

LESSON: Hoecker/Auschwitz Albums Photo Analysis

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 7–12

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary

TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 60–75 minutes (extensions available)

This lesson is designed as a standalone exercise, but can be used as an extension for many other Museum lessons (particularly the Introduction lessons, the Timeline lesson, and the Elie Wiesel lesson) or as an introduction to an examination of the Museum’s online exhibition [Some Were Neighbors: Collaboration and Complicity in the Holocaust](#).

RATIONALE

In this exercise, students will learn about the importance of considering perspective and historical context when viewing photographs as historical sources. Students will examine photographs taken in and around the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and killing center in 1944 and engage in photo analysis techniques to deconstruct the photographs. Students consider the fact that all of the photographs were taken by German SS officers. Some photographs depict the arrival and selection process of several transports of Jews from areas controlled by Hungary, while others depict SS officers and auxiliaries seemingly enjoying their lives at the camp.

Note: This exercise is recommended for students who are already familiar with the definition of the Holocaust and within the context of longer Holocaust-related units.

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do these photographs enhance your understanding of what happened at Auschwitz?
- Why is historical context important when looking at photographs taken during the Holocaust?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the end of this exercise, students will understand:

- The value of photographs of Auschwitz as historical sources
- The importance of considering perspective and historical context in examining photographs, particularly those taken during the Holocaust

TEACHER PREPARATION

- Read the [Auschwitz Through the Lens of the SS](#) web exhibit (four webpages)
- Watch the USHMM’s video “[Auschwitz Through the Lens of the SS](#)” (07:59) and Yad Vashem’s video “[The Auschwitz Album](#)” (05:41)
- Copies of the [Images for Photo Analysis](#) (if you are distributing paper copies). Print enough copies of images 3-10 for each student to receive one of the images to analyze (they do not need copies of each image).

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- Copies of the [Photo Analysis worksheet](#) for each student (one for each student)
- Optional reading: *New Yorker* piece “[Picturing Auschwitz](#)”

MODIFICATIONS

Photographs may be distributed in paper copy to groups of students or presented on a screen via this [PDF presentation](#). Teachers may use all the photographs or a subset, and either ask students to analyze photographs individually, in small groups, or together as a class.

The lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications to achieve the educational outcomes. [Padlet](#), [FlipGrid](#), [Mentimeter](#), [Nearpod](#), [Jamboard](#), and [Peardeck](#) for Google Slides -- for example -- may all be used effectively to visually record and display student responses.

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE

1. Without explaining the context of the image (this will be revealed later), project the first image from the “[Images for Photo Analysis](#)” packet (or from the [PDF presentation](#)) so students can see it. Ask the students to describe the photograph focusing on the questions in the box below, and prompt them to provide evidence for their assertions. Record their answers using whatever format (digital or blackboard) you generally use so that all students can see the answers.

ASK THE STUDENTS

- Where do you think these people are?
- When do you think this photo was taken?
- What are the people in the photo doing?
- How old do you think these people are?
- What do their clothes tell us?
- What do the expressions on their faces tell us?
- Do you think it was taken by a professional photographer or an amateur?

Feel free to add any other questions that you wish to use.

2. As a class, make a list of the information you would want to know if you needed to write a caption for this photograph.

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3. Repeat steps one and two with the second photograph in the “[Images for Photo Analysis](#)” packet.
4. Explain to students that these photographs were all taken around the same time, in the summer of 1944, and in the same place, the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and killing center. These are very rare photographs, some of the only known photos of the camp in operation. All of the photographs were taken by the Nazi-SS who ran the camp and were not meant to ever become public images. One photograph is from a photo album called the Auschwitz album, which shows Jews arriving at the camp and undergoing the selection process (dividing the new arrivals into those who were sentenced to forced labor and those who were to be murdered in gas chambers). The other photograph is from a personal photograph album owned by Karl Hoecker (pronounced *Hook-er*), a senior Nazi official at Auschwitz, and is called the “Hoecker album.”

If students are unfamiliar with Auschwitz, or if you would like to reinforce their learning, consider sharing this paragraph, either by reading, distributing, or projecting. Answer any student questions using the USHMM Encyclopedia article on [Auschwitz](#).

Located in German-occupied Poland, Auschwitz consisted of three camps including a killing center. The camps were opened over the course of nearly two years, 1940-1942. Auschwitz closed in January 1945 with its liberation by the Soviet army. More than 1.1 million people died at Auschwitz, including nearly one million Jews. Those who were not sent directly to gas chambers were sentenced to forced labor. The Auschwitz complex differed from the other Nazi killing centers because it included a concentration camp and a labor camp as well as large gas chambers and crematoria at Birkenau constructed for the mass murder of European Jews.

5. Distribute copies of images 3-10 in the “[Images for Photo Analysis](#)” packet (so that each student or small group receives one image) and a copy of the [Photo Analysis worksheet](#) for each student. Ask them to examine their assigned photograph and answer the questions on the worksheet.
6. When students are finished, show each photograph (images 3-10) and ask the students to decide whether it belonged in the “Auschwitz Album” of prisoners arriving or in the “Hoecker album” of activities of Nazi officials. Ask them to support their answers with evidence from the photograph. For more advanced classes, consider asking the students to make an argument as to what is happening in each photo, again providing evidence. Review and discuss each photo as a class. (*Answers: Images 3, 4, 6, 7 are from the Auschwitz Album, Images 5, 8, 9, 10 are from the Hoecker album.*)

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7. Explore the histories of the two albums by
 - Distributing the [histories of the two albums](#) or projecting the [Google Slides presentation](#) and reading through the descriptions as a class
 - Watching the USHMM video “[Auschwitz Through the Lens of the SS](#)” (07:59) and Yad Vashem video “[The Auschwitz Album](#)” (05:41)
 - Asking students to explore the “[Auschwitz Through the Lens of the SS](#)” articles in the USHMM Encyclopedia

If your class has already done the Museum’s foundational [Timeline Lesson](#), you may consider adding a component here where students complete a gallery walk of the 1944 cards to gather further historical context. You can also print these photos and add them to the spring/summer 1944 section of the timeline.

8. Project image 1 for the class, and read the Museum’s captions for the photograph.

Image 1: Jewish women and children from Subcarpathian Rus await selection on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau in May 1944. Pictured are Channah Weiss Goldberger (daughter of Zvi Weiss and wife of Rabbi Goldberger), her grandson, Chaya Weiss Halpert (daughter of Rabbi Leib Weiss), her sister Feige Weiss Neiman, Sara Moshkovics Rosenreich from Visk, Itzik HersHKovitz, his sister Frimid HersHKovitz and mother Pessil HersHKovitz from Kitesco. Also pictured are Chaya Kreitenberg and her daughter Suri (neither survived).

ASK THE STUDENTS

- When we first saw these photographs, we listed the information we thought we’d need to write captions. Is that information included here?
- Using what you just read/heard about the history of the Auschwitz Album, what information did Museum historians use to write this caption? How do you think they might have learned this information?
- What is not in this photograph? What doesn’t this photo show that you know was happening? Why is it important to consider what isn’t included?

9. Repeat step 8 with image 2.

Image 2: Nazi officers and female auxiliaries (Helferinnen) run down a wooden bridge in Solahuette on July 22, 1944. The man on the right carries an accordion. Karl Hoecker is pictured in the center. The original caption reads “*Regen aus heiteren Himmel*” [Suddenly, it started to rain.]

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10. Discuss, or use these questions as a writing prompt for assessment:

- Why is it important to know the background (historical context) of Holocaust-era photographs?
- What more would you want to learn about these photographs and the people who are shown in them?
- Why are these photographs important historical evidence?

CONCLUSION

ASSESSMENT

Student interactive sheets, group work, and class participation can be evaluated for understanding.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Caption for Image 3: Jews from Subcarpathian Rus (an area of present-day Ukraine) who have been selected for death at Auschwitz-Birkenau, wait in a clearing near a grove of trees before being led to the gas chambers. A copy of this photograph was given to Esther Pinkas by Lili Jacob. Pictured are members of the Pinkas and Gutmann families. Golda Pinkas Berkovics Gutmann is pictured at the bottom right, Moshe is the child in the foreground. Behind him is Sheindele Pinkas. Leib Pinkas has his back turned to the camera. On the bottom left is Rivka Gutmann holding her daughter. All are from Maramaros.

Caption for Image 4: Jews from Subcarpathian Rus (an area of present-day Ukraine) undergo a selection on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In front of the SS officer is Geza Lajtbos of Budapest.

Caption for Image 5: Several SS officers study a document during the dedication of the new SS hospital on September 1, 1944. Pictured facing the camera left to right are Dr. Enno Lolling, Commandant Richard Baer and Adjutant Karl Hoecker and former Commandant Rudolf Hoess. Standing with his back to the camera is probably Dr. Eduard Wirths.

Caption for Image 6: Jews from Subcarpathian Rus (an area of present-day Ukraine) undergo a selection on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Pictured in front right is either SS *Unterscharfuehrer* Wilhelm Emmerich or SS *Hauptsturmfuehrer* Georg Hoecker assisted by the Jewish prisoner Hans Schorr. Also pictured in the front, second from the front is Jakob de Hond from Holland [also identified as Szlomo Glogower from Makow, Poland] and Yap Van-Gelder, far left [also identified as Shlomo Pivnik]. The woman next to him has been identified as Rosa Landau from Er-Mihaifalva (Valea-Lui-Mihai).

Caption for Image 7: Jewish women from Subcarpathian Rus (an area of present-day Ukraine) who have been selected for forced labor at Auschwitz-Birkenau wait to be taken to another section of the camp. Behind the fence is block BIId where 20,000 men were imprisoned. Among those pictured are Gizi Krousz Kauf of Szeged, Rozsi Egri Swartz, Zseni Stern of Bodrogkeresztur, Ester Erzsebet Egri Deutsch (Rozsi's niece) of Bodrogkeresztur, Freda Egri Salomon (Ester's sister), Aranka Stern (Zseni's niece) and Etu Szumet of Bodrogkeresztur.

Caption for Image 8: SS officer Karl Hoecker pets his dog, Favorit.

Caption for Image 9: SS officers, including several SS physicians, sit around a table drinking probably following a visit to a coal mine. The original caption reads "*Nach der Ausfahrt*" (after the outing [exiting the mine]). Among those pictured are Karl Hoecker (far left), Dr. Fritz Klein (left hand side, end of table), Gerhard Gerber (right, third from front), Dr. Enno Lolling (fourth from front), Alfred Trzebinski, and Dr. Willi Schatz (right side, end).

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Caption for Image 10: An accordionist leads a sing-along for SS officers at their retreat at Solahuetten outside Auschwitz, sometime between July 14-17, 1944. Pictured in the front row are Karl Hoecker, Otto Moll, Rudolf Hoess, Richard Baer, Josef Kramer (*standing slightly behind Hoessler and partially obscured*), Franz Hoessler, Josef Mengele, Anton Thumann, and Walter Schmidetzki. Hermann Buch is in the center. Konrad Wiegand, head of the Fahrbereitschaft (car and truck pool) is in the middle.