

Teachers' guide 5: the Holocaust



War Memorials Trust

Background: This teachers' guide is designed to provide information about and ideas for teaching the Holocaust and remembrance of the Holocaust. They aim to provide pupils with knowledge about the events leading up to the killing of European Jews under the Nazis and how this came about. It also provides information about some of the impact of the Holocaust and memorials that remember this aspect of the war. These notes are intended to be suggestions only – they are not comprehensive guidance on this vast subject - and teachers will need to adapt the teaching ideas to suit the needs of their class. Teachers should bear in mind the particularly upsetting nature of this topic and approach it carefully, particularly when considering what additional resources may be appropriate to use. You may want to spread the suggested activities over more than one lesson.

Suitable for: Key Stage 3

Learning objective: Pupils will learn:

- The key events leading up to and during the extermination of Jews during the Holocaust
- Some examples of how the Holocaust is remembered through memorials

Key information

- The Holocaust was the systematic killing of six million Jews by the Nazis during World War II. This was approximately two-thirds of the European Jewish population. 1.5 million victims were children. If non-Jewish victims are included, the total killed in this way rises to 11 million.
- This happened as the culmination of years of persecution and oppression of Jewish people in Germany and Nazi occupied countries. The final stage of this process – the mass murder of Jews designed to annihilate the Jewish population – was known as the 'Final Solution.' There is evidence that the Nazis eventually intended to see this happen throughout the world.
- The origins of the anti-Semitic sentiment that led to these atrocities go back years – the 'Volkisch' movement (which saw Jews as a separate race and a threat to the Aryan race) became prominent in the 19th century, but incidents of Jewish oppression date back centuries. This movement advocated the removal of German citizenship from Jews, along with many rights and the ability to participate in the professions and social life. Nazi policies took these ideas further, as outlined below.
- While there are many known incidents of support for Jews from individuals there was, in many places, widespread general acceptance of anti-Semitic feeling or at least no significant protest against it in favour of Jews, which meant it was possible for such beliefs to take hold and become embedded.
- While it is simplistic to assign one event to the beginnings of the Holocaust, the conditions in Germany in the inter-war period played a part in the rise of support for the Nazis and in paving the way for what followed for Jews. In the aftermath of World War I Germany was in the midst of economic depression and there was widespread bitterness over the German

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surrender and harsh terms of the peace treaty. In such an environment, Jews were blamed for the surrender and there was a tendency, given the economic hardship, for views in favour of preserving more 'valuable' races and the expense of Jews and other groups.

- During Hitler's rise to power in the 1920s he was open about his complete hatred for Jews and his desire to see them exterminated. When he came to power in 1933 policies soon began to remove Jews from society. The first concentration camps were used from 1933. At this stage they were not the death camps we now associate with the term 'concentration camp' but were used to imprison those who the Nazis opposed. This included, among others, the disabled and political opponents as well as Jews. Many died on the way to and at these camps due to poor conditions and extreme work but the killing was not, at this point, systematic with a view to deliberate extermination.
- The 1935 Nuremberg Laws further eroded the rights of Jews. Under these laws the citizenship and civil rights of Jews were removed. Jews were barred from many jobs, schools and universities.
- 'Kritallnacht,' in 1938, was a wave of violence against Jews carried out by the Nazi SA. Many were injured or killed and property was vandalised and destroyed. Following these events emigration of Jews out of Germany increased.
- The invasion of Poland in 1939 led to the formation of ghettos in which Jews were forced to live and work for the benefit of the war industry. These ghettos were overcrowded and disease was common. In 1941 43,000 people died in the Warsaw Ghetto. These deaths were still not on the scale seen later in the death camps but the Nazis did see any extermination of residents as a result of the conditions in the ghetto as a good outcome.
- From 1942 onwards, deportations of Jews from ghettos to concentration camps started, and the Wannsee Conference of the same year saw plans for the 'Final Solution' put into action. This was a meeting of 15 Nazi leaders and while it is impossible to know exactly what was said there, its aim was to plan for a 'Final Solution' to the 'Jewish problem.' This led to Jews being moved eastwards to camps specifically geared to being 'death camps,' the most infamous of which is arguably Auschwitz.
- Jews were transported to these camps in appalling conditions, separated from relatives, deprived of possessions and exterminated in gas chambers, often immediately on arrival, or after having been put to work for a time first. Others were used in medical experiments which often killed them; those that survived were generally killed afterwards. Alongside these, concentration camps remained where the terrible conditions often killed many inmates.
- The extermination of Jews continued throughout 1942 and 1943. By 1944, with many Jewish communities largely wiped out and with Germany's defeat approaching, many camps were closed down and inmates forced on 'death marches' away from them in a bid to get evidence away from advancing Soviet forces. The camps were liberated in the early months of 1945.

Suggested teaching and activities

1. Use the information above, and that is available from other sources, teach pupils about the events, laws and policies against Jews that took place and were implemented between 1933 and 1945. You should select material for this teaching carefully as many images and accounts may be upsetting for pupils. A timeline of those laws and events may help pupils put them into the wider context of Nazi policies.
2. Alongside looking at the laws that were passed against Jewish people, pupils could consider the nature of the prejudice against Jews that existed in the wider population at the time, and what this meant for the ability of the Nazis to persecute Jews to such an extent. Although

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extermination of the Jews was the intention of the Nazis early on, the death camps were the culmination of years of oppression and pupils could examine how this was able to happen. This may tie in well with wider discussions about prejudice and be useful for citizenship lessons.

3. Holocaust Memorial Day is marked on 27th January – the day Auschwitz was liberated. Looking at the commemorations of the Holocaust can be a way of approaching the importance of the Holocaust and the long-lasting impact it has had on the population, especially on Jewish people. Pupils could consider, given the knowledge acquired through other activities, why it is so important to continue to remember these events. There are various memorials to the Holocaust, many of which were erected relatively recently, which can be used to show pupils that the events of the Holocaust are still remembered around the world more than 70 years on. Some of these are described on the accompanying 'Holocaust memorials' information sheet and PowerPoint. In particular, pupils could analyse the design of these. Many use symbolism rather than the realistic imagery we see on other memorials and can be powerful.
4. The numbers of Jews murdered during the Holocaust can seem overwhelming and possibly difficult for pupils of this age to comprehend. You may choose to focus on individual stories to enable pupils to gain an understanding of what happened but on a smaller, more personal scale. There are various survivors' accounts which may help inform such research, with pupils working to find out what happened to them. This may link well to other subjects including English.

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