

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

WHO?

WHAT?

WHERE?

WHEN?

WHY?

HOW?

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 student 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?

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 in a planned and coordinated way (systematically)
- state-sponsored (organized by the Nazi German government)
- mass murder on an unprecedented scale, including industrialized methods of killing
- implemented through an extensive bureaucracy operated by thousands of ordinary people, and
- driven by 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, communists, socialists, Poles, Soviet POWs, Black people, gay men, Jehovah's Witnesses and others.

WHEN?

WHEN DID THE HOLOCAUST HAPPEN?

1933-1945 - The **persecution** of the Jews, which marks the beginning of the Holocaust, started in 1933 when Nazis came to power in Germany. It ended in 1945, when the Allied forces defeated Germany.

1941-1945 - The **systematic mass murder** of the Jews of Europe, which the Nazis called the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question,” was carried out during World War II following the Nazi German invasion of the Soviet Union from 1941 and continued through 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:



WHO WERE THE PERPETRATORS?

WHO?

PERPETRATORS



ALSO COMPLICIT



WHERE?

WHERE DID THE HOLOCAUST HAPPEN?

The Holocaust was a continent-wide genocide. It was initiated by Nazi Germany, but took place throughout Europe in Axis-controlled areas, specifically:

- **Across Nazi-occupied Europe:** Germany and occupied Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, France, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, USSR (Ukraine, Belarus, Western Russia), Norway, Greece, Serbia, Slovenia
- **In Nazi-allied countries that were not occupied:** Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Croatia (NDH), Bulgaria, Macedonia, Montenegro
- **In North Africa:** Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Libya and West Africa

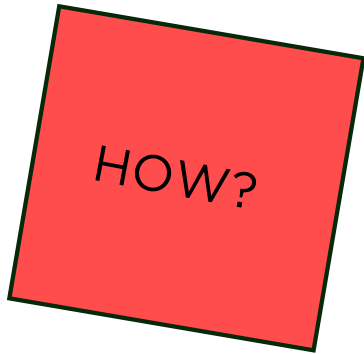
WHERE DID MASS MURDER OF JEWS OCCUR?

WHERE?

The mass murder of Jews did NOT occur primarily in Germany. It was carried out in various sites, primarily in occupied Eastern Europe including:

- **Ghettos** in Eastern Europe, from starvation, disease and violence (500,000 - 1 million Jews)
- **Concentration or labour camps** across Germany and Nazi occupied Europe from starvation, disease, exposure and violence (400,000-600,000 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)
- **Death camps** (“extermination camps”) build 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?

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.