

Building to Genocide in Nazi-occupied Europe

The Stages of Genocide Applied to the Holocaust

Time: 60-90 minutes

Audience: 6-12th Grade

Learning Targets

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to...

- Describe how a genocide develops through the stages of genocide.
- Apply the stages of genocide to the Holocaust.
- Understand the power oral testimony has in learning history.

Aligned Standards

Common Core: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-12.1a-e

This curriculum is a project of the California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education. Established by the JFCS Holocaust Center, with support from a grant from the Marin County Office of Education and the State of California.

Context

The lesson should be placed inside of a World War II unit and/or after students already have context on the Holocaust. For a list of common terms used within this lesson, go to the glossary at the end of the lesson.

Materials Needed

- [Google Slides](#)
- [Handout 1 - Station Activity: Stages Through Their Eyes \(Stations\)](#)
- [Handout 2 - Station Activity: Stages Through Their Eyes \(Student Handout\)](#)
- [Handout 3 - Student Assignment](#)

Lesson/Activity

This lesson has been designed for in-person learning but has modifications for **virtual learning** noted in bold throughout the lesson. Please note, due to the challenging themes of hatred and discrimination that this lesson focuses on, it is recommended that students receive a trigger warning about the challenging nature of the subject, frame the lesson as a continuing conversation, and remind students of their options if they feel they need to take a break.

1. Before beginning this lesson, you will need to review the [Google Slides](#), decide how you will run your Station Activity ([Handout 1 - Station Activity: Stages Through Their Eyes \(Stations\)](#)/[Handout 2 - Station Activity: Stages Through Their Eyes \(Student Handout\)](#)) and determine if any additional scaffolding needs to be made within the Student Assignment ([Handout 3 - Student Assignment](#)) based on your past instruction and student knowledge of expository writing.

Please note, each station requires students to scan a QR code to hear testimony aligned with the themes within the station. Station 5 requires students to watch a video before diving into that testimony. We recommend breaking the students into teams with one device with them and setting up one laptop at Station 5 with the video preloaded.

Virtual? Flip your classroom! Record the mini-lecture on genocide and assign it to students in advance, enhancing engagement through platforms such as EdPuzzle or Pear Deck and focusing class time on the station activity and student assignment application.

2. **Slide 1.** Introduce the lesson to your students by informing them that genocides, like the Holocaust, Armenian and Cambodian genocides, were not created in one moment or with one decision, but instead, they were built over time in stages that could take months, years, decades to happen. One of the strongest tools in genocide prevention is genocide education. With this in mind, this lesson is about learning about those stages of genocide applied to the Holocaust.
3. **Slide 2.** Before going into these stages and learning more, it is important to be specific about language. Prompt the students to respond to the following question: *What is genocide?*

Teaching Tip! Not all students are comfortable sharing out in the whole class setting. To differentiate instruction for all learners, provide time for students to think, pair-share, and then, share out into the whole class setting.

With your students compile a list of the definitions they think constitute a genocide at the front of room.

Virtual? Place this list in the chat or a running document that students have access to!

4. **Slide 3.** With their knowledge (or perceptions) in mind, pivot the students to the definition you will be using.

After WWII, leaders, and activists set out to create international institutions, like the United Nations (UN), to build new laws, set standards, and enforce treaties that could prevent future crimes, like those committed in Nazi occupied Europe. Following the Nuremberg Trials, on December 9, 1948, the UN adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1951), which classified which defined the term genocide and classified it as a crime under international law.

As you read the definition on the slide with your students, highlight three key parts:

- For an atrocity to be classified as a genocide, intent to destroy needs to be proven; however, this can be difficult as evidentiary support needs to be produced for motivations to be confirmed and with the targeted group being intentionally destroyed, evidence is usually hidden or destroyed as well.
- Only one of the five genocidal acts needs to be committed for it to be classified as a genocide. It is common for multiple genocide acts to be committed during a genocide, and all five were committed during the Holocaust and currently within the Uyghur Genocide.

- Within the Holocaust the Nazis kept meticulous records of all five genocidal acts being committed against the Jewish population.
5. **Slide 4.** Creating this definition and classifying genocide under international law would not have been possible without the work of Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer. Lemkin who dedicated his life to the study of mass murder and holding leaders accountable to the actions committed within their states. Three particular events in Lemkin’s life led to the 1948 law and definition:
- In 1921, when Armenian vigilante Soghomon Tehlirian assassinated Ottoman leader Talaat Pasha for the atrocities he committed against the Armenian people, Lemkin entered law school to hold other leaders, like Pasha, accountable through law.
 - In 1929, Lemkin began drafting international law to do so.
 - In 1942, he coined the term “genocide” to better define his mission and the current atrocities being committed by the Nazis and their collaborators in Europe.

Did you know? Inspired by his mother and Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Quo Vadis?*, a book which delves into massacres of Christian converts in the first century by the Roman emperor Nero, Raphael Lemkin dedicated his life to understanding mass slaughter. This dedication only increased with the assassination of the Ottoman leader Talaat Pasha by the Armenian vigilante Soghomon Tehlirian, whose entire family was murdered in the atrocities committed against the Armenian people. Lemkin entered law school and studied Pasha’s acts of violence and questioned the legal nature of leaders acting with impunity within his state’s borders to commit mass murder. By 1929, Lemkin spent his spare time drafting international law to hold governments accountable of attempted annihilation of people based upon their religious beliefs, nationality or ethnic group. His ideas were first presented to his European legal colleagues in Madrid in 1933 as an essay entitled *Crime of Barbarity* and coined the term “genocide” in 1944 as way of advocacy for action against the Nazis. Following WWII, Lemkin advocated for genocide to be placed in international law to hold the Nazis and their collaborators accountable at Nuremberg (Lemkin, 1944; Lemkin, 1946; Holocaust Memorial Trust, 2024).

For more information on Lemkin, see *Did you know?* (above) or visit the *Supplemental Information* at the end of this lesson plan.

6. **Slide 5.** Genocides are built over time in a process of non-linear stages. Despite the numbers listed, being non-linear stages means that the stages can happen out of order and do not need to follow in number order. Regardless of order, all genocides have Extermination and Denial.

These stages were originally presented as a briefing paper, “The Eight Stages of Genocide” at the US State Department in 1996 by Gregory Stanton. Since, Discrimination and Persecution have been added to his original model.

The first eight stages are early warning signs. Until Extermination (symbolic for all 5 genocidal acts) occurs, a genocide can be prevented because a genocide has not yet taken place.

Teaching Tip! If your students need additional framing before diving into the Station Activity, pause the lesson here to involve the class in an activity to have the students define the stages.

7. **Slide 6.** Then, transition the students to the Station Activity. This activity is called Stages Through Their Eyes. It makes the stages of genocide come alive by applying them to the Holocaust using primary sources - archival photos and video testimony.

The students will need to visit each of the stations ([Handout 1 - Station Activity: Stages Through Their Eyes \(Stations\)](#)).

- There are 5 stations that cover all the stages of genocide as applied to the Holocaust; they do NOT need to be visited in order.
- Each station is designed to take 4-6 minutes.

Did you know? Roma and Sinti originated in the Punjab region as a nomadic people. Entering Europe between the 8-10th centuries, Europeans mistakenly believed both groups came from Egypt, calling them "Gypsies." The term "Roma" now includes both the Sinti and Roma family groupings, through some Roma still prefer to be known by the mistaken name Europeans gave them. Regardless of name, Roma were heavily persecuted both inside of WWII and outside of it by way of their nomadic way of life and religion - both Christian and Muslim (USHMM, 2021).

Upon arriving at a station, students should (1) Read the primer information, (2) Listen to the oral testimony of Holocaust survivors and liberators, and (3) Discuss and reflect on their experiences in accordance with the stage(s) of genocide with the guiding question(s) provided on the notes sheet ([Handout 2 - Station Activity: Stages Through Their Eyes \(Student Handout\)](#)).

8. **Slide 7.** After students have visited all 5 stations, begin to debrief student knowledge with the following questions: *How did your understanding of genocide shift across the lesson? Using the stages of genocide as a guide, how did the Holocaust occur?*

Teaching Tip! Running short on time? Divide your class in half with each half assigned to each question before sharing out.

As you debrief the questions with the class, revisit the stages of genocide on slide 4 and the definition the class composed at the start of class.

9. **Slide 8.** Close out this lesson with an application of student learning with a final written reflection in the Student Assignment ([Handout 3 - Student Assignment](#)).

The assignment asks students to choose one of the following prompts, responding to it by composing a 3-5 sentence expository writing paragraph and incorporating both a thesis statement and 1-2 pieces of evidence from this lesson:

- Option 1: Why is oral testimony an important tool in understanding history?
- Option 2: How did the testimonies viewed in this lesson help you understand the stages of genocide?

Next Steps? History comes alive through primary sources like those seen in this lesson. To learn about incorporating more archival materials into your curriculum or bringing a survivor of genocide to your classroom through our [Speaker's Bureau Program](#), contact the JFCS Holocaust Center (holocaustcenter@ifcs.org).

Supplemental Resources

- To learn more about what genocide is and what it is not in hopes of recognizing genocide in its early stages to prevent it, "[Identifying Genocide and Related Forms of Mass Atrocity](#)" (Straus, 2011) provides an in-depth analysis of the topic.
- To learn more about Raphael Lemkin, go to [Holocaust Memorial Day Trust](#).
- To bring more about the persecution of Roma and Sinti into your classroom, Facing History and Ourselves developed an interactive lesson plan, "[Targeting the Sinti and Roma](#)."
- To learn more about Holocaust Denial and Distortion, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) published a chapter within their *Antisemitism Uncovered* Series on the subject, called "[The Holocaust Didn't Happen](#)." It is a great starting point to go into depth on some of the themes that came up in the lesson.

Glossary

Antisemitism: Hatred or prejudice against Jewish people as a group for being Jewish.

Auschwitz-Birkenau: A complex consisting of concentration, extermination, and labor camps in Poland. Auschwitz 1 was established in 1940 as a concentration camp. Auschwitz-Birkenau (or Auschwitz II), the death camp, began operation in 1942.

Final Solution: The “Final Solution for the Jewish Question” often shortened to the Final Solution is a Nazi regime code-phrase referring to the systematic plan to murder every Jewish man, woman, and child in Europe.

Holocaust: The systematic and state-sponsored persecution and murder of 6 million European Jews by the Nazi German regime and their collaborators.

Judaism: a monotheistic religion, believing in one god. Individuals who are Jewish may identify religiously, ethnically, or culturally as Jews - or may not identify as Jews at all. Jewish communities may differ in belief, practice, politics, geography, language, and autonomy.

Nuremberg Race Laws: Composed of two laws, Reich Citizenship Law and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, that embodied many of the racial theories underpinning Nazi ideology. Their passage in 1935 would provide the legal framework for the systematic persecution of Jews in Germany, moving Nazi occupied Germany from a democracy to a dictatorship.

Racism: The hatred or prejudice against a person based on their race.

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A Jewish boy wearing the compulsory Star of David. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives. Courtesy of Czechoslovak News Agency. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Advertising poster for the antisemitic film, *Der ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew), directed by Fritz Hippler. Germany, ca. 1940. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives. Courtesy of Museum für Deutsche Geschichte. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Aerial photograph showing the gas chambers and crematoria 2 and 3 at the Auschwitz-Birkenau (Auschwitz II) killing center. Auschwitz, Poland, August 25, 1944. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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A chart of prisoner markings used in German concentration camps. Dachau, Germany, ca. 1938–1942. Courtesy of US Holocaust Memorial Museum. KZ Copyright of Gedenkstätte Dachau.

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Jewish children wearing the compulsory yellow badge. In September 1943, they were deported to Auschwitz. Antwerp, Belgium, 1943. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives. Courtesy of Yad Vashem Photo Archives. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi minister of propaganda, speaks at a rally in favor of the boycott of Jewish-owned shops. Berlin, Germany, April 1, 1933. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives #44203. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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Onlookers View the Damaged Reichstag. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives. Courtesy of Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Raphael Lemkin prepares for a talk on UN radio, probably between 1947 and 1951. Lemkin coined the term "genocide" in 1944. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

RG-50.030.0133, Oral history interview with Hanne Eva Liebmann (Hirsch), Oral History interviews of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC.

Samples of the Nuremberg Race Laws (the Reich Citizenship Law and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor). Germany, September 15, 1935. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Shattered storefront of a Jewish-owned shop destroyed during Kristallnacht (the "Night of Broken Glass"). Berlin, Germany, November 10, 1938. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives #86838. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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View of the entrance to the main camp of Auschwitz (Auschwitz I). The gate bears the motto "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Work makes one free). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives #00001. Courtesy of Instytut Pamięci Narodowej. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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