



# THE WAR



## A KEN BURNS FILM

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## Introduction to the Holocaust

### Subjects

History, Social Studies, Humanities, Language Arts

### Objectives

During this lesson, high school students will: understand the German National Socialism (Nazi) extermination campaign against European Jews and other targeted groups within the context of World War II history; appraise responses to the Holocaust by governments and individuals; reflect on racism and stereotyping; reflect on responsibility and remembrance

Note: The Holocaust is a specific event in history. Between 1933 and 1945, Nazi Germany and its collaborators pursued a program to systematically persecute and destroy European Jewry. Six million Jews were killed. Nazi ideology identified other enemies; they were targeted for racial, ethnic or political reasons. The murder of Poles, Gypsies, Soviet prisoners of war, handicapped people, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, sympathetic Christian church leaders, and political dissidents resulted in approximately five million more deaths.

The Holocaust is an event of vast and brutal cruelty and horror. Educators are reminded that its content can be disturbing to many students; graphic material should be used with forethought. The lessons to be learned are equally vast. It is important to partner the facts of the Holocaust with these other teachings.

### Estimated Time Required

Depending on whether Internet research occurs in the classroom or as homework, the lesson can be completed, minimally, in 4-5 classroom sessions. The lesson can also frame an extended Holocaust unit. Students will develop a greater understanding of Holocaust history and fundamental moral connections if additional classroom time can be devoted to the material.

### Description of Activity

The lesson is composed of four parts: introduction, group research, class share, and individual reflection. Using narratives from Episode Seven of *THE WAR* as springboards for research, groups examine key Holocaust topics. The

Holocaust is discussed as groups share their findings with the class. A closing session encourages student reflection about the systematic extermination of millions of people and promotes a conversation about fundamental moral connections.

### Part 1: Introduction

Prepare students for their research on Holocaust history. Encourage a discussion about the segments in Episode Seven that address the campaign to exterminate European Jews and other undesirable groups. Some students may already have familiarity with the topic. There may also be student misinformation. Use student knowledge and student reaction to Episode Seven to generate a list of questions or K-W-L chart (<http://www.indiana.edu/~1517/KWL.htm>) about Holocaust events. Shape the conversation so that the list complements the research questions asked in Part 2.

To see a collections of photos, interviews, and letters available for classroom use visit the Search & Explore ([http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search\\_results.php?search\\_type=battles&battles\\_id=30&keyword=The+Holocaust](http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_results.php?search_type=battles&battles_id=30&keyword=The+Holocaust)) section of the web site.

\*Please note that the content in this section can be disturbing to many students; graphic material should be used with forethought. We recommend that you preview all content before showing your class in order to determine whether it is appropriate.

Students can be encouraged to keep a Holocaust/World War II journal to help them process the content and their reactions. The initial entry should be a response to the questions raised by Episode Seven and class discussion. Additional entries can include student reactions to Holocaust research or address classroom discussion topics.

### Part 2: Research

Students break into small groups. Explain that groups will investigate different aspects of the Holocaust and develop answers to earlier student questions. Narrative comments from Episode Seven will be entry points into their research. Encourage students to critically evaluate the various factors that contributed to the Holocaust events they encounter.

Direct groups to begin their research by exploring the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, ([www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)). Students may subsequently research other websites. Some research topics are suggested for each group.

If research is assigned as homework, be sure to provide classroom time for groups to collaboratively prepare their oral presentations and display boards. Display boards should include maps, timelines, key terminology, explanatory texts, other appropriate elements (letters, memoirs, photographs), and an annotated bibliography. Alternatively, students can design blogs, wikis or Web sites to display their findings.

#### **Group A: The Jews Of Europe: 1933-1945**

*Narrator: In 1933, there were nine million Jews in Europe. By 1945, two out of three of them were dead. Thousands of Jewish communities were wiped from the face of the earth.*

Suggested topics: Jewish culture before the war, ghetto life, antisemitism, Kristallnacht, Nuremberg Laws, Wannsee Conference, the “Final Solution”

#### **Group B: Other Nazi Targets**

*Narrator: Hitler's regime also slaughtered nearly two million non-Jewish Poles. They murdered more than four million Soviet prisoners of war, as well as hundreds of thousands of handicapped people and political opponents, homosexuals and gypsies and Jehovah's Witnesses and slave laborers from all the countries they'd conquered.*

Suggested topics: Roma and Sinti (Gypsy) history and culture, stereotypes, race, propaganda, intolerance, pluralism, AB-Aktion, “Night and Fog” Policy, Einsatzgruppen, “Extermination Through Work”

#### **Group C: Nazi Ideology and Racial Science**

*Ray Leopold: We noticed that up on the hill there was a “building that the Burgomeister described as an insane asylum. We went up there and found that, true they did have an insane “asylum there, at least initially. But it was a place where there was medical experimentation going on humans. And I really can't tell you what I saw there. It affected me profoundly, and I think all the men who were with me at that time were equally affected...I felt that this was the most horrible human experience that had ever been visited on the face of the earth.*

Suggested topics: nationalism, biological superiority, eugenics, Aryan master race, race hygiene, T-4 Euthanasia Program, Karl Brandt, Josef Mengele

#### **Group D: Nobody Knew?**

*Narrator: As the Red Army had moved through Eastern Europe the previous summer it had uncovered at Majdaneck in Poland the first evidence of the Nazi's industrialized barbarism. The ashes of thousands of human beings were found in a crematori-*

*um. The American and British press played it down, assuming the Soviets were exaggerating...By the end of April, 1945 more than a hundred camps and sub-camps would be liberated.*

Suggested topics: deportation, concentration camps, killing centers, perpetrators, collaborators, Gerhart Riegner/Rabbi Stephen Wise

Include USHMM website page,  
“The United States and the Holocaust”

(<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005182>)

A useful resource to support this inquiry is *Page One: The Front Page History of World War II*, by The New York Times Company (1996). The book reproduces nearly 200 front pages of the newspaper from Sept. 1, 1939 until Sept. 2, 1945. There are no more than two or three mentions about death camps and systematic genocide. Jews are not identified. (Although out of print, it is available for purchase at on-line book dealers.)

#### **Group E: Apathy, Silence, Response, Rescue**

*Burnett Miller: We lived in Mauthausen, which was an idyllic little Austrian town on the river but you could smell the camp in town. And all the villagers of course said they didn't know anything about the camp and the local priest said he didn't know anything about the camp. And I knew that was a lie because you could smell the camp.*

Suggested topics: bystanders, Danish rescue of Jews, Voyage of the St. Louis, “Righteous Among the Nations,” Raoul Wallenberg, Oskar Schindler, Varian Fry, Chiune Sugihara

#### **Group F: Jewish Resistance Before Liberation**

*Burnett Miller: And they had put some signs out, “Welcome Americans, you've saved us” and things like this, and we surrounded the camp...*

Suggested topics: Vilna partisans, Warsaw ghetto uprising, Sobibor uprising, “spiritual resistance,” The Working Group /Europa Plan, Mendel Grossman, Janusz Korczak

#### **Group G: Youth and War**

*Quentin Aanenson: We went out as a bunch of kids. Wars are fought by kids. And we came back - looked maybe the same, but inside we were so different.*

Suggested topics: Armee Juive, The White Rose, Kindertransport, Mordechai Anielewicz, Hirsh Glik, Rosa Robota, Hannah Szenes (or Senesh)

Include “Memories of Courage”

([http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/dor\\_02](http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/dor_02))

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## Group H: Judgment and Post-War Responsibility to Remember

*Paul Fussell: To forget the war would be not just impossible, it would be immoral. It doesn't get to me very often except when I talk about it like this and I seldom do that, actually. It's just something, it never goes away. It's something you have to endure the way you endured the war, itself. There's no alternative. You can't wipe out these memories. You can't wipe out what you felt at that time or what you knew other people felt. This is part of, it's part of your whole possession of life. And I suppose it does some good.*

Suggested topics: Nuremberg Military Tribunal, Yad Vashem, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Holocaust denial, "Holocaust Industry," Simon Wiesenthal, Elie Wiesel

## Group I: How Could this Happen? How Does it Continue to Happen?

*Sam Hynes: The world contains evil... There will always be plenty of evil. And there'll always be wars. Because human beings are aggressive animals.*

Suggested topics: human nature, individual responsibility, human rights, hate crimes, terrorism, apartheid, ethnocide, Darfur, Chechnya

Note: Teachers may prefer to shift Group I questions into Part 4 of the lesson. All students will address the content as a means to initiate the class's culminating discussion and reflection.

## Part 3: Oral Presentations

After completing their research, groups present their findings to the rest of the class. Presentations are supported by group poster displays that build from visual and textual information students have compiled. Presentations follow in order, beginning with Group A. Each student in the group should present research.

## Part 4: Reflection and Closure

Following oral presentations, students will have a range of questions and comments. Invite students to share what they regard as the most compelling lessons that come from learning about the Holocaust. Reflect on moral ramifications of the Holocaust, and discuss concepts such as injustice, indifference, and obedience. Include the questions raised in Group I. A final journal entry can be assigned.

## Extended Discussions:

- Students often wonder why Jews didn't simply leave Europe as hardship and danger increased. Discuss the conflicting decisions faced by Jews as they decided whether, when, and how to leave their homelands. Include a discussion of emigration policy.

- A linked discussion requires guiding students to recognize Holocaust roles—victim, oppressor, bystander and rescuer—were variously imposed, assumed, and came with or without choice. Remind students that veterans in Episode Seven were in the role of rescuer. Discuss the shared and differing perspectives of victim and rescuer.

## Extended Activities:

- As a class or individually, create a visual "memorial" that draws from student response to lessons about the Holocaust. Alternatively, create a memorial that draws from student reflection on genocide, intolerance, responsibility, and remembering. Teachers may wish to partner the activity with a viewing of the film *Paper Clips*. The 2004 film documents how middle school students in Tennessee responded to lessons about the Holocaust.
- Perform a reading of the play, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*. The play is adapted from the book of the same name (see below). The book is a collection of the pictures and poetry of children who were brought to the Terezin Concentration Camp. Approximately 15,000 children under the age of fifteen were brought here; less than 100 survived.
- As a class, read the young children's picture book, *Brundibar* (written by Tony Kushner, illustrated by Maurice Sendak). The book is based on a 1938 Czech opera and was performed by children at Terezin. Study the book for its connections to the Holocaust.
- Have students form literature circles and read, journal about and discuss one of the following novels:
  - *Night*, Elie Wiesel
  - *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Anne Frank
  - *All But My Life*, Gerda Weissman Klein

Visit the "Search and Explore"

([http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search\\_home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_home.htm)) section of *THE WAR* web site for more information about the Holocaust.

## Resources

Jewish Virtual Library  
(<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>)

Yad Vashem  
(<http://www.yadvashem.org>)

Jewish Partisans Educational Foundation  
(<http://www.jewishpartisans.org>)

Multimedia Learning Center Online; Museum of Tolerance, Simon Wiesenthal Center  
(<http://motlc.wiesenthal.com>)

Human Rights Watch  
(<http://www.hrw.org>)

Facing History and Ourselves  
(<http://www.facinghistory.org>)

Holocaust Education Foundation  
(<http://www.holocaust-trc.org>)

A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust, Florida Center for Instructional Technology  
(<http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust>)

### Books:

*I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, Hana Volavkova, editor  
*The Complete Maus*, Art Spiegelman  
*Mendel's Daughter*, Martin Lemelman  
*Milkweed*, Jerry Spinelli  
*Night*, Elie Wiesel

### Films:

*Daring to Resist: Three Women Face the Holocaust* (1999)  
*Hiding and Seeking: Faith and Tolerance After the Holocaust* (2004)  
*Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* (2000)  
*Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961)  
*The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1971)  
*Paper Clips* (2004)  
*Schindler's List* (1993)

### Standards

The National Standards for History are from The National Center for History in the Schools

#### Standard 4

The causes and global consequences of World War II.

#### Standard 4A

The student understands the causes of World War II.

#### Standard 4B

The student understands the global scope, outcome, and human costs of the war.

#### Standard 5

Major global trends from 1900 to the end of World War II.

#### Standard 5A

The student understands major global trends from 1900 to the end of World War II.

### Social Studies

Thematic strands and standards for Social Studies come from the National Council for the Social Studies

### English Language Arts

Standards for the English Language Arts come from the National Council of Teachers of English.

#### NL-ENG.K-12 Understanding the Human Experience

Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

#### NL-ENG.K-12.7 Evaluating Data

Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

#### NL-ENG.K-12.8 Developing Research Skills

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

### Civics

The National Standards for Civics and Government come from the Center for Civic Education

#### NSS-C.9-12.4 Other Nations and World Affairs

What is the Relationship of the United States to Other Nations and to World Affairs?

- How is the world organized politically?
- How do the domestic politics and constitutional principles of the United States affect its relations with the world?
- How has the United States influenced other nations, and how have other nations influenced American politics and society?

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