

Holocaust and Human Behavior

One-Week Unit Outline



Introduction

The five lessons in this unit give students an overview of the history of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust and provide a window into the choices individuals, groups, and nations made that contributed to genocide. For a more comprehensive unit about the Holocaust that follows the [Facing History scope and sequence](#), see our [One-Month Unit Outline](#).

This unit incorporates readings, videos, and other resources from *Holocaust and Human Behavior*. As you prepare to teach, it is important to refer to the book for the context necessary to help guide students from lesson to lesson and to answer their questions. We also recommend you read the [Get Started](#) section of the book for important suggestions about how to foster a reflective classroom community and how to support students as they encounter the emotionally challenging history of the Holocaust.

Each lesson below corresponds to roughly one day of instruction time. Since schedules, class period length, and the needs of individual classes and students vary, you will likely need to make adjustments to this plan to best suit your needs and circumstances. The “teaching notes” accompanying each lesson often provide suggestions for making adjustments to the lesson in order to abbreviate or go deeper.

Learning Goals

The resources and activities in this unit outline have been chosen and sequenced to target the following goals:

- Give students an overview of the history of the Holocaust and provide them with an opportunity to respond to the stories of victims and survivors.
- Give students the opportunity to learn about some of the specific choices made by individuals, groups, and nations during the the rise of the Nazi Party and the Holocaust.
- Help students understand how circumstances of time, place, and opportunity play a role in defining the choices available to individuals, groups, and nations throughout history.

Essential Questions

What does learning about the decisions people made during the rise of the Nazis and the Holocaust suggest to us about our choices and responsibilities today?

Lesson Name	Materials	Activity	Teaching Notes
1. Choices after World War I	<p>Video: Facing History Scholar Reflections: The Weimar Republic</p> <p>Video: Facing History Scholar Reflections: The Nazi Rise to Power</p>	<p>Introduce this unit by telling students that they will be learning about the Holocaust. If helpful for your students, you might provide them with this definition of the Holocaust:</p> <p><i>The catastrophic period in the twentieth century when Nazi Germany murdered six million Jews and millions of other civilians (including Roma and Sinti, the disabled, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Poles, and prisoners of war), in the midst of World War II.</i></p> <p>Explain that to learn about what led to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, you will begin more than twenty years earlier, at the end of World War I.</p> <p>Students watch two short videos about the Weimar Republic and the Rise of the Nazis. You might use a Close Viewing Protocol to ensure students' engagement.</p> <p>Students reflect on and discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What decisions did Germany, as a country, face between 1919 and 1934? What decisions did individual Germans face? (Possible answers could include <i>Should we be a democracy or not? Should I join the Nazi Party?</i>)• What choices did the country and individuals make?	<p>It's important for the students to know that this week will not be a comprehensive study of the Holocaust. Instead, these five lessons are meant to give students a window into the history and the choices individuals, groups, and nations made that contributed to genocide.</p> <p>If you have an additional one or two class periods, teach the lesson Choices in Weimar Republic Elections to engage students in a more in-depth examination of the political choices Germans faced in the early 1930s.</p> <p>Background Information: Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5</p>

Lesson Name	Materials	Activity	Teaching Notes
<p>2. Understanding Kristallnacht</p>	<p>Video: Facing History Scholar Reflections: Kristallnacht</p> <p>Reading: The Night of the Pogrom</p> <p>Reading: Opportunism during Kristallnacht</p> <p>Reading: A Family Responds to Kristallnacht</p> <p>Reading: Thoroughly Reprehensible Behavior</p> <p>Reading: A Visitor’s Perspective on Kristallnacht</p> <p>Reading: World Responses to Kristallnacht</p>	<p>The class watches Facing History Scholar Reflections: Kristallnacht for an overview of Kristallnacht and its significance.</p> <p>Introduce terms to describe the roles people can play in times of crisis: <i>perpetrator</i>, <i>victim</i>, <i>bystander</i>, <i>upstander</i>.</p> <p>Students then work in groups to analyze readings that describe different responses to Kristallnacht. They should identify evidence they find of perpetrator, bystander, and upstander behavior and discuss the factors that may have influenced individuals to take on one of those roles.</p> <p>Finish with a brief class discussion about the ways in which the roles students explored might be helpful in describing human behavior in other circumstances.</p>	<p>Emphasize that <i>perpetrator</i>, <i>victim</i>, <i>bystander</i>, and <i>upstander</i> are roles, not identities. A single individual can slip in and out of each of these roles depending on circumstances and choices.</p> <p>You may need to provide students with context for this lesson about the rearmament of Germany, the <i>Anschluss</i>, and the annexation of the Sudetenland. Consider creating a mini lecture about the events described in the following Chapter 7 readings:</p> <p>Rearming Germany</p> <p>Taking Austria</p> <p>Crisis in Czechoslovakia</p> <p>Beyond Any Nation’s Universe of Obligation</p> <p>Background Information: Chapter 7</p>
<p>3. Responding to the Stories of Holocaust Victims and Survivors</p>	<p>Video: Facing History Scholar Reflections: The Holocaust</p> <p>Map: Main Nazi Camps and Killing Sites</p> <p>Reading: Identity in the Camps (Primo Levi’s testimony)</p> <p>Reading: Survival in Hiding (Otto Wolf’s testimony)</p> <p>Reading: A Basic Feeling of Human Dignity (Hanna Lévy-Hass’s testimony)</p> <p>Reading: A Transport to Bergen-Belsen (Hanna Lévy-Hass’s testimony)</p> <p>Reading: The Jewish Ghettos: Separated from the World (anonymous girl’s testimony)</p> <p>Featured Collection: Survivors and Witnesses: Using Video Testimony in the Classroom</p> <p>Handout: Creating a Found Poem</p>	<p>Students watch Facing History Scholar Reflections: The Holocaust for an overview of the mass murder perpetrated by Nazi Germany during the Holocaust, and then they examine the map Main Nazi Camps and Killing Sites illustrating the locations and the variety of methods Nazis used to perpetrate mass murder.</p> <p>Students read about a variety of experiences of those targeted by the Nazis during the Holocaust. (Students need not read all of the suggested testimony.) They may also watch video testimony from the Survivors and Witnesses collection. Then students create a found poem based on one account.</p> <p>Students respond privately to the following prompt in their journals or notebooks:</p> <p><i>Accounts like these are disturbing and painful to read. They prompt us to ask many questions, some of which may be unanswerable. What questions do these events raise for you about history and human behavior?</i></p>	<p>See the lesson Responding to the Stories of Holocaust Survivors for more detailed suggestions.</p> <p>Consider ending this lesson by having students complete Exit Cards to give you a sense of how they are responding to this emotionally challenging content.</p> <p>While it is important to illustrate a variety of experiences, the size of your class and the needs of your students may dictate that you choose not to use every suggested reading in this lesson.</p> <p>Background Information:</p> <p>Chapter 8 reading: The Invasion of the Soviet Union</p> <p>Chapter 9 readings: Mobile Killing Units, The Wannsee Conference, Establishing the Killing Centers</p>

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<p>4. The Roles People Played: Resisters, Rescuers, and Bystanders</p>	<p>Reading: Choiceless Choices</p> <p>Reading: A Commandant's View</p> <p>Reading: Bystanders at Hartheim Castle</p> <p>Reading: Protesting Medical Killing</p> <p>Reading: Difficult Choices in Poland</p> <p>Reading: Speaking Out "In the Face of Murder"</p> <p>Reading: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising</p> <p>Reading: Protests in Germany</p> <p>Reading: Deciding to Act</p> <p>Reading: Le Chambon: A Village Takes a Stand</p> <p>Reading: Diplomats and the Choice to Rescue</p> <p>Reading: Denmark: A Nation Takes a Stand</p>	<p>The class reads Choiceless Choices together and discusses Langer's concept.</p> <p>Then each student reads and analyzes one from a selection of readings about the choices of those who had varying levels of agency during the Holocaust. They should think about the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What led each individual to make the choices they made? • How did circumstances of time, place, and opportunity play a role in the choices each person made? <p>Finish with a class discussion about the factors that seemed to either constrain or expand the range of choices available to individuals.</p>	<p>While it is important to illustrate varying levels of agency people experienced and the variety of choices they made during the Holocaust, the size of your class and the needs of your students may dictate that you choose not to use every suggested reading in this lesson.</p> <p>Background Information: Chapter 8 and Chapter 9</p>

Lesson Name	Materials	Activity	Teaching Notes
<p>5. Dilemmas of Judgment</p>	<p>Reading: Moral Luck and Dilemmas of Judgment</p>	<p>Students review what they have learned about the choices that were available to individuals, groups, and nations after World War I, during Kristallnacht, and during the Holocaust. Then they discuss, using the Fishbowl format, the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How were the decisions people were faced with at each of these moments similar? How were they different? • How were the options available to perpetrators, bystanders, rescuers, and resisters different at each of these points in this history? <p>Students read together Moral Luck and Dilemmas of Judgment, and they respond to the connection questions following the reading using the Think, Pair, Share strategy.</p> <p>Finally, students discuss the question:</p> <p><i>What does our examination of the decisions people made during this difficult period in history suggest to us about our responsibilities and the importance of our choices today?</i></p>	<p>Consider providing students with information about the Nuremberg Trials that followed World War II and the Holocaust by showing the short video Facing History Scholar Reflections: The Nuremberg Trials.</p> <p>Students can dig deeper into the philosophical dilemmas of justice after the Holocaust by completing the Justice after the Holocaust Anticipation Guide and then having a Four Corners debate.</p> <p>You can use the final discussion question as the basis of a writing assignment to assess students' understanding of this short unit.</p>

Assessment

In her book *War and Genocide*, Historian Doris Bergen issues an important reminder to students of the Holocaust:

The Holocaust was an event in human history. Everyone involved—victims, witnesses, collaborators, rescuers, and perpetrators—was a human being with human feelings and needs. Recognizing that shared humanity does not excuse the killers or somehow soften the past. If anything it makes studying the Holocaust more painful.

Why is Bergen's reminder of the humanity of "everyone involved" in the history of the Holocaust important? Why might reflecting on our shared humanity make studying the Holocaust more painful? How does it affect how you think about what it means to be human and your own choices today?