

3.4 STUDYING THE HOLOCAUST IN GERMANY

? FOCUS QUESTION:

- How do nations confront chapters of their history that contain prejudice, discrimination, persecution, and genocide?

STANDARD #2 TIME, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE.

LESSON OVERVIEW:

This lesson assumes that students are already familiar with the events of the Holocaust. Students will learn how both the German government and the German people deal with the Holocaust in contemporary society. Students will be asked to respond to speeches given by Angela Merkel, Barack Obama, and Elie Wiesel at the Buchenwald Memorial; to an interview with Daniel Gaede, director of the Buchenwald Memorial Education Department; and to a video about the Holocaust memorial in Berlin. In addition, students will learn how the Holocaust is studied in German schools.

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

This lesson helps students understand the study, discussion and remembrance of the Holocaust in contemporary Germany. How is it dealt with in German schools? Is it a required course of study? The American television miniseries *Holocaust* (1978) provoked a passionate public discussion when it aired in West Germany in 1979, giving rise to public exhibitions and education programs. Teachers can familiarize themselves with Holocaust education in Germany by reading *Germany: Holocaust Education Report* and *Holocaust Education in Germany* (**Handout 3.4.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**).



🕒 TIME:

(4-5) 45 minute class periods

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:

- *Germany: Holocaust Education Report* and *Holocaust Education in Germany* (**Handout 3.4.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- “Remarks by President Obama, German Chancellor Merkel, and Elie Wiesel at Buchenwald Concentration Camp,” a transcript of three speeches given June 5, 2009 (**Handout 3.4.2 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Interview with Daniel Gaede, director of the Education Department at the Buchenwald Memorial (**Handout 3.4.3 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- German Secondary Students’ Reflections on a School Visit to Auschwitz (**Handout 3.4.4 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Internet access for video and article viewing
- Holocaust Memorial PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 3.4.5 on Instructional Resource Disc**)

PROCEDURE:**DAYS 1-2:**

- **Anticipatory Set:** After providing a brief review of the Holocaust and discussing the various groups that were persecuted under the Nazi regime, teachers should instruct students to make a T-chart on a sheet of paper. On the left side, students should write, *Issues faced at the end of the war by the people who were persecuted by the Nazis*. On the right side, they should write, *Issues faced at the end of the war by Germans who were not persecuted by the Nazis*. In small groups, students should brainstorm what issues German society faced once the full knowledge of the Holocaust had been exposed. The teacher should solicit student responses and point out that Holocaust remembrance continues to be a national issue in contemporary Germany.
- The teacher should lead a class discussion of students' observations.
- At the end of the class period, the teacher should give students the following homework assignment:
 - Read "Remarks by President Obama, German Chancellor Merkel, and Elie Wiesel at Buchenwald Concentration Camp," a transcript of three speeches given June 5, 2009 (**Handout 3.4.2 on Instruction Resource Disc**). Then respond to the following questions:
 1. What reason(s) does each dignitary—Merkel, Obama, and Wiesel—give to explain why it is important to remember the Holocaust?
 2. Why do you think it is important to remember the Holocaust?

DAYS 2-3:

- The teacher should ask students to form pairs and share their responses to the homework.
- Next the teacher should lead a group discussion. Several possible questions are listed below. Before the class discussion, the teacher may ask students to reread the text and prepare responses in small groups. In order to help students answer certain questions about specific parts of the text, the teacher may distribute index cards with a question on one side and the corresponding passage/paragraph from the text on the other.
 - What perspective of the Holocaust does each of the speakers—Merkel, Obama, and Wiesel—contribute? How are their relationships to the Holocaust the same and how do they differ? How are their responses to the Holocaust the same and how do they differ?
 - What aspect(s) of Holocaust remembrance does each speaker emphasize?
 - According to Barack Obama, why is it important for those who witnessed the concentration camps not to give in to the "impulse to silence"?
 - What does Barack Obama mean when he says, "And just as we identify with the victims, it's also important for us I think to remember that the perpetrators of such evil were human, as well, and that we have to guard against cruelty in ourselves"? Why is it important to remember that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were humans—and what would be the alternative? How can we guard against cruelty in ourselves?
 - What three messages does Angela Merkel consider most important?
 - How does Angela Merkel define the "very special responsibility" of Germans with regard to its history? What connection does she see between the past and the future?
 - Reread the following statement by Angela Merkel: "We ask young people to carry on our struggle against Nazi ideology, and for a just, peaceful and tolerant world; a world that has no place for antisemitism, racism, xenophobia, and right-wing extremism." Why do you think Merkel calls on the younger generations to continue the fight against Nazi ideology?
 - What does Elie Wiesel believe the Holocaust should have taught the world about war, hatred, and otherness? Does he believe the world has, in fact, learned these lessons?
 - Do you agree with Elie Wiesel that memory "has become a sacred duty of all people of good will"?

- Next, students should divide into groups and read the Interview with Daniel Gaede, director of the Education Department at the Buchenwald Memorial (**Handout 3.4.3 on Instructional Resource Disc**). Teachers should ask groups to discuss the following question: In Gaede’s view, how and why should the persecution of people by the Nazis be studied today and in the future?
- After reviewing some basic facts about the Auschwitz concentration camp, the teacher should give students the following homework assignment:
 - Read German Secondary Students’ Reflections on a School Visit to Auschwitz (**Handout 3.4.4 on Instructional Resource Disc**) and write a brief response to the following questions:
 1. What did these German students know about Auschwitz before visiting the camp?
 2. What did they learn about the camp while they were there?
 3. How do students view this part of German history? How does it make them feel?

DAYS 4-5:

- Teachers should present information on how German secondary schools teach about the Holocaust, using the reference materials provided.
- Teachers should then segue into a discussion of the homework. How can visiting a concentration camp add to a person’s understanding of the Holocaust? How do the student-authors of these essays describe their learning experiences?
- Teachers should explain that learning centers at concentration camps represent just one kind of memorial, and that other types of public memorials also facilitate remembrance of the Holocaust. Next, teachers should show the ca. 13-minute video, “Chapter One: Germany’s New Holocaust Memorial,” which was filmed in 2005 as the German government was deciding on a memorial to commemorate the Holocaust in Berlin. The video is available here: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/view/>. As students view the video, they should reflect on the following questions in order to prepare for a class discussion:
 1. How do people interviewed in the video view the purpose of the Holocaust memorial? What does the commentator, Marian Marzynski, see as its purpose?
 2. Which proposal won the initial contest but was later rejected? Why do you think it became controversial?
 3. What kind of memorials does the contest judge, James E. Young, prefer? How do such memorials allow people to remember the Holocaust in ways that others might not?
- Finally, teachers should show students the memorial by Peter Eisenman that was eventually constructed in Berlin. It is possible to view the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin” on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SX8kivBbaB0>.
- The discussion might focus on the following questions: Why do you think this proposal was chosen? What are its strengths and weaknesses, in your opinion?

WHOLE GROUP REFLECTIONS:

- As an individual summative assessment, students should write an essay in which they address the following questions:
 - How have the German people confronted the Nazi Era: prejudice, discrimination and genocide (the Holocaust)?
 - How well have responses to this chapter in German history addressed the needs of Germans to commemorate, but not perpetuate, guilt and angst?



- Students should (either in pairs or in full class discussion) reflect on the following as a result of this lesson:
 - What are some new things that you learned?
 - What surprises you? Cite examples.
 - In what ways have your attitudes changed regarding the Holocaust, German education, and German students? Cite examples.
 - What are some lingering questions or specific areas that you would like to learn more about?

MODIFICATION:

- Instead of distributing written cards, the students may write their own questions.

EXTENSIONS:

- Ask students to read the following text about the controversial comments made by Martin Walser, a German novelist, regarding the remembrance of the Holocaust: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/germans/controversy.html>
- Then ask them to respond to the following questions:
 - What aspects of Holocaust remembrance are criticized by Martin Walser?
 - What would you say in response to his criticisms? Write down your answers.
- As a second step, students can read Birgit Rommelspacher's response to Walser: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/germans/speeches.html>
- To follow-up, students should contrast and compare the responses they wrote during the first extension to those of Rommelspacher.
- For further study, the teacher may wish to show the Holocaust Memorial PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 3.4.5 on Instructional Resource Disc**)



Sources:

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Portions of this lesson have been included and adapted from the work of 2010 TOP Fellow Jessica Stock