

Historical Context in Holocaust Education

In your effort to provide historical context for the study of the Holocaust it is essential that students see the basis for and the evolution of Nazi policy and aggression. By taking the time to establish this context for Auschwitz and the Final Solution students will gain a more accurate and complete understanding of the political and social system that created the Holocaust, the people who were affected by it, and the way of life that was destroyed by it.

To assist you in this effort we have identified the following themes which will help you structure a chronological and systematic approach to your unit. Realistically, given time constraints and curriculum demands, every teacher will not be able to address each concept in depth. Wherever possible, though, students should be introduced to the concepts listed below and have a chronological framework for the events from 1933-1945. Reproducible timelines for classroom use are available at <http://www.mchekc.org/Timelines.htm>.

Two general resources in the Remembrance and Hope Resource Chest that you will find helpful in all content areas are the books **Tell Them We Remember** and **The World Must Know**. Both are appropriate for 6th-12th grade students and have a classroom-friendly format of short readings and compelling visuals to reinforce historical points. In the following pages you will find a topical breakdown of the recommended content areas and Chest resources which will help you teach that subject matter to your students.

Those concepts are:

1. Jewish Life Before the Holocaust
2. Antisemitism
3. Germany and the Rise of Nazism
4. 1933-1939: "The Limited Solution" - Persecution and the Racial State
5. 1939-1941: "The Situational Solutions" - Ghettos and *Einsatzgruppen*
6. 1941-1945: The Final Solution
7. Jewish Responses to the Holocaust
8. Non-Jewish Responses to the Holocaust
9. Liberation and Aftermath

**WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU PRINT THIS RESOURCE TO UTILIZE
DURING YOUR REMEMBRANCE AND HOPE CHEST RENTAL.**

Jewish Life before the Holocaust

An understanding of the rich 1,500 year history of the European Jewish community is essential to an understanding the human suffering of the Holocaust. Far from being a homogeneous group, European Jews were assimilated at different levels into their national cultures, practiced their religion with varying degrees of observance, spoke different languages, practiced different professions and lived unique lives with their families. Giving students a glimpse of the diversity of the Jewish community shows the Jews as a living culture rather focusing on victimhood, personalizes the experience of the Holocaust, and serves to dispel past and present stereotypes of Jews.

A study of prewar Jewish life will also help you address the following USHMM Guidelines For Teaching the Holocaust:

- Avoid simple answers to complex history
- Just because it happened does not mean it was inevitable
- Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions
- Contextualize the history you are teaching
- Translate statistics into people
- Strive for balance in establishing whose perspective informs your study of the Holocaust

Relevant topics might include:

- Diversity of Jewish cultural life prior to the Holocaust
- Jewish religious observance and levels of nationalism and assimilation

Chest contents helpful in teaching this subject:

Books

Introductory chapters of most survivor memoirs

Friedrich – pages 1-25

Surviving Hitler –pages 7-19

Videos

Camera of My Family

Antisemitism

Anti-Jewish sentiment and violent pogroms span all of European history and geography. Nazi policy toward the Jews built on this long tradition of persecution. By studying the Christian roots of antisemitism and examining the gradual shift from religious to secular persecution of the Jews, students will begin to understand the cultural climate that informed perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders and victims through the Holocaust.

A study of antisemitism will also help you address the following USHMM Guidelines For Teaching the Holocaust:

- Avoid simple answers to complex history
- Strive for precision of language
- Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions
- Contextualize the history you are teaching

Relevant topics might include:

- Christian anti-Judaism
- 19th Century racial antisemitism
- Antisemitic propaganda

Chest contents helpful in teaching this subject:

Books

Smoke and Ashes – Chapter 1

The Holocaust, The World and the Jews – Chapter V

Understanding the Holocaust – Chapter 1

Denying the Holocaust

Pamphlets and Teaching Packets

“The Historical Origins of Antisemitism” in *The Holocaust* Jackdaw

Life Unworthy of Life – Lessons 3-4

Chest contents helpful in teaching related topics such as prejudice and discrimination:

Books

The Terrible Things

The Wave

Videos

Green Eggs and Ham Video – show *Sneetches* (recommended clip from beginning of movie to beginning of second song) approximately 4 minutes

Germany and the Rise of Nazism

The cultural, political, and economic consequences of World War I and the interwar period in Germany have direct bearing on the eventual rise of the Nazi Party and the creation of a totalitarian state. By studying these topics, students will be able to understand how the Nazis accumulated power and utilized the bureaucratic machinery of the state against their enemies.

A study of Germany and the Rise of Nazism will also help you address the following USHMM Guidelines For Teaching the Holocaust:

- Define the term Holocaust
- Avoid simple answers to complex history
- Just because it happened does not mean it was inevitable
- Strive for precision of language
- Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions
- Contextualize the history you are teaching

Relevant topics might include:

- The end of WWI and the Versailles Treaty
- The Weimar Republic
- Worldwide depression, economics, reparations
- Rise of nationalism
- Life in Germany 1919-1933
- Adolf Hitler
- Totalitarian state - dictatorship

Chest contents helpful in teaching this subject:

Books

Smoke and Ashes – Chapter 2

The Holocaust, The World and the Jews – Chapter VI

Understanding the Holocaust – Chapters 3 and 5

Friedrich

Pamphlets and Teaching Packets

“Hitler and the Rise of Nazism” in *The Holocaust* Jackdaw

Life Unworthy of Life – Lessons 5-6

1933-1939: “The Limited Solution” - Persecution and the Racial State

Under Hitler’s leadership German, Austrian and Czech Jews and others endured persecution in the form of physical violence, economic boycotts, and laws to strip them of their rights before WWII even began. Controlled by the Nazi party, this system of persecution utilized propaganda and the legislative system to gain acceptance by the German public. Students should understand the seemingly small steps that cumulatively stripped the Jews and others of their rights.

A study of the years 1933-1939 will also help you address the following USHMM Guidelines For Teaching the Holocaust:

- Define the term Holocaust
- Avoid comparisons of pain
- Avoid simple answers to complex history
- Just because it happened does not mean it was inevitable
- Strive for precision of language
- Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions
- Contextualize the history you are teaching

Relevant topics might include:

- Racial Science
- Antisemitic propaganda
- Nuremberg Laws
- Other victims of Nazi persecution
- The *St. Louis*
- *Kristallnacht*

Chest contents helpful in teaching this subject:

Books

Holocaust and Human Behavior Resource Book – chapters 3 -4

Smoke and Ashes – Chapter 2

The Holocaust, The World and the Jews – Chapters VII-VIII

Understanding the Holocaust – Chapters 6-7

Friedrich

Videos

Witnesses to the Holocaust: German Jews

Pamphlets and Teaching Packets

A State of Terror: Germany 1933-1939 pamphlet

USHMM Other Victims Booklets: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Homosexuals, Roma and Sinti

“The Final Solution” in *The Holocaust* Jackdaw

Primary Source Documents in *The Holocaust* Jackdaw including:

- *Der Stürmer* 1938
- Nuremberg Laws on Reich Citizenship

Life Unworthy of Life – Lessons 7-8

1939-1941: “The Situational Solutions” - Ghettos and *Einsatzgruppen*

The outbreak of World War II radicalized Nazi policy toward the Jews of Europe. No longer able to encourage immigration and having conquered the home countries of millions more Jews, the Nazis sought to find a new solution to the “Jewish Question.” This period marks the end of Jewish family life and the Nazis’ initial attempts to create a process to murder Jews. For students this period offers a chance to study not only the Nazi attempts to perfect a solution to the “Jewish Question” but also the final attempts of Jewish men, women and children to normalize their situation and live as families and communities.

A study of the years 1939 - 1941 will also help you address the following USHMM Guidelines For Teaching the Holocaust:

- Avoid simple answers to complex history
- Just because it happened does not mean it was inevitable
- Strive for precision of language
- Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions
- Contextualize the history you are teaching
- Translate statistics into people
- Be sensitive to appropriate written and audiovisual content

Relevant topics might include:

- World War II
- Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact
- Ghetto life
- Operation Barbarossa
- *Einsatzgruppen* actions

Chest contents helpful in teaching this subject:

Books

We Are Witnesses – David Rubinowicz Chapter 1

Growing Up in the Holocaust – pages 17-183

Holocaust and Human Behavior Resource Book – pages 313-340

I Never Saw Another Butterfly

Smoke and Ashes – Chapter 3-4

Understanding the Holocaust – Chapter 8

The Holocaust, the World and the Jews – Chapter III

Videos

Witnesses to the Holocaust: The Ghettos

Pamphlets and Teaching Packets

Janusz Korczak’s Warsaw Booklet

Anatomy of a Ghetto Booklet

Life Unworthy of Life – Lessons 9-10

“The Final Solution” in *The Holocaust* Jackdaw

Primary Source Documents in *The Holocaust* Jackdaw including:

- Heydrich order of September 21, 1939
- Goring order of July 31, 1941

Miscellaneous

USHMM Artifact Posters – Ringelblum Milkcan

1941-1945: The Final Solution

The state-sponsored program to murder European Jews beginning in 1942 is one of the most widely studied aspects of the Holocaust. The creation of six death camps, the use of gas chambers, and the complicity of vast numbers of people to allow the murder to happen are central issues in every study of the Holocaust. Despite the importance of this study, teachers are encouraged to spend time creating a context for the Final Solution before mentioning or reading about the killing operations.

A study of the Final Solution will also help you address the following USHMM Guidelines for Teaching the Holocaust:

- Define the term Holocaust
- Avoid comparisons of pain
- Avoid simple answers to complex history
- Just because it happened does not mean it was inevitable
- Strive for precision of language
- Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions
- Contextualize the history you are teaching
- Translate statistics into people
- Be sensitive to appropriate written and audiovisual content
- Select appropriate learning activities

Relevant topics might include:

- Wannsee Conference
- Deportation
- Six Death Camps
- Survivors

Chest contents helpful in teaching this subject:

Books

Holocaust and Human Behavior Resource Book – pages 341-362

Escape from Sobibor

Smoke and Ashes – Chapters 5, 7-9

The Holocaust, the World and the Jews – Chapter IV

Understanding the Holocaust – Chapter 9

Night

Surviving Hitler

Videos

Escape from Sobibor– clip from beginning through elderly man being shot beside train

Auschwitz: If You Cried You Died

Pamphlets and Teaching Packets

“The Final Solution” in *The Holocaust* Jackdaw

Primary Source Documents in *The Holocaust* Jackdaw including aerial map of Auschwitz-Birkenau

Life Unworthy of Life – Lessons 9-12

Miscellaneous

USHMM Artifact Poster Set – Shoes, Badges, Deportation Railway Car

Survivors: Testimonies of the Holocaust CD-Rom

Jewish and Non-Jewish Responses to the Holocaust

Responses to the Holocaust took many forms. The Jews themselves reacted to radicalized Nazi policy in a variety of ways including armed and spiritual resistance. Collaborators and bystanders in Germany and throughout occupied Europe made decisions about their actions. Nazi perpetrators made decisions and reacted to events as they happened. Rescuers risked their own lives to save the lives of neighbors and of complete strangers. World governments made policy decisions about emigration, intervention, and the war. Students will benefit from understanding that far from being an inevitable consequence of history, the Holocaust was defined by choices made throughout the world – in some cases to act and in others to remain silent.

A study of responses to the Holocaust will also help you address the following USHMM Guidelines for Teaching the Holocaust:

- Avoid simple answers to complex history
- Just because it happened does not mean it was inevitable
- Strive for precision of language
- Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions
- Do not romanticize history to engage students' interest
- Contextualize the history you are teaching

Relevant topics might include:

- U.S. and World response
- Evian Conference
- Resistance and survival in the Jewish community
- Rescuers
- Collaborators and bystanders

Chest contents helpful in teaching this subject:

Books

Holocaust and Human Behavior Resource Book – Chapter 8

Smoke and Ashes – Chapters 10-14

Understanding the Holocaust – Chapter 10

The Holocaust, The World and the Jews – Chapters X-XII

The Holocaust: A History of Courage and Resistance

Twenty and Ten

The Upstairs Room

Videos

Courage to Care

Escape from Sobibor

Pamphlets and Teaching Packets

USHMM Resistance Booklet

To Save One Life: The Story of Righteous Gentiles Booklet

“The Response of the Free World” in *The Holocaust* Jackdaw

Primary Source Documents in *The Holocaust* Jackdaw including *New York Times* 11/11/38

Life Unworthy of Life – Lessons 13-16

Miscellaneous

USHMM Artifact Poster Set – Danish Rescue Boat

Liberation and Aftermath

Liberation in 1945 did not bring a happy end to the Holocaust. Too often students walk away from a unit on the Holocaust thinking that the survivors who lived to see liberation simply walked away from the camps and into their new lives. By studying liberation, the turmoil of post-WWII Europe and the displaced persons camps students gain insight into what survivors still had to endure even after the immediate threat to their lives was eliminated. Similarly, by looking at the debates about justice and the trials after the Holocaust, students can begin to see that the Holocaust led to the formation of an international legal framework for dealing with genocides.

A study of liberation and aftermath will also help you address the following USHMM Guidelines for Teaching the Holocaust:

- Avoid comparisons of pain
- Avoid simple answers to complex history
- Just because it happened does not mean it was inevitable
- Strive for precision of language
- Make careful distinctions about sources of information
- Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions
- Do not romanticize history to engage students' interest
- Contextualize the history you are teaching
- Reinforce the objectives of your lesson plan

Relevant topics might include:

- Death marches
- Liberation experiences
- Displaced Persons camps
- Nuremberg Trials and Eichmann Trial
- Justice
- Survivors
- Genocide since the Holocaust
- The United Nations and the Genocide Convention

Chest contents helpful in teaching this subject:

Books

Holocaust and Human Behavior Resource Book – chapters 9-10

Smoke and Ashes – Chapters 15-18

The Holocaust, The World and the Jews – Chapter XIV

Understanding the Holocaust – Chapters 11-13

Videos

The Long Way Home

Witnesses to the Holocaust – The Liberators

Pamphlets and Teaching Packets

Life Unworthy of Life – Lessons 17-18