

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?

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

Focus Question: *How can everyday bias and prejudice escalate into violence and genocide?*

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:

- 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?

Create a "Wall of Resistance" poster: Students write down ways to interrupt bias at each level.

Grades 7-8 Extension Activity: [How Does Hate Escalate? An Examination of the Past & Present](#) (iWitness)

DAY TWO

Focus Question: *How did violence against Jewish people become acceptable and public?*

Project 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 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.
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- What message did this send to Jewish people? What message did this send to non-Jewish Germans about the treatment of Jewish people?

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 THREE

Focus Question: Why is it important to learn individual stories during times of mass violence?

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.

Briefly remind students that yesterday, they studied Kristallnacht and saw how Nazi policy turned increasingly violent. Today, they’ll meet individuals affected by those events and others, to understand the human side of history.

Assign an [Individual Profile card](#) to pairs or small groups of students, having them underline or highlight the major events that impacted that person’s experience during the Holocaust including:

- Name, age, country of origin
- Key life events and Nazi policies that affected them
- What year was most significant? Why?
- What stood out to you about this person’s experience?

Have the students share information about their individual with the class. discuss what can be learned by looking at a single person’s experiences and what they reveal about the Holocaust. Have students discuss:

- What do these stories have in common?
- What surprises you about the people represented?

Written Reflection: “Why is it important to remember individual people during times of mass violence?”

**CROSS CURRICULAR
CONNECTIONS**

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

Geography: Map activity showing the spread of Nazi control across Europe and how Jews were impacted differently by region.

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

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