

Holocaust and Human Behavior

One-Week Unit Outline



Introduction

The five lessons in this unit give students an overview of the history of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust and provide a window into the choices individuals, groups, and nations made that contributed to genocide. For a more comprehensive unit about the Holocaust that follows the [Facing History scope and sequence](#), see our [One-Month Unit Outline](#).

This unit incorporates readings, videos, and other resources from *Holocaust and Human Behavior*. As you prepare to teach, it is important to refer to the book for the context necessary to help guide students from lesson to lesson and to answer their questions. We also recommend you read the [Get Started](#) section of the book for important suggestions about how to foster a reflective classroom community and how to support students as they encounter the emotionally challenging history of the Holocaust.

Each lesson below corresponds to roughly one day of instruction time. Since schedules, class period length, and the needs of individual classes and students vary, you will likely need to make adjustments to this plan to best suit your needs and circumstances. The “teaching notes” accompanying each lesson often provide suggestions for making adjustments to the lesson in order to abbreviate or go deeper.

Learning Goals

The resources and activities in this unit outline have been chosen and sequenced to target the following goals:

- Give students an overview of the history of the Holocaust and provide them with an opportunity to respond to the stories of victims and survivors.
- Give students the opportunity to learn about some of the specific choices made by individuals, groups, and nations during the the rise of the Nazi Party and the Holocaust.
- Help students understand how circumstances of time, place, and opportunity play a role in defining the choices available to individuals, groups, and nations throughout history.

Essential Questions

What does learning about the decisions people made during the rise of the Nazis and the Holocaust suggest to us about our choices and responsibilities today?

Lesson Name	Materials	Activity	Teaching Notes
<p>1. Identity and Belonging in the Weimar Republic</p>	<p>Video: Facing History Scholar Reflections: The Weimar Republic</p> <p>Reading: Social Democratic Party Platform</p> <p>Reading: Communist Party Platform</p> <p>Reading: Nazi Party Platform</p> <p>Handout: Which Political Party?</p>	<p>Introduce this unit by telling students that they will be learning about the Holocaust. If helpful for your students, you might provide them with this definition of the Holocaust:</p> <p><i>The catastrophic period in the twentieth century when Nazi Germany murdered six million Jews and millions of other civilians (including Roma and Sinti, the disabled, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Poles, and prisoners of war), in the midst of World War II.</i></p> <p>Explain that to learn about what led to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, you will begin more than twenty years earlier, at the end of World War I.</p> <p>Students begin by watching a short video about the Weimar Republic: Facing History Scholar Reflections: The Weimar Republic.</p> <p>You might use a Close Viewing Protocol to ensure students' engagement. After watching the video, ask students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were some positive elements of life in the Weimar Republic? What were some challenges? • What choices did Germany face, as a country, during these years? <p>Then, ask students to read the three political party platforms readings and the handout Which Political Party? In pairs, students discuss what they know about the identities of one or more of the individuals profiled. Which parties would be most likely to appeal to each individual and why?</p> <p>As a class, discuss:</p> <p><i>If all Germans lived through the same economic, political, and cultural events, why didn't all Germans vote the same way? Why do you think more than half of German citizens did not vote for the Nazi Party? What, then, can explain why many Germans voted for the Nazi Party in 1932?</i></p>	<p>It's important for the students to know that this week will not be a comprehensive study of the Holocaust. Instead, these five lessons are meant to give students a window into the history and the choices individuals, groups, and nations made that contributed to genocide.</p> <p>If you have an additional time, consider showing the video Preconditions for the Holocaust: Prejudice in 20th Century Europe.</p> <p>Background Information: Chapter 3, Chapter 4</p>

Lesson Name	Materials	Activity	Teaching Notes
<p>2. Choices in the 1930s</p>	<p>Reading: Universe of Obligation</p> <p>Video: Hitler’s Rise to Power, 1933-1934</p> <p>Reading: Do You Take the Oath?</p> <p>Reading: No Time to Think</p> <p>Reading: Women and the National Community</p>	<p>The previous lesson explored some of the conditions of the Weimar Republic that weakened Germany’s new democracy and led many Germans to support the Nazi party. This lesson introduces the concept of the “universe of obligation” and applies it to analyze changes in Germany in the 1930s, as the Hitler rose to power and the Nazis established a dictatorship.</p> <p>First, read Universe of Obligation together as a class. Ask students to explain what “universe of obligation” means in their own words. What are some consequences of being outside a nation’s universe of obligation?</p> <p>Then, watch the video Hitler’s Rise to Power, 1933-1934. As students watch, ask them to note how and why Germany’s universe of obligation changed during the Nazis’ first years in power.</p> <p>Then assign one of the three readings below to each pair of students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do You Take the Oath? • No Time to Think • Women and the National Community <p>In pairs, students read their assigned text and discuss: <i>How did the individual profiled in this reading respond to the Nazi regime? What were some consequences of their choice?</i></p> <p>As a class, consider,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors allowed some people to conform and enabled others to dissent from the growing Nazi dictatorship? • How do these readings help you understand the transformation of Germany in the 1930s? 	<p>To explore the concept of universe of obligation in greater depth, see the lesson Understanding Universe of Obligation, including a helpful graphic organizer.</p> <p>If you would like to delve deeper into the individual experiences and motivations explored in the three historical readings, consider using the Character Maps strategy.</p> <p>Background Information: Chapter 5, Chapter 6</p>

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<p>3. Voices of Holocaust Victims and Survivors</p>	<p>Video: <i>Step by Step: Phases of the Holocaust</i></p> <p>Reading: <i>Survival in Hiding</i> (Otto Wolf's testimony)</p> <p>Reading: <i>A Basic Feeling of Human Dignity</i> (Hanna Lévy-Hass's testimony)</p> <p>Reading: <i>The Jewish Ghettos: Separated from the World</i> (anonymous girl's testimony)</p> <p>Featured Collection: <i>Survivors and Witnesses: Using Video Testimony in the Classroom</i></p>	<p>In this lesson, students will examine stories of victims and survivors to explore the experience and impact of the Holocaust.</p> <p>First, view the short film <i>Step by Step: Phases of the Holocaust</i> for an overview of the mass murder perpetrated by Nazi Germany during the Holocaust. Review the four phases of the Holocaust identified by historian Doris Bergen in the film.</p> <p>Then, students read about a variety of experiences of those targeted by the Nazis during the Holocaust. (Students need not read all of the suggested testimony.) They may also watch video testimony from the <i>Survivors and Witnesses</i> collection.</p> <p>Then students use the <i>Color, Symbol, Image</i> strategy to reflect on one account.</p> <p>Students respond privately to the following prompt in their journals or notebooks: <i>Accounts like these are disturbing and painful to read. They prompt us to ask many questions, some of which may be unanswerable. What questions do these events raise for you about history and human behavior?</i></p>	<p>Make sure that you review the <i>Get Started</i> section in <i>Holocaust and Human Behavior</i> for information about how to support students as they encounter the emotionally challenging content of this lesson.</p> <p>See the lesson <i>Responding to the Stories of Holocaust Survivors</i> for more detailed suggestions.</p> <p>Consider ending this lesson by having students complete <i>Exit Cards</i> to give you a sense of how they are responding to this emotionally challenging content.</p> <p>While it is important to illustrate a variety of experiences, the size of your class and the needs of your students may dictate that you choose not to use every suggested reading in this lesson.</p> <p>Background Information:</p> <p>Chapter 8 reading: <i>The Invasion of the Soviet Union</i></p> <p>Chapter 9 readings: <i>Mobile Killing Units, The Wannsee Conference, Establishing the Killing Centers</i></p>

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<p>4. The Range of Human Behavior</p>	<p>Reading: A Commandant's View</p> <p>Reading: Bystanders at Hartheim Castle</p> <p>Reading: Protests in Germany</p> <p>Reading: Deciding to Act</p> <p>Reading: Le Chambon: A Village Takes a Stand</p>	<p>In this lesson, students consider the range of choices available to individuals, communities, and nations in the midst of war and genocide.</p> <p>Begin by introducing vocabulary for the roles people can play in a time of crisis, including <i>perpetrator</i>, <i>victim</i>, <i>bystander</i>, and <i>upstander</i>. Share definitions with students or create working definitions together.</p> <p>Then each student reads and analyzes one from a selection of readings about the choices of those who had varying levels of agency during the Holocaust. They should think about the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role/s did each individual play? • What led each individual to make the choices they made? • How did circumstances of time, place, and opportunity play a role in the choices each person made? <p>Finish with a class discussion about the factors that seemed to either constrain or expand the range of choices available to individuals.</p>	<p>Emphasize that <i>perpetrator</i>, <i>victim</i>, <i>bystander</i>, and <i>upstander</i> are roles, not identities. A single individual can slip in and out of each of these roles depending on circumstances and choices.</p> <p>While it is important to illustrate varying levels of agency people experienced and the variety of choices they made during the Holocaust, the size of your class and the needs of your students may dictate that you choose not to use every suggested reading in this lesson.</p> <p>If you have time, consider concluding with a Text to Text, Text to Self, Text to World activity. Invite students to focus on one of the readings make text to text, text to self and text to world connections in their journal.</p> <p>Background Information: Chapter 8 and Chapter 9</p>

<p>5. Judgment and Legacy</p>	<p>Handout: Justice After the Holocaust Anticipation Guide</p> <p>Video: Facing History Scholar Reflections: the Nuremberg Trials.</p> <p>Video: Benjamin Ferencz: Watcher of the Sky</p>	<p>This final lesson considers dilemmas of justice and legacy after the Holocaust. Begin by asking students to complete an anticipation guide exploring these themes. (If you have time, you can discuss students responses using a Four Corners strategy, as in the lesson Justice and Judgment After the Holocaust.)</p> <p>Then, introduce the Nuremberg Trials using the video Facing History Scholar Reflections: the Nuremberg Trials. After watching the video, refer back to the Anticipation Guide and consider how the Allies negotiated some of the dilemmas of judgment named there.</p> <p>Finally, consider how World War II and the Holocaust shape our sense of conscience and commitment today by watching the story of former Nuremberg prosecutor and activist Benjamin Ferencz in the documentary excerpt Benjamin Ferencz: Watcher of the Sky. Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did Ferencz’s experiences at Nuremberg shape his commitments throughout his life? Why does he say he is a “watcher of the sky”? • How might studying the history of the Holocaust inform our choices and our own sense of responsibility in the world today? 	<p>The lesson Justice and Judgment After the Holocaust has additional resources and strategies for connecting the Nuremberg Trials to broader dilemmas of judgment, and its extension activities address other legal and institutional legacies of World War II and the Holocaust.</p> <p>Background Information: Chapter 10 and Chapter 11.</p>
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Assessment

In her book *War and Genocide*, Historian Doris Bergen issues an important reminder to students of the Holocaust:

The Holocaust was an event in human history. Everyone involved—victims, witnesses, collaborators, rescuers, and perpetrators—was a human being with human feelings and needs. Recognizing that shared humanity does not excuse the killers or somehow soften the past. If anything it makes studying the Holocaust more painful.

Why is Bergen’s reminder of the humanity of “everyone involved” in the history of the Holocaust important? Why might reflecting on our shared humanity make studying the Holocaust more painful? How does it affect how you think about what it means to be human and your own choices today?