HOLOCAUST MUSEUM LA TEACHER GUIDE AND STUDENT RESOURCES

Teaching the Holocaust with the Virtual Sobibor Camp Model

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TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST WITH THE VIRTUAL SOBIBOR MODEL

The educational philosophy of Holocaust Museum LA is to utilize oral history and primary sources to teach the important lessons and social relevance of the Holocaust.

This guide is intended to support your work and engage your students through Augmented Reality (AR) technology, primary sources, Holocaust Survivor testimony, and historical context to understand the past and build a more dignified future.

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What is the Virtual Sobibor Model?

The AR app features an augmented reality replica of an incredible artifact in the Holocaust Museum LA collection.

Holocaust survivor Thomas Blatt built the detailed model of the Sobibor death camp all from his memories of his experience there. He donated it to the Museum in the 1970s, and would frequently come to teach students with it.

Now, you can download and explore the model through the AR app available in the Apple App Store.

Context

The Virtual Sobibor Camp Model Teacher Guide includes historical context to Holocaust history as well as resources to use with students regarding the history of the Sobibor escape, Thomas Blatt's testimony, and the AR app developed by Holocaust Museum LA and Magnopus.

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Learning Outcomes

- Learn how Augmented Reality (AR) technology works in order to collect, organize, and utilize historical artifacts and information.
- Analyze various primary resources including artifacts, photographs, and Holocaust Survivor testimony used to document conditions of life and death in the camps.
- Develop critical thinking skills using visual and artifact-based inquiry learning models.
- Contextualize Sobibor's history within the Holocaust as a part of Operation Reinhardt.
- Understand different forms of resistance – physical and spiritual – present in the Sobibor Camp and how Jewish prisoners attempted to maintain their sense of humanity.
- Recognize how Thomas Blatt's story of survival reinforces the importance of using Holocaust education to inspire a more dignified and humane world.

Essential Questions

How does enhancing visual and virtual learning through AR contribute to Holocaust education?

Why is it important to focus on individual stories and experiences in accounts of mass atrocity?

Summative Assessment

We kindly request your participation in an important initiative aimed at assessing the impact of this new teacher guide. To ensure the effectiveness of our work, we are seeking to gather data through pre and post surveys that will allow us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the guide's impact on your teaching practices, student engagement, and knowledge acquisition related to the Holocaust.

In order to gauge students' knowledge of the Holocaust, we ask that you have students fill out the following surveys before and after interacting with Holocaust Museum LA's AR representation of Sobibor Camp. We deeply appreciate your help with this.

Students PRE Virtual Sobibor Model Survey: https://forms.gle/m795Zwdg4bzYn9tF8
Students POST Virtual Sobibor Model Survey: https://forms.gle/vmD9kFFkrBy8DG9v9

California Common Core Standards

This guide meets the following California Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6,9-10.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3,11-12.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1,9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

See Appendix A for further information regarding each standard.

History of Holocaust Museum LA

Founded in 1961, Holocaust Museum LA is the first survivor-founded and oldest Holocaust museum in the nation and houses the West Coast's largest collection of Holocaust-era artifacts. The Museum continues the founding survivors' mission to commemorate those who perished, honor those who survived, educate future generations about the Holocaust, and inspire a more dignified and humane world.

The Museum teaches students and visitors – both on-site and online – the critical lessons and continued social relevance of the Holocaust through customized tours, artifact-rich exhibits, creative programs, and intergenerational conversations with Holocaust survivors. Admission is free for all students and youth 17 and under. The Museum also provides bus transportation grants for schools where field trips would otherwise be cost-prohibitive.

Learning from survivor testimony and the Museum's primary sources and educational programming empowers students and public visitors to speak out against and stand up to hatred, bigotry, and antisemitism.

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The Holocaust: An Overview

A genocide is the deliberate and systematic attempted annihilation of a national, racial, ethnic or religious group of people

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic mass murder of those identified as Jews perpetrated by Nazi Germany, its allies, and collaborators. From their initial rise to power, the Nazi Government worked to systematically marginalize, segregate, and dehumanize the Jewish population, along with other minority groups, which later manifested in **genocide**.

While the term "**Holocaust**" has come to denote the destruction and murder of Jewish communities by Nazi Germany and its allies, the original word holocaust stems from the Greek word for “burnt offering.” The term holocaust can also be found in the Biblical text Samuel 1: 7-9, where it refers to the consumption of a sacrifice by fire. The Hebrew word for the Holocaust is Shoah, which connotes a calamity, disaster, or destruction that cannot be fully described by human language.

Life Before the Holocaust

For 2,000 years after the Jewish people lost their political independence in the Land of Israel, most Jews lived in diaspora as a minority group spread across the globe. In most cases, they maintained their religious practices and traditions, forming a rich culture in various empires, nations, and states they inhabited. In 1933, approximately 9.5 million Jews lived in Europe, comprising 1.7% of the total European population. This number represented more than 60% of the world's Jewish population at that time, estimated at 15.3 million. The majority of Jews in pre-war Europe resided in Eastern Europe, with the largest community in Poland, where Jewish communities settled in the 12th century. By 1933, the Jewish population in Poland numbered over three million and comprised roughly 10% of the total Polish population.

The Polish Jewish community, as well as many other Eastern European Jewish communities, was diverse in its traditions and practices. Some families lived secular, urban lives in the largest cities of Eastern Europe, such as Lodz, Warsaw, Kiev, and Vilna, while others lived in smaller towns (communities known as **shtetls**). In shtetls, members of the community often spoke **Yiddish**, a language that combines elements of German, Slavic languages, and Hebrew, in addition to Polish and other local languages.

Historically, Jewish communities of the Diaspora have been multilingual, having knowledge of Hebrew (the language of the Bible), the local language of where they lived, and an additional Jewish language. Jewish languages and dialects have existed for more than two millennia, first emerging during the First Temple period (586 BCE) when Jews escaping wars and destruction in the Land of Israel fled to or were enslaved in other countries. Over the centuries, these local Jewish languages grew in nearly every area of the Jewish Diaspora.

The languages, written mainly in Hebrew letters, are a vibrant mix of local vocabulary with Hebrew and Aramaic words and include unique syntactic structures coupled with distinct expressions and gestures.

Although some long-standing Jewish vernaculars are on the verge of extinction, Jewish languages can still be found today, including Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic, Ge'ez (spoken by Ethiopian Jews), Neo-Aramaic, Judeo-Marathi (spoken by Bene Israel in India), Yevanic (Judeo-Greek), Judeo-Bukharian, Judeo-Georgian, Judeo-Italian, and Judeo-Persian.

Jews throughout history faced persecution, discrimination, limited rights, and even death because of their identity. By the end of the 19th century, the majority of Jews living in Western and Central Europe were **emancipated** and subsequently granted equal rights. Post emancipation, Jews across Europe lived varied lifestyles. Some Jews continued to live in traditional religious communities, while others assimilated into the urban landscape. Jews had a variety of professions ranging from farmers to doctors, tailors to teachers, and other jobs common at the time. Like their fellow citizens, wealth varied a great deal between Jewish families.

Emancipation is the freeing of a group of people who have been restricted socially and legally by the ruling class

Perpetual Antisemitic Myths and Tropes

While the term “**antisemitism**” is relatively new, dating back to the 19th century, antisemitic ideas and violence have occurred for thousands of years. Throughout history, Jews were often blamed for many social, economic, or political problems, serving as **scapegoats**. Over the centuries, prominent antisemitc tropes have

The term antisemitism describes hatred or prejudice against Jews

been used to incite prejudice and violence against the Jewish people time and again. These tropes, or negative **stereotypes**, are all unequivocally false; however, they are still used as **propaganda** today. It is not always easy to recognize and combat antisemitism.

The following section serves as a guide to identifying eight of the most common and dangerous conspiracy theories surrounding Jews. Understanding the roots of these antisemitic myths and how they relate to wider narratives and power structures is crucial to stopping their growing normalization.

One of the most pervasive antisemitic tropes is that Jews have too much power in society. Despite accounting for approximately 0.2% of the world population, antisemites believe that Jews control the media, banks, government, and industry. This myth of excessive Jewish power, which can be traced back to medieval Europe, extends beyond reason. According to the myth, Jews are responsible for controlling world affairs – even the weather. It asserts that Jews are manipulative and conspiratorial schemers who wield immense power and influence behind the scenes, controlling governments, economies, and media organizations to manipulate world events for their own benefit.

The Enlightenment Era was the development of intellectual and philosophical ideas in Europe throughout the 18th century, creating spaces of dialogue that eventually led to changes in government, religion, and ideals

Another false trope is that Jews are inherently disloyal. The origin of this myth can be traced back to the New Testament of the Christian Bible when Judas is said to have betrayed Jesus. Anti-Jewish laws and measures were enacted during the Middle Ages and **the Enlightenment Era** to prevent Jews from surpassing or deceiving the Christian majority. In communities around the world, Jews faced persecution and mistreatment because of the false view that they are inherently disloyal. For instance, in 1654, 23 Jewish refugees fled persecution in Dutch Brazil to New Amsterdam. There, New Amsterdam Governor Peter Stuyvesant tried to expel them from the colony, calling them a “deceitful race” that he hoped would not be allowed to “further infect and trouble” New Amsterdam.

Around the turn of the 20th century, Jews became synonymous with the word “traitor.” They were portrayed throughout history as wanderers who lacked allegiance to any nation – only loyal to other

Jews; governments often propagated the notion that citizens should be wary of Jews as they were disloyal of nation-states. The late 19th century Dreyfus Affair was a political controversy in which French Jewish artillery officer Alfred Drefus was wrongly accused and convicted of treason, demonstrating the deep undercurrent of antisemitism and mistrust of Jews in stately affairs. For many, Dreyfus symbolized the disloyalty of French Jews, and, as a result, most of the French public supported Dreyfus' guilty conviction despite the evidence indicating his innocence. Subsequently, the "stab in the back" myth, refers to a historical conspiracy theory that claimed that Germany's defeat in **World War I** was not due to military shortcomings but rather the result of betrayal and subversion by various internal elements, particularly Jews.

Also known as the "Great War," World War I occurred from 1914 to 1918 and was lost by Germany and Austria-Hungary

The myth that Jews are greedy originated in the Middle Ages and is, to this day, a prominent and problematic stereotype. During the Middle Ages, Jews were often prohibited from owning land, working in certain professions, and had restrictions placed on their economic activity. Subsequently, Jews were forced to be moneylenders or work with high-interest crediting, since Christians were not allowed to hold those types of professions. This dynamic between Christians and Jews led to tension and mistrust. Jews were often scapegoated or blamed as the cause of financial downturns and painted as being stingy or hoarding wealth for themselves.

Even in modern times, Jews are seen as relentless in their pursuit of wealth and are accused of controlling financial systems. For example, Jews have often been blamed for economic crises spanning from the Great Depression to the 2008 recession.

Medieval antisemitism also manifested as Judeophobia, which stems from a fear of Jews for being culturally "other" than the mainstream European Christian community. This failure to understand Jews manifested in accusations of deicide — the belief that Jews killed Christ — and blood libel, which accused Jews of murdering Catholic babies to use their blood when making unleavened bread on Jewish holidays. Often, when Christian children went missing or were found injured or dead, Jews were unjustly blamed and consequentially persecuted and tortured. These false allegations often led to violent **pogroms**, targeted riots, and

A pogrom is the organized destruction of a certain group of people; a term often used to describe acts of violence and persecution of Jews throughout history

attacks against Jews. Both deicide and blood libel myths have been used to justify violence and discrimination against Jews time and again.

During the Middle Ages, another common trope was that Jews are vermin, dirty, and responsible for spreading diseases. Jews have often been scapegoated for causing health crises and epidemics. On February 14, 1349, during the height of the Black Plague, the Jewish community of Strasbourg was rounded up, arrested, and condemned to death for conspiring against Christians and poisoning the well sources. Approximately 2,000 Jews were burned at the stake for these false allegations. In Nazi Germany, propaganda blaming Jews for the spread of typhus and syphilis was disseminated throughout the country from classrooms to movie theaters. The Nazis used this trope to justify the isolation of Jews in **ghettos**, which in fact only increased the proliferation of the diseases. More recently, Jews were blamed for the spread of COVID-19. In March 2023, a man shot two Jewish men leaving a **synagogue** in Los Angeles, California because he believed, "Every single aspect of the COVID agenda is Jewish."

A synagogue is a Jewish religious house of worship

The *Ten Stages of Genocide* is a conceptual framework developed by Dr. Gregory H. Stanton to identify and understand the process through which genocide unfolds. This framework provides a useful tool for analyzing the progression of genocide and recognizing warning signs in order to prevent or intervene in such atrocities. Stanton identifies that the last stage of genocide is not systematic murder but denial of the crime altogether. The final stage involves the denial of the atrocities committed and the efforts to conceal or distort evidence. Perpetrators, or those sympathetic to them, often deny the existence of genocide, downplay the numbers, or shift blame onto the victims. The final stage is not the removal of a group but the covering up of the action, which erases not just the people but also the memory of what happened to them.

Despite the fact that Germany admits to perpetration of the Holocaust, there are various forms of Holocaust denial. They range from denying elements of the Holocaust to denying that the Holocaust happened altogether. For example, denying that the Nazis used gas to kill Jews in **death camps** is ultimately Holocaust denial.

Holocaust denial is one possible and significant effect that the rhetoric in these examples of propaganda can cause, as dismissing or distorting the genocide of Jewish people is incredibly harmful to Jews who have painful memories of suffering. As a result, Holocaust denial has become another prominent antisemitic myth today.

Lastly, while criticism of the government of the State of Israel is not in itself antisemitic, contemporary anti-Zionism can often draw on and perpetuate previously mentioned antisemitic tropes.

Zionism is defined as the movement for Jewish self-determination in their ancestral homeland. It posits that Jews should have a place of refuge from the longstanding prejudice and endangerment they suffer as a minority culture – whether that be from European pogroms, Nazi Germany, or anti-Jewish laws imposed by the Soviet Union.

Anti-Zionism not only downplays the history of Jewish nationhood and its connection to the land of Israel but, more than anything, demonizes Israel as uniquely evil among all other nations of the world. Attacks against Jews are especially prevalent on college campuses. For example, on April 13, 2022, Rutgers University Professor Noura Erakat delivered a lecture at the University of Illinois entitled “Zionism as Racism and Racial Discrimination.” In this lecture, Erakat expressed blatant anti-Zionism, including her support of military campaigns to end the existence of Israel. She also suggested that Zionism is a “bedfellow” of Nazism, displaying a complete disregard for the painful history of the Holocaust.

The Rise of Nazism

From the end of World War I in 1919 to the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor in 1933, the German government was a democracy called the **Weimar Republic**. Despite economic challenges and the Great Depression, the Weimar Republic saw a period of remarkable cultural and intellectual creativity and freedom, known as the Golden Twenties. Berlin, in particular, became a vibrant center of artistic expression, with advancements in literature, theater, film, architecture, and science. As a fledgling democracy, there was also a shift to protect human rights and freedoms.

However, when World War I ended, the Germans were required to pay a large reparation sum to the victorious countries for the war’s cost. This, and chronic political instability that arose during the Weimar Republic, plagued Germany in the 1920s and led to economic and social strife throughout the country, which was further exacerbated by the Great Depression. In 1921, the National Socialist German Workers Party, or **Nazi Party**, was founded. The party was explicitly anti-communist and anti-Marxist. It condemned the liberalism of the Weimar Republic and sought for a return to the

"authenticity" of Germany. The party valued nationalism, "**Aryanism**," and a revival of **nativism**. The Nazi Party's popularity within German society varied through the 1920s, but they secured their position in government through a coalition in 1933.

On January 30th, 1933, Germany's President, Paul von Hindenburg, appointed Adolf Hitler to be the Chancellor of Germany to form a coalition government.

Those who opposed Hitler believed that von Hindenburg's position and power would control and balance the government. Adolf Hitler's antisemitic ideology was apparent in his writing and speeches before his entrance into the German political sphere. In his infamous 1924 memoir, *Mein Kampf*, Hitler writes, "...no one need be surprised if among our people the personification of the devil, as the symbol of all evil, assumes the living shape of the Jew."

In his public speeches, Adolf Hitler capitalized on Germany's unstable environment in the 1920s and 30s, blaming Germany's defeat and failing economy on Liberals, Marxists, and Jews. Hitler asserted his hatred of Jews, whom he considered a "foreign race," and proclaimed the supremacy of the "**Aryan** race" as well as a need for racial purity. Hitler and the Nazis found it imperative to reverse the decades of emancipation and **assimilation** by ostracizing Jews and other minority groups, thereby fulfilling their objective of creating a commanding, powerful, and "racially pure" German Empire.

Nazi Antisemitism: Its History and Conceptualization

Nazi racism draws on many preconceived notions. The theoretical practicalities of modern antisemitism, which translated into racism in Nazi Germany, originated at the end of the 18th century in reaction to the emancipation and subsequent assimilation of German Jews, both of which were products of Enlightenment thinking; the awakening of ideas regarding fraternity, equality, and liberty characterized the Enlightenment period, resulting in the emancipation of Jews across Western Europe. However, this time period also witnessed the development of nationalistic debates that were later used as a foundation for racism. Scholars and philosophers, including Johann Gottfried von Herder and Friedrich Schlegel, wrangled with practical questions like how to strengthen the national community and concepts such as "organic" theory, which argued that natural, racial gaps existed between groups of people. These scholars did not explicitly argue for the superiority of one group of people over the other, but their ideas later lent themselves to the nationalistic theory of racial superiority that fueled Nazi antisemitism.

Arthur de Gobineau altered the early notions of racial categorizations, arguing that there was a distinctive cultural and political element to each race. In his 1885 work, *Essai sur*

l'inégalité des races humaines ("Essay on the Inequality of Human Races"), Gobineau sought to explain history through a racial lens: racial purity and racial pollution were the primary forces behind historical events. Gobineau divided the races into "yellow," "black," and "white," arguing that the strong "white" race was steadily losing its superiority due to blood contamination, and that mixing between the races resulted in the superior race deteriorating to the inferior level of lesser ones. According to Gobineau, the great empires of world history degenerated because they allowed their blood to be contaminated.

Racist notions in Europe flourished in the 19th century; Charles Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species* was a scientific source frequently cited by those in Europe who believed inferior races had to be eliminated through a race war. Nazi ideology borrowed many pre-existing concepts involving race, mankind, blood purity, power, and natural order; often, these concepts were unrelated, illogically connected, or even conflicting.

In 1879, German journalist Wilhelm Marr coined the term "antisemitism," which denotes a general hatred of Jews. When the term was first used, it was understood as prejudice against or hatred of Jews. However, Nazi ideology transformed the notion of antisemitism by propagating hatred of Jews based on a racial framework; Hitler and the Nazis held racial principles as one of the most important components of their ideology and beliefs.

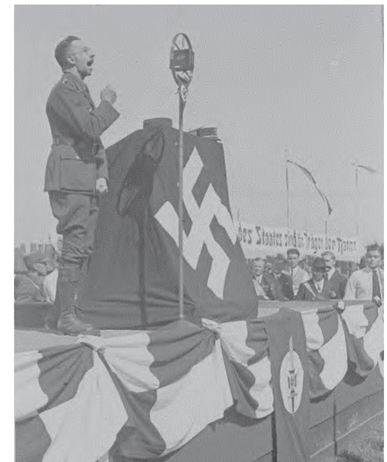
While the first use of the term "antisemitism" dates back to the 19th century, antisemitic ideas and violence occurred for thousands of years, and Jews were often blamed for many social and political problems throughout history, time and again serving as the scapegoat for countless issues. Perhaps most infamously, the Jewish people collectively received the blame for Jesus' crucifixion—a misconception still held by some today. During the Crusades, between 1095 and 1291 CE, thousands of Jews were massacred or lost their homes and property. Spanish monarchs King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella expelled Jews who refused to convert during the 15th century Spanish Inquisition, in which a tribunal of the Roman Catholic Church tortured, imprisoned, and burned tens of thousands of Jews at the stake — all in the name of investigating "heresy" against the Church.

Nazi Propaganda and Discrimination Against German Jews

On February 27, 1933, a large fire at the Reichstag (German Parliament building) broke out, giving the government an opportunity to falsely depict the arson as an attempted communist coup. Marinus van der Lubbe, a young Dutch council communist, was arrested for the crime. Hitler pressed President von Hindenburg to declare a State of Emergency, suspending civil liberties and freedom of the press and arresting communists around the country, including 100 communist members of parliament.

The suspension of civil rights remained in place until the end of World War II. The Nazis utilized vigorous propaganda to exploit the public fear of a communist take-over and to portray Hitler as the protector and savior of Germany. This chain of events allowed Hitler to consolidate power, moving the Nazi Party to the majority on the German political stage. To this day, historians suspect that the Nazis orchestrated the arson to seize power.

Hitler's Nazi party boasted ideals such as national pride, nativism, and **xenophobia** alongside its virulent anti-communist and antisemitic beliefs, all of which were portrayed as essential to the restoration of power to the superior Aryan race. To spread these beliefs and ensure public approval, Hitler utilized propaganda through mass media to convince the German people of Nazi ideology. Hitler established the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, which was led by Joseph Goebbels. Its purpose was to disseminate information through various forms of mass media to influence the general public. Racial superiority was central to these messages, and those that were not descendants of the pure Aryan race were demonized. A special focus of attack was the Jewish population, which was used as a scapegoat for society's issues and was made to appear both inferior to Aryans and dangerous, leading to the German population's gradual acceptance of increasingly antisemitic laws.



Joseph Goebbels addressing a crowd, c. 1930 [Photograph]. Holocaust Museum LA Archival Collection.

The Nazis successfully communicated their ideology through art, music, rallies, theater, films, books, radio, educational materials, and the press. The Nazis censored anything considered "un-German" and attempted to purge everything that went against Nazi ideology from society. Nazi propaganda targeted all age ranges, backgrounds, and demographics. Essential to the Nazi propaganda machine was public radio. To allow the entire community to own a new radio, the Nazis

created an inexpensive radio called the Volksempfänger ("people's radio"). The Nazis additionally controlled the broadcasting so they could create a direct connection into every home. During the war, it was illegal to listen to foreign news at home, and the **Gestapo**, the German secret police, arrested those discovered listening to BBC or radio broadcasting produced by Allied countries (enemies of the German state).

To better control the German population, the Nazi government weaponized society's fear. The Gestapo began to heavily rely on informants and denunciations. In his essay, "The Gestapo and German Society," Robert Gellately explored the role German citizens played in informing the Gestapo on their fellow citizens' criminal activity by analyzing 19,000 surviving Gestapo files. The Gestapo were infamous for their brutality and secrecy, which perpetuated a climate of fear, but they lacked sufficient manpower to meticulously police the entire nation. Gellately found that German citizens took it upon themselves to police their neighbors and turn in those they suspected of engaging in anti-Nazi activity, which could be as simple as listening to foreign radio broadcasts.[1] This is one of the many ways in which the Nazi government worked to control the information that people accessed and the allegiance of the population.

Nazi propaganda utilized negative **stereotypes** to propagate the idea of Jews as a detested "other." Jews and other "non-Aryans" were depicted as dangerous enemies of Germany and were made to feel alienated and subhuman. The Nazis—notably Heinrich Himmler, one of the leading members of the Nazi Party—often employed rhetoric that compared Jews to vile vermin such as parasites, roaches, fleas, and rats. For example, in 1941 in Nazi-occupied Poland, propaganda posters featuring slogans such as "Jews are lice" were publicly displayed. These posters included images of Jews with drawings of lice superimposed over their faces. These connections instinctively conjured the association between Jews and parasites.

Stereotypes are simplistic, firmly held beliefs about individual characteristics generalized to all people within that group

Shortly after Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, the Nazis gradually enacted antisemitic legislation to diminish the lives, humanity, and dignity of Jews and to further their exclusion from society. The first law

[1] Robert Gellately, "The Gestapo and German Society: Political Denunciation in the Gestapo Case Files." The Journal of Modern History 60, no. 4 (1988): 654-694.

of this nature was the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, which was enacted on April 7th, 1933. This law barred Jews from employed positions as civil servants. The subsequent laws in following months removed German Jews from practicing law and medicine and limited the number of Jewish students allowed in schools. These laws created a hostile environment and made dehumanization and brutality acceptable in the public eye; even if Jews were not forbidden from attending school or university, they were still targeted for discrimination and subjected to humiliation. For example, by 1934, "Jewish students at the Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin had to come to terms with a wide yellow stripe stamped on their matriculation books."[2] This blatant identification facilitated antisemitism and, coupled with rules that required Jewish students to sit on separate benches or in the back of classrooms, resulted in a drop in matriculated Jewish students attending German universities from 3,950 in 1932 to 656 in 1934.

In April of 1933, the Nazis planned a nationwide **boycott** of Jewish businesses. However, the boycott ultimately failed to engage the public on a wide scale, signaling to the Nazi government that the larger population did not share in their same deep-seated antisemitic and hateful beliefs. The Nazis quickly focused on intense propaganda and did not stage another national boycott until 1938; by then, their ideology had permeated German society, and this boycott did not fail.

A boycott is a social protest against a group of people or organization, many times aligning with certain ideals.

In May of 1933, a nationwide “action against the Un-German spirit” was declared. This resulted in the destruction of all books, artwork, and media that was not in line with the ideologies of the Nazi Party, including pieces about Judaism, communism, liberal ideas, or any material that contested Nazi ideological beliefs. For example, the books of Sigmund Freud and Erich Maria Remarque were included in the massive burnings of all literature considered “un-German.” The books of Helen Keller were burnt as well, as the Nazis believed that those with disabilities were “subhuman” and did not belong in Aryan society.

Life for German Jews became increasingly oppressive in Nazi Germany. Through violent acts and anti-Jewish laws, the Nazis created an environment of segregation and dehumanization. In

[2] Francis R. Nicosia and David Scrase, Jewish Life in Nazi Germany: Dilemmas and Responses (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 21.

reversing the previous decades of emancipation and assimilation, the Nazis worked to ostracize the Jewish population. Additionally, "ordinary Germans were invited to participate in and profit from the exclusion, expropriation, and expulsion of the unwanted Jews."[3] In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws were passed. These laws stripped Jews of their German citizenship, forbade them from flying the national flag, and prohibited them from marrying or having sexual relations with persons of "German or German-related blood." Additional laws took away Jews' political and civil rights, including the right to vote and hold public office. The Nuremberg Laws became the ideological cornerstone for the National Socialists, and they were intended to protect the nation and individual Germans from perceived racial degeneration.

A turning point in Nazi Germany's persecution of their Jewish population was the horrifying and unprecedented violence of **Kristallnacht**, "the Night of Broken Glass,". On November 9th and 10th of 1938, violent anti-Jewish pogroms took place throughout Germany and Austria. During this state-sponsored event, rioters destroyed 267 synagogues, looted over 7,500 Jewish-owned businesses, and murdered 91 Jews. As synagogues and Jewish property burned, fire departments were instructed not to assist unless the fires endangered Aryan buildings. Approximately 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up and deported to Dachau, the first **concentration camp**, which was created in 1933 to detain political prisoners, and other camps including Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald. Prisoners' release was contingent upon the presentation of large sums of money and papers produced by their families indicating that they would leave Germany or Austria. Kristallnacht marked the first instance in which the Nazi regime incarcerated Jews on a massive scale. This unprecedented event signified the danger for Jews remaining in Germany. Many of the Jewish men who were able to return from the concentration camps were despondent and desperate to get their families out of the country.

The Boerneplatz synagogue in flames during Kristallnacht, Frankfurt, Germany, November 10th, 1938 [Photograph]. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

[3] Nicosia and Scrase, Jewish Life in Nazi Germany, 117

In response to the brutality of Kristallnacht, several organizations worked together to bring Jewish children living under Nazi occupation to safety in England. Roughly 10,000 Jewish children from Germany, Austria, parts of Czechoslovakia, and parts of modern-day Poland were sent to England on **Kindertransports** ("children's transports"). The vast majority of the rescued children never saw their families again. The Kindertransports operated until the outbreak of war on September 1st, 1939.

The Outbreak of War and Genocide

The relationship between war and genocide was closely tied during the Holocaust. Nazi racial policy radicalized with early military successes and was implemented despite military defeats.

On August 23rd, 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a **Non-aggression Pact** (the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact) that stipulated that neither country would attack the other and laid out the division of an occupied Poland. On September 1st, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and two days later, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany, marking the beginning of World War II. The Polish army was defeated in less than a month, and Poland was partitioned between Germany and the Soviet Union, as agreed upon in the Non-aggression Pact.

At the time of the invasion, there were roughly 3 million Polish Jews living in Poland; the single largest Jewish community in the world.

In response to the large number of Jews under their authority, the Nazis began a process of ghettoization, establishing the first **ghetto** in Piotrków Trybunalski, Poland in October 1939. Jews from smaller towns and villages were brought to more populated areas where ghettos had been established, allowing the Nazis more control over the Jewish populations. Daily life in the ghettos was horrid. Families were crowded together in unsanitary apartments, food was limited, and diseases ran rampant. Starvation, inadequate health care, extreme overcrowding, deadly diseases such as dysentery and typhus, and severe weather caused hundreds of thousands of deaths.

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In the spring of 1940, Germany began its assault on Western Europe, invading Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. In June 1940, France signed an armistice with Germany, allowing the German occupation of the northern half of the country, while the southern half of France remained under control of the collaborating Vichy government. The armistice remained until November 1942, when German troops invaded and occupied the area.

Germany broke the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact on June 22nd, 1941 with their invasion of the Soviet Union during **Operation Barbarossa**. Hitler and the Nazi elite viewed this war not only as a territorial battle between countries but as a racial war between the Aryans and those regarded as "subhuman." Under the cover of war, the Nazis and their collaborators began a systematic mass murder of European Jews. Beginning in the summer of 1941, **Einsatzgruppen** (Mobile Killing Units) murdered those perceived to be racial or political enemies of Nazi Germany, mostly Jewish women and children.

On September 29th and 30th, 1941, in the largest single action of these mobile killing squads, Einsatzgruppe C massacred 33,771 Jews in less than three days at Babi Yar, Ukraine, a ravine outside of Kiev. As the **Wehrmacht** moved through Eastern Europe, Einsatzgruppen units followed them, murdering over one million Jews. Although some Einsatzgruppen units used gas vans, the primary method of murder was mass shootings of victims into shallow, mass graves. Several reports demonstrated the psychological impact of the shootings on the soldiers themselves, which, in addition to the desire for a more quiet, less public, streamlined and efficient method of murder, led the Germans to establish permanent death camp facilities—the first of which opened in Chelmno, Poland in December of 1941.

The Wehrmacht was Nazi Germany's unified armed forces.

On January 20th, 1942, the chief of the Reich Main Security Office, Reinhard Heydrich, organized the **Wannsee Conference** to direct and coordinate the **"Final Solution to the Jewish Question**"—a **euphemism** for the systemic, deliberate physical annihilation of the Jewish Population. The fifteen mid-level officials in attendance represented the relevant government industries needed to smoothly organize this plan to systematically murder the European and West Asian Jewish populations.

To implement the Final Solution, six death camps were expanded and built in different locations in Poland: Chelmno, Belzec, Treblinka, **Sobibor**, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Majdanek. Chelmo, as the first permanent death camp, utilized gas vans to asphyxiate victims, while gas chambers were built in the other five death camps to speed up the killing process.

Sobibor is the camp that is focused on in this guide.

The Germans employed large scale attempts to deceive Jews, portraying deportations as “resettlement” of the Jewish population to work in the “East.” In Western and Central Europe, Jews were told to pack luggage, purchase train tickets, pay their utility bills, and leave their house keys clearly marked before showing up for “resettlement” to work in the “East.” In reality, the "resettlement in the East" became a euphemism for deportation to killing centers.

Jews were deported from the ghettos to transit camps and, from there, were sent to various concentration camps. Upon arrival at the death camps, prisoners were ordered to leave their belongings and strip off their clothes in preparation for showers. They were then assembled in large numbers in the gas chambers, where they were killed within minutes. It is estimated that, at the height of the **deportations**, up to 6,000 Jews were gassed each day in Auschwitz-Birkenau alone. Carbon Monoxide and Zyklon B were used as poisonous gas in these facilities. While Auschwitz-Birkenau, Chelmno, and Majdanek kept some prisoners alive for slave labor, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka had no purpose other than mass murder.

The death camp of Sobibor was one of the three **Operation Reinhard** camps designed to implement the Final Solution. The camp was located in eastern Poland in the small village of Sobibor, a sparsely populated, wooded area. The camp was surrounded by trees and a minefield spreading 50 feet in all directions. Jews were deported to Sobibor between 1942 and 1943 from ghettos in Poland, German occupied Soviet territory, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Bohemia and Moravia, the Netherlands, and France. It is estimated that approximately 200,000 people were killed at Sobibor.

Operation Reinhard was the code name for the plan to murder two million Jews in Nazi occupied Poland

In 1942, the Allied governments learned of the murderous intentions of Nazi Germany and issued public condemnations. Despite these condemnations, 1942 was the deadliest year of the Holocaust, as

approximately 2.7 million Jews were murdered in that year alone, and deportations and gassings continued.

On October 14th, 1943, the prisoners at Sobibor participated in an uprising and escape at the death camp. Of those prisoners who were able to escape, it is estimated that less than 50 survived. The uprising at Sobibor led the Germans to raze the entire camp to hide evidence of its existence. They tore down the buildings, burned bodies, and planted trees to disguise the location as a farm.

Additional examples of uprisings and revolts occurred in other killing centers, including Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau. These and the **Warsaw Ghetto Uprising** led Nazi officials to accelerate the killing process, shooting approximately 42,000 Jews on November 3rd, 1943 in the Lublin District in Poland.

Germany's invasion of its ally, Hungary, on March 19th, 1944 drastically changed the situation for Hungarian Jews. With the advancing Soviet Army on the Eastern Front and the military decline of the Third Reich, the Nazi Government focused its efforts on quickly deporting and gassing over 400,000 Hungarian Jews in the time between Hungary's invasion in 1944 and the end of World War II in 1945.

The Conclusion of the War

As the **Red Army**, the army of the Soviet Union, rapidly advanced on the Eastern Front, the Germans attempted to destroy evidence of mass murder. The Soviets liberated Auschwitz on January 27th, 1945. However, the Nazis had already bombed the gas chambers and forced the majority of Auschwitz prisoners out of the camp on a westward death march. Thus, Soviet soldiers found only several thousand prisoners when they entered the camp.

U.S. forces liberated Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany on April 11th, 1945; however, the Nazis had evacuated the camp a few days prior, and only 20,000 remaining prisoners were liberated. U.S. forces also liberated Dora-Mittelbau, Flossenbürg, Dachau, and Mauthausen. British forces liberated concentration camps in northern Germany, including Bergen-Belsen, in mid-April 1945. The camp contained over 60,000 prisoners, and most were in critical condition due to starvation, torture, and a rampant typhus epidemic. More than 10,000 prisoners died from malnutrition or disease within a few weeks of liberation.

Liberators confronted unspeakable conditions in the Nazi camps, such as emaciated prisoners and piles of unburied corpses. Although rumors and information about the

brutal mass murder perpetrated by the Nazis were known as early as 1942, the full scope of the horrors were exposed to the world only after liberation. Disease was rampant in the camps, and many camp structures were burned to prevent the spread of epidemics. Survivors of the camps faced a long and difficult road to recovery. Many Survivors ended up in **Displaced Persons (DP) Camps** following liberation.

Following Germany's surrender in 1945, the Allied forces held a series of military tribunals—the **Nuremberg trials**—to prosecute individuals involved in the political, military, judicial, and economic apparatus of Nazi Germany. Beginning on October 18th, 1945 with the indictment of 24 individuals and several organizations, the Nuremberg trials were the first act of legal justice for victims of the Nazi regime. A milestone in contemporary international law, the Nuremberg trials were instrumental in establishing a legal precedent and a historic legacy of holding individual war criminals responsible for their crimes against humanity and in creating standards of human rights. The first Nuremberg trial indicted war criminals on four charges: participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of a crime against peace; planning, initiating, and waging wars of aggression and other crimes against peace; war crimes; and crimes against humanity. Twelve of the defendants were sentenced to death, seven were sentenced to imprisonment, and three were found innocent and acquitted. The Nuremberg trials served as a model for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Geneva Convention (1949), and the International Criminal Court (1998).

Life After the Holocaust and Modern Antisemitism

Antisemitism and anti-Jewish sentiment existed before the Holocaust and continue to exist today—even after World War II and the Nuremberg trials made the world aware of the dangers of inhumanity, intolerance, and hatred. After the war, many survivors, unsure of what to do after liberation, returned home to find people living in their homes and using their possessions. Survivors were forced to buy back their own photographs of loved ones who had perished in the Holocaust. Tremendous antisemitism continued to permeate Eastern Europe following the war. In an extreme case, Polish people murdered 42 returning Holocaust survivors in the town of Kielce in 1946. After the Holocaust, 75,000 of the Jewish survivors who encountered deadly violence upon returning to their hometowns in Poland fled to Displaced Persons camps in Western Europe. Many survivors joined the Brihah movement, which arranged illegal immigration to the British Mandate of Palestine, because they felt that a Jewish homeland would be the only place where they could be safe and live without antisemitism. Thousands of survivors immigrated to Israel when it received its independence in 1948.

In modern times, antisemitism endures, and recently, antisemitism has been on the rise in America, Europe, and the Middle East. In some countries, antisemitism is spread by the government. For example, former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad publicly denied the Holocaust. In Europe, there has been a rise of far right-wing extremist political parties who view Jews as “others.” There have been several violent attacks on Jews in Europe recently, including the 2014 attack on a Jewish supermarket in Paris that left four killed and the shooting of a security guard at a Danish synagogue in 2015.

The United States has also seen a rise in anti-Jewish violence, including vandalism of Jewish synagogues, cemeteries, and on college campuses; a rise in anti-Jewish rhetoric on social media; and the largest antisemitic shooting at a synagogue. On October 27, 2018, 11 Jews were murdered at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. On January 15, 2022, a man took 4 people hostage in Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas because he believed in the anti-Jewish myth that Jews control the world. In March 2023, a man shot two Jewish men in Los Angeles because he believed the antisemitic trope that Jews were responsible for the Covid-19 pandemic. Sadly, these are not the only examples of violence against Jews in America today.

The Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at Cal State San Bernardino found that Los Angeles “recorded the most hate crimes of any U.S. city this century” in 2021 alone. The Anti-Defamation League's recent audit reported a 34% increase in antisemitic incidents nationwide in 2021, averaging 7 antisemitic incidents each day.

Discussion Questions for Students

Stereotypes are widely held beliefs or assumptions about a particular group of people based on characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, or other attributes. These beliefs often oversimplify and generalize individuals within those groups, ignoring their unique qualities, abilities, and experiences.

It's important to challenge stereotypes, recognize individual differences, and promote a more inclusive and equitable society that values the diversity of human experiences and perspectives.

The following discussion questions are meant to help students think critically and analyze information surrounding stereotyping. They prompt students to reflect on the topic, consider different viewpoints, and evaluate evidence. This helps develop their ability to question, analyze, and make informed judgments, fostering intellectual growth and developing a generation of upstanders:

1. What is a stereotype?
2. “All girls like pink. All boys like sports.” What is the operative word in these

statements? Are these statements true? How could they be hurtful?

3. How could stereotyping and racism lead to antisemitism and other forms of hate rhetoric? Have you seen examples of antisemitism, racism, or negative stereotyping in your own life?

4. Have you ever heard a stereotype about a community or people you are part of? How did it make you feel?

5. What can you do to prevent antisemitism or hatred of others? How can we combat hate and intolerance?

INTRODUCTION TO SOBIBOR

Historical Context of the Sobibor Model

The “Final Solution” or “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” was a Nazi euphemism—code phrase—referring to the plan to systematically murder 11 million Jewish people across Europe and Asia. It resulted in the murder of 6 million Jews—2 out of every 3 Jews in Europe.

In 1941, the Nazi Government and their collaborators began the systematic mass murder of Jews with the use of special killing units called “Einsatzgruppen”, which followed the advancing German army, rounded up Jews, including women and children, and shot them into pits. The mobile killing units required large numbers of executioners, the intimacy of the murder caused psychological trauma for the killers, and the large number of people involved made it impossible to keep the mass killings quiet. A new, industrial method of mass killing was devised by Nazi leadership, utilizing systems already in place within their structure. To carry out these plans, death camps were established.

German SS and police authorities opened Sobibor in 1942 as the second of three death camps established as part of Operation Reinhard. Operation Reinhard was the code name the Nazis gave to their plan to murder 2 million Jews in gas chambers set up in occupied Poland. Implemented in 1941, this plan included the construction of three new death camps: Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. In contrast to previously-established concentration camps that maintained large groups of enslaved prisoners, these camps were intended to act as highly efficient, industrial killing centers.

The Nazis constructed the Sobibor Camp near the small village of Sobibor in East Poland after measuring the track and ramp of the railway line and village station. By connecting local railway lines to the camp, German SS and police were able to conduct mass transports of people to Sobibor between May 1942 and the fall of 1943.

Sobibor was built along the Lublin-Chelm-Wlodawa railway line. A dense forest of pine and birch shielded the site from view, and branches were furthermore woven into the barbed-wire fence and trees planted around the perimeter to camouflage the camp, which covered a rectangular area of 1,312 by 1,969 feet (a bit larger than 33 soccer fields). A 50-feet-wide minefield surrounded the camp.

Most Jews deported to Sobibor came from the Lublin District of Poland. German authorities also deported German, Austrian, French, Slovak, Czech and Dutch Jews to Sobibor from across Europe. In late summer 1943, they also deported Soviet Jews from Belarusian [Belorussian] and Lithuanian ghettos. Approximately 200,000 Jews were murdered at Sobibor by the Germans and their auxiliaries.

Sobibor consisted of three separate areas called Lagers (the German word for camp) I, II, and III. Lager I contained the barracks for the few enslaved Jewish prisoners, the prisoner-run kitchen, and buildings that provided services to Nazi guards. Lager II was established to assist the daily operations of the camp, including large warehouses intended for sorting seized personal items, a small stable, the main administration office, a Catholic chapel, and an imposing watchtower. This was the part of the camp in which Jewish prisoners were dropped off and sorted, so it was disguised to look like a pleasant village.

The Sobibor camp gate in the Spring of 1943 Sobibor Perpetrator Collection [Photograph]. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Digital Archive.

Though many Polish Jews knew what arrival at Sobibor meant, Jews from other European countries, such as the Netherlands, arrived under the false impression that they were being resettled for work. This facade was meant to ensure that they would go to the gas chambers with little resistance. A narrow passageway led from Lager II to Lager III, cynically nicknamed *Himmelstrasse* (road to heaven) by the Sobibor guards. Lager III was where the Nazis carried out the mass murder of prisoners. It contained gas chambers disguised as a bathhouse and, eventually, a crematorium. This section of the camp was hidden from the rest of the camp, with great care taken to ensure that its operations were kept in extreme secrecy. If a prisoner went to Lager III for a task, they were killed to prevent them from telling others what they saw.

Transports of 40 to 60 freight cars would arrive at the Sobibor railway station. 20 cars at a time were taken to Camp I where camp guards greeted victims and announced that the deportees were to be sent to labor, but that first they were to bathe and undergo disinfection. The Germans ordered the Jews to place their belongings down and undress, with the

promise their belongings would be returned after their shower. Men were usually separated from women and small children and sent into the gas chambers first, which were deceptively labeled as showers. Women's hair was cut off before they were killed. Once the gas chamber doors were sealed, guards in an adjacent room started an engine that piped carbon monoxide gas into the chamber. Arriving Jewish victims who were too ill, weak, or elderly to walk to the gas chambers were taken to Camp III and shot in an open pit. When all the people from the 20 rail cars had been killed, the whole process was repeated with the next set of cars. The process continued until the entire transport was murdered.

Most of the Jewish people sent to Sobibor were sent straight to the gas chambers upon arrival, as the camp was intended to be a death camp. However, the Germans kept a small number of prisoners alive for enslavement in the camp. Prisoners kept alive for slave labor worked in the camp's daily operations such as sorting seized personal items, tending to the guards, working on expansion construction, and transporting the bodies of murdered prisoners. As with other concentration and death camps, Sobibor prisoners were treated brutally, given little food and water, and forced to sleep in tight quarters with few to no blankets to keep them warm. The camp held a strict and highly monitored routine, with role calls at the beginning and end of each grueling work day.

Sobibor Uprising

In the summer of 1943, a group of prisoners formed an underground resistance, motivated by rumors that camp operations would soon be dismantled and all of the remaining prisoners murdered. Previous escape efforts were brutally quelled, so this newly formed resistance took special care to limit their members and keep their conspiracy quiet. For months, the group gathered intel on the operations of the camp, including the layout of the buildings and the rotations of the guards. In late September, a transport of Jewish prisoners of war from the Red Army arrived, bringing with them military and weaponry knowledge that would be a critical factor in the revolt's success.

Alexander Pecherskij, led the Sobibor revolt [Photograph]. Holocaust Museum LA Digital Archive.

Within a few weeks, one of these POWs, Alexander Pechersky (Pecherskij), stepped into the role of leader of the resistance and worked out a plan of escape. The plan was divided into three phases: preparing the assault teams,

silently eliminating the Nazis, and mobilizing all prisoners for mass escape. Pechersky's concept depended on the Nazi's confidence in their control over the camp as well as the reliability of the daily routine.

At 4pm on October 14th, 1943, a few prisoners informed Nazi officers that they found nice clothing and possessions for them among victims' possessions, calling them into the sorting room. When the officers and guards entered, the prisoners killed them. Using this method, prisoners were able to kill almost a dozen SS personnel in under an hour. By the time the prisoners gathered for the end of day role call, all guards that would have monitored them had already been killed. As the watchtowers were far away, this allowed the resistance to mobilize the rest of the camp for escape.

Alexander Pechersky stood on a table and delivered a stirring speech, which he ended by urging his fellow prisoners that if they survived, it would be their duty to tell the world about the atrocities committed at Sobibor.

At the same time, the prisoners rushed to the barbed wire, broke through, and began to run through minefields towards the forest. The remaining guards, though initially unaware of the revolt, soon caught on and opened fire on the prisoners. The resistance fired back with weapons they had collected. In total, three hundred prisoners fled the camp. Many perished in their escape, but about one hundred prisoners were able to make it past the barbed wire, through the minefield, and into hiding in local farmland and forest. Those who made it to the forest faced great difficulties, as Polish residents of the surrounding communities were often not willing to hide them and even turned them in to the Nazis.

The Nazis murdered anyone found assisting Jews, and they conducted an extensive manhunt of the area. Only fifty of those who escaped survived to the end of the war. The camp closed as a result of this uprising, and the Nazis raised it to the ground, planting a forest on top to hide the evidence of their crimes. As the most successful camp uprising in Holocaust history, the resistance at Sobibor represents an inspiring act of resilience and bravery.

Introduction to Holocaust Survivor Testimony

A Holocaust Survivor is a person who was targeted by the Nazis and their collaborators during the Holocaust and managed to survive. Survivors were displaced, persecuted, discriminated against, tortured, and dehumanized by the Nazis and their allies between 1933 and 1945. They coped and lived through extreme difficulties during this time.

Holocaust Survivor testimony and **oral history** are important components of Holocaust education and remembrance. They allow listeners to personalize the history and form personal connections and relationships to Survivors, each of whom possesses their own unique experiences.

Experiences of Holocaust Survivors included living in hiding, having a false identity, surviving ghettos and/or concentration camps, and/or hiding outdoors in forests or mountainous regions. It is quite remarkable that people not only survived horrific ordeals but were also able to adjust to normal society after the war.

Oral history of Holocaust Survivors consists of recounting traumatic memories. Thus, it does not always follow a chronological path or have a logical continuum. There is an importance in understanding that specific facts recounted in Survivor testimony may not be the exact same as those historians have documented.

When including Survivor testimony as part of Holocaust education, it is important to research and learn from additional sources to create a full understanding and an accurate historical narrative. Survivors' experiences are an imperative component to learning about the Holocaust; it is vital to remember the extremes they faced during this time and maintain sensitivity to how these memories are shaped.

Discussion Questions for Students

Watch the following clip of Thomas Blatt's Testimony, one of the few survivors of the Sobibor death camp, explains events of the Sobibor Uprising, and his own escape.

1. What did you learn from Thomas' testimony? What stuck with you about his story?

2. Sobibor was a death camp where thousands of Jews were murdered every day. What do you think Thomas and the others needed in order to escape a place like Sobibor?

3. Did you hear Thomas mention Alexander Pechersky's speech in which he ended by urging his fellow prisoners that if they survived, it would be their duty to tell the world about the atrocities committed at Sobibor? How do you think Thomas understood the "duty is to talk"?

4. Why do you think, in a moment in which a focus on survival is so critical, the leader of the revolt told the resistance that it was their duty to tell the world of the crimes against them? How would you feel hearing this speech?

5. What does resistance look like in this context?

6. Thomas ends with, “People should know about Sobibor”, why do you think people should know about Sobibor?

In the Jewish tradition, there is a command to learn about the past, called Zachor ("remember"). Zachor is not just about memory. It is also about positive action to make the world a better place.

1. What does it mean to learn about the past?

2. What is a story in your own life that you would want to pass on to future generations?

3. What is an "identity"? What is your identity, and how do you determine your identity?

Thomas Blatt’s testimony can be found at **https://vimeo.com/hmla/thomasblatt**

Holocaust Museum LA films are available to view at
www.vimeo.com/hmla

Biography of Thomas (Toivi) Blatt

Thomas Blatt in 1950, around 21 years old. (1950). *Thomas Blatt, circa 1950* [Photograph]. Holocaust Center Seattle Digital Archive.

The Polish Jewish community, as well as many other Eastern European Jewish communities, was diverse in its traditions and practices. Some families lived secular, urban lives in the largest cities of Eastern Europe, such as Lodz, Warsaw, Kiev, and Vilna, while others lived in small communities known as shtetls, where they often spoke Yiddish, in addition to Polish and other local languages, and followed a more traditional lifestyle.

Thomas (Toivi) Blatt was born April 15, 1927 in Izbica, a small shtetl in Poland, home to about 4,500 Jews. He lived a happy life and looks back on his upbringing fondly, as his family was surrounded by a tight-knit Jewish community. He attended a public school until the sixth grade and enjoyed spending holidays with his parents, younger brother and extended family.

Thomas describes the town as a typical “shtetl”, which is a yiddish word originally meaning “small town”. Shtetls were unique to Eastern Europe and were smaller to larger towns where the majority of the population of the town was Jewish. So anywhere from 60% to 90% to even 100% of the town was Jewish. These towns had a unique cultural style, rooted in traditions of Jewish learning and practice. Shtetls became symbols of Jewish life before the Holocaust, during which they ceased to exist.

Thomas was twelve years old at the outbreak of World War II in 1939, when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union divided and occupied his native Poland. In this division, Izbica and the surrounding areas were delegated to Germany, and troops immediately stole goods from Jewish shops upon occupation. By the end of 1939, the German authorities prohibited Jews from engaging in trade or leaving Izbica to barter with the surrounding population. Around the same time, the Nazis began forcing thousands of Jews into Izbica from western Polish towns.

Shortly after the invasion of Poland, the Nazis established ghettos, centralized, enclosed areas in which Jewish communities were isolated, making it easier for Nazis to control them. The Izbica Ghetto was the largest ghetto in the Lublin District and soon became a key transfer point, as the Germans deported Jews from across Europe to be murdered in the Belzec and Sobibor death camps. In accordance with Operation Reinhard, the Sobibor death camp was constructed in 1942, and Nazis began forcibly transporting the Jewish people of Poland to this camp.

Thomas recalls that, despite the Nazi's attempts to veil the murderous activities of the death camp, the Jewish community of Izbica knew what happened there, as thousands of people were sent to Sobibor, but none ever returned. Thomas witnessed a huge influx of transports of Jews from all over Europe, as the train station in Izbica was a central location in which people could be easily transported to this area and then sent onward to the death camps that were not too far away.

Thomas and his family created a hiding place in the attic of their house, which they hid in whenever the SS would round up Jews to be deported. However, it very quickly became clear that their lives were in danger and this wasn't going to be a feasible option for long term survival.

Thomas' mother, sensing the danger of staying in their hometown, was able to organize **false papers** identifying Thomas as a Polish non-Jew, and she put him on a train to Hungary. This plan was unsuccessful, however, as authorities on a train identified him as Jewish and placed him in jail. After six months, Thomas escaped and made his way back to Izbica. At this time, the Germans declared that no Jewish people were allowed to reside in Nazi occupied Poland, so Thomas and his family were forced on a transport to Sobibor. Thomas almost managed to escape being sent to the camp, but one of his schoolmates betrayed him by leading a Nazi officer to where he was hiding. The Blatt family was transported to Sobibor, in April of 1943.

Upon arrival, Thomas was one of the few selected for forced labor, while the rest of his family was murdered immediately in the gas chambers. Thomas found out later that one of the reasons why he was selected or why a selection for slave labor happened the day he arrived was because a large number of those enslaved had been killed the day prior.

Thomas was enslaved in the camp for months, doing various forms of forced labor, including sorting through personal items and cutting victims' hair before they were murdered. In mid-1942, the underground resistance at the camp selected him to be one of their messengers. At 4pm on October 14th, he told Nazi officers to go to the sorting area to look at items, leading them to their deaths.

Afterwards, all the prisoners gathered in the yard, and those who were not in on the revolt were informed that they should attempt to escape. Thomas recalls revolt leader Alexander Perchersky standing up on a table and delivering a speech, saying, "to those of you who may survive, bear witness: Let the world know what has happened here!"

Thomas Blatt's bowl from Sobibor. He buried it, along with valuables, shortly before the revolt.
Thomas Blatt's Bowl from Sobibor Death Camp [Photograph]. Holocaust Center Seattle Digital Archive.

The prisoners then rushed to the fence and broke through the barbed wire, battling Nazi guards on their way to escape. As Thomas was crawling through an opening in the barbed wire, his coat got caught. Stuck in the fence, he watched hundreds of prisoners running ahead of him hit the landmines placed around the camp. He later remarked that getting his coat stuck saved his life. Eventually freeing himself, Thomas ran where the mines had already exploded, into the forest, and eventually into the care of a farmer. With two other escapees, he hid under the care of this farmer for some time, paying his family handsomely for their service. However, the man betrayed them, attempting to kill them so that he would not be caught for hiding Jews. Thomas narrowly escaped, and with the help of a few kind non-Jewish people, he was able to survive until the end of the war. In 1957, Blatt emigrated to Israel, and in 1958, he finally settled in America.

Throughout the rest of his life, Thomas Blatt devoted himself to the documentation and preservation of Holocaust history, including writing two books on his time in Sobibor and interviewing other survivors on their experiences. Angered by the lack of information about Sobibor and fueled by Alexander Perchersky's inspiring remarks, Blatt assisted in the construction of the Sobibor model at Holocaust Museum LA.

Discussion Questions for Students

1. What did you learn about Thomas in this short biography?

2. How does Thomas' biography add to your understanding of the Holocaust?

3. How old was Thomas Blatt during the uprising and escape? How might his age have impacted his experience?

4. What does it mean to take on a false identity?

Learning From Thomas' Testimony

As one of the fewer than 50 survivors of Sobibor, Thomas' witness account is critical in the remembrance of the over 200,000 lives that were taken there. His story not only represents bravery and strength in the face of adversity but a commitment to the need for education in order to both remember the past and create a better future.

Have your students read the following testimony.

What does the beginning of Thomas' testimony tell you about what Jews already knew by Spring 1943?

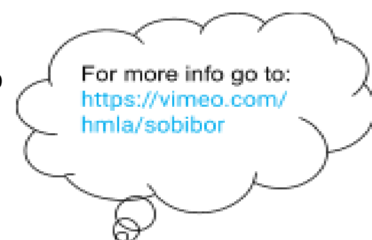
"On April 28, 1943, our little town Izbica, was surrounded and older Jewish inhabitants, were taken to the marketplace, loaded to trucks and taken away.

From the beginning, we didn't know that the trucks are going to Sobibor.

But still, we hoped maybe, maybe to a concentration camp.

A lot of people knew about concentration camps. But beside the concentration camps, people died of hunger, of beatings, there were special death factories, extermination camps, which existed under a codename "Operation Reinhard".

In a death camp, you had no choice- you were there to die. When a transport arrived, a thousand, two thousand people, the train was pushed into the camp. Half an hour later, it'd go out empty and the people already were in the gas chambers without any selections.



I arrived with my family- my brother, my mother, my father on the 28th of April.

And at that time, they needed some people- Sobibor was expanding- and they took out 40 people from my transport.

And they took me out too. The rest- my family, my mother- two hundred Jews were taken immediately to the gas chamber and killed.

I was working there until we revolted and escaped the prisoners.

A lot of people say it can't be, it's impossible to kill so many people, 6 million, in such a short time"

Why do you think Thomas says: 'A lot of people say it can't be, it's impossible to kill so many people, 6 million, in such a short time.'? How do you think it makes him feel?

"So I will explain how it was possible, how very efficient the death machine did work and I will explain this under the example of a transport of Dutch people from Holland.

Usually a transport of about 2,300 Jews from Holland arrived in the morning and stopped in a little train station called Sobibor. When a transport arrived, this gate was opened and the train was pushed in inside. The train was pushed in, into the camp, people were told to step down and later, they were told to leave their heavy luggage- which would be returned later- and go farther down.

Why do you think the Nazis told the arriving Jews that they would receive their luggage later?

This way here, turn left and this was a hallway between barbed wires. They went straight this way to this big barrack.

This was a barrack for horses, military horses, converted to sleeping quarters.

Here some people, especially women had still their handbags, men had still their wallets, and so and so they were told to leave everything in this barrack. The people didn't know what's happen with them and here I've seen in their eyes some surprise.

I mean, women mostly have in their handbags valuable stuff and now they told them, leave it. I've seen in the eyes some kind of worry but nevertheless, they left the handbags and went straight out from this barrack to this yard.

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They went to the yard and while they were in the yard, a Nazi, in a white uniform pretending to be a doctor, stood on this balcony and had a short talk.

What types of items would people keep with them despite being told to leave everything? Why do you think?

He nicely, quietly apologized for the 3 day trip from Holland, what is it now, you are in a nice place.

Because Sobibor, otherwise, was like a nice village. He said "here you will spend the rest of your time till the end of the war. But now, because of sanitary reasons, you must have a shower. And after the shower, you will go to your quarters."

What tactics did the Nazis use to control their victims?

Many people not knowing what happened, believing what the Nazi said, clapped Bravo, and undressed themselves and while they were undressing themselves here the handbags were taken out to these two barracks where we prisoners were sorting.

We'd take out a handbag, we turn it over, everything went down on the tables, they had low low tables, and we sorted, lipstick to lipstick, money to money, papers, documents, we threw out in a big blanket and later was taken to this place where it was burned.

So the people undressed themselves under the canopy so if it's raining the clothing shouldn't be wet. They went straight to this alley, here was a guard who asked to leave if he noticed it, a gold ring or whatever or earrings, to leave the valuables here. And the people went straight over there.

After the polite speech of the Nazi pretending to be a doctor, they undressed themselves nicely, and being nude, they went along this hallway which the Germans called Himmel Von Strasse which meant "The Road to Heaven".

The women went here to this barrack, and here their hair was shorn…When they were in the gas chambers, I am sure they didn't know that they will die in minutes…I wasn't allowed to go farther only to this doors leading to the gas chambers.

But I could hear the screams, feel they had the engines working, engines from an old tank as I found out later.

The fumes, the exhaust fumes were directed to the gas chambers and were killed through the carbon monoxide.

The screams was loud for about ten minutes, and then it got quiet, quieter until it was completely quiet, people were dead and they would be taken out through the doors and taken here and cremated.

Now, so this was, this was routine it didn't take long except how long the gassing took. Now, here were a lot of clothing and we need to clean it up fast because another train was waiting in the train station…"

What systems (structures, methods, plans) were used to carry out the Final Solution at Sobibor?

Discussion Questions for Students

1. How did you feel hearing about a death camp and mass killings from a survivor? What did it add to your understanding of the Final Solution?
2. Why were death (extermination) camps formed? Reflecting on Thomas' testimony, why do you think the term "industrialized mass murder" was used to describe the death camps?
3. Thomas' story demonstrates how rare it was for Jews to survive the Holocaust;he was one of only 50 out of over 200,000 who were spared from the gas chamber at Sobibor. How does this statistic reflect the plans the Nazis had for Jews?
4. Choose a moment from the excerpt that you think represents a turning point in Thomas' life. How do you think this moment changed his perception of the world, relationships, life, other people, or even himself?

INTRODUCING THE MODEL TO YOUR STUDENTS

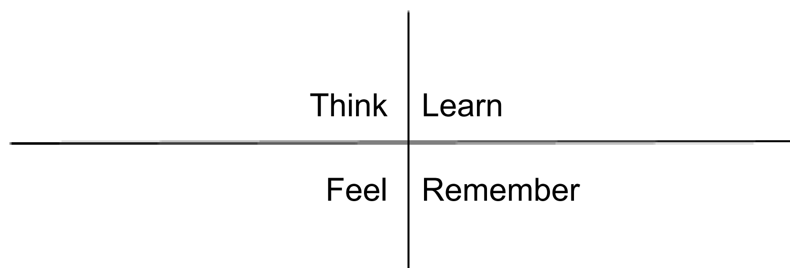
“The model, this story, is not intended to be a tool for self pity. It is intended to be a warning for humanity…to be on guard against forces of darkness - to be on guard against blind hatred and prejudice.” – Thomas Blatt

We suggest you inform students that they will be interacting with a virtual model of an artifact of the Museum’s collection, which was built by hand to represent the death camp, Sobibor, located in modern day Poland. Have students reflect before viewing this content to help them emotionally process the impactful material.

The subject of the Holocaust is difficult beyond words, and Thomas, like many other survivors, volunteered his time to put together this model and share it because he understood the value of his personal testimony in the remembrance of these horrific events. These deeply personal and emotional events can help foster empathy in students.

We recommend that you create a space for students to have a wide range of reactions and emotions.

Have students write what they think they will think, learn, feel, and remember.
Use components of this guide to provide context prior to viewing. It is important to understand the historical implications of the Holocaust, specifically in the context of this model.



Consider the following questions before you view the AR app of Sobibor Camp with your class:

- What background do your students have on the history of the Holocaust?
- What do your students know about Holocaust Survivor testimony?
- How may interacting with an app differ from reading about a Survivor's testimony?
- How can interacting with a virtual concentration camp change your students' perspective?

Digital Media Ethics

When teaching the Holocaust using digital media, it is crucial to adhere to certain ethical guidelines to ensure respectful and accurate representation.

Make responsible methodological choices:

- Graphic material should be used judiciously and only to the extent necessary to achieve the objective of the lesson.
- Do not use simulation exercises. Even when great care is taken to prepare a class for such an activity, simulating experiences from the Holocaust remains pedagogically unsound. The activity may engage people, but they often forget the purpose of the lesson and can be left with the impression that they now know what it was like to suffer or even to participate in the Holocaust. We will never know what it is like.
- Approach the topic with sensitivity, empathy, and respect for the victims, survivors, and their families. Avoid sensationalism or any form of content that may exploit the suffering of individuals or trivialize the Holocaust.
- Avoid altering or manipulating historical images or footage in a way that distorts the truth.

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Exploring the Model

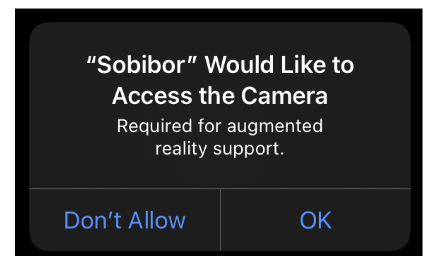
This model was built as a way to combat Holocaust denial, a reminder to humanity, and remember the hundreds of thousands of lives that were taken in Sobibor. Denial is considered the final stage of genocide, and the Nazi Government's attempt to hide their crimes at Sobibor is an example of denial during the Holocaust.

Take some time to allow your students to explore the model and read the blurbs. Make sure that they gain an understanding of the basic layout of the camp.

Sobibor AR Exhibit: Step-by-Step Tutorial

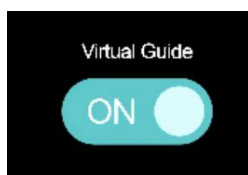
1. Download the app on the Apple App Store on either your iPad or iPhone either by searching **"Sobibor AR Exhibit"** or using this QR code

2. Tap the icon to open the app

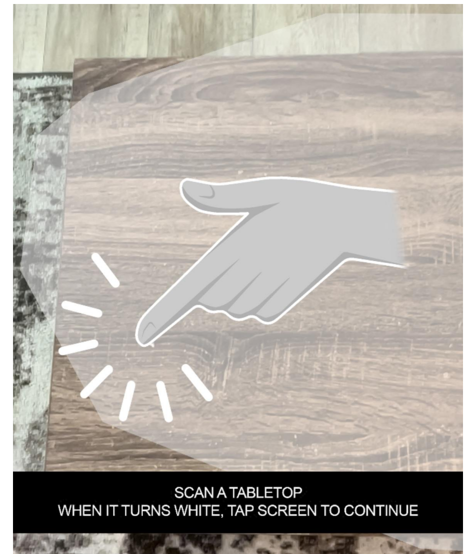


3. Give the app permission to use your device's camera by pressing **"OK"**

4. In the top left corner of your screen, choose to turn **ON** or **OFF** the Virtual Guide. We recommend using the Virtual Guide the first time you use the app. But it does have audio, so if students are exploring the app independently, we recommend they wear headphones



5. Hold the device above a desk, table, or the floor, pointing the device's camera at the surface



6. Follow the instructions on screen: Wait for the AR to spawn a **translucent white shape** on top of the surface in front of you. Then, **tap** the screen.

7. Pinch the screen to zoom in or out of the model, or to relocate the model on your chosen surface

Exploring the Model: Guided Questions

This exercise could be given as a class activity or homework individually or broken up for jigsaw learning.

Have students explore the AR representation of the Sobibor Model from Holocaust Museum LA's collection.

Students can see the path of the victims in the model. Start at the gate in the corner, where the train tracks lead into the camp. Victims arrived at the camp packed into cattle cars. They left the cattle cars and proceeded up the path which curves gradually towards the other corner of the camp. Students can see the barbed wire on either side of the path, giving the victims only one way to walk.

While passing along the path, the victims were forced to remove their clothing. At the top of the path, farthest from the train tracks, their heads were shaved. They then proceeded through another gate, into the area of the gas chambers. They were forced into the chambers and killed, within hours of their arrival.

Click on number 18, The Barrack for Sorting Hand Luggage.

1. What is happening here? What do the photographs represent?

2. Why do you think the Germans collected the prisoners' belongings? What did they do with them?

3. What types of belongings did they sort? Why do you think they went through the belongings of victims?

4. What do you think makes an item valuable to someone?

Find number 22, The Incinerator.

1. What types of items were selected to be burned and destroyed?

2. Why do you think they choose to burn these personal items instead of collecting them at the Barrack for Sorting Hand Luggage?

3. Why do you think the Nazis felt threatened by the existence of these items?

4. Think about the stages of genocide, how does this action fit into this?

5. What does this teach us about the importance of remembrance of people's identities and names?

Identify 24, The Barrack for Cutting Women's Hair.

1. How does altering someone's appearance against their will affect their sense of identity and human dignity?

2. Why would the Nazi guards have women's hair cut?

Find Number 39, it represents The Barrack for Male Prisoners.

1. Who was Thomas Blatt? What was his role in the camp?

2. How were the conditions in the barrack?

3. How did Thomas Blatt resist the Nazi guards?

Explore a few of the numbers related to the camp guards: 5. Living Quarters for Nazi SS Guards; 47. Watchtower; and 48. Nazi SS Guard with German Shepherd.

1. Describe the photographs you see at these stops. What does it tell you about the guards at Sobibor?

2. How did the Nazis establish control in Sobibor?

3. Why do you think there were so many guards stationed around the property?

4. How did the guards normalize their daily lives despite engaging in mass murders?

5. How was the camp designed to facilitate “systematic” murder?

Number 49 represents the Transport Trains that brought Jewish victims to Sobibor from as close as neighboring Polish villages to far away cities in the Netherlands. The European rail network played a crucial role in the implementation of the Final Solution. Jews from across countries occupied by Germany and their collaborators were deported by railroad to killing centers in occupied Poland, where they were killed.

The Germans attempted to disguise their intentions, referring to deportations as "resettlement to the east." Victims were told they were to be taken to labor camps, but in reality, from 1942 onward, deportation meant transit to killing centers for most Jews. Deportations on this scale required the coordination of numerous German government ministries, including the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), the Transport Ministry, and the Foreign Office.

1. What was the “Reichsbahn”? What role did it play in the mass murder of Jews?

2. Read the information above and compare it to Number 49 in the app. How does this enhance your understanding?

3. How do you think the conditions for prisoners were inside the transport train?

Number 26 represents the Gas Chamber powered by a tank engine.

1. Why do you think the Nazis used euphemisms and deception for their plan to murder the entire Jewish population?

2. How did the Nazis create an industrial way to kill? Why do you think they did that?

3. What do the archival photographs in this model teach you? Who do you think took these photos and why? Has their meaning or significance changed?

4. Why did you think that the guards used tactics of deception and disguise regarding the gas chamber?

Watch the animation in Number 50 which displays a reenactment of the prisoners escaping the Sobibor Death Camp and highlights Thomas Blatt's story.

1. Describe Thomas' experience escaping.

2. How did the Nazi guards try to prevent the prisoners from escaping?

3. How did the Jewish prisoners escape? What was the result of the escape?

4. What happened to Thomas Blatt after he escaped the Sobibor Death Camp?

Discussion Questions for Students

After viewing the Virtual Sobibor Camp Model, have students reflect on the following questions to connect to larger historical narratives and themes.

1. What were your initial reactions to viewing this virtual representation of a 3D reconstruction artifact of a concentration camp? What did you notice? What stood out to you?

2. Do you feel like this enriched your understanding of the experience of Jewish people during the Holocaust? How?

3. Why do you think Thomas made this model from memory? What stands out to you when you look at this AR replica of the camp model?

4. What did this model teach you about Thomas' experiences? What did it teach you about Thomas as a person? Why do you think he donated it to a museum?

5. Why would the Nazis attempt to destroy all evidence of this camp? What does this tell us about the importance of remembrance?

6. Although Jews were already being deported and killed prior to the Nazi invasion of Poland, the systematic mass murder of the Jews began after the implementation of Operation Reinhard in 1941. How did circumstances for Polish Jews change between the outbreak of the war and the construction of Sobibor?

7. What do we mean by “systematic” murder? How is this goal reflected in the way that this death camp was designed?

8. How was the layout of the camp constructed to deceive the incoming prisoners? Why would the Germans go through such lengths to make sure the Jewish people would be unaware of their fate?

9. How was the camp constructed to dehumanize the prisoners who were forced to labor in it? How does the story of Thomas and the others who rebelled show you the ways in which people refused to be dehumanized?

10. Find the photograph of the bowl Thomas was given in Sobibor and reflect on Thomas’ memory:

> “Each of us was given an eating pot. The workday ended at 5:00. I picked up my aluminum pot from under the pillow of my bunk and joined the others in line for supper. When my turn came, the cook at the dispensary poured out 16 ounces of black liquid that tasted like lightly sweetened warm water. I received dark bread with a warning that it should last me until the next evening.”

Consider what this bowl meant to Thomas. He buried his bowl before the escape and unearthed it after the Holocaust. Did the meaning of the bowl change for him? Thomas stated that he retrieved this bowl as evidence “for all those left behind.” What do you think he means?

Object Share Activity

At Holocaust Museum LA, we understand the power that primary sources and personal narratives offer students in their quest to better understand history. With this in mind, we invite you to ask your students to bring an object to share with the class that illuminates something meaningful about their identity, family history, or cultural heritage. Students may choose to bring an artifact that connects them to their individual identity, their hobbies or passions, or their family’s narrative. In the past, participants have brought everything from a baseball bat that a grandparent used in his professional baseball career, to a final piece of art painted by a loved one, to a map of a grandparent's journey to America.

Object Shares demonstrate how we use inquiry-based, student-centered techniques when teaching about Holocaust history at the Museum. The activity also establishes the idea that each member of the community has an important story to tell, similar to the mission of the founding Survivors of Holocaust Museum LA when they established the Museum in 1961. The belief in the sharing of personal narratives within a broader historical context is the foundation for our educational programming and serves as a basis to begin teaching about the Holocaust and relaying the universal and valuable lessons learned.

Object: A material thing that can be seen and touched

Artifact: An item of cultural or historical interest

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CREATING HISTORICAL NARRATIVES: ARTIFACT-BASED INQUIRY WORKSHEETS

These worksheets contain images of artifacts, primary sources, and documents from the Holocaust Museum LA Archival Collection, maps from the Routledge Atlas of the Holocaust, and a song based on testimony from Thomas Blatt. Each primary source directly relates to and creates historical context for the interactive Sobibor map. By utilizing different sources, historians, educators, and students can create historical narratives, providing a fuller understanding of this complex history. Holocaust history is multi-layered and intricate; therefore, this case-study exercise will allow your students to gain a better understanding of the larger history by creating a micro-history that focuses on a specific narrative and experience.

We recommend that you use the primary sources and suggested artifact-based inquiry questions in the following pages with your students in the classroom. Encourage them to think analytically about the sources presented and how they directly and indirectly relate to Thomas Blatt's personal history, what they have learned about Sobibor, and to the larger context of the Holocaust.

Map Exercise #1

Anti-Jewish Violence in Europe During Interwar

Map of deaths of Jewish individuals due to anti-Jewish violence in Europe during the interwar period (1918-1932).

Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish violence did not begin with the Holocaust, nor did they end with it. Judaism is a 4,000-year-old religion, and Jewish people lived across Europe, Asia, and North Africa for thousands of years before World War II. They faced attacks, expulsions, discriminatory laws, and even murder in each century. The numbers on this map represent the number of Jewish people killed because of their Jewish identity in each area between the two world wars, a time known as the **interwar period**.

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Identify the country and area Thomas Blatt lived in. What do you learn about the social environment during his formative years based on this map?

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What does this map teach you about antisemitism?

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Map Exercise #2

Map of Non-aggression Pact

Map of the German-Soviet division of Poland as agreed upon in the Non-aggression Pact. Land to the right of the demarcation line was allotted to the Soviet Union, while land to the left was allotted to Germany.

Thomas Blatt grew up in Izbica, a small shtetl close to the city of Lublin.

Which country annexed the part of Poland in which Thomas Blatt lived? What were the implications for Thomas and his family at this time?

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Note the mass movement of people from the Nazi occupied region of Poland across the "Eastern Frontier." What could explain this mass migration? How does the movement of people impact the transmission of knowledge and news?

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Map Exercise # 3

Invasion of Soviet Union and Beginning of Mass Murder

This map depicts how during the first weeks of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, killing squads engaged in mass murder in conjunction with the army advancement. This map shows only a small percentage of the killings, as for many places, specifically smaller villages, no records survived.

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Why do you think the Nazis’ mass murder of Jews coincided with the invasion of the Soviet Union? What do you think is the relationship between War and Genocide?

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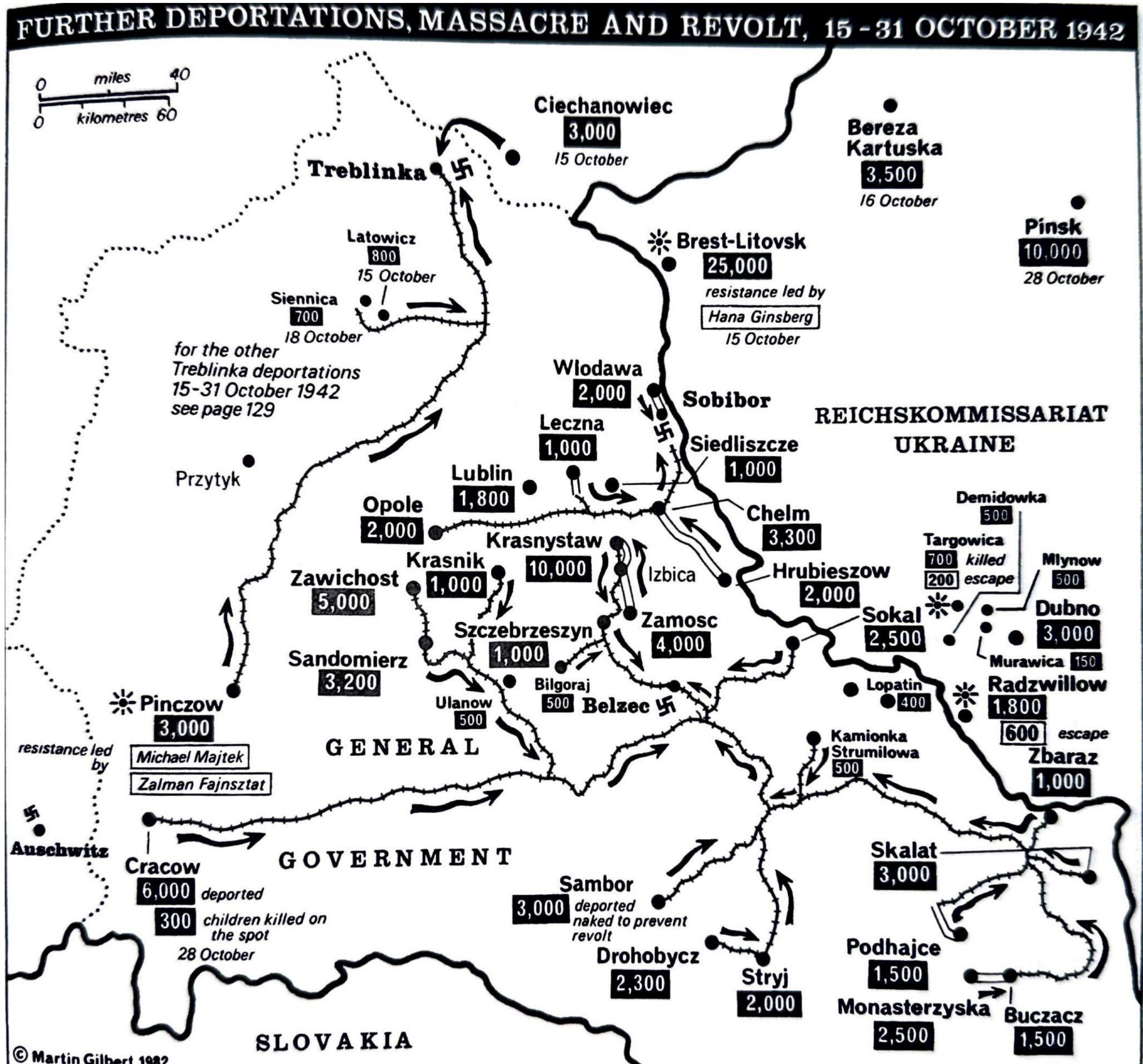
Map Exercise # 4

Deportations to Operation Reinhard Death Camps



Map depicting the deportation of Polish Jews to four different concentration camps: Auschwitz, Belzec,Sobibor, and Treblinka.

Identify Izbica, where Thomas was born, and Sobibor on the map. What do you notice?

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Look at the title of the map, what is this a map of? The Sobibor Uprising was a full year after the date of this map. What does this tell you about resistance, murder, and revolts during the Holocaust?

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Notice the rail lines connecting the different locations on the map. How do you think the rail road played a role in the genocide? Have you heard of any other references to trains, rail road stations, and rail lines during the Holocaust?

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Nazi Propaganda Worksheets

These worksheets provide an opportunity for students to dialogue and reflect on the ways in which propaganda affected society during the Holocaust and how it continues to affect people today.

Primary Source Activity 1

A Nazi propaganda postcard with a grotesquely stereotypical image of an eastern European Jewish man. The words in red read: "The Eternal Jew" (1938)

Describe the image of the depiction of the Jewish man on the postcard: What stereotypes does this picture represent? What is the man holding? What is the intention of this image? What feelings or thoughts are the Nazis attempting to evoke in the population?

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How did Nazi racial ideology give rise to the Final Solution?

Thomas Blatt and Alexander Pechersky were Jewish men in Eastern Europe. How do the photographs of them compare to the stereotypes depicted on the postcard? What does this tell you about stereotypes and propaganda?

Thomas Blatt in 1950, around 21 years old. (1950). *Thomas Blatt, circa 1950* [Photograph]. Holocaust Center Seattle Digital Archive.

Alexander Pecherskij, led the Sobibor revolt [Photograph]. Holocaust Museum LA Digital Archive.

Primary Source Activity 2

This anti-Jewish propaganda poster depicts a Jewish man standing behind the British, American, and Soviet flags. The poster was printed in several languages and distributed in the occupied countries to promote the idea that Jews were manipulating the Allied Powers into waging war with Germany.

Describe the image: What stereotypes does this picture represent? What is the man's expression? What is the intention of this image? What feelings or thoughts are the Nazis attempting to evoke in the population?

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Who is the target audience of this image? What reactions do you think people would have? What effects could this image have on society?

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Primary Source Activity 3

*Propaganda cartoon warning of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. The cartoon depicts a creature with similar features to Winston Churchhill and a **Star of David** over its head. The creature, which resembles an octopus, has its tentacles encompassing a globe and sludge leaking from the spots where its tentacles and the globe are in contact.*

Describe the image: What stereotypes does this picture represent? Why might the creature look similar to a world leader who isn't Jewish in real life? What is the intention of this image? What feelings or thoughts are the Nazis attempting to evoke in the population?

Who is the target audience of this image? What reactions do you think people would have? What effects could this image have on society?

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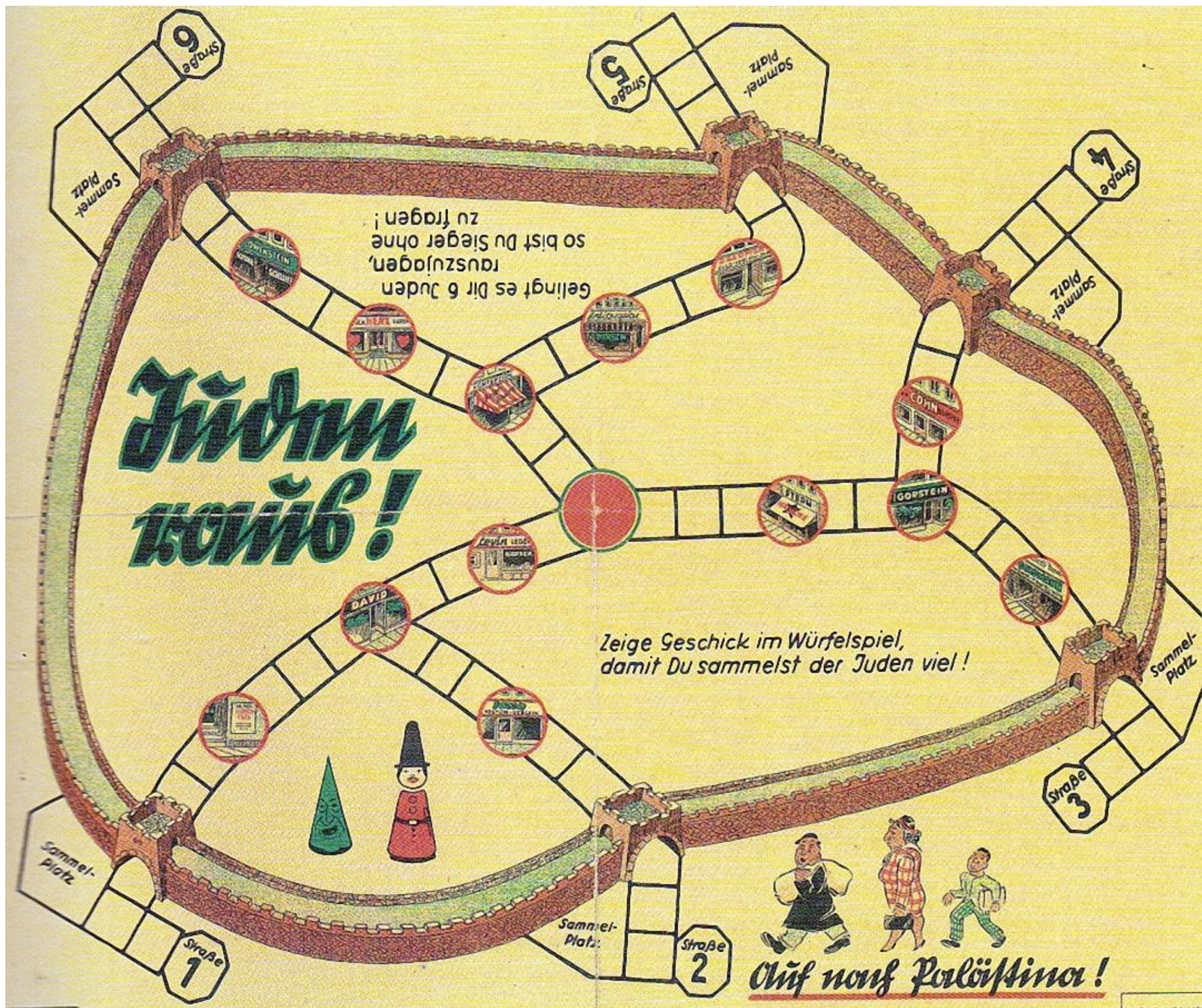
Primary Source Activity 4



The purpose of this "Jews Out" board game is to force the Jews beyond the medieval walls and out of the city. The first player to rid the city of six Jews wins the game. It reads: "Jews Out! Show skill in the dice game, so that you collect many Jews! If you succeed in chasing out six Jews, you will be the victor without question! Off to Palestine!"

What is the message of this Nazi board game? What are the graphics, symbols, and words that tell you that?

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Who is the target audience? What would make this game appealing to the audience? What reactions do you think people had? What do you think the audience will think, feel, or do?

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Discussion Questions for Students

1. How and why did the Nazis' propaganda messages work? What were the consequences of Nazi propaganda?

2. Propaganda was not invented by the Nazis, and it did not go away in 1945. It continues to be present today. Propaganda appears in a variety of forms, using techniques to indoctrinate like activating strong emotions, the simplification of ideas, and attacking an "other." Reflect on the following questions:

    - When is propaganda most dangerous?

    - How can you guard against harmful propaganda?

    - How do we identify what is propaganda?

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Izbica, Poland: Thomas' Childhood in Photos

Primary Source Activity 1

Photograph of Thomas' parents, Leon and Masha. This is actually possibly one, if not the only photo that Thomas had of them. It was one that he discovered after the war, in which they are seated in a larger group photo.

Why do you think Thomas had no photographs of his parents, brother, and family from before the war? What do you think it meant to Thomas to have a photograph of his parents?

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Think about how Thomas felt about this photograph before the Holocaust. How do you think the importance of it changed?

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Primary Source Activity 2

Houses on Lubelska Street in Izbica, Poland. Photo by Max Kirnberger, collection of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

A new town charter was granted to Izbica in the mid-18th century for the town to be established for Jews, which was probably dictated by the expulsion of Jews from nearby Tarnogóra in 1774. Though Izbica never developed into a larger urban center, the population grew due to its location between Lviv and Lublin. A Jewish cemetery was established in 1754, and the first wooden synagogue was built in 1819. In 1855, a stone synagogue replaced the wooden one at the same location. By 1939, the population of the town reached about 4,500 inhabitants, of whom 92% were Jews. Nearly all the Jews in Izbica were murdered in the Holocaust and the Synagogue was destroyed.

Izbica was a small town without a sewage system; water was supplied by a few artesian pumps and three wells and not all of the houses had electric lighting. Izbica was a town of craft and trade in which small tanneries, oil mills, and sawmills played an important role. In the 1930s, Izbica's only industrial plant was established – a state-owned clinker brick factory, where Jews were not employed.

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Voices From History

Thomas Blatt from “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre, Lublin 2004.

“There were some three oil mills and two tanneries, there were various kinds of shoe repair shops and tailor’s shops, there were locksmiths and mechanics, there were two sawmills, there were beerhouses, there were six libraries, there was a cinema, and there was an amateur theater. Cultural life was highly vibrant. There was a fire brigade in Izbica, with a Pole as its commander. Later, a Jew was the commander. When there was a fire, they would arrive with an extinguisher and pump the water manually to put it out.”

Describe Thomas’ birth town of Izbica.

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Creating Historical Narratives: Artifact-Based Inquiry Worksheet

Primary Source Activity 3

Photograph of Izbica Synagogue taken at the end of World War II after the Jewish community was killed.

Modern photograph taken of the remains of the Jewish cemetery in Izbica.

Based on what you learned about Izbica, what do these photographs represent?

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Right before the outbreak of World War II, over 90% of the Izbica residents were Jewish. Nearly every single one of them was murdered. What is left when a community vanishes?

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Creating Historical Narratives: Artifact-Based Inquiry Worksheet

Primary Source Activity 4

Public School Class Photo from Izbica, Poland. Thomas remembered the two women on either side of the woman with the hat as his teachers.

This photograph of a class photo is one of the few things Thomas can point to in order to represent his life prior to the Holocaust, as he had the same teachers as a kid. Why do you think this photograph would be important to Thomas even though he is not in it?

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Examine the photographs. Describe them. What do they tell you about life before the Holocaust?

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Voices From History

Thomas Blatt – a fragment of Oral History from the collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre, Lublin 2004

> *"My first home was in Izbica; this is where I was born. This was my inheritance – yerushe, as you say in Yiddish – my great-grandfather had built the house and passed it on to the following generations."*
>
> *"On a Saturday evening, when the Sabbath was over, I remember there was a tradition of everyone going out to the main street for a stroll, from one end to the other. Whole families. People would dress up in their best clothes and celebrate the end of the Sabbath. I would never go, but my mother always would, with my younger brother – she took him by the hand and they strolled back and forth. That was traditional."*

Thomas did not have photographs of his life before the Holocaust, but he had his memories. Read these two quotes. What can you infer? What do you think Thomas' childhood was like?

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Creating Historical Narratives: Artifact-Based Inquiry Worksheet

Primary Source Activity 5

Izbica Railway Station in 1938

Call back to what you learned about the location of Izbica. How does the history change your understanding of this photo of the Izbica Rail Road Station?

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Izbica Railway Station in 1940

Study this photo. Who is in it? Why do you think they are there? Who is missing from this photograph?

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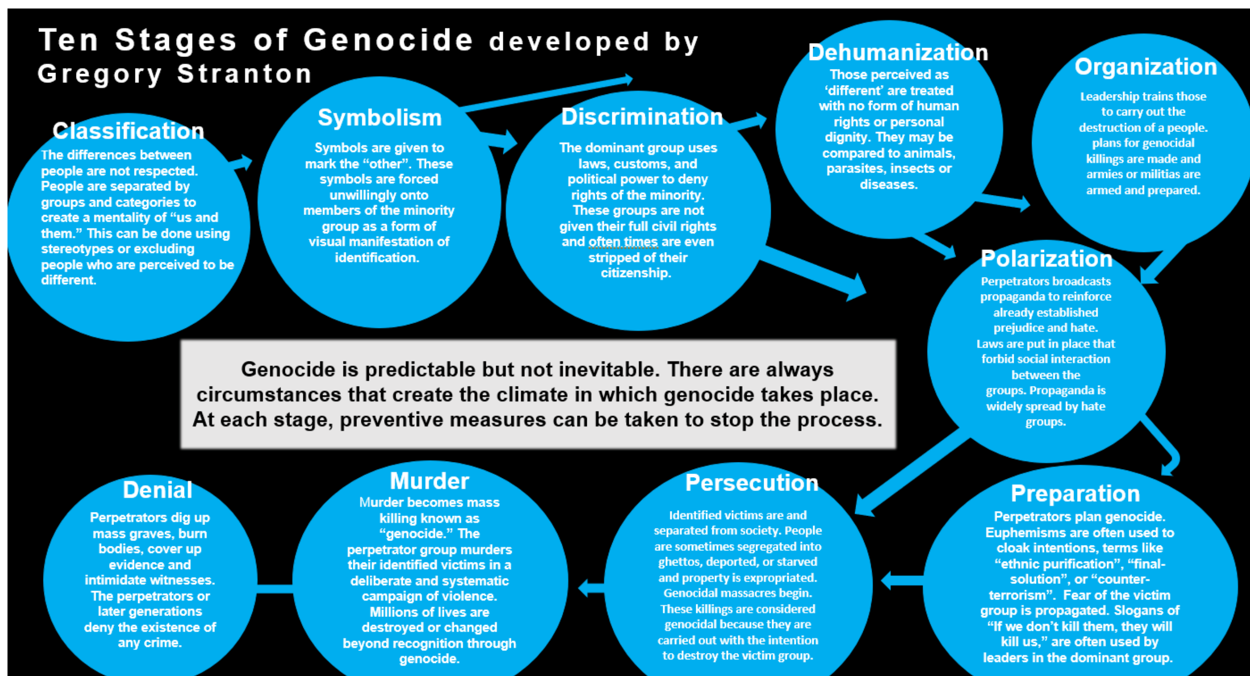
The Ten Stages of Genocide

Now we're going to dive into an activity that will allow us to better understand the lifespan of a genocide. After carefully reviewing the chart below, please complete the following reflection questions.



Look at the 10 stages of genocide. Does anything surprise you?

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How do the 10 Stages of Genocide underscore the relationship between cause and effect?

What does genocide erase? What do the 10 Stages of Genocide tell us about how we can fight against its occurrence?

Identify the stage of murder, what does it make you think? What does it tell you about genocide?

What do the 10 Stages of Genocide tell us about the role that the individual can play at each stage in preventing genocide from occurring?

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Why do you think denial is the last stage? Does that change the way you think about genocide?

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Mein Yiddish Mamme Listening Comprehension

Listen to the following song, "Mein Yiddish Mamme", in both the English translation and the original Yiddish version.

In his memoir, Thomas Blatt recalls a young girl singing the song, 'Mein Yiddish Mamme" at meal time in Sobibor. Many of the other Jewish prisoners, who came from different countries throughout Europe, joined in. At the time, this was a popular song among Jewish communities, and most of the prisoners in Sobibor would have known it. As you listen, think about the emotions the song evokes.

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How do you feel hearing this song? How do you imagine Jewish prisoners may have felt when singing it?

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Why do you think survivors talk about these moments of music within the camps? What can this tell us about the function of art and song in our lives?

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Can you think of a song that's important to you? Why did you choose it?

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Multiple survivors recall singing music as a way of banding together with their community in the camps. However, the Nazi guards also forced prisoners to sing cheery songs while performing difficult labor and horrific tasks like moving dead bodies. Why do you think the Germans would do this? How might this function to dehumanize the Jewish prisoners?

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You can listen to the English translation of Mein Yiddish Mamme at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nc42Ke0Pg6Y

You can listen to the Yiddish version with English subtitles at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DbzInoRitQ0

Sobibor Perpetrator Photograph Collection

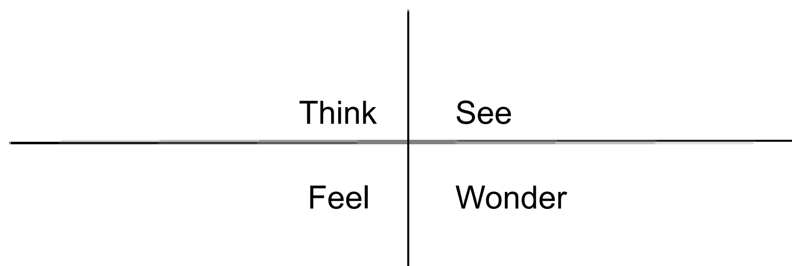
The Sobibor Perpetrator Collection provides an unprecedented view into the operations of one of the five killing centers Nazi Germany established for the sole purpose of murdering Jews. Created by the Sobibor Camp's deputy commandant Johann Niemann, this large collection of recently discovered photographs and documents offers new insights into the implementation of the Final Solution and the workings of Sobibor, located in German-occupied Poland, and in operation from April 1942 until November 1943.

The Sobibor Perpetrator Collection is an album containing over 360 black and white photographs, some in two albums and some loose, as well as dozens of paper documents that chronicle Johann Niemann's social background, his family, and his SS career, culminating in his role as deputy commander of the Sobibor killing center. 62 of the images were taken during the Sobibor's operation by the SS officers who worked there. The album also contains dozens of images and documents that depict the background and professional advancement of its creator, deputy commandant of Sobibor, Johann Niemann. Niemann was killed by prisoners during the October 1943 Sobibor uprising. Among the photos and documents included in the Sobibor Perpetrator Collection are images of smiling SS officers in the Sobibor camp, Niemann's family photographs, and postcards.

The Collection was donated to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2020.

"Critics warn against 'a danger of viewing the past only through the eyes of the perpetrators' because 'we risk seeing the victims as the Nazis saw them'."

In small groups, students analyze photographs from the Sobibor Perpetrator Collection using the See, Think, Feel, Wonder graphic organizer. As they observe, students remain aware that they are viewing "perpetrator photography" and consider the missing perspectives.



The entire collection can be viewed on USHMM's website at USHMM Collections Search and searching 'Sobibor Perpetrator Collection'.

Below are several of the 62 photos from File 9: Sobibor 1942-1943

About Photos

Left: Trawniki platoon (Trawniki men were Eastern European collaborators) standing on an open area of Camp I, circa March 1943. In the background, to the left side, the fire alarm tower from the pre-war era is visible and on the right the former forester's house which was situated on the grounds of the "Erbhof" and served as living quarters for a few German SS as well as administrative buildings. The building also contained a store room in which gold, jewelry and cash of the victims were stored.

Right: Johann Niemann on horseback in the summer of 1943. Niemann would often greet the arriving victims this way. At the bottom of the picture, the Sobibor ramp can be seen, which is where the deportation trains arrived. In the background is the residential barrack of the Trawniki men.

About Photos

Left: A view from the Vorlager (the German living quarters) towards Camp I and II, spring 1943. To the left of the high fire alarm tower, a pre-war structure, was the camp bakery. The arm of the excavator, which removed the bodies from the mass graves, protrudes over the roof. The later renovated barrack on the right-hand side of the picture served as lodging for the Trawniki men. From the watchtower on the left, they monitored the deportees on their way to the gas chambers. A foreign object can be seen on the camera lens in the upper left corner.

Right: The Sobibor camp gate in the spring of 1943. Jews from the region were driven through the gate into the death camp on foot, by truck, or by horse-drawn cart. The train track led through a separate entrance to the right onto the site. The pine branches, braided into the fence to make it difficult to see in from the outside, are clearly identifiable in the back.

After viewing the photographs from the Sobibor Perpetrator Collection, have the class discuss their thoughts on it as well as their reflections on Thomas' testimony.

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What did you see, think, or feel as you looked at the photographs in the Sobibor Perpetrator Collection?

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What did you not see? In what ways were experiences missing from the view of the photographer?

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What information or feeling do you get from Thomas' testimony that is different from the photo collection? How does this relate to the quote about "viewing the past only through the eyes of the perpetrators"?

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About Photos

Left: Johann Niemann on horseback (left) in winter 1942/43 in front of the officers' dining room at Sobibor. SS-Oberscharführer Rudolf Beckmann likely also on horseback. Standing on the left is probably SS-Oberscharführer Karl Frenzel, and beside him, holding a whip, is SS-Oberscharführer Erich Bauer.

Top Right: Erich Bauer (center) with an unidentified female. Franz Reichleitner on the left, Erich Schulze in the background, and Johann Niemann on the right. All are standing on the terrace of the officers' dining room in Sobibor, 1943.

Bottom Right: Heinrich Unverhau, Rudolf Kamm, possibly Fritz Konrad, Willi Wendland, and Johann Klier on the terrace of the officers' dining room in Sobibor playing musical instruments, early summer 1943 (from left to right).

How does Thomas describe the arrival, sights, sounds, interactions, and pace of activity at Sobibor? What do you think was the Nazi's purpose in creating such an atmosphere?

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What story does Thomas' testimony tell you? What is the contrast between it and the story transmitted by the perpetrators through the Sobibor Perpetrator Collection?

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Thomas never forgot the charge for those who survived the escape of Sobibor. They had a duty to tell the world what had happened to them. Students should consider their role as having a "duty to tell" and articulate two or three messages that they would want to tell based on their study.

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What conditions and beliefs allowed the Final Solution to occur?

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Who were the perpetrators of the Final Solution at all different levels of society?

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The Larger Historical Narrative

Using the primary sources in the Artifact-Based Inquiry Worksheets in addition to the virtual Sobibor Model, we suggest you utilize the questions below to create a larger historical narrative.

What experiences are covered in learning through this individual's narrative? Name concrete examples.

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What do these archival sources teach about the Holocaust?

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What does each source tell us? What do these sources add to your understanding of the past? What new questions do they raise?

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What does this microhistory study teach us about the larger context of Holocaust history? How can it be applied on a macrohistory level?

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What narratives do these primary sources tell when compiled together?

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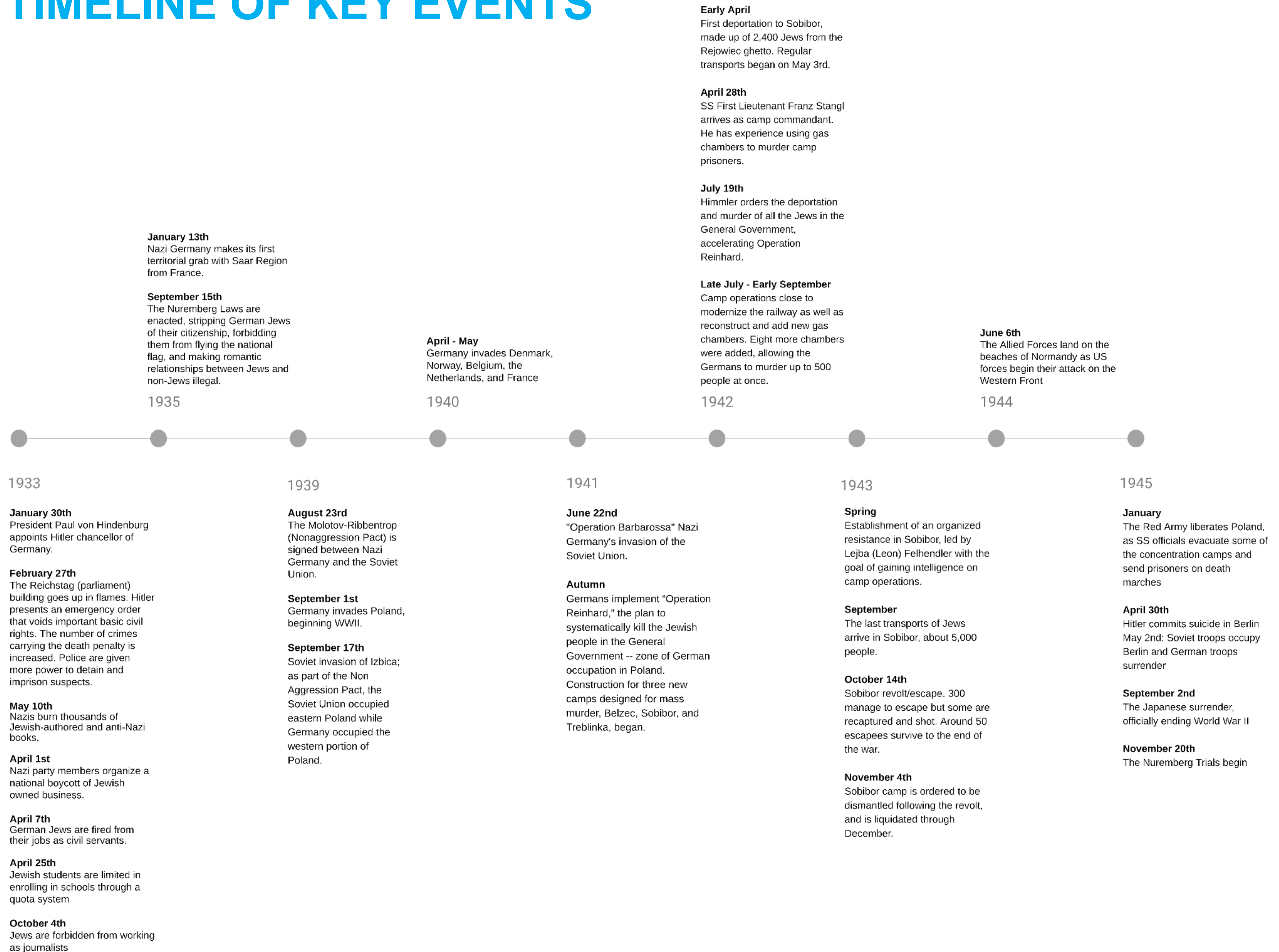
TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS



1933

January 30th
President Paul von Hindenburg appoints Hitler chancellor of Germany.

February 27th
The Reichstag (parliament) building goes up in flames. Hitler presents an emergency order that voids important basic civil rights. The number of crimes carrying the death penalty is increased. Police are given more power to detain and imprison suspects.

May 10th
Nazis burn thousands of Jewish-authored and anti-Nazi books.

April 1st
Nazi party members organize a national boycott of Jewish owned business.

April 7th
German Jews are fired from their jobs as civil servants.

April 25th
Jewish students are limited in enrolling in schools through a quota system

October 4th
Jews are forbidden from working as journalists

1935

January 13th
Nazi Germany makes its first territorial grab with Saar Region from France.

September 15th
The Nuremberg Laws are enacted, stripping German Jews of their citizenship, forbidding them from flying the national flag, and making romantic relationships between Jews and non-Jews illegal.

1939

August 23rd
The Molotov-Ribbentrop (Nonaggression Pact) is signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

September 1st
Germany invades Poland, beginning WWII.

September 17th
Soviet invasion of Izbica; as part of the Non Aggression Pact, the Soviet Union occupied eastern Poland while Germany occupied the western portion of Poland.

1940

April - May
Germany invades Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France

1941

June 22nd
"Operation Barbarossa" Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union.

Autumn
Germans implement "Operation Reinhard," the plan to systematically kill the Jewish people in the General Government -- zone of German occupation in Poland. Construction for three new camps designed for mass murder, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka, began.

1942

Early April
First deportation to Sobibor, made up of 2,400 Jews from the Rejowiec ghetto. Regular transports began on May 3rd.

April 28th
SS First Lieutenant Franz Stangl arrives as camp commandant. He has experience using gas chambers to murder camp prisoners.

July 19th
Himmler orders the deportation and murder of all the Jews in the General Government, accelerating Operation Reinhard.

Late July - Early September
Camp operations close to modernize the railway as well as reconstruct and add new gas chambers. Eight more chambers were added, allowing the Germans to murder up to 500 people at once.

1943

Spring
Establishment of an organized resistance in Sobibor, led by Lejba (Leon) Felhendler with the goal of gaining intelligence on camp operations.

September
The last transports of Jews arrive in Sobibor, about 5,000 people.

October 14th
Sobibor revolt/escape. 300 manage to escape but some are recaptured and shot. Around 50 escapees survive to the end of the war.

November 4th
Sobibor camp is ordered to be dismantled following the revolt, and is liquidated through December.

1944

June 6th
The Allied Forces land on the beaches of Normandy as US forces begin their attack on the Western Front

1945

January
The Red Army liberates Poland, as SS officials evacuate some of the concentration camps and send prisoners on death marches

April 30th
Hitler commits suicide in Berlin May 2nd: Soviet troops occupy Berlin and German troops surrender

September 2nd
The Japanese surrender, officially ending World War II

November 20th
The Nuremberg Trials begin

GLOSSARY

Affidavit: A document signed by an individual that outlines their financial responsibility for another person, usually a relative, who is immigrating to the United States.

Aktion (Action): German word meaning "campaign" or "mission." Used by Nazi officials for the purposes of deportation or execution of Jews.

Antisemitic/Antisemitism: Hostility toward or hatred of Jews as a religious or ethnic group, often accompanied by social, economic, or political discrimination.

Aryan: The term the Nazis developed to identify the "pure, German race." The term was used to describe non-Jewish objects and belongings such as "aryan homes" and "aryan papers." Identification papers at that time were required to state a person's identity as a Jew or non-Jew. For Jewish people to have "aryan papers" meant that they were in possession of false identity papers that did not label them as Jewish. People were required to always carry identification papers and often had to present them to Nazi officials, Gestapo, and police. If identification papers appeared to be questionable, the person could be arrested, interrogated, beaten, or sent to a concentration camp.

Aryanization: The expropriation and plundering of Jewish property by German authorities and their transfer to "aryan" ownership.

Assimilation: The process of which a person or group of people adapt to another culture's way of living and are absorbed into the dominant culture of society. Following emancipation, Jews, particularly in cities, often culturally assimilated into the way of life and traditions of the dominant groups around them.

Boycott: Social protest against a group of people or organization, many times aligning with certain ideals.

Child Survivor: A Child Survivor is an individual who was under the age of 18 either at the start or end of the Holocaust and survived under extraordinary circumstances.

Concentration Camp: Concentration camps served many different functions, but they were all part of the overarching objective to murder the European Jewish community. Concentration camps included transit camps, forced labor camps, and death camps. These were places of intense dehumanization, mistreatment, and death. Historians estimate that there were over 40,000 Ghettos and Camps across Europe.

Death Camp: The Nazis established 6 death camps, all of which were in Poland (Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, Belzec, Treblinka, and Auschwitz-Birkenau). People were murdered at all camps, but at death camps, people were taken en masse straight from arrival to be murdered.

Deportation: Forced transfer of Jews to ghettos, concentration camps, or killing centers. When being deported long distances, Jews were generally forced into cattle cars without food, water, proper ventilation, or toilets.

Displaced Persons (DP) Camps: A temporary facility for Survivors after the war, mainly established in Germany, Italy, and Austria. These camps were intended to help former prisoners of concentration camps by providing aid, food, medicine, or a place to live. DP camps are where Survivors began to rebuild their lives.

Einsatzgruppen: Mobile killing units. These SS units (divided into four groups: A, B, C, and D) followed the advancing German Army during Operation Barbarossa. With the assistance of auxiliary units and the Wehrmacht (Nazi Germany's army), these killing squads systematically murdered Jewish populations across Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Latvia.

Emancipation: Freeing a group of people that have been restricted socially and legally by the ruling class. Early European countries to grant emancipations were France (1791), Greece (1830), and Great Britain (1858). Despite Jews receiving civil equality in these countries, antisemitism and discrimination remained rampant in many parts of Europe.

The Enlightenment Era: Throughout the 18th century, a development of intellectual and philosophical ideas swept through Europe, creating spaces of dialogue that eventually led to changes in government, religion, and ideals.

Euphemism: A euphemism is a mild or indirect word or expression used to substitute for one that may be considered too harsh, blunt, or offensive. The perpetrators of the Holocaust often used euphemisms as a deliberate strategy to mask the true nature of the horrific events taking place. Euphemisms served to veil the true intentions and actions of the Nazis, making it easier for them to carry out their genocidal agenda while minimizing resistance or awareness among the victims and the wider public.

False Papers: In the context of the Holocaust, false papers were identity documents forged for the sake of posing as a non-Jew. Creating false papers was illegal and very risky.

The "Final Solution" (Endlösung): A euphemism for the extermination of the Jewish people.

Genocide: Coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944, the term describes the deliberate and systematic attempted to destroy the existence of a group of people, often a national, racial, ethnic or religious group.

Gestapo: The Nazi Secret State Police. Established in Prussia in 1933, its power spread throughout Germany after 1936, when it was incorporated into the SS. In German-occupied territories Gestapo held the role of “political police,” arresting actual and perceived enemies of the Nazis without judicial review.

Ghetto: The term "ghetto" has roots in 16th Century Venice, Italy when the closed Jewish Quarter of the city, called the Geto Nuovo (New Foundry) was established in 1516. “Geto" became the foundation for the term “ghetto.” When the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, approximately 3 million Jews lived in Poland. The Nazis began plans for the ghettoization of Polish Jews shortly after.

Interwar Period: The period of general peace between the conclusion of the First World War (1918) and the beginning of the Second World War (1939).

Kindertransport: After Kristallnacht in November of 1938, 10,000 Jewish children from the ages of 2 to 17 were allowed into the United Kingdom to escape the increasing violence. Children had to say goodbye to their parents, were sent alone to Great Britain, and were placed in family homes or orphanages. Most never saw their parents again.

Kosher: Jewish dietary laws according to the Kashrut detailing the types of foods allowed and forbidden and how food should be prepared.

Kristallnacht: Usually referred to as the "Night of Broken Glass." It is the name given to the violent anti-Jewish pogrom of November 9th and 10th, 1938. Instigated primarily by Nazi party officials and the SA (Nazi Storm Troopers), the pogrom occurred throughout Germany, annexed Austria, and the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia.

Liquidated: Clearing of the ghettos. Anyone left alive was rounded up and deported to concentration camps.

Nativism: Policies that prioritize the interests of native-born citizens as opposed to immigrants.

Nazi Party: Byname of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP). The Nazi Party was founded in 1919 and was taken over by Adolf Hitler in 1920-1921. The party was focused around strong nationalistic ideology with antisemitic rhetoric. Following the failed Nazi coup in 1923, the party had about 55,000 members. However, with growing unemployment and poverty in Germany, Hitler manipulated people’s plight for his own political gain. He became Chancellor ten years later and governed by totalitarian methods until the end of World War II in 1945.

The Non-aggression Pact/Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact: The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (also known as the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact), passed on August 23rd, 1939 and stipulated neutrality between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany while also secretly dividing the territories of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland between the two countries. In September of 1939, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia began occupation of their decided-upon territories

(see Map #2 in the Artifact-Based Inquiry Worksheets). On June 22nd, 1941, Nazi Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, breaking the Non-aggression Pact and invading the Soviet Union and land previously under Soviet occupation.

Nuremberg Trials: The first International War Crimes Tribunal. Judges from the Allied powers (United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union) presided over the Nuremberg Trials in 1945 and 1946, where 22 top officials from the Nazi party were tried for crimes against humanity. Twelve of them were sentenced to death for playing a direct role in the mass murder.

Operation Barbarossa: German code name for the attack and invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22nd, 1941. This operation created a two-front war for the Germans to fight and increased the number of Jews under German control. With the launch of Operation Barbarossa, and under the cover of war, the Nazi's systematic mass murder of European Jews began.

Operation Reinhard: Code name for the plan to murder 2,000,000 Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland. Named for top SS officer Reinhard Heydrich, who was one of the architects of the Final Solution and who was assassinated in Prague in 1942 by Czech Partisans. Operation Reinhard included the death camps Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka and ended with the murder of 1.7 million Jews.

Oral History: Stories or histories told by a person who experienced an event or time period first-hand.

Pogrom: The organized destruction of a certain group of people. Used to describe acts of violence and persecution against Jews throughout history. The word is derived from Russian, implying "havoc" and "to harm." Pogroms were carried out throughout the late 19th and early 20th century in Eastern Europe, inciting an influx of Jewish immigrants to Western European countries and America.

Propaganda: The deliberate spreading of ideas, ideology, or information with the purpose of manipulating public opinion to gain support for one's own cause or to discourage support for another.

Red Army: The military army of the Soviet Union.

Scapegoat: An individual or group unfairly blamed for problems not of their making.

Shtetls: The Yiddish word for "town." It refers to the small Jewish villages or towns, commonly found throughout Eastern Europe. Most, if not all, shtetls were destroyed during the Holocaust.

Star of David (Magen David or Jewish Star): A symbol often used by Zionists before World War II. The Nazis utilized it to identify Jews, often requiring Jews in different countries under their occupation to wear a yellow or blue Jewish star on their clothes when in public. The

implication of this was to identify, humiliate, and publicly shame Jewish communities and individuals.

Stereotype: A simplistic, firmly held belief about individual characteristics generalized to all people within that group.

Synagogue: Jewish religious house of worship.

Wannsee Conference: On January 20th, 1942, fifteen bureaucratic Nazi Party and German officials met to discuss the logistics of what they called “the Final Solution to the Jewish Question,” the code name for the plan to murder 11 million European Jews. SS Officer Reinhard Heydrich led the meeting.

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: During Passover in 1943, the remaining Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto learned that they were all to be deported to death camps. For almost a year, underground organizations made up of about 800 ghetto inhabitants had been preparing for the final deportations by stockpiling weapons and explosives. From April 19th to May 16th of 1943, Nazi soldiers and policemen fought with the ghetto’s resistance fighters, ultimately burning the ghetto to the ground. This was the largest and most successful uprising in any ghetto during the Holocaust and demonstrated the Jewish people’s continued will and fight to live.

Wehrmacht: Nazi Germany’s unified armed forces. Soldiers invaded countries and coordinated with the SS in regards to the implementation of the Final Solution.

The Weimar Republic: Parliamentary democracy established in Germany from 1919 to 1933, following the collapse of Imperial Germany and preceding Nazi rule.

World War I: Also known as “The Great War” for its extreme destruction and introduction of weapons, such as the machine gun and lethal gas in warfare. Occurred from 1914 to 1918 and was won by the Allies—Russia, France and Great Britain (later joined by the US and Japan)—and lost by Germany and Austria-Hungary. Per the Treaty of Versailles, Germany paid reparations to the victorious Allies, lost territory and colonies, and was forced to accept complete blame for the war. This, coupled with the Great Depression, led to economic devastation as well as humiliation throughout Germany.

Xenophobia: The irrational and intense fear or dislike of foreign people.

Yiddish: Language spoken by much of the Ashkenazi European Jewish population. A mixture of Hebrew and German with Slavic influence. Primary language in shtetls and sometimes spoken at home by Jews that lived in cities. The majority of Yiddish speakers perished in the Holocaust.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: California Common Core Standards

Middle School

1. Historical Interpretation
    a. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3: "**Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them."
        i. Students identify and interpret the multiple causes of the Holocaust: for example, the racism towards Jews that predated and laid the basis for the events of the Holocaust
        ii. Students analyze the effects of past events on present circumstances: notably, the anti-Jewish stereotypes that still exist today
2. Primary and Secondary Sources
    a. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8:** "Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text."
        i. Students approach sources about the Holocaust from an unbiased perspective
    b. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9:** "Compare and contrast treatment of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources."
        i. Students note where sources differ in their version of events and understand why they might differ; for example, students understand that trauma can impact one's retelling of an event
3. Point of View
    a. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6,9-10.6:** "Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts)." AND "Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts."
        i. Students investigate the differences between Nazi propaganda about Jewish people and about the war and accounts from Jews
        ii. Students understand the impact of propaganda on shaping the public's perception of Jewish people
4. Integration of Knowledge

   a. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7:** "Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts."
      i. Mentally place pictures in context with written and audio testimony
      ii. Students understand that a variety of sources are necessary to obtaining a holistic understanding of the Holocaust—testimony, images, etc

High School

1. Historical Interpretation
   a. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3,11-12.3: "**Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them." AND "Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain."
      i. Students understand the historical context for the Holocaust and know that very little is entirely unprecedented: for example, the racism towards Jews that predated and laid the basis for the events of the Holocaust
      ii. Students analyze the significance of past events on present day circumstances: notably, the anti-Jewish stereotypes that still exist today
2. Primary and Secondary Sources
   a. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1,9:** "Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific detail to an understanding of the text as a whole." AND "Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources."
      i. Students utilize both primary and secondary sources to gain a deeper understanding of the Holocaust; students appreciate survivor testimony for the unique lens into the human experience it provides
      ii. Students understand why sources might differ in their retelling of an event; for example, students understand that trauma can impact one's retelling of an event
3. Point of View
   a. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6:** "Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the author's claims, reasoning, and evidence."

i. Students analyze the differences between the Sobibor Perpetrator Collection and Sobibor survivor testimonies; students understand the implications of the destruction of Sobibor post-rebellion
ii. Students understand the power of manipulating public perception; in particular, students investigate the impact of propaganda on shaping the public's perception of Jewish people

4. Integration of Knowledge
   a. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7:** "Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
      i. Students understand that a variety of sources are necessary to obtaining a holistic understanding of the Holocaust—testimony, images, etc

Appendix B: Additional Resources

Join our Vice President of Education & Exhibits, Jordanna Gessler, and our Collection Manager, Christie Jovanovic, as they explore the story of Thomas Blatt and take a closer look at some of the artifacts recovered from Thomas' time imprisoned at Sobibor, as well as other objects in this collection that help to illustrate this incredible story of resilience and survival.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-JwzpwqUxc&list=PLWtMdN9wJkY6ebrH1oqbbfvcC6K37MBp6&index=13&pp=iAQB

In 1996 video footage, Jan Karski (1914-2000) describes his visit to Izbica Lubelska, a transit camp in Eastern Poland where deported Jews were held awaiting shipment to the death camps of Bełżec and Sobibor. Video footage recorded October 1996 by E. Thomas Wood, co-author of the biography *Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aax3pgdLJ5E

In the autumn of 1942, Jewish leaders who smuggled Karski into the Ghetto arranged for him to visit a German Nazi transit camp to witness Jews being herded onto trains, to be sent to their deaths. Karski entered the Izbica transit camp in disguise. Later he recalled this dreadful experience in his interview for Claude Lanzmann's "Shoah."
https://youtu.be/4rF0UKhShFw

The following are two brief but powerful videos on YouTube entitled “Past and Present: History Falsified” which record Tom’s return to Izbica and Sobibor:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLbc-cncpiU&feature=youtu.be
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v78KTbU922c&feature=youtu.be

After the war, Tom fought being dragged into the abyss of depression by the nightmares that came with his memories. Even then, he fought against forgetting. He did so in two remarkable books: *Sobibor: The Forgotten Revolt* and his memoir, *From the Ashes of Sobibor: A Story of Survival.*