

Holocaust Summary

World War 2

Unit 8

Key Idea:	A) Rewrite the Key Idea as an investigative question.
SS.912.A.6.3: Analyze the impact of the Holocaust during World War II on Jews as well as other groups.	

B) Read and Annotate. No Annotation, no grade.

During the last months of the European war, Allied forces uncovered one of the greatest evils of World War II as they march across Europe towards Berlin. Allied troops witnessed the horrors of Nazi concentration and death camps, which were part of the Holocaust. The Holocaust was the systematic, Nazi-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews, including one and a half million children – two-thirds of the Jewish population of Europe. The Nazis carrying out these murders believed they were exterminating subhumans who threatened the German nation.

When Adolf Hitler and the Nazis gained power of Germany in 1933, they began stirring up anti-Semitism, which means a hatred of Jews. Hitler and his followers constantly blamed Jews for all of Germany's problems. The Nazi Party emphasized the principle of Aryan supremacy, which is the belief in the superiority of the German race. They believed their race was destined to rule the world and that all other races were inferior.

When Hitler became Germany's leader, he began passing laws that took away the rights and freedoms of Jews. The measures were designed to humiliate Jews and make them outcasts. They were forced to wear a yellow star on their clothing for identification. The Nazis kept Jews from voting and banned them from working. Thousands of Jewish doctors, lawyers, musicians, artists, and professors were prevented from practicing their profession. Schools, restaurants, hospitals, theaters, museums, and athletic fields were gradually closed to Jews.

The Nazis used many other tactics to discriminate against the Jewish people in Germany. Germans boycotted Jewish stores, meaning they did not shop at Jewish owned businesses. In the years leading up to World War II, Jews were threatened and attacked and Jewish property was vandalized. In November 1938, a seventeen-year-old Jewish youth whose family had been mistreated by the Nazis, assassinated a German official. In response, Nazi gangs murdered many Jews and burned and looted thousands of Jewish businesses, homes, and synagogues all over Germany – an event that became known as Night of the Broken Glass, or Kristallnacht.

Jews were also segregated from the rest of the German population and forced to live in crowded, filthy areas called ghettos. The ghettos served as gigantic prisons, with entire neighborhoods surrounded by barbed-wire fences or gates. The ghettos were designed to isolate and control Jews. Curfews were imposed and no one was allowed to leave their neighborhood without police permission. Anyone that attempted to escape was punished with death. Tens of thousands of Jews died from starvation and diseases from the unsanitary conditions.

By the mid-1930s Germany started a system of concentration camps. These were large prison camps used to hold anyone they considered a threat to their power. Jews were often sent to these camps. Overcrowded conditions, disease, and harsh treatment caused many of the prisoners to die. The Nazi guards that ran the camps often took pleasure in humiliating and brutalizing their helpless victims. The camps included non-Jewish inmates as well. While Jews were the top target of Nazi racism, Germany also persecuted other groups, including prisoners of war, Poles, Roma, Afro-Germans, and people with mental and physical disabilities.

Between 1939 and 1945, the Nazi regime murdered at least 250,000 mentally or physically disabled individuals. As Germany advanced across Europe during the war, they targeted Jews and other groups in newly acquired territories. World War II provided an opportunity for Nazi officials to adopt more radical measures against Jews and other groups under the excuse that they posed a threat to Germany's ability to win the war. In 1941, Hitler had begun what he called the "final solution to the Jewish question." He called for the entire Jewish population to be killed. The Nazis established mobile death squads, the Einsatzgruppen, to enter conquered territories alongside the German army with the task of murdering Jews, and other political opponents. The Einsatzgruppen massacred 1 to 1.4 million Jews.

To achieve the "final solution," Hitler ordered the building of death camps, which had only one purpose: the extermination of all European Jews. The camps looked like other concentration camps, but large poison gas chambers were installed that could kill hundreds of people at a time. Jews from all over Europe were crammed into cattle cars and shipped to the camps. The Nazis killed Jews in gas chambers and then burned the bodies. At Auschwitz, the most notorious of the camps, the Nazis used five gas chambers to kill 9,000 or more people a day. Special squads of prisoners were forced to pick over the corpses for gold teeth, jewelry, and anything else of value for the German war effort. Some 1.3 million Jews died at Auschwitz.

As the war came to an end, Allied forces liberated Jews and other groups from Nazi camps. Hitler and the Nazis tried to cover up what happened in the camps. Buildings, gas chambers and crematories were destroyed. Documents were burned, bodies were disposed of, and able-bodied prisoners were evacuated to other sites. Over the course of the war, 12 million people were murdered in concentration camps and death camps. Half of that total – 6 million – were Jews. Following the war, Nazi leaders responsible for the atrocities of the Holocaust were brought to trial by the Allies in Nuremberg, Germany. At the Nuremberg Trials 12 Nazi leaders were sentenced to death for war crimes. Thousands of other Nazis were imprisoned for their involvement in the camps.

C) Based on what you read, complete the worksheet.

1) Define the terms in the chart below

The Holocaust	
Anti-Semitism	
Aryan Supremacy	
Einsatzgruppen	

2) What type of rights and freedoms did Hitler take away from Jews when he initially became Germany's leader?

3) What happened on Kristallnacht? What sparked the event?

4) What were Jewish ghettos? Why were they formed?

5) Besides Jews, what other groups were targeted by the Nazi regime?

6) What was Hitler's "final solution?" How did he attempt to achieve his goal?

