

The Six Stages That Led to the Holocaust: Talking Points*

Using these Talking Points:

This interactive lecture is divided into six parts, with each part representing one of Hilberg's six stages that led to the Holocaust. We suggest you begin by presenting students with a definition of the stage and then the key question they should answer about what happened during this stage. In the talking points, we list resources where your students can find evidence that will help them answer the key questions. To help you evaluate students' responses, we have also listed possible answers to the key questions. You can introduce any ideas that students do not bring up themselves. Finally, we include journal prompts designed to help students process important themes relevant to each stage. We encourage you to give students the opportunity to write in their journals after they have learned about each of Hilberg's stages. These talking points are not meant to be used as a script. We encourage you to add more information based on your own expertise and the interests of your class. Since many students are visual learners, you might want to present the information and questions included in the talking points in the form of a power point presentation or on an overhead projector.

Stage 1. Definition: Jews are defined as the “other” through legalized discrimination.

Key questions: How did the Nazis define Jews as different and inferior? What examples do you know about from the study of this history?

Suggested resource: Notes from prior lessons.

Possible answers:

- Through racism: categorizing people into fixed categories based on (supposed) bloodlines.
- Through laws: The Nuremberg laws defined who was a Jew and who was not a Jew.
- Through propaganda: Cartoons, books, movies, and posters portrayed Jews as different from (and inferior to) their Aryan neighbors.

Journal prompt: What are some reasons why many Germans labeled Jews as different and inferior? Why do we sometimes label groups as “other” or different than ourselves?

Stage 2. Isolation: Once individuals are labeled as Jews, they are separated from mainstream society.

Key question: How did the Nazis isolate Jews?

Suggested resource: Notes from prior lessons.

* Hilberg's six stages outline how the Nazis systematically tried to murder the Jewish population of Europe. Other groups, such as Gypsies, homosexuals, and the physically disabled, encountered many of the steps described below as well, including mass murder. Also, Hilberg structured these stages based on his study of German documents. Because of this, the stages represent how the events of the Holocaust played out in Germany. As Germany occupied other countries, they applied similar policies to these territories. Yet, while the six stages defined by Hilberg played out over the course of nearly fifteen years in Germany (and more if you consider the impact of Nazi propaganda during the Weimar Republic), the stages were condensed or skipped in other countries. For example, most Jews in Hungary spent a very short time in ghettos (weeks or a few months) before being deported to Auschwitz or other camps. To learn more about Hilberg's stages, read Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985).

Possible answers:

- Through laws: Jews were not allowed to attend German schools or universities. They could not go to public parks or movie theatres. All German youth were obliged to join the Hitler Youth Movement; Jewish youth were excluded from membership.
- Through social practices: Many Germans stopped associating or “being friends” with Jews. Jews and non-Jewish Germans were not allowed to join the same clubs.
- Through the economy: Jews were excluded from the civil service and Jewish businesses were taken over by Germans. Jewish doctors and lawyers had their licenses taken away. This made it less likely for Germans to interact with Jews in their daily life.

Journal prompt: What are some reasons why many Germans separated their Jewish neighbors from mainstream society? Why do we sometimes segregate or isolate groups that we label as different from ourselves?

Stage 3. Emigration: Jews are encouraged to leave Germany. With the beginning of World War II in 1939, the Nazis apply their racial laws to the countries they invade and occupy. Thus, Jews in these territories also tried to emigrate outside of the Third Reich.

Key question: How did the Nazis encourage the Jews to leave Germany and other occupied countries?

Chronology of Nazi Occupation in Europe

1938: Austria, parts of Czechoslovakia

1939: Czechoslovakia, Poland

1940: Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Hungary, Romania

1941: Yugoslavia, Greece, parts of the Soviet Union

Suggested resource: Notes from prior lessons and map of Europe.

Possible answers:

- Through discriminatory laws: Many Jews, especially artists and academics, left Germany when they were no longer allowed to work in the universities.
- Through new immigration laws: Jews were allowed to obtain exit visas so long as they left behind their valuables and property.
- Through fear: Kristallnacht encouraged many Jews to leave the area.

Journal prompt: What are some reasons why many Germans wanted their Jewish neighbors to leave the country? Why do people sometimes believe that those who are different do not belong in their community?

Stage 4. Ghettoization: Jews are forcibly removed to segregated sections of Eastern European cities called ghettos.

Key questions: What are ghettos? What were the conditions like in these ghettos?

Suggested resource: *I'm Still Here*, “Yitskhok” (16:55–20:20)—In this excerpt, we hear the words of 15-year-old Yitskhok Rudashevski as he describes his experience living in a ghetto in Vilna, Lithuania. So that students can focus on the idea of residential segregation in ghettos, we suggest you stop showing this clip at 20:20. After this point, Yitskhok describes the next stages on the way to genocide: deportations and mass murders.

Possible answers:

- Ghettos were walled-off areas of a city where Jews were forced to live. They were not allowed to leave their ghetto without permission from Nazi officials. Likewise, except for Nazi officials, non-Jews were not allowed to enter the ghetto.
- Conditions in the ghettos were crowded and filthy. Many families were forced to share one small apartment. There was limited access to proper waste disposal. Jews had to give up their property and valuables. There were very few jobs in a ghetto and since everyone had to give up their property and valuables, most of the residents were extremely poor. Food was scarce. Forced, unpaid labor was common.

Journal prompt: What are some reasons why many Germans allowed their Jewish neighbors to be forced to live in ghettos? Why do we sometimes allow those who we think are “different” to be treated unfairly?

Stage 5. Deportation: Jews are transported from ghettos to concentration camps and death camps.

Key questions: What is a concentration camp? What is a death camp? Who was affected by these camps?

Suggested resource: *I'm Still Here*, “Petr and Eva Ginz” (26:52–32:46)—In this excerpt, we hear the words of a brother and sister from Czechoslovakia who were deported to the Terezin concentration camp. They describe life in this camp, separated from their parents. In 1944, Petr was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, a death camp. After students watch this excerpt from *I'm Still Here* you can show them a map of Nazi concentration camps and death camps in Europe in 1944. By studying this map, students can learn a great deal about the extent of the human lives affected by deportations, both in terms of the victims sent to these camps and the number of bureaucrats and soldiers required to operate these facilities. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website (<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/maps/>) publishes a map of where Nazi concentration camps were located, and the Jewish Virtual Library also posts a similar map (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/campmap.html>).

Possible answers:

- The Nazis built the first concentration camp in 1933 as a place to detain (place-by-force) communists and other opponents to the Nazi Party. At the beginning of World War II, the Nazis began building more concentration camps where they could imprison “enemies of the state,” including Jews, Gypsies, and homosexuals, as well as prisoners of war. Many concentration camps functioned as labor camps, where inmates worked until they either starved to death or died of disease.
- Death camps, also called extermination camps, were designed for the purpose of killing large numbers of people in the most efficient manner possible.
- Because these camps were located away from major cities, victims had to be transported to them via train. Some rides lasted for several days. Thousands of prisoners died en route to the camps.

- Many people were affected by these camps. Of course, there were the victims; millions of children, women, and men suffered as inmates in these camps. But there were also bureaucrats—the train conductors, prison guards, cooks, secretaries, etc.—that made sure that millions of victims were transported to camps throughout Europe and who ran the camps once the victims arrived.

Journal prompt: What are some reasons why Germans might have participated in transporting Jews to concentration camps and death camps? Once the Holocaust reached this stage, who could the victims turn to for help? What choices did they have?

Stage 6. Mass murder: It is estimated that the Nazis murdered approximately 11 million innocent civilians during World War II. These are civilians killed not in the crossfire of armed combat but murdered for being an “enemy of the state” or for belonging to an undesirable group. The Nazis and those who worked for them killed children, women, and men mostly through shooting, suffocation in gas chambers, and imprisonment in labor and death camps. Conditions in the camps were such that many prisoners died from disease, such as typhus, malnutrition, and exhaustion from overwork. Of those killed, six million were Jews. Two-thirds of the entire European Jewish population was killed by the Nazis. Petr, Ilya, and Dawid, three teenagers profiled in *I’m Still Here*, were murdered by the Nazis.

Suggested resources: At this point, we suggest you end the lecture and use a different teaching method to help students process the horrors of mass murder. Refer to the lesson plan for recommendations.

Journal prompts: What was the Holocaust? How did the choices made by ordinary people contribute to the death of millions of innocent children, women, and men? What could have prevented these crimes from taking place?