

Witold Pilecki – The Unsung Hero of World War II Intelligence

Lesson Plan 3: Youth

CREATE THE CONTEXT

[for homework or in class the previous day]

A | Ask students what they know about the policy of President Woodrow Wilson toward Europe during and after World War I. Discuss the Fourteen Points speech and the implications it had for the aspirations of independence for the nations of Central Europe, notably Poland. Discuss briefly what the partitions of Poland were—to give context to Wilson’s speech.

B | Have students read, think about, and answer the following:

Read Background Information: Pilecki monograph, 11–52.

1. What was the significance of the breakout of World War I for the Poles?
2. Why did Poles consider 1918 the year of the rebirth of Poland?
3. Identify the key features of a traditional Polish upbringing as exemplified by Witold Pilecki’s youth.
4. List and explain Pilecki’s involvement in World War I and the ensuing border wars in the East of Poland.
5. What did Pilecki consider his patriotic duty in everyday life?
6. Was he a successful real estate owner?

(See **Answer Key**.)

ACTIVITY A (Primary Source Activity) [15 minutes]

A | Distribute the maps of Poland under the partitions of Poland in the years 1918–1921. Analyze the changes along the eastern border in the years following World War I.

(See **Answer Key**.)

B | Distribute propaganda posters from the Polish–Bolshevik War. Discuss the significance of the Polish–Bolshevik War for the interwar political order in Europe. Why was it a formative event for the generation of Witold Pilecki?

(See **Answer Key**.)

ACTIVITY B [15 minutes]

A | Prior to class, duplicate **photographs of Witold Pilecki and his family along with subtitles/descriptions**. Divide class into pairs and provide a set of photos and subtitles/descriptions for each pair. Ask the students to match pictures with descriptions.

B | Ask students to discuss what everyday life of the Pilecki family possibly entailed.

C | Ask students to characterize Witold Pilecki's everyday life with his family as portrayed in the photos. Ask them the following:

- What conditions did they live in?
- What do the photos suggest about the reality of the Polish countryside in the eastern part of Poland in the 1930s? Do they differ from the conditions in the American countryside in the same period?
- Do the Pileckis look happy?

ACTIVITY C [10 minutes]

Take a look at the collection of photographic portraits of Witold. In what ways does his appearance change? Why do you think the changes occurred?

(See **Answer Key**.)

WRAP-UP [10 minutes]

Ask the class: "What were the formative events in the eastern Polish border lands in the first half of the 20th century?" "How did Witold Pilecki's young life prepare him for later heroic choices?"

IMMEDIATE ASSESSMENT

A | Write an imaginary letter from Witold Pilecki to his grandson, describing the most important achievements at his estate—assuming that World War II never happened. What would be Pilecki's course of life and his input into the local community life or his career, had World War II never occurred?

B | In a well-written 3–4 paragraph essay, analyze how Pilecki's upbringing and youth contributed to his later life choices. Base your essay on what you have learned about him.