

ANTIRACISM EDUCATION

THE HOLOCAUST

FOR

ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOLS

(A TEACHER RESOURCE)

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OBJECTIVES: The study of the Holocaust is officially covered under the guidelines of the High School History curriculum in the province of Ontario. However, Holocaust Education can be included as part of the Elementary/Intermediate Social Studies curriculum, specifically pertaining to antiracism/antidiscrimination education. Students are expected to demonstrate an understanding of respect and tolerance towards individuals, groups, and cultures. Students should also learn that protecting human rights and taking a stand against racism and other expressions of hatred and discrimination are essential components of responsible citizenship (The Ontario Social Studies Curriculum, pg. 17).

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: Teachers will read an abridged version of Hitler’s rise to power and examine how this affected the Jewish people of Europe. Students will be required to keep a journal and after or during each reading or class discussion, specific journal topics will be assigned. Journal entries may vary in length from one paragraph to one page.

This specific unit is broken down into five sections and each section is meant to take approximately two days to cover.

Included throughout this unit are various journal questions or class discussion questions that I use with my students.

CURRICULAR CONNECTION: The lesson’s topic and materials directly address important aspects of the Ontario Curriculum Expectations. Sample Related Curricular Expectations:

Responsible Citizenship

- (6-8) “Enable students to become responsible, active citizens within the diverse communities to which they belong. As well as becoming critically thoughtful and informed citizens who value an inclusive society, students will have the skills they need to solve problems and communicate ideas and decisions about significant developments, events, and issues”.

Community, Culture and Caring

- Character education: “The themes to be drawn include dignity for all people, as well as the importance of cross-cultural understanding and respect”.

Social Studies (6 - 12)

- “Developing an understanding of responsible citizenship. Developing an understanding of the diversity within local, national, and global communities, both past and present”.



Journal questions or class discussion questions: Teacher will read to students or with students each session and discuss the following points. Students may be asked to write the answers in a journal they keep during this lesson.

Session 1: The rise of Hitler and Nazi racism

- Q. Before you begin, have students find the definition of the following words – dictatorship, democracy, propaganda, censorship, and euthanasia.
- Q. Why would it be important for a leader like Hitler to control all forms of communication in Germany?
- Q. Ask students to find a picture of Hitler to see if he fit the “Aryan” ideal?
- Q. Think – would you or anyone in your family be considered handicapped or imperfect if you had lived in Germany during this time? What do you think of this policy?

Session 2: Jewish life in Europe before the Holocaust

- Q. Have students look up the word segregation in the dictionary.
- Q. Who was Jesse Owens and what did he do that upset Adolf Hitler?
- Q. Why do you think racism is wrong? Would the world not be a boring place if we all looked and acted the same?

Session 3: The Holocaust

- Q. Why do you think it was important for young people to continue their education even during these dire times?
- Q. Character In Confinement. Lesson and Study (Five Steps).
- Q. What do you think is the difference between these three types of camps?

Session 4: Liberation

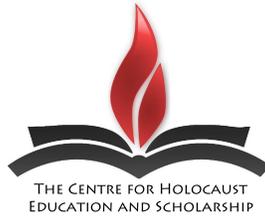
- Q. Is a person still responsible for their own actions even if they are following orders? If you were a judge during the trials at Nuremberg, what would you decide and why?
- Q. There is still Nazi war criminals alive today. Most are in their 80’s or 90’s. If caught, do you think they should still be prosecuted for crimes that took place 60 years ago?

Session 5: Rescue and resistance



Q. Explain in your own words the meaning of the following statement – “As long as good people are ready to act, evil cannot overcome”.

Q. In your opinion, were the three members of the “White Rose” heroes? Should they have acted like everyone else or should everyone else have acted like them?



(Section 1)

THE RISE OF HITLER AND NAZI RACISM

(Q. Before you begin, have students find the definition of the following words – dictatorship, democracy, propaganda, censorship, and euthanasia.

In the early 1930's, the mood in Germany was grim. The worldwide economic depression had hit the country especially hard, and millions of people were out of work. Still fresh in the minds of many was Germany's humiliating defeat fifteen years earlier during World War I, and as a result most Germans lacked confidence in their weak government, known as the Weimar Republic. These conditions provided the chance for the rise of a new leader, Adolph Hitler, and his party, the Nationalist Socialist German Worker's Party, or the Nazi party for short. Hitler was a powerful and spellbinding speaker who attracted a wide following of Germans desperate for a change. He promised a better life for the people of Germany. The Nazis appealed especially to the unemployed, young people, and the members of the lower middle class. The party's rise to power was rapid. In January 1933, Hitler was appointed chancellor, the head of the German government, and many Germans believed that they had found a savior for their nation.

After Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany, he moved quickly to turn Germany into a one-party dictatorship and to organize the police power necessary to enforce Nazi policies. He persuaded his Cabinet to declare a state of emergency and end individual freedoms, including freedom of the press, speech, and assembly. Individuals lost the right to privacy, which meant that officials could read people's mail, listen in on telephone conversations, and search private homes without a warrant. Hitler also relied on terror to achieve his goals. Lured by wages, a feeling of comradeship, and the striking uniforms, tens of thousands of young jobless men put on the brown shirts and high leather boots of the Nazi Storm Troopers. The Storm Troopers were used as auxiliary policemen and they often took to the streets to beat up and kill anyone who opposed the Nazi regime. The fear of the Storm Troopers usually pressured into silence other Germans who did not support the Nazi ideas.

An important tool of Nazi terror was the Protective Squad, or SS, which began as a special guard for Adolf Hitler and other party leaders. The black-shirted SS members formed a smaller, elite group whose members eventually overshadowed the Storm Troopers in importance. The SS became, after 1934, the private army of the Nazi party. SS chief Heinrich Himmler also turned the regular police forces into instruments of terror. He helped forge the powerful Secret State Police, or Gestapo; these non-uniformed police used ruthless and cruel methods throughout



Germany to identify and arrest political opponents and others who refused to obey the laws and policies of the Nazis. In the months after Hitler took power, the Storm Troopers and Gestapo agents went from door to door looking for Hitler's enemies. Socialists, Communists, trade union leaders, and others who had spoken out against the Nazi party were arrested, and some were killed. By the middle of 1933, the Nazi party was the only political party in Germany, and nearly all organized opposition to them was eliminated. Democracy was dead in Germany.

Once Hitler succeeded in ending democracy, he orchestrated a massive propaganda campaign to win the loyalty and cooperation of all Germans. The Nazi Propaganda Ministry, directed by Joseph Goebbels, took control of all forms of communication in Germany: newspapers, magazines, books, public meetings, rallies, art, music, movies, and radio. Viewpoints in any way threatening to the Nazi beliefs or to the regime were censored or eliminated from all media.

(Q. Why would it be important for a leader like Hitler to control all forms of communication in Germany?)

For years before Adolf Hitler became leader of Germany, he was obsessed with ideas about race. In his speeches and writings, Hitler spread his beliefs in racial "purity" and in the superiority of the "Germanic race" – what he called the Aryan "master race." He pronounced that his race must remain pure in order to one day take over the world. For Hitler, the ideal "Aryan" was blond, blue-eyed, and tall.

(Q. Ask students to find a picture of Hitler to see if he fit the "Aryan" ideal?)

The Nazi party began to put Hitler's ideas into practice with the support of German scientists who believed that the human race could be improved by limiting reproduction of people considered "inferior." Beginning in 1933, German physicians were allowed to perform forced sterilizations, operations making it impossible for the victims to have children. Among the targets of this public program were Roma (Gypsies), an ethnic minority numbering 30,000 in Germany, and handicapped individuals, including the mentally ill and people born deaf and blind. Also victimized were about 500 African-German children, the offspring of German mothers and African colonial soldiers in the Allied armies that occupied the German Rhineland region after World War I. Hitler and other Nazi leaders viewed the Jews, not as a religious group, but as a poisonous "race" which "lived off" the other races and weakened them. Nazi teachers in school classrooms began to humiliate Jewish students by saying they were an inferior race of people.

Germany started to attack and take over other European countries such as Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, Yugoslavia, and Greece. Germany



planned to Germanize these conquered countries. Millions of prisoners were deported to Germany to be used as forced laborers in German war industries or agriculture.

Wartime, Hitler suggested, “was the best time for the elimination of the incurably ill.” Many Germans did not want to be reminded of individuals who did not measure up to their concept of the “master race.” The physically and mentally handicapped were viewed as “useless” to society, a threat to “Aryan” genetic purity, and ultimately, unworthy of life. At the beginning of World War II, individuals who were mentally handicapped, physically handicapped, or mentally ill were targeted for murder in what the Nazis called the “T-4,” or “euthanasia,” program. Doomed patients were transferred to six institutions in Germany and Austria, where they were killed in specially constructed gas chambers. Handicapped infants and small children were also killed by injection with a deadly dose of drugs or by starvation. The bodies of the victims were burned in large ovens called crematoria.

(Q. Think – would you or anyone in your family be considered handicapped or imperfect if you had lived in Germany during this time? What do you think of this policy?)

Despite public protests in 1941, the Nazi leadership continued this program in secret throughout the war. More than 200,000 handicapped people were murdered between 1940 and 1945. The T-4 program became the model for mass murder of Jews, Roma (Gypsies), and others in camps equipped with gas chambers that the Nazis would open in 1941 and 1942.

German forces attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, pushing more than 600 miles to the gates of Moscow. But the Soviet Union, together with the Allied Forces of Great Britain, Canada, and the United States, turned the tide against Germany in December 1941. Nazi Germany surrendered in May of 1945. Adolf Hitler committed suicide before he could be captured.



(Section 2)

JEWISH LIFE IN EUROPE BEFORE THE HOLOCAUST

(Q. Have students look up the word segregation in the dictionary.)

When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, Jewish people were living in every country in Europe. A total of approximately nine million Jews lived in the twenty-one countries that would be occupied by Germany during World War II. By the end of the war, two out of every three of these people would be dead and European Jewish life would be changed forever.

Jewish people could be found in all walks of life, they worked as farmers, tailors, seamstresses, factory workers, accountants, doctors, teachers, and small-business owners. Some families were wealthy; many others were poor. Many children were forced to end their schooling early to work in a craft or trade; others looked forward to continuing their education at the university level. Whatever their differences, they were the same in one respect: by the 1930s, with the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany, the Jewish people all became potential victims, and their lives were changed forever. The Nazis were not the first to discriminate against Jewish people – throughout history Jews have faced prejudice and discrimination, known as anti-Semitism. The Romans placed restrictions on Jews barring them from holding certain jobs and from owning land. Eventually (remember this is happening nearly two-thousand years ago) the Romans drove the Jews from the land which is today called Israel, where they spread throughout the globe and tried to retain their unique beliefs and culture while living as a minority.

For centuries the Roman Catholic Church had blamed Jews for being responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. Today historians now know that Jesus himself was Jewish, and he was executed by the Roman government because he was viewed as a threat to them. In Russia and Poland, in the late 1800s, the governments organized or did not prevent violent attacks on Jewish neighborhoods, called pogroms, in which mobs murdered Jews and looted their homes and stores. Some politicians began using the idea of racial superiority in their election campaigns as a way to get votes. Karl Lueger (1844-1910) was one such politician. He became the Mayor of Vienna, Austria, at the end of the century through the use of antisemitism – appealed to voters by blaming the Jews for the bad economic times. Lueger was a hero to a young man named Adolf Hitler, who was born in Austria in 1899. Hitler's ideas, including his views of the Jewish people were shaped during the years he lived in Vienna, where he studied Lueger's tactics. Lueger's tactics included controlling the media by running antisemitic newspapers and promoting antisemitism through the use of pamphlets.



In 1933, about 600,000 Jews lived in Germany, less than one percent of the total population. Most Jews were proud to be citizens of a country that had produced many great poets, writers, musicians, and artists. More than 100,000 German Jews had served in the German army during World War I, and many were decorated for bravery. They spoke the German language and regarded Germany as their home.

When the Nazis came to power, the lives of German Jews changed drastically. On April 1, 1933, the Nazis carried out the first nationwide, planned action against them: a boycott of Jewish businesses. Nazi spokesmen claimed the boycott was an act of revenge against both German Jews and foreigners, including U.S. and English journalists who criticized the Nazi regime. Storm Troopers stood menacingly in front of Jewish-owned shops with signs posted – “Don’t buy from Jews” and “The Jews are our Misfortune.” A week later, the government passed a law restricting employment in the civil service to “Aryans” only. Jewish government workers, including teachers in public schools and universities, were fired.

After the Nazi party rally held in Nuremberg in 1935, the Nazis announced a number of new laws. The laws excluded German Jews from having German citizenship and prohibited them from marrying any person of “German blood.” Before and during the 1936 Olympic Games held in Berlin, the Nazi regime actually slowed down its anti-Jewish attacks and even removed some of the signs saying “Jews Unwelcome” from public places. Hitler did not want international criticism of his government to result in the transfer of the Games to another country. Such a loss would have been a serious blow to German prestige. Hitler had planned to use the 1936 Olympics as a way to showcase and prove that the “Aryan Race” was superior to all others. An American athlete by the name of Jessie Owens ruined Hitler’s plan.

(Q. Who was Jessie Owens and what did he do that upset Adolf Hitler?)

After the Olympic Games, (in which the Nazis did not allow German Jewish athletes to participate), the Nazis again stepped up the persecution of German Jews. In 1937 and 1938, the government set out to impoverish Jews by requiring them to register their property, and then by “Aryanizing” Jewish businesses. This meant that Jewish workers and managers were dismissed, and the ownership any Jewish-owned business was to be taken over by non-Jewish Germans who bought the businesses at bargain prices set by the Nazis. Jewish doctors were forbidden to treat non-Jews, and Jewish lawyers were not permitted to practice law. Like everyone in Germany, Jews were required to carry identity cards, but the government added special identifying marks to theirs: a red “J.” Such cards allowed the police to identify Jews easily.

On the night of November 9, 1938, violence against Jews broke out across Germany. In two days, over 1000 synagogues were burned, 7000 Jewish businesses were trashed and looted,

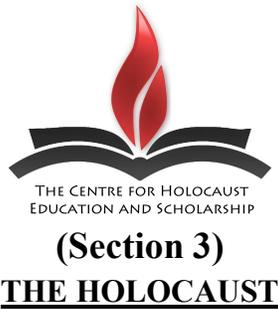


dozens of Jewish people were killed, and Jewish cemeteries, hospitals, schools and homes were looted or destroyed while police and firemen stood back and watched. The next day, 30,000 German Jewish men were arrested for the “crime” of being Jewish and sent to concentration camps, where hundreds of them disappeared. Businesses owned by Jews were not allowed to re-open unless they were managed by non-Jews. Curfews were placed on Jews, limiting the hours of the day they could leave their homes. Life became even more difficult for German and Austrian Jewish children and teenagers. They were barred from entering museums, public playgrounds, and swimming pools. They were also expelled from public schools. Jewish youngsters, like their parents, were totally segregated in Germany. In despair, many Jewish adults committed suicide. Most families tried desperately to leave Germany.

Between 1933 and 1941, the Nazis aimed to cleanse Germany of Jews by making life so difficult for them that they would be forced to leave the country. After Germany annexed (took over) Austria in March of 1938, an additional 185,000 Jews were brought under Nazi rule. Many Jews were unable to find countries willing to take them in. Many German and Austrian Jews tried to go to the United States but could not obtain the visas needed to enter. Even though news of the violent attacks on Jews was widely reported, Americans remained reluctant to welcome Jewish refugees. In the midst of the Great Depression, many Americans believed that the refugees would compete with them for jobs and overburden social programs set up to assist the needy.

In the summer of 1938, delegates from thirty-two countries, including Canada, met at the French resort of Evian. During the nine-day meeting, delegate after delegate rose to express sympathy for the refugees. But most countries, including the United States and Britain, offered excuses for not letting in more refugees. Responding to Evian, the German government was able to state with great pleasure how “astounding” it was that foreign countries criticized Germany for their treatment of the Jews, but none of them wanted to open their doors to them.

(Q. Why do you think racism is wrong? Would the world not be a boring place if we all looked and acted the same?)

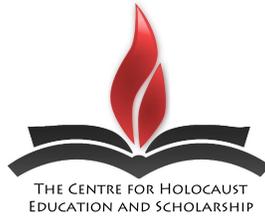


In 1939, the German government conducted a census of all persons living in Germany. Census takers recorded each person's age, sex, residence, profession, religion, and marital status, and for the first time, they also listed the person's race as traced through his or her grandparents. This information was later punched into coded cards to help the Nazis create a Jewish Registry containing detailed information on all Jews living in Germany. The registry was later used as a means of locating victims of the Holocaust.

Millions of Jews lived in Eastern Europe. After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, more than three million Polish Jews came under German control. After Germany invaded the Soviet Union (Russia) in 1941, several million more Jews came under Nazi rule. The Germans aimed to control this sizable Jewish population by forcing Jews to reside in marked-off sections of towns and cities the Nazis called "ghettos." The Germans usually marked off the oldest, most run-down sections of cities for the ghettos. Many of the ghettos were enclosed by barbed-wire fences or walls, with entrances guarded by local and German police, and SS members. At night, the residents were forced to stay inside their apartments during curfew.

Life in the ghettos was usually unbearable. Overcrowding was common. One apartment might have several families living in it. Plumbing broke down and human waste was thrown in the streets along with the garbage. Contagious diseases spread rapidly in such cramped, unsanitary housing. People were always hungry. The Germans deliberately tried to starve residents by restricting their purchases to only small amounts of bread, potatoes, and fat. During the long winter months, heating fuel was scarce, and many people lacked adequate clothing. People, weakened by hunger and exposure to the cold, became easy victims of disease; tens of thousands died in the ghettos from illness, starvation or cold. Some individuals killed themselves to escape their hopeless lives.

Every day children became orphaned, and many had to take care of even younger children. Orphans often lived on the streets, begging for bits of bread from others who had little or nothing to share. Many froze to death in the winter. In order to survive, children had to be resourceful and make themselves useful. Small children in the Warsaw Ghetto sometimes helped smuggle food to their families and friends by crawling through narrow openings in the ghetto wall. They did so at great risk, as smugglers who were caught were severely punished. Many young people tried to continue their education by attending school classes organized by adults in many of the



ghettos. Since such classes were held secretly, pupils learned to hide books under their clothes to avoid being caught by the Nazis.

(Q. Why do you think it was important for young people to continue their education even during these dire times?)

After the German army invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, a new stage in the Holocaust began. Under cover of war, and confident of victory, the Germans turned from the forced emigration and imprisonment of Jews to mass murder. Special action squads, made up of Nazi SS units and police, moved quickly on the heels of the advancing German army. Their job was to kill any Jews they could find in the occupied Soviet territory. These mobile killing units acted swiftly, taking the Jewish population by surprise. The squads entered a city or town and rounded up all Jewish men, women, and children. The victims were forced to surrender any valuables and remove their clothing, which was later sent for use in Germany. Then the killing squad members marched their victims to open fields, forests, and ravines on the outskirts of the conquered towns and cities, where they shot or gassed the victims and dumped their bodies into mass graves.

On September 21, 1941, on the eve of the Jewish New Year, a mobile killing squad entered Ejszyszki, a small town in what is now Lithuania. The killing squad rounded up 4,000 Jews from the town and the surrounding region, and forced them into three synagogues, where they were held for two days without food or water. In a two day period, all the Jewish men, women, and children were taken to cemeteries, lined up in front of open pits, and shot to death. Today there are no Jews in Ejszyszki. It was one of hundreds of cities and towns whose Jewish populations were murdered during the Holocaust. The killing squads murdered more than one million Jews and hundreds of thousands of other innocent people. At Babi Yar, near Kiev, about 34,000 Jews were murdered in two days of shooting. Only a few people in the general population helped their Jewish neighbors escape, as most were afraid that they too might be killed.

On January 20, 1942, fifteen high-ranking Nazi party and German government leaders gathered for the Wannsee Conference. They met to discuss the “final solution” to the Jewish question in Europe.” The “final solution” was the Nazis’ code name for the deliberate, carefully planned destruction, or genocide, of all European Jews. No one at the meeting objected to the announced policy to kill all Jews. Never before had a modern state committed itself to the murder of an entire race of people.

Q. Character In Confinement with your students. Lesson and Study (Five Steps):



Step 1: Q. Ask students to define "confinement". Ask the students to describe what confinement (and being confined) means to them. Educators can opt to wait to present the recognized definition of confinement until after the students have brainstormed associated meanings and applications.

Step 2: Discuss the ideas of "physical" and "psychological" confinement and have the students suggest some concrete examples of each . . . and of the two forms in combination. For example, a person can be physically confined in an elevator; or if their hands and feet are bound; or if they are in a comatose state. A person can be psychologically confined by self-doubt; fear; mental health issues, etc . . .

Step 3: Q. (Assignment): ask students create a "character in confinement." Once they have done so, they are to write a 1 to 2 page journal entry as this character. The composition should describe the character's situation and explore how this particular confinement (physical, psychological or a mix of both) is affecting the character emotionally. IF the students prefer, they can use themselves as the character. Perhaps they wish to write about a time in their lives where *they* felt confined in some way.

Educators can opt to do BOTH journal approaches -- one fictional and one non-fictional.

Step 4: (Sharing and Discussion) This can be done publicly, if the students are comfortable, or anonymously, if the students prefer not to be identified. Students (or educators) shall read out the journal entries and the class shall spend some time upon each one, discussing the impact and associated thoughts that occur to them. This exercise can be done over a span of time, depending upon the educator's preference.

Step 5: (Connection to Holocaust History and Legacy). Students should already have some background knowledge regarding the Holocaust. Following the reading and discussion of the journal entries, educators shall now lead their students in a discussion regarding how confinement was a forced part of Jewish life during and following the Holocaust, and exploring how those who were targeted during the Holocaust may have experienced -- and responded to -- different experiences involving confinement.

After deportation trains arrived at the killing centers, guards ordered the deportees to get out and form a line. Men were separated from women and children. A Nazi, usually an SS physician, looked quickly at each person to decide if he or she was healthy and strong enough for forced labour. This SS officer then pointed to the left or the right; victims did not know that individuals were being selected to live or die. Babies and young children, pregnant women, the elderly, the handicapped, and the sick had little chance of surviving the first selection.

Those who had been selected to die were led to gas chambers. In order to prevent panic, camp guards told the victims that they were going to take showers to rid themselves of lice. The guards instructed them to turn over all their valuables and to undress. Then they were driven into the "showers." A guard closed and locked the steel door behind them. In some killing centers, carbon monoxide was piped into the chamber. In others, camp guards threw "Zyklon B" pellets



down an air shaft. “Zyklon B” was a highly poisonous insecticide also used to kill rats and insects.

Usually within minutes after entering the gas chambers, everyone inside was dead from lack of oxygen. Under guard, prisoners were forced to haul corpses to a nearby room, where they removed hair, gold teeth, and fillings. The bodies were burned in ovens in the crematoria or buried in mass graves. Many people profited from the pillage of the corpses. Camp guards stole some of the gold. The rest was melted down and deposited in an SS bank account. Private business firms bought and used the hair to make products, including ship rope and mattresses.

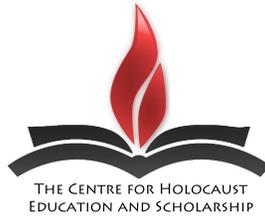
In the months following the Wannsee Conference, the Nazi regime continued to carry out their plans for the “Final Solution.” Jews continued to be “deported” – transported by trains or trucks to six camps all located in occupied Poland: Chelmno, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Majdanek-Lubin. The Nazis called these six camps “extermination” camps most of the deportees were immediately murdered in large groups by poisonous gas. The Nazis changed to gassing as their preferred method of mass murder because they saw it as “cleaner” and more “efficient” than shooting. Gassing also spared the killers the emotional stress many mobile killing squad members had felt shooting people face to face. The killing centers were in semi-rural, isolated areas, fairly well hidden from public view. They were located near major railroad lines, allowing trains to transport hundreds of thousands of people to the killing site.

The SS began in earnest to empty the ghettos in the summer of 1942. In two years’ time, more than two million Jews were taken out of the ghettos. By the summer of 1944, few ghettos remained in Eastern Europe. At the same time that the ghettos were being emptied, masses of Jews and Roma (Gypsies) were transported from the many distant countries occupied or controlled by Germany, including France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Hungary, Romania, Italy, North Africa, and Greece.

The deportation required the help of many people and all the branches of the German government. The victims in Poland were already imprisoned in ghettos and totally under German control. However, the deportation of Jews from the other parts of Europe, was a far more complex problem. The German Foreign Ministry succeeded in pressuring most governments of occupied and allied nations to assist the Germans in the deportation of Jews living in their countries.

Of all the camps, the largest was Auschwitz. It was a complex of various camps, including a concentration, extermination, and forced-labor camp.

(Q. What do you think is the difference between these three types of camps?)



More than one million people lost their lives at Auschwitz; nine out of ten were Jewish. The four largest gas chambers could each hold 2,000 people at one time. A sign over the entrance to the camp read ARBEIT MACHT FREI, which means “work makes one free.” In actuality, the opposite was true. Labour became another form of genocide that the Nazis called “extermination through work.”

Victims who were spared immediate death by being selected for labor were systematically stripped of their individual identities. They had their hair shaved off and a registration number was tattooed on their left forearm. Men were forced to wear ragged pants and jackets, and women wore work dresses. Both were issued ill-fitting work shoes. They had no change of clothing and slept in the same clothes they worked in. Each day was a struggle for survival under unbearable conditions. Prisoners were housed in primitive barracks that had no windows and were not insulated from the heat or cold. There was no bathroom; only a bucket. Each barrack held 36 wooden bunk-beds and inmates were squeezed in five or six across. Sometimes as many as 500 inmates were lodged in a single barrack.

Inmates were always hungry. Food consisted of watery soup made with rotten vegetables and meat, a few ounces of bread, a bit of margarine, tea, or a bitter drink resembling coffee. Diarrhea and stomach problems were common. People became weakened by dehydration and hunger and easily fell victim to the contagious diseases that spread throughout the camp.

Escape from Auschwitz was almost impossible. Electrically charged barbed-wire fences surrounded both the concentration camp and the killing center. Guards, equipped with machine guns and automatic rifles, stood in the many watchtowers. The lives of the prisoners were completely controlled by the guards who on a whim could inflict cruel punishment on them.

Cruel “medical experiments” were also conducted at Auschwitz. Jewish men, women, and children were used as subjects. Dr. Josef Mengele carried out painful and traumatic experiments on dwarfs and twins, including young children. The aim of some experiments was to find better medical treatments for German soldiers and airman. Other experiments were aimed at improving methods of sterilizing people the Nazis considered inferior. Many people died painful deaths as a result of these experiments. Others were killed after the “research” was completed and their organs were removed for further study. Most of the prisoners at Auschwitz survived only a few weeks or months. Those who became too ill or too weak to work were condemned to death in the gas chambers. Some committed suicide by throwing themselves against the electric fence. Others resembled walking corpses, broken in body and spirit. Yet other inmates were determined to stay alive.



(Section 4)

LIBERATION

Although the Jews were the main target of Nazi hatred, they were not the only group persecuted. Like Jews, Roma (Gypsies) were targeted by the Nazis as “non-Aryans” and racial “inferiors.” Jehovah’s Witnesses were victimized not for reasons of race but because of their religious beliefs. Their beliefs prohibited them from entering the army or showing obedience to any government by saluting the flag or, in Nazi Germany, raising their arms in the “Heil Hitler” salute. Soon after Hitler took power, Jehovah’s Witnesses were sent to concentration camps. Those who remained at large lost their jobs, unemployment and social welfare benefits, and all civil rights. The Witnesses, nevertheless, continued to meet, to preach, and to distribute religious pamphlets. Homosexuals were also victimized by the Nazis because of what they viewed as abnormal behavior.

Near the end of the war, Germany’s military force was collapsing; the Allied armies closed in on the Nazi concentration camps. The Soviets approached from the east, and the British, French, Canadians, and Americans from the west. The Germans frantically began to move the prisoners out of the camps near the front and take them to be used as forced laborers in camps inside Germany. Prisoners were first taken by train and then by foot on “death marches.” They were forced to march long distances in bitter cold weather, with little or no food, water or rest. Those who could not keep up were shot.

The largest death marches took place in the winter of 1944-45, when the Soviet army began its liberation of Poland. Nine days before the Soviets arrived at Auschwitz, the Germans marched 60,000 prisoners out of the camp toward Wodzislaw, a town thirty-five miles away, where they were put on freight trains to other camps. About 25% of the prisoners died along the way. The Nazis often killed large groups of prisoners before, during, or after marches. During one march, 7,000 Jewish prisoners, 6,000 of them women, were moved from camps in the Danzig region bordered on the north by the Baltic Sea. On the ten-day march 700 were murdered. Those still alive when the marchers reached the shores of the sea were driven into the water and shot.

The Soviet soldiers were the first to liberate concentration camp prisoners in the final stages of the war. British, Canadian, American, and French troops also freed prisoners from the camps. On July 23, 1944, they entered the Majdanek camp in Poland, and later overran several other killing centers. On January 27, 1945, they entered Auschwitz and there found hundreds of sick and exhausted prisoners. The Germans had been forced to leave these prisoners behind in their hasty retreat from the camp. Although the Germans had attempted to empty the camps of surviving prisoners and hide all the evidence of their crimes, the Allied soldiers came upon thousands of



dead bodies stacked on top of one another. The prisoners who were still alive were living skeletons.

Allied troops, physicians, and relief workers tried to provide nourishment for the surviving prisoners, but many of them were too weak to digest food and could not be saved. In spite of the liberators' efforts, many camp survivors died. Half of the prisoners discovered alive in Auschwitz died within a few days of being freed.

For the survivors, returning to life as it had been before the Holocaust was impossible. Jewish communities no longer exist in much of Europe. When people tried to return to their homes from camps or hiding places, they found that, in many cases, their homes had been looted or taken over by others. Returning home was also dangerous. After the war, anti-Jewish riots broke out in several Polish cities. The largest anti-Jewish riot took place in July 1946 in Kielce, a city in southeastern Poland. When 150 Jews returned to the city, people living there feared that hundreds more would come back to reclaim their houses and belongings. As a result, a riot broke out that killed 41 people and wounded 50 more. News of the riot spread rapidly, and Jewish people realized that there was no future for them in Poland. Many survivors ended up in displaced persons' (DP) camps set up in Western Europe under Allied military occupation at the sites of former concentration camps. There they waited to be admitted into any country that would take them.

After the war, some of those responsible for the crimes committed during the Holocaust were brought to trial. Nuremberg, Germany, was chosen as the site for the trial that took place in 1945-46. Judges from the Allied powers – Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States – presided over the hearings of twenty-two major Nazi criminals. Twelve prominent Nazis were sentenced to death. Most of the defendants admitted to the crimes of which they were accused, although most claimed that they were simply following orders given to them by higher authorities.

(Q. Is a person still responsible for their own actions even if they are following orders? If you were a judge during the trials at Nuremberg, what would you decide and why?)

The Nazis' highest authority, the person most to blame for the Holocaust, was missing at the trials. Adolf Hitler had committed suicide in the final days of the war, as had several of his closest aides. Many more criminals were never captured or tried (ex. Josef Mengele lived out his life in South America and never came to trial). However, even after the trials in Nuremberg, trials of Nazis continued to take place both in Germany and in many other countries around the world. Simon Wiesenthal, a Nazi-hunter, located Adolf Eichmann in Argentina. Eichmann, who had helped plan and carry out the deportation of millions of Jews, was brought to trial in Israel.



The testimony of hundreds of witnesses, many of them survivors, was followed all over the world. He was found guilty and executed in 1962.

(Q. There is still Nazi war criminals alive today. Most are in their 80's or 90's. If caught, do you think they should still be prosecuted for crimes that took place 60 years ago?).



(Section 5)

RESCUE AND RESISTANCE

Most individuals in occupied Europe did not actively collaborate with the Nazis, nor did they do anything to help the Jewish people and the other victims of Nazi policies. Throughout the Holocaust, millions of people stood by silently while they saw their fellow citizens being rounded up and deported. Many of these bystanders told themselves that what they saw happening was none of their business. Others were too frightened to help. In many places, providing shelter to Jews was a crime punishable by death.

In spite of the great risks, a small number of individuals refused to stand by and watch. These people had the courage to help by providing hiding places, underground escape routes, false documents, food, clothing, money, and sometimes weapons. In all of Europe, Denmark was the only occupied country that actively resisted the Nazi regime's attempts to deport Jewish citizens. On September 28, 1943, Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, a German diplomat, secretly informed the Danish resistance that the Nazis were planning to deport the Danish Jews. The Danish people responded quickly, organizing a nationwide effort to smuggle the Jews by sea to neutral Sweden. With the help of the Danish people, they found hiding places in homes, hospitals, and churches. Within a two-week period fishermen helped 7,220 Danish Jews to safety across the narrow body of water separating Denmark from Sweden.

The Danish rescue effort was unique because it was nationwide. It was not completely successful, however, as 500 Danish Jews were deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto in Czechoslovakia. All but 51 survived the Holocaust, largely because Danish officials pressured the Germans with their concerns for the well-being of those who had been deported. The Danish people proved that widespread support for Jews and resistance to the Nazi policies could save lives.

There are numerous stories of brave people in other countries who also tried to save Jewish people from perishing at the hands of the Nazis. Nearly 12,000 Jewish children were rescued by clergymen in France who found housing for them and even smuggled some into Switzerland and Spain. About 20,000 Polish Jews were able to survive in hiding outside the ghetto in Warsaw because people provided shelter for them in their homes. Some Jews were even hidden in the Warsaw Zoo by the zoo's director, Jan Zabinski.

Turkey a country that was neutral during the war had its diplomats (the majority who were Muslim) act to save Jews who were Turkish citizens. Turkey felt a responsibility to protect its



citizens, all citizens in their eyes were considered valuable. One diplomat even went as far as to get on a train with the Jewish prisoners headed to Auschwitz. He knew that if he were harmed this would cause an international incident that would perhaps force Turkey to enter the war against Germany. As a result, the Turkish Jews were released and sent back to Turkey.

(Q. Explain in your own words the meaning of the following statement – “As long as good people are ready to act, evil cannot overcome”).

Many Jews themselves tried to organize their own resistance against the Nazis. Some Jews, who managed to escape from ghettos and camps, formed their own fighting units. These fighters, or partisans, were concentrated in densely wooded areas. A large group of partisans in occupied Soviet territory hid in a forest near the Lithuanian capital of Vilna. They were able to derail hundreds of trains and kill over 3,000 Nazi soldiers.

Life as a partisan in the forest was difficult. People had to move from place to place to avoid discovery, raid farmers' food supplies to eat, and try to survive the winter in flimsy shelters built from logs and branches. In some places, partisans received assistance from the local villagers, but more often they could not count on help, because of people's fears of being severely punished for helping. The partisans lived in constant danger of local informers revealing their whereabouts to the Nazis.

The most famous attempt by Jews to resist the Germans in armed fighting occurred in the Warsaw ghetto. In the summer of 1942, about 300,000 Jews were deported from Warsaw to Treblinka. When reports of mass murder in the killing center leaked back to the Warsaw ghetto, a surviving group of young people formed an organization called “The Jewish Fighting Organization.” Led by 23-year-old Mordecai Anielewicz, they issued a proclamation calling for the Jewish people to resist going to the railroad cars. In January 1943, Warsaw ghetto fighters using a small supply of smuggled weapons, fired upon German troops as they tried to round up another group of ghetto inhabitants for deportation. After a few days, the German troops retreated. This small victory inspired the ghetto fighters to prepare for future resistance.

On April 19, 1943, the Warsaw ghetto uprising began after German troops and police entered the ghetto to deport its surviving inhabitants. Seven hundred and fifty fighters fought the heavily armed and well-trained Germans. The ghetto fighters were able to hold out for nearly a month, but on May 16, 1943, the revolt ended. The Germans had slowly crushed the resistance. Of the more than 56,000 Jews captured, about 7,000 were shot, and the remaining were deported to killing centers or concentration camps. The Warsaw ghetto uprising inspired revolts in other ghettos and killing centers as well. Although many resistors knew they were bound to lose against the overwhelmingly superior German forces, they chose to die fighting. After the Jews



deported to Treblinka were gassed in May 1943, about 1,000 Jewish prisoners decided to revolt. On August 2, armed with shovels, picks, and a few weapons stolen from the arms warehouse, they set fire to part of the camp and broke through its barbed wire-fence. Almost 200 prisoners managed to escape, and about half of them survived German efforts to recapture them.

Not every German followed Hitler's beliefs. Despite the high risk of being caught by police, some individuals and groups attempted to resist Nazism in Germany. Unfortunately, many of these outspoken rebels were arrested and imprisoned in concentration camps. There were also many plots to assassinate Hitler during the war. After the important Soviet victory at Stalingrad in early 1943, when it looked as though the tide was turning against the German army, a serious assassination attempt was planned by a group of German military officers and carried out in 1944. Hitler escaped the bomb blast with minor injuries. The four leaders of the conspiracy were immediately shot. Later, 200 other individuals convicted of involvement in the plot were also executed.

Of the Germans who opposed Hitler's dictatorship, very few groups openly protested the Nazi genocide against the Jews. The "White Rose" movement however, did just that. The "White Rose" movement was founded in June 1942 by Hans Scholl, a 24-year-old medical student at the University of Munich, his 22-year-old sister Sophie, and 24-year-old Christoph Probst. Although the exact origin of the name "White Rose" is unknown, it clearly stands for purity and innocence in the face of evil. Hans, Sophie, and Christoph were outraged that educated Germans went along with the Nazi policies. They distributed anti-Nazi leaflets and painted slogans like "Freedom!" and "Down with Hitler!" on the walls of the university. In February 1943, Hans and Sophia Scholl were caught distributing leaflets and arrested. Together with their friend Christoph, they were executed four days later. Hans's last words were "Long Live Freedom!"

(Q. In your opinion, were the three members of the "White Rose" heroes? Should they have acted like everyone else or should everyone else have acted like them?)

Survivor Childhood Stories:

It is always meaningful and impactful when Survivors visit classrooms to share their stories. In particular, when focusing upon children, Survivor stories which include details of a Survivor's childhood experiences can help young people to identify and relate to the speaker. Discussion and reflection can include how elements of the Survivor's story and lived experience affected the students and how they, themselves, might have responded if this had been their story.

Third Generation Holocaust Survivors:



Another approach that could be very meaningful is to have third-generation Survivors come in to share the stories of their grandparents. Young people can definitely understand and relate to relationships with grandparents, and the love that they feel for their grandparents. This is another way in which to encourage students to think about and process the generational impact of the Holocaust.

CONCLUSION: There are a number of very good resources that would help bring this document to life. First and foremost would be to allow students the opportunity to hear and meet a survivor. Unfortunately, in time there will be fewer and fewer survivors speaking in schools however, many survivor testimonies have been recorded. Organizations like the Centre for Holocaust Education and Scholarship (CHES), Yad Vashem, The Friends of Simon Wiesenthal, the USC Shoah Foundation all allow access to witness testimonies.

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