

Lesson 11: Holocaust

Essential Questions:

How were the atrocities of the Holocaust encountered by Allied liberators different from the destruction caused by conventional warfare that they had experienced?



What is the importance of the liberators' firsthand, eyewitness accounts of concentration camps and Nazi mass atrocities?

Overview:

During World War II, Jews who lived in Germany or in countries that had been occupied by Germany were imprisoned in labor camps, concentration camps, and death camps. They were liberated from these camps by Soviet, British and American soldiers in 1944 and 1945.

The first concentration camp to be liberated was Majdanek. The prisoners in Majdanek were liberated by Soviet troops in July 1944. Soon thereafter Soviet troops reached other Nazi camps and freed their inmates. British and American troops reached Nazi camps in the spring of 1945, liberating tens of thousands of prisoners.

Our Holocaust exhibit touches on a very important topic in history. The Holocaust Museum in Boston or Auschwitz and Birkenau Memorial Museum (<https://www.auschwitz.org/en/education/resources-for-teachers/>) would be highly recommended for further resources.

Materials:

Reader Boards and Propaganda Video Screens

Prison Camp Uniforms

Deutschesbahn Railcar



Procedure:

Direct the students to read the Liberation, Holocaust Reader boards and Video Screens.

Discuss what they have read on the story boards and ask the students if there were any facts or information that stuck out to them.

Point out the quote, "Escape was not our goal since it was so unrealistic. What we wanted was to survive, to live long enough to tell the world what had happened..." Buchenwald Survivor ask the students to think about the quote and reflect on what they meant. Ask the students to discuss their thoughts about the quote.

Concentration Camp Uniforms



Discuss with the students who wore these uniforms and what they represent.

The black triangle meant the prisoner was asocial or work-shy. Examples that the Nazis defined as such; Roma and Sinti (known by the exonym Gypsies), alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes, vagrants, beggars, pacifists and conscription resisters. The yellow(faded) triangle sewn over the black signified this person was also Jewish.

Ask the students what they feel when they see the artifacts and who might have worn them. Ask how they would feel about wearing them and how they would feel about being marked like that.

Deutschesbahn Railcar

Introduction (1-3 minute):

Provide a brief overview of the Holocaust and explain the use of rail cars for transportation to concentration camps.

- Railcar Narrative Main Takeaways.
- German National Railway was a vital component in Germany's plan to carry out the European mass extermination of Jews, as well as Roma, the physically disabled, neuro divergent, LGBTQ, communists, Poles, Slavic and Anti-Nazi individuals and groups.
- Prior to the establishment of extermination camps, Germany's paramilitary killing squadrons were responsible for the mass murder of Jews and other groups deemed political dissidents of Germany.
- Once extermination camps were created, the use of rail cars were implemented to begin mass deportation of Jewish people and other groups to the camps.
- Railcars were used to transport captives to various locations throughout Europe.
- The rail cars were overcrowded, with some estimates being as many as 150 people in an individual car, like the one you see here.
- Sanitation was terrible, prisoners were subjected to deadly heat in the summer and freezing temperatures throughout the winter. The elderly and the very young often did not survive the journey and those who tried to escape were shot by armed guards.
- The young, old and sick were sometimes immediately separated and killed. Those prisoners deemed fit for work were utilized as slave labor in the manufacturing of munitions and other products necessary for the German war effort.

- Although it is difficult to know if this railcar was used to transport human beings to the Nazi extermination camps, it is certainly possible that this railcar was used to move victims of the Holocaust at some point in time.

Procedure

Observation and Reflection (2 minutes):

- Ask students to silently observe the railcar and images surrounding the exhibit and jot down their initial thoughts and feelings.
- Encourage them to reflect on the emotions evoked by the images and the significance of the rail car experience.

Conclusion

Reflection and Discussion (5 minutes):

- Encourage students to share their thoughts, insights, and reactions to the virtual experience.
- Facilitate a discussion on the historical significance of Holocaust railcars and their role in the larger context of the Holocaust.

