

Challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day
Why do genocides happen?

Lesson 1: What was the Holocaust?

The Holocaust is the most infamous genocide in history. It came close to wiping out the entire Jewish population of Europe.

A summary of the Holocaust

TASK: Read the information below and complete a timeline to show the key events:

After 1919, Jewish people in Germany were free and legally equal and often felt more German than Jewish. Many were wealthy and successful. But there was an undercurrent of anti-Jewish racism, called 'anti-Semitism', in Germany. Hitler appealed to this anti-Semitism by blaming the Jewish people for Germany's defeat in the First World War.

As soon as Hitler came to power, in 1933, he introduced a programme of persecution. The Nuremberg Laws (1935) deprived Jewish people of many of their civil rights. On 9 November 1938, Kristallnacht or the 'Night of Broken Glass' took place. Jewish businesses, synagogues and homes were attacked and destroyed. This was a response to the assassination of a German diplomat by a Polish Jewish man in Paris.

After the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, the Nazis stepped up the persecution of the Jewish people: They were herded into over-crowded 'ghettos'.

After 1941, following the invasion of the Soviet Union, Nazi death-squads, called 'einsatzgruppen', murdered more than a million Jewish people in eastern Europe. In 1942, a Nazi conference at Wannsee decided on the 'Final Solution' - the Jewish people were to be systematically taken to camps such as Auschwitz and gassed.

Nobody knows how many Jewish people died during the Holocaust, but the usual figure given is 6 million.

TASK: Read the information below and answer the questions, in full sentences:

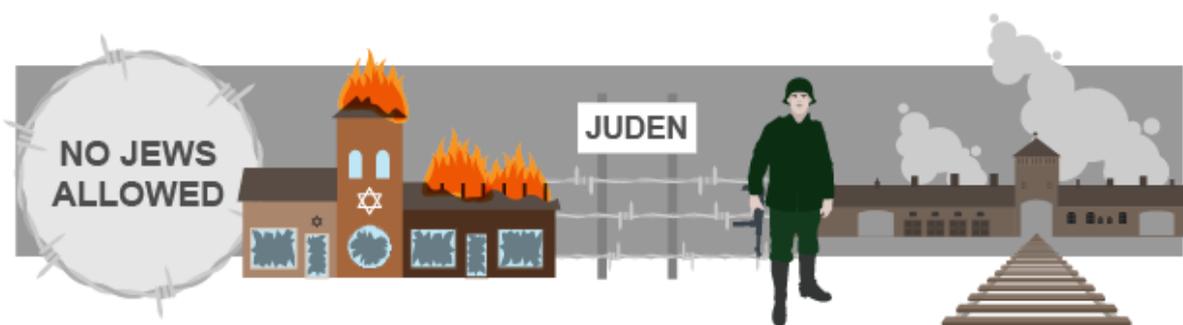
Anti-Semitism, which is the hatred of Jewish people, had been common in Europe since the Middle Ages, and was especially strong in the 19th century. In the 1920s, Germany was one of the countries in Europe where Jewish people were free. German Jewish people:

- were few in number - 1% of the population
- were often wealthy and successful in business
- were prominent in politics and the arts (theatre and film)
- had married Germans – in some cases they had converted to Christianity
- many had fought for Germany in the First World War
- most (80%) were German citizens

However, German-Jewish success and wealth made many non-Jewish Germans envious.

In the 1920s and 1930s, so-called 'race scientists' declared that some races, eg German 'Aryans', were a master race, and superior to other sub-humans, or 'Untermenschen', such as the Roma gypsies, and black people. Nazi race-scientists said that the Jewish people were an anti-race, which means not really human at all.

After the First World War, right-wing politicians looked for a scapegoat to blame for Germany's defeat. Hitler blamed the Jewish people - he said they had stabbed the German army in the back. He believed that the Jewish people had no ambition but greed. He thought that they were selfish and not truly German and saw them as enemies of Germany.



Persecution

As soon as Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, he began to persecute the Jewish people:



1933	Hitler's 'brownshirts' stood outside Jewish shops and persuaded Germans to boycott them.
Summer 1935	'Jews not wanted here' posters began to go up around Germany.
September 1935	The Nuremberg Laws deprived Jewish people of their civil rights. They were forbidden to vote and they were not allowed to marry Germans. Other laws were passed forbidding them to go out at night or own a bicycle, among other things.
9 November 1938	Kristallnacht was when Jewish businesses, synagogues and homes were destroyed. Many Jewish men were killed or put in concentration camps.
January 1939	Hitler accused the Jewish people of stirring up other countries against Germany. He threatened them with annihilation if a war broke out.

1. What does Anti-Semitism mean?
2. Why were many Germans envious (jealous) of German Jews?
3. What did 'race scientists' say about Jews?
4. How did WW1 contribute to Anti-Semitism?
5. Give 3 examples of how the Nazis persecuted German Jews in the 1930s.

Lesson 2: What was the Holocaust?

TASK: Read the information below and answer the questions, in full sentences:

During the Second World War, Nazi persecution of the Jewish people worsened into 'genocide' - the attempt to kill all the Jewish people in Europe.

1940	In many towns, Jewish people were forced to leave their homes and go to live in Jewish areas, or 'ghettos', where they were forbidden to earn a wage. Many starved to death.
1941	All Jewish people were forced to wear a yellow Star of David.
1941	In eastern Europe, Nazi Einsatzgruppen rounded up and murdered over a million Jewish people.
1942	Wannsee Conference: In January, the decision was taken for a 'Final Solution to the Jewish Problem' - to exterminate all the Jewish people in Europe. Camps were built at places such as Auschwitz and Jewish people were rounded up and sent there to be gassed. Jewish prisoners were organised into Sonderkommando units to burn the bodies in the crematoria. Others were worked to death in labour camps to help the war effort.
Winter 1944- 1945	The 'Death Marches'. As the Russians advanced, the SS guards marched the Jewish people to concentration camps in the west. Many Jewish people died on the marches. Many were killed because they could not keep up. When they reached camps such as Bergen-Belsen in West Germany, they were crammed in in such numbers that they died of starvation or disease.

1. What do you think the aim of the ghettos was?
2. What does the Wannsee Conference suggest about Nazi attitudes towards Jewish people? (think about what was discussed and eventually decided)

Consequences of the Holocaust



Auschwitz concentration camp, Poland

Jewish people call the Holocaust the 'Shoah', which means 'destruction' or 'catastrophe'. It's estimated that 6 million Jewish people died. The Nazis also:

- exterminated half a million Roma gypsies
- put a quarter of a million mentally ill and disabled people to death
- sterilised deaf people
- imprisoned homosexuals
- considered that Slavic people were sub-human and intended to starve up to 30 million Soviet civilians and prisoners of war
-

Jewish people reacted in different ways:

- in some places, the Jewish people resisted, eg the Warsaw Uprising of 1943
- some of them fled from Germany and other countries such as Poland.
- Some put their children on Kindertransport trains, which took them to Great Britain, where they were fostered
- some hid
- some survived the concentration camps, often against all odds

Many Jewish people were saved by acts of bravery and compassion carried out by Jewish and non-Jewish people alike, eg Oskar Schindler. Schindler was an ethnic German and credited with saving the lives of 1,200 Jews, despite being a member of the Nazi party. His moving story was made into the film, *Schindler's List* in 1993.

After the war, Nazi leaders were put on trial at the Nuremberg War Crimes trials (1945–1946). Many were sentenced to death. War criminals continued to be found and put on trial, including high profile cases such as Adolf Eichmann in 1960 and Klaus Barbie who was put on trial in 1987. It is universally believed that such a genocide must never be allowed to happen again.

27 January is Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD). The date was chosen as the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Holocaust Memorial Day is an international day of remembrance - not only for the Jewish Holocaust, but for subsequent genocides in places like Cambodia, Bosnia and Rwanda. All over the world, people honour the survivors and reflect on the consequences.

TASK: After reading the **Consequences of the Holocaust**, design a memorial that could commemorate the lives lost, and also encourage people to never forget this event.

Extension Task: Who was responsible for the Holocaust?

By the 1960s, historians were arguing about why the Holocaust happened. The '*intentionalists*' claimed that Hitler always intended to mass-murder the Jewish people, whereas the '*functionalists*' argued that the Holocaust arose out of the chaos of the war. **Daniel Goldhagen** (1996) suggested that anti-Semitism had turned ordinary Germans into 'Hitler's willing executioners'.

It is certainly hard to imagine something like this happening today in Great Britain. If one group of people were persecuted the way the Jews were in Germany, it is likely that most people would get together and do something about it.

However, lots of people in Germany at the time were very poor and had had years of problems with previous governments. Hitler offered them a fresh approach and told them that their luck would improve if they got rid of the Jewish problem. Many Germans themselves disliked Jews because they did not understand why 'foreign' people should make more money than them.

When it came to the Holocaust, many Germans did not know about it until it was too late. Those who did know, were too scared to say or do anything. Hitler had made them feel as though they were always being watched by the secret police forces and they knew that the punishment for helping a Jew escape would be death.

TASK: Historians fiercely debate this question of whether or not ordinary German people should take some responsibility for the Holocaust. What do you think?

Is this an excuse? Does this justify people sitting back and letting the Jews be treated in this way?

