

GUIDELINES

UNDER BESLENEI'S SKY: A TALE OF COURAGE



WOMEN FROM THE BESLENEI VILLAGE

GUIDELINE

Historical Background

Between 1941 – 1944, the German army imposed a brutal siege on the city of Leningrad, during which approximately 750,000 people died, as a result of hunger, disease and cold. In April 1942, children from one of the orphanages were smuggled out of the city, through the Ladoga Lake. They were supposed to be transported by train to Georgia, but it was bombed and many of the children were killed. Those who survived were collected by a Red Army officer in a number of carts, and they began to move along the icy roads between different villages, begging for help. No one was willing to shelter the children, out of fear of the Nazis. The convoy arrived at the outskirts of the Muslim Circassian village – Beslenei. Prof' Yair Oron writes [1]: "When they (children from Beslenei) approached the children of the caravan, they found them apathetic, they tried to talk to them – and they did not answer. Some of them were already dead or dying. The children called their mothers from the fields. Without any hesitation, the women took children to their homes. One of the women returned home with a child and her neighbor asked her: 'What is this baby'? After she answered, the neighbor ran towards the convoy – and right before it left, she took another child with her. On that day, the residents of the village, mainly mothers, adopted 32 children, some of them Jewish (on the topic of the orphans Judaism later in the activity).



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Introduction to the Circassian story

Today we will learn about an extraordinary rescue story that took place in the Muslim Circassian village of Beslenei, in the Caucasus Mountains, during the Holocaust.

let's get to know a bit about the Circassian people and their history. On the first slide, listen to the Circassian lament song accompanied by an explanation of the song's lyrics. In the background – images depicting the Circassian culture.

On the next slide, a brief background about the tragic Circassian genocide by the hands of the Russian Empire, which lasted for a hundred years, between 1764-1865.

After the introduction, we are now ready to learn about the remarkable rescue story, that took place in the Circassian Muslim village of Beslenei in the Caucasus Mountains, in April 1942.

We will now watch the first videoclip, taken from the film: "An event that happened in Beslenei" [2].



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1. Prof' Yair Oron. The Banality of Compassion. 2016.

2. Sarah Tziproni. Director. An event that happened in Beslenei. 2020

RATIONAL

During this activity, we will examine and delve into the events that took place in the Muslim Circassian village of Beslenei, in April 1942, when the villagers rescued orphans from Leningrad, some of whom were Jewish, despite the obvious danger they were putting themselves in. At the base of this story stand the values and beliefs that dictated the choices of those rescuers as individuals, and as a community. They were guided by the principle of 'Adyga Khabaza' - the moral code of the Circassians. At its core are the values of courage, generosity, loyalty, discipline and self-control. We believe that it is important and relevant for the younger generation to be aware of this story.

GOALS

- To shed light on the rescue story that took place in the village of Beslenei in April 1942.
- To delve into the dilemmas of recognizing Beslenei residents as “Righteous Among Nations” [1]
- To Examine the rescue story from a moral perspective, emphasizing values such as solidarity, courage and humanity, and their relevance to our lives today.



THE MONUMENT COMMEMORATING THE RESCUE IN THE VILLAGE OF BESLENEI

3. This honor is rewarded by a special committee of the “Yad Vashem” Museum, to non-Jews who saved Jewish People during the Holocaust, on behalf of the State of Israel and the Jewish nation.

After viewing the video, let's add some additional information providing relevant historical context, such as: the Barbarossa operation - the German army's invasion in the USSR territories, from June 1941, this operation also marks the beginning of the final solution - the mass murder of the Jews in these areas, who make up more than a third of the victims of the Holocaust. And of course, the siege of Leningrad, which is relevant to our story.

Question: Would you like to raise additional questions regarding the film, the era, and the area?

Now let's watch the main film of this activity, which sheds light on testimonies regarding the act of rescue in the Muslim village of Beslenei.

Optional Questions for discussion:

1. In your opinion, what values stood out during the rescue led by the Beslenei village residents?
 2. During the film, were you surprised by this story? Why?
 3. What can be taken from this story to our lives today?
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Memory and Appreciation

To this day, the rescuers from the village of Beslenei have not been recognized as "Righteous Among Nations", because at that time it was impossible to know that some of the children being saved were Jewish.

What is your opinion in this matter? Do you think that the act of rescue in Beslenei should be commemorated?

How would you commemorate the actions of the residents of the Muslim village Beslenei?

In the activity, click your favorite social media logo, and then upload a video or post, raising awareness about this unique story and its relevance today.

After posting, share your TikTok video/Instagram post with the rest of the participants of this activity. Let's see what one high school in Israel did in this matter. Now let's have a look at your posts/videos.

What stands out in them?



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SUMMARY

During this activity, we wanted to raise awareness about a less known act of bravery and rescue during the Holocaust, led by the residents of Beslenei, a Circassian Muslim village in the mountains of the Caucasus.

In this case, "It took a whole village...", as said.

We believe this story to be relevant, today more than ever, and maybe help rethinking stereotypes, bias and prejudice.

Let's read the last text of this activity:

The most important moral code of the Circassians is called 'Adyge Khabze'. At its core stand values of courage, generosity, loyalty, discipline and self-control.

"It is our duty as Circassians and as Muslims to save people, certainly children who are in a life-threatening situation. We saved those children not because they were Jews, but because they were in danger.

Indeed, some of them were in danger because they were Jews; *'Whoever saves one soul'...* as written in the Quran".

The Banality of Compassion. Prof' Yair Oron.



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