



LESSON PLAN: Perpetrators of the “Final Solution”: Ideology and Responsibility

1 Introduce students to **Itka Zygmuntowicz (bio)** and **Nathan Offen (bio)** and then show their clips of testimony before asking the following questions:

- After listening to Itka Zygmuntowicz, what image emerges for you regarding what life was like in the extermination camps?
- What are some examples of daily humiliation and intimidation that camp prisoners had to endure?
- What experience does Nathan Offen share in his testimony?
- Nathan continues to show emotion while he recounts experiences in his testimony. Why do you think after so many years he continues to convey such great emotion?
- What are some of your emotions as you listen to these testimonies?
- What do you learn from hearing the survivors talk about their experiences that is different from what you learn from textbooks?

2 Explain to students that many people ask the question, “How was it humanly possible?” when studying the Holocaust. Ask them to think about this seemingly simple, yet complex, question in light of the survivor testimony they just watched.

3 Review the definition of “perpetrator” available in the **Glossary**.

4 Distribute the **Interview with Franz Stangl**¹ handout. After reading the interview together, use some or all of the questions below in a whole-group discussion.

- How would you characterize Stangl’s ability to see human beings as cargo or cattle?
- Why do you think he is unable to make the connection between the children who arrive on transports and his own children? Do you think there should be a connection? Explain your thinking.
- Do you think Stangl had a choice in the decisions he made? Explain why or why not.

¹ Due to the sensitive nature of this material, it is recommended that the teacher read Franz Stangl’s responses to the interview questions.

- How does Stangl explain working for the system?
- Are there any emotions expressed in the interview? If so, what are they? If not, how might this lack of emotion be explained?
- In the past, some regarded perpetrators such as Stangl as “human beasts.” Today, we realize that they were human beings. What were the possible reasons for people to regard the perpetrators as “beasts”? What purpose did it serve?
- In his **poem**, “Testimony,” Dan Pagis writes, “No, no, they definitely were human beings.” What do you think Pagis may have been trying to convey to readers with this line?
- Think about the earlier question, “How was it humanly possible?” What, if anything, can you add to your thinking about this question in light of the Franz Stangl interview?

5 Divide the class into four groups and distribute **The “Final Solution”** handout. Assign one section of the handout to each group. Have group members read their section of the handout together and prepare an oral presentation for the rest of the class on the material. Instruct each group to also develop one or two discussion questions based on its section of the reading material.

6 Have each group present its material to the class. After all groups have made their presentations, have a whole-group discussion using the discussion questions that the groups developed and/or the suggested questions below.

- In what way did the invasion of the Soviet Union reflect the basic tenets of Nazi ideology?
- What was the difference between a concentration camp and an extermination camp?
- Why were the extermination camps located in Poland? What role did Nazi ideology play in this decision?
- In what ways did the Nazis apply modern technology to the mass murder of the people in the camps?
- How do we understand the word “modern” in the context of the Holocaust? What does modern mean to you? Does this term always imply enlightenment and humanity? Why or why not?
- The Nazis used deception in the extermination camps. What do you think was their purpose in using deception?
- As noted in the reading, “hundreds of thousands of people were involved, either directly or indirectly, in implementing the ‘Final Solution.’” In your opinion, were any of these people exempt from responsibility? Explain your thinking.

7 Display the map, **Nazi Camps and Sites of Mass Execution**, and have students identify which camps the survivors talked about in their testimonies. Allow time for students to make additional observations based on the map.

8 Share information about *The Auschwitz Album* using information in the corresponding **Note**. Provide students an opportunity to study and discuss their thoughts and feelings about each photograph from this album using the questions below.

- What are your feelings as you look at these photographs?
- What do you see? What do you “hear”?
- Looking at the photographs together, what “story” do they tell?

9 Explain to students that when Adolf Eichmann² (an SS officer who played a major role in the extermination of European Jews) was on trial in Jerusalem in 1961, he claimed that he was merely performing his duty as an obedient soldier. He viewed himself as not personally responsible for his actions, but rather part of a system. Ask students to think about issues of social and personal responsibility by discussing the following questions:

- What does it mean to be “held responsible”?
- What does it mean to “accept responsibility”?
- How is “accepting responsibility” different from being “held responsible”?
- What are some ways that you witness people acting responsibly? What are the benefits to society when people act responsibly?
- What are some ways that you witness people evading responsibility? What is the potential harm to society when people evade responsibility?
- Explain who you believe is responsible for making sure that something like the Holocaust never happens.

10 Have students share their thoughts and feelings about what they have learned about the “Final Solution.” Remind them that studying a topic as complex as the Holocaust often leads to additional questions. Have students identify a specific question that they have about the “Final Solution” and research the answer using reliable sources (ushmm.org; yadvashem.org; iwitness.usc.edu). Have students post both the question and answer on the class wiki, website, or blog, or submit to you as a culminating activity.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 150-180 MINUTES

² Additional information and resources about perpetrators, including Adolf Eichmann, can be found in the Perpetrators, Collaborators, and Bystanders unit.