Resistance in the Forests

Weighing what Jewish partisans achieved

SS24.HOS.17 "Assess the effectiveness of different armed and unarmed resistance efforts in Europe from 1933 to 1945, including individuals who opposed the Nazis and their policies.* 17a Explain how and why Jewish partisans undertook armed resistance..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two reasons Jews joined partisans, circle two armed actions, and write 1 beside evidence of results and 2 beside evidence of limits. Use your marks to weigh what the groups achieved.

Fighting and Surviving

1. In German-occupied eastern Europe, Nazi authorities forced many Jews into ghettos and murdered millions. Some Jews escaped into nearby forests and formed armed partisan groups. They fought because German policies threatened their families and communities with death. A forest offered cover, but it did not provide food, weapons, or safety from patrols. Partisans obtained supplies through raids, trade, or help from local people and sometimes joined larger Soviet-led units. Their attacks could damage German transport and communications, yet their choices also had to account for people who could not fight. Armed resistance meant both striking an enemy and trying to survive.

2. In the forests of present-day Belarus, the Bielski brothers led a Jewish partisan group that made rescue a central goal. The group accepted children, older adults, and others who could not carry weapons. Fighters guarded a forest camp and obtained food, while residents built shelters and worked to keep the community alive. Bielski fighters also took part in attacks on German forces and their collaborators. By the time Soviet troops reached the area in 1944, about 1,200 members of the group had survived. Its armed defense helped protect a large community, though gathering supplies and moving such a large group posed constant risks.

3. In Vilna, now Vilnius, Lithuania, Jewish underground members prepared to resist inside the ghetto. When German forces destroyed the ghetto in 1943, some fighters reached the forests and joined partisan units. From there, Jewish partisans attacked rail lines used by the German military. Damaging a line could delay supplies, but an army could repair it, so a single attack could not stop the killing. Escape was also dangerous: German patrols hunted partisans, and some local people refused to help Jews or attacked them. These experiences show two measures of effectiveness: lives saved and the disruption of German operations.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did some Jews form armed groups, and what made the forests both useful and dangerous?

2. How did armed defense support the Bielski group's goal? What evidence suggests it was effective?

3. How could the Vilna fighters' attacks affect German operations, and what limited their impact?

4. Compare what the Bielski group and the Vilna fighters achieved. What danger limited both groups?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 90 word museum label arguing which measure better shows the effectiveness of Jewish armed resistance: lives saved or German operations disrupted. Use evidence from both groups, acknowledge one limit, and explain your choice.

ANSWER KEY

Resistance in the Forests

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HOS.17

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two reasons Jews joined partisans, circle two armed actions, and write 1 beside evidence of results and 2 beside evidence of limits. Use your marks to weigh what the groups achieved. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did some Jews form armed groups, and what made the forests both useful and dangerous?	**They resisted Nazi policies that threatened their communities with death. Forests offered cover but lacked supplies and did not protect them from patrols.**
2	How did armed defense support the Bielski group's goal? What evidence suggests it was effective?	**Fighters guarded the camp and attacked German forces and collaborators while the group sheltered people who could not fight. About 1,200 members survived.**
3	How could the Vilna fighters' attacks affect German operations, and what limited their impact?	**Attacks on rail lines could delay German military supplies, but the lines could be repaired.**
4	Compare what the Bielski group and the Vilna fighters achieved. What danger limited both groups?	**The Bielski group protected a community of about 1,200 survivors, while Vilna fighters attacked rail lines that carried German supplies. German patrols threatened both groups.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Saving lives is the stronger measure of Jewish armed resistance because the Nazis aimed to destroy Jewish communities. The Bielski group used armed guards and attacks while sheltering people who could not fight; about 1,200 members survived. Vilna fighters reached the forests and attacked rail lines, which could delay German supplies. Repairs limited the effect of those attacks. Rescue preserved people whom German policies targeted, even though armed partisans could not stop the killing across Europe.

Accept either measure if the student supports it with accurate evidence from both groups and acknowledges a limit. Do not require students to claim that armed resistance stopped Nazi persecution.