



**About Photo**

Smoke Rising from the  
Burning of Bodies in the  
Camp, Treblinka, Poland,  
1943 (2 BO 8)

Yad Vashem Photo Archive

*“Some of the people disapproved, but their  
disapproval was only silence.”*

– Kurt Messerschmidt, Jewish Survivor

## Preparing to Use This Lesson

Below is information to keep in mind when using this lesson. In some cases, the points elaborate on general suggestions listed in the “Teaching about the Holocaust” section in the [Introduction](#) to this resource, and are specific to the content of the lesson. This material is intended to help teachers consider the complexities of teaching the Holocaust and to deliver accurate and sensitive instruction.

- Students will likely have a general understanding of what is meant by “the Holocaust,” but that understanding may come primarily from movies and a few assigned readings. Determine what students know about the Holocaust and how they have come to possess that knowledge.
- It is important that students have a clear understanding of the vocabulary used in *Echoes and Reflections*. Teachers may decide to distribute a copy of the [Glossary](#) (available on the website) to each student for future reference or point out where students can access the [Glossary](#) online. It is recommended that other words in the lesson that may be unfamiliar to students are also reviewed to ensure understanding of the subject matter.
- Help students understand that the Nazis used words and phrases to influence and manipulate the masses. The term *Kristallnacht* is an example of Nazi “language.” Translated, *Kristallnacht* means “Crystal Night” (also often translated as “Night of Broken Glass”), a description that hardly captures the devastation and demoralization that Jews faced across Germany, Austria, and in areas of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia on November 9/10, 1938. There are numerous other examples of this same tendency in the language of the Nazi perpetrators: *Sonderbehandlung* (“special treatment”) for the murder of primarily Jewish victims, *Euthanasie* for a policy of mass murder of individuals with mental or physical disabilities, *Arbeit Macht Frei* (“Work Makes You Free”) over the entrance to Auschwitz. When the Nazis launched their plan to annihilate the remaining Jews in Poland in the fall of 1943, they called it *Erntefest*, or “Harvest Festival.” While this may have been a code word, it had the same grim irony that was reflected in *Kristallnacht*.
- Teachers are strongly discouraged from using simulations when teaching about the Holocaust and other genocides. There is a danger that students might be excited by the power of the perpetrators or demonstrate a morbid fascination for the suffering of the victims. It may be useful, however, for students to take on the role of someone from a neutral country, responding to events: a journalist writing an article or editorial; a concerned citizen writing to his or her political representative; or a campaigner trying to mobilize public opinion. Such activities can highlight possible courses of action that students can take about events that concern them in the world today.
- Many students will be unfamiliar with the medium of first-person, visual history testimony. Students will react to the visual history testimony in this and all of the lessons in very different ways. This range of responses should be expected and welcomed. It may be necessary for students to view a particular testimony clip more than once in order to feel comfortable with the medium and to process the information presented by the interviewee. For additional information on using visual history testimony in the classroom, refer to “About Visual History Testimony” in the [Introduction](#) to this resource or access [Guidelines for Using Visual History Testimony](#) on the website.

# Lesson 1 STUDYING THE HOLOCAUST

## About This Lesson



120–180 minutes

L1

❖ **INTRODUCTION** This lesson provides an opportunity for students to discuss the value and importance of studying human catastrophes, in general, and the Holocaust, in particular. The lesson also provides an opportunity for students to consider the importance of examining both primary and secondary source materials when studying historical events and to begin to develop a common vocabulary for studying the Holocaust and other genocides.

This two-part lesson has material appropriate for history, social studies, Holocaust and genocide studies, and English/language arts classes. Instructional strategies and techniques used in the lesson include large-group discussion, small-group work, brainstorming, vocabulary building, comparing and contrasting information, analyzing primary and secondary source material, interpreting visual history testimony, and journaling.

❖ **OBJECTIVES** After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Differentiate between natural and human catastrophes.
- Develop a rationale for studying human catastrophes.
- Compare and contrast several definitions of the Holocaust.
- Define genocide.
- Differentiate between primary and secondary source materials and explain how each is important when studying historical events.
- Summarize the causes and effects of the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* based on analysis of primary and secondary source materials.
- Discuss both the content and the messages in a clip of visual history testimony.

### ❖ KEY WORDS & PHRASES

Brownshirts	Gypsies	Reich
collaborator	Holocaust	Shoah
concentration camp	Jehovah's Witness	Sinti-Roma
discrimination	<i>Kristallnacht Pogrom</i>	survivor
European Jewry	Nazi	United Nations
genocide	<i>pogrom</i>	visual history testimony
Gestapo	propaganda	

### RESOURCES & TESTIMONIES

All of the resources used in this lesson can be found in this guide at the end of this lesson and at [echoesandreflections.org](http://echoesandreflections.org).

Visual history testimonies are available on the website or on the DVD that accompanies this resource guide.

Teachers are urged to review the lesson procedures to identify other materials and technology needed to implement the lesson.

❖ **ACADEMIC STANDARDS** The materials in this lesson address the following national education standards:

#### Common Core State Standards

- Reading Standards for Informational Text 6–12
- Writing Standards 6–12
- Speaking and Listening Standards 6–12
- Language Standards 6–12
- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–12
- Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–12

A complete analysis of how this lesson addresses Common Core State Standards by grade level and specific skills is available on the *Echoes and Reflections* website.

#### National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

- ② Time, Continuity, and Change
- ⑤ Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ⑥ Power, Authority, and Governance
- ⑨ Global Connections
- ⑩ Civic Ideals and Practices

## Procedures

### Part 1: Human Catastrophes

1. Begin this lesson by writing the word “catastrophe” on the board or on chart paper. Ask students to define the term and identify what factors they believe make an event a catastrophe. Have students give examples of both natural and human catastrophes. Chart student responses. For example:

#### CATASTROPHE

<u>Natural</u>	<u>Human</u>
earthquake	Middle Passage
drought	September 11th
tsunami	Holocaust

2. Discuss the difference between natural and human catastrophes. Emphasize that natural catastrophes are most often out of people’s control, whereas human catastrophes are the direct result of actions that people take.
3. Divide the class into pairs or small groups and have each group select a recorder. Instruct students to answer the following questions:
  - Who is likely to study human catastrophes (e.g., historians, social scientists, theologians) and why?
  - What kinds of questions do you think people studying human catastrophes would want to answer?
  - How might the questions be different from questions asked about natural catastrophes?

4. Have each group select a reporter to share its ideas with the whole group. [Optional: Chart responses on the board or on chart paper.]
5. Explain to students that they will be studying about a time in history in which a great human catastrophe occurred. This catastrophe, the Holocaust (in Hebrew, *Shoah*), is the name given for the murder of some six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. The Holocaust occurred during what is known as the Nazi era from 1933 until 1945, during which time Jews were persecuted with increasing severity. After the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, and especially after the Nazis and their collaborators invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, they began the systematic mass murder of Jews in an attempt to kill all Jews everywhere. Although only Jews were targeted for complete annihilation, many others also fell victim to the Nazis and their allies during World War II which lasted until 1945: scores of thousands of Sinti-Roma; at least 250,000 people with mental or physical disabilities; more than three million Soviet prisoners, about two million Poles; and thousands of homosexuals, Communists, Socialists, trades unionists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Have students volunteer possible reasons why this period of history is studied. Encourage students to consider that this period of history is studied because it is an important part of world history and because many of the underlying causes and effects of the Holocaust have had a profound influence on later historical events.
6. Display the definitions of the Holocaust used by three different organizations. Review the definitions with students, analyzing the cumulative impact of specific word choices. Have students compare and contrast the definitions and consider possible reasons why the definitions are not all exactly the same. [Optional: Divide the class into three groups and provide each group with one of the definitions to study. Follow with each group sharing its findings and then have students compare and contrast the definitions.]
7. Write the word "genocide" on the board or on chart paper. Ask students for their thoughts on what the word means or in what context/s they have heard the word used. Ask students for examples of genocides based on material they may have studied in other classes or know from current events (e.g., Native Americans, Armenians, Tutsi, Darfurians).
8. Inform students that the United Nations has defined genocide as a crime. Before presenting the legal definition of genocide, ask students how they would define genocide to include the instigator (e.g., the state), the targeted group (e.g., an ethnic, racial, tribal, national, or religious group) and the intent (deliberate). Present the United Nations' definition of genocide and have students compare their definition to the United Nations' definition. Have students consider which definition they think best fits the Holocaust and consider why the Holocaust fits the definition of genocide.
9. Ask students to share what they already know about the Holocaust and to identify whenever possible their source or sources of

**NOTE 1.6**

A differentiation can be made between the general meaning of the word "holocaust" and the use of "the Holocaust" to describe a series of events at a particular historic time. Compare the use of "the Holocaust" to the use of "9/11" in that both refer to a specific historic event during a particular time.

**NOTE 1.8**

Provide each student with a copy of the [Glossary](#) downloadable on the website or have them bookmark the web page on their computers. Encourage students to refer to the [Glossary](#) throughout their study of the Holocaust.

information. List responses on the board or chart paper.

Examples:

- Some Jews went into hiding (source: *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*)
  - Some non-Jews tried to rescue Jews (source: *Schindler's List*)
  - Allied troops liberated the concentration camps (source: textbook, a survivor of the Holocaust, a relative who fought in World War II)
10. Review the list of sources that was developed. Help students understand the difference between the primary sources and secondary sources on the list, and have them consider primary and secondary sources not identified on the list that might also be useful in studying the Holocaust. Review how the many types of sources (e.g., diaries, letters, historical fiction, written and visual history testimony, autobiographies, photographs, textbooks) may differ in the type of information included. Initiate a discussion on the accuracy of such sources and reasons why source material must be scrutinized for accuracy.
  11. Explain that throughout this study of the Holocaust, students will examine many primary and secondary source materials. Explain that the Holocaust is one of the most documented events in human history and that the perpetrators produced much of the evidence. The Holocaust occurred in modern times, and the Nazi system was a highly bureaucratic one. When the historian wants to know what happened, when, and why, there is a sea of official records, private papers, and first-person accounts ready to be investigated. Naturally, sources must be studied carefully, and all require interpretation. The documents reproduced throughout this resource highlight the historian's tools and tasks, and bring the topics incorporated into these lessons into sharper focus.

## Part 2: Primary and Secondary Source Materials

1. Tell students that they will be studying several documents related to the same event in order to compare and contrast source material. To prepare them for this assignment, provide students with some or all of the following background on the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*.

**About Kristallnacht Pogrom** From the time the Nazis came to power in 1933 they began isolating Jews in Germany, and passed many laws to that effect. In the first half of 1938, additional laws were passed in Germany restricting Jewish economic activity and occupational opportunities. In July 1938, a law was passed requiring all Jews to carry identification cards. Later that year, 17,000 Jews of Polish citizenship, many of whom had been living in Germany for decades, were arrested and relocated across the Polish border. The Polish government refused to admit them so they were interned in “relocation camps” on the Polish frontier.

Among the deportees was Zindel Grynszpan, who had been born in western Poland and had moved to Hanover, Germany, where he established a small store, in 1911. On the night of October 27, Grynszpan and his family were forced out of their home by German police. His store and the family's possessions were confiscated and they were forced to move over the Polish border.

Grynszpan's seventeen-year-old son, Herschel, was living with an uncle in Paris. When he received news of his family's expulsion, he went to the German embassy in Paris on November 7, intending to assassinate the German Ambassador to France. Upon discovering that the Ambassador was not in the embassy, he shot a low-ranking diplomat, Third Secretary Ernst vom Rath. Rath was critically wounded and died two days later, on November 9.



Grynspan's attack was interpreted by Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Chief of Propaganda, as a direct attack against the Reich and used as an excuse to launch a *pogrom* against Jews. The Nazis euphemistically called this *pogrom* *Kristallnacht*, "Night of the Broken Glass"; the harmless sound of the name disguised the terror and devastation of the *pogrom* and the demoralization faced by Jews across Germany, Austria, and in areas of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia.

On the nights of November 9 and 10, rampaging mobs throughout Germany and the newly acquired territories of Austria and Sudetenland freely attacked Jews in the street, in their homes, and at their places of work and worship. Almost 100 Jews were killed and hundreds more injured; approximately 7,000 Jewish businesses and homes were damaged and looted; 1,400 synagogues were burned; cemeteries and schools were vandalized; and 30,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

2. Divide the class into six groups and have each group select a recorder. Distribute one of the documents listed below to each group, and instruct students to discuss and make notes on what they learn about the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* from studying the material:
  - *Heydrich's Instructions, November 1938*
  - *Letter by Margarete Drexler to the Gestapo*
  - *Description of the Riot in Dinslaken*
  - *Magdeburg, Germany, November 10, 1938*
  - *Siegen, Germany, November 10, 1938*
  - Textbook description of the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* [**Note:** Locate and have on hand a textbook, or a portion thereof, that includes information about the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*.]
3. After allowing ample time to discuss the documents, instruct students to pass their documents to another group. Group members should again discuss and make notes on what they learn about the topic from studying the material. Continue this process until all groups have had an opportunity to analyze all six documents.
4. Have students share their thinking about the six documents in a whole-group discussion. Following are suggested questions:
  - Which of these materials are primary source documents? Which are secondary source documents?
  - What were some of the things your group noticed while studying the two photographs? What questions, if any, did the photographs raise for your group?
  - How is studying photographs different from studying other types of material?
  - What did you learn about the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* by reading Heydrich's instructions?
  - What argument does Margarete Drexler use in her letter to the Gestapo to try to get her money returned? Why is this information important to know?
  - How does the *Description of the Riot in Dinslaken* make the story of the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* a "human story"?
  - What, if anything, did you learn from the textbook description of the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* that you didn't learn from any of the primary sources?
5. Explain to students that another source of information about the Holocaust is survivor and witness testimony. Survivor and witness testimonies, unlike documents or words from a book, communicate the crucial role of the individual's experiences through his or her stories.

**NOTE 2.5**

Teachers are encouraged to review the document [Guidelines for Using Visual History Testimony](#) available on the website.

**TESTIMONY VIEWING****About the Interviewee**

Kurt Messerschmidt was born January 2, 1915, in Werneuchen, Germany. He was forced to live in the Theresienstadt ghetto and later imprisoned in the concentration camps of Flossenbürg, Sachsenhausen, Gollerschau, and Ganacker. Kurt also was a prisoner in the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. His interview was conducted in the United States. When the war began, Kurt was twenty-four years old.

For additional information about Kurt Messerschmidt, see his [Biographical Profile](#) available on the website.

**NOTE 2.7**

Additional testimony and materials on the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* can be found in Lesson 3: Nazi Germany and on [IWitness](#).

The interviewees in these testimonies are not “simply” Holocaust survivors and other witnesses. They are students, teachers, brothers, sisters, friends, and family members. They tell stories that recount anger, frustration, humor, surprise, relief, and fear. Viewing first-person, visual history testimony is a personal experience—no two people necessarily react to hearing a particular clip of testimony exactly the same way. Tell students that the visual history testimony that they will hear was collected by USC Shoah Foundation. Information about USC Shoah Foundation can be found at the beginning of this guide and on the *Echoes and Reflections* website.

6. Show students Visual History Testimony: *Studying the Holocaust* and follow with a discussion using some or all of the questions below.
  - How do you feel after listening to Kurt Messerschmidt talk about his experiences?
  - What is meant by the term “testimony”?
  - What role, if any, does memory play when giving testimony?
  - What, if anything, do you learn about the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* from Kurt’s testimony that you didn’t learn from any of the other materials studied?
  - How does Kurt’s testimony reinforce what you learned from other sources?
  - What are the benefits and challenges of using visual history testimony?
  - What role does the testimony collected by the Shoah Foundation play in the study of the Holocaust? How is this role different from the role and responsibility of historians? How is each important?
7. End this lesson with each student completing a “3-2-1 Assessment”.
  - List three things you learned participating in this lesson.
  - Name two things that surprised you. [**Note:** Some teachers prefer to use Name two things that you didn’t understand.]
  - Identify one question you still have.

## Reflect and Respond

Either in class or as homework, have students reflect and respond to one or more of the topics below or have them develop a topic that has meaning for them based on the material covered in the lesson.

- What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you hear reference to “the Holocaust”? What do you know about this event and how have you learned your information? Discuss your thoughts on the importance of studying the Holocaust.
- In his testimony, Kurt Messerschmidt talks about helping the cigar shop owner pick up pieces of glass from the street. He says



that he was sure some of the people disapproved of what was happening that night, but their disapproval was only silence. Why do you think that people are often unwilling to speak out when they see something wrong happening? What are the dangers of being silent in the face of injustice?

- Kurt Messerschmidt’s testimony about his experience during the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* is filled with rich detail and sensory images, and yet is very compact. Describe a particularly important experience from your life, crafting the memory in a narrative with a clear beginning, middle, and end, vivid details, and a sense of place.

## Making Connections

The additional activities and projects listed below can be integrated directly into the lesson or can be used to extend the lesson once it has been completed. The topics lend themselves to students’ continued study of the Holocaust as well as opportunities for students to make meaningful connections to other people and events, including relevant contemporary issues. These activities may include instructional strategies and techniques and/or address academic standards in addition to those that were identified for the lesson.

1. Visit IWitness ([iwitness.usc.edu](http://iwitness.usc.edu)) for activities specific to Lesson 1: Studying the Holocaust.
2. Have each student or pairs of students prepare a list of three to five questions that they would like to ask Kurt Messerschmidt after listening to his clip of testimony. After developing the questions, students should go to Kurt’s **Biographical Profile** on the *Echoes and Reflections* website and see if the answers to their questions are included in the text. If unable to answer all of their questions from the **Biographical Profile**, have students go to IWitness ([iwitness.usc.edu](http://iwitness.usc.edu)) and identify clips of testimony from Kurt’s full testimony that may help answer the questions.
3. If the class has a dedicated classroom wiki, have one of the students volunteer to pose a question to the group based on what was covered in this lesson and have other students respond. Another option would be for students to start a wiki based on Kurt Messerschmidt’s testimony and his decision “not to be silent” in the face of injustice. Students could then contribute to the discussion; add stories, videos, etc. As the class continues its study of the Holocaust, different students could take a leadership role in posting new material and questions and inviting others to respond.
4. Instruct students to gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources about a recent catastrophe (either human or natural), including both primary sources (e.g., an interview) and secondary sources (e.g., a news report) regarding the event. Students should then write an informational essay that introduces the topic, compares and contrasts the information gathered from various sources, and explain how, if at all, the use of both types of sources led to a more complete understanding of the event.
5. Have students research how the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* was covered in media, especially newspapers, in their state, city, or town. After gathering relevant information, instruct students to develop an argument to support or refute the idea that this event was accurately covered and reported to the public. [**Note:** If unable to locate local or state coverage of the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*, research how this historical event was covered in national or international media.] Have students prepare a written or oral summary of their findings and conclusions.
6. As an alternative to the activity above, have students research how editorial/political cartoonists in major national and international newspapers reacted to the events of the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*. Have students develop a PowerPoint or cloud-based presentation (e.g., Prezi), a written report, or decide on another format to present their work. Their presentations should include

examples of political cartoons published following the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*, information about how people responded to the cartoons if possible, as well as their interpretations of the cartoons and what they learned from studying them.

L1