

I am sending home a packet of materials for you to work on over the "break." Please do not wait until the last moment. Try and spend at least 20-30 minutes a day working on these readings, handouts, etc. PS, there is no particular order. If you get confused you may email me.

Sincerely,
Morton

- Finish your Holocaust timeline. Make sure you are using ushmm.org. Also, 3-5 events per year with a brief description of each event, in your words. 4 class periods.
- Read the excerpt by Elie Wiesel's from *Night*. On one of the 3x5 cards in the folder and write 3 observations and/or questions in complete sentences. 1 class period.
- Read the handout on the Final Solution. Do the same as above on the second 3x5 card. 1 class period.
- If you have Netflix I want you to watch *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. Using your 3rd 3x5 card, write 3-5 Questions and/or observations in complete sentences. Please put some thought into them. If you do not have Netflix, do not worry. 2 class periods.
- Watch *Inside Auschwitz* on Youtube. It is a 9:36 short virtual tour of the Auschwitz death camp. Develop 3-5 questions. 2 classes.

Lesson 5 The "Final Solution"

STUDENT HANDOUT - The "Final Solution"

Introduction

Although the Nazis came to power in 1933, it wasn't until the second half of 1941 that Nazi policy began to focus on the annihilation and murder of the Jewish people. This evolution in policy coincided with Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. Historians note that on July 31, 1941, Hermann Goering, Hitler's second in command, sent an official order to Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the security branch of the SS, to authorize a "Final Solution of the Jewish Question." The exact meaning behind this order is still debated among many Holocaust scholars. Current research shows that mass systematic killing of Jewish men in the newly conquered territory of the Soviet Union began in June, and by August had spread to women and children as well. There is no surviving order by Hitler to expand the murder activities to encompass all Jews under Nazi control, but most scholars believe such an order was given in the autumn of 1941, or at the latest early in 1942. In the meantime, following the invasion of the Soviet Union, mass murder continued swiftly, and soon spread to Poland. By the end of 1941, many hundreds of thousands of Jews had been murdered.

Einsatzgruppen

The systematic murder of Jews began with the shootings in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union in June 1941. When "Operation Barbarossa" began, the Einsatzgruppen, special SS killing units, followed the German army, the Wehrmacht. Their job was to search for opponents of the Reich, including Communists and all Jews — and execute them. There were four units of Einsatzgruppen (A, B, C, and D) and the largest unit was composed of 1,000 men. These groups alone did not carry out the destruction of Soviet Jewry — wherever they went, ordinary German soldiers, German police units, and local collaborators helped get their murderous job done. By spring 1943, the Einsatzgruppen and their helpers had exterminated 1.25 million Jews and hundreds of thousands of others, including Soviet prisoners of war and Sinti-Roma.

The Einsatzgruppen killed their victims — men, women, and children — by gathering them along the edges of ravines, mines, ditches, or pits dug specifically for this purpose. First, they would force Jews to hand over their possessions and remove their clothing. Then they would shoot them and throw the bodies into ditches that often had been dug beforehand by Jews themselves.

The commanders completed daily reports of their murderous activities, which are still accessible today. The evidence of the murderous actions is also found in photos taken by the soldiers and personal diaries and letters sent back home to Germany, telling close family of their daily routine.

Among the bloodiest massacres was that which occurred at Babi Yar, just outside of Kiev, Ukraine in late September 1941. There, close to 34,000 Jewish men, women, and children were forcibly taken to the Jewish cemetery and ordered to remove their valuables and clothing before being killed. One by one, the young and old, grandparents and infants, were shot in the back of the head, as they lay on top of one another in a mass grave.

After the war, leaders of the Einsatzgruppen were tried at Nuremberg. Of twenty-four defendants, fourteen were sentenced to death. Only four were actually executed; the rest had their sentences reduced. Although there were subsequent trials of men who had been involved in the shooting of Jews, most of those who took part in the murder were never punished.

STUDENT HANDOUT - The “Final Solution”**The Perpetrators**

Hundreds of thousands of people were involved, either directly or indirectly, in implementing the “Final Solution.” The core organizers and planners of the annihilation of European Jewry came from the ranks of the Nazi Party and the SS, who in general fervently believed in Nazi ideology; the spearhead of the murders was the SS, among whom were commanders of killing units and Nazi camps. Yet it is important to emphasize that the SS members were not the only ones who were actively involved in carrying out the “Final Solution.” Soldiers from the Wehrmacht (the German regular army) and the German police forces took part in these activities. Moreover, officials from the civil apparatus that the Germans maintained in the occupied lands participated in implementing the “Final Solution.”

For a wide range of reasons, people from the nations that fell under Nazi domination or were allied with the Nazis took part in the “Final Solution,” either directly or indirectly. Some were motivated by their acceptance of Nazi ideology; others were of German extraction and willingly took up the offer by the Nazi authorities to become their partners; others collaborated with the Nazis in the hope that it would further their own national political agenda; others joined the Nazis in order to ameliorate their own or their family’s suffering under the brutal occupation; and still others joined the Nazis in order to escape almost certain death as prisoners of war on the Eastern Front. Regardless of how the door to collaboration swung open, many non-Germans became full and frequently enthusiastic participants in the mass systematic murder of European Jews.

Lesson 5 The "Final Solution"

STUDENT HANDOUT - Excerpt from Elie Wiesel's *Night*

The beloved objects that we had carried with us from place to place were left behind in the wagon and, with them, finally, our illusions.

Every few yards, there stood an SS man, his machine gun trained on us. Hand in hand we followed the throng.

An SS came toward us wielding a club. He commanded:

"Men to the left! Women to the right!"

Eight words spoken quietly, indifferently, without emotion. Eight simple, short words. Yet that was the moment when I left my mother. There was no time to think, and I already felt my father's hand press against mine: we were alone. In a fraction of a second I could see my mother, my sisters, move to the right. Tzipora was holding Mother's hand. I saw them walking farther and farther away; Mother was stroking my sister's blond hair, as if to protect her. And I walked on with my father, with the men. I didn't know that this was the moment in time and the place where I was leaving my mother and Tzipora forever. I kept walking, my father holding my hand.

Behind me, an old man fell to the ground. Nearby, an SS man replaced his revolver in its holster.

My hand tightened its grip on my father. All I could think of was not to lose him. Not to remain alone.

The SS officers gave the order.

"Form ranks of fives!"

There was a tumult. It was imperative to stay together.

"Hey, kid, how old are you?"

The man interrogating me was an inmate. I could not see his face, but his voice was weary and warm.

"Fifteen."

"No. You're eighteen."

"But I'm not," I said. "I'm fifteen."

"Fool. Listen to what I say."

Then he asked my father, who answered:

"I'm fifty."

"No." The man now sounded angry. "Not fifty. You're forty. Do you hear? Eighteen and forty."

He disappeared into the darkness. Another inmate appeared, unleashing a stream of invectives:

"Sons of bitches, why have you come here? Tell me, why?"

Someone dared to reply:

"What do you think? That we came here of our own free will? That we asked to come here?"

The other seemed ready to kill him.

"Shut up, you moron, or I'll tear you to pieces! You should have hanged yourselves rather than come here. Didn't you know what was in store for you here at Auschwitz? You didn't know? In 1944?"

True. We didn't know. Nobody had told us. He couldn't believe his ears. His tone became harsher:

"Over there. Do you see that chimney over there? Do you see it? And the flames, do you see them?" (Yes, we saw the flames.) "Over there, that's where they will take you. Over there will be your grave. You still don't understand? You sons of bitches. Don't you understand anything? You will be burned! Burned to a cinder! Turned into ashes!"

His anger changed into fury. We stood stunned, petrified. Could this be just a nightmare? An unimaginable nightmare?

I heard whispers around me:

"We must do something. We can't let them kill us like that, like cattle in the slaughterhouse. We must revolt."

There were, among us, a few tough young men. They actually had knives and were urging us to attack the

Lesson 5 The "Final Solution"

STUDENT HANDOUT - Excerpt from Elie Wiesel's *Night*

armed guards. One of them was muttering:

"Let the world learn of the existence of Auschwitz. Let everybody hear about it while they still have a chance to escape...."

But the older men begged their sons not to be foolish:

"We mustn't give up hope, even now as the sword hangs over our heads. So taught our sages...."

The wind of revolt died down. We continued to walk until we came to a crossroads. Standing in the middle of it was, though I didn't know it then, Dr. Mengele, the notorious Dr. Mengele. He looked like the typical SS officer: a cruel, though not unintelligent, face, complete with monocle. He was holding a conductor's baton and was surrounded by officers. The baton moving constantly, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left.

In no time, I stood before him.

"Your age?" he asked, perhaps trying to sound paternal.

"I'm eighteen." My voice was trembling.

"In good health?"

"Yes."

"Your profession?"

Tell him that I was a student?

"Farmer," I heard myself saying.

This conversation lasted no more than a few seconds. It seemed like an eternity.

The baton pointed to the left. I took half a step forward. I first wanted to see where they would send my father. Were he to have gone to the right, I would have run after him.

The baton, once more, moved to the left. A weight lifted from my heart.

We did not know, as yet, which was the better side, right or left, which road led to prison and which to the crematoria. Still, I was happy, I was near my father. Our procession continued slowly to move forward.

Another inmate came over to us:

"Satisfied?"

"Yes," someone answered.

"Poor devils, you are heading for the crematorium."

He seemed to be telling the truth. Not far from us, flames, huge flames, were rising from a ditch. Something was being burned there. A truck drew close and unloaded its hold: small children. Babies! Yes, I did see this, with my own eyes . . . children thrown into the flames. (Is it any wonder that ever since then, sleep tends to elude me?)

So that was where we were going. A little farther on, there was another, larger pit for adults.

I pinched myself: Was I still alive? Was I awake? How was it possible that men, women, and children were being burned and that the world kept silent? No. All this could not be real. A nightmare perhaps.... Soon I should wake with a start, my heart pounding, and find that I was back in the room of my childhood, with my books...

My father's voice tore me from my daydreams:

"What a shame, a shame that you did not go with your mother... I saw many children your age go with their mothers...."

His voice was terribly sad. I understood that he did not wish to see what they would do to me. He did not wish to see his only son go up in flames.

My forehead was covered with cold sweat. Still, I told him that I could not believe that human beings were being burn in our times; the world would never tolerate such crimes....

"The world? The world is not interested in us. Today, everything is possible, even the crematoria...." His voice broke.

"Father," I said. "If that is true, then I don't want to wait. I'll run into the electrified barbed wire. That

Lesson 5 The “Final Solution”

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would be easier than slow a slow death in the flames.”

He did not answer. He was weeping. His body was shaking. Everybody around us was weeping. Someone began to recite Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. I don’t know whether, during the history of the Jewish people, men have ever before recited Kaddish for themselves.

“*Yisgadal veyiskadash, shmey raba...* May His name be celebrated and sanctified....” whispered my father.

For the first time, I felt anger rising within me. Why should I sanctify His name? The Almighty, the eternal and terrible Master of the Universe, chose to be silent. What was there to thank Him for?

We continued our march. We were coming closer and closer to the pit, from which an infernal heat was rising. Twenty more steps. If I was going to kill myself, this was the time. Our column had only some fifteen steps to go. I bit my lips so that my father would not hear my teeth chattering. Ten more steps. Eight. Seven. We were walking slowly, as one follows a hearse, our own funeral procession. Only four more steps. Three. There it was now, very close to us, the pit and its flames. I gathered all that remained of my strength in order to break rank and throw myself onto the barbed wire. Deep down, I was saying good-bye to my father, to the whole universe, and against my will, I found myself whispering the words: “*Yisgadal, veyiskadash, shmey raba...*” My heart was about to burst. There. I was face-to-face with the Angel of Death....

No. Two steps from the pit, we were ordered to turn to left and herded into barracks.

I squeezed my father’s hand. He said:

“Do you remember Mrs. Schächter, in the train?”

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed.

Never shall I forget that smoke.

Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky.

Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.

Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes.

Never shall I forget those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God Himself.

Never.

Excerpt from Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960). Translation copyright © 2006 by Marion Wiesel. Reprinted by permission of Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC.