

DIDACTIC UNIT 1

# **Onni Happonen - a man to die for democracy**

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**Resistance**

**Ahmo Koulu, Siilinjärvi, Finland  
2014-2017**

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## INTRODUCTION

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### Title

Omni Happonen - a man to die for democracy

### Age

Secondary education, students aged 13-18 years

### Duration

3 sessions of 45 min each

### Sources

A drawn wreath for students to tear apart in the beginning of the first lesson and to put back together after lessons.

A Power Point presentation to study Finland's political situation and Omni Happonen's murder and to understand the need for human rights in the light of this case diminishing democracy.

Made by Ahmo school students with Petri Hokkanen and Silja Kärjä

### Aims

1. To understand what the concept of resistance means,
2. To find examples of resistance in today's world,
3. To learn of what was going on in Finland before WWII,
4. To raise awareness of the fact that Lapua Movement's illegal actions were silently approved,
5. To make Omni Happonen's case known,
6. To learn how big an impact can resistive actions have on a local community,
7. To learn about human rights and to consider the need for them,

8. To understand what it would be without the human rights,
9. To reflect on one's own opinions: to distinguish between what is fair and what is not fair in life in general
10. To increase the students' ability to critical thinking.

## Other aspects

- **Classroom arrangements.** Students will work individually and discuss with each other. If possible, the chairs can be arranged in a circle for the discussion. The teacher should sit with the students during the discussion and widen the argumentation.
- **Equipment.** A projector is needed to show the presentation. A copied or drawn wreath, as large as possible is needed for student's activities.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

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### **A complicated historical situation in Finland before the WWII**

Silja Kärjä

Finland's situation was complicated before World War II. Finland had had a very short time of independence as Finland became independent only in year 1917 as a result of World War I.

Finland's location between the two former governing countries Russia and Sweden became problematic especially when social circumstances in other parts of Europe started to tighten. There was not social inequality in Finland in a similar sense than there was in many European countries. The social conditions on what comes to subsistence of living for the peasants and working people was ensured by a law after the Finnish Civil War in 1918.

However in Finland too the atmosphere was tightening as the common opinions became more intense and critical towards the communist party and the political left in general. A strong fear for a new Civil War was felt commonly and the Soviet Union was seen as a threat because of the possibility for the Soviet Union to take over Finland using the Finnish communist party for penetration.

Everything that was related to the political left wing, represented automatically an acquiescence towards the Soviet Union for the majority of the nation. And more, everything related to the political left wing, was interpreted to be something unpatriotic.

In Finland just like in the other parts of Europe a right wing movement was born after the WW I but unlike in Europe, it developed to protest and resist communistic ideology and not to protest the development of social conditions which was the initial setting in most parts of Europe.

Lapua Movement was originally established to support the government and society in 1929 but then turned to a protest movement. Members of the Finnish White Guard were involved so it had strong links to the Finnish army. Even though the Lapua Movement had only 30 000 registered members, many more people were involved and what was notable, the movement had a quiet approval of the majority of the Finnish people even when it committed illegalities.

Lapua Movement managed to get the communists act from underground and form covering organisations. The communistic symbols were forbidden by law after the peasant's march in

1930 and Lapua Movement agitated people to support its actions and show patriotism. It then started to prohibit social democrats to take part to politics and even went so far that several assaults, captures of resisting people and their deportations to Russian border happened. This was silently approved by the Finnish people.

Lapua Movement finally went too far, they took the right into their own hands and very often the situation reached out of hands. There were manslaughters and even Finland's first president K. J. Ståhlberg with his wife was transported to the border because of his order to release all the left wing captives from the Civil War. To humiliate a former president was too much for the people. Finally in 1932 after the Mäntsälä Rebellion when Lapua Movement protested towards Finland's legally chosen democratic government, the movement was prohibited and closed by president P. E. Svinhufvud.

## BIOGRAPHY

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### Case Mr. Onni Happonen, the Chairman of Heinävesi Municipal Board

Mr. Onni Happonen was born in Pölläkkä, Heinävesi in year 1898. When he died in year 1930, he was a 32-years old hard-working man, an undisputed leader of the local Labour movement and chairman of Heinävesi county Municipal Board.

What did Onni Happonen stand for? He stood for democracy and legality by refusing to suspend the majority of the Municipal Board's representatives. They were told to withdraw by the Lapua Movement because they represented political left wing, social democrats. The representatives were chosen by legal election. Onni Happonen also stood for freedom of speech and opinion. If any ideology is executed using illegal actions, the society can not be called civilized. Onni Happonen stood for this and got to pay for it with his life.

Perhaps he was not meant to be killed, perhaps he was just meant to be threatened and transported to the Soviet Union border. Something went wrong and Onni Happonen was killed and buried in a forest. What really happened, stays unknown. Notable is that when a memorial for Onni Happonen was arranged 80 years after his death in 2010, the wreaths were teared broken next morning. This reminds us how uncertain and delicate this issue still is. Human rights are not taken for granted.

Apart from the historical and political aspects another motivation of Onni Happonen's case is that it's a local, not widely known example. The locality brings an idea of what was going on closer to students and at the mean time it represents the existing conditions through the entire country. The case remaining a mystery shows in a concrete way that understanding and tolerance towards different ideologies is not self-evident still today. Another example of that is the destroying of the memorial wreaths. The finality of the case ending up to a killing points out the fact the nature of the idea of resistance: one risks one's own life when protesting societal conditions. This reveals to be a question of the most important of the human rights: the right of life.

A presentation about Onni Happonen's case is available on [www.lessonsforfuture.com](http://www.lessonsforfuture.com).

## ACTIVITIES

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### Activity 1

- **Orientation - what is resistance?**

After the Lapua Movement was forbidden in Finland, a far right Patriotic Folk's party "Isänmaallinen Kansanpuolue" was established. They did not gain many places for the parliament in the election, so it located in the political marginal and did not have any significant influence in the societal life.

In the light of this kind of political situation a natural example to Finland's Resistance Lesson Plan is Onni Happonen, one of the Lapua Movement's victims to show that even though resistance towards governing bodies is necessarily not a safe act for a person or in a personal level, it can change things in a societal level and have a huge impact on people's collective mind. Resisting persons often put their own lives at risk for the society. Resistance is activity, by which unwarranted or wrong operation is actively protested. Sometimes this kind of activity can lead to a sad end thinking of an individual, but often resisting persons have been able to change things, conditions or human fates.

- **Lesson procedure and questions to discuss with students:**

A copied drawn wreath for students to tear apart in the beginning of the first lesson: every student takes one piece of the wreath and keep it for further use. The wreath will be put back together after lessons as a symbol of recovering Onni Happonen's memory.





## Activity 2

**At first the definition of the idea of resistance is discussed:**

**What is resistance?**

Even though resistance towards governing bodies or when facing injustice is necessarily not a safe act in a personal level, it can change things in a societal level and have a huge impact on people's collective mind. Resisting persons often put their own lives at risk for the society. Resistance is activity, by which unwarranted or wrong action is actively protested. Sometimes this kind of activity can lead to a sad end thinking of an individual, but often resisting persons have been able to change things, conditions or human fates.

## Activity 3

**Secondly, the students together with the teacher create a collection of names of widely known resisting individuals.**

Possible questions:

Who have put their own life at risk for common good?

Who has been able to change things by opposing the system?

Why is it easier to follow than to oppose?

For example Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Malala Yousafzai and many more people can be mentioned and reminded what they stood for.

## Activity 4

**As the third part of the lesson a local example - Onni Happonen's case that represents the situation in the whole country is studied.**

The teacher shows the students the presentation "Onni Happonen's case".

([www.lessonsforfuture.com](http://www.lessonsforfuture.com))

## Activity 5

**Finally, students reflect their own opinions - what human rights are assaulted in this case?**

They write a short text of what they think about the Omni Happonen's case and what is the most important thing they have learned. Use these questions to help the students to write down their thoughts:

What is the most important thing you have learned?

What made you think?

What human rights were assaulted in Omni Happonen's case?

What are human rights needed for?

What kind of things insult your sense of justice in your every day life?

## Activity 6

**Parts of the students' reflections are read and discussed. The wreath will be put back together.**

## REFERENCES

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