Timeline of the Holocaust: Suggested Activities for Classroom Use

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The following activities—developed with input from Echoes & Reflections educators—provide ideas for using the Timeline of the Holocaust in the classroom. Suggested grade level, subject area, and time needed for completion can be modified to meet the needs of your students and the time available.

Activity #1: Escalation: Examining Events between 1936-1938

Summary: Students will investigate the progression of events between 1936-1938 in order to understand the steps taken against the Jews and whether possible intervention could have saved lives or had some other positive effect. Teachers have the option to go further with asking students to connect with USHMM's *Americans and the Holocaust* online exhibit.

Grade Level: High School
Subject Area: History or English
Estimated Time: 30-45 minutes
Directions:

1. Quick write: Instruct students to make a timeline of their past year and identify aspects of causation. How did one thing impact another? For instance, if your family moved here from another country or state, how has that impacted your choice of school, your teachers, your friends, perhaps even your future?

2. Divide students into pairs (or triads) and assign each a different event from the Timeline of the Holocaust for the years 1936-1938. Instruct students to research their assigned event using the timeline assets and prepare a brief summary to share with the class. They should be able to explain the event's significance to the Holocaust and respond to the following questions:

    - What happened in your event? What was its impact at the time and on whom?

3. Come back together and have students share their summaries. Pose the question: What can we learn about the progression of events leading up to the Holocaust?

4. Extension: Introduce students to USHMM's *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibition and have them review information specific to the years they studied in this activity. What, if anything, can they add to their understanding of events during 1936-1938 and how the United States responded or reported on events.

Activity #2: 'The Whole World is Watching': The Global Response to the Holocaust

Summary: Students will use the timeline to understand how the world perceived the Holocaust and to consider the global community's response to reports of Jewish persecution in Europe. This activity can serve as an introductory exercise or support to the Bystanders to History: The World's Response to the Holocaust lesson.

Grade Level: High School
Subject Area: History or English
Estimated Time: 25-40 minutes
Directions:

1. Pose or write the question, "Many of us have asked, 'why didn't the Jewish people just leave Europe?'" Conduct a short discussion with students.

2. Show students Felix Nussbaum's *The Refugee*. Have a brief discussion using the following questions: What is happening in the painting? What is the dilemma? What questions does this painting raise for you about the international community and Jews during the Second World War?

3. Have students access the Timeline of the Holocaust. Assign students numbers that correspond to the following events: 1) Nuremberg Laws in 1935, 2) Evian Conference in 1938, 3) MS *St. Louis* in 1939, and 4) *Kristallnacht*.

4. Have students review information about the events, considering the significance of the event as well as what the world knew about what was going on at the time. Be sure to have students read the summary handouts on the Nuremberg Laws, the Evian Conference, the MS *St. Louis*, and *Kristallnacht* as part of their research.

5. Explain that each event had implications for whether Jews would be able to leave Europe. Direct students into groups according to number and discuss the following questions:

    - What did you learn about the opportunity and ability for Jews to emigrate before and during the war?
    - What did you learn about the response of other countries, including the United States, as it related to the plight of the Jews at these different points in time?

6. Exit Ticket: Ask students to answer the question posed initially, "Many people have asked, 'why didn't the Jewish people just leave Europe?'"; ask students to write a short single-paragraph explanation.

7. Extension: Using information from Yad Vashem's Righteous Among the Nations and USHMM's *Americans and the Holocaust,* provide students with an opportunity to learn more about Americans who worked to help Jews during the Holocaust as well as the coverage of events in Europe by the American Press.

    - Yad Vashem recognized Americans Varian Fry, Lois Gunden, Roddie Edmonds, and Waitstill and Martha Sharp as "Righteous Among the Nations." Research their stories and identify specific actions they took to help Jews.
    - Click through and read two entries in What Americans Knew and consider the questions below.
        - How did the American press respond to *Kristallnacht?* The Evian Conference? The Nuremberg Laws in 1935? The MS *St. Louis?*
        - Did American popular opinion favor helping the Jews? Entering the war? Given what you know of American history, why was this?

Activity #3: Dehumanization

Summary: This activity is an inquiry-based way for students to think critically about the events of 1933-1945; consider the meaning and impact of dehumanization; and the systemic deprivation of basic rights while examining how Jews perceived and exercised opportunities for choice and human agency within each stage.

Grade Level: Middle and High School
Subject Area: History
Estimated Time: 30-45 minutes
Directions:

1. Write the term "dehumanization" on the board. As a class, compose a definition. Present and review the definition of dehumanization with students. Students should have a basic understanding of the process of dehumanization.

2. Assign each student, pair of students, or small group, a single year, between the years 1933-1945.

3. Ask students to examine their assigned year using the Timeline of the Holocaust and find what they believe to be the three most influential events and stories of that year that contributed to the dehumanization of the Jewish people. Identify and be prepared to justify choices.

4. Have students share the events they identified from their research of the Timeline, and then as a class respond to the following questions:

- What are some examples of how Jews were dehumanized socially? How was their political power taken away?
- Identify three opportunities in the year you were assigned that show how an individual was able to make their own choices or have "agency" – to act independently.
- How might a neighbor, friend, or citizen have helped?
- What choices were Jews forced to make?
- Whose opportunity for human agency is most resonant with you? In your opinion, why is this story meaningful? What does this show you about dehumanization?

Activity #4: Acts of Resistance

Summary: One of the questions students often ask when learning about the Holocaust is "Why didn't the Jews fight back?" Using this activity, combined with resources from the Jewish Partisans Educational Fund, students will examine the timeline to find Jewish responses to the loss of rights and acts of violence by examining various forms of resistance to the Nazis as early as 1933. This activity can serve as an introductory exercise or support to the Jewish Resistance unit.

Grade Level: Middle or High School
Subject Area: History and English/Language Arts
Estimated Time: 30-45 minutes
Directions:

1. Instruct students to do a quick-write or journal for 5-10 minutes answering the following prompt:
    - "Resistance does not have to be with a gun or a bullet." What do you think of when you read this quote? What images come to mind?
2. Define and review the definition of resistance with students.
3. Either organize students in partners, or jig-sawed, and assign an event from the list below. Students will look to the Timeline of the Holocaust, the Echoes & Reflections Jewish Resistance Unit, as well as the Jewish Partisans Educational Fund website for stories of resistance.
    - May 1935: Read – Protest against refusal to allow Jews in the Wehrmacht
    - April 1943: Watch – Sol Rosenberg discusses resistance in the Warsaw ghetto
    - October 1943: Read – Rescue in Denmark; Watch – Hans Moller
    - Echoes & Reflections Jewish Resistance Unit: Watch – Ruth Brand
    - Echoes & Reflections Jewish Resistance Unit: Watch – Helen Fagin
    - Jewish Partisans: Watch – Every day the Impossible: Jewish Women in the Partisans
    - Jewish Partisans: Watch – Partisans: Through the Eye of the Soviet Newsreel
4. Follow with a class discussion using the questions below. Encourage students to use evidence from their readings to support responses.
    - How did Jews actively resist before and during the Holocaust?
    - What role did women play in resistance?