

8E: Holocaust: Memory & Meaning

In this unit, students work with a variety of memoir and primary source materials connected to the Holocaust to explore two key questions: How do a society and its people become participants (willingly or indifferently) in such horror? And what is the responsibility of those who experienced, witnessed, participated in, or now learn about these events? The materials are selected to present events from several different perspectives—those of perpetrators, survivors, victims, bystanders, and witnesses. They enable students to begin to understand the strategies Nazis used to influence the mindset of a nation, and to reflect on the human responses to the unfolding of genocide.

First, students analyze “I Cannot Forget,” a poem by Holocaust survivor Alexander Kimel that explores the haunting power of memory. Next, students read from the memoir *Shores Beyond Shores*, in which author Irene Butter describes how her Jewish family’s happy life in Berlin was slowly destroyed as the Nazis came to power. As a counterpoint, students examine passages from *A Child of Hitler* by Alfons Heck, an Aryan boy who became an enthusiastic member of the Hitler Youth. Students also explore articles and images that show the Nazi propaganda machine in full swing during the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, where the government sought to showcase the supposed superiority of the Aryan race. Finally, students read additional excerpts from *Child of Hitler*, *Maus*, and *Night*, where participants and survivors trace the descent into darkness: from Kristallnacht, to the creation of the ghettos, and eventually to the death camps. As students explore these materials, they are guided by a series of interviews with Holocaust survivor Irene Butter, who speaks about her family’s experiences, the work she does to educate young people about the Holocaust, and her hope that more people stand up against injustice.

Note: The subject of the Holocaust is, by definition, a difficult and disturbing one. Several of the selections in this unit contain images that are both graphic and potentially upsetting for students. Be sure to preview selections and prepare students for what they will read. There are many excellent resources outside Amplify to support your work with this unit if needed, including the [Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission](#).

Core texts your student will read:

- “I Cannot Forget” by Alexander Kimel
- *A Child of Hitler* by Alfons Heck
- “Helene Mayer, Fencing Champ, Says She’ll Try for Olympics” from *Jewish Daily Bulletin*
- “100,000 Hail Hitler; U.S. Athletes Avoid Nazi Salute to Him” by Frederick T. Birchall from *The New York Times*
- “Jesse Owens’ Olympic Triumph Over Time and Hitlerism” from *Ebony* by Lerone Bennett, Jr.
- Excerpts from *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* by Art Spiegelman
- Excerpts from *Night* by Elie Wiesel
- Excerpts from *Shores Beyond Shores* by Irene Butter

What my student will do/learn:

- Students analyze anti-Semitic propaganda and other techniques that Nazis used to turn Germany against its Jewish citizens.
- Students explore various first- and second-hand materials, including video interviews with a Holocaust survivor, memoir, and a graphic novel, to better understand the evolution of the Holocaust and the actions and reactions of those involved.
- Students continue to actively discuss their responses connected to classroom activities in order to share their range of perspectives and refine their understanding.
- Students continue to write in response to prompts 2–3 times weekly, and practice analytic writing in response to text by developing a controlling idea or claim and providing support with details or evidence.
- Students end their exploration of these accounts of the Holocaust by writing a reflective poem that presents the images and ideas from the unit they found most powerful.
- Students write an end-of-unit essay responding to the following prompt: The Holocaust did not happen overnight. As the Nazis laid the groundwork for what would eventually become known as the Holocaust, they used a number of strategies to isolate, oppress, and control the Jewish population of Europe, and to convince others to go along with their plan.

Choose two of the strategies that stood out to you as you explored this unit. Using examples from the texts and images you analyzed, describe each strategy and the impact it had.

Here are some conversation starters that you can use during this unit to promote discussion and encourage continued learning with your student.

1. According to the texts you've read in this unit, why is remembering important? What memories stood out to you as you read these texts? How might these memories, and those like them, help to ensure events like the Holocaust don't happen again?
2. Which text, image, or video had the greatest impact on you? Why?
3. Can you share a piece of writing with me in which you provide evidence from the text to support your controlling idea or claim? (Provide feedback to your student by finding something in their writing that you can respond to as a reader. For example, "The details you used about the Olympic rules helped me understand how Mayer felt forced to join the German team.")
4. What were a couple of the strategies that the Nazis used to lay the groundwork for the Holocaust? What were the impacts of these strategies on those they sought to isolate, oppress, or control?