

Essential Questions:

- What have we learned about the risk factors and warning signs of genocide?
- In what ways can prejudice escalate when it is left unchecked?
- What conditions, ideologies, and ideas made the Holocaust possible?
- How and why did ordinary people across Europe contribute to the persecution of their Jewish neighbors?
- How did the Nazis and their collaborators implement the Holocaust?
- What does learning about the Holocaust suggest to us about our choices and responsibilities today?

Subjects

Multidisciplinary

Grades

9-12

Lesson Objectives:

- Define the Holocaust and related terms
- Understand the historical causes and progression of the Holocaust.
- Understand who the Nazis were and what they believed
- Examine how the events of World War II and the Holocaust are intertwined
- Evaluate why the Nazis and their collaborators systematically targeted Jewish people and other persecuted groups
- Recognize the range of experiences of Jewish people in different times and places in Europe during the Holocaust
- Analyze how individuals and communities responded to oppression during the Holocaust.
- Evaluate the Holocaust's impact and apply its lessons to the present day.
- Reflect on contemporary examples of prejudice and discrimination and discuss the parallels to historical events

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT FOR THIS LESSON

This activity is intentionally flexible to allow for teacher modifications and can be completed in a **single class or multiple class sessions**, used as a point of reference throughout an entire unity of study, or provide a base for thematic extension activities. Teaching strategies are suggested in the lesson sequence; however please use other options if they support the learning needs of your students.

Teachers often have limited time to teach about the Holocaust. This presents challenges to ensuring the content, context, and complexity are adequately addressed. 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](#)".

This [lesson](#), developed by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, is structured around building a timeline that integrates personal stories, key historical events, and Nazi laws and decrees. This provides students with a foundation to examine how and why the Holocaust happened. The goal is not to definitively answer how and why the Holocaust happened but rather to allow students to formulate their own questions and arguments, based on evidence. It's important for the students to know that this lesson is not a comprehensive study of the Holocaust.

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

- [Holocaust Definitions](#)
- [Holocaust Definitions: Sorting It Out Handout](#)
- [Color-coded timeline cards](#)
 - [Years: 1933-1945](#)
 - [Individual Profiles](#)
 - [Laws and Decrees](#)
 - [Historical Events](#)
- [Optional Timeline Activity Worksheet](#)

LESSON SEQUENCE

WARM-UP & DISCUSSION

Ask students to create a working definition of the Holocaust.

Provide students with a copy of [Holocaust definitions](#) developed by different museums. As they study these definitions, have students fill out the [Holocaust Definitions: Sorting It Out Handout](#), which can be used to facilitate a class discussion.

INDIVIDUAL PROFILES

Note to Teachers: Prior to beginning the lesson with students, place the [1933-1945](#) timeline cards around the classroom.

Assign an [individual profile card](#) to each student (or pairs of students) and have students read for basic information, noting the following:

- Country of origin
- Gender of individual
- Nazi justification for persecution
- Major events that impacted that person's experience during the Holocaust.

Have students record their answers and share the information with another person or group.

Have students place the individual on the timeline based on the year in bold on the card.

**WHOLE CLASS
DISCUSSION**

Discuss with students:

- What do you observe about the range of individuals targeted by the Nazis for persecution?
- Are people targeted from the beginning to the end (1933-45) or are there years with more victims than others?
- What questions does this raise?

LAWS AND DECREES

With students still working in pairs or groups, distribute the [Laws and Decrees cards](#) for students to read, having them note the following:

- Who does the law/decreed target?
- How could it affect an individual's life?

Have students record their answers and then share their law/decreed with another person or with the group. Following this, have students place the law/decreed on the timeline.

Discuss with students:

- Note the timing of the laws/decrees. Can you describe a pattern?
- Considering the whole timeline with the Individual Profile cards and the Laws and Decrees, what assertions can be made? What questions does this layer raise?

**ANALYZING
HISTORICAL EVENTS**

Distribute the [Historical Events cards](#).

After reading and sharing about their event in pairs or groups, have students explain the significance of this event in relation to the Holocaust.

Ask students to place their event card on the timeline.

ELA Extension: If your students are reading literature about the Holocaust, have them place the events from the story on the timeline in addition to the existing layers in order to provide greater historical context.

GALLERY WALK

Have students take a gallery walk to study the completed timeline. Students should revisit their individual profile card and identify the laws/decrees and historical events that affected the person on the individual profile card they studied.

DEBRIEFING

Discuss with students:

- What did you observe?
- The Individual Profile cards are in clusters, as are the Laws and Decrees and the Historical Events. What does this tell us about the evolution of the Holocaust?
- Which events are pivotal to the Holocaust? Consider:
 - What is the connection between the invasion of Poland and Polish victims?
 - When are Jews targeted? Victimized?
 - Gay men and political prisoners were designated for persecution early on. Why?
 - When and where are Soviet POWs affected?
 - Can you see responses on the timeline? Who was responding? How? Why?
- Which laws and decrees affected the individual on their profile card? Record the events with the most impact. What assertions can be made from this evidence?

**ASSESSMENT
OPTIONS**

Re-share the definitions of the Holocaust. Ask students to find evidence on the timeline that connects to these definitions.

Have students select additional individual profile cards and use the Holocaust Encyclopedia to further research at least two laws/decrees and two events from the timeline that affected the individual's life.

**CROSS CURRICULAR
CONNECTIONS**

Social Studies Extension: [Non-Jewish Victim Timeline Extension](#): This extension highlights individual stories of non-Jewish victims and provides context for why the Nazis and their collaborators targeted various groups of people.

US History Extension: [American Responses to the Holocaust](#) - This timeline and lesson plan helps students understand the historical and societal context of American responses to the

Holocaust, including the responses of individuals and of the US government.

US History Extension: [Racial “Science” and Law in Nazi Germany and the United States](#) - This timeline extension lesson is a case study examining Nazi Germany and the United States during the 1930s, at a time when racism and eugenics were enshrined in law and practice.

ELA Extension: [Exploring Night as Literature, Bearing Witness to History](#) - This lesson will help teachers and students understand the fuller historical context of the events described in Wiesel’s writing. This can be connected with the timeline activity.

ELA Extension: [Exploring Anne Frank’s Diary](#) - This timeline extension activity will allow students to examine Anne Frank’s diary as both a historical and a deliberately-created literary text, and will understand how the Holocaust affected the lives of the Frank family.

STANDARDS

- **6.1.12.HistoryUP.11.b:** Compare the varying perspectives of victims, survivors, bystanders, rescuers, and perpetrators during the Holocaust.
- **6.2.12.CivicsHR.4.a:** Analyze the motivations, causes, and consequences of the genocides of Armenians, Ukrainians, Jews in the Holocaust and assess the responses by individuals, groups, and governments and analyze large-scale atrocities including 20th century massacres in China.
- **6.2.12.HistoryCC.4.c:** Analyze the extent to which the legacy of World War I, the global depression, ethnic and ideological conflicts, imperialism, and traditional political or economic rivalries caused World War II.
- **6.2.12.HistoryUP.4.c:** Compare and contrast the actions of individuals as perpetrators, bystanders, and rescuers during events of persecution or genocide, and describe the long-term consequences of genocide for all involved.