

We, Young Jews: A Jewish Middle School on the Eve of the Holocaust

The Notebook of Heinz Fischer

Time: 45-60 minutes

Audience: 6-12th Grade

Learning Targets

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

- Investigate the life of a Jewish Middle School student, Heinz Fischer, through reading excerpts of his notebook.
- Determine the implications or significance of using primary sources in interpreting history.

Aligned Standards

Common Core: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-12.2f

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

Context

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

Materials Needed

- [Handout 1: Primary Source Activity - Student Handout](#)
- [Handout 2: Primary Source Activity - Sources](#)

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, prepare the materials:
 - Each student will need a [Handout 1: Primary Source Activity - Student Handout](#)
 - Students will need access to [Handout 2: Primary Source Activity - Sources](#). We recommend printing Picture 1 separately from Pictures 2/3 to scaffold the activity, especially if your learners like to jump ahead.
2. Begin this lesson with a question to tap into past student knowledge and recontextualize the Holocaust within the stages of genocide: *How did the Holocaust occur?*

As the class debriefs, ensure the students are aware of two main ideas:

- The Holocaust was the systematic and state-sponsored persecution and murder of 6 million European Jews by the Nazi German regime and their collaborators.
 - The Holocaust occurred because of individual decisions made over many years rooted in antisemitism. Those decisions led to systematic actions and can be classified by the stages of genocide.
3. As part of the stages of genocide in the Holocaust, the German government passed laws discriminating against Jewish people. These were called the Nuremberg 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.

These laws were meant to oppress Jews. To name a few of the laws, below are a few examples:

- Jews who are German subjects had to apply for identification cards and carry them at all times,
- Jews could not marry anyone not Jewish, and
- **Jewish children could no longer go to school with German children and were forced to attend segregated schools.**

The example in bold will be the focus of the lesson today.

4. The focus of the lesson today is investigating the notebook of a Jewish Middle School child named Heinz Fischer. At the time the notebook was created, Heinz was attending a segregated Jewish school in Austria due to the influence of the Nuremberg Laws.
5. Pass out [Handout 1: Primary Source Activity - Student Handout](#) for each student.
6. Inform the students that the investigation will take place in 2 parts and within teams or groups of students. They will begin Part 1 by examining the first page of the notebook.

The procedure for Part I will be as follows:

- View the primary source.
- Discuss the questions posed with their team or student group.
- Share out as a class in 10 minutes.

Following all directions being provided, pass out Picture 1 from [Handout 2: Primary Source Activity - Sources](#).

7. As you debrief with the class, guide the conversation with the questions posed on their handout:

- What do you see? Make a list of everything you see without drawing conclusions.
 - What season (i.e. summer, fall, etc.) do you think it was when Heinz made these drawings? Why?
 - What conclusions can you draw about Heinz and the people in his life based on his drawing? Why? Explain.
8. Following the debrief, transition to Part 2 in which the students will investigate the second page of Heinz' notebook. On the page there is a poem written in German.

The procedure for Part 2 is as follows:

- View at the poem in German (*Picture 2*) and answer question #1.
- Then, the English version (*Picture 3*), and discuss and answer the subsequent questions.
- The whole class will debrief in 10 minutes.
- Like with Part 1, choose a different speaker for each question prior to coming back to the whole class.

Following all directions being provided, pass out Pictures 2-3 from [Handout 2: Primary Source Activity - Sources](#).

Teaching Tip! If your students need additional framing to approach a poem, scaffold the procedure further to add interpretation and analysis of the poem before moving to the subsequent questions.

9. As you debrief with the class, guide the conversation with the questions posed on their handout:
- What do you think the poem means?
 - What else about Heinz do you learn from this poem?
 - Sometimes, as a spelling exercise, Heinz's teacher would dictate a reading for Heinz and his classmates to write in their notebooks. Do you think Heinz was the author of this poem, or do you think his teacher dictated it to the class? Why? Explain.
 - Challenge: On September 1, 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland, and World War II began. The Nazis began to enact their racist beliefs in the territories they occupied by persecuting Jews and the Judaism that they practiced. How might the onset of the war have impacted Heinz or his teacher in what they thought about their Jewish identity?
10. End the lesson with additional information about Heinz by reading the following statement and prompting students to reflect on the importance of using primary source investigation in history (on their handouts):

Heinz and his parents, Gustav and Margarethe Fischer, arrived in San Francisco via Yokohama, Japan, on the S.S. Asama Maru in August 1940. Gustav died two years later. We believe Heinz changed his name to Harry, did not marry or have children. The middle school that he attended in Vienna - with his Jewish classmates and teacher - lives on through his notebook. This is the first time that his story is appearing in print.

Teaching Tip! Utilize their reflections as a jumping off point for the next class - a warm up could be a small group discussion to share out what they wrote before continuing to uncover the history of WWII and the Holocaust through primary sources.

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

- For additional resources getting started with primary sources in your classroom, [go to the Library of Congress](#).

Glossary

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

Genocide: Outlined by the United Nations in Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), a genocide is the following acts committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, in whole or in part: (1) Killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and/or forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

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.

Primary Source: A first-hand account of an event or topic. Primary sources are the most direct evidence of a time or event because they were created by people or things that were there at the time or event; they are original thinking and without any modification or interpretation.

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

Stages of Genocide: Originally coined by Gregory Stanton, the 10 stages of genocides - Classification, Symbolization, Discrimination, Dehumanization, Organization, Polarization, Persecution, Preparation, Extermination, Denial - are a way to standardize the approach of studying genocides.

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Notebook of Heinz Fischer from the Fischer Family Papers, 2002-1003, Tauber Holocaust Library & Archives, JFCS Holocaust Center, San Francisco, CA.