TEACHER'S GUIDE

DEFINING THE HOLOCAUST

This introductory classroom activity is designed to:

- assess students' existing knowledge
- identify gaps in understanding
- correct common misconceptions about the Holocaust
- build a class definition of the Holocaust that can be re-visited throughout the unit of study

DEFINING THE HOLOCAUST

VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TEACHER

This classroom activity allows teachers to assess students' existing knowledge of the Holocaust, identify gaps in understanding and correct misconceptions.

1. Write the following questions on 7 pieces of chart paper and post them around the room:
   - **What** was the Holocaust?
   - **When** did the Holocaust occur?
   - **Who** were the victims of the Nazis?
   - **Who** were the perpetrators?
   - **Where** did the Holocaust happen?
   - **How** was the Holocaust carried out?
   - **Why** did the Holocaust happen?

2. Students write what they know in response to each question, either on sticky notes which they post on the chart paper OR using markers to 'graffiti' the chart paper with their answers (meaning they write in any direction and in any spot on the paper).

3. Review responses as a class – correct any misconceptions.

4. Hand out the VHEC Student Worksheet: "What was the Holocaust" (https://www.vhec.org/wp-content/uploads/VHEC_WhatWasTheHolocaust_f.pdf)

5. Give students the opportunity to complete the worksheet and assess any new information they might have missed in their earlier responses.

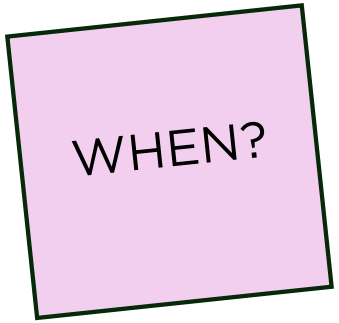
6. The following slides provide a very detailed teacher's answer key. Although this is not exhaustive, it includes far more information than can be expected from students. However, it is intended to give teachers a greater background from which to facilitate discussion and correct misconceptions students may have.

WHAT WAS THE HOLOCAUST?

The Holocaust was the persecution and genocide of the Jews of Europe. It was:

- an evolving and escalating process
- carried out by the Nazi German government (state-sponsored) and its collaborators
- intended to destroy the Jewish population of Europe
- in a methodical and coordinated way (systematically)
- driven by radical antisemitic ideology.

At the same time, the Nazis perpetrated a genocide against the Roma. They also persecuted and murdered millions of individuals who were members of groups targeted on ideological grounds. These groups included people with disabilities, political opponents, Poles, Soviet POWs, Black people, gay men and queer individuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and others.



WHEN DID THE HOLOCAUST HAPPEN?

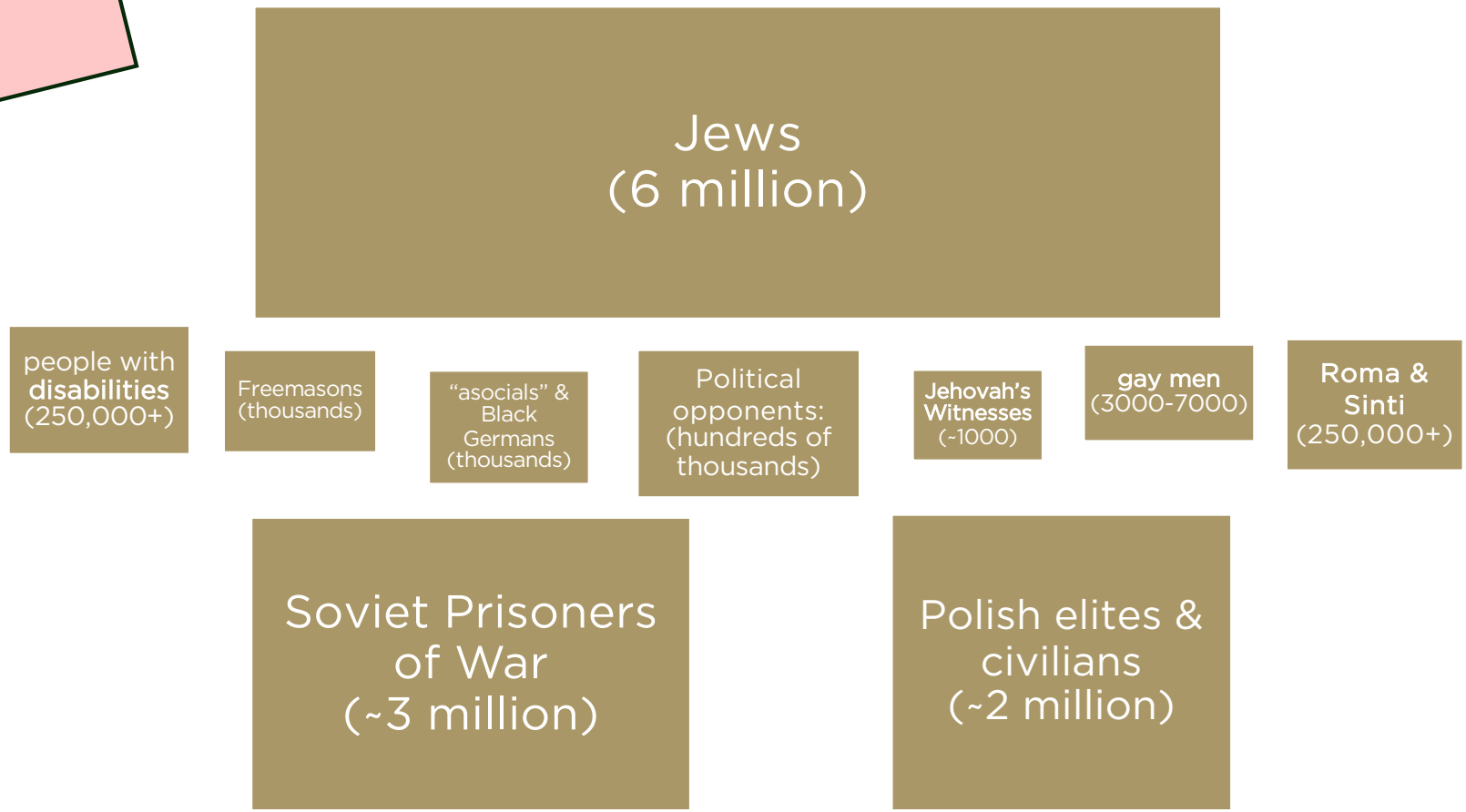
1933-1945 - The **persecution** of the Jews started in 1933 when Nazis came to power in Germany and introduced increasingly severe legal, social and economic restrictions against Jews. Persecution expanded and intensified as Nazi Germany conquered other parts of Europe. The Holocaust ended in 1945 with the defeat of Nazi Germany.

1941-1945 - The **systematic mass murder** of the Jews of Europe began in 1941, following Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union. Nazi policy increasingly focused on murdering the entire Jewish population of Europe. The mass murder continued until Nazi Germany was defeated in 1945.

WHO WERE THE VICTIMS OF THE NAZIS?

WHO?

The estimated number of individuals murdered in each targeted group during the Holocaust is indicated in brackets:



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WHO WERE THE PERPETRATORS?

PERPETRATORS

Nazi German state & Nazi leadership

SS

Collaborator governments

Military/ Wehrmacht

Gov't officials & bureaucrats

Gestapo & security forces

local & auxilliary police in collaborator countries

ALSO COMPLICIT

professionals whose expertise helped create and sustain the administrative, legal, and technical systems of the genocide.

informants & neighbours

German industry

train dispatchers, clerks, labourers, drivers, camp staff and others who performed daily tasks within the vast bureaucracy that carried out the genocide.

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WHERE DID THE HOLOCAUST HAPPEN?

The Holocaust was a continent-wide genocide. It did not occur primarily in Germany itself. It took place throughout Europe in areas controlled by Nazi Germany and its allies:

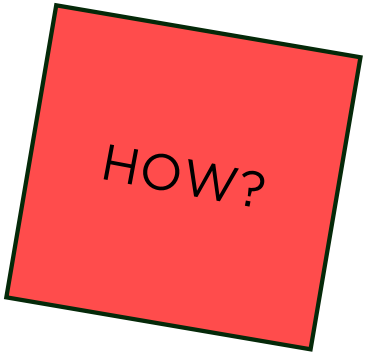
- In Germany and territories incorporated into Nazi Germany: Austria, parts of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Luxembourg.
- Across German-occupied Europe: Poland, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Greece, Serbia, Slovenia, the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), and large areas of the Soviet Union, including present-day Ukraine, Belarus and western Russia.
- Axis allies and satellite states: Italy, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria and the Independent State of Croatia. The extent and form of participation varied considerably among these states.
- North Africa: Jews in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya faced antisemitic persecution under Vichy French, Italian and German rule.

WHERE DID MASS MURDER OF JEWS OCCUR?

The mass murder of Jews did NOT occur only in death camps. It was carried out in various sites including:

- Ghettos in Eastern Europe, from starvation, disease and violence (800,000 – 1 million Jews)
- Mass Shootings in fields, ravines and forests of occupied Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states carried out by Nazi SS Einsatzgruppen and local collaborators (1.3 million Jews)
- Concentration or labour camps across Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe from starvation, disease, exposure and violence (400,000-600,000 Jews)
- Death camps ("extermination camps") built for the specific purpose of murdering Jews *en masse* in Nazi-occupied Poland (about 2.7 million Jews)
- In Transit while in train transports or death marches (250,000+ Jews)

HOW WAS THE HOLOCAUST CARRIED OUT?



The Holocaust began with propaganda and scapegoating followed by incremental persecution of the Jews including: legal discrimination (laws against Jews), exclusion from economic and public life, forced labour, ghettoization, mass shooting, roundup, and deportation to camps. As the process escalated after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, Jews were intentionally and systematically murdered using every available method, including:

- starvation
- disease
- forced labour until death
- torture and beatings
- mass shootings in fields, forests and ravines
- suffocation, dehydration & starvation in cattle cars
- medical experiments in camps
- lethal injections
- gas vans (carbon monoxide)
- gas chambers (Zyklon B)
- death marches

WHY DID THE HOLOCAUST HAPPEN?

- Long-standing antisemitism was transformed by Nazi ideology and propaganda to portray Jews as the racial enemy of the German nation
- Conspiracy theories that blamed Jews for every economic, social and political problem in Germany
- Extreme nationalism across Europe and a widespread drive for ethnically homogeneous nation-states
- Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes that used state power and bureaucracy to implement genocidal policy and reduce personal accountability
- World War II, which created conditions that made genocide possible and easier to carry out than in peacetime
- Indifference, opportunism, fear and conformity among millions of ordinary people across Europe
- Local collaboration and institutional compliance across Europe that enabled mass murder with very limited resistance.