



LESSON PLAN: Collaborators and Perpetrators

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students analyze the roles of collaborators and perpetrators in the Holocaust, and will consider the circumstances, potential choices versus choices made, and actions of those who decided to collaborate. They will also see the fluidity of the roles; one does not necessarily remain in one role, but can move from one to another based on one's circumstances, choices, and actions¹.

- 1** In pairs or in small groups, students define the terms collaborator and perpetrator, utilizing as many adjectives as possible. As a class, the two terms are discussed with a definition agreed upon for each term. **OPTIONAL:** Students can return and add to their previous concept map to put the concepts of bystanders, collaborators, and perpetrators in conversation with each other.
- 2** Students learn they are going to read parts of an official report by German officer Paul Salitter side-by-side with Jewish victim Hilde Sherman's testimony about similar events. (Brief biographies can be found in this footnote².) The handout, **Report by Salitter and Memoir of Hilde Sherman**, is distributed and in small groups, students focus on one of the four sections and complete their specific section in the **Salitter and Sherman Graphic Organizer**. Students may also watch **Teaching about Nazi Perpetrators** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2yiT8NrOPk>) for information about the Salitter Report.
- 3** When finished, each group presents its findings to the class, citing textual evidence from Salitter and Sherman. As a class, students discuss some of the following questions:
 - What are some similarities and some differences between the two accounts?
 - Compare and contrast the word choices and tones of Salitter and Sherman.
 - Based on the report, how would you characterize Salitter's role in the murder process?
 - Where did Salitter have the opportunity to make different choices? What would be some of his motivations for collaborating with the Nazis or potentially choosing a different course of action?
 - What are some other roles portrayed in these accounts? How would you characterize them (perpetrators, bystanders, collaborators)?

¹ While we may expect to see names of high-profile Nazis here, e.g. Mengele, Eichmann, or Himmler, this lesson instead focuses on rank-and-file Nazis and collaborators, those who worked for and with the Nazis to enable the Final Solution. You should note that these people were human beings with agency who made choices and acted upon them. You should also note the ease with which many collaborators move into the role of perpetrator based on choices they made in their positions.

² Paul Salitter was born in 1898, and joined the Nazi party at the age of 39. He was married and had two children. In October 1941, he was given the mission to accompany a transport of Jews from Dusseldorf to Riga. After the war ended, he was investigated and suspended from the German police force. Although Salitter did not resume his job as a policeman again, he was granted full rights to his pension until his death in 1972. Hilde Sherman was born in Germany in 1923. She married Kurt Winter in 1941, in order to be deported together with him. (Kurt was murdered at the Salaspils Camp in Latvia in 1942). During World War II, she was deported to the Riga Ghetto in December 1941 by the Nazis. She later emigrated to Colombia and published her memoir, *Between Light and Darkness: Girlhood in the Ghetto* in 1982. She retired to Jerusalem, Israel, where she died in 2011.

- What emotions does Sherman’s testimony raise? Mark specific sentences from Sherman’s testimony that expose the brutality and violence of the guards. Why do you think Salitter’s report lacks these references?

4 Students watch testimony of a Polish Jew in hiding who was exposed and betrayed to the Nazis by people she knew: **Dora Iwler (bio)**. As they watch the clips, students take notes on the **Testimony Reflections** handout, found at the beginning of this unit. After viewing the clips, the class discusses the following questions:

- a) How was Dora discovered by the Nazis? Who came to arrest her?
- b) Why do you think Dora’s former classmates turned her in? Why do you think the Polish man collaborated with the Nazi who came to arrest her?
- c) Many Jews were betrayed by their neighbors, former friends, and others who turned them over to the Nazis, sometimes for a monetary reward, sometimes to curry favor with the Nazis, and sometimes for reasons as personal as jealousy or a past feud. Antisemitism was also a factor, as was revenge. Usually, the arrested Jews would be murdered. How would you categorize people such as Dora’s former classmates who alerted the Nazis to where she was staying? Were they perpetrators? Collaborators? What responsibility do they bear for their actions?

5 Students annotate the handout, **Profiting from Hatred**, highlighting what they find important while pondering what responsibility major corporations should have for collaborating, profiting, and providing the infrastructure necessary to commit murder on a mass scale.

6 Students view the testimony of **Silvia Grohs-Martin (Clip 46-47 with edits needed) (bio)** as she describes performing forced labor for Siemens while she was imprisoned at Ravensbruck concentration camp. Discuss some or all of the following questions:

- As Silvia mentions, there were civilian laborers who worked alongside prisoners at factories located in and near concentration camps such as Siemens at Ravensbruck. Some ignored the inmates but others made different choices, from giving food, mailing letters for them, and treating them with kindness. What were the options for civilians who worked for a company that utilized forced laborers or provided the equipment needed to build a camp?
- How would you categorize the German citizens who were Siemens employees who worked alongside prisoners such as Silvia?
- From engineers to secretaries, teachers to doctors, lawyers to judges, what responsibility did typical Germans bear for their role in supporting Nazi Germany and the perpetration of the Holocaust? Do you feel that these different roles change their level of responsibility?
- What do the decisions these individual companies made say about the people in charge of the company? What responsibility do they have for their role in the Holocaust?

7 Students read the handout, **Letters from Karl Kretschmer to His Family**, and annotate with a focus on Kretschmer’s activities and his relationship with his wife and children. Next, discuss the following questions³:

- How did Kretschmer participate in the perpetration of the Holocaust? How does Kretschmer justify his actions, as explained to his family in his letters? What reasons does he give for why his actions are acceptable and even honorable?
- What do his letters say about the claim that everyday Germans didn’t know what was happening?

³ For more information on the role of the Einsatzgruppen in the Holocaust, see *Echoes & Reflections Unit V: The "Final Solution"*

- How did the love of family members at home help perpetrators cope with their actions and even normalize the crimes that they were committing?
- In the letters there is evidence that perpetrators were in favor of disciplining their emotional “weakness” and overcoming feelings of human sympathy. Where can you find such evidence? What does this say about perpetrator behavior?



On the concept map, where do each of the examples in this lesson fall in terms of guilt and responsibility?

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 120 - 150 MINUTES