a sick bunkmate respond to conditions in the camp? Name a condition and explain the response.

2. Why might keeping forbidden records count as resistance? Connect the act to what was happening in the camp.

3. Describe the October 1944 revolt and explain why carrying it out was especially dangerous.

4. Compare one quiet form of resistance with the armed revolt. How did each challenge what was happening in the camp?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 90 word museum label describing daily life and resistance at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Include at least two conditions and two different forms of resistance, explain how resistance related to camp life, and make clear that not every prisoner could resist. Use your own words.

ANSWER KEY

Life Under Guard

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HOS.15b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that describe prisoners' daily conditions, and circle examples of resistance. Look for how each act of resistance responded to life in the camp. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did sharing food or helping a sick bunkmate respond to conditions in the camp? Name a condition and explain the response.	**Meals were too small and prisoners faced illness. Sharing food or helping someone through roll call supported other prisoners and challenged attempts to isolate them.**
2	Why might keeping forbidden records count as resistance? Connect the act to what was happening in the camp.	**Prisoners secretly recorded names and events to preserve evidence of Nazi crimes that the perpetrators wanted hidden.**
3	Describe the October 1944 revolt and explain why carrying it out was especially dangerous.	**Sonderkommando prisoners used explosives smuggled by women prisoners to damage a crematorium. The revolt took place under intense surveillance, and the SS killed many participants.**
4	Compare one quiet form of resistance with the armed revolt. How did each challenge what was happening in the camp?	**Sharing food quietly helped prisoners survive hunger and challenged their isolation. The armed revolt damaged a crematorium and showed that prisoners could act together despite surveillance.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At Auschwitz-Birkenau, prisoners held in the camp faced exhausting labor, hunger, and crowded barracks. Some quietly shared food or helped sick people at roll call, pushing back against attempts to isolate them. Others recorded events in secret so evidence of Nazi crimes would survive. In October 1944, Sonderkommando prisoners revolted using explosives smuggled by women prisoners. Each form of resistance brought serious risk. Prisoners had different chances to act, and not resisting was never a sign of agreement.

Accept other passage-supported conditions and forms of resistance when students explain the connection accurately. Do not treat survival, resistance, or the chance to resist as the same for every prisoner.