

Yom HaShoah: Understanding the Holocaust

UNIT OVERVIEW

Essential Question: How do systems of injustice develop and escalate into genocide, and what is our responsibility as the next generation in preventing future atrocities?

Unit Learning Objectives: By the end of this series, students will be able to:

- Analyze the systemic nature of the Holocaust and how ordinary systems became instruments of genocide
- Understand the progression from prejudice to persecution to genocide
- Evaluate the roles and responsibilities of different groups during the Holocaust
- Analyze resistance movements and their significance
- Understand Yom HaShoah as a commitment to justice and prevention
- Recognize their own agency in preventing injustice and genocide
- Connect Holocaust lessons to modern genocides and human rights violations
- Understand their responsibility as the next generation

Lesson 1: From Prejudice to Genocide—The Progression of Evil

Duration: 60 minutes | **Objective:** Students will understand how the Holocaust developed systematically through stages, and recognize warning signs of escalating injustice.

Materials:

- Timeline showing progression of Nazi persecution (1933-1945)
- Chart paper and markers
- Images of laws and propaganda (age-appropriate)
- Photos of Bayla and Henry Mann (from Stories of Strength document)
- Lesson 1 Student Handout

Instructional Sequence:

HOOK

Ask: "How do you think a society goes from having prejudice against a group to committing genocide? Does it happen suddenly, or gradually? What warning signs might we see along the way? Today we're going to trace how the Holocaust developed step by step. Understanding this progression helps us recognize warning signs in our own world."

Take 2-3 responses. Say: "We're also going to learn about Bayla and Henry Mann, a couple from our community whose story shows us how ordinary people experienced this progression and how they survived."

MINI-LESSON: THE PROGRESSION FROM PREJUDICE TO GENOCIDE

Explain: "Genocide doesn't happen overnight. It develops through stages. Understanding these stages helps us recognize when injustice is escalating and when we need to speak up."

Create a chart: "The Progression of Persecution"

Stage	What Happened	Year(s)
1. Prejudice & Propaganda	Antisemitism is spread through propaganda. Jewish people are blamed for Germany's problems. Stereotypes are repeated constantly.	1933-1935
2. Discrimination & Laws	Laws are passed that take away rights. Jewish people are excluded from jobs, schools, and public places. They must wear identifying badges.	1935-1939
3. Segregation & Ghettos	Jewish people are forced into separate areas (ghettos). They are isolated from the rest of society. Movement is restricted.	1939-1941
4. Concentration & Camps	Jewish people are sent to concentration camps. Conditions are brutal. People are forced to work. Many die from starvation and disease.	1941-1942
5. Genocide	The Nazis implement the "Final Solution"—a plan to systematically murder all Jewish people. Extermination camps are built. Millions are killed.	1942-1945

Ask: "At what point do you think people should have spoken up? When was it too late? What could have stopped this progression?"

SYSTEMIC NATURE OF THE HOLOCAUST

Explain: "The Holocaust wasn't just the work of a few evil people. It was systematic. It involved many systems and institutions:

- **Government:** Made laws that took away rights
- **Military:** Carried out orders to arrest and deport people
- **Police:** Enforced discriminatory laws
- **Businesses:** Benefited from taking Jewish property and using forced labor
- **Schools:** Taught antisemitic propaganda to children
- **Media:** Spread lies and hatred
- **Churches:** Some remained silent; some actively collaborated

This is important because it shows us that genocide requires the participation or silence of many institutions and many people. It's not just about one evil leader. It's about systems that allow evil to happen."

BAYLA AND HENRY MANN'S STORY: EXPERIENCING THE PROGRESSION

Read aloud: "Bayla and Henry Mann were born and raised in a small town called Gordz in Lithuania. They went to school there, and Bayla studied to become a nurse. In 1939, when they were both in their early 20s, they got married. But just two years later, in 1941, the Nazis invaded Lithuania.

Let's trace how Bayla and Henry experienced each stage of persecution:

Stage 1 - Prejudice & Propaganda: The Nazis spread propaganda about Jewish people. They blamed Jewish people for Lithuania's problems. They made people believe lies about Jewish people.

Stage 2 - Discrimination & Laws: The Nazis made laws that took away Jewish people's rights. Bayla and Henry couldn't go to certain places. They couldn't do certain things.

Stage 3 - Segregation & Ghettos: The Nazis marched through Gordz and burned the town to the ground. They forced all 400 Jewish families into the town's marketplace. Under heavy guard, they were kept there for three days without food or water. Then, they were taken to Kovno Ghetto, a slave labor camp in Lithuania. Life in the camp was extremely hard. People were always hungry and weak. Bayla once tried to get an extra ration of potatoes, but a Nazi officer hit her on the head. She suffered from migraines for the rest of her life.

Stage 4 - Concentration & Camps: After two years in the ghetto, Bayla and Henry knew they had to escape. They had hidden money in their clothing when the Nazis first arrived. They used it to pay a German Catholic farmer named Yoroslav Rakevcious to help them.

The farmer smuggled them out of the ghetto by disguising them as Catholics. They shaved their heads, wore crosses, and hid during the day. At night, they worked on Yoroslav's farm in exchange for food and shelter. The farmer's wife was deeply religious and believed that helping them would bring her and her husband to heaven. Thanks to their kindness, Henry, Bayla, and two others survived.

Sadly, none of the other 400 Jewish families from Gordz survived, including Bayla and Henry's parents and relatives—except for Hanna, Henry's sister.

In 1945, after years of hiding, Bayla and Henry were finally freed when Russian soldiers defeated the Nazis. They were placed in a camp for displaced people in the American Zone of Germany. After 18 months, they traveled to the United States and eventually settled in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In America, they worked hard as painters and truck drivers and eventually started Mann's Kosher Poultry business. Later, they moved to Miami Beach and went into real estate. They lived in Miami for decades, where Henry passed away in the late 1980s at around 70 years old, and Bayla passed away in the mid-1990s in her late 70s."

Ask: "How did Bayla and Henry experience each stage of persecution? What choice did they make to survive? What does the farmer's choice tell us about individual responsibility?"

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students complete their handout: "Understanding Systemic Persecution"

Prompts: "The progression from prejudice to genocide includes... At stage [X], people should have... The farmer's choice shows... Systems that allowed genocide included..."

CLOSURE

"The Holocaust developed through stages. At each stage, people had choices. Some chose to participate in the system. Some chose to resist. Some chose to do nothing. Understanding this progression helps us recognize warning signs in our own world. Next lesson, we'll explore different forms of resistance and what they teach us."

Lesson 2: Resistance, Complicity, and Moral Agency

Duration: 60 minutes | **Objective:** Students will analyze different forms of resistance and complicity, and understand the concept of moral agency.

Materials:

- Chart paper and markers
- Lesson 2 Student Handout
- Case studies of different individuals' choices

Instructional Sequence:

REVIEW & HOOK

Quick review: "Last lesson we learned how the Holocaust developed through stages. We learned that individuals had choices at each stage. Today we're going to explore different forms of resistance and complicity, and what they teach us about moral agency—our ability to make choices and take action."

MORAL AGENCY AND COMPLICITY

Explain: "Moral agency means we have the ability to make choices and take action. During the Holocaust, people had moral agency. They could choose to participate, to resist, or to do nothing.

Some people chose to participate in the Holocaust. They became perpetrators or collaborators. They made a choice to do evil.

Some people chose to resist. They risked their lives to help Jewish people or to fight back. They made a choice to do good.

Some people chose to do nothing. They didn't actively help the Nazis, but they didn't help Jewish people either. They made a choice to remain silent.

This is important because it shows us that people are not helpless. Even in terrible circumstances, people have choices. And those choices matter."

Create a chart: "Choices and Their Consequences"

- **Perpetrators:** Actively participated in genocide. Made a choice to do evil.
- **Collaborators:** Worked with the Nazis. Made a choice to benefit from evil.
- **Bystanders:** Did nothing. Made a choice to remain silent.
- **Resisters:** Actively fought back or helped. Made a choice to do good.
- **Rescuers:** Risked their lives to help. Made a choice to do good at great personal cost.

Ask: "What does it mean to have moral agency? What choices did different people make? What would you have done? Why?"

BAYLA AND HENRY'S RESISTANCE AND ESCAPE

Read aloud: "Bayla and Henry Mann made a choice to resist the system. They didn't have weapons. They didn't fight in armed resistance. But they made a choice to escape.

They used their hidden money to pay a farmer to help them. The farmer, Yoroslav Rakevcious, made a choice to resist. He risked his life and his family's safety to help Bayla and Henry. His wife believed that helping them would bring them to heaven. Their choice to help was an act of resistance.

Bayla and Henry's choice to escape was an act of resistance. They refused to accept what the Nazis were doing. They refused to go to a concentration camp. They chose to fight for their survival."

Ask: "What choices did Bayla and Henry make? What choice did the farmer make? Why was the farmer's choice significant? What does this tell us about individual responsibility?"

REBUILDING AND LEGACY

Explain: "After the war, survivors faced an enormous challenge. They had lost families, homes, and years of their lives. But they didn't give up. They rebuilt their lives and built communities. They passed on their values to their children and grandchildren."

Share: "Bayla and Henry came to America. They worked hard as painters and truck drivers. They started a business. They had a family. They stayed connected to their Jewish community. They lived full, meaningful lives. Their descendants are part of our community today."

Ask: "What does it tell us about human resilience that survivors could rebuild their lives? How did they help build our community? What legacy did they leave?"

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students complete their handout: "Analyzing Resistance and Moral Agency"

Prompts: "Bayla and Henry resisted by... The farmer's choice was... Moral agency means... I would have..."

CLOSURE

"The Holocaust shows us that people have moral agency. They have choices. Some chose to resist. Some chose to do nothing. Some chose to participate. These choices had real consequences. Next lesson, we'll explore what Yom HaShoah means for us today and our responsibility to prevent future atrocities."

Lesson 3: Yom HaShoah, Prevention, and Global Responsibility

Duration: 60 minutes | **Objective:** Students will understand Yom HaShoah as a commitment to preventing genocide and recognize their responsibility in a global context.

Materials:

- Chart paper and markers
- Lesson 3 Student Handout
- Information about modern genocides (age-appropriate)
- Photos or names of community members (with permission)

Instructional Sequence:

HOOK

Ask: "What does it mean to remember? What responsibility comes with remembering? How can we use lessons from the Holocaust to prevent future atrocities? Today we're going to explore Yom HaShoah as a commitment to prevention and justice."

Take 2-3 responses. Say: "Yom HaShoah is not just about the past. It's about the future. It's about our responsibility to prevent genocide."

MINI-LESSON: YOM HASHOAH AND THE COMMITMENT TO PREVENTION

Explain: "Yom HaShoah means 'Day of the Holocaust' in Hebrew. It's a day when Jewish people around the world remember the Holocaust. But it's more than just remembrance. It's a commitment to prevention.

When we say 'Never Again,' we're making a promise. We're saying: We will not allow another Holocaust. We will not allow genocide. We will stand up against injustice. We will speak up when we see hatred spreading. We will protect the vulnerable."

Create a chart: "What 'Never Again' Means"

- Recognize warning signs of hatred and injustice
- Speak up when we see discrimination
- Stand with people who are being targeted
- Question leaders who blame groups of people
- Protect freedom and democracy
- Teach people about history
- Work to prevent all genocides, not just the Holocaust
- Protect human rights

GENOCIDE THEN AND NOW

Explain: "The Holocaust wasn't the only genocide in history. Genocides have happened before and after the Holocaust. Understanding this helps us recognize that 'Never Again' is not just about the Holocaust. It's about preventing all genocides.

Examples of genocides:

- **Armenian Genocide (1915):** Ottoman Empire killed approximately 1.5 million Armenians
- **Holocaust (1933-1945):** Nazi Germany killed approximately 6 million Jewish people
- **Cambodian Genocide (1975-1979):** Khmer Rouge killed approximately 2 million Cambodians
- **Rwandan Genocide (1994):** Hutu extremists killed approximately 800,000 Tutsis
- **Bosnian Genocide (1992-1995):** Serbian forces killed approximately 100,000 Bosnian Muslims

In each case, we see similar patterns: propaganda, dehumanization, discrimination, segregation, and finally genocide. Understanding these patterns helps us recognize warning signs."

Ask: "What patterns do you see in these genocides? What warning signs appear in each? How can we use these lessons to prevent future atrocities?"

WARNING SIGNS OF GENOCIDE

Create a chart: "Warning Signs of Genocide"

- A leader or group blames another group for problems
- Propaganda spreads lies about a group
- Laws are passed that take away rights from a group
- A group is dehumanized (called animals, vermin, etc.)
- A group is segregated or isolated
- Violence or threats are used against a group
- People are afraid to speak up
- International community remains silent

Ask: "Where do you see these warning signs in the world today? What should we do when we see them?"

SURVIVORS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Explain: "Many Holocaust survivors came to America after the war. They built new lives. They had families. Some are part of our community. Their children and grandchildren are our neighbors, our friends, our community members."

Share: "Bayla and Henry Mann survived the Holocaust. They came to America and built a beautiful life together in Minneapolis and Miami. They had children and grandchildren. Their family is part of our community today. When we remember Bayla and Henry's story, we're honoring their strength and their legacy."

Ask: "Why is it important that survivors are part of our community? What responsibility do we have to their stories? How does knowing Bayla and Henry's story change how we think about genocide prevention?"

OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS GLOBAL CITIZENS

Explain: "You are the next generation. Survivors like Bayla and Henry are not here anymore. But their families are. And you are part of this community and a global community. You have inherited their stories and their responsibility."

What does that responsibility mean?

- Learn about the Holocaust and other genocides
- Recognize warning signs of hatred and injustice
- Speak up when you see discrimination
- Stand with people who are being targeted
- Question leaders who blame groups of people
- Protect freedom and democracy
- Work for human rights
- Support organizations that work to prevent genocide
- Teach others about history
- Make choices that promote justice

You have more power than you might think. Your choices matter. Your voice matters. You can help prevent future atrocities."

Ask: "What does it mean to be a global citizen? What responsibility do we have to people in other countries? How can you help prevent genocide?"

Prepare Students for Respectful Listening:

Say: "We're going to have a special guest who will share their family's story with us. This person's family member survived the Holocaust. We need to be respectful listeners. This is an honor and a responsibility."

Create a chart together: "How to Be a Respectful Listener"

- Listen with your whole heart and mind
- Don't interrupt
- It's okay to feel sad, moved, or emotional
- Ask kind and thoughtful questions
- Thank them for sharing
- Remember what they shared
- Respect their experience
- Think about what their story teaches us

Generate Questions Together:

Ask: "What would you like to know about their family's story?"

Write student questions on paper. Guide them toward respectful, thoughtful questions that connect to prevention and responsibility.

CLOSURE

"Yom HaShoah is a day to remember, to honor, and to commit to prevention. Next lesson, we'll hear directly from someone in our community about their family's story. This person's family survived the Holocaust, and they're going to share what that means to them and what they want us to know."

Lesson 4: Guest Speaker & Reflection on Responsibility

Objective: Students will listen respectfully to a community member's family story and reflect on their own responsibility as global citizens.

Materials:

- Guest speaker (relative of Bayla and Henry Mann or another Holocaust survivor from the community)

POST-VISIT REFLECTION DISCUSSION

Ask students:

- "What did you learn from the guest's story?"
- "How does this story connect to what we've learned about the Holocaust?"
- "What responsibility do you feel after hearing this story?"
- "How can you help prevent future atrocities?"
- "What will you do with what you've learned?"
- "How will you be a global citizen?"

ACTIVITY: COMMITMENT LETTER

Students write a commitment letter to themselves:

"Dear [Your Name],

I learned that _____. This story teaches me that _____. I commit to _____. When I see _____, I will _____. I promise to _____. As a global citizen, I will _____.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]"

CLOSURE

"Our community is strong because of survivors and their families. When we remember their stories, when we stand against hate, when we work for justice—we're honoring their strength and their legacy. You are the next generation. You have the power to prevent future atrocities. You are global citizens with responsibility to the world. Thank you for listening with your whole hearts and minds."

Trauma Informed Teaching Notes

Throughout All Lessons:

- **Emphasize resilience, resistance, and agency**, not victimization
- **Use respectful language** and avoid graphic descriptions
- **Focus on what people did** (survived, resisted, helped, rebuilt) rather than what was done to them
- **Normalize emotions:** "It's okay to feel sad, angry, or moved when we learn about injustice."
- **Provide safety:** "These terrible things happened a long time ago. You are safe."
- **Have support available** for students who become upset

If a Student Asks Difficult Questions:

Q: "Could this happen again?"

A: "That's an important question. History shows us that when people ignore warning signs, terrible things can happen. But it also shows us that people have the power to prevent it. When we stand up against hatred, when we speak up for what's right, when we protect freedom and democracy—we help prevent atrocities."

Q: "Why didn't the world stop it?"

A: "That's a hard question. Many countries didn't know what was happening. Some knew but didn't act. Some were fighting their own wars. This is why it's important for us to speak up and act when we see injustice. We can't wait for others to do it."

Q: "What can I do to prevent genocide?"

A: "Great question. You can learn about history. You can speak up when you see discrimination. You can stand with people who are being targeted. You can support organizations that work for human rights. You can make choices that promote justice. Your voice and your choices matter."