



LESSON PLAN: Defining Terms for Studying the Holocaust

- 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. See corresponding **Note** for additional background. After reviewing the background information, 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 Distribute or display the **definitions of the Holocaust**¹ handout 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** handout 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 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. Such documents highlight the historian’s tools and tasks, and bring complex topics into sharper focus.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 60-90 MINUTES

¹ 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.

