



Franklin D. Roosevelt
Presidential Library and Museum

CURRICULUM GUIDE

Investigating the Holocaust *Nuremberg: Its Lesson for Today*

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SECTION VI

Essential Questions Surrounding Holocaust Themes and Concepts

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and murder of an estimated six million European Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. Many others were targeted based on their perceived “racial inferiority” or on political, ideological and behavioral grounds.

Though the total number of victims is staggering, it is important to remember that it represents individual people: mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, children, the elderly, friends, and neighbors.

The Holocaust did not happen by accident; it was planned and perpetrated by Adolf Hitler and his Nazi followers, in the middle of the 20th Century, in Germany – a nation with rich cultural heritage. The Holocaust was the result of the decisions and indecision, actions and inactions, and of the attitudes and beliefs of individuals, groups, organizations, and nations.

Below is a list of important themes and concepts that present themselves while studying the Holocaust. Each raises some essential questions worthy of consideration and understanding when learning about how the Holocaust came to be, considering its importance to history, and realizing its importance to each of us today.

Essential Questions surrounding Holocaust Themes and Concepts

Share these themes and concepts with your students. The questions presented in bold speak directly to that theme or concept’s role in the Holocaust. The questions in italics are scaffolding questions that speak to the themes and concepts more broadly.

These can be used with your students by asking them to consider: how and why the questions were important to the world in the 1930s and 1940s, and how and why they are important to us today.

Their responses can be shared through open discussion in class, structured as a debate, considered as a consensus-seeking deliberation exercise, assigned as a homework written response or presented as a research paper.

Essential Questions Surrounding Holocaust Themes and Concepts

- 1. Action vs Inaction – What actions and inactions allowed the Holocaust to occur?**
 - a) *What is the difference between action and inaction?*
 - b) *What factors might move someone from inaction to action?*
 - c) *Is failing to prevent something (inaction) the same as allowing it to happen (action)?*
 - d) *Just how much needs to be done in order for action to have been considered “taken?”*

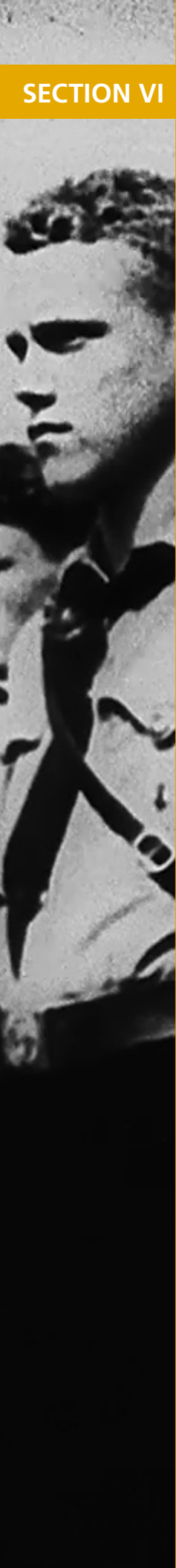
- 2. Anti-Semitism – How did Hitler use anti-Semitism as a tool to advance the power of the Nazis party?**
 - a) *What is anti-Semitism?*
 - b) *What does it stem from?*
 - c) *The Holocaust is history’s most extreme example of anti-Semitism – when and where can we find other examples in history?*
 - d) *When and where can we find examples of anti-Semitism today?*

- 3. Bearing Witness – What role do those who bore witness to the Holocaust play in our understanding the importance of the Holocaust to us today?**
 - a) *What does it mean to bear witness?*
 - b) *Why is bearing witness to historic events so important?*
 - c) *What happens when those who remember are gone?*

- 4. Bullying – How were the Nazis so easily able to bully their way to power?**
 - a) *Why do people bully each other?*
 - b) *What forms can bullying take?*
 - c) *What harm can bullying cause?*
 - d) *How can bullying be prevented or stopped?*

- 5. Conspiracy – How was the concept of conspiracy used by the Nazis to perpetrate their crimes?**
 - a) *What is a conspiracy?*
 - b) *How does a conspiracy differ from a plan?*
 - c) *What conditions are necessary for a conspiracy to develop or take place?*
 - d) *If you are aware of a conspiracy and do nothing to stop it, to what extent are you culpable when it takes place?*

Essential Questions Surrounding Holocaust Themes and Concepts

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6. **Courage – How did victims of the Holocaust demonstrate their courage to resist and survive?**
 - a) *What is courage?*
 - b) *Why are some people more courageous than others?*
 - c) *Give some examples of “big acts of courage” and “little acts of courage.”*

 7. **Critical Thinking – What methods did the Nazis use to discourage critical thinking?**
 - a) *What is critical thinking?*
 - b) *What specific skills and conditions are required for critical thinking to occur?*
 - c) *Why is critical thinking so important?*
 - d) *How does critical thinking differ from ordinary thinking?*

 8. **Culpability – Who might be considered culpable in allowing the Holocaust to occur?**
 - a) *What does it mean to be culpable?*
 - b) *What makes some people culpable and others not culpable?*
 - c) *Can culpability be considered as occurring in a matter of degrees?*

 9. **Division – How did the Nazis use division as a political tool?**
 - a) *What causes division?*
 - b) *At what point do ordinary differences become dangerous divisions?*
 - c) *What does it take to overcome division?*

 10. **Empathy – How might empathy have prevented the Holocaust?**
 - a) *What is empathy?*
 - b) *How does empathy differ from sympathy?*
 - c) *How can we develop and demonstrate empathy for others?*

 11. **Genocide – Why did the Nazis choose genocide as a means of advancing their beliefs?**
 - a) *What is genocide?*
 - b) *What factors/excuses have been used to “justify” genocide?*
 - c) *Where else has genocide been used as a tool to oppress and eliminate others?*

Essential Questions Surrounding Holocaust Themes and Concepts

12. Hate Speech – How did the Nazis use hate speech to desensitize and “normalize” their actions and behavior?

- a) *What is hate speech?*
- b) *How does hate speech differ from free speech?*
- c) *At what point does direct and pointed speech cross the line to become hate speech?*
- d) *In what ways does hate speech harm?*

13. Intolerance – What role did intolerance play in the Holocaust?

- a) *What does it mean to be intolerant?*
- b) *What is “social intolerance?”*
- c) *What is “cultural intolerance?”*
- d) *What is the difference between “tolerance” and “acceptance?”*
- e) *How can intolerance be overcome?*

14. Justice – Why was/is it so important to seek justice for the victims of the Holocaust?

- a) *What is justice?*
- b) *What is injustice?*
- c) *Why is justice important?*
- d) *Is it ever too late for justice?*

15. Peer Pressure – What role did peer pressure play in the Holocaust?

- a) *What is peer pressure?*
- b) *What are the causes of peer pressure?*
- c) *What are the results of peer pressure?*
- d) *How does peer pressure affect the way you behave?*

16. Prejudice – In what ways did the actions of the Nazis go beyond the limits of ordinary prejudice?

- a) *What is prejudice?*
- b) *What are the causes of prejudice?*
- c) *What forms can prejudice take?*
- d) *How do we overcome prejudice?*

Essential Questions Surrounding Holocaust Themes and Concepts

17. Resilience – How do survivors of the Holocaust evidence their resilience?

- a) *What is resilience?*
- b) *Why is resilience so important?*
- c) *How can we help build or develop resiliency?*

18. Resistance – In what ways was resistance shown to the Nazis?

- a) *What is resistance?*
- b) *What does resistance mean to you?*
- c) *How do we determine when it is necessary to resist?*
- d) *What forms can resistance take?*

19. Propaganda – What role did propaganda play in bringing about the Holocaust?

- a) *What is propaganda?*
- b) *How does propaganda differ from news, “fake news” and advertising?*
- c) *What is propaganda designed to do?*

20. Responsibility – Who is responsible for the Holocaust?

- a) *What does it mean to be responsible?*
- b) *Why is it important that people be held responsible and accountable for their actions?*
- c) *Why is it important to accept responsibility?*

21. Right and Wrong – How did so many people fail to point out right from wrong during the Holocaust?

- a) *How do we define what is “right” and what is “wrong”?*
- b) *Who gets to determine what is “right” and what is “wrong”?*
- c) *What is morality?*
- d) *Can morality be conditional?*

Essential Questions Surrounding Holocaust Themes and Concepts

22. Scapegoating – How did the Nazis use scapegoating to justify their actions?

- a) *What is scapegoating?*
- b) *What function does scapegoating serve?*
- c) *What forms does/can scapegoating take?*
- d) *In what ways does scapegoating harm?*

23. Slippery Slope – What were the “slippery slopes” that brought about the Holocaust?

- a) *How do we know when we are in a situation where a series of actions or events has become a slippery slope?*
- b) *How can we free ourselves from the consequences once we are on a slippery slope?*

24. Speaking Truth to Power – Why did so many people fail to speak truth to power during the Holocaust? What happened to those that did?

- a) *What does it mean to speak truth to power?*
- b) *Why is it important to speak truth to power?*
- c) *How do we know what “truth” is?*
- d) *Who gets to decide what is “truth” is?*

25. Words Matter – How did the Nazis use words/language to perpetrate the Holocaust?

- a) *Why do words matter?*
- b) *What power do words have?*
- c) *Under what conditions should words, and how they are used, be regulated?*
- d) *Who should decide what words are acceptable and what words are not?*