

Crimes Against Humanity

Springboard:

Students should read “Liberating the Camps” and answer the question.
(Answers will vary.)

Objective: The student will be able to explain the kinds of abuses Jews and others suffered at the hands of the Nazis during the Holocaust.

Materials:

- Liberating the Camps (Springboard handout)
- Holocaust History (handout or transparency)
- Survivor Stories (2-page handout)
- Searching for Survivor Stories (handout)

Terms to know:

- illiteracy** - inability to read and write
- deportation** - banishment or forced movement from one's country or home
- genocide** - systematic extermination of a racial or ethnic group
- ethnic group** - people who share the same language, religion, ways of life, etc.
- liquidate** - to do away with; shut down
- ghetto** - part of a city where Jews or others live separated from the rest of society

Procedure:

- During discussion of the Springboard, explain that the Allied soldiers were horrified to discover what had been going on when they liberated the concentration camps.
- Hand out or display the “Holocaust History” transparency and review, noting: reasons why relatively few Jews had been able to escape Hitler and the Holocaust; efforts the Jews made to defy their oppressors; and reviewing the vocabulary on the page.
- Then explain that in this lesson the student(s) will learn more about the Holocaust by reading firsthand accounts of abuses the Jews and other targeted groups suffered at the hands of the Nazis.
- Distribute the “Survivor Stories.” Have the student(s) read each of the primary sources and identify when and where the survivors could have been from, using the “Holocaust History” timeline.
- Then have the student(s) search for their own survivor stories and complete the “Searching for Survivor Stories” handout. (This can be a class or homework assignment.)
- Have the student(s) share what they learn and discuss.
- EXTENSION:** Have the student(s) find information or read books about Holocaust-related topics such as turning away of refugees, living in hiding, Christian resistance, experiences at the death camps, etc.





Liberating the Camps

The following was written by Major Cameron Coppman, an American officer who visited Gunskirchen Lager, a concentration camp in Austria, shortly after it was liberated by Allied soldiers.

"...I visited (a) camp today. The living and dead evidence of horror and brutality beyond one's imagination was there, lying and crawling and shuffling, in stinking, ankle-deep mud and human excrement. The sight and smell made your stomach do funny things...It was impossible to count the dead, but 200 emaciated corpses would be a very conservative estimate. For the most part they had died during the past two days, but there were many other rotting bodies inside the barracks beside living human beings who were too weak to move.

A little girl, doubled with the gnawing pains of starvation, cried pitifully for help. A dead man rotted beside her. An English-speaking Jew from Ohio hummed, "The Yanks Are Coming," then broke out crying. A Jewish Rabbi tripped over a dead body as he scurried toward me with strength he must have been saving for the arrival of the American forces. He kissed the back of my gloved hand and clutched my sleeve with a (claw-like) grip as he lifted his face toward heaven.

Everywhere we turned the pathetic cry of "wasser" (water) met our ears. An English-speaking Czechoslovakian woman told us that they had received no food or water for five days....A lieutenant stooped to feed one creature a bit of chocolate. The man died in his arms. That lieutenant, formerly an officer in the Czech Army, fingered his pistol nervously as he eyed a group of German soldiers forcibly digging a grave outside. I also pumped a cartridge in my automatic. As I left him there were tears streaming down his face. His mother was last reported in a concentration camp "somewhere in Germany."

An unforgettable drama was enacted when a sergeant of our group of five raced out of one building, his face flaming with rage. The sergeant, a Jewish boy of Polish descent, had found three of his relatives lying in the filth of that barracks. They are sleeping tonight between white sheets for the first time in three years in one of the better homes in Lambach (an Austrian city). Their diet of a daily cup of anemic soup has suddenly changed to eggs, milk and bread.

Another sergeant, whose mother and father disappeared into a Nazi concentration camp three years ago, turned his head and in a tear-choked voice remarked: "And Hitler wanted to rule the world."

Adapted from remember.org/

Explain what you think the sergeant, whose words were highlighted at the end, meant when he said, "And Hitler wanted to rule the world."



Holocaust History



1935 September - Reichstag (German legislature) passes anti-Semitic "Nuremburg Laws" depriving Jews of citizenship.

1936 March - Jewish doctors barred from practicing medicine.

1937 July - Buchenwald Concentration Camp opens.

1938 April - Jews inside the Reich required to register all property.

July - International conference in Evian, France fails to help German Jews.

October - All Jewish passports required to be marked with a large "J."

October - Britain restricts Jewish entrance into Palestine (later called Israel).

November 9 - "Kristallnacht" (Night of Broken Glass) anti-Semitic riots destroyed 200 synagogues and looted 7,500 Jewish shops.

November 11 - New York Times headlines story of Kristallnacht.

November - 26,000 Jews arrested and sent to concentration camps.

November - Jewish students forbidden to attend schools.

December - German Jews fined for property destroyed during Kristallnacht.

December - German government seizes all Jewish-owned businesses.

1939 October - First **deportations** of Jews begin.

October - British report reveals concentration camp abuses.

November - Wearing of yellow Star of David patch is required in public.

1940 April - Lodz Ghetto established with 165,000 people in 1.6 square mi.

May - Auschwitz concentration camp established.

November - Warsaw Ghetto sealed 500,000 people within.

1941 July - Nazis decide upon the "Final Solution," the extermination of all Jews in Europe.

September - First experiments with gassing are made at Auschwitz.

September - 35,000 Jews massacred outside of Kiev, Russia.

October - Establishment of Auschwitz-Berkenau for extermination of Jews, Gypsies, and Slavic people.

October - Mass deportation of German Jews begins.

1942 March - Extermination begins; 600,000 Jews killed by year's end.

June - Treblinka Extermination camp opens.

October - Allied nations pledge to punish Germany for its **genocide**.

1943 April - Warsaw Ghetto Jews revolt before Germans **liquidate** 70,000 in May.

October - Armed revolt in Sobibor Extermination camp.

1944 May - Nazis deporting 380,000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz.

July - Soviet troops liberate Maidanek extermination camp.

1945 January - Soviets arrive in Warsaw and find 5,000 starving inmates alive; other prisoners taken on death march away from approaching Allies.

January - Stutthof concentration camp death march of inmates begins.

April - British troops liberate Bergen-Belsen death camp; U.S. troops liberate Buchenwald.

Adapted from www.holocaust-trc.org/wmp02.htm

Survivor Stories

“At the age of seven, I knew already that we’re different ... all of a sudden stones were thrown from the neighbors’ windows. I was terribly scared and asked Papa why they did this to us. He said only softly, “Because we are Jews”. That was in the year 1937.

We stayed for another two years ... we had to wear the yellow Star of David and we were not allowed to leave our homes after 8 p.m., while we could ride only in the last carriage of the tramway, since the first ones were “Not allowed for Jews”.

Many houses bore captions in large letters, “Do not buy in Jewish shops,” or “Jews get out”. Instinctively I didn’t want to know anything about it and that’s why my teddy bear was my best friend. My elder sister Esther had once brought it to me ...

One day, when I was eleven and a half years old, Mama received a printed summon, instructing us to appear at Prague’s Exhibition Halls, in order to join a “transport” (i.e. the actual deportation convoy of human beings to the concentration camps) which would drag us into the unknown...”

Judith Jaegermann excerpted from www.remember.org/witness/

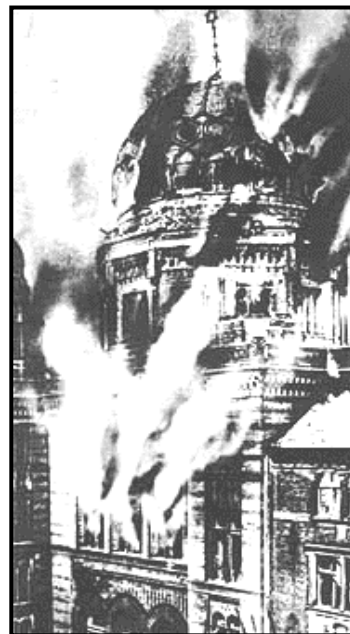
“On November 9, 1938, I stood by the window of our house - the house where I was born - and watched while they burned down the big synagogue across the street (photo). The Boerneplatz Square was crowded with thousands of spectators; they made a circus out of it. We saw it all. Suddenly they burst into our rooms with axes and bars and smashed everything up.

We ran to the neighborhood police station for help. They looked at us and just laughed. Several days after, on the 15th of November, my mother sent my little sister Lorle, my younger brother Asher, and me to Holland. We went together with a group of about twenty-five children, organized by some Jewish women; I don’t know who they were.

When we arrived at the Dutch border, two S.S. men (German soldiers) took us off the train, into a waiting room. All the Germans had to leave the room because they couldn’t have Germans and Jews in one place together - we were very dangerous people, you know; I was fourteen, Lorle was eight, Asher was twelve, and there was another child of three or four. They told us there was no toilet, no water fountain, no nothing, and don’t cry. Right away, the little ones started crying.

We weren’t allowed to leave the room until evening when they put us aboard another train.... We crossed the border into Holland. When we arrived, a committee was waiting to greet us. There were journalists and photographers; everyone was asking how things were in Germany. We told them about the burning and arrests. ... I think I realized all at once that something was irreversibly broken. It was only at that moment that I understood what was going on, or maybe more, I started to think about what might be in store in the future.”

Joseph Heinrich, excerpted from www.humboldt.edu/~rescuers/book/Pinkhof/josephh/joe1.html



Survivor Stories

When we have nothing to eat,
They gave us a turnip, they gave us a beet.
Here have some grub, have some fleas,
Have some typhus, die of disease.

Poem from a Jewish Ghetto remember.org/courage/chapter6.html

"We were pushed up on railroad cars, actually cattle cars. ... We were about 50 people or 60. Twenty more, 30 more, so we must have been in that little cattle car, which is about a third of the size of an American railroad car, about 120, 140. And before we knew, whoever didn't make it of the family in the same car was cut off and they, they just slammed the doors, and those who were outside, they still had to put barbed wire on the little bit of opening which was on the outside on the top of the railroad car. These cars were usually used for cattle transports or for grain." (Bart Stern)

"The only facility in the train was two buckets for over a hundred men, women, and children. And the train was standing on one place. It was unbearably hot. Lack of air. So some people had an idea that the minute we start moving it's going to get cooler. But at one moment, we heard that the gate opened up in the boxcar, so we thought, 'Maybe they changed their mind. They're going to leave us out.' But instead, they brought a few dozen Jews discovered in a hiding place; they were all badly beaten up because they were hiding.... And they added to our car." (Leo Schneiderman)



It was late at night that we arrived at Auschwitz. When we came in, the minute the gates opened up, we heard screams, barking of dogs, blows from those Kapos, those officials working for them, over the head. And then we got out of the train. And everything went so fast: left, right, right, left. Men separated from women. Children torn from the arms of mothers. The elderly chased like cattle. The sick, the disabled were handled like packs of garbage... My mother ran over to me and grabbed me by the shoulders, and she told me "Leibele, I'm not going to see you no more. Take care of your brother."

(Also Leo Schneiderman)

"I tell you what I looked like. I weighed at liberation sixty-nine pounds. I'm not a very short lady. I don't know how tall I was at that time, how much I grew during the war, when, uh...I am five four and a half now. Can you imagine sixty-nine pounds? My face was swollen because I was beaten up severely on the death march. My hands had frostbite. My toes were black from frost. I had one dress, a blanket that was wrapped around my body. Between the blanket and the dress, my body was wrapped around with straw." (Nesse Galperin Godin)

Last three accounts excerpted from www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/phistories/

Searching for Survivor Stories

DIRECTIONS: Search the Internet for “Holocaust survivor stories” to locate an account that provides new information about some aspect of the Holocaust and answer these questions about the person’s experiences.

Survivor’s name _____

Nationality _____

Event or situation described _____

When the situation occurred _____

Others involved along with the survivor _____

Briefly describe what you learned from the survivor’s story: _____

URL _____

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