



LESSON PLAN: War Crimes Trials

1 Distribute the **War Crimes Trials** handout. Have students review the text and answer the questions that follow. [Optional: This can be assigned for homework beforehand or students can read and discuss the questions in small groups.]

2 Introduce students to **Edith Coliver (bio)** and **Regina Zielinski (bio)**; show their clips of testimony, and follow with a discussion using the questions below.

- What does Edith Coliver say were her father’s messages to her after he learned that she would go to the Nuremberg Trials as a translator?
- What information do you learn about Hermann Goering and Rudolf Hoess from listening to Edith’s testimony?
- How does Edith support her statement “the legacy of Nuremberg is still with us”?
- When does Regina Zielinski say she was contacted to testify in a war crimes trial? What conclusions can you draw based on that information?
- What kinds of questions does Regina say she was asked at the trial? What strategies were used to try to trick her while she was testifying?
- Why was it so difficult for Regina to testify?
- What is the difference between giving testimony to USC Shoah Foundation and testifying in court?
- Why was it important to bring witnesses to testify in the war crime trials?
- Do you think the trials were important? If so, why?

3 Distribute the **Rudolf Hoess** handout and read together as a whole group. Follow with a discussion, using some or all of the questions below. Instruct students to cite textual evidence to support their answers.

- In the handout there are two different sources. What are they? How are the two sources different? Might those differences influence what Hoess says in each? If so, how?
- What was Hoess’s role in the “Final Solution”?
- How did Hoess describe the process of gassing at Auschwitz? Based on his choice of words, how would you characterize his tone as he described this process? What does this suggest

about his attitude toward his crimes?

- What was Hoess’s explanation for why he went through with the murders, despite admitting to feeling sympathy for the victims?
- Does Hoess express any moral reservations about the murder of the Jews? Why does he say that he thinks they were wrong? What does that say about his beliefs?
- In your opinion, what was the objective of the postwar criminal trials? After reading Hoess’s testimony, do you think these aims were achieved? Explain your response.

4

Continue by distributing the **Adolf Eichmann** handout and read together. Ask students to consider some or all of the following questions:

- What was Eichmann’s role in the “Final Solution”?
- How were Eichmann’s and Hoess’s roles different?
- How does Eichmann explain his actions during the war?
- Eichmann and Hoess defend their actions as soldiers who were only following orders. Do you see this as justification for their actions? Why or why not? What were their choices?
- After reading Eichmann’s answers, do you think he regretted his actions? Why or why not?
- Hoess commanded the largest extermination camp—Auschwitz-Birkenau—and was on the site of murder on a daily basis. Eichmann was responsible primarily for the logistics of deportation to camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau. He generally worked out of an office far from those camps, although in his posting in Budapest in 1944, he directed the deportations to that camp. Do you think one of these men was guiltier than the other? Explain your response.
- What role might ideology have played in the motivations and actions of these men?
- What does “crimes against humanity” mean? [Optional: Have students look up “crimes against humanity” in the **Glossary**.]
- Do you think the perpetrators who carried out the Holocaust can ever be sufficiently punished? Explain your thinking.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 90-120 MINUTES