



LESSON PLAN: The Weimar Republic and Rise of the Nazi Party

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson students explore factors that lead to the erosion of rights in a democracy. After reflecting on rights that are personally important to them, students view visual history testimonies of individuals who discuss changes in the Weimar Republic that ultimately led to a loss of rights in that society. Students analyze maps and read a text on the emergence of the Nazi Party in the 1930s, and identify reasons why German society was vulnerable to the rise of Nazism.

PART 1: WHAT FACTORS LEAD TO THE EROSION OF RIGHTS IN A DEMOCRACY?

Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.

1 Students review the *What Rights Are Most Important to Me?* handout and rank the choices in order of importance from 1 (most important) to 11 (least important). In pairs or small groups, they share how they ranked the rights and the rationale behind their decisions. Students are encouraged to think about the interdependence of rights and their own inner conflict in having to create a hierarchy of rights.

2 In their pairs or small groups, students create a T-chart with one column labeled “How rights in a democracy are protected” and the other “Factors that can lead to the loss of rights.” Students consider the right they ranked as most important on their handout and list ideas on the T-chart specific to that right. As time allows, they consider and record thoughts on other rights.

How rights in a democracy are protected	Factors that can lead to the loss of rights

3 As a class, students discuss some of the following questions:

- What systems or mechanisms exist in democracies to protect people’s rights?
- How easy or hard is it to lose rights in a democracy? What are some ways this might occur?
- What might allow an extreme party or group to undermine rights in a democracy and even take over?
- Can you think of any examples of rights being taken from a group of people in a democracy? Have you or people you know ever personally experienced a violation of rights?

4 Students watch testimony clips from two individuals who discuss some of the changes that took place in the Weimar Republic leading to the breakdown of democracy: **Alfred Caro (bio)** and **Frank Shurman (bio)**. As they watch the clips, students take notes on the handout, *Testimony Reflections*, found at the beginning of this unit.

- 5** After viewing the testimony clips, students journal and/or participate in a whole group discussion in response to some of the following questions:
- In his testimony, why does Alfred Caro say democracy broke down in German society?
 - Based on what you heard from Alfred and Frank, how confident do you think the German people were with the status of the government?
 - What example does Frank Shurman share to illustrate the “insecure situation” that Germany was facing in the early 1920s? How does Frank say that Hitler took advantage of the situation?

PART 2: WHY WAS GERMAN SOCIETY VULNERABLE TO THE RISE OF NAZISM?

Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.

- 6** Before analyzing the maps, *Europe Before/After 1919 and the Treaty of Versailles*, students activate prior knowledge using the following prompts in small groups:
- How can maps help us to understand events in history or changes in the world?
 - What countries can you name in Europe, especially Eastern Europe?
 - What changes do you know about that took place in this region between 1914 and 1919?

- 7** Students view the maps, *Europe Before/After 1919 and the Treaty of Versailles*, projected on a large screen. In small groups, they discuss and record responses to the questions below. Their ideas are shared as a whole class and the **NOTE** on the Treaty of Versailles is used to fill in information as needed.
- What changes do you notice took place in Europe in 1919? What occurred prior to 1919 that led to these changes?
 - What was the Treaty of Versailles? What conclusions can you draw about its provisions from studying the maps?
 - How do you think these changes might have affected the German people on different levels, e.g. economically, socially, and emotionally?
 - What questions do you have as a result of viewing the maps?

- 8** Individually or in small groups, students read the handout, *The Weimar Republic and the Rise of the Nazi Party* and take notes on the corresponding **graphic organizer**. As they review, students annotate the text and record information that helps them to answer the supporting question.

- 9** While students work, the following headings are posted on the board or chart paper: Political Reasons, Economic Reasons, Social Reasons, Cultural Reasons. Groups are invited to add one idea to each category without repeating ideas. When groups have completed work, the class gathers for a discussion using some of the following prompts:
- What political, economic, social, or cultural factors do you think were most pivotal in setting the stage for the rise of the Nazi Party?
 - What were the conditions under which the Weimar Republic was formed? How do you think ordinary German citizens felt about this government?
 - How did the above factors contribute to a fragile form of democracy in German society? (Think about what Alfred Caro and Frank Shurman shared in their testimonies.)
 - What principles in the Nazi Party platform do you think were particularly dangerous? Why?
 - What principles in the platform do you think appealed to German people in the 1930s? Why?

did Nazi ideology engender support even though it went against democratic values?

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As a summative task, students journal in response to the following prompt/quote:

Write at least a paragraph in response to the quote below from novelist Margaret Atwood. Discuss two to three ways individuals and groups can work to protect a democracy. Comment on reasons for the erosion of democracy in the Weimar Republic during the Nazi era, citing at least two pieces of evidence from the sources used in this lesson.

“The fabric of democracy is always fragile everywhere because it depends on the will of citizens to protect it, and when they become scared, when it becomes dangerous for them to defend it, it can go very quickly.”

– MARGARET ATWOOD

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 90 MINUTES