

Leadership Viewed Through History

A lesson plan.

This lesson was designed for my 12th-grade Diplomacy major students in Israel.

Class size: 30 students

Lesson duration: 90 minutes

Materials and preparation: * a slideshow * an enlarged poster of the person introduced (in this lesson, a poster of Fania Brantsovskaya) * A4 cards for the students to use * pens.

Lesson Pedagogical Rationale

This lesson introduces leadership as a lived human practice rather than a position of authority alone. Using the biography of. from the Centropa archive (<https://www.centropa.org/en/biography/fania-brantsovskaya>), students examined grassroots leadership, moral courage, resilience, and solidarity in a historical context. The lesson's objective was to prepare the students for Daniel Goleman's leadership model, which is part of the Diplomacy major curriculum, by connecting leadership theory to a real-life case study among Jews in WW2.

Lesson Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

Describe key leadership traits and explain how they appear in real-life situations.

1. Explore the role of individuals in grassroots resistance movements through the biography of Fania Brantsovskaya(1922–2024), a survivor of the Vilna Ghetto and a legendary Jewish partisan.
2. Compare formal leadership with moral leadership and evaluate their impact in times of crisis.
3. Discuss how leadership, memory, and testimony contribute to international understanding and peacebuilding.
4. Practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English in an academic context.

Materials and Online Resources

- Centropa biography of Fania Brantsovskaya:
<https://www.centropa.org/en/biography/fania-brantsovskaya>
- PowerPoint presentation with selected biographical slides and anecdotes. (added)
- Board or digital display for vocabulary and key ideas.

Key Concepts

During the lesson, students reviewed and applied the following terms: leadership, leadership style, courage, resilience, grassroots leadership, mutual aid, coordination, memory preservation, partisans, and resistance.

Simple definitions and model sentences were provided to support comprehension and academic discussion.

Lesson Procedure

Photo Analysis Activity (5 minutes)

The photo of Fania Brantsovskaya was presented on the board.

The teacher should ask:

- What do you notice first?
- What emotions does the image evoke?
- What evidence of resilience can be seen?

1. Warm-Up Discussion: Leadership Under Oppression (15 minutes)

The lesson began with a discussion designed to activate prior knowledge and encourage higher-order thinking. (In the previous lesson, we discussed Goleman's leadership style chart).

Questions that can be asked by the teacher (a teacher can choose some):

- Have you ever seen someone lead others without holding a formal title?
- What does it mean to lead a group without official authority?
- Which personal qualities help a leader remain calm under pressure?
- What helps people stay strong in difficult times?
- If you were in a dangerous situation with friends, what would you want your leader to do first?

Following the discussion, I presented slides from Fania Brantsovskaya's biography and asked students to identify the actions, values, and qualities that reflect leadership.

- Which elements of Goleman's framework best describe her leadership?

2. Building Historical Understanding (5-10 minutes)

I explained that while many people associate leadership with fame, title, or political power, some of the most meaningful forms of leadership are grassroots and morally driven.

At this point, I emphasized that Fania Brantsovskaya was not a formal political leader, yet she demonstrated decisive leadership in situations of extreme danger. Her biography will serve as a historical and ethical case study of leadership in action.

3. Comparative Group Work: Formal vs. Moral Leadership (10-15 minutes)

During group work, students will work according to the assigned roles: a facilitator, a recorder, and a speaker.

Information cards about Fania Brantsovskaya were distributed to each group. In addition, students will watch a short Centropa video testimony of Fania Brantsovskaya and identify examples of resilience, leadership, and moral courage.

Students will work in groups of four to compare two types of leadership:

- Formal leadership, based on title, authority, and institutional power.
- Moral leadership is based on courage, solidarity, resilience, and action.

Students will discuss the following guiding points:

- Participation in organized resistance.
- The often overlooked role of women in resistance movements.
- Resistance and support as forms of leadership.

The teacher will raise the questions:

- How does Fania's conduct challenge the idea that leadership depends only on rank or position?
- In what ways does she model leadership through action rather than authority?

4. Close Reading and Discussion (10 minutes)

Students will examine Fania's experience as a partisan in the forests of Lithuania. They will discuss her life in *Zemlyanka* and her participation in sabotage missions against Nazi supply lines.

The teacher will raise a question:

- How would you describe Fania's life in the forest using the words hardship, sabotage, solidarity, resistance, and resilience?

5. Leadership, Testimony, and Memory (5-10 minutes)

The teacher presents a slide with the content:

After the war, Fania remained in Vilnius and later worked as a librarian at the Vilnius Yiddish Institute. She also became an important witness for Centropa.

The teacher will guide students to consider how testimony can function as a form of influence. By speaking to students, diplomats, and historians, Fania contributed to remembrance, education, and moral understanding.

Fania did not lead through force or hatred. She led through truth, memory, and testimony.

6. Concept Introduction: Soft Power (5 min) (Optional if time allows)

The teacher will introduce the concept of soft power and explain that Fania's personal narrative influenced international understanding of the Holocaust through values, memory, and moral authority rather than coercion.

Teacher's slide :

Her story demonstrates that influence can be achieved through credibility, witness, and ethical responsibility, which makes her life especially relevant to students studying diplomacy and international relations.

7. Pair Activity: Diplomatic Report Writing (15 min) - [Optional, I have done it with a strong class]

Students will work in pairs on a short formal report.

Scenario:

You are a young diplomat assigned to the embassy in Lithuania, where Fania Brantsovskaya was born and lived. You have just met Fania Brantsovskaya. Write a

formal report to your home country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs explaining why her story is relevant to modern human rights policy.

The report should include:

- A summary of her transformation from victim to partisan.
- An analysis of how her moral authority contributes to modern peacebuilding.
- A recommendation on how a country can honor survivors to prevent future conflicts.

Teacher note:

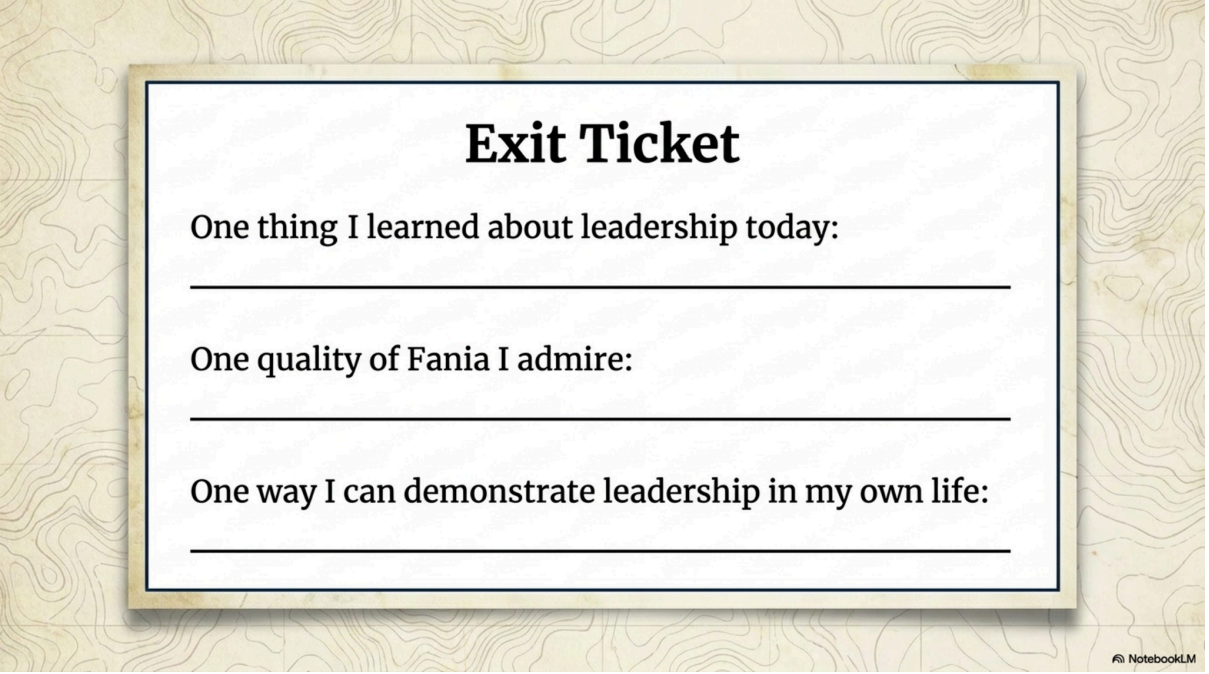
This task builds on students' prior experience in report writing and allows them to apply academic language in a real-world diplomatic context.

After the diplomatic report activity, the teacher should ask students to create:

"Leadership Legacy Card" - Samples of student work are attached.

Students create a digital Canva slide containing:

- One image
- One quote from Fania
- Three leadership traits
- One lesson for young leaders today



The image shows a digital slide titled "Exit Ticket" set against a background of a topographic map. The slide is a white rectangle with a thin black border. It contains three prompts, each followed by a horizontal line for a response:

- Exit Ticket**
- One thing I learned about leadership today:

- One quality of Fania I admire:

- One way I can demonstrate leadership in my own life:

In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small logo that says "NotebookLM".

Samples of student work are attached.

Closing Reflection (10 minutes) - Samples of student work are attached.

I will close the lesson by returning to the central idea that **leadership is defined not only by titles but also by moral action in moments of crisis.**

Homework Assignment

Students will complete a persuasive writing task using the SEE(C)T structure: Statement, Evidence, Explanation, [Counterargument], and Tie-up.

Students will choose one of the following topics:

1. Which aspect of Fania Brantsovskaya's leadership — action, resilience, or solidarity — is most relevant to a 21st-century leader?
2. Identify one specific moment in which Fania Brantsovskaya mentions a "comrade," and explain how teamwork is essential in both partisan warfare and international diplomacy.

Teacher's slide:

You should write persuasively and convincingly, as though you have a personal stake in the issue.

Another activity that can be done:

"Fania's Leadership Through Goleman's Lens"

Students create a chart matching Fania's actions to Goleman's leadership styles.

Fania's Action	Leadership Style	Evidence
Joining the resistance	Visionary	Worked toward freedom
Supporting comrades	Affiliative	Strengthened relationships
Preserving testimony	Coaching/Visionary	Educated future generations

Students assessment:

Student learning was assessed through:

- Participation in whole-class discussions.
- Contributions during group work.
- Diplomatic report writing activity.

- Leadership Legacy Canva slide.
- Exit Ticket reflections.
- Homework persuasive writing task.