

7th Grade Prompt: *The film Defiance is about resistance and survival of Jews in Eastern Europe. How did the film represent the diversity of Jewish experiences (secular vs. religious, rich vs. poor, city vs. rural) and how did this partisan experience affect these divisions?*

Building a Community written by: Sarah A.

Imagine having to build up a community out of nothing and saving hundreds of people from certain death. This is exactly what the Bielski family did during World War II. At school, we watched, *Defiance*, a movie about the true story of Zus Bielski and his brothers. They became partisans who fought against the Nazis. They established a camp in the forest in Belarus and saved 1200 Jews from death from the Nazis. The camp was a diverse group of Jews who all had different perspectives and opinions. As a result, the forest Jews were at times conflicted with one another. Yet, the forest Jews of *Defiance* overcame their differences by learning to work together and applying their strengths to help build the community.

We saw the community discover and use their strengths in the movie after the Bielski Otriad freed several Jews from a ghetto. They interviewed the Jews to help issue them positions and to count how many of them. We saw some of the Jews find their hidden strengths. An old man comes to the camp and says that he is, “a watchmaker. . . [Tuvia says] can you repair guns?” He is able to and becomes a big help to the community. Without him, they wouldn’t have been able to defend themselves and maybe not have even survived. Tuvia, Zus’s brother, decides that “women will learn to use weapons and fight alongside men.” They became strong and valuable fighters to the partisans and were able to defend the community. This shows how the forest Jews managed to find and use their strengths that positively affected the building of the community. To add, the character Rabbi Shimon was of great use to the Jews in the forest. The forest Jews needed him to help continue and remember their ancient traditions and without him, they would have lost touch with their religion. During the wedding, it was at this point that all of the Jews really came together as one to celebrate during a tough time. Despite all of their disputes, they were able to put them aside for one moment and really appreciate the simcha. Zus Bielski and some of his comrades were left out of the community due to their allegiance with the Russians. This was a bitter time for the Bielskis because Zus left. But, the wedding scene showed how the forest Jews were united and put away their differences. The rabbi helped do this by having everyone pool their *kavanah* and enjoy a happy occasion during a grim time.

In conclusion, towards the end of the film, Asael, Zus’s brother, becomes a true leader by helping the forest Jews escape the Nazis. He has everyone cross the river to the other side by using their belts as a rope of sorts. In the end, it was a success because everyone was working together. The eternal conflict Asael was struggling with was his faith in G-d and he overcame it when he crossed to the other side. This was something most people in the camp had lost and questioned but Asael found it and carried on. This scene reminded me of the splitting of the Sea

of Reeds. It was Nachshon who walked into to the water and prayed for the separation of the sea because he had faith in G-d. Nachshon mirrors Asael this way because when everyone else was skeptical in the plan, Nachshon and Asael both were confident in it and achieved it and had everyone work together. In our world today, there are so many bystanders and people who don't take action in a problem. Now, we need to be leaders like Nachshon and Asael. The *Defiance* story teaches us lessons about community and leadership that are a true inspiration to all of us.