

Lesson 7

To deepen your understanding of the ideas in this lesson, read Chapter Three in Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior.

The Weimar Republic: Historical Context and Decision-Making

WHY teach this material?

Rationale

Adolf Hitler did not gain power by a military coup; he gained power primarily through lawful means. How did this happen? What factors may have influenced the choices made by regular people that led to the popularity of the Nazi Party? In this lesson, students will explore primary documents that will help them answer these questions. As they interpret how conditions during the Weimar Republic may have impacted the appeal of the Nazi Party to specific German citizens, students begin to recognize how economic, political, social, and cultural factors influence their own beliefs and choices.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The purpose of this lesson is to help students:

- Reflect on these **guiding questions**:
 - *What was life like in Germany during the Weimar Republic (1920–1933)?*
 - *How did the Nazi Party, a small, unpopular political group in 1920, become the most powerful political party in Germany by 1933?*
 - *What is historical context? How does our historical context shape our beliefs and choices?*
- Practice these **interdisciplinary skills**:
 - *Interpreting primary source documents*
 - *Connecting historical context to individual choices and beliefs*
 - *Collaborating with peers*
 - *Presenting information in an oral presentation*
 - *Active listening and speaking in a class discussion*
- Deepen understanding of these **key terms**:
 - *Weimar Republic*
 - *Democracy*
 - *Economy*
 - *Depression*
 - *Political party*
 - *Inflation*
 - *Versailles Treaty*
 - *Constitution*
 - *Historical context*
 - *Nazi*
 - *Hitler*

- *Fear/bullying*
- *Antisemitism*

(See the main glossary in the unit’s “Introduction” for definitions of these key terms.)

WHAT is this lesson about?

The history of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) illuminates one of the most creative and tumultuous periods of the twentieth century. According to historian Paul Bookbinder, “The fourteen years of the Weimar Republic were a way station on the road to genocide, and yet they also witnessed the struggle of many decent, sincere people to create a just and humane society in a time of great artistic creativity.”¹ Looking at Germany in the early 1920s, we would see a society with the following characteristics: a constitution that established separate branches of government, numerous outlets for creative expression, many groups vying for political power through an electoral process, a plentiful dose of cultural disagreement—characteristics familiar to many democratic nations today. The Weimar Constitution granted women the right to vote while this right was still being denied to women in the United States. The constitution also protected civil liberties and religious freedom.

While Germans were adjusting to democratic political institutions and modern ideas about civil liberties, they were also slowly recovering from their losses in World War I and coping with the pressures placed upon them by the Versailles Treaty. Losing overseas colonies and paying war reparations were crippling Germany’s already war-torn economy. In 1923, Germans suffered astounding hyperinflation. People who had saved their money in banks or were living on pensions or disability checks found themselves bankrupt. Those with salaries found that they could not keep up with the perpetual rise in prices.

German Inflation Chart (1919–1923)

Date	Marks	U.S. Dollars
1919	4.2	1
1921	75	1
1922	400	1
Jan. 1923	7,000	1
Jul. 1923	160,000	1
Aug. 1923	1,000,000	1
Nov. 1, 1923	1,300,000,000	1
Nov. 15, 1923	1,300,000,000,000	1
Nov. 16, 1923	4,200,000,000,000	1

At the height of this inflationary period, Hitler tried to organize a coup. At a beer hall in Munich, he gave a speech declaring that the government should be overthrown. He was arrested and was found guilty of treason. According to German law, Hitler, at the time an Austrian citizen, should have been deported. But the judge decided not to follow the law, explaining, “In the case of a man whose thoughts and feelings are as German as Hitler’s, the court is of the opinion that the intent and purpose of the law have no application.”³ During the Weimar Republic, it was commonplace for judges to place the need for order and patriotism before the law. German judges, many of whom had worked under the former monarchy, did not consider themselves responsible for upholding Germany’s new constitution. For example, artists and activists were fined or imprisoned if they expressed ideas that were contrary to those held by the mostly conservative judges.



Adolf Hitler on the cover of *Mein Kampf*, published in 1925.

Hitler spent nine months in jail. During that time he wrote *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle). This book expanded on many of the ideas articulated in the Nazi Party platform. Hitler wrote extensively about the superiority of the Aryan race and the privileges that should be bestowed on Aryans. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler characterized Jews as a threat to the German people and to the world at large. He added to long-held anti-semitic beliefs and fears with exaggerated claims of the financial and political success of the Jewish community. Even though Jews made up only 1% of the German population, Hitler made it appear as if they were operating a conspiracy to take over Germany. The increased visibility of some Jewish Germans, including physicist Albert Einstein and composer Arnold Schoenberg, could have been interpreted as evidence of the Jewish community’s contributions to German culture and position in the world. Yet, Hitler manipulated examples of Jewish success to prove his theory that Jews were the enemy.

Drawing from the German public’s frustration with the government’s mishandling of the economy and then the attention of *Mein Kampf*, the Nazi Party gained popularity.

Hitler and other Nazi leaders organized rallies and strengthened the Hitler Youth Movement. James Luther Adams, an American student traveling in Germany in 1927, recounts his experience at a Nazi rally. When he questioned some men about how they planned on “purifying Germany of Jewish blood,” he was quickly shushed and led out of the rally. His German companion then reprimanded Adams, warning, “Don’t you know that in Germany today you keep your mouth shut or you’ll get your head bashed in.”⁴ Many political parties at that time had their own paramilitary branch, and the Nazis were no different. Nazi “stormtroopers,” or “brownshirts” as they were later called, were known

to intimidate political opponents if they spoke against Nazi leaders or ideas. The German police were often required to break up street fights between Nazi brownshirts and their Communist Party counterparts.

By 1928, the German economy improved, largely as the result of the Dawes Plan—an agreement between the United States and Germany whereby American banks offered the German government and businesses loans to rebuild their country. By this time, Germany had also been invited to join the League of Nations. No longer international outcasts or in financial turmoil, Germans seemed less interested in Hitler’s ideas that the Jews and the rest of the world were to blame for Germany’s problems. In the 1928 elections, the Nazi Party only received 2 percent of the votes. However, the global depression of 1929 rejuvenated the Nazi Party. With unemployment high and many Germans concerned about how they could shelter and feed their family, Hitler’s scapegoating of the Jews and promises of jobs regained popularity. In the 1932 presidential election, 84% of all eligible voters cast ballots. Hitler lost his bid for president. But, in July 1932, the Nazi Party won their greatest victory yet—37% of the seats in the Reichstag. While not a clear majority, the Nazis had received more votes than any other political party.

**Reichstag Election Results (1928–1932):
Number of seats won by major political parties⁵**

Party	1928	1930	July 1932	November 1932
Social Democrat	153	143	133	121
Center	62	68	75	70
Communist	54	77	89	100
Nazi	12	107	230	196
People’s	45	30	7	11

With all of this change and turmoil in German society, one thing that did not change was the education system. In classrooms, German students continued to be taught about Germany’s heroic past. Klaus, a German who was in school during this period, recalls, “We were taught history as a series of facts. We had to learn dates, names, places and battles. Periods during which Germany won wars were emphasized. Periods during which Germany lost wars were sloughed over. We heard very little about World War I; expect that the Versailles peace treaty was a disgrace. . . .”⁶ He continues to describe how lessons were designed to prepare students for a national final exam. The exam emphasized rote memorization; students were not asked to analyze information or draw their own conclusions. Studying the German education system at this time begs the question of how to best prepare students for living in a democracy. In what ways might an education system designed for a monarchical system be inadequate for preparing students for their future role as participatory citizens?

In the next lesson, students will see how the success of the Nazi Party in the 1932 elections led to the unraveling of democracy in Germany. By August of 1933, Germany was a

totalitarian government ruled by one dictator, Adolf Hitler. Jews were no longer allowed to work in the government or in universities. Many famous artists and intellectuals had left Germany, choosing to reside in places where they could enjoy artistic and intellectual freedom. Women, once allowed the right to vote and serve in government, were now told that their place was in the home as wives and mothers. Gone were political parties, elections, artistic diversity, and freedom of religion. In its place was a nation ruled by fear and propaganda where difference and dissent were prosecuted and often punished by imprisonment or even death.

Learning about the Weimar Republic does not only help students understand the origins of Hitler's dictatorship, but it also serves as a lesson on the fragility of democracy. Democracy is a system of government that depends on the resilience of both its institutions and its citizens. For example, constitutional rights gain meaning through a functioning judicial system that protects those rights and an open public space where citizens can safely express dissent. In a healthy democracy, leaders are held accountable by citizens who are critical consumers of information, especially political propaganda, and who are active participants who speak up against injustice rather than passively watch it unfold. An understanding of the Weimar Republic helps us recognize these essential ingredients to a vibrant, sustaining democracy.

Related readings in

Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior

“Voices in the Dark,” pp. 126–27

“What Did You Learn at School Today?” pp. 128–30

“Order and Law,” pp. 130–33

“Criticizing Society,” pp. 133–35

“Inflation Batters the Weimar Republic,” pp. 135–37

“A Revolt in a Beer Hall,” pp. 137–41

“Creating the Enemy,” pp. 141–44

“Beyond the Stereotypes,” pp. 144–46

“Hard Times Return,” pp. 146–50

HOW can we help students engage with this material?

Duration: two class periods

Suggestion for how to implement this lesson over two class periods: During the first day of this lesson, students can begin their group work (steps 1–3 of the main activity). Any unfinished work can be assigned for homework. After giving groups a few minutes to check in about their presentations, you can begin day two of this lesson with step four of the main activity—presentations and class discussion.

Materials

Handout 1: Weimar Republic biographies

Handout 2: Weimar Republic: Primary source documents 1–10

Handout 3: Weimar Republic timeline

Handout 4: Weimar Republic timeline answer bank

Handout 5: The Election of 1932

Opener

The purpose of this lesson is to help students understand how the particular historical context of the Weimar Republic shaped the voting decisions of German citizens, many of whom ultimately voted for the Nazi Party in 1932. You can begin this lesson by having students recognize how their own attitudes and actions have been influenced by their historical context.

First, ask students to brainstorm a list of major events that have taken place in their lifetime. You might ask students to respond to the question, “Twenty years from now, what do you think people will remember about the time period in which you grew up? What major events took place? What ideas, inventions, or people will people remember when they look back at this time?” With this list posted on the board or wall, explain that these items make up the historical context in which students live. You might want to add *historical context* to your word wall and/or have students record a definition for historical context in their journals.

Then ask students to identify an example of how their historical context has shaped their life. Another way to look at this question would be for students to consider how their choices and beliefs might be different if they had been born in a different time period or a different part of the world.

Main Activities

Explain to students that they will be using the documents they review in this lesson to begin to answer the following question: “How did the Nazis go from being an unpopular political group in 1920 to being the most powerful political party in Germany by 1932?” You can put this question on the board to remind students of the purpose of this lesson. To answer this question, students need to understand the historical context of the Weimar Republic—the time period from the establishment of democracy in Germany at the end of World War I—to Hitler’s dismantling of democracy in 1933.

Students will work in groups of four or five for this four-step activity.

Step one: Recognize the perspective of a German living during the Weimar Republic

Handout 1 includes short biographical sketches, representing typical experiences of German citizens during the Weimar Republic. Assign one German citizen to each of the groups. Ask for a volunteer from each group to read the text aloud. Then have the group make an identity chart for this German citizen. [For more information on making identity charts, refer to page 8 in the resource book.]

Step two: Describe conditions during the Weimar Republic (establishing historical context)

What political, economic, social, and cultural events might be impacting the life of this individual? To answer this question, students will analyze primary source documents. You can use all or some of the documents included at the end of this lesson (handout 2). You can find other documents on Facing History’s online module “The Weimar Republic: The Fragility of Democracy.” (Refer to the extension section of this lesson for more information about this resource.)

Students can go through these documents together. Or, they could each take one or two documents and then present their analysis to the members of their group. Students could share information as they complete a timeline for the Weimar Republic (handout 3). If students need additional support, you can give them an answer bank that they can use to complete the timeline (handout 4). Alternatively, students could construct an identity chart for the Weimar Republic.

To help students retain this historical information, you could have them create their own timeline by cutting out images and captions and pasting them in the appropriate place on a large sheet of paper. Reviewing students' timelines and/or their responses to the questions about the primary source documents will reveal the depth of students' understanding of the historical context of the Weimar Republic. You may find the need to help students understand concepts such as inflation and depression as they interpret the documents.

Step three: Synthesize information about historical context to answer the question, “How might conditions during the Weimar Republic have influenced the voting decisions of German citizens?”

Once you are confident that students have an understanding of the conditions during the Weimar Republic, ask them to consider how the citizen they have been assigned might vote in the July 1932 election. Groups will explain their answer to the rest of the class. To prepare students for this presentation, you can have them complete handout 5.

Step four: Present and discuss

A representative from each group shares how they think their German citizen will vote in the election and explains their decision. Then you can share the results of the election: The Nazis won 37% of the seats in the Reichstag, which was more than any other political party. This made the Nazi Party the most powerful political party in Germany. [See the extension section for information on how to use the documents on Facing History's Weimar Republic online module to help illustrate this point.]

Now students have enough information to participate in a discussion that both synthesizes what students have learned thus far and foreshadows the history students will explore in the following lessons. Prompts for this discussion might include:

- How did the Nazi Party, a small, unpopular political group in 1920, become the most powerful political party in Germany by 1932?
- If all Germans lived through the same economic, political and cultural events, then why didn't all Germans vote in the same way? Why do you think more than half of German citizens did not vote for the Nazi Party?
- In 1932, there were no penalties for those who did not vote for the Nazi Party, as citizens voted using secret ballots. What, then, can explain why many Germans voted for the Nazi Party in 1932? What could have been done in the early 1930s that might have prevented the Nazis from gaining so much power?
- Given what you know about Nazi beliefs, what do you think they might do now that they are in power?

- What might limit the power of the Nazis? In a democracy, what keeps one group or one person from having too much power?
- What can happen in a society if one group or one person has unlimited power?

Follow-Through (in class or at home)

One way to reinforce students' understanding of the material in this lesson is to review the concept of historical context that was introduced during the lesson opener. Students' exploration of elections during the Weimar Republic demonstrates how people do not make decisions in a vacuum. Individuals' attitudes and actions are shaped by their economic, political, and cultural surroundings. Yet, the same event can impact people in different ways because we all have distinct identities. Students could spend time at the end of this lesson reflecting on the relationship between their current context and their identity. You might select several major events or trends taking place in students' community (local, national, or global) and have students share how this event has impacted their life.

Another way to approach this topic is to have students reflect on the question, "Do people make history or does history make people?" This prompt can lead to a stimulating discussion about the degree to which people shape their world or are shaped by their world. Students can begin answering this question by drawing from their knowledge of the Weimar Republic. Who (or what) is more responsible for the victory of the Nazi Party—the German citizens or the Depression of 1929? Then students can apply this question to their own social world by considering questions such as: In what ways are you influenced by the peer culture around you? In what ways do you influence this culture?

Assessment(s)

Students' work interpreting primary source documents, their presentations, and their participation in class discussions can be used to evaluate students' historical understanding and their ability to make connections between context and individuals' choices and beliefs. You can have students complete the timeline in groups or as a quiz to gauge their awareness of the sequence of historical events. A final assessment of this lesson might ask students to write a brief essay responding to the following prompt: Explain how you think the German citizen you were assigned voted in the 1932 election. In your answer, describe how the historical context and this individual's personal identity impacted his/her decision.

Extensions

- For homework, you might ask students to interview someone in their family or community who has voted in a national election about the factors that influenced their choice at the ballot box. Students may find that the same factors that influenced voters during the Weimar Republic (e.g., the economy, fear, cultural issues. . .) also shape the voting decisions of people today.
- The Weimar Republic: The Fragility of Democracy is an online module created by Facing History and Ourselves (<http://www.facinghistorycampus.org/campus/weimar.nsf/Home?OpenFrameSet>). The module was developed so that teachers and students could create their own learning paths to explore the many facets of German society in the years between World War I and World War II. Many of the documents included with this lesson can also be found in this module. The module includes many more historical artifacts, including images, songs, political cartoons,

and speech excerpts. Additionally, historian Paul Bookbinder's reading, "Why Study Weimar Germany: Questions for Today," which is posted on the module, makes excellent background reading for teachers and students with college-level reading skills.

- Another way to introduce students to the Weimar Republic is through the film *Witness to the Holocaust*. Episode 1, "The Rise of the Nazis," provides some excellent visual imagery and commentary on the first years of the Weimar Republic. The episode is only 20 minutes long, but the class need only watch the first 8 minutes of the film. This covers the devastation of the war, the Treaty of Versailles, hyperinflation, riots in the street, and other issues. This film can be borrowed from the Facing History library, but it is only available in VHS format.
- Rather than use a collection of primary source documents, many teachers have helped students understand conditions during the Weimar Republic by interpreting the painting *The Agitator* by George Grosz. This painting includes symbolic references to many of the key ideas represented in this lesson (e.g., economic hardship, the Nazis' use of terror and propaganda, antisemitism, etc.). For more information on how you might use this painting in the classroom, refer to the lesson "Interpreting. . . ." found in the lessons and units section of the Facing History website.
- You can add geography skills to this lesson, by showing a map of Germany before and after World War I. This will help students appreciate the impact of Germany's loss on the national psyche. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum posts a map that illustrates the European territory Germany relinquished by signing the Versailles Treaty (<http://www.ushmm.org/lcmedia/map/lcimage/ger71020.gif>). Germany also had to give up her colonies overseas. The Nationmaster website lists former German colonies and provides a map of their location (<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/List-of-former-German-colonies>).

Lesson 7: Handout 1

Weimar Republic biographies⁷

Hermann Struts

Hermann Struts, a lieutenant in the German army, fought bravely during the war. He comes from a long line of army officers and is himself a graduate of the German military academy. Struts has always taken pride in the army's able defense of the nation and its strong leadership. Yet Struts is bitter about the fact that he has not had a promotion in over ten years. Few soldiers have, mainly because the Treaty of Versailles limited the size of the German army. In the old army, Struts would have been at least a captain by now and possibly a major. The treaty, he argues, has harmed not only Germany's honor but also his own honor as a soldier. He feels that if the government had refused to sign the treaty and allowed the army to fight, both he and Germany would be better off.

Otto Hauptmann

Otto Hauptmann works in a factory in Berlin. Although his trade union has actively worked for better conditions and higher wages, it has not made many gains. Hauptmann blames their lack of success on the 1923 inflation and the current depression. He believes that the union would be more successful if the economy were more stable. Still, it is the union that has kept him employed. At a time when many of his friends have been laid off, his union persuaded the owners of his factory to keep men with seniority.

Karl Schmidt

Karl Schmidt is an employed worker who lives in the rich steel-producing Ruhr Valley. Like so many men in the Ruhr, he lost his job because of the depression. Yet Schmidt notes that the owners of the steel mills still live in big houses and drive expensive cars. Why are they protected from the depression while their former employees suffer? Although the government does provide unemployment compensation, the money is barely enough to support Schmidt, his wife, and their two children. Yet the government claims that it cannot afford to continue even these payments much longer. Schmidt feels that the government would be in a stronger position to help people if it cut off all reparations.

Elisabeth von Kohler

Elisabeth von Kohler, a prominent attorney who attended the University of Bonn, has a strong sense of German tradition. She believes that her people's contributions to Western civilization have been ignored. Kohler would like to see the republic lead a democratic Europe. She disapproves of the methods the Weimar Republic often uses to silence and repress different points of view. Her sense of justice is even more outraged by the way the victors of World War I, particularly France, view Germany. She would like to prove to the world that the Germans are indeed a great race. She is proud to be an attorney and a German woman in the Weimar Republic.

Lesson 7: Handout 1

Weimar Republic biographies

Gerda Munchen

Gerda Munchen is the owner of a small Munich grocery store started by her parents. For years, her parents saved to send her to the university. But Munchen chose not to go and the money stayed in the bank. In 1923, she had planned to use the money to pay for her children's education. But that year inflation hit Germany. Just before her older daughter was to leave for the university, the bank informed the family that its savings were worthless. This was a blow to Munchen, but even more of a blow to her daughter, whose future hung in the balance. Munchen does not think she will ever regain her savings. With so many people out of work, sales are down sharply. And Munchen's small grocery is having a tough time competing with the large chain stores. They can offer far lower prices. She and her children question a system that has made life so difficult for hardworking people.

Albert Benjamin

Albert Benjamin is a professor of mathematics at the University of Berlin. While his grandparents were religious Jews, Benjamin is not religious. Benjamin's three brothers, however, are religious Jews. He is very proud of his German heritage, and even volunteered to serve in the German Army during World War I. After the war, Benjamin married Eva Steiner. Eva is Protestant and they are raising their three children as Christians. Benjamin is concerned because prices have gone up while his salary as a professor has not. His family can no longer afford vacations and special presents for the children. His wife worries that if the economic problems continue, the family might have to cut back on spending for food.

Eric von Ronheim

Eric von Ronheim, the head of a Frankfurt textile (fabric) factory, is very concerned about the depression. Sales are down and so are profits. If only Germany had not been treated so ruthlessly at Versailles, he argues, the nation would be far better off. Instead the government has had to impose heavy taxes to pay reparations to its former enemies. As a result, Germans are overtaxed with little money to spend on textiles and other consumer goods. The worldwide depression has made matters worse by making it difficult to sell German products to other countries. Even if the depression were over, Ronheim does not think taxes would come down because of reparation payments.

Lesson 7: Handout 2, Document 1

Weimar Republic: Primary source documents

World War I

In 1924, Otto Dix, an artist and veteran of World War I created a series of pictures illustrating his experience as a soldier in the war. He titled this picture, *Battle-Wearied Troups Retreat*.

Facts: Over half of the German army was hurt or killed during World War I. Almost two million German soldiers died and over four million German soldiers were wounded.⁸



Speaking about World War I, Otto Dix said:

“As a young man you don’t notice at all that you were, after all, badly affected. For years afterwards, at least ten years, I kept getting these dreams, in which I had to crawl through ruined houses, along passages I could hardly get through.”

“People were already beginning to forget, what horrible suffering the war had brought them. I did not want to cause fear and panic, but to let people know how dreadful war is. . .”

Questions:

1. What does this picture by Otto Dix tell you about World War I?
2. How do you think World War I impacted Germany? (Use all of the information on this page to answer this question.) How might it feel to live in Germany after World War I?
3. How might World War I have impacted _____ (the German citizen you have been assigned)?

Lesson 7: Handout 2, Document 2

Weimar Republic: Primary source documents

The Treaty of Versailles

(the peace treaty that ended World War I, signed in 1919)

Excerpt from the Treaty of Versailles¹⁰

231. Germany and her Allies accept the responsibility for causing all the loss and damage to the Allied Powers.

233. Germany will pay for all damages done to the civilian population and property of the Allied Governments.

Reaction to the Treaty of Versailles published in a German newspaper:

“[T]oday German honor is being carried to its grave. Do not forget it! The German people will, with unceasing labor, press forward to reconquer the place among the nations to which it is entitled. Then will come vengeance for the shame of 1919.”¹¹

Questions:

1. When was the Treaty of Versailles signed?
2. What did Germany agree to when signing this treaty to end World War I?
3. How do you think the terms of the Versailles Treaty impacted _____ (the German citizen you have been assigned)? How might he/she have felt about this treaty?

Weimar Republic: Primary source documents

The Weimar Constitution (approved in 1919)

After Germany lost World War I, the king left the country and a new government was formed. It was called the Weimar Republic because it was formed in Weimar, a city in Germany. One of the first acts of this new government was to write a constitution. A constitution is a document which sets up the way a nation will govern itself. Questions such as “Who writes the laws? Who picks the leaders? Who is a citizen? And what rights do they have?” are answered in a nation’s constitution.

Excerpts from the Weimar Constitution¹²

Article 22

Members of parliament are elected in a general, equal, immediate and secret election; voters are men and women older than 20 years . . .

Article 109

All Germans are equal in front of the law . . .

Article 118

Every German is entitled, within the bounds set by general law, to express his opinion freely in word, writing, print, image or otherwise . . .

Article 123

All Germans have the right to assemble peacefully and unarmed . . .

Article 135

All Reich inhabitants enjoy full freedom of liberty and conscience. Undisturbed practice of religion is guaranteed by the constitution and is placed under the protection of the state . . .

Questions:

1. When was the Weimar Constitution approved?
2. What does the constitution say about elections?
3. What rights does the Weimar Constitution give to German citizens living at this time?
4. What thoughts or opinions might _____ (the German citizen you have been assigned) have had about any of the ideas in the Weimar Constitution?

Hyperinflation



Germans describe life during the hyper-inflation:

Lingering at the [shop] window was a luxury because shopping had to be done immediately. Even an additional minute meant an increase in price. One had to buy quickly because a rabbit, for example, might cost two million marks more by the time it took to walk into the store. A few million marks meant nothing, really. It was just that it meant more lugging. . . . People had to start carting their money around in wagons and knapsacks.¹³

Of course all the little people who had small savings were wiped out. But the big factories and banking houses and multimillionaires didn't seem to be affected at all. They went right on piling up their millions. Those big holdings were protected somehow from loss. But the mass of the people were completely broke. And we asked ourselves, "How can that happen?" . . . But after that, even those people who used to save didn't trust money anymore, or the government. We decided to have a high-ho time whenever we had any spare money, which wasn't often.¹⁴

Inflation is when money loses its value. During an inflation, you need more money to buy the same item (e.g., \$3 to buy milk when it used to cost \$2). Hyperinflation is very high inflation. This picture, taken in 1923, shows German children playing with stacks of money. Because of hyperinflation, German money had become virtually worthless. People even put paper money in their stoves, instead of wood, to heat their homes.

Questions:

1. When was this photograph taken?
2. Describe what you see in this photograph.
3. What does this image and the quotations tell you about how hyperinflation impacted life in Germany at this time? How might it feel to live in Germany at this time?
4. How might hyperinflation have impacted _____ (the German citizen you have been assigned)?

Lesson 7: Handout 2, Document 5

Weimar Republic: Primary source documents

Mein Kampf (“My Struggle”) — published in 1925



Quotations from *Mein Kampf*:

“The Jew has always been a people with definite racial characteristics and never a religion.”⁵

“What we must fight for is to safeguard the existence and reproduction of our race and our people, the sustenance of our children and the purity of our blood, the freedom and independence of the fatherland, so that our people may mature for the fulfillment of the mission allotted it by the creator of the universe.”⁶

“[T]he personification of the devil as the symbol of all evil assumes the living shape of the Jew.”⁷

Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* (“My Struggle”) while he was in jail for treason (trying to overthrow the German government). In this book, Hitler writes about many of the ideas in the Nazi Party platform. He writes that one cannot be both a German and a Jew and that the Jews are hurting Germany. He also writes that Germans are part of a superior race and that Germany should have never signed the Versailles Treaty.

Questions:

1. When was *Mein Kampf* written? By whom?
2. What ideas are expressed in this book?
3. What do you think _____ (the German citizen you have been assigned) would have thought if he/she read *Mein Kampf*? Would any of the ideas have appealed to him/her?

Lesson 7: Handout 2, Document 6

Weimar Republic Historical Context: Primary source documents

Culture and Arts During the Weimar Republic



Metropolis by Otto Dix (1928)

Otto Dix painted *Metropolis* to represent the cultural life of many German cities during the Weimar Republic. Throughout the 1920s in Germany, the arts flourished. The number of dance halls (cabarets), art galleries, and movie houses increased. While some Germans were excited by this artistic growth, other Germans saw the music, films, and images as evidence that German culture was becoming immoral and out of control. Even though the Weimar Constitution said that Germans had the right to freedom of expression, many artists, including Otto Dix, were fined or arrested for producing work that was considered “anti-German” by judges.

Questions:

1. When was *Metropolis* painted?
2. Describe this painting. What do you see?
3. What message do you think the artist is trying to send about art and culture during the Weimar Republic?
4. What do you think _____ (the German citizen you have been assigned) would have thought about German culture during the Weimar Republic? Would he/she have been more likely to be excited about artistic freedom or worried that this art was evidence of Germany's moral decline?

Lesson 7: Handout 2, Document 7

Weimar Republic: Primary source documents

Antisemitism



When Jews face discrimination or when they are harmed because of the fact that they are Jewish it is called *antisemitism*. This word was invented in 1879 by a German journalist who described antisemitism as a hatred of Jews because they belonged to a separate race.

Before *antisemitism* was a word, Jews, like many minority groups, had been discriminated against in Germany (and the rest of Europe). For hundreds of years, and especially during tough economic times, Jews had been denied certain jobs, had been forced to live in certain sections of town, and had been victims of violence and bullying. Even though many Jews assimilated—blended into mainstream society—they were still often thought of as different.

In the 1920s, the German press published books and articles portraying negative ideas about Jews. In this cartoon, published in 1929, the top square shows a German family leaving Germany because of economic conditions. In the bottom square, the shop signs all have Jewish names and the men are supposed to represent Jewish businessmen.

Questions:

1. When was this cartoon published?
2. The name of this cartoon is “Fatherland.” What message do you think it is trying to send? What story does it tell?
3. How might the rise of antisemitism have impacted _____ (the German citizen you have been assigned)? What do you think he/she might have thought when seeing this cartoon?

Lesson 7: Handout 2, Document 8

Weimar Republic: Primary source documents

Depression



Depression is a word used to describe a time when many workers are unemployed. During a depression, companies make less money and some may close. As a result, workers lose their jobs. Without regular paychecks, many workers and their families struggle. They might not have money to buy food or pay rent.

In 1929, Germany's economy was in a depression. With so many people out of work and with wages low, many Germans relied on the government and charities for food. This photograph, taken in 1930, shows a long line of men waiting for soup in Berlin. In 1932, Germany's economy was still suffering and the unemployment rate remained very high.

Questions:

1. When was this photograph taken?
2. Describe what you see in this image.
3. What does this image tell you about life in Germany at this time? How might it feel to live in Germany at this time?
4. How might the depression have impacted _____ (the German citizen you have been assigned)?

Lesson 7: Handout 2, Document 9

Weimar Republic: Primary source documents

Fear in the Streets: Nazi Stormtroopers



James Luther Adams, an American student, attended a Nazi rally in 1927. A young Nazi supporter told him that it was necessary for Germany to be free of Jewish blood. Adams asked him where the Jews would go if they were forced to leave Germany. The conversation continued and suddenly, somebody grabbed Luther and dragged him down an alley. Luther recalls what happened next:

I didn't know what was going to happen to me. Was he going to beat me up because of what I had been saying . . . He shouted at me in German, "You damn fool, don't you know that in Germany today you keep your mouth shut or you'll get your head bashed in. . . . You know what I have done. I've saved you from getting beaten up. They were not going to continue arguing with you. You were going to be lying flat on the pavement."¹⁸

This postcard made in 1930 shows a crowd of Germans saluting Hitler. Next to Hitler is a Nazi stormtrooper. Stormtroopers were the military branch of the Nazi Party. Hitler organized the stormtroopers to protect Nazi meetings and rallies. Many of the stormtroopers were former soldiers who were now unemployed. They often carried weapons and intimidated people who spoke against the Nazi Party.

Questions:

1. When was this postcard made?
2. Describe what you see in this image.
3. What does this image tell you about life in Germany at this time? How might it feel to live in Germany at this time?
4. How might these conditions at Nazi rallies (and in the streets as well) have impacted _____ (the German citizen you have been assigned)?

1932 Nazi Election Posters



In July of 1932, Germans voted in national elections. Before the elections, the Nazi Party, as well as other political parties, used posters as one way to attract voters. In the photograph on the left, German youth are standing next to an election poster that says, “Adolf Hitler will provide work and bread. Elect List 2!” The posters on the wall behind them are Nazi election posters urging women and workers to vote for the Nazis. The poster on the right says, “Workers of the mind and hand, vote for the soldier Hitler.”

Questions:

1. When were these posters made? Why were they made?
2. Describe what you see in these images.
3. What does this image tell you about life in Germany at this time?
4. How might Nazi posters like these have impacted _____ (the German citizen you have been assigned)?

Lesson 7: Handout 3

Weimar Republic timeline

Directions: Write a short caption describing what was happening during these dates on the timeline.

1916

1918

1919

1920

1923

1925

1929

1932

Lesson 7: Handout 4

Weimar Republic timeline answer bank

Directions: Match these captions with the correct date on the Weimar Republic timeline. Some dates might link to more than one caption.

The Nazi Party does not receive enough votes in elections to earn a seat in parliament.

Depression hits Germany. Unemployment rises.

World War I devastates Europe.

Versailles peace treaty is signed, ending World War I. Germany is held responsible and must pay back the winners of the war.

German money becomes virtually worthless due to inflation. Many Germans struggle to afford food and shelter.

Weimar Constitution is approved. For the first time in history, Germany has a democratic government.

In elections in July, the Nazi Party receives 45% of the votes—more votes than any other political party.

The Nazis publish their party platform. Hitler organizes former soldiers as “stormtroopers” to protect Nazi rallies and meetings.

Mein Kampf (“My Struggle”) by Adolf Hitler is published.

Lesson 7: Handout 5

The Election of 1932

Using your understanding of conditions during the Weimar Republic (1918–1933) and your understanding of the Nazi Party platform, consider the reasons why the Nazi Party might appeal, or not appeal to the German citizen you have been assigned.

Reasons why the Nazi Party might appeal to (fill in name of your assigned German citizen)	Reasons why the Nazi Party might not appeal to (fill in name of your assigned German citizen)

Based on the information in this chart, do you think this citizen is very likely, likely, or not likely at all to vote for the Nazi Party in the 1932 election?

Explain your answer:

Notes

- ¹ Paul Bookbinder, "Why Study the Weimar Republic?" *The Weimar Republic: The Fragility of Democracy*, Facing History website, (accessed January 5, 2009).
- ² "1923 Germany's Hyperinflation: Loads of Money," *The Economist*, December 23, 1999, (accessed January 5, 2009).
- ³ Margot Stern Strom, *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior* (Brookline: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, Inc., 1994), 137–38.
- ⁴ James Luther Adams, interview, *No Authority but from God*, vol. 1 (VHS) (Boston: James Luther Adams Foundation, 1990).
- ⁵ Stephen Lee, *Weimar and Nazi Germany: Heinemann Secondary History Project* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1996), 35.
- ⁶ Ellen Eichenwald Switzer, *How Democracy Failed* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), 62–63.
- ⁷ Margot Stern Strom, *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior* (Brookline: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, Inc., 1994), 148–50.
- ⁸ "World War I," *One Thousand Children: Georgia's Role in the Rescue of Jewish Children*, The Breman website, <http://www.thebreman.org/exhibitions/online/1000kids/WWI.html> (accessed January 6, 2009)
- ⁹ Otto Dix, "Otto Dix," Spartacus website, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ARTdix.htm> (accessed January 6, 2009).
- ¹⁰ "Primary Documents: Treaty of Versailles," FirstWorldWar.com website, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/versailles231-247.htm> (accessed January 6, 2009).
- ¹¹ Koppel S. Pinson, *Modern Germany: Its History and Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 398.
- ¹² "Weimar Constitution," PSM-Data History website, http://www.zum.de/psn/weimar/weimar_vve.php (accessed January 6, 2009).
- ¹³ George Grosz, *A Little Yes and a Big No: The Autobiography of George Grosz*, trans. L.S. Dorin (New York: Dial, 1946), 63.
- ¹⁴ Rolf Knight and Phyllis Knight, *A Very Ordinary Life* (Vancouver: New Star Books), 59–60. http://www.rolfknight.ca/A_Very_Ordinary_Life.pdf (accessed January 6, 2009).
- ¹⁵ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), 306.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 324.
- ¹⁸ Adams, *No Authority but from God* (VHS).