

Student Activity

Johtje Vos: Choices of Courage

Name _____

In the role of rescuers during the Holocaust, Johtje and Aart Vos were faced with choices and complex situations on a daily basis. To Johtje, many of those choices were what “decent people” would do, yet such decisions led to four years of constant danger and fear.

Directions: The following is a list of some of the dangers and difficulties that Johtje related in her testimony. Consider her actions and/or choices listed and then answer the questions below in small groups. Each group should attempt to come to a consensus before sharing their conclusions with the class.

1. Attending meetings for the underground organization
2. Using signals like moving a geranium from window to window to communicate
3. Dividing rations so that all would receive food
4. Listening to Allied radio broadcasts to get information about the war
5. Dealing with illness and death of those in hiding
6. Refusing a Jewish man who sought aid from Johtje because he lacked the proper credentials
7. Creating an escape tunnel from the house
8. Answering questions during long interrogations by authorities
9. As husband and wife, keeping certain resistance activities from each other
10. Entrusting their son with incriminating documents that would implicate the family as rescuers

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Discussion Questions

1. In your group's opinion, which three of the above choices and/or actions assumed the highest degree of risk for Johtje and her family? Be prepared to defend your answers.
2. Of the choices Johtje describes, which might have been the hardest for her to make, and why?
3. We are often moved and inspired when ordinary people do extraordinary things. Why is this so? Using her testimony, what factors do you think contributed to Johtje and her husband being rescuers despite the inherent risks they faced?