



## NAZI GERMANY

*"With the rise of Nazism, nothing Jews had done for their country made a difference..."*

-ALFRED GOTTSCHALK, JEWISH SURVIVOR

## PREPARING TO TEACH THIS UNIT

The following points are intended to help educators consider the complexities of teaching about Nazi Germany and to deliver accurate and sensitive instruction.

- Studying about the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany inherently requires students to reflect on the importance of preserving and protecting democratic values and institutions and to consider the role of a responsible citizen in that process. Students may have the impression that the Holocaust was inevitable. Whenever possible, help students recognize that the Holocaust took place because individuals, groups, and nations made decisions to act or not to act. Begin to set the stage for this understanding in this unit. The Weimar Republic was a fragile democracy. This unstable democracy paved a path for the Nazi Party. However, it is essential for students to understand that German people did not have to vote for the Nazis in the 1932 election; this was a choice they made.
- Students learn about Nazi concentration camps in this unit. The Nazis initially built these camps to control and subdue political opposition and, over time, the camp system expanded to imprison millions based on religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other factors. The concentration camp system was not established as part of the "Final Solution"; however, as the policy of murder took hold, the concentration camps played a role in it. The "Final Solution" unit provides information about the many kinds of camps that were established during the Holocaust.
- In this unit learners are introduced to the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* that took place November 9-10, 1938 across Germany, Austria, and in areas of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. The *Kristallnacht Pogrom* should be understood as part of the progression of Nazi antisemitic activity rather than as an isolated or spontaneous event. The *Kristallnacht Pogrom* demonstrated that the Nazis could wield brutality without consequence, and conditions for Jews grew increasingly more intolerable after that point. The events of the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* present an opportunity for learners to consider complicity and choice in the face of hate.
- Help students understand that the Nazis used language to influence and manipulate the populace. *Kristallnacht*, for example, literally means "Crystal Night" (also often translated as "Night of Broken Glass"), a description that hardly captures the devastation and demoralization that Jews faced. Among the numerous other examples of this twisting of language that the Nazi regime would later introduce are *Sonderbehandlung* ("special treatment") for the murder of primarily Jewish victims and *Arbeit Macht Frei* ("Work Makes You Free") over the entrance to some concentration and extermination camps.

- When using the “Pyramid of Hate” to study the Holocaust, caution students not to think that there was a methodical progression from one stage to the next, ultimately resulting in genocide. The atmosphere of the German state was chaotic, and there was an experimental nature to the Nazis’ actions. Not only is it important to keep that in mind when trying to understand Nazism, but also when trying to understand the reactions of Jewish people and other victims to Nazi policies.

## ABOUT THIS UNIT

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this unit is for students to learn about the Weimar Republic’s fragile democracy between 1918 and 1933, and the historical events that allowed for the complete breakdown of democracy in Germany between 1933 and 1939. Students focus on the unfolding of anti-Jewish policies during this period, which culminated in the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*. They investigate primary source materials in order to understand how legislation, terror, and propaganda isolated German Jewry from German society. Students also have an opportunity to consider the role and responsibility of the individual in interrupting hate and the escalation of violence.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What factors can lead to the breakdown of democracy in a society?
- How were German Jews isolated and demonized by the Nazis?
- In what ways can prejudice escalate when it is left unchecked?
- What is the role of individuals and groups in interrupting hate?

### OBJECTIVES

Students will

- Describe the Weimar Republic and its fragile democracy, and reasons for the rise of Nazism.
- Explain features of democracy and the role of the individual and government in sustaining democratic practices.
- Identify Nazi policies and practices between 1933 and 1939 that intensified antisemitism and isolated Jewish people.
- Interpret primary source materials—including visual history testimony—that represent a range of Jewish experiences and responses to Nazi-German state policies.
- Summarize the causes and effects of the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* based on analysis of primary and secondary source materials.
- Analyze our responsibility to interrupt the escalation of hate and violence, as individuals and members of societal groups and organizations.