

## INTRODUCTORY LESSON WHAT WAS THE HOLOCAUST?

**This lesson helps students to define the Holocaust, through the stories of individuals whose lives were affected by the Holocaust. Students will learn about people throughout Europe whose lives were impacted by the Holocaust.**

### WHAT WAS THE HOLOCAUST?

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany, its allies and collaborators, between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims - six million were murdered.

Roma (Gypsies), physically and mentally disabled people and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including the LGBTQ community, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political opponents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

By 1945, the Germans and their allies and collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews as part of the "Final Solution." The "Final Solution" was the Nazi policy to murder the Jews of Europe.

### VOCABULARY

Ask students to identify what they believe are important terms and/or ideas, in each of the 3 paragraphs. Then ask them what they think these words mean.

Systematic	Done or acting according to a fixed plan or system; methodical.
State sponsored	Actions organized by the civil government of a country
Persecution	To harass or punish in a manner designed to injure, hurt or remove rights; grieve, or afflict
Collaboration	To work with another person or group in order to achieve or do something. German authorities required the assistance of local people in the regions they occupied to implement the "Final Solution." These collaborators helped to commit some of the worst crimes of the Holocaust era.

### PARSING THE DEFINITION:

Questions for Paragraph 1:

- Who was responsible for the Holocaust?
- Who were the primary victims of the Holocaust? How many people were murdered?
- When did the Holocaust occur?

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Questions for Paragraph 2:

- Who were the other victims who were targeted?

Questions for Paragraph 3

- By the time the Holocaust ended, how many European Jews had been murdered?
- What did the Nazis call their policy to murder the Jews of Europe?

## ANIMATED MAP: THE HOLOCAUST

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/gallery/introduction-to-the-holocaust-maps>



THE HOLOCAUST - ANIMATED MAP.mp4

**ID CARD ACTIVITY** Put cards on our website, to be downloaded, or provide a request form on our website – we would send the materials to teachers upon request.

## Roles in the Holocaust

During the Holocaust, people, organizations and governments made choices. These choices were motivated by many things, like beliefs, greed, fear, opportunity. Depending on the circumstances, people's behavior could fit into different categories.

**Perpetrators** They were responsible for the Holocaust. They violated civil and human rights.

**Collaborators** They helped the Nazis carry out their plans. They chose to assist the Nazis.

**Targets** They were targeted for destruction by the Nazis for racial, political or social reasons.

**Rescuers** They chose to help the targets, sometimes risking their own lives.

**Resisters** They could resist using weapons or sometimes maintaining their humanity in terrible circumstances.

**Bystanders** They were witnesses to the Holocaust. They remained silent, choosing not to get involved.

## Tell your students:

There were millions of people involved in the Holocaust. The Holocaust took place in countries throughout Europe.

These cards represent stories of people impacted by the Holocaust. These people actually existed and some are still alive today.

Think about the choices the person made or the choices the people around them made when reading their card.

Consider in which category the person on their card might be placed.

## Distribute Cards

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Ask students to read their cards silently and look at the map on the back.

Assist students with unfamiliar vocabulary (Glossary available).

## Ask the following questions:

Stand if you have a card which tells the story of: *Have students sit down before the next questions.*

- A Jewish person. *Sit down if the person on your card did not survive.*
- A rescuer or resister.
- A Roma or Sinti person.
- A member of the LGBTQ person.
- A Jehovah's Witness.
- A Polish Catholic.
- A person with a disability.

What conclusions can you draw about the target groups?

What conclusions can you draw about rescuers and resisters?

What happened to rescuers and resisters?

Stand if the person on your card was from each place I list. Then answer the following questions:

What year did life change for the person on your card?

Did the person on your card survive?

- Germany
- Austria
- Poland
- Soviet Union
- Belgium
- France
- Italy
- Greece
- Yugoslavia
- Hungary
- Netherlands
- Romania
- Lithuania
- Denmark
- Ukraine
- Czechoslovakia

## Concluding Activity

How does the story on your card fit into the definition of the Holocaust?