

Timeline Activity

PREPARATION

In preparation for this activity, teachers who are new to teaching this topic and history may find it helpful to access the following links (teachers with more experience may find it helpful as a review):

- [Guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust](#)
- [Animated Maps](#)
- [Encyclopedia - Introduction to the Holocaust](#)
- [Encyclopedia - Overview of Topics to Teach](#)

OUTCOMES

At the conclusion of this activity students will:

- understand that the Holocaust happened to individuals
- understand the Nazi persecution, culminating in the Holocaust, was incremental and didn't happen all at once
- understand that the events of World War II and the Holocaust are intertwined
- make inferences about the inter-relatedness of time and geographic location to the events that took place, affecting both individuals and victim groups
- identify individuals, organizations, and nations who had opportunities to respond to the events of the Holocaust

RATIONALE

Teachers often have very little time to teach about the Holocaust, and yet they are asked to focus on Content, Context and Complexity—the foundational principles of our pedagogical guidelines in their approach. We believe that building a timeline that integrates personal stories, key historical events (including World War II, the Holocaust, and the world's response), Nazi laws and decrees, and other relevant themes/topics can provide a platform to understand both how and why the Holocaust happened, and that it can be accomplished in a relatively short timeframe. This interactive lesson also lends itself to critical thinking and understanding that the Holocaust happened to individuals and was incremental. It allows students to make inferences about the inter-relatedness of time and geographic location to the events that took place, affecting individuals and victim groups.

OVERVIEW

This activity is highly adaptable and can be completed in a single class period, used as a point of reference throughout an entire unity of study, or have thematic extension activities added to it.

The Framework:

Students will build a timeline in what we call layers. It's important to understand that each layer should provide *content*, reveal meaning through *context*, and ask the participants to reflect on a new level of *complexity*. As each layer is added, new insights, connections, and questions will emerge. The goal of this activity is not to answer why the Holocaust happened, but rather to allow students to formulate their own questions about why it happened.

MATERIALS

Using the materials provided by the USHMM, photocopy each set of timeline cards in a different color

Categories of Timeline Cards: (See Files for individual cards to be photocopied)

- Years (1933-1945)
- Victims of Nazi persecution during the Holocaust (Victim ID Cards)
- Events from history (World War II and Holocaust Timeline)
- Anti-Jewish Laws and Decrees (Laws and Decrees)
- Events that represent the world's response (US and World Response)

PROCESS

Step I: Years

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

Step II: Victim ID Cards

Students will work in pairs or groups. Distribute the ID cards and have students read for basic information and underline the following:

- Country of origin
- Gender of individual
- Age of individual
- Identifiable victim group
- The year in which the individual first experienced Nazi persecution

Students will then share their story with another person or group. Following this, students will place the individual on the timeline according to the year they first experienced Nazi persecution. When finished, there are two options:

1. Ask students to share out the various countries affected, victim groups and ages of victims. The teacher will write these on the board. Looking at the whole timeline, what conclusions can be drawn? Have a class discussion about this.
2. Have the students do a Gallery Walk and on sticky notes have them write down what they notice:
 - Range of victims
 - Are people victimized from the beginning to the end (1933-45) or are there certain years that see more victims than others, from specific countries during specific years? Why?

- What questions does this raise?

Step III: Events of World War II (World War II and Holocaust Timeline)

Follow the same process as the ID cards but have students summarize the event and write a statement about its significance to the Holocaust. When done sharing in pairs or groups, place their event on the timeline. Again, have a large group discussion or a Gallery Walk to help students make connections between the events taking place and the people's experience. (Example: Draw conclusions about Poles becoming victims in 1939 when Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany, Jews appear to be victimized throughout the entire timeframe of 1933-45, Homosexuals and Political Prisoners were victims early on, why is that?)

Step IV: Anti-Jewish Laws and Decrees

Repeat the process as in Step III, making connections between each layer, drawing conclusions and raising questions.

Step V: US and World Response

Repeat the process as in Step III, making connections between each layer, drawing conclusions and raising questions.

DEBRIEFING

Wrap-Up: Written Exercise

Have students write about *how* the Holocaust happened, based on evidence from the Timeline. (The teacher should be looking for insight such as the Holocaust was incremental, it affected individual lives as well as victim groups, one's geographic location and events during World War II affected one's experience, etc.)

What questions do they still have? What did they learn from this exercise?

EXTENSIONS

Language Arts: Literature can be an extension for this activity. If your students are reading literature about the Holocaust, place the events from the story on the timeline in addition to the pieces already mentioned. This will provide historical context.

NOTES

Each layer should illuminate another. For example, if one victim is a Polish Jew, is it important that we see the relationship between the invasion of Poland and the Polish Jews becoming victims of Nazi oppression? Will it complicate our thinking if we see that Polish Jews were required to wear a Star of David in 1939, nearly two years before German Jews were required to do the same? Is it important to know about anti-war sentiment in the US in 1939, to read the diaries of children from Lodz or Warsaw, or to know that non-Jewish Poles who helped Jews faced a death sentence? Can each piece of information shed light on every other?