

The Crime of the Bystander in the Holocaust

“...a civilization is not destroyed by wicked people;
it is not necessary that people be wicked,
but only that they be spineless.”

James Baldwin

Overview

Why did the German people and the rest of the world allow the Nazi dictatorship to establish itself, label certain groups as “different” or “inhuman”, remove individual rights and freedoms from those groups, and violently persecute those sections of society? Students will explore these questions and more as they use the Holocaust as a context for exploring the dangers of remaining silent, apathetic, and indifferent in the face of oppression of others.

Grade

9

North Carolina Essential Standards for World History

- WH.1.2- Use historical comprehension...
- WH.1.3- Use Historical analysis and interpretation...
- WH.1.4- Use historical research...
- WH.8.1- Evaluate global wars in terms of how they challenged political and economic power structures and gave rise to new balances of power (e.g., Spanish American War, WWI, WWII, Vietnam War, Colonial Wars in Africa, Persian Gulf War, etc.).
- WH.8.2- Explain how international crisis has impacted international politics (e.g., Berlin Blockade, Korean War, Hungarian Revolt, Cuban Missile Crisis, OPEC oil crisis, Iranian Revolt, “911”, terrorism, etc.).
- WH.8.3- Explain how liberal democracy, private enterprise and human rights movements have reshaped political, economic and social life in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, the Soviet Union and the United States (e.g., U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, end of Cold War, apartheid, perestroika, glasnost, etc.).

Essential Questions

- What are the traits of an active citizen/community member?
- Why did much of German society allow the Nazi dictatorship to establish itself, remove individual rights and freedoms from groups they targeted as “different”, and violently persecute those sections of society?
- In what ways does Maurice Ogden’s poem *The Hangman* relate to the themes present in the Holocaust?
- What causes of the Holocaust are still at play in modern society?
- What do we risk by being apathetic citizens/community members?

Materials

- Warm-Up Quotes, attached
- *Hangman Checklist*, attached
- *Hangman*, by Maurice Ogden
- *Group Discussion Questions for Hangman*, attached
- *First They Came for the Jews*, attached
- Six pieces of chart paper containing one of the following largely lettered words: Apathy, Intolerance, Prejudice, Hatred, Fear, Propaganda; chart paper should be posted around classroom
- *Assessing and Defining Responsibility*, worksheet by the USHMM attached

Duration

60-90 minutes

Preparation

This lesson should come towards the end of a unit on the Holocaust, once students have already developed an understanding of the events of the Holocaust as well as its contributing factors. See Carolina K-12's lessons "Introduction to the Holocaust" and "Hate & Anti-Semitism in the Holocaust."

Procedure**Exploring the Roles of Citizens**

1. As a warm-up, break students into partners or small groups and give them one of the attached quotes to discuss for approximately 5 minutes. Afterwards, have each group read their quote to the remainder of class and share their thoughts regarding the discussion questions. Once all groups have shared, ask students to identify what all of the quotes had in common (they all addressed inaction on the part of a citizen) and ask students to define an "active citizen."
2. Next, ask students to apply these quotes as they ponder how an event as horrific as the Holocaust was allowed to occur. How is it possible that millions of people were murdered by a government and its citizens based solely on the fact that they had been labeled as "different?" After a moment of silent contemplation, ask students to share their ideas.

The Role of the Bystander

3. Discuss with students the fact that the Holocaust was not inevitable; it did NOT have to occur. However, sometimes it is easier for society to view things otherwise – to assume it must have been unavoidable in some way - otherwise how could such terrible things have been allowed to go on? We also like to think that the perpetrators in the Holocaust were monsters, that they were not normal people and that they were very different than any of us. The fact is, while many people committed monstrous acts, they too were human beings. And many others, also human beings, stood by quietly as terrible things happened. Police officers, teachers, doctors, parents, youth – it took the active participation or the passive acceptance of the majority of German society for the Holocaust to take place.
4. Further the conversation by noting that often, when we ask ourselves, "What would we have done?" it's quite simple to say, "I would never do something like that. I am stronger, braver, more resilient..." Encourage students to consider exactly what they have learned regarding the events of the Holocaust and to really consider what the Jews went through. Would you really risk your own life for another? Would you risk your family's life? All to save a stranger, perhaps even someone in your society who is unlike any friend you have; someone many around you say is "less than you" anyway? For some students, it's hard enough to face their peers within the walls of school, without the threat of death that was present in Germany. Explain to students that while it is difficult to truly know what any of us would have done, in actuality the percentage of Germans who resisted the Nazis or served as rescuers was unfortunately extremely small. Discuss:
 - Why didn't more German people protest and speak out against Nazi rule in the 1930s?
 - Why did the German people allow the Nazi dictatorship to establish itself, label certain groups as "different" or "inhuman", remove individual rights and freedoms from those groups, and violently persecute those sections of society?
5. Share the following quote with students and discuss:
 - "We must put ourselves in the difficult position of "bystander" in German society in the 1930s. As human beings we naturally gravitate toward the "rescuer" or "resister." Instead we must consider the reactions of people who were not directly affected by restrictive legislation. An understanding of people's inaction in the face of mounting persecution of other members of society should help us focus our own priorities about civil liberties. Why was this persecution of the Jews allowed to develop?" Discuss with students

that “many people didn't speak out against the Nazis because they were satisfied with other policies and achievements--that other considerations were held to be more important than the defense of democracy. One major factor inhibiting protest was, of course, fear of the Gestapo and the concentration camps. The Nazi promises of prosperity, stability, and greatness were seductive.”

Source: <http://www.suite101.com/lesson.cfm/17387/728/3>

“The Hangman”

6. Tell students they will be exploring these concepts further in a poem called *The Hangman* by Maurice Ogden. As an introduction to the poem, hand out the attached *Hangman Checklist* and instruct students to place a check in the first column beside each statement that is true of them.
7. Once students have finished, hand out the attached poem, *The Hangman*, as well as the attached discussion questions. Again in their groups, instruct students to read the poem together then discuss and answer the accompanying questions. Teachers may want to give students specific reading instructions while in their groups, such as:
 - One person should volunteer to read each numbered stanza to the group, while everyone else follows along.
 - Mark the text as you read:
 - Circle any words that are unfamiliar to you.
 - Underline any parts of the poem that stick out to you (for example, if a line paints a strong image in your mind).
 - If you are confused by any part of the poem, write a question mark by that line or section. You can also write out questions on the text.
 - If anything surprises you or evokes a strong emotional response from you, you can write an exclamation mark by the line or section,
 - If a particular thought pops in your head that connects to the poem, write it in the margins.
 - After you have read the poem, a new volunteer should lead the group through discussing the questions on the worksheet.
- **Note:** For a shorter alternative to *The Hangman*, or for use with groups who are not as strong in reading, teachers can use the attached poem *First They Came for the Jews*. Also, teachers can alternatively have students complete the above activities in partners or as an entire class rather than in small groups.
8. Give students approximately 20 minutes to read and discuss the poem in their groups. As each group finishes, instruct students to individually return to their *Hangman Checklist*. Tell students they should review the statements once more, this time placing a check in the second blank beside each statement they believe the poet would agree with. Once all groups are finished and students have completed the second column of the “Hangman Checklist,” have groups report back on their conversations:
 - What was your group’s opinion of this poem? What stood out for your group? How did it make you feel as you read it?
 - What message did your group feel the poet is trying to convey?
 - How does this poem connect to the events of the Holocaust?
 - What lesson do you think can we take from this poem regarding society today?
 - Review your individual *Hangman Checklist* responses. Discuss the statements you felt strongly about and why. Discuss the comments that you chose not to place a check beside and why. (Teachers should allow students to share freely, but use this as an opportunity to ask additional clarifying questions to encourage student learning and understanding regarding the themes present in the various statements.)
 - What types of things did you and the poet agree on? What did you disagree on?

The Recipe for a Holocaust

9. Focus student attention on large words that you have posted around the classroom on chart paper (the words should be written in large letters at the top of the paper, with room to write underneath. You may wish to post another piece of blank chart paper beside the first piece for overflow):
 - Apathy/Indifference
 - Silence
 - Anti-Semitism
 - Prejudice
 - Hatred
 - Fear
 - Propaganda

10. Again in their seven groups, tell students to assign a scribe and give each group a different colored marker. Tell students that they will rotate on your signal (sound a bell or flicker the lights) between each piece of chart paper. In the 2+ minutes they have at each piece of chart paper, groups will discuss their interpretation of the word they see and what part they feel it played in the occurrence of the Holocaust, and/or what part it plays in society today. The scribe should note their main thoughts and ideas on the chart paper under the word. Once students hear the teacher's signal, students will rotate clockwise to the next piece of chart paper. When arriving to subsequent words, the group should read and discuss what has already been written and add any additional thoughts, agreements, disagreements, etc. Encourage students to place a check beside any previous comments they strongly agree with.

11. Review your expectations for group work and safe movement then allow students to begin. Teachers should circulate around the room and monitor conversations and behavior while signaling students when it is time to move to their next conversation area.

12. Once students have finished rotating and discussing, have one student spokesperson remain at each sign while the rest of the students take their seats. Going word by word, have the student spokesperson read what has been written and allow the class to comment. Clear up any misconceptions or questions word by word and discuss:
 - Of these words, which is most connected to the causes of the Holocaust in your opinion and why?
 - Are there any other words that now come to mind when considering why the Holocaust happened? (note students responses on an additional sheet of chart paper)
 - Which of these words are evident and active in our society today? Explain.
 - What is our responsibility to counteract the negative effects of these words?
 - Could a Holocaust occur again? Explain. (See the below activity for exploring this further with students.)
 - Why is it important to study the Holocaust?

13. As a closing reflection assignment or for homework, have students complete the attached handout *Assessing and Defining Responsibility* from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Discuss as a class on the following day:
 - What is responsibility? How does one assess responsibility for a situation as complicated as the Holocaust?
 - Which descriptions did you place a 4 beside? Who is most responsible and why?
 - Which descriptions did you place a 1 beside? Who is least responsible and why?
 - What are the characteristics of a responsible citizen? (*Ensure students consider all aspects of responsible citizenship, from voting to writing letters to the editor to standing up against hatred and intolerance.*)
 - Evaluate the responsibility assumed by teen citizens your age. Are young people participating in their communities and governments, standing up for what they believe in, etc.? Why do you think this?
 - What do we risk by being apathetic citizens?

Additional Activities

- **Connections to the Holocaust**

Many times students assume that the Holocaust was an isolated event in history and they fail to understand that many incidences of mass genocide, persecution, and rights violations exist throughout history into today's modern world. Divide students into groups and have them research a past or present event that connects to the Holocaust. Examples may include:

- African-American Slavery in the United States
- Trail of Tears
- Jim Crow Era/Segregation
- Bosnia
- Rwanda
- Darfur

- **Personal Reflection:** "All men make mistakes, but only wise men learn from their mistakes." - Winston Churchill

- Ask students to do an honest reflection and think of a moment in their own lives when they made a choice to not stand up for someone or something that they since regret (for example, perhaps they can pinpoint a moment when they wish they would have stood up for a peer being picked on, or invited someone sitting along to join them at the lunch table; they might have heard someone make a racist joke and didn't say anything, or failed to voice their opinion about something important due to fear of others disagreeing.)
- Instruct students to brainstorm then focus on a particular instance or period from their life when they felt they were not being the best citizen they could be. Students should write a one-page reflection describing the incident, their behavior, their evaluation of why they made the choices they made, and their assessment of what they have since learned from the situation and/or what they would do differently.
- Remind students that the purpose of this writing assignment is to describe a poor choice that they regret and to learn from it through reflection. It is advised that students not share these reflections out loud; rather they turn the assignments in for only teacher review.

- **Get Active & Make a Difference**

Further explore active citizenship by having your students identify, plan, and execute a community service project. See Carolina K-12's "Window's to My Community" (available in the "Activities" section of the Database of K-12 Resources, or by e-mailing a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu) for leading students in creating an action plan. Students can also be given the task of designing an anti-hate or tolerance campaign in which they create posters, announcements, displays, etc. to teach the student body about these themes.

Warm-Up Quotes



“To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men.”

Abraham Lincoln

Based on the above quote, discuss:

- What historical examples can you think of that show the validity of this quote?
- In what ways does this quote connect to the Holocaust?
- What types of things prevent people from standing up for someone else or doing what they know is right?
- Are there examples from your own life, or examples you have witnessed in this school, when someone has not stood up for something or someone? Explain. What should they have done differently?



“When you have a choice to make and you don’t make it, that in itself is a choice.”

William James

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“The world is too dangerous to live in, not because of the people who do evil, but because of the people who sit and let it happen.”

Albert Einstein

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“The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.

Edmund Burke

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“Thou shalt not be a victim. Thou shalt not be an oppressor.
But most of all, thou shalt not be a bystander.”

Yehuda Bauer

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"We are all different; because of that, each of us has something different and special to offer and each and every one of us can make a difference by not being indifferent."

Henry Friedman

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Name: _____

Hangman Checklist

Directions. Before reading the poem, check those statements with which you agree. After reading the poem, check those statements with which you believe the poet, Maurice Ogden, would agree.

You **Poet**

- | | | |
|-------|-------|---|
| _____ | _____ | 1. A person who commits a crime should be punished. |
| _____ | _____ | 2. I don't care if I see something bad happen to someone, as long as it doesn't happen to me. |
| _____ | _____ | 3. Evil actions occur because of bad people. |
| _____ | _____ | 4. It is difficult for me to give support to someone who is being taken advantage of by someone else. |
| _____ | _____ | 5. It is important to mind only your own business. |
| _____ | _____ | 6. Getting involved in other people's problems is <u>not</u> the responsible thing to do. |
| _____ | _____ | 7. Many people need to be persecuted to be kept in line. |
| _____ | _____ | 8. If someone pushes me around, I want everyone to know about it. |
| _____ | _____ | 9. People should help other people who are being mistreated. |
| _____ | _____ | 10. The ultimate crime is murder. |
| _____ | _____ | 11. I think many people have been murdered for no reason whatsoever. |
| _____ | _____ | 12. I would defend or protect a family member or friend, but <u>not</u> a stranger. |
| _____ | _____ | 13. I expect help if I am mistreated. |
| _____ | _____ | 14. Someone else can help others who are wronged even if I'm unable to intervene. |
| _____ | _____ | 15. I think people who infringe on the rights of others would do the same to me. |
| _____ | _____ | 16. People should stick together for the common good. |
| _____ | _____ | 17. People generally get what they deserve. |
| _____ | _____ | 18. The bad things that happen outside our community are not our problems to deal with. |

Adapted from Georgia Commission on the Holocaust:

http://holocaust.georgia.gov/vgn/images/portal/cit_1210/31/2/26497476Study%20Guide%20one1.pdf

Hangman

by Maurice Ogden

1.

Into our town the Hangman came,
Smelling of gold and blood and flame.
And he paced our bricks with a diffident air,
And built his frame in the courthouse square.

The scaffold stood by the courthouse side,
Only as wide as the door was wide;
A frame as tall, or little more,
Than the capping sill of the courthouse door.

And we wondered, whenever we had the time,
Who the criminal, what the crime
That the Hangman judged with the yellow twist
of knotted hemp in his busy fist.

And innocent though we were, with dread,
We passed those eyes of buckshot lead --
Till one cried: "Hangman, who is he
For whom you raised the gallows-tree?"

Then a twinkle grew in the buckshot eye,
And he gave us a riddle instead of reply:
"He who serves me best," said he,
"Shall earn the rope of the gallows-tree."

And he stepped down, and laid his hand
On a man who came from another land.
And we breathed again, for another's grief
At the Hangman's hand was our relief

And the gallows-frame on the courthouse lawn
By tomorrow's sun would be struck and gone.
So we gave him way, and no one spoke,
Out of respect for his Hangman's cloak.

2.

The next day's sun looked mildly down
On roof and street in our quiet town,
And stark and black in the morning air
Was the gallows-tree in the courthouse square.

And the Hangman stood at his usual stand
With the yellow hemp in his busy hand;
With his buckshot eye and his jaw like a pike
And his air so knowing and business-like.

And we cried, "Hangman, have you not done
Yesterday, with the foreign one?"
Then we fell silent, and stood amazed,
"Oh, not for him was the gallows raised."

He laughed a laugh as he looked at us:
"Did you think I'd gone to all this fuss
To hang one man? That's a thing I do
To stretch a rope when the rope is new."

Then one cried "Murder!" and one cried "Shame!"
And into our midst the Hangman came
To that man's place. "Do you hold," said he,
"with him that was meant for the gallows-tree?"

And he laid his hand on that one's arm.
And we shrank back in quick alarm!
And we gave him way, and no one spoke
Out of fear of his Hangman's cloak.

That night we saw with dread surprise
The Hangman's scaffold had grown in size.
Fed by the blood beneath the chute,
The gallows-tree had taken root;

Now as wide, or a little more,
Than the steps that led to the courthouse door,
As tall as the writing, or nearly as tall,
Halfway up on the courthouse wall.

3.

The third he took -- we had all heard tell --
Was a usurer, and an infidel.

"What," said the Hangman "have you to do
With the gallows-bound, and he a Jew?"

And we cried out, "Is this one he
Who has served you well and faithfully?"
The Hangman smiled: "It's a clever scheme
to try the strength of the gallows-beam."

The fourth man's dark, accusing song
Had scratched our comfort hard and long;
"And what concern," he gave us back.
"Have you for the doomed -- the doomed and Black?"

The fifth. The sixth. And we cried again,
"Hangman, Hangman, is this the man?"
"It's a trick," he said. "that we hangmen know
For easing the trap when the trap springs slow."

And so we ceased, and asked no more,
As the Hangman tallied his bloody score.
And sun by sun, and night by night,
The gallows grew to monstrous height.

The wings of the scaffold opened wide
Till they covered the square from side to side;
And the monster cross-beam, looking down,
Cast its shadow across the town.

4.

Then through the town the Hangman came,
Through the empty streets, and called my name
-- And I looked at the gallows soaring tall,
And thought, "There is no one left at all

For hanging, and so he calls to me
To help pull down the gallows-tree."
So I went out with right good hope
To the Hangman's tree and the Hangman's rope.

He smiled at me as I came down
To the courthouse square through the silent town.
And supple and stretched in his busy hand
Was the yellow twist of the hempen strand.

And he whistled his tune as he tried the trap,
And it sprang down with a ready snap --
And then with a smile of awful command
He laid his hand upon my hand.

"You tricked me. Hangman!," I shouted then,
"That your scaffold was built for other men...
And I no henchman of yours," I cried,
"You lied to me, Hangman. Foully lied!"

Then a twinkle grew in the buckshot eye,
"Lied to you? Tricked you?" he said. "Not I.
For I answered straight and I told you true --
The scaffold was raised for none but you.

For who has served me more faithfully
Then you with your coward's hope?" said he,
"And where are the others who might have stood
Side by your side in the common good?"

"Dead," I whispered. And amiably
"Murdered," the Hangman corrected me:
"First the foreigner, then the Jew...
I did no more than you let me do."

Beneath the beam that blocked the sky
None had stood so alone as I.
The Hangman noosed me, and no voice there
Cried "Stop!" for me in the empty square.

Group Discussion Questions for “The Hangman” by Maurice Ogden

1. What words first come to mind when considering this poem?
2. Who does the Hangman mean when he says, “He who serves me best...shall earn the rope of the gallows-tree”?
3. How is the first victim described? Why do you think this victim was chosen?
4. Why do the townspeople remain silent as the first victim is hung?
5. Why are the townspeople surprised in part 2 of the poem?
6. How do the townspeople react when one townspeople speaks out against the Hangman?
7. What do the townspeople notice about the gallows? (“The gallows-tree had taken root”) What does this symbolize?
8. What does the third and fourth victim in section three have in common with the first?
9. How would you describe the townspeople? Why do you think they allow the executions to take place?
10. Why does the Hangman tell the narrator that the gallows was built for him?
11. In your opinion, what is the Hangman’s purpose or goal?
12. What do you imagine the last victim wanted most at the end of the poem?
13. Who or what could have stopped the Hangman?
14. What events throughout history can you connect to the themes present in this poem?
15. What examples of the Hangman exist in society today? In our school?
16. Who or what does the Hangman represent or symbolize?
17. What message is this poet trying to convey?
18. Who is most responsible for this incident and why?

Name: _____

First They Came for the Jews

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for me
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.

by Pastor Martin Niemöller

Answer the following questions:

1. Who do you think “they” refers to and why?
2. Why do you think they came for the Jews, Communists, and trade unionists?
3. Why do you think the narrator did not “speak out?”
4. What message is the narrator of this poem trying to convey? What evidence makes you think this?
5. What is a citizen’s responsibility in terms of speaking out? Explain.
6. What is the mood and tone of this poem?
7. What historical event does this poem refer to?

Teaching about the Holocaust

Assessing and Defining Responsibility

If you were a judge, how would you assess the “responsibility” of these people for what happened in the world between 1933 and 1945? Indicate one of the following:

1. Not responsible
2. Minimally responsible
3. Responsible
4. Very responsible

- _____ 1. One of Hitler’s direct subordinates, such as Heinrich Himmler or Joseph Goebbels
- _____ 2. A German who voluntarily joined Hitler’s special elite, the SS
- _____ 3. A German industrialist who financially supported Hitler’s rise to power and continued to support him verbally
- _____ 4. A judge who carried out Hitler’s decrees for sterilization of the “mentally incompetent” and internment of “traitors”
- _____ 5. A doctor who participated in sterilization of Jews
- _____ 6. A worker in a plant making Zyklon B gas
- _____ 7. The Pope, who made no public statement against Nazi policy
- _____ 8. An industrialist who made enormous profits by producing Zyklon B gas
- _____ 9. A manufacturer who used concentration camp inmates as slave labor in his plants
- _____ 10. An American industrialist who helped arm Hitler in the 1930s
- _____ 11. A person who voluntarily joined the Nazis in the 1930s
- _____ 12. A person who agreed to publicly take the Civil Servant Loyalty Oath (swearing eternal allegiance to Adolf Hitler in 1934)

- _____ 13. A person who complied with the law excluding Jews from economic and social life
- _____ 14. A person who regularly, enthusiastically attended Hitler rallies
- _____ 15. A person who always respectfully gave the “Heil Hitler” salute
- _____ 16. A person who served as a concentration camp guard
- _____ 17. A person who turned the lever to allow the gas into the chambers
- _____ 18. A driver of the trains that went to the concentration camps
- _____ 19. A diplomat for the Nazi government
- _____ 20. The American Government, which limited emigration of Jews to the U.S. in the 1930s
- _____ 21. The “little guy” who claimed “he doesn’t get involved in politics” and thus went about his business as quietly as he could in the Hitler regime
- _____ 22. The soldier who carried out orders to roust Jews from their homes for “evacuation and resettlement”
- _____ 23. The German couple who took up residence in a home evacuated by Jews
- _____ 24. The non-Jews who took over a store just abandoned by Jews
- _____ 25. The German who refused all pleas to participate in hiding and smuggling of Jews
- _____ 26. The policeman who helped round up escaping Jews
- _____ 27. A teacher who taught Nazi propaganda
- _____ 28. Children who joined the Hitler Youth
- _____ 29. Parents who sent or allowed their children to attend Hitler Youth meetings
- _____ 30. The Protestant clergyman who gave to the Nazis lists of members of his congregation who were “non-Aryan.”