

Lesson

Duration:

Two 50-minute class periods

Learn the History: Kristallnacht in Klaus Langer's Diary

Learning Objectives

In this lesson students will read Klaus Langer's account and compare it with other available primary source material to understand the events of Kristallnacht and its significance in the context of the Holocaust. We encourage educators and students to read the introduction to Klaus Langer's diary in *Salvaged Pages* (pages 13–17) before beginning the lesson. It provides valuable information about the writer's life and historical context for a reading of the diary.

Overview

This lesson was initially drafted by Holocaust educator, Bonnie Sussman

Core diary entries from *Salvaged Pages* used in this lesson: [Klaus Langer, November 11, 1938](#)

The Nazi pogrom on November 9–10, 1938, known as Kristallnacht was a turning point in the escalation of anti-Jewish policy and public violence against Jews in Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland. One day later on November 11, 1938, diarist Klaus Langer wrote at length about what he and his family endured during this time. His diary offers a vivid account of this pivotal moment in the Nazi rise to power and helps readers understand the confusion, fear, and profound upset that this event caused for German Jews.

Focus Questions

The Nazis incited and orchestrated Kristallnacht and, in the course of the events, many Germans became participants in or bystanders to the mob violence. This is a tactic that some governments use to further their political agendas.

- What makes individuals participate in government-incited mob violence? What might be the risks of refusing to participate? What might be the personal, emotional, or moral consequences of either choice?
- How do you understand the role of the bystander vs. the active participant? What moral reasons might each person use to justify his or her actions?
- Is there a moral imperative to speak out and oppose such actions? What if the moral course of action is dangerous, impractical, or seems pointless? How do we reconcile these personal and social conflicts?

Materials

- Reading: [Nazi Telegram with Instructions for Kristallnacht](#)
- Reading: [Klaus Langer's Diary Entry](#)
- Reading: [New York Times Report on Kristallnacht](#)
- Reading: [Daily Express Report on Kristallnacht](#)
- Video: [USC Shoah's Remembering Kristallnacht](#)
- Gallery: [Kristallnacht Images](#)

Activities

Opener: Read [Klaus Langer's Diary Entry](#)

Begin by having students read the entry from November 11, 1938, in which Klaus Langer describes his experience of the series of events known as Kristallnacht. The excerpt begins:

The past three days brought significant changes in our lives. On November 7 a German legation member was assassinated in Paris. He died two days later. The day following, on November 10 [sic], came the consequences. At three o'clock the synagogue and the Jewish youth center were put on fire. Then they began to destroy Jewish businesses. During the morning, private homes also were being demolished. Fires were started at single homes belonging to Jews. At six-thirty in the morning the Gestapo came to our home and arrested Father and Mother [. . .]. Mother returned after about one and a half hours. Dad remained and was put in prison. . .¹

Ask students to reflect on and discuss what Klaus is describing. What words and phrases catch their attention? What words would students use to describe the experience Klaus describes? What questions does this entry raise for students about the events Klaus describes? Why was Kristallnacht such a significant event in the lives of German Jews? What change did it represent in Nazi policies toward German Jews?

If the class needs additional help solidifying their understanding of this event, you might follow this activity by reading together a summary from the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) website.

Main Activity: Explore Kristallnacht Through Primary Sources

Historians rely on multiple sources—to build an understanding of past events. Given the wide range of sources focused on Kristallnacht, this activity will both build content knowledge and exercise historical thinking skills including analyzing documents, assessing their value and placing them in historical context including Klaus Langer's diary entry.

Collecting evidence can occur through several methods. One engaging practice for the classroom is a work-station model. This process involves students circulating around classroom tables and analyzing the primary source material assembled at each station. These can include documents, video, photographs, testimony, art, and more.

For this activity, we suggest using the following sources: **Nazi Telegram with Instructions for Kristallnacht, November 10, 1938; Klaus Langer's Diary Entry on Kristallnacht, November 11, 1938; New York Times Report on Kristallnacht, November 10, 1938; Daily Express Report on**

Kristallnacht, November 11, 1938; Remembering Kristallnacht found on USC Shoah Foundation's website; and Berlin Storefront Destroyed during Kristallnacht, Essen Synagogue Destroyed during Kristallnacht, and Synagogue Destroyed during Kristallnacht found in the Kristallnacht Images gallery.

As students work with the resources in this activity, we recommend using the following analysis process. Consider using Klaus Langer's diary entry from November 11, 1938, to model this process with the entire class before engaging with the other source material.

Analysis Process:

1. Identification: Who was the author? Who was the audience (if it is stated?) What kind of document is it? When was it created or written?
2. Analysis: After gathering background information, what was the document's significance or purpose? What new information does the document contribute to your understanding of the historical moment?²

Deeper Exploration: Examine a Telegram Illustrating Nazi Plans

For a deeper exploration of how the Nazis planned, organized, and executed Kristallnacht, share [Nazi Telegram with Instructions for Kristallnacht, November 10, 1938](#) with your students.

Students can use the procedure described above to analyze this primary source document. USHMM also provides the following analysis questions and answers to help students understand the document and the significance of its contents.

- To whom was the telegram addressed?
- What did the author instruct the police to expect?
- Who appears to have been in charge of coordinating the police role in the anti-Jewish "demonstrations"?
- What were the German police instructed to "protect"? What was not "protected"?
- Why would the police be ordered to arrest looters but allow the destruction of Jewish-owned stores and businesses?
- Why was Kristallnacht such a significant event in the lives of German Jews? What change did it represent in Nazi policies toward German Jews? Who did this suggest was planning and participating in the actual rioting?
- Why would the Nazis want to prevent the harassment of foreign citizens?
- Why would Heydrich order the police forces to arrest "particularly affluent Jews" as opposed to those who were poor, and then add the instruction that "Jews arrested on this order are not [to be] mistreated"?
- How would the arrest of healthy adult males affect the livelihood of Jewish families in Germany?
- The security police [political and criminal divisions], the order police [uniformed police], and the fire brigades were involved in the planning of Kristallnacht. What were the implications of this coordinated planning for the victims of the riot?

Citations

1 Alexandra Zapruder, ed., *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015) 19–20.

2 The document analysis process was adopted from National Archives, Docs Teach website. Accessed November 10, 2014. <http://docsteach.org/resources>

Assessment

Have students choose one media account from the documents included. Write a detailed response discussing how the media chosen portrayed Kristallnacht. Some suggested questions may include:

- Who was the audience?
- What bias, if any, is evident?

Extensions

If you choose to have students view "[Remembering Kristallnacht](#)" on USC Shoah Foundation's website, discuss the following questions:

- What similarities did you notice between the accounts and that of Klaus? Did you note any differences in the accounts?
- What was the reaction of their neighbors?
- What actions did each take as a result of the events of Kristallnacht?

If you choose to have students view images Berlin Storefront Destroyed during Kristallnacht, Essen Synagogue Destroyed during Kristallnacht, and Synagogue Destroyed during Kristallnacht, find them in the [Kristallnacht Images gallery](#). Have students consider the following questions while they view the images:

- **Describe.** What do you see? What is occurring? What details stand out to you?
- **Analyze.** How is the image framed? What feelings does the image provoke? What do you think what occurring around the cameras as this image was captured?
- **Interpret.** What larger story does this image capture? How does the photograph convey the moment in time?