

LESSON PLAN: HOW AND WHY DID THE HOLOCAUST HAPPEN? US HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM TIMELINE ACTIVITY

Grade Level: Middle and High School



This lesson provides students with foundational knowledge about the history of the Holocaust. This activity helps students develop a timeline that integrates personal stories, key historical events, and Nazi laws and decrees. Additional categories include Holocaust literature (Elie Wiesel’s *Night* and Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl*).

As each layer is added, we can see how the events of World War II and the Holocaust slowly unfolded. We learn how the story of each person, each country, each event, is different. At the end of the activity, students can draw conclusions and develop questions about this difficult history.

At the conclusion of this activity students will:

- Define the Holocaust.
- Learn that Europe’s Jews were the primary target of Nazi ideology.
- Identify other groups targeted by the Nazis.
 - Roma (gypsies)
 - People with disabilities
 - Poles
 - Afro Germans
 - Members of the LGBTQ community
 - Soviet prisoners of war
 - Jehovah’s Witnesses
- Observe that persecution of targeted groups increased over time.
- Explore the relationship between events of World War II and the Holocaust.
- Identify how the Holocaust unfolded differently in different geographic locations.

SOURCES (from the USHMM):

[Resource Request: Holocaust Timeline Activity Cards](https://engage.ushmm.org/request-timeline-cards.html) (free)

<https://engage.ushmm.org/request-timeline-cards.html>

OR

You may download and print the cards.

Years 1933 – 1945

<https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/USHMM-Timeline-Activity-Years.pdf>

Individual Profiles

<https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/USHMM-Timeline-Activity-Individual-Profiles.pdf>

Laws and Decrees

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<https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/USHMM-Timeline-Activity-Laws-Decrees.pdf>

Historical Events

<https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/USHMM-Timeline-Activity-Historical-Events.pdf>

RESOURCES: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Path to Nazi Genocide

<https://www.ushmm.org/learn/holocaust/path-to-nazi-genocide/the-path-to-nazi-genocide/full-film>

Animated Maps

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/search?query=&types%5B%5D=33&languages%5B%5D=en>

Encyclopedia - Introduction to the Holocaust

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005143>

Encyclopedia - Nazi Racial Ideology

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/victims-of-the-nazi-era-nazi-racial-ideology>

LESSON PLAN

Prior to beginning the lesson with students, place the timeline cards of each year horizontally around the classroom.

DIRECTIONS – PROFILE CARDS

Students work in pairs or groups. Distribute the Individual Profile cards, and have students read for basic information, noting the following:

- Country of origin
- Gender of individual
- Nazi justification for persecution
- The year in bold that notes Nazi persecution of the individual
- Age of individual at the time of highlighted persecution

Questions to Consider

- Why do you think the particular year is highlighted for the individual?
- Would you have chosen another year? Why or why not?
- Are there other times when the individual suffered from Nazi persecution?

Students discuss their answers with their groups and then place the cards on the timeline, based on the year in bold on the card.

DIRECTIONS – LAWS AND DECREES CARDS

Distribute the Laws and Decrees cards, and have students read for basic information, noting the following:

- Who does the law/decreed target?
- How could it affect an individual's life?

Questions to Consider

- Note the timing of the laws/decrees. Can you describe a pattern?
- What conclusions might you draw?

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- What questions do you have?

Add these cards to the timeline.

DIRECTIONS – HISTORICAL EVENTS CARDS

Distribute the Historical Events cards, and have students read for basic information, noting the following:

- How did these historical events influence the events of the Holocaust?
- Which of these events would you consider a turning point in the war? In the Holocaust? Why?

Add these cards to the timeline.

DIRECTIONS – GALLERY WALK

Debrief: Ask students to note the following:

1. What events and decrees affected the person on your Profile Card?
2. What conclusions can you draw about the Holocaust in:

Austria	Germany	Romania
Belgium	Greece	Soviet Union
Czechoslovakia	Italy	Ukraine
Denmark	Lithuania	
France	Poland	

3. What was the world response to the events of the Holocaust?
4. What do you see on the timeline that fits the definition of 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.

5. What other conclusions can you draw?
6. What other questions do you still have?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY CARDS:

- [Exploring Night as Literature, Bearing Witness to History \(PDF\)](#)
- [Exploring Anne Frank's Diary \(PDF\)](#)
- [Racial Science and Law in Nazi Germany and the United States \(PDF\)](#)