

LESSON: Introduction to the Holocaust: One Day Lesson

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 7–12

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary

TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 60 minutes

This is a *foundational* lesson that introduces key concepts and information to students.

RATIONALE

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

This lesson provides an introduction to the Holocaust by defining the term and highlighting the story of one Holocaust survivor, Gerda Weissmann.

NOTE: This lesson is designed as a one-class period introduction to the Holocaust for educators with limited time. Lessons that expand on themes presented are noted in extensions.

This lesson plan and accompanying materials are available in Spanish on the Museum's [website](#).

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What was the Holocaust?
- What was the experience of one young girl in the Holocaust?
- What questions can help students begin to understand the Holocaust?
- How does annotation help you make a personal and critical connection to text?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the end of this lesson, students understand:

- The purposes and techniques of annotation by examining text closely and critically
- The definition of the word Holocaust
- Some of the different experiences people had during the Holocaust
- Answers to frequently asked questions
- Where to learn more at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's [website](#)

TEACHER PREPARATION

- 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.
- *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](#)
 - [Sample Annotated Definition](#) for teachers
 - Access for students to [additional online ID](#) cards or [PDFs to print](#) of individual profiles

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- If new to teaching the Holocaust, review the USHMM's [Guidelines for Teaching about the Holocaust](#) or watch a [teacher training video](#)

LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

The lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications to achieve educational outcomes. Technology and teaching strategies are suggested in the instructional sequence; please use other options if they support the learning needs of your students. Consider utilizing graphic organizers, note-taking strategies, reading choices, and online engagement tools.

Educators may choose to use learner variability modifications specific to this lesson:

- Teachers can provide students with choices as to how they access information throughout lessons, i.e. read print alone, read print with a partner, read along while the teacher reads aloud, etc.
- Define terms that would clarify understanding for students.
- Use online discussion or engagement tools that work best in your classroom, such as Padlet.
- *Holocaust Encyclopedia* articles are available in various languages; refer to the word “Language” and select the Globe icon available on the lefthand side of the article.
- The Path to Nazi Genocide is subtitled in 12 languages. Scroll below the video to see the options.
- Closed captions are provided for videos.
- Transcripts are provided for video and audio files.
- Reference the [Glossary](#) in the *Holocaust Encyclopedia* for definitional support.
- Incorporate strategies such as think-pair-share and jigsaw to enhance student engagement.

This lesson is available as an [online, asynchronous experience for students](#), which can be accessed through a web browser or LMS files. The online lessons are accessible to all students for in-person and virtual learning, and they provide specific support for students using screen readers.

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE

DEFINING THE HOLOCAUST

1. Show [this film clip](#) and share the [student interactive](#).

NOTE: The clip is closed captioned, and the transcript can be found below or in the student interactive.

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 this doorway of that abandoned factory and I saw a car coming down the hill. And the reality of that

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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.

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

ASK THE STUDENTS

- Who are the two people speaking in the video?
 - Gerda Weissmann Klein and her husband Kurt Klein
- What do you think she is describing?
 - She is describing seeing the US Army and meeting Kurt for the first time
- What do you notice about their exchange?
 - It means a lot to both of them, and they both remember a lot about it

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- What role is Kurt playing here?
 - He is in the US Army and they have encountered victims of Nazi concentration camps
- Why is this exchange so important to Gerda?
- Why is it so important to Kurt?

2. Explain that Gerda and Kurt were describing experiences they had during the Holocaust. The definition of the Holocaust is in the chart below.

Modification: If necessary, ask students to read the definition of the Holocaust on the student interactive as you read it aloud. Then, give students time to read and underline words they need to understand better.

THE HOLOCAUST was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators.	The Nazis came to power in Germany in January 1933. They believed that the Germans belonged to a race that was "superior" to all others. They claimed that the Jews belonged to a race that was "inferior" and a threat to the so-called German racial community.	By 1945, the Germans and their allies and collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews as part of the "Final Solution." The "Final Solution" was the Nazi policy to murder the Jews of Europe.
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3. Clarify words or terms your students flag. This [chart](#) provides definitions of key terms.
4. Next, distribute either [physical copies](#) of Gerda Weissmann's profile card or share the [online link](#) with students. Read the card aloud. Then, working in pairs, groups, or individually **ask students to compare Gerda's story to the definition of the Holocaust** by highlighting parts that correlate to the definition on the ID card and the film clip transcript. Use this [Sample Annotated Definition](#) for teachers, or refer to your preferred annotation strategies.

ASK THE STUDENTS

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- Where does the definition of the Holocaust intersect 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 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 unimaginable circumstances
- What words need clarification? What words would you like me to explain or about which you would like to learn more? [Refer to this vocabulary sheet for assistance.](#)
- What questions do Gerda’s story and the definition of the Holocaust raise?
 - Potential student questions might include:
 - How did they know who was Jewish?
 - How did Jews fight back?
 - Who were the Nazis?
 - Why did they target Jews?

Have students share and record student questions on the board or [padlet](#).

5. Next, to seek answers to the questions raised, students read the complete “[Introduction to the Holocaust](#)” article from the *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. Explain that this [online encyclopedia](#) provides accurate historical information about the Holocaust and that **it is important to use reliable sources when searching for information about the Holocaust.**

ASK THE STUDENTS

- What questions did the *Introduction to the Holocaust* article answer?
- What questions do you still have?

6. Refer to this [FAQ](#) for assistance in answering student questions. Refer as a group back to the [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#) to answer questions. Model how to use the encyclopedia.
7. Students select or are provided with [an online profile card](#) or a [printed profile card](#) of an additional individual and repeat the exercise above that was completed with Gerda’s card: determining how the person’s story intersects with the definition of the Holocaust. Students record their work on the student interactive and share their findings with the class. This activity can be completed independently or in pairs, based on classroom needs.
8. Depending on time, students can complete the work in the assessment (below) in class or for homework.

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ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

1. Students construct an [annotated definition of the Holocaust](#) using the definition provided by the USHMM as a base and adding information from Gerda's story and the additional individual's story. This annotated definition can be the basis for a paragraph summarizing what they learned from the two individuals' stories. Here's a [Sample Annotated Definition](#) for teachers.
2. Assign students to watch one or all of the four additional videos about Gerda to gather information for their annotated definition or the 39 minute film, [One Survivor Remembers](#), about her life.
3. Students choose either a FAQ, an aspect of Gerda's story, or another individual's story to research further using the [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *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](#)
- [Overview of the Holocaust 2-Day Lesson](#)
- [The Path to Nazi Genocide](#), foundational 38 minute film
- [Timeline Activity Lesson](#)
- [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#)