



WHAT WAS THE HOLOCAUST?

The Holocaust was a watershed event in human history that involved millions of people across the globe.

Read part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's definition below.

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators.

Introduction to the Holocaust

Administer Pre-test

Lesson Plan: The Historical Background of the Holocaust

Grade Level: 8th Grade

Subject: Social Studies/History

Duration: 60 minutes

Lesson Title: Understanding the Historical Background of the Holocaust

THE HOLOCAUST was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million *Jews* by the *Nazi* regime and its allies and collaborators.

The Nazis came to power in Germany in January 1933. They believed that the Germans belonged to a race that was "superior" to all others. They claimed that the Jews belonged to a race that was "inferior" and a threat to the so-called German racial community. By 1945, the Germans and their allies and collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews as part of the "Final Solution." The "Final Solution" was the Nazi policy to murder the Jews of Europe.

Lesson Objectives:

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

1. Recognize and identify various political, social, and economic conditions in Germany and Europe leading up to the Holocaust.
2. Identify key historical events that contributed to the rise of Nazi power and the beginning of the Holocaust.
3. Understand the significance and history of antisemitism and how it influenced Nazi ideology and policies.
4. Recognize the major events of the Holocaust, from the rise of Hitler to the implementation of the "Final Solution."
5. Identify the Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935

Materials:

- Whiteboard and markers
- Projector and screen (for videos or presentations)
- Student composition books or journals
- Handout of historical timeline of world events 1933-1939
- Worksheet with discussion questions and key vocabulary terms
- Map of Europe (before and after WWII)
- Video clip of historical events or a short, age-appropriate documentary); You may want to select something from here: <https://www.ushmm.org/teach/holocaust-videos-for-classroom-use>
- Additional resources can be found: <https://www.hmrec.org/learning-modules>
- Excerpts from primary sources (optional): speeches, diaries, or Nazi propaganda posters.

Key Vocabulary:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1. Allied Powers | 9. Genocide |
| 2. Antisemitism | 10. Ghetto |
| 3. Aryan race | 11. The Invasion of Normandy, France |
| 4. Axis Powers | 12. Kristallnacht |
| 5. Concentration camps | 13. Liberation |
| 6. D-Day | 14. Nuremberg Laws |
| 7. Final Solution | 15. Propaganda |
| 8. General Eisenhower | |

Lesson Activities:

1. **Introduction and Warm-Up (10 minutes)**
2. **Hand out Journals (1 per student)**

Begin: Write on the board: "What do you know about World War II?" and "Have you ever heard of the Holocaust?"

- Allow students a few minutes to write their thoughts individually, then invite a few students to share their responses.
- **Teacher Introduction:** Briefly introduce the Holocaust as a mass genocide during World War II, where six million Jews were systematically murdered by Nazi Germany, along with millions of others, including Roma people, disabled individuals, and political dissidents.

2. Lecture/Presentation (20-40 minutes)

- **Part 1: The Rise of Nazi Germany**
 - **Contextual Overview:**
 - Germany after WWI: Treaty of Versailles, economic hardship (Great Depression), and political instability.

- The rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party: Hitler's promise to restore Germany's strength and "purity."
- Antisemitism and Nazi ideology: How Nazi beliefs targeted Jews and other minorities.
- **Key Events:**
 - 1933: Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany.
 - 1935: Nuremberg Laws, stripping Jews of their rights.
 - 1938: Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass) — pogroms against Jewish businesses and synagogues.
 - 1941: The invasion of the Soviet Union, leading to mass killings.
 - 1942: The Wannsee Conference and the formalization of the "Final Solution."
- **Part 2: Nazi Policies and the Holocaust**
 - Nazi propaganda, discrimination, and the concept of the "Aryan race."
 - **Concentration camps and ghettos:** What they were, how they were used, and the horrific conditions within them.
 - **The Final Solution:** Systematic murder of Jews and others deemed "undesirable" by the Nazis.
 - Discuss the concept of **genocide**.

3. Video (10 minutes)

- Show a short, age-appropriate video of historical video clips followed by a video of Suzanne Schneider, a Holocaust survivor. Together these videos offer an explanation of the historical background of the Holocaust. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-SfLpKXgRI>
- **Discussion:** After the video, ask students to reflect on what they just saw. Use questions such as:
 - Reflect in journal, then discuss. What did you find most shocking or heartbreaking?
 - How did the Nazis justify their actions?
 - What were some of the consequences for Jewish communities?
- **Read:** Provide students with passages from *The Diary of Anne Frank*, in the student journal, annotate the definition of the Holocaust with details from Anne's story.
 - What events does Anne write about which support historical information?
 - How does Anne feel about being in hiding?
 - Why is the preservation of her diary important?

4. Class Discussion (15 minutes)

- Split the class into small groups and give each group a specific question related to the Holocaust's background. After 5 minutes, have groups share their responses with the class.
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - What impact did the ending of WWI have on the rise of Nazism ideology in Germany?
 - How did the Nazis use propaganda to spread their beliefs about Jews and other minorities?
 - Why do you think Hitler and the Nazis were able to gain so much power?
 - Why did the Nazis target the Jews?

5. Activity/Worksheet (10 minutes)

- Hand out a worksheet that includes:

- A timeline of historical world events, 1933-1939, students will identify events which directly contributed to the Holocaust.
- Key vocabulary matching exercise.
- Short-answer questions: "What were the Nuremberg Laws, and how did they affect Jewish people in Germany?" "How did Kristallnacht mark a turning point in Nazi policies toward Jews?"
- Allow students time to complete the worksheet individually or in pairs.

6. Closure (10 minutes)

- Summarize the main points of the lesson.
- Ask students to share one thing they learned today about the Holocaust's historical background.
- **Exit Ticket:** Have students write one sentence explaining why it's important to learn about the Holocaust.

Assessment:

- Participation in class discussions.
- Completion of worksheet, including understanding of key events and vocabulary.
- Responses during group work and exit ticket.
- Administer a pre and post test

Extensions:

- **Homework:** Write. A brief reflection on "A day in hiding." What would it be like to have left your home during the early morning with only a backpack of your personal items and two pairs of clothes worn on top of one another? Describe your feelings and activities throughout the day.
- Assign students to read a short article or watch a video about a specific aspect of the Holocaust (e.g., life in ghettos, the Nuremberg Trials) and write a brief reflection.
- **Research Project:** In small groups, students can research different topics related to the Holocaust (e.g., concentration camps, resistance movements, the role of the international community) and present their findings to the class.
- **Administer Post-Test**

Teacher Reflection:

After the lesson, reflect on the following:

- Were students able to grasp the significance of the Holocaust's historical background?
- Did the video and discussion help clarify complex topics like antisemitism and Nazi ideology?
- How can future lessons expand on this to deepen students' understanding of the Holocaust and its impact?