



Introduction to the Holocaust: Activities for the First Lesson

The following are activities that are useful for an introductory class on this very important, sensitive and vast topic. Often students come to the subject matter with little awareness of what the Holocaust was, which groups were involved in the Holocaust, where and when it took place, and how a tragic event of this magnitude could actually occur.

Activity I

This activity provides an opportunity to explore the origins of the Holocaust and to explore what you already know, what you think you know and what you want to know.

Process:

Using chart paper (or another medium to record them), create 3 columns.

- In column 1, write down what you already know about the Holocaust.
- In column 2, write down what you think you know about the Holocaust.
- In column 3, write down what you want to know.

Take this up as a class. Do not try to explain everything in depth during this activity, but ensure the students leave with a general overview of the Holocaust.

Activity II

[Why Study the Holocaust Worksheet \(link\)](#)

Process:

Fill out this sheet individually or in groups of 2.

Take this up as a class expanding and guiding discussion as necessary.

Activity III

[Terms and Definitions with Vocabulary Match Ups Worksheet \(link\)](#)



Process:

There are a number of ways to use this vocabulary activity, depending on your students, available time, and prior knowledge.

Teachers may:

- Divide the terms among students or small groups and have them research and explain a few terms to the class.
- Introduce and discuss the terms as a class, providing historical context as needed.
- Assign selected terms for students to investigate before discussing them together.
- Use the matching activity after the vocabulary has been introduced as a quick check for understanding.

Teachers should use their discretion in determining whether the matching activity is useful for their students. It may be omitted, particularly where a term would benefit from discussion and historical context rather than simple definition matching.

The goal of the activity is not simply for students to memorize definitions, but to develop the vocabulary they will need to understand and discuss the historical events and sources they encounter throughout the unit.

Activity IV

Chapters on Antisemitism in Germany: These are chapters that give a brief overview of antisemitism and of the beginning of the Nazi Regime.

[Chapter 3 \(link\)](#)

[Chapter 4 \(link\)](#)

Teachers can select from the two chapters and accompanying primary sources; it is not necessary to use all the material.

Use the readings to establish that antisemitism existed before the Nazi period and that Nazi persecution of Jews developed progressively. Selected primary sources can then be examined individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Questions below the readings can be used for comprehension checks and further discussion.