
What Was the Holocaust?

Note to Teachers

The purpose of this presentation is to provide Grade 6 students with a basic understanding of the Holocaust before engaging in discussions about Holocaust literature. Since the Holocaust is such a vast topic, I have distilled it down to its essential components, taking care to provide key vocabulary and most importantly, conceptual understanding of this historical event by showing how decisions led to actions and how those actions escalated to genocide.

In my classroom, I don't show the entire presentation at once. I use it as a reference tool so that my students aren't searching the internet for information and accidentally discovering inappropriate materials that might confuse or upset them. Although I have not used any graphic images or descriptions, the horrors of the Holocaust are deeply disturbing.

Please use your discretion when using this presentation with your own students, particularly if you teach students who may have experienced war trauma.

To support my own explanations, I have used materials from excellent sources, listed on the last slide. I strongly encourage you to explore these websites so that you may deepen your own understanding of the Holocaust and enrich the discussions that you have with your students. These trusted sources have extensive resources and materials as well as numerous high-quality Professional Development opportunities.

If you need support or wish to ask any questions, I can be reached at cindy.kozierok@tdsb.on.ca

~ Cindy Kozierok, Doctoral Candidate in Holocaust Education and TDSB Grade 6 Teacher, February 2023

Definition:

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of 6 million Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945.

Who were the perpetrators?



Adolf Hitler

Germany's leader from 1933-1945



The Nazis

The National Socialist Party



Collaborators

People who helped the Nazis - Individuals and Governments



The swastika

Although a different version of this design has been a symbol of peace in some Asian cultures for hundreds of years, Hitler took it over as his own. He altered its shape and direction and then made it the official symbol of the Nazi party, changing the German flag to the Nazi flag.

The swastika is now seen as a symbol of hatred throughout the world.



'Heil Hitler' Salute

Meaning "Hail Hitler", this gesture was meant to show respect for Hitler and his ideas. It was the official greeting that was used in the Nazi party, but it was also used between regular citizens. The salute was taught to children as the right way to be a good German.

If someone uses that salute today, they are showing that they support the same hatred that the Nazis did.

Who were the victims?

Jewish People

Jewish people were the main target of the Nazis.

Jews are a group of people who share a common culture and religion called Judaism, but there is not just one way to be Jewish, and not just one way to look Jewish.



A Jewish family in Poland before the Holocaust.



The Star of David

Jewish symbol

Other Groups

The Nazis targeted anyone who went against them or didn't fit into their idea of what a person worthy of living should be.

Some of the groups included:

German Citizens with Disabilities

The Roma and Sinti People

(formerly called Gypsy People)

Polish Citizens

Russian Prisoners

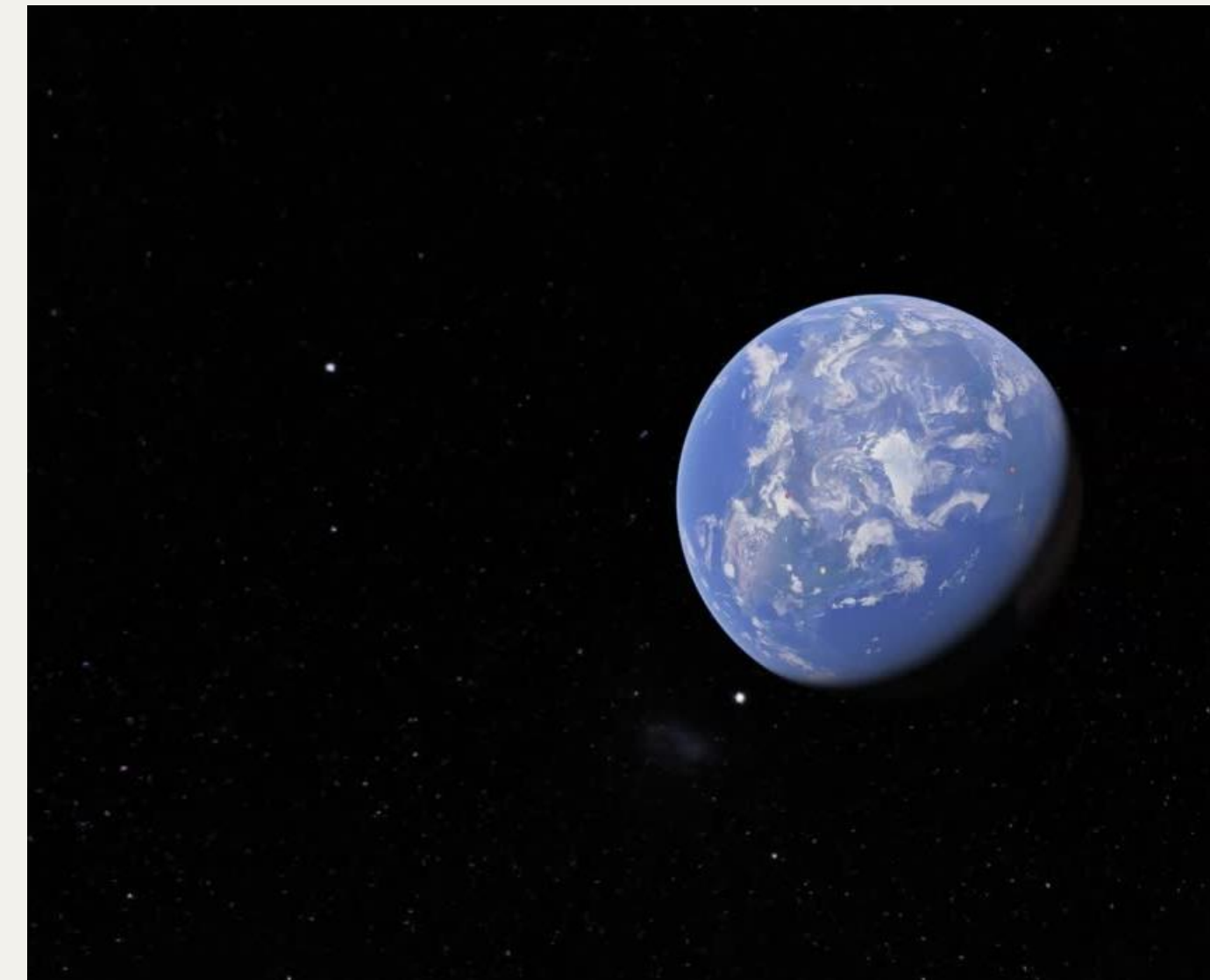
Jehovah's Witnesses

Homosexual Men

Where did it happen?



Canada to Germany on Google Earth




The Holocaust began in Germany in 1933 and spread throughout Europe during World War II.


Why did it happen?

Hitler had strong views about what was wrong with the world and how things should be.
This is called having an **ideology**.


Hitler gave passionate speeches and explained his ideology as often as possible. He developed a strong following because many people agreed with his ideology. This is how he came to be the leader of Germany and his ideas became official Nazi policy.

The Nazi ideology can be summarized in two words: **RACE** and **SPACE**

Race → **People** 

Space → **Land** 

Nazi Ideology - Part I

Race → **People** 

Race



The Nazis believed that all human beings were divided into different races, and that some races were superior (better) and some races were inferior (worse).

A person's race would determine nearly everything about them and it was something that could never be changed.

They said that German people were part of the Aryan race which was the "master" race. This meant that Aryans should be allowed to rule over all non-Aryans in Germany, and all around the world.

The main group of non-Aryans that they meant were Jewish people.

None of what the Nazis said about race is true. Scientists agree that there is no basis for separating people into different races. It's just an idea that people have created, not a part of nature or biology.

Believing that some people are better than others based on these ideas is called racism.



This poster depicts what the Nazis believed to be the ideal German family.



A German teacher proudly demonstrates the "Aryan" features of his student. German children were taught to hate and distrust Jewish children.

Race



Before the Nazis came to power, Jews had the same legal rights as their neighbours. They owned homes and businesses, went to school, worked, and defended their country in WWI just like other Germans. Many Jewish families had lived in Germany for hundreds of years.

The same was true in other countries in Europe at that time. Jewish people lived full lives and contributed to all of the communities in which they lived, even though they were often mistreated for being Jewish.

Hitler and the Nazis did not invent the idea of hating Jewish people.

Unfortunately, since the time of early Christianity over 2000 years ago, and continuing even today, Jewish people have been persecuted for following different religious traditions.

This is called antisemitism: prejudice against or hatred of Jews.

Antisemitism did not begin or end with the Holocaust, but the Holocaust was antisemitism in its most extreme form.

The Nazi type of antisemitism was different from other types of antisemitism.

Instead of focusing on religious or cultural differences, Nazi antisemitism was based on the idea that Jewish people were a separate race that was a dangerous threat to the German people.

The Nazis used their power in the government to spread lies in the media about Jews to encourage the German people to go along with Nazi policies. This is called propaganda.

They showed drawings of Jews looking like devils, rats or insects, trying to control the world and destroy Germany.

By showing Jews as less than human, people would fear them and be willing to accept the actions of the Nazis against them.

Race




The result of this extreme Nazi antisemitism was **genocide** - a crime where acts are committed with the intent to destroy an entire group of people. Hitler's goal was to destroy the Jewish people forever.

There were about 9.5 million Jews in Europe before the Holocaust.

The Nazis murdered about 6 million of them, including 1.5 million children.



Nazi Ideology - Part II

Space → **Land** 



Lebensraum (Living Space)



Because Hitler believed that the German people were the master race, he also believed that they should rule over the world. They had the right to take what they wanted and to do whatever they wished with any people that were in their way.

He wanted Germany to be more than a country. He wanted it to be an empire. To accomplish this goal, Hitler needed more land for *lebensraum* which means "living space".

Hitler wanted to conquer as much land as he could for his new empire, but Germany had signed an agreement after World War I that they would not build up their military to fight against any other countries in Europe.

This agreement did not stop Hitler and he invaded other countries anyway.

After 6 years as leader of Germany, Hitler started World War II.



German Land Before WWII



German Occupied Land during WWII

World War II: 1939-1945

September 1939 Germany invades Poland

Great Britain, France, Canada, India, Australia, and South Africa declare war on Germany.

They are called the Allied countries, or just the Allies.

September 1940 Japan enters the war

Japan signs a pact with Germany and Italy and they form the Axis alliance to fight together against the Allies.

June 1941 Germany invades Soviet Union

Going against a pact that he signed with the Soviet Union at the beginning of the war, Hitler decides to invade the Soviet Union, who declares war on Germany in return.

December 1941 United States enters the war

After trying to stay out of the war, the US is attacked by Japan at Pearl Harbor. They decide to join the allies to fight against the Axis alliance.

May 1945 Germany surrenders

The Allies and the Soviet Union defeat the German army. Hitler kills himself in a bunker rather than face being captured.

May 8, 1945 is declared VE (Victory in Europe) Day.

August 1945 Japan surrenders

The United States drops two atomic bombs on Japan, causing massive death and destruction.

August 15, 1945 is declared VJ (Victory over Japan) Day.

Canada and World War II



World War II was the worst war in human history, resulting in over 60 million deaths worldwide. It was also extremely important because it wasn't just about land. It was about protecting freedom.

Canada played a very important part in helping the Allies win the war against Nazi Germany. As a small country (only 11 million people at the time), the rest of the world did not expect Canada to contribute as greatly as it did.

More than 1 million Canadians fought in the war.
More than 55,000 were injured.
More than 43,000 were killed.

On Remembrance Day each year, we remember our veterans who sacrificed to guard our democracy and to stop the Nazis from taking over the world.



How did the Nazis persecute Jewish people?

Since the Holocaust happened in many places, not all Jews had the same experiences. The types of persecution also changed over time. These are some examples of what the Jews endured under the Nazis.

Legal Discrimination



A passport stamped with a "J" to identify a Jew.

Public Identification and Exclusion



Jewish business owners forced to carry signs to boycott Jewish businesses.

Organized Violence



A synagogue (Jewish place of worship) burns.

Antisemitic laws took away the rights of Jewish people to live as full citizens. Jewish children could no longer attend school. Adults were fired from their jobs.

Boycotts of Jewish businesses, public humiliations, and forcing Jews to wear a yellow star to identify themselves as Jews.

Kristallnacht, the night of Broken Glass
November 9/10, 1938.
The Nazis ordered attacks on Jewish people, businesses, and synagogues.
30,000 Jewish men are arrested.

How did the Nazis persecute Jewish people?

(Continued from Previous Slide)

Displacement and Imprisonment



Without warning or explanation, Jews were removed from their homes and relocated to **ghettos** and **concentration camps** where conditions were very poor and many died of disease and starvation.

Plunder (Stealing)



A box full of gold wedding rings stolen from Jews.

The Nazis took all of the property, personal belongings, and valuables of the Jewish people. Using this wealth was an important part of their plan to expand their power.

Forced Labour



Jewish adults and children were forced to work for the German government and for private German companies as slaves.

Ghettos and Concentration Camps

Ghetto



The term “ghetto” comes from Italian. Because of antisemitism, in the 15th and 16th centuries in Europe, it was common for Jews to be forced to live in certain parts of the city to keep them separate from the rest of the population. The Nazis used this idea to force the Jews to leave their homes and belongings (which the Nazis stole) and whole families would be moved into tiny rooms to live in one section of the town. There was barbed wire keeping the ghetto closed. If anyone tried to leave, they would be shot. There was no food, no sanitation services, and no health care, so many people died of starvation and disease. Life in the Ghetto was miserable.

Concentration Camp



The Nazis built many concentration camps.. The first one was called Dachau and it was built in 1933. Concentration camps were places where people who were arrested by the Nazis were sent to live. The conditions in the camps were harsh and the prisoners were beaten and tortured. They were not secret places and people were terrified of being sent to one. This helped the Nazis to keep people from challenging their ideas and actions. After Kristallnacht, 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to Dachau.

What was the "Final Solution"?

Before 1941, many Jews died as a result of these earlier types of persecution - from starvation, disease, and Nazi violence.

However, the Nazis didn't have an organized plan for mass murder of the Jews until 1941, when they invaded the Soviet Union.

The Nazis realized that they had a bigger "Jewish Problem" than they had before, when they didn't occupy so many countries. The Soviet Union was home to millions more Jewish people.

Before the war began, the democracies of the world, including Canada and the United States, had decided that they were not able to deal with the large number of Jewish refugees who were trying to escape the Nazis. They allowed only a very small number of Jews to immigrate.

Hitler knew that there was nowhere for the Jewish people to go.



The Wannsee Conference

Hitler sent the top leaders in the Nazi party to have a meeting to strategize over their "Jewish Problem". They knew *what* Hitler wanted them to do. Their job was to figure out *how* to do it.

At that meeting, the Nazis planned out the "Final Solution" - the code word for the decision to murder every Jew in Europe.

What was the "Final Solution"?

The Nazis prided themselves on being organized. They planned the Final Solution as carefully as they could to make it as efficient as possible, meaning that they could kill as many people as possible in the least amount of time, with the least amount of effort and expense.

There were two main methods that they used: shooting and gassing.

Shooting

When they invaded Eastern Europe, the Nazis had help from many of the local communities who hated Jews as much as the Nazis did.

These collaborators would help the Nazis to round up all of the Jews in a town and march them out into the forest where they would be forced to dig a large pit. The Nazis would then shoot the people so that they would fall into the pit and die.

About 2 million people died in this way.

Gassing

The Nazis built special camps along the railroad that were used as killing centres. The victims arrived in packed cattle cars (trains meant for animals) and were killed right when they arrived. After locking them in a room called a gas chamber, Nazis would release poison gas inside the room. The gas killed everyone inside.

Afterwards, other Jewish prisoners were forced to remove the dead bodies and burn them in special ovens called crematoria.

What Happened After the Holocaust?

As the Allied forces moved through Europe, they liberated victims from the Nazis. They were horrified by what they discovered in the concentration camps and by the conditions of the victims themselves who were so thin that they looked like skeletons.

Sadly, many of those victims still died after they were liberated because they didn't have the strength to get better after being starved and abused for so long.

For those victims that did survive, they were faced with rebuilding their lives by trying to see if any of their relatives had survived and figuring out where to live. Many tried to go back to the homes they once knew, but found that their homes had been taken over by others who were violently opposed to them coming back. Jews were still being attacked and killed by antisemitic mobs even though the Holocaust was over.

The Nazis and their collaborators had succeeded in destroying thousands of Jewish communities in Europe.

Most survivors realized that Europe was no longer a safe place to be.

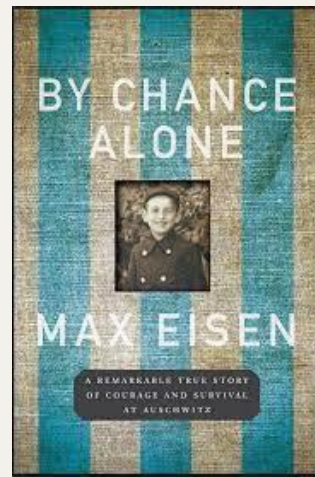
They became refugees, living in Displaced Persons camps run by the Allies in Europe while waiting to be able to immigrate to new countries and build a new life.

Who are Holocaust Survivors?

Max Eisen

1929-2022

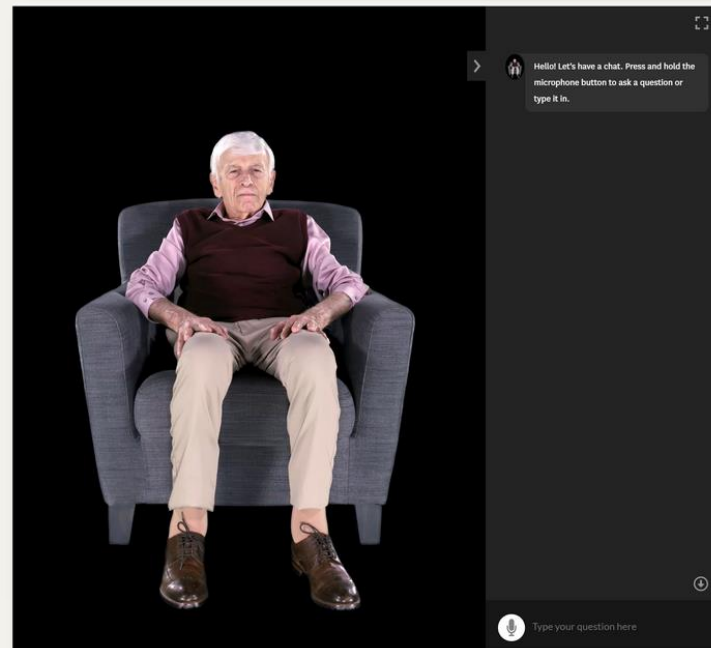
May his memory be a blessing



Survivor Max Eisen was an active speaker and an award-winning author who emigrated to Canada after the war. He dedicated his life to Holocaust Education and was appointed to the Order of Canada in 2021. Max passed away in 2022 at the age of 93.



The identification number tattooed on Max's arm. Not all survivors have a tattooed number. It depends on where they were during the Holocaust.



Max's avatar in Dimensions in Testimony. You can ask him questions and he will 'answer' them with recorded testimony. Link in the resources.

We call the victims who lived through the Holocaust survivors. The trauma that they experienced affected them for all their lives and will continue to affect their families for generations.

Some survivors couldn't speak about their experiences because it was too painful, but some survivors found purpose in telling their stories as often as possible. They believed that they were doing a service to humanity by telling what happened, by bearing witness to the truth so that children and adults could learn from the mistakes of the past to help make a better future.

This is called testimony and it is a very important part of understanding history because it is told by people who were *there*.

Since the Holocaust ended nearly 80 years ago, there are very few survivors alive today to speak to children about their experiences.

We are fortunate to have thousands of hours of video recordings of testimonies that we can watch. New technologies are also providing opportunities for us to interact with survivor testimonies as if the survivors are there in person.

Selected Sources:

Please note: These links are for teachers, not students. Since these sites have a tremendous amount of material, there will be content that is not age-appropriate for Grade 6 students. Always preview and select materials before sharing your screen with your students.

- **The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:**
 - <https://www.ushmm.org/learn>
- **Yad Vashem**
 - <https://www.yadvashem.org/>
- **Echoes and Reflections:**
 - <https://echoesandreflections.org/>
- **USC Shoah Foundation iWitness platform:**
 - <https://iwitness.usc.edu/home>
- **iWitness Dimensions in Testimony (Max Eisen and others):**
 - <https://iwitness.usc.edu/sites/dit>
- **Facing History and Ourselves Canada:**
 - <https://www.facinghistory.org/about/locations/facing-history-ourselves-canada>