

Lessons from the Holocaust

Using historical fiction to learn ethical lessons from the Holocaust

Introduction

The Holocaust, also known as the Shoah (meaning catastrophe), was perhaps the most heinous crime committed against humanity in modern times. The Holocaust was conceived and carried out by the German Nazis during World War II. This lesson discusses what led up to the Holocaust, what happened during the Holocaust and the final outcome. The historical fiction book, *Number the Stars*, by Lois Lawry will be read and students will then write a book report. Finally, students will learn about modern genocide and how the Holocaust in many ways resembles it.

Pre-assessment: What do you already know?

Please complete **Worksheet I** before moving on to **Section I**.

Section I

The Holocaust happened back in the 1930s and 40s in Europe. It was a time of great anxiety both in the United States and in other parts of the world. Germany, whose government perpetrated the Holocaust, was in bad shape after World War I. Germany was supposed to pay reparations to France in the billions of dollars. At first, Germany was able to make some payments to France, but it became difficult for the Germans to continue.

The United States stepped in and tried to help by adopting the Dawes Plan. The plan was supposed to make it easier for Germany to fulfill its obligation to pay reparations to France. Unfortunately, the Germans did not like the plan, especially the Nazi Party.

The Nazi Party was a political group within Germany called the National Socialist German Workers Party. They formed a totalitarian dictatorship from 1933-1945. The Germans at that time wanted to be a world leader, dominate the other countries in

Lessons from the Holocaust (Cont'd)

Europe and get rid of anything they felt stood in their way. The Nazis wanted to have a pure and strong race. That pure and strong race would be themselves, but not Jews, disabled people, gays or other ethnic groups that they did not like.

The Nazis then set out to round up all of the Jews in Germany. Then they branched out to other European countries. The Nazis figured that if they could get rid of all the Jews who were supposed to be inferior, then they could have a pure race of superior people who were the Germans.

The Nazis did round up many of the Jews, put them into trains and sent them to concentration camps. The concentration camps were made to eventually kill all of the Jewish people, but before they were put in the gas chambers to die, the Nazis made them do hard labor. Some of the Jews were used for medical experiments and were treated in inhumane ways. It was a horrible time for Jewish people. Many of them died in the Nazi's concentration camps. In fact there were over six million Jewish people who were killed by the Nazis. The sad truth is that many people in Europe knew what the Nazis were doing and did nothing to stop it. They were just bystanders.

However, there were some people who decided to risk their own lives to help Jews hide from the Nazis. They were brave and chose to help even if they could get in trouble, be hurt or even themselves be killed.

Our selected reading is a book about a young girl and her family who lived in Denmark during this time. The people of Denmark too were persecuted by the Nazis, as they occupied the country. The story, although fictional, does tell us a lot about the choices that some people made in Europe during World War II.

Assessment: Key Terms

Please complete **Worksheet 2** before moving on to **Section II**.

Lessons from the Holocaust (Cont'd) - Section II

Let's take a few moments to learn a bit more about where and when the Holocaust took place. We will also learn about some of the major events that took place during the Holocaust.

As we learned, the Nazis, who were responsible for the killing of Jewish people in Europe, were from Germany. The leader of the Nazi party was Adolf Hitler, also known as the Fuhrer, which means someone who had a lot of power and was a tyrant. Someone like Adolf Hitler might not have gained so much power if it weren't for the bad shape that Germany was in. We discussed the fact that Germany was having some financial problems making their reparations payments to France. The Germans owed France money and France wanted to make sure that it was paid. The money was owed to France, because of what happened in World War I. The economy was so bad that people had a really hard time just buying what they needed to survive. People were angry and afraid. They could not understand how things became so bad. With so many people upset, the country was looking for a new sense of direction and for someone to lead them out of the mess that the country was in. Adolf Hitler seemed to be the one to help. He was strong and spoke well, so people put their trust in him to make Germany powerful again. The bad thing was that Hitler wanted to find someone to blame for all of Germany's problems. He claimed that the Jewish people were the reason why things got so bad. That's when the persecution of the Jews began. They could not live with the rest of the Germans and had to stay in areas just for Jews called ghettos. People were in small quarters, they did not have what they needed and life was very difficult for them.

The way that Hitler went about making Germany strong again was the problem. He wanted to take back Austria and make it part of Germany. Then Hitler wanted to add even more countries to Germany's control, like Finland and Denmark. He invaded even more countries, like France, Belgium and Poland. That's when England and France decided to go to war. Then Germany found itself challenged by other countries, so Hitler decided to get some countries to support the Nazi military. Italy and Japan joined Germany in the fight against the other nations (France and England). When the Japanese made the mistake of attacking the United States at Pearl Harbor, the United States then became involved in the war.

Lessons from the Holocaust (Cont'd) - Section II

It was a very difficult time during World War II. Many people died in battle. Jews died in the Holocaust. Still others died from the fighting among the nations. Much of what caused World War II to begin with was about the desire for power and control. Hopefully the world will not repeat the mistakes that happened not so long ago.

Assessment: Discussion Questions

Please complete Worksheet 3. Next, read the Book Report Resource sheet and follow your teacher's instructions.

Section III

Next, read the book by Lois Lawry, *Number the Stars*. Complete the book report by following the instructions on the Book Report Resource sheet.

Section IV - Some Thoughts to Hold Onto

Now you have learned a little bit about the Holocaust. You have also read a story about a girl who lived during the time of the Holocaust and who made some courageous choices. There are lessons that we can learn from what happened during the Holocaust. What we would not want is a repeat of what happened during the Holocaust. How can we make sure that this terrible situation could never again happen?

It is often said that bad things happen when good people do nothing. While it is true that some people living in Germany and in other German-occupied countries in Europe were very brave and courageous, it is also true that some people were not. It is understandable that some people might not have known what was really happening to all the Jewish people, but most of them eventually did find out. Once they did find out that the Jewish people were being rounded up and taken to concentration camps to be killed, why did they not do anything to stop it? Maybe one person alone could not make a difference, but if enough people cooperated, then they might have been able to save the lives of many Jews. It is likely that most ordinary people who lived through this terribly difficult time were good people. What we know happened is that many innocent people lost their lives, because not enough of the good people would help.

Darfur:

In Africa in the western Sudan, there has been a fierce conflict between the Sudanese government and several African tribes. The Arab militia, known as the Janjaweed, was hired by the government of Sudan. This militia has attacked the Massaleet, Zagawa and Fur tribes. Their goal is to drive away these tribes from their land, so that the Janjaweed may take it and the Sudanese government could do what they wanted. The land is valuable, because it is good for pasture and has an enviable water supply.

In order to obtain this land, the Janjaweed has committed many heinous acts including murder, torture and destruction of homes. As many as 300,000 people have been killed as a result of this conflict. More than two million people have been forced to leave the

Section IV - Some Thoughts to Hold Onto (Cont'd)

area. There are groups which are trying to fight back against the Janjaweed, but they have not had much success.

Now the world watches what is happening in Darfur. Many reports about how bad the situation is in Darfur have been published in newspapers and reported on television newscasts. International peacekeeping organizations like the United Nations have tried to assist the refugees and urged the Sudanese government to stop the fighting and killing.

Is this similar to the Holocaust? In some ways it is. The Darfur crisis is happening because some groups of people don't want other people around. It just so happens that the ones who are being driven from their homes and land are members of a few African tribal ethnic groups. The ones who are trying to get rid of them at any cost are Arab militia working on behalf of the Sudanese government.

Should the world be bystanders while hundreds of thousands of people have been murdered?

Have we not yet learned the lessons of the Holocaust?

Name _____

Date _____

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Pre-Assessment - Lessons from the Holocaust

Answer the following questions using complete sentences. You should have one paragraph for each question.

1) What do you know about the Holocaust?

2) What would you do if you saw something bad happen to another person (examples- One person hurting another using words, violence, or abuse in other ways)?

Worksheet 2 - Lessons from the Holocaust
Vocabulary

Define the following terms. Then use each term in a sentence. Use an internet dictionary or what your teacher provides.

1. Holocaust
2. Genocide
3. Nazi Party
4. Concentration camp
5. Totalitarian
6. Scapegoat

Name _____

Date _____

7. Reparations
8. Jews
9. Judaism

Worksheet 3 - Discussion Questions

Complete the following discussion questions using complete sentences. Use the resource page for websites to help with completing them.

1. Describe what was happening in Germany before World War II. How did this situation make it easier for someone like Adolf Hitler to rise in power?
2. What reasons did the Nazis give for mistreating the Jewish people?
3. Describe the ways that the Nazis persecuted the Jews.
4. There were many people who were bystanders. Why is it important for people not to be bystanders?

Book Report - Number the Stars, by Lois Lowry

1. When your teacher instructs you to do so, read the book, *Number the Stars*, by Lois Lowry.
2. Write a book report following the directions below:
 - a) Create a title page for your book report. Include your name, date and the name of the book. Use a 12 pt. font. Ask your teacher for help with choosing a 12 pt. font.
 - b) Write a summary of the book using 150-200 words. Be sure to include a description of the main characters, important events and the setting of the book.
 - c) Answer the following questions. Include them in your book report after the summary. Use the Resource Sheet for help with finding your answers.

Questions:

- I. Using at least 50 words, describe what happened in Denmark during World War II.
 - II. Who were the Nazis? Why did they round up all of the Jewish people they could find? Respond using at least 50 words.
 - III. Do you think that Annemarie and her family did the right thing for the Rosen family? Why or why not? Respond using at least 50 words.
- 3) Review your paper for errors in spelling. Make sure that it is your best work. Submit all the pages to your teacher by the due date.

Date due _____

Book Report Resource Sheet

Use the following online resources to help with completing your assignments for our study of the Holocaust.

1. This website has information about the rescue of the Jews from Denmark.
<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/danish/>
2. This website has historical information about Germany during World War II, as well as other world nations.
<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?groupid=2815&HistoryID=ac62>
3. For maps of Europe and other geographical information, use the following website:

https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/reference_maps/europe.html
4. Use the following website to answer your Capstone Question about genocide in Darfur.
<http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/analysis/details.php?content=2005-06-03&menupage=Sudan>

Worksheet 3 - Capstone Question
Lessons from the Holocaust

1. Using your Resource Sheet, in 75-100 words answer the following question in the space below.

Why is there genocide happening in Darfur right now? Is this situation anything like what happened to the Jews during World War II? Why or why not?

2. Using your resource sheet, in 75-100 words answer the following question in the space below.

What did you learn from reading the book and doing research about Darfur in terms of how we should treat people?

Worksheet 1 - Pre-Assessment
Lessons from the Holocaust Answers

Answer the following questions using complete sentences. You should have one paragraph for each question.

1) What do you know about the Holocaust?

Students' answers will vary, ranging from no prior knowledge to considerable knowledge.

2) What would you do if you saw something bad happen to another person (examples- One person hurting another using words, violence, or abuse in other ways)?

There is no right or wrong answer to this question; however, the desired response would be the recognition of a pressing need to do something. Seeking the help of others, as well as personal intervention would be the ideal response.

Worksheet 2 - Lessons from the Holocaust
Vocabulary Answers

Define the following terms. Then use each term in a sentence. Use an internet dictionary or what your teacher provides.

1) Holocaust

The planned torture and eradication of the Jews by the Nazis during World War II. Over six million Jews were killed as part of the "Final Solution."

2) Genocide

The systematic destruction of an entire ethnic, social or religious group.

3) Nazi Party

Brought to power by Adolf Hitler in 1933 was the National Socialist German Workers' Program.

4) Concentration camp

A prison camp used to hold Jews during the Holocaust. Many were sent to the gas chambers and firing squads in the concentration camps.

5) Totalitarian

The type of government which has absolute control over people's lives.

6) Scapegoat

One who is made to blame for something not of his own doing.

7) Reparations

Money paid to someone who was wronged or in this case a government of a nation

8) Jews

People from the tribe of Judah; Israelites who were targeted by Adolf Hitler during the Holocaust.

9) Judaism

A religion based on the Torah and Talmud.

Worksheet 3 - Discussion Questions Answers

Complete the following discussion questions using complete sentences. Use the resource page for websites to help with completing them.

- 1) Describe what was happening in Germany before World War II. How did this situation make it easier for someone like Adolf Hitler to rise in power?

Germany was in dire economic straits after World War I. The country could not meet its payments of reparations to France. The nation was looking for a leader who could lead them out of this situation. A charismatic leader like Adolf Hitler seemed to be the right person to do so.

- 2) What reasons did the Nazis give for mistreating the Jewish people?

The Nazis blamed the Jews for the dire straits that the country was in. The Nazis believed that the Final Solution would be to rid Europe of the Jews and then there would be economic security and a powerful nation.

- 3) Describe the ways that the Nazis persecuted the Jews.

The Nazis forced Jews to live in ghettos and identify themselves by wearing a yellow star (representing the Star of David, a Jewish symbol) on their clothing. The Nazis tortured, maimed, raped and killed Jews in the concentration camps. Some Jews never made it to the concentration camps and were killed on the streets of Germany and in the occupied countries of Europe.

Worksheet 3 - Discussion Questions Answers (Cont'd)

- 4) There were many people who were bystanders. Why is it important for people not to be bystanders? Bad things can happen when good people do nothing. Although there were many people who saved Jews and put their own lives at risk. However, there were also many people who chose to ignore what was happening. They were the bystanders who watched the Jews go to their death.

Worksheet 3 - Capstone Question
Lessons from the Holocaust Answers

1) Using 75-100 words, answer the following question in the space below.

Why is there genocide happening in Darfur right now? Is this situation anything like what happened to the Jews during World War II? Why or why not?

The Arab militia is seeking to remove some African tribes from their land. A staggering number of these Africans have been abused, tortured and even murdered. Over 2 million people have been displaced from their land.

There are some parallels to what happened to the Jews during World War II. There is systematic targeting of people from certain ethnic groups. There have been mass killings. The efforts to scapegoat these ethnic groups seems to have focused on their being in the way of what others want, as well as some enmity from the Arab militia toward these groups.

The bystanders are the greater community in other African nations and throughout the world who have in large measure failed to intervene.

Worksheet 3 - Capstone Question
Lessons from the Holocaust Answers (Cont'd)

2) Using 75-100 words, answer the following question in the space below.

What did you learn from reading the book and doing research about Darfur in terms of how we should treat people?

There should be a realization of the potential for people to be capable of tremendous good and also startling destruction. The idea of thinking that people will come to their senses is a fallacy as we have seen during World War II.

'Good' people who are concerned need to speak out and step up to help others who are in need.