

A PROJECT WITNESS MICROSHORT STORIES LESSON PLAN

THE FORGER

An eighteen-year-old Jewish forger in occupied Paris races to produce nine hundred identity papers for three hundred children marked for deportation — because every hour he sleeps, thirty people die.

GRADES 9–10

QUICK REFERENCE

TIME 45 min core / 90 min with extensions. Recommended: 2 days. Day 1: Watch + Analyze. Day 2: Create + Reflect.	MATERIALS Device to play video; printed discussion questions (optional)	CONTENT ADVISORY None required. Film contains no graphic imagery.
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EPISODE SUMMARY

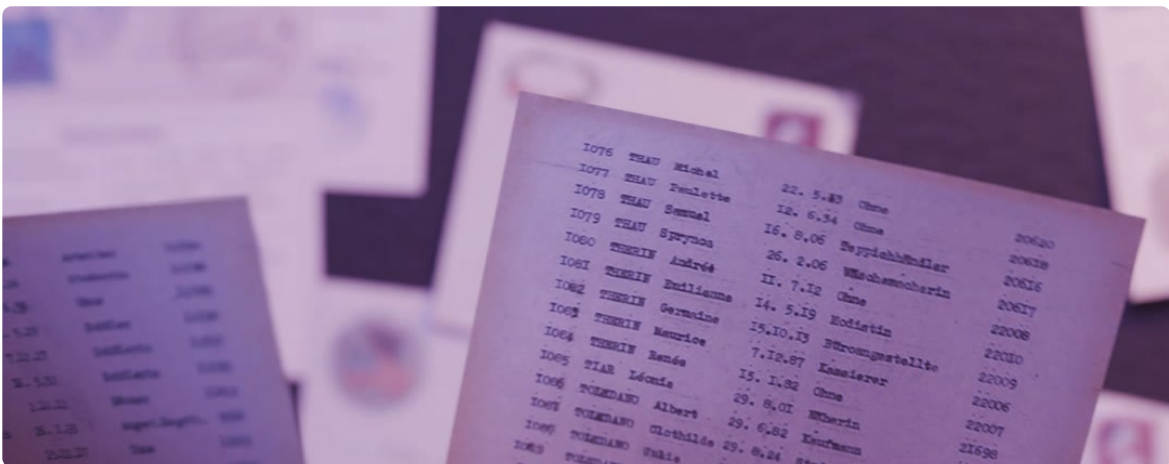
About This Film

Adolfo Kaminsky was eighteen years old, Jewish, and hiding in a Paris attic he had disguised as an artist's studio. His survival depended on invisibility. Before the war, he had worked in a dye shop, and in learning the chemistry of color, he made a discovery that would define the rest of his life: a solution of lactic acid — found in ordinary milk — could erase the official inks stamped on French identity documents. If you could erase an ink, you could change a name. If you could change a name, you could save a life. Kaminsky began forging papers for the French Resistance.



Adolfo Kaminsky (1925–2023), Paris

Then a courier arrived at his door with a list. Three hundred Jewish children were living in orphanages and convents across Paris. The Nazis knew where they were. Deportation orders had been signed. Each child required three forged documents: an identity card, a ration card, and a certificate of non-Jewish status. Nine hundred documents in total. Three days. Kaminsky was alone. He sat down and did the arithmetic: he could produce thirty documents per hour. If he slept for one hour, thirty people would die. He did not sleep.



The list arrives — 300 children, 900 documents, three days

By the end of the war, Kaminsky's forgeries were estimated to have saved fourteen thousand lives. He never accepted a single franc in payment. He lost partial sight in one eye from the strain of close work under lamplight. After liberation he continued forging — for Algerian independence fighters, for anti-apartheid activists in South Africa, for refugees who needed to become someone else in order to survive. He lived quietly in Paris, nearly unknown, until a 2009 book by his daughter brought his story to public attention. Adolfo Kaminsky died on January 9, 2023, at the age of ninety-seven.



Kaminsky, as depicted in The Forger, working through the night



Adolfo Kaminsky in his laboratory during the war years

FOR EDUCATORS

About This Lesson Plan

This lesson plan is designed around a single 90-second microshort film — a format that combines the emotional power of documentary storytelling with the time constraints of a real classroom. It follows a four-step structure: Watch (pre-viewing context and the film itself), Analyze (discussion and close reading), Create (structured creative response), and Reflect (personal connection and exit thinking). Each step is differentiated across three grade bands (7–8, 9–10, 11–12) so a single film can serve an entire department. Extension activities and full standards alignment are available in the appendix.

STEP 1 OF 4

Watch

Use the pre-viewing activities below to build context, activate prior knowledge, and frame student thinking before the film begins. Then show the 90-second microshort.

BEFORE WE BEGIN

A Child Who Was Hidden

“I was five years old when they came for us. My mother pushed me into the arms of a stranger and said, ‘Go with this woman.’ I did not understand. I did not see my mother again for three years. The papers that woman carried said I was her niece. I do not know who made those papers. I only know that without them, I would not be here.”

— Testimony of a hidden child, France, circa 1943 (adapted from accounts in the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive)

The children Kaminsky forged papers for were real. Most were too young to understand what was happening. Many never learned who had saved them.

BEFORE VIEWING

Based on what you have just read, write down one or two questions you want answered. What do you want to know about this story? Hold onto your questions as you watch.

Historical Context

From 1940 to 1944, Nazi Germany occupied France. The German administration worked closely with the Vichy French government, a collaborationist regime that chose to cooperate with the Nazis rather than resist them, to enforce anti-Jewish laws, conduct censuses of Jewish residents, and organize mass deportations. Identity papers were not optional — every person in France was required to carry them and present them on demand. For Jewish people, those papers were death warrants: the documents identified their religion, making them instantly visible to authorities. Forged documents that removed or changed that designation were not merely useful — they were the difference between life and death. The network of forgers who produced them operated in constant danger, working against the bureaucratic machinery of genocide.



Actual French identity card stamped Juif

PREDICTION PROMPT

The film is titled *The Forger*. Based on the logline, “every hour he sleeps, thirty people die,” what do you predict will be the film’s central tension? Write your prediction in 2–3 sentences.

VIEW THE MICROSHORT — 90 SECONDS

Show the film in full without interruption. Students should have their pre-viewing notes visible but should not be writing during the film. The goal is full, attentive viewing.

STEP 2 OF 4

Analyze

These discussion and analysis activities develop close reading and historical thinking skills. Use small groups or whole-class discussion formats as appropriate.



A forged identity card held up for inspection, as depicted in The Forger

Text-Dependent Analysis

1. Now that you have seen the film, what does the word “forger” suggest about the kind of heroism this story depicts? How is Kaminsky’s heroism different from what you might expect?
2. The narration opens with a specific, concrete detail: the number 300 children, 3 documents each, 900 total. How does the story use numbers to build tension? Why numbers rather than names?
3. The logline tells us Kaminsky’s calculation before we watch. How does knowing the arithmetic in advance change how you experience the film’s pacing?
4. The film presents Kaminsky’s story without interviewing survivors or showing the children he saved. What effect does this absence have on how you understand his significance? What might be gained or lost by including their voices?

Historical Sourcing

5. What specific claims in the film can be corroborated through other historical sources? What remains unverifiable from the film alone?
6. The film states Kaminsky saved 14,000 lives. How might historians arrive at or dispute that kind of figure? What does it mean to count rescued lives?
7. What questions does the film leave unanswered that you would want to investigate further?

STEP 3 OF 4

Create

Students respond to the film through structured creative writing. Choose the option that best suits your strengths or interest. Allow 20–25 minutes for the core activity, or assign as homework for a longer response.



Adolfo Kaminsky at 19 — self-portrait

“The laboratory was so cold that the ink wouldn’t dry. I held each document over the lamp, one by one, watching the signatures set. Outside, I could hear boots on the street. I couldn’t think about that. I could only think about the next blank page.”

— Adolfo Kaminsky, as recalled in *A Forger’s Life* by Sarah Kaminsky, 2009

GRADES 9–10

Argumentative Paragraph (MEAL Format)

Kaminsky never accepted payment for his forgeries — not during the war, and not after. Write one well-developed argumentative paragraph using the MEAL structure (Main claim, Evidence, Analysis, Link back to claim) that answers the following question:

PROMPT

Was Kaminsky's refusal to accept payment a moral necessity — the only ethical response possible given the circumstances — or was it an extraordinary personal choice that went beyond what we can reasonably expect of anyone? Use evidence from the film and your historical knowledge to support your position.

Your paragraph should be 150–200 words. Underline your main claim sentence. Circle your evidence.



Adolfo Kaminsky in his laboratory — the forger who never accepted payment

STEP 4 OF 4

Reflect



Adolfo Kaminsky (1925–2023)

These closing activities help students consolidate their thinking, make personal connections, and carry the lesson's meaning beyond the classroom. Allow 8–12 minutes.

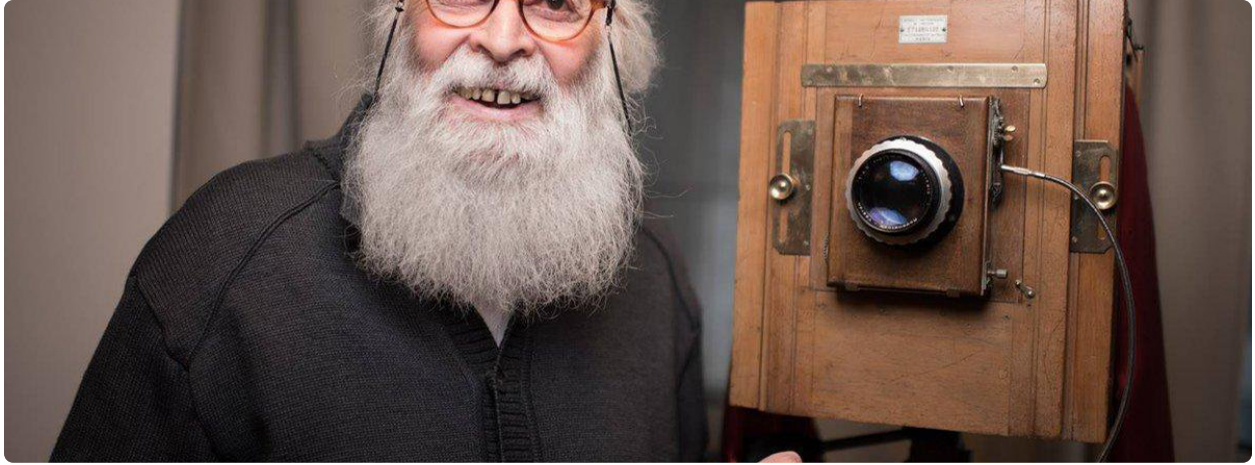
GRADES 9–10

Sentence Frame Reflection

Complete the following sentence frame as a written reflection. You may write as many sentences as you need to complete each thought — the frame is a starting point, not a limit. Be specific. The strongest reflections name something particular they learned, not just general impressions.

“This story changed my understanding of resistance because _____. Before watching, I thought resistance meant _____. Now I understand that it can also mean _____. What surprised me most was _____, because I had assumed _____.”

Share your reflection with a partner. Where do your reflections overlap? Where do they diverge? What might explain the difference?



Kaminsky in his later years — still believing in equality despite everything

*“All humans are equal, whatever their origins, their beliefs,
their skin color. There are no superiors. No inferiors.”*

— Adolfo Kaminsky (1925–2023)

GOING DEEPER

Extension Activities

These activities are designed for students who want to go further — in research, in creative production, or in interdisciplinary analysis. They are suitable for homework, independent projects, or honors-level coursework.



Kaminsky's forged documents, official stamps, and tools of the trade

Research and Argumentation: The Ethics of Forgery

Kaminsky broke the law every day for years. He forged government documents, falsified identities, and deceived authorities. In most circumstances, these are serious crimes. But in Kaminsky's case, they saved thousands of lives.

Research one of the following questions and write a 400–500 word argumentative essay with a clear thesis, evidence, and counterargument:

1. **Legal vs. moral:** When, if ever, is it justified to break the law to save lives? Use Kaminsky's case and at least one other historical example (e.g., the Underground Railroad, draft resistance, sanctuary movements) to build your argument.
2. **Recognition and memory:** Kaminsky lived in near-anonymity until 2009. Many rescuers during the Holocaust were never recognized. Does public recognition matter for moral acts? Should societies actively seek out and honor people like Kaminsky, or does the anonymity itself reflect something important about the nature of rescue?
3. **Ordinary expertise, extraordinary use:** Kaminsky's skill came from a dye shop. He was not trained as a spy or a soldier. What does his story suggest about the relationship between ordinary professional skills and moral responsibility in a crisis?

Your essay must include at least two credible sources beyond the film. Cite them properly.



Wartime identity documents used across occupied Europe

APPENDIX

Full Standards Alignment

Appendix A: Common Core ELA Standards

Grades 7–8

CODE	STANDARD DESCRIPTION	HOW THIS LESSON ADDRESSES IT
RI.7.1	Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	Students cite evidence from the film's narration in comprehension questions, connecting details to Kaminsky's motivations.
RI.7.2	Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text.	Students identify central ideas — moral courage, the arithmetic of conscience — and trace how they develop.
RI.7.6	Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position.	Moral Reasoning questions ask students to consider Kaminsky's point of view and how the story frames his choices.
W.7.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information.	Letter Writing and Personal Narrative activities require organized, structured writing.
SL.7.1	Engage effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues.	Small-group discussion of comprehension questions, plus partner-share exit prompt.

Grades 9–10

CODE	STANDARD DESCRIPTION	HOW THIS LESSON ADDRESSES IT
RI.9-10.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	Text-Dependent Analysis requires citing specific details from narration, historical claims, and numerical evidence.
RI.9-10.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.	Students analyze specific word choices — "arithmetic," "forger" — and their effect on meaning.
RI.9-10.6	Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.	Students examine how the story uses rhetorical framing and the arithmetic of conscience to build argument.
W.9-10.1	Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning	MEAL-format argumentative paragraph requires a clear claim about Kaminsky's

CODE	STANDARD DESCRIPTION	HOW THIS LESSON ADDRESSES IT
	and relevant and sufficient evidence.	refusal of payment.
SL.9-10.1	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners.	Historical Sourcing and Text-Dependent Analysis designed for group discussion, plus sentence-frame partner reflection.

Grades 11–12

CODE	STANDARD DESCRIPTION	HOW THIS LESSON ADDRESSES IT
RI.11-12.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.	Historiographic Questions require identifying what the film leaves uncertain and unverifiable.
RI.11-12.5	Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument.	Students evaluate the 90-second constraint — what is gained and lost by compression.
RI.11-12.6	Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective.	Students analyze third-person narration and its rhetorical effect.
W.11-12.1	Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.	Comparative Medium Analysis requires a 400–500 word argument about form and meaning.
W.11-12.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately.	Open-ended reflection on Kaminsky's closing statement requires sustained organized writing.
SL.11-12.1	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners.	Rhetorical Analysis and Historiographic Questions designed for seminar-style discussion.

Appendix B: C3 Framework for Social Studies

CODE	STANDARD DESCRIPTION	HOW THIS LESSON ADDRESSES IT
D2.His.1	Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.	Students connect Kaminsky's actions to Nazi occupation, Vichy collaboration, and systematic persecution.
D2.His.3	Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time.	Discussion questions assess how Kaminsky's significance is constructed.
D2.His.14	Explain multiple causes and effects of events and developments in the past.	Historical Context traces from anti-Jewish laws to identity papers to Kaminsky's operation.

CODE	STANDARD DESCRIPTION	HOW THIS LESSON ADDRESSES IT
D2.His.16	Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument.	Historical Sourcing asks students to evaluate which claims can be corroborated.
D4.1	Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources.	MEAL paragraph and Comparative Medium Analysis require evidence-based claims.
D4.6	Use disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses to understand the characteristics and causes of local, regional, and global problems and responses.	Reflect step connects Kaminsky's story to present-day issues.

Appendix C: Florida B.E.S.T. Standards

CODE	STANDARD DESCRIPTION	HOW THIS LESSON ADDRESSES IT
ELA.x.R.2.1	Explain how individual text sections and/or features convey meaning in texts.	Students analyze how story sections each convey distinct aspects.
ELA.x.R.3.2	Analyze the author's choices in structure, order, and narration of a text.	Moral Reasoning and Rhetorical Analysis focus on story structure and point of view.
ELA.x.C.1.3	Write and support a claim using logical reasoning, relevant evidence, and credible sources.	Create step requires supporting claims across all grade bands.
SS.912.W.7.6	Describe the causes, events, and effects of the Holocaust (1933–1945).	The entire lesson centers on the Holocaust — Kaminsky's operation, deportation, Nazi occupation.

Appendix D: Texas TEKS

CODE	STANDARD DESCRIPTION	HOW THIS LESSON ADDRESSES IT
ELAR x.6(A)	Analyze how authors use language, point of view, and literary devices to create meaning.	Students analyze third-person narration and numerical language.
ELAR x.8(A)	Analyze the author's purpose and message within a text and the response to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.	Historiographic Questions examine how the story handles conflicting evidence.
ELAR x.10(A)	Write informational essays that synthesize and organize information from multiple sources.	Identity Card research project synthesizes Yad Vashem and other sources.
WH.15(A–D)	Analyze causes and events of World War II, including the Holocaust.	Lesson directly addresses WWII and Holocaust through Kaminsky's story.

Appendix E: California HSS Framework

CODE	STANDARD DESCRIPTION	HOW THIS LESSON ADDRESSES IT
10.8.1–10.8.6	Causes and consequences of World War II, persecution of minorities, and Allied response.	Covers persecution of European Jews, identity documents, individual resistance.
11.7	America's participation in World War II.	Extension activities connect to broader Allied context.
7.10	Medieval and early modern political developments in Europe.	Historical Context provides background on European identity systems.

Appendix F: CASEL SEL Competencies

This lesson builds self-awareness through personal reflection on moral choices. It develops social awareness through empathy with historical figures under extreme pressure. Responsible decision-making is exercised through analysis of ethical dilemmas — Kaminsky's arithmetic of conscience, refusing payment, continuing to forge after liberation. Collaborative discussion activities develop relationship skills including active listening and building on others' ideas.

DASA — Dignity for All Students Act (New York State)

This lesson plan supports New York State's Dignity for All Students Act by engaging students in anti-bias education through the study of historical injustice and moral response. Students examine how prejudice and dehumanization operate systemically, and how individuals can resist through courage, skill, and solidarity.

Appendix G: State Holocaust Education Mandates

This lesson plan satisfies Holocaust education mandates in 25+ states including New York, Florida, California, Illinois, New Jersey, Connecticut, Michigan, Oregon, Colorado, Rhode Island, Kentucky, and Maine. The lesson meets the instructional intent of these mandates: that students learn not only the historical facts of the Holocaust, but also the moral dimensions of resistance, rescue, and the choices available to individuals within genocidal systems.

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