

**Essential Questions:**

- What was the Holocaust?
- How can unfair treatment of people grow into something very dangerous?
- What can we learn from the choices people made during this time?
- Why is it important to learn about people who were affected by the Holocaust?
- How do individual stories help us understand history?
- What warning signs can we see when prejudice escalates?
- What do the events of the Holocaust teach us about human choices and responsibility?
- How do historical events influence and shape literature?

**Subjects**

Multidisciplinary

**Grades**

5-8

**Lesson Objectives:**

- Define the Holocaust and related terms
- Identify basic causes and events that led to the Holocaust.
- Understand that Jewish people and other groups were unfairly targeted.
- Learn about the Holocaust through the stories of real people.
- Discuss how people responded to unfairness and danger.
- Reflect on how we can stand up for others and treat people fairly today.

**BACKGROUND/CONTEXT FOR THIS LESSON**

This lesson provides a gentle introduction to the Holocaust through storytelling and visual timelines. Designed to build empathy and historical understanding without overwhelming students, it emphasizes the human impact over graphic content. Teachers are encouraged to create a safe and respectful space and prepare students for emotionally sensitive material. This version avoids graphic descriptions and focuses on courage, dignity, and humanity during tragic times. Teaching strategies are suggested in the lesson sequence; however please use other options if they support the learning needs of your students.

**Note to Teachers:** Before beginning any unit or lesson on the Holocaust, we highly recommend closely reviewing the USHMM [Guidelines for Teaching About the Holocaust](#). We also highly encourage creating a safe and respectful learning environment by engaging your students in the activities provided by Facing History's guide "[Fostering Civil Discourse: Difficult Classroom Conversations in a Diverse Democracy](#)".

## EXTERNAL LINKS

- [Essential Topics to Teach About the Holocaust](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions about the Holocaust for Educators](#)
- [Students' Toughest Questions](#)
- [Resource Evaluation Rubric](#)
- [Echoes and Reflections Timeline of the Holocaust](#)
- [USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia](#)

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- [Pyramid of Hate](#)
- [Photograph](#) of the burning of the Boemestrasse Synagogue in Frankfurt, Germany in November 1938
- [Individual Profile card](#)

## LESSON SEQUENCE

### DAY ONE

**Objective:** Students will understand how biased attitudes can escalate to violence and genocide through a visual framework.

Ask students what they already know about the Holocaust.

Introduce students to the [Pyramid of Hate](#). As a class, identify and discuss two to three examples for each section of the pyramid.

Discussion Prompts:

- Why do you think this is a pyramid shape? What happens when actions at the lower levels go unchecked?
- What do you notice about how the Pyramid of Hate is organized?
- Why do you think it starts with jokes or stereotypes and builds up to violence and genocide? What does that tell us about how hate can grow?
- How might something that seems small—like a mean joke—contribute to bigger problems?
- How could speaking up or acting early make a difference?
- How can the Pyramid of Hate help us better understand the choices people made—and didn't make—during the Holocaust?

**Optional Extension Activity:** [How Does Hate Escalate? An Examination of the Past & Present](#) (IWitness)

## DAY TWO

**Objective:** Students will explore diverse personal experiences during the Holocaust through individual profiles.

Do Now: *“Why do you think it’s important to learn about individual people when studying big events in history like the Holocaust?”* Have students respond in writing or in a quick pair-share.

Distribute a [photo](#) (printed or digitally) to each pair of students. Provide time to silently study the image and note:

- What we see in the picture (clothing, posture, setting, etc.)
  - What we think or wonder about this person (guesses about their life, feelings, etc.)
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Explain to students that the images they received were of Holocaust victims that had been taken *before* the Holocaust. Explain to students that some of the photographs are of people who we cannot identify. Discuss the meaning of photographs of unknown people.

- What do you see in the pictures that might tell you when or where they were taken?
- Look at the various expressions of the people and poses in the photographs. What do they reveal about the people?
- Look at the children and babies in the photographs. How similar or different do they appear to be from children today?
- How does seeing a person's face change your connection to their story?
- What happens when people's faces are forgotten or hidden?

**Optional Extension Activity:** Explore [Individual Profile cards](#) from USHMM

## DAY THREE

**Objective:** Students will examine Kristallnacht to understand how violence became state-sanctioned and public.

Display the [photograph](#) of the burning of the Boemestrasse Synagogue in Frankfurt, Germany in November 1938 without providing any contextual information. In pairs, have students discuss:

- What do you see in this image? (Focus on details like the smoke, flames, people's reactions, uniforms, and setting.)
  - What emotions or messages do you think this image conveys? (Who took the photo, who is in it, and what they might be feeling?)
  - What might have led to this event, and what do you think could happen next? (Hypothesize about historical
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context and consequences based on what they observe.)

After discussing students' responses, explain the context of the photograph and the events of Kristallnacht. This can be done through [lecture](#) or [video](#).

- Where on the Pyramid of Hate would you place the events of Kristallnacht? Explain.
- What message did this send to Jewish people? What message did this send to non-Jewish Germans about the treatment of Jewish people?
- What might it have felt like to witness or experience Kristallnacht? What questions do you have about people's choices?

**Note to Teachers:** It is helpful to define the term *pogrom* to students as “an organized massacre of helpless people; in this case a massacre of Jews”.

## DAY FOUR

Lesson Preparation: Download, print and affix the timeline to the wall, leaving enough space between the cards. Print the resource and instruction cards. Each group should receive one instruction card and a map. The interactive map should be prepared in advance for use on the board.

Group 1: Ana Maria Gordon: Pre-war Jewish Life

Group 2: Ana Maria Gordon: Fleeing

Group 3: Ana Maria Gordon: Persecution Under Nazi Rule

Group 4: Ana Maria Gordon: Liberation and Return to Life

Group 5: Ana Maria Gordon: From Europe to Canada

Group 6: Gustav Schröder: The St. Louis

Group 7: Gustav Schröder: Recognition and Memory

## DAY FIVE

**Objective:** Students will recognize the impact individual actions can have in moments of crisis.

Do Now Prompt: *Imagine a time when someone did something kind or brave for you or when you saw someone help someone else in a difficult situation. Describe what happened. How did it make you feel? What do you think motivated the person to act?*

*Now think bigger: Why do some people choose to help others—even when it's risky? What makes someone step up when others stay silent?*

Explain to students that today in class, they will be focusing on a story of rescue. Show students the film "[Thanks to Good People - The Story of Holocaust Survivor Yona Amit](#)" (10 min).

As they watch, have students write down:

- Who helped Yona and her family?
- What risks did these rescuers face?
- How did Yona and her family respond to this help?

After watching the film, guide a class discussion using the following prompts:

- Who were the "good people"?
- What risks were involved in hiding and helping them?
- What qualities do you think the rescuers had?
- How did courage and kindness change Yona's outcome?
- How might you have felt if you were Yona or a rescuer?

Distribute 4–6 [still image cards taken from the film](#). Have students work in silent pairs to:

1. **Describe** what's happening visually.
2. **Infer** thoughts or feelings of subjects.
3. **Connect**: Relate image to why the rescuers did what they did.

Have each pair share one image with the class, describing their inferences.

Final Reflection Questions - can be completed as a written assignment or class discussion:

- What surprised you most as we learned about the Holocaust?
  - Why is it important to learn about individual people—not just events?
  - What lessons do you take from this history about standing up to hate?
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**Optional Extension Activity:** [“Why Did Some Choose to Rescue?”](#) (IWitness)

## CROSS CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

**ELA:** Write a historical fiction diary entry or short story inspired by one of the profile cards or historical events.

**Civics/ELA:** Research and present a modern example of a group being marginalized or dehumanized. Connect it to the Pyramid of Hate.

**Civic Action:** Write letters to museum curators or local leaders about the importance of remembering the Holocaust.

**Propaganda Analysis:** Explore Nazi propaganda and connect it to the Pyramid of Hate.

**Geography:** Map the countries where Holocaust victims lived and trace the spread of Nazi control.

**Visual Arts:** Create symbolic artwork inspired by survivor testimonies, Kristallnacht images, or the idea of “resistance through remembrance.”

**Music:** Introduce songs written in ghettos or camps and discuss music as resistance or memory.

**Social-Emotional Learning:** Reflective circle or journaling. “How does learning this history make you feel?” “What kind of person do I want to be when I see injustice?”

## STANDARDS

Insert State Standards Here

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