

LESSON: Introduction to the Holocaust

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 7–12

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary

TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 60-70 minutes

This is a modified *foundational* lesson that provides additional scaffolding to introduce fundamental concepts and information to students who benefit from additional instructional support.

RATIONALE

The Holocaust was a watershed event in human history that involved millions of people across the globe.

This lesson introduces the Holocaust by defining the term and highlighting the story of one Holocaust survivor, Gerda Weissmann Klein.

NOTE: Designed as a one-class period introduction to the Holocaust, this lesson is for educators with limited time. Additional lessons that expand on the themes presented are noted in extensions.

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What was the Holocaust?
- What were some of the experiences of Jewish people during the Holocaust?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the end of this lesson, students understand

- The definition of the word *Holocaust*
- That Jews were the primary victims of the Holocaust and that there were a range of experiences based on when and where they lived
- Answers to frequently asked questions about the Holocaust

TEACHER PREPARATION

- Place the [years ONLY from the timeline activity](#) on the wall in your classroom. If appropriate for your classroom, select additional timeline cards to display.
- Preview [film clip](#) of Holocaust survivor Gerda Weissmann Klein and her husband, Kurt Klein, sharing their experiences of liberation and meeting for the first time.
- Read the *Holocaust Encyclopedia* article "[Introduction to the Holocaust](#)"
- Preview [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about the Holocaust.
- Survivor story: ID [card of Gerda Weissmann](#) (online) or [PDF to print](#) (Gerda's card is #40)
- Print/share copies of the [student interactive](#)
- Access for students to [additional online ID](#) cards or [PDFs to print](#) individual profiles (Anne Frank's card is #12)

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MODIFICATIONS

The lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications for recording student responses. **This lesson includes learner variability modifications incorporated into the instructional sequence.**

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE

DEFINING THE HOLOCAUST

1. Using this [KWL chart](#), ask students to share what they already know about the Holocaust.
2. Explain to students that today you'll talk about people who lived during the Holocaust and that you'll **start by defining the Holocaust**. Share the student interactive with this definition of the Holocaust on the first page:

<p>THE HOLOCAUST was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi government and by those who helped them.</p>	<p>The Nazis were a political party that came to power in Germany in January 1933.</p> <p>They believed the Germans were "superior" to all other people, especially Jewish people.</p> <p>Nazis said that Jewish people were "inferior" and a threat to Germany. This was not true.</p>	<p>The "Final Solution" was the Nazi plan to murder the Jews of Europe.</p> <p>By 1945, the Nazis and people who helped them had killed nearly two out of every three European Jews as part of the "Final Solution."</p>
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3. Share this [chart](#) of definitions of key terms with your students, and provide dictionaries, if desired. The definitions chart is alphabetized and numbered for easy reference.
4. Go over the highlighted words in the definition of the Holocaust and read their definitions. Clarify words or terms your students flag. Take time to ensure students understand the words in the definition.
5. Ask students to read the definition of the Holocaust on the student interactive as you read it aloud. Ask students to say in their own words what each section of the definition means. Students write the definition of the Holocaust in their own words. This work can be completed in pairs or small groups if appropriate for your class.

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6. Explain that they will now hear from two people who lived during the time of the Holocaust by watching a video clip with two people speaking: Gerda Weissmann Klein and her husband, Kurt Klein.
7. **If appropriate for your class, preview the film clip** for students. The video features a married couple: Gerda and Kurt. Both Gerda and Kurt were Jewish. Before they met, Gerda was a prisoner of the Nazis, and Kurt was in the US Army. As you watch, pay attention to how Gerda and Kurt met. Notice how Gerda describes meeting the US Army soldiers and how Kurt describes encountering the newly-liberated prisoners. If appropriate for your class, explain that Goethe (pronounced 'Ger-ta'--not to be confused with Gerda--they are pronounced similarly) was a German writer and scientist whose works include plays, poetry, literature, and books about science. He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the German language, and in the film, Kurt talks about how Gerda recited a line from one of his poems.
8. Make sure students find the transcript on the [student interactive](#).
9. **Choose what is appropriate for your class: read the transcript before OR after** watching the clip while students follow along. Stop after each person speaks. Have students highlight places in the text they find confusing and/or a keyword or phrase that resonates with them. If appropriate, students can also work in pairs to complete this.
10. Show [this film clip](#). It's closed-captioned; **if it is appropriate for your class, students can follow along with the printed transcript on the student interactive or** concentrate on the film clip.

Transcript for Gerda Weissmann Klein and Kurt Klein clip

Gerda: My very clear view of freedom and liberation came that morning when I stood in the doorway of that abandoned factory and I saw a car coming down the hill. And the reality of that came when I saw the white star on its hood and not the swastika. There were two men in that car. One jumped out.

Kurt: I saw some skeletal figures trying to get some water from a hand pump. But over on the other side, leaning against the wall next to the entrance of the building, I saw a girl standing, and I decided to walk up to her.

Gerda: I remember that aura of him, of that awe, of that disbelief in daylight, to really see someone who fought for our freedom, for my ideals. And he looked like god to me.

Kurt: And I asked her in German and in English whether she spoke either language, and she answered me in German.

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Gerda: And I knew what I had to say. And I said to him, “We are Jewish, you know.” For a very long time--at least to me, it seemed very long--he didn’t answer me. And then his own voice betrayed his emotion. He was wearing dark glasses. I couldn’t see his eyes. He said, “So am I.”

Kurt: I asked about her companions.

Gerda: He said, “May I see the other ladies?” A form of address we hadn’t heard for six years. I told him most of the other girls were inside. They were too ill to walk. And he said to me, “Won’t you come with me?” I didn’t know what he meant. So he held the door open for me and let me precede him. And that was the moment of restoration of humanity, of humaneness, of dignity, of freedom.

Kurt: We went inside the factory. It was an indescribable scene. There were women scattered over the floor on scraps of straw, some of them quite obviously with the mark of death on their faces.

Gerda: I took him to see my friends.

Kurt: The girl who was my guide made sort of a sweeping gesture over this scene of devastation and said the following words, “Noble be man, merciful and good.” And I could hardly believe she was able to summon a poem by the German poet Goethe, which was called, is called “The Divine,” at such a moment. And there was nothing that she could have said that would have underscored the grim irony of the situation better than what she did.

Gerda: And this first young American of liberation day is now my husband. He opened not only the door for me, but the door to my life and my future.

Interview with Gerda Weissmann Klein and Kurt Klein, March 13, 1992

After the video concludes, ASK THE STUDENTS

- Why do you think Gerda and Kurt remember this so clearly?
 - Possible answers:
 - It means a lot to both of them as it is the first time they met.
 - It was a difficult and traumatic event
- What are some details they remember?
 - Possible answers:
 - Kurt remembers Gerda reciting lines from the poem
 - Gerda remembers how polite he was to her
 - Kurt remembers the look on the faces of the women
- The video and the transcript have the same message/text/words. How was the experience of reading the transcript different from the experience of watching the video?
 - Possible answers:
 - You can tell how much it means to Gerda and Kurt by hearing the emotion in their voices and seeing it on their faces

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11. Next, distribute [printed copies](#) of Gerda Weissmann’s profile card. Read the card aloud and ask students to highlight terms or words they don’t understand. What words need clarification? [Refer to the definition sheet for assistance.](#)
12. Does the profile card answer any of the questions about the Holocaust raised by her testimony?
13. Refer students to the Holocaust [definition](#) and Gerda’s story on the student interactive. Highlighted words may need defining and can be found on the definition sheet. Working in pairs, groups, or as a class discussion, ask students to discuss how Gerda’s interview and her story as explained on the card relate to the definition of the Holocaust. Students add questions, notes, and additional explanations on the student interactive.

ASK THE STUDENTS

How does the Holocaust connect with Gerda's story?

- Gerda was born into a Jewish family, and this made her a target of Nazi persecution because of false Nazi “racial” ideas
- When the Germans invaded Poland, Gerda's community was subject to Nazi control
- Gerda was sent to ghettos and camps, part of the Nazi plan to systematically persecute and murder Jews
- Gerda survived terrible treatment, violence and starvation circumstances
- What questions do you have about Gerda's story as it relates to the Holocaust?
 - Possible student questions might be:
 - How did they know who was Jewish?
 - How did Jews fight back?
 - Who were the Nazis?
 - Why did they target Jews?
 - Why didn't the Jews just leave?

Refer to this [FAQ](#) to answer these student questions, and cover the others on the FAQ.

14. Provide students with a printed profile card of individuals impacted by the Holocaust and repeat the exercise modeled above: determining how their story connects with the definition of the Holocaust. Students can work in pairs or groups. Students record their work on the student interactive and share their findings with the class. **Teachers have two levels of scaffolding for the profile card definitional work** and can choose the best option for individual students or student groups.

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- a. **Option A:** The connection between the individual's story and the Holocaust is blank, and the student completes all of the work
- b. **Option B: Anne Frank's profile card.** Some of the connection information is completed for the students, providing scaffolding for them to complete the analysis.

ASSESSMENT

1. Students return to the KWL chart and complete the activity.
2. Students place their profile cards on the timeline posted in the classroom in order of their birthdates. Have students do a gallery walk to note the range of ages and experiences of victims of the Holocaust.
3. Assess completed student interactives.
4. Students can create a word cloud portrait of the individual's life and experiences, either from an additional card or for Gerda and Kurt.
5. Students can create a collage of historic photos from the Museum's collections related to the person's story.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Timeline Activity Lesson](#)
- *All But My Life* (memoir written by Gerda Weissmann Klein)
- [One Survivor Remembers](#) (39 min. film about Gerda Weissmann Klein's experiences)
- [Pre-War Jewish Life Lesson](#)
- [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#)