

TIMELINE ACTIVITY

OVERVIEW

This activity is highly adaptable and can be completed in a single class period, used as a point of reference throughout an entire unity of study, or have thematic extension activities added.

FRAMEWORK

Students build a timeline in layers. Each layer provides *content*, reveals meaning through *context*, and asks the participants to reflect on a new level of *complexity*. As each layer is added, new insights, connections, and questions emerge. The goal is not to definitively answer *how and why* the Holocaust happened, but rather allows students to formulate their own questions and arguments, based on textual evidence.

RATIONALE

Teachers often have limited time to teach about the Holocaust. This presents challenges to ensuring the content, context and complexity are adequately addressed. Building a timeline that integrates personal stories, key historical events, and Nazi laws and decrees provides a foundation to examine in a relatively short time frame how and why the Holocaust happened.

Each layer illuminates another, showing the incremental nature of persecution. It allows students to make inferences about the inter-relatedness of time and geographic location to the events that took place and promotes critical thinking about the impact on groups targeted for persecution and the experience of individuals within those groups.

OUTCOMES

At the conclusion of this activity students will:

- Define the Holocaust
- Understand that Nazis ideology targeted Jews as the priority “enemy”
- Recognize the Nazi concept of race targeted other groups for persecution, including Roma/Sinti, people with disabilities, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, and Afro-Germans
- Learn that political opponents and others were targeted as enemies because they either opposed the Nazi regime or their behavior defied social norms under the Nazi regime

- Identify that Nazi persecution of Jews and others gradually increased over time
- Examine how the events of World War II and the Holocaust are intertwined
- Make inferences about the inter-relatedness of time and geographic location to events and how that impacted individuals *and* groups

PREPARATION

The following links provide historical context for the lesson. The first two are geared for teachers and the rest are suitable for teachers and students:

- [Essential topics to teach about the Holocaust](#)
- [Guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust](#)
- [The Path to Nazi Genocide](#)
- [Animated Maps](#)
- [Encyclopedia - Introduction to the Holocaust](#)
- [Encyclopedia - Nazi Racial Ideology](#)

MATERIALS

Download and photocopy each set of the color-coded timeline materials.

- Years: 1933-1945. (Years of World War II are blue)
- Individual profiles
- Laws and decrees (Orange border)
- Historical events (Blue border)

PROCESS

Step I: Years

Prior to beginning the lesson with students, place the timeline cards of each year horizontally around the classroom.

Step II: Individual Profiles

Students work in pairs or groups. Distribute the *Individual Profile* cards and have students read for basic information, noting:

- Country of origin
- Gender of individual
- Nazi justification for persecution

- The year in **bold** that notes Nazi persecution of the individual
- Age of individual at the time of highlighted persecution
- Why do you think the particular year is highlighted for the individual? Would you have chosen another year? Why or why not? Are there other times when the individual suffered from Nazi persecution?

Students record their answers and share the information with another person or group. Following this, students place the individual on the timeline based on the year in **bold** on the card.

When finished, ask students to share the following from their individual profile stories:

- Countries
- Gender
- Nazi justification for persecution
- Year in **bold**
- Ages

Record the responses on the board. Ask:

1. What do you observe about the range of individuals targeted by Nazis for persecution?
2. Are people targeted from the beginning to the end (1933-45) or are there years with more victims than others?
3. What questions does this raise?

Step III: Laws and Decrees

With students still working in pairs or groups, distribute the *Laws and Decrees* cards for students to read, noting:

- Who does the law/decreed target?
- How could it impact an individual's life?

Students record their answers and then share their law/decreed with another person or with the group. Following this, students place the law/decreed on the timeline. When finished, discuss with the entire class:

1. Note the timing of the laws/decrees. Can you describe a pattern?
2. Considering the whole timeline with the individual profile cards and the laws and decrees, what assertions can be made? What questions does this layer raise?

Step IV: Historical Events

Still working in pairs or groups, distribute the *Historical Events* cards. After reading and sharing about their event in pairs or groups, students write one sentence stating its significance in relation to the Holocaust. Students place their event card on the timeline.

When finished, ask students to take a gallery walk to study the completed timeline and record observations. During this time students also revisit their individual profile card and list the laws/decrees and historical events that impacted the person on the individual profile card they studied.

When finished, debrief as a class:

1. What did you observe?
2. The individual profile cards are in clusters, as are the laws/decrees and the historical events. Why?
3. Choose some (or all, if time permits) laws/decrees cards and historical events cards. Ask students to indicate if the selected card impacted the individual on their profile card. Record the events with the most impact. What assertions can be made from this evidence?
4. Which events are pivotal to the Holocaust?

Consider:

- What is the connection between the invasion of Poland and Polish victims?
- When are Jews targeted? victimized?
- Gay men and political prisoners were designated for persecution victims early on. Why?
- When and where are Soviet POWs impacted?
- Can you see responses on the timeline? Who was responding? How? Why?

Step V: Conclusion/Assessments

1. Share the USHMM [definition of the Holocaust](#). Ask students to find evidence on the timeline that connects to this definition.
2. Based on evidence from the timeline, ask students to write one question about how or why the Holocaust happened that they can answer, using the timeline as a source. Share with the class. What questions do they still have? Do their classmates have answers to those questions?
3. Have students write a paragraph about *how* and *why* the Holocaust happened, citing textual evidence from the timeline.
4. Students select additional individual profile cards and using the Holocaust Encyclopedia research further, choosing at least two laws/decrees and two events from the timeline that impacted the individual's life.

ELA assessments

1. If your students are reading literature about the Holocaust, placing the events from the story on the timeline in addition to the existing layers provides historical context.
2. Anne Frank, Elie Wiesel, and Gerda Weissmann Klein are in the individual profile cards. What does the timeline add to your understanding of their story?