

LESSON: The Holocaust - History and Memory

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 7–12

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary

TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 45–90 minutes (extensions available)

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

RATIONALE

In this lesson, students engage in a virtual field trip to explore how the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum preserves and presents Holocaust history. The experience begins with an examination of how the museum building itself speaks about the Holocaust; it continues in 1938, five years after the Nazis came to power, with a presentation of artifacts and photographs in the main exhibition that illustrate how the Nazis identified, segregated, concentrated, deported, and killed millions of Jews during the Holocaust. The tour closes with a discussion of what it means to preserve history and act as a living memorial.

NOTE: This lesson was adapted from an activity created in conjunction with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What was the Holocaust?
- How does the US Holocaust Memorial Museum preserve and present Holocaust history?
- What makes the US Holocaust Memorial Museum a *living memorial*?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the end of this lesson, students understand:

- the design, meaning, and purpose of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as a history museum and living memorial
- key events and topics related to the Holocaust
- the systematic nature, scope, and consequences of the Holocaust

TEACHER PREPARATION

- A computer or tablet with an Internet connection is required to participate in the field trip; if available, a projector will also increase visibility of the exploration for students.
- Provide students with the [Virtual Field Trip worksheet](#) (an [answer key](#) is provided for teachers)
- [Guidelines for Teaching about the Holocaust](#) - Confronting the history and legacy of the Holocaust can be upsetting to students. Be aware of students' emotions during this lesson, and acknowledge that the Holocaust is a complex and difficult topic to learn about.

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- [The Path to Nazi Genocide](#) - To frame an Expedition within the broader historical context and promote student understanding of how and why the Holocaust happened, you may begin a lesson with this 38-minute documentary. **The film includes graphic imagery; so, please preview the film before screening it with students.** A [worksheet](#) and [answer key](#) are available to help you in guiding students through a discussion of how and why the Holocaust happened. [OPTIONAL]
- [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#) - For additional content background. [OPTIONAL]

LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

The lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications to achieve the 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.

In a distance learning environment, teachers may guide students through the virtual field trip from their computer using videoconferencing and screen share. In this scenario, teachers may read the text narration provided with each scene in the tour and pose questions that are provided in the worksheet.

Alternatively, students may independently explore the virtual field trip, using the [worksheet](#) to focus their examination of the museum exhibitions and spaces. In this scenario, teachers may use [Word Cloud generator](#), [Padlet](#), Google Slides, or non-technology dependent means to visually record student responses, however, the lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications for recording student responses.

Students could use screen readers and voice to text features to complete the worksheet.

INTRODUCE

Explain that today you will be visiting the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in a virtual field trip.

Find out what students already know about the Holocaust and the museum, as well as what questions they have.

ASK THE STUDENTS

- What was the **Holocaust**?
Definition: The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were "racially superior" and that the Jews, deemed "inferior," were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community.

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- What is the purpose of a museum?
- What is the purpose of a memorial?

A [word cloud](#) or [padlet](#) can be used to show responses.

NOTE: Additional information about the definition of the Holocaust available below.

During the era of the Holocaust, German authorities also targeted other groups because of their perceived racial and biological inferiority: Roma (Gypsies), people with disabilities, and some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and men accused of "homosexuality."

Explain to your students that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is a special kind of museum—designed to present history, memorialize the dead, and inspire action to prevent genocide.

TEACH

1. Guide students through the virtual field trip [The Holocaust: History and Memory](#). Explain to students that the virtual field trip begins with an examination of how the museum building itself speaks about the Holocaust. It continues in 1938, five years after the Nazis came to power, with a presentation of artifacts and photographs in the main exhibition that illustrate how the Nazis identified, segregated, concentrated, deported, and killed millions of Jews during the Holocaust
2. As students explore each scene, read the information that appears to the class. Select each point of interest to direct students' attention, then share the additional information. Each scene includes a set of leveled questions (provided in the [worksheet](#) and [answer key](#)) that you can use to check students' understanding and to encourage critical thinking. Take time to draw students' attention to aspects of each scene that are relevant to the worksheet.

ASK THE STUDENTS

- What did you learn from the field trip that you didn't know before? Or what was something that stood out to you?
- What did the visit make you feel as you traveled through the museum?
- Which photos and artifacts had the greatest impact on you? Why
- What changes did you observe in the experiences of Jews between 1938-1944?
- Which photos and artifacts illustrated the systematic nature, scope, and consequences of the Holocaust?

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- A [word cloud](#) or padlet can be used to show responses.

CONCLUDE

ASSESSMENT

Discuss how the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum uses its collections and exhibitions, and even the building design, to teach about the Holocaust and memorialize the Nazis' victims. Reflect on Elie Wiesel's desire that the museum be a living memorial—as he said, “a memorial unresponsive to the future would violate the memory of the past.” Students should share their thoughts on actions they think people can take to honor victims of the Holocaust.

Teacher note: The Museum offers a [lesson plan](#) on *Night* by Elie Wiesel as well as an [8-minute video](#) contextualizing his experience.

SHORT VIDEOS THAT COMPLEMENT THE VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP

Life Before the Holocaust

- [Fragments of Childhood: The de Groot Family Home Movies \(Curators Corner #36\)](#)
- [A Life Left Behind: The Lean Grochowska Gutman Collection \(Curators Corner #42\)](#)

Kristallnacht

- [Survivors Remember Kristallnacht](#)

Ghettos

- [Interview with Judy Cohen: “Voices from the Lodz Ghetto”](#)
- [Conversations with survivors from the Lodz ghetto](#)

Rail Car

- [A Letter Thrown from a Train](#)
- [Holocaust Survivor Leo Schneiderman describes arrival at Auschwitz](#)

Auschwitz Barracks

- [Encountering Auschwitz](#)
- [“To the Memory of My Parents”: Michael Kraus’s Diaries \(Curators Corner #10\)](#)
- [Aerial Photography and the Holocaust: The Dino A. Brugioni Collection \(Curators Corner #32\)](#)

Gas Chamber Model

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- [Holocaust survivor Sam Itzkowitz describes the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau](#)

The Conservation Lab

- [Secrets Inside: How a Boy's Bear Helped a Family Escape Nazi Persecution \(Curators Corner #34\)](#)