



LESSON PLAN: How the Final Solution was Made Possible and Implemented

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students use a variety of texts and primary sources to study the factors that made the Final Solution possible and how it was implemented. They consider the importance of individual stories and experiences as they study the mass killings perpetrated by the Nazis. Students reflect on an excerpt from Elie Wiesel's *Night* as well as a number of visual history testimonies from Jewish survivors of the extermination camps.

PART 1: WHAT WAS THE “FINAL SOLUTION OF THE JEWISH QUESTION” AND HOW SHOULD WE STUDY IT?

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

- 1** The handout, *How Should We Study the Final Solution?* is distributed and the class together reads the first paragraph, defining the Final Solution. Individually or in pairs, students read the remainder of the handout and respond to the question about how the poem informs the way they should study the Final Solution. The class debriefs, discussing the importance of “the one” or seeing the individual amidst the masses of victims.
- 2** Copies of the handout, *The One*, are made available to students to use throughout this unit. The class reads the handout together and learns that they will use it to guide their thinking and recording as they meet various survivors and reflect on their individual stories and experiences of the Final Solution.
- 3** Students are introduced to Elie Wiesel and his memoir, *Night*, using the background information in the NOTE. Individually or in pairs, students read the *Excerpt from Night* and record their thoughts using *The One* handout. The class discusses some of the following questions¹:
 - What questions did you focus on while recording on *The One* handout? What parts of the excerpt most struck you? What questions do you have after reading the excerpt?
 - In addition to being forcibly torn away from the rest of their family, what else did Elie Wiesel and his father “leave behind”?
 - In this excerpt, how did the Nazis dehumanize Jews?

¹ Elie Wiesel was born in Sighet, Romania in 1928, to an ultra-Orthodox Jewish Hasidic family. In 1944, he was deported to Auschwitz where he was imprisoned for a short time. From there he was sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp. After liberation in 1945, Wiesel went to Paris where he eventually became a journalist. During an interview with the distinguished French writer, Francois Mauriac, Wiesel was persuaded to write about his experiences in the camps. The result was his internationally acclaimed memoir, *Night (La Nuit)*, which has since been translated into more than thirty languages. In this memoir, Wiesel summarizes his experiences as a concentration camp prisoner. Wiesel went on to publish more than sixty books of fiction and non-fiction. He exerted an influence on world leaders regarding commemoration of the Holocaust—perceiving his role as that of society’s conscience, which must be alert to wickedness and injustice. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. Elie Wiesel died in New York City in 2016.

- Why were Elie and his father told to lie about their ages?
- Why do you think the older men did not want the younger men to revolt?
- When Elie says that “the world would never tolerate such crimes,” his father answers that “The world is not interested in us.” Why do you think their perspectives are so different at this particular moment?
- Choose a moment from the excerpt that you think represents a turning point in Elie’s life. How did this moment change his perception of the world, relationships, life, other people, or even himself?
- How does the title chosen by Elie, *Night*, reflect the experiences of people who lived through the Holocaust?

PART 2: WHAT FACTORS MADE THE FINAL SOLUTION POSSIBLE, AND WHAT WERE THE EXPERIENCES OF THE PEOPLE WHO BECAME ITS VICTIMS?

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

4. Students learn they will further investigate the Final Solution to find out how events – such as those described by Elie Wiesel – were made possible and carried out. The following questions are posted to guide student work as they examine lesson sources:

- How did Nazi racial ideology give rise to the Final Solution?
- What conditions and beliefs allowed the Final Solution to occur?
- What systems (structures, methods, plans) were used to carry out the Final Solution?
- Who were the perpetrators of the Final Solution at all different levels of society?

5. The handouts and resources below are made available to students. Small groups are each assigned one section of *The “Final Solution”* handout to examine closely. After reviewing the entire handout, groups focus in on their assigned section. They create a brief oral report summarizing it and answering the questions in step 4 above that are applicable. Students draw upon the map and timeline as needed to deepen their understanding.

- ***The “Final Solution”*** handout
- ***Major Nazi Camps in Europe, 1944*** map
- ***Echoes & Reflections Timeline of the Holocaust*** (1941-45)

Groups present their oral reports to the class as time allows, and discuss some of the following questions:

- Why did the development of the Final Solution coincide with the invasion of the Soviet Union? How did this reflect basic principles of Nazi ideology?
- Why did the Einsatzgruppen prove to be problematic for Nazi leaders, despite being an effective killing operation (responsible for the murder of more than 2million Jews, a third of those killed in the Holocaust)?
- Why were extermination camps formed? Why is the term “industrialized mass murder” used to describe the extermination camps?
- Why were the extermination camps located in Poland? What role did Nazi ideology play in this decision?
- 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.’” What were the roles and motivations of people at different levels of society?

6 Students watch testimony clips of Jewish survivors who witnessed mass killing by the Nazis: **William Good (bio)** and **Abraham Bomba (bio)**. As they watch the clips, students take notes on *The One* or *Testimony Reflections* handout^{2 3}.

7 After viewing the testimony clips, students participate in a whole group discussion in response to some of the following questions:

- How did you feel hearing about mass killings from a survivor? What did it add to your understanding of the Einsatzgruppen?
- Abraham describes Jewish prisoners with blue armbands (escorting Jews from the train to the undressing area) and red armbands (preparing Jews for the gas chamber). Why did the Germans purposefully force Jewish prisoners to take part in the extermination process?
- What is the significance of the description that Abraham shares about the people being forced to undress?
- In both Abraham’s and William’s stories, how did the Nazis use fear and terror to control their victims?
- Abraham’s and William’s stories demonstrate how rare it was for Jews to survive Nazi violence – Abraham was one of only five out of 18,000 who were spared from the gas chamber that day. How does this statistic reflect the plans the Nazis had for the Jews?
- What was your reaction to the kindness of the Polish family toward William Good after his escape? Were you surprised by their actions? Why?

8 The photographs from the *Auschwitz Album* are projected or students access them online. Students are introduced to the collection of photos using the background information in the NOTE. The following quote is posted and discussed by the class⁴:

² It is often beneficial for students to watch each clip twice, completing the *Testimony Reflections* handout during the second viewing.

³ The testimonies featured in this lesson represent the evolution of the Final Solution, and correlate with the student handout, “*The Final Solution*,” found in step 5 of this lesson.

It was extremely rare for people to survive the Nazis’ extermination centers and mass killing operations. It was even more exceptional to survive the first phases of the Final Solution: murder by the Einsatzgruppen, and murder in the first extermination camps (which had no function other than murder, unlike Auschwitz, which was also a labor camp).

This unit contains two exceptional testimonies from survivors of these events, William Good (who survived an Einsatzgruppen murder) and Abraham Bomba (who was one of perhaps 70 Jews who survived the Treblinka death camp), making them significant sources of learning and remembrance.

⁴ On the day of her liberation – in the Dora concentration camp hundreds of miles from Auschwitz – Lilly Jacob-Zelmanovic Meier found the photos known as the “Auschwitz Album” in a deserted SS barracks. Among the many images, it contained pictures of her family and friends as they arrived on the ramp of Auschwitz and unknowingly awaited their death. In 1980, Lilly donated the photo album to Yad Vashem.

With the exception of three photographs smuggled out by the Sonderkommando, The Auschwitz Album is the only surviving visual evidence of the process leading to mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

“Critics warn against ‘a danger of viewing the past only through the eyes of the perpetrators’ because ‘we risk seeing the victims as the Nazis saw them’.”⁵

9 In small groups, students analyze the four photographs from the *Auschwitz Album* using the *See, Think, Wonder* graphic organizer. As they observe, students remain aware that they are viewing “perpetrator photography” and consider the missing perspectives of the subjects depicted in the photographs.

10 Students watch a testimony clip of a Jewish survivor who was imprisoned at Auschwitz: **Ellis Lewin (bio)**. As they watch the clips, students take notes on *The One* or *Testimony Reflections* handout. After viewing, the class discusses the testimony and their thoughts about the *Auschwitz Album* using some of the following questions:

- What did you see, hear, or feel as you looked at the photographs in the *Auschwitz Album*?
- What did you *not* see? In what ways were the experiences of the subjects missing from view?
- What information or feeling do you get from Ellis Lewin’s testimony that is different from the photo album? How does this relate to the quote about “viewing the past only through the eyes of the perpetrators”?
- How does Ellis describe the sights, sounds, and the pace of activity at Auschwitz? How is it similar to Abraham Bomba’s description of arriving at Treblinka? What was the Nazi’s purpose in creating such an atmosphere?
- How did the Nazis break apart Ellis’ family? How did his father try to prevent the two of them from separating? How do you think this conflicted with his instincts or desires as a father?
- How is Elie Wiesel’s account of arriving at Auschwitz similar to Ellis’ description? What is the value of having both of these accounts available?
- Taken together, what story do the survivor testimonies tell? What is the contrast between them and the story transmitted by the perpetrators through the *Auschwitz Album*?

The photos were taken in the spring of 1944, either by Ernst Hofmann or by Bernhard Walter, two SS men whose task was to take ID photos and fingerprints of the inmates. The photos show the arrival of Hungarian Jews from Carpatho-Ruthenia, and depict the entire process leading to mass murder except for the killing itself.

The purpose of the album is unclear. It was not intended for propaganda purposes, nor does it have any obvious personal use. One assumes that it was prepared as an official reference for a higher authority, as were photo albums from other concentration camps.

Because the album reflects the viewpoints and purposes of the perpetrators, it tells a fragmented and incomplete story. It focuses on the operational facets of extermination, perhaps to highlight Nazi efficiencies or to create a rationale for its systems. The photos present Jewish people as passive and nameless victims, and fail to capture individuality or acts of resistance. They also do not depict the worst of the living conditions or Nazi brutality, thereby giving us only a partial understanding of the experiences of the Jewish people imprisoned in Auschwitz.

For additional context, see:

- *Testimony of Lili Meier*
- *The Auschwitz Album*
- *The Auschwitz Album: Guidelines for Teachers*

⁵ Ulrike Koppermann, “Challenging the Perpetrators’ Narrative: A Critical Reading of the Photo Album ‘Resettlement of the Jews from Hungary’,” *Journal of Perpetrator Research*, 2.2 (2019): 101–129.



As a summative task, students choose one of the survivors they encountered in this lesson and note three things: (a) an insight about the systems that made the Final Solution possible; (b) an observation about the dehumanizing conditions or experiences faced by the individual; ; and (c) a question they would pose to the individual if they could. Students draw on examples from lesson sources to support their observations.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 90 - 120 MINUTES