

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 7-8 | 9-10 | 11-12

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.

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.

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 9 January 2023, at the age of ninety-seven.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Curriculum Standards

| FRAMEWORK | GRADES 7–8 | GRADES 9–10 | GRADES 11–12 |
|--|---|--|---|
| Common Core ELA | RI.7.1, RI.7.2, RI.7.6, W.7.2, SL.7.1 | RI.9–10.1, RI.9–10.4, RI.9–10.6, W.9–10.1, SL.9–10.1 | RI.11–12.1, RI.11–12.5, RI.11–12.6, W.11–12.1, W.11–12.2, SL.11–12.1 |
| C3 Social Studies | D2.His.1.6–8, D2.His.3.6–8, D2.His.14.6–8 | D2.His.1.9–12, D2.His.3.9–12, D2.His.14.9–12, D2.His.16.9–12 | D2.His.1.9–12, D2.His.3.9–12, D2.His.14.9–12, D2.His.16.9–12, D4.1.9–12 |
| Florida B.E.S.T. | ELA.7.R.2.1, ELA.7.R.3.2, ELA.7.C.1.3 | ELA.910.R.2.1, ELA.910.R.3.2, ELA.910.C.1.3; SS.912.W.7.6 | ELA.1112.R.2.1, ELA.1112.R.3.2, ELA.1112.C.1.3; SS.912.W.7.6 |
| Texas TEKS | ELAR 7.6(A), 7.8(A), 7.10(A) | ELAR 9.6(A), 9.8(A); WH.15(A–D) | ELAR 11.6(A), 11.8(A); WH.15(A–D) |
| California HSS | 7.10 (Medieval/Early Modern) | 10.8.1–10.8.6 (WWII & Holocaust) | 11.7 (WWII — American perspective) |
| CASEL SEL | Self-awareness, Social awareness, Responsible decision-making | Self-awareness, Social awareness, Responsible decision-making | Self-awareness, Social awareness, Responsible decision- making, Relationship skills |
| DASA (NY) | Anti-bias education: moral courage, standing up against injustice, protecting vulnerable communities | | |
| TIME 45 min core / 90 min with extensions | MATERIALS Device to play video; printed discussion questions (optional) | CONTENT ADVISORY None required. Film contains no graphic imagery. | |

STEP 1 OF 4

Watch

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

GRADES 7–8**Vocabulary Preview****Forger**

A person who creates false documents, signatures, or records intended to deceive authorities.

Identity Papers

Official government-issued documents that prove a person's name, nationality, and identity.

Deportation

The forced removal of people from one country or region, typically by a government, often to a camp or hostile territory.

French Resistance A network of individuals inside Nazi-occupied France who worked — often at grave personal risk — to oppose the German occupation and protect persecuted people.

Anticipation Question**THINK ABOUT IT**

If you knew that every minute you rested, someone else would be in danger, what would you do? How long could you keep going? Write two or three sentences before we watch.

GRADES 9–10

Historical Context

From 1940 to 1944, Nazi Germany occupied France. The German administration worked closely with the collaborationist Vichy French government 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.

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? What does the word "forger" suggest about the kind of heroism this story depicts?

GRADES 11–12

Primary Source: Kaminsky's Memoir

"I did the math — in one hour I could make thirty blank documents, which meant that if I slept for one hour, thirty people would die. So I worked through the nights — pen to paper, stamp to paper, next sheet — until my hands could barely move."

— Adolfo Kaminsky, *A Forger's Life* (as recalled by his daughter Sarah Kaminsky, 2009)

FRAMING QUESTION

Kaminsky describes what we might call an "arithmetic of conscience" — a moral calculation expressed in numbers. What does it mean to reduce the weight of a human life to a unit in a mathematical equation? Is this a form of dehumanization, or the opposite? Come prepared to defend your interpretation after viewing.

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 media literacy skills. Use small groups or whole-class discussion formats as appropriate.

GRADES 7–8

Comprehension Questions

1. Who was Adolfo Kaminsky, and what skill did he have that made him valuable to the Resistance?
2. Why were identity papers so important for Jewish children in occupied Paris?
3. The film references a mathematical calculation. Explain it in your own words: what did the math mean for Kaminsky's decision?
4. What did Kaminsky give up — personally — in order to complete his work? What do you think that cost him?

Visual Storytelling

5. What images stood out to you in the film? Why do you think the filmmakers chose those specific images?
6. How did the lighting make you feel? What mood did it create?
7. What sounds did you notice? How did the sound design affect your understanding of the story?
8. The film is only 90 seconds. Did it feel rushed, or did it feel complete? What choices did the filmmaker make to control the pace?

GRADES 9–10

Text-Dependent Analysis

1. The narration opens with a specific, concrete detail: the number 300 children, 3 documents each, 900 total. How does the film use numbers to build tension? Why numbers rather than names?
2. 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?
3. Identify one filmmaking choice — camera angle, lighting, narration style, sound — and explain how it contributes to the film's argument about Kaminsky's significance.

Historical Sourcing

4. What specific claims in the film can be corroborated through other historical sources? What remains unverifiable from the film alone?
5. 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?
6. What questions does the film leave unanswered that you would want to investigate further?

Rhetorical Analysis

1. The film imposes a strict 90-second constraint on a life that spanned ninety-seven years and touched fourteen thousand others. What is gained and what is lost by that compression? Is the compression itself an ethical act?
2. The narration is written in the third person. Analyze the effect of that choice: how would the film differ if Kaminsky narrated his own story in the first person? What does the third-person frame signal about the filmmakers' intentions?
3. How does this microshort compare to other representations of Holocaust rescuers you have encountered — in literature, film, or testimony? What assumptions about heroism does it reinforce or challenge?

Historiographic Questions

4. The film frames Kaminsky as an unambiguous hero. Historian Yad Vashem has documented the complexity of rescue — the compromises, the failures, the lives that could not be saved. Does the heroic framing serve or distort the historical record?
5. Kaminsky forged documents for many liberation movements after the war, including some that used violent tactics. The film does not mention this. How should educators handle historical figures whose moral record is complicated by later actions?
6. What does the absence of survivors' voices in this film — we hear about the children, but not from them — tell us about whose perspective is centered? What would a different centering look like?

STEP 3 OF 4

Create

Students respond to the film through structured creative writing. Each grade band offers two options; students may choose the option that best suits their strengths or interest. Allow 20–25 minutes for the core activity, or assign as homework for a longer response.

GRADES 7–8**Option A — Letter Writing**

Imagine you are one of the three hundred children whose life was saved by Kaminsky's work. You are now an adult, and you have just learned his name for the first time. Write a letter to Adolfo Kaminsky — even though you know he has passed away. Your letter should include:

- A specific moment from your childhood that you are now able to connect to his sacrifice
- What you would want him to know about the life you were able to live
- A question you would have asked him if you could

Option B — Personal Narrative

Kaminsky pushed through exhaustion because the stakes were too high to stop. Write a short personal narrative about a time you had to keep going — physically, emotionally, or academically — even when you wanted to give up. How did you make the decision to continue? What did it cost you, and what did it mean when you got to the other side?

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.

GRADES 11–12

Comparative Medium Analysis

Read the following memoir excerpt carefully. Then write a comparative analysis (400–500 words) that examines what each medium — the written memoir and the 90-second microshort — reveals that the other cannot. Your analysis should not simply summarize; it should make an argument about the relationship between form and meaning.

"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

Consider: sensory detail, pacing, emotional tone, what is foregrounded versus suppressed, and the reader's/viewer's role in constructing meaning. What does the memoir's intimacy reveal that the film's compressed narration cannot access? What does the film's visual dimension do that language alone cannot achieve?

STEP 4 OF 4

Reflect

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 7–8**One-Sentence Takeaway**

Write the single most important thing you are taking away from this lesson in one complete sentence. Then answer: Where do you see a connection between Kaminsky's story and something happening in the world today? Your connection can be about courage, injustice, identity, or the power of one person's skill put to moral use.

EXIT PROMPT

Complete both parts on a notecard or in your journal:

1. The most important thing I'm taking from this story is: ____
2. This connects to what's happening today because: ____

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?

GRADES 11–12

Open-Ended Reflection on Kaminsky's Closing Statement

In an interview near the end of his life, Adolfo Kaminsky said:

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

— Adolfo Kaminsky, 2015 interview

Write a sustained reflection (one page) on the following question: Kaminsky lived through the Holocaust, witnessed the systematic denial of this principle at an industrial scale, and dedicated decades of his life to protecting it through illegal means. What does it mean that — after all of that — he still felt the need to state it? Is the statement an act of hope, an act of grief, an act of defiance, or something else entirely? And what does it ask of us, the people reading it now, more than eighty years after the events that shaped him?

There is no single right answer. The goal is to think rigorously and honestly about what this statement demands of those who encounter it.

*"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.

GRADES 7–8

Research Project: The Identity Card

Adolfo Kaminsky was not the only person who risked his life to save others through forgery, hiding, or rescue during the Holocaust. Research one other forger or rescuer from the Holocaust era. Your research should include:

- Who they were and where they lived
- What they did and how many lives they are believed to have saved
- What risk they took and what it cost them
- What happened to them after the war

Present your findings as a one-page "identity card" — modeled after the kind of document Kaminsky forged. Include a name, a date, a place, a brief biography (3–4 sentences), and one quote or detail that you think captures who they were. Use Yad Vashem's online database (yadvashem.org) as a starting point.

Creative Production: Write Your Own 90-Second Microshort Script

The Microshort Stories format follows a tight six-beat structure. Using the same architecture, write a 90-second script for a related story from the Holocaust era — a story you believe deserves to be told in this format. Your script must follow the beat structure below:

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Hook (0–10s) | A single arresting fact, image, or question that stops the viewer cold. |
| Setup (10–25s) | Establish the person, the place, the time, and the stakes. |
| Mission (25–40s) | What must the protagonist do, and why is it nearly impossible? |
| Race (40–65s) | The compressed action — the doing. Show the work and the danger. |
| Cost (65–80s) | What did it take from them? What did they give that cannot be returned? |
| End Card (80–90s) | A final fact or quote that reframes everything the viewer just watched. |

Your script should be 200–250 words. Include a brief note (2–3 sentences) explaining why you chose this story and what you hope a viewer would feel.

Interdisciplinary Essay: The Chemistry of Conscience

Kaminsky's discovery was chemical before it was moral. He learned that lactic acid — the same compound found in sour milk — could dissolve the iron gall ink used in official French government documents. This was not obvious: iron gall ink was chosen precisely for its permanence and forgery-resistance. The connection between chemistry and rescue was an accident of profession turned into a weapon of survival.

Write a 600–800 word interdisciplinary essay that does the following:

1. **Explain the chemistry:** What is lactic acid? What is iron gall ink? Why does one dissolve the other? Use at least one credible scientific source.
2. **Trace the discovery:** How did Kaminsky come to understand this — what was his prior training, and how did the dye shop prepare him for forgery in ways he could not have anticipated?
3. **Analyze the moral application:** What does it mean that a scientific fact — neutral, indifferent, discovered by accident — was turned to moral purpose? Does this change how we think about the relationship between knowledge and ethics?
4. **Conclude with a claim:** Make an argument about what Kaminsky's use of chemistry tells us about the relationship between expertise, circumstance, and moral responsibility.

Your essay should include a works cited section. Minimum two sources: one scientific, one historical.

APPENDIX A

Common Core ELA Standards

Common Core ELA — Grades 7–8

| CODE | STANDARD DESCRIPTION |
|--------|--|
| 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. |
| RI.7.2 | Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| RI.7.6 | Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes their position from others. |
| W.7.2 | Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content. |
| SL.7.1 | Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. |

Common Core ELA — Grades 9–10

| CODE | STANDARD DESCRIPTION |
|-----------|---|
| 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. |
| RI.9–10.4 | Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone. |
| 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. |
| W.9–10.1 | Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. |
| SL.9–10.1 | Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. |

Common Core ELA — Grades 11–12

| CODE | STANDARD DESCRIPTION |
|------------|--|
| RI.11–12.1 | Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including where the text leaves matters uncertain. |
| RI.11–12.5 | Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. |
| RI.11–12.6 | Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text. |
| 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. |
| W.11–12.2 | Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. |
| SL.11–12.1 | Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. |

APPENDIX B

C3 Framework for Social Studies

| CODE | STANDARD DESCRIPTION |
|-----------|--|
| D2.His.1 | Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts. |
| D2.His.3 | Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of those individuals and groups is determined. |
| D2.His.14 | Explain multiple causes and effects of events and developments in the past. |
| D2.His.16 | Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past. |
| D4.1 | Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments. |
| D4.6 | Use disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses to understand the characteristics and causes of local, regional, and global problems and to analyze potential responses. |

APPENDIX C

Florida B.E.S.T. Standards

| CODE | STANDARD DESCRIPTION |
|--------------|---|
| ELA.x.R.2.1 | Explain how individual text sections and/or features convey meaning (where <i>x</i> = grade band: 7, 910, or 1112). |
| ELA.x.R.3.2 | Analyze how an author's choices in text structure, narration, and point of view create meaning. |
| ELA.x.C.1.3 | Write and support a claim using logical reasoning, relevant evidence from sources, elaboration, and a concluding statement. |
| SS.912.W.7.6 | Describe the causes, events, and effects of the Holocaust, including its impact on European Jewish communities and the Allied and Axis powers' responses. |

APPENDIX D

Texas TEKS

| CODE | STANDARD DESCRIPTION |
|---------------|---|
| ELAR x.6 (A) | Analyze how authors use language, including point of view, to achieve specific purposes and produce specific effects (where <i>x</i> = grade level: 7, 9, or 11). |
| ELAR x.8 (A) | Analyze the author's purpose and message within a text and how the author responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints. |
| ELAR x.10 (A) | Write an informational essay that synthesizes information from multiple sources (Grades 7–8). |
| WH.15 (A–D) | World History: Analyze the causes and events of World War II, including the Holocaust — its causes, the Allied and Axis powers' responses, and its lasting historical impact. |

APPENDIX E

California History-Social Science Framework

| STANDARD | DESCRIPTION |
|---------------|--|
| 10.8.1–10.8.6 | Students analyze the causes and consequences of World War II, including the Holocaust — the persecution of European Jews and others, the Allied response, liberation, and the Nuremberg Trials. |
| 11.7 | Students analyze America's participation in World War II, including the ideological and strategic context of Allied military campaigns in Europe and the Pacific. |
| 7.10 | Students analyze the causes and effects of significant political and cultural developments in the medieval and early modern period — provides historical context for European national identity and governance (Grades 7–8 context). |

APPENDIX F

CASEL SEL Competencies

This lesson builds **self-awareness** through personal reflection on moral choices and the limits of individual endurance. It develops **social awareness** through empathy and perspective-taking with historical figures who acted under extreme pressure. **Responsible decision-making** is exercised through analysis of ethical dilemmas — Kaminsky's arithmetic of conscience, the weight of refusing payment, the choice to continue forging after liberation. Collaborative discussion activities — especially the sentence frame reflection and small-group analysis — develop **relationship skills**, including active listening, turn-taking, and the ability to build productively on others' ideas. These competencies align to all four CASEL core areas and are activated across every grade band.

DASA — DIGNITY FOR ALL STUDENTS ACT (NEW YORK STATE)

This lesson plan directly supports the goals of 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. The lesson asks students to examine how prejudice, discrimination, and dehumanization operate at a systemic level — and how individuals can resist those systems through courage, skill, and solidarity. The activities develop students' capacity for empathy, critical thinking, and moral reasoning: core competencies for building inclusive school and community environments.

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. As the number of states with Holocaust and genocide education requirements continues to grow, this lesson is designed to meet the instructional intent of those 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.