
What was the Holocaust?

Note to Teachers

The purpose of this presentation is to provide Grade 6 students with a basic understanding of the Holocaust before engaging in discussions about Holocaust literature. In my classroom, I use it as a reference tool so that my students aren't searching the internet for information and accidentally discovering inappropriate materials.

Although there are no graphic images or descriptions, the horrors of the Holocaust are deeply disturbing. Please use your discretion when using this presentation with your own students.

To support with my own explanations, I have used materials from excellent sources, listed on the last slide. I strongly encourage you to explore these websites so that you may deepen your own understanding of the Holocaust and enrich the discussions that you have with your students.

If you need support or wish to ask any questions, I can be reached at cindy.kozierok@tdsb.on.ca.

~ Cindy Kozierok, Doctoral Candidate in Holocaust Education and TDSB Grade 6 Teacher

Definition:

**The Holocaust was the
systematic,
state-sponsored persecution
and murder
of 6 million Jews
by Nazi Germany
and its collaborators
between 1933 and 1945.**

Who were the perpetrators?

The perpetrators are all the people who were responsible for the Holocaust. This includes all of the people who were leaders and followers of the Nazi party in Germany. It also includes people from other countries who helped the Nazis.





Adolf Hitler

Hitler was the ruler of **Germany** from 1933-1945. He was elected by the people because he promised to help their country become great again after losing **World War I**. Hitler became a **dictator**, which meant that he could make up any **laws** that he wanted.



The Nazis

The Nazis were Hitler's political **party** - the National Socialist Party. When Hitler came to power, he decided to use a new symbol called the **swastika**  on the new flag. Hitler took the symbol from India where it is a religious symbol representing good luck and hope,  and turned it into a symbol of **hate**.



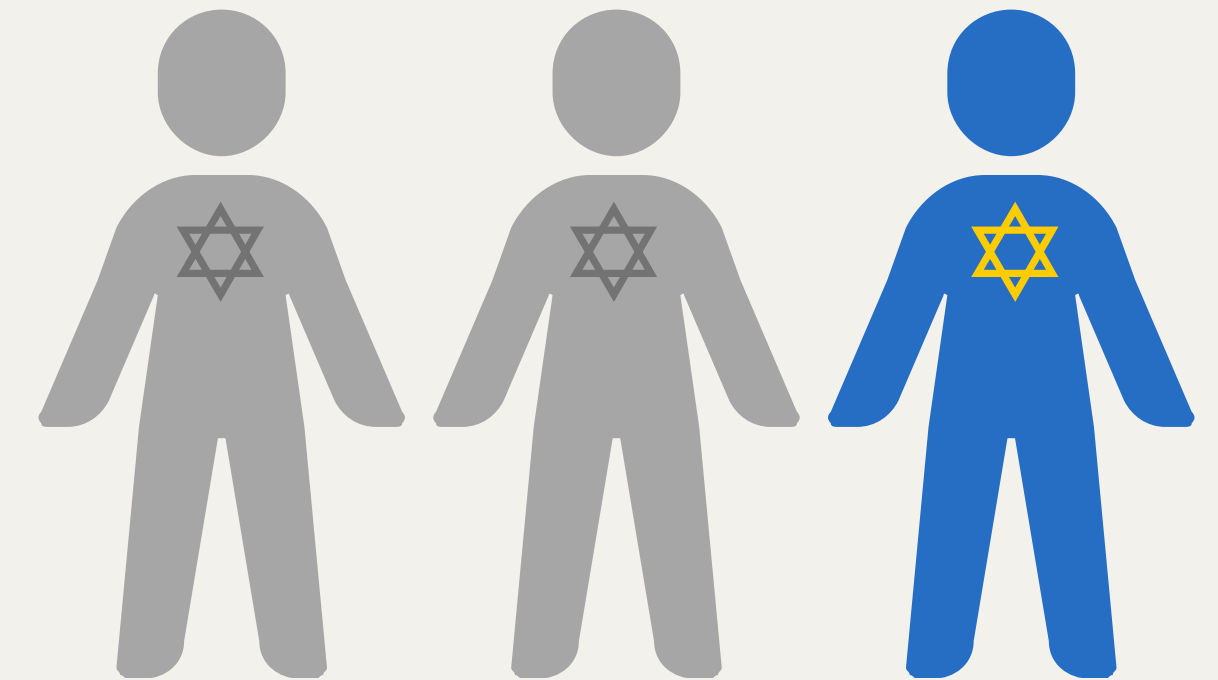
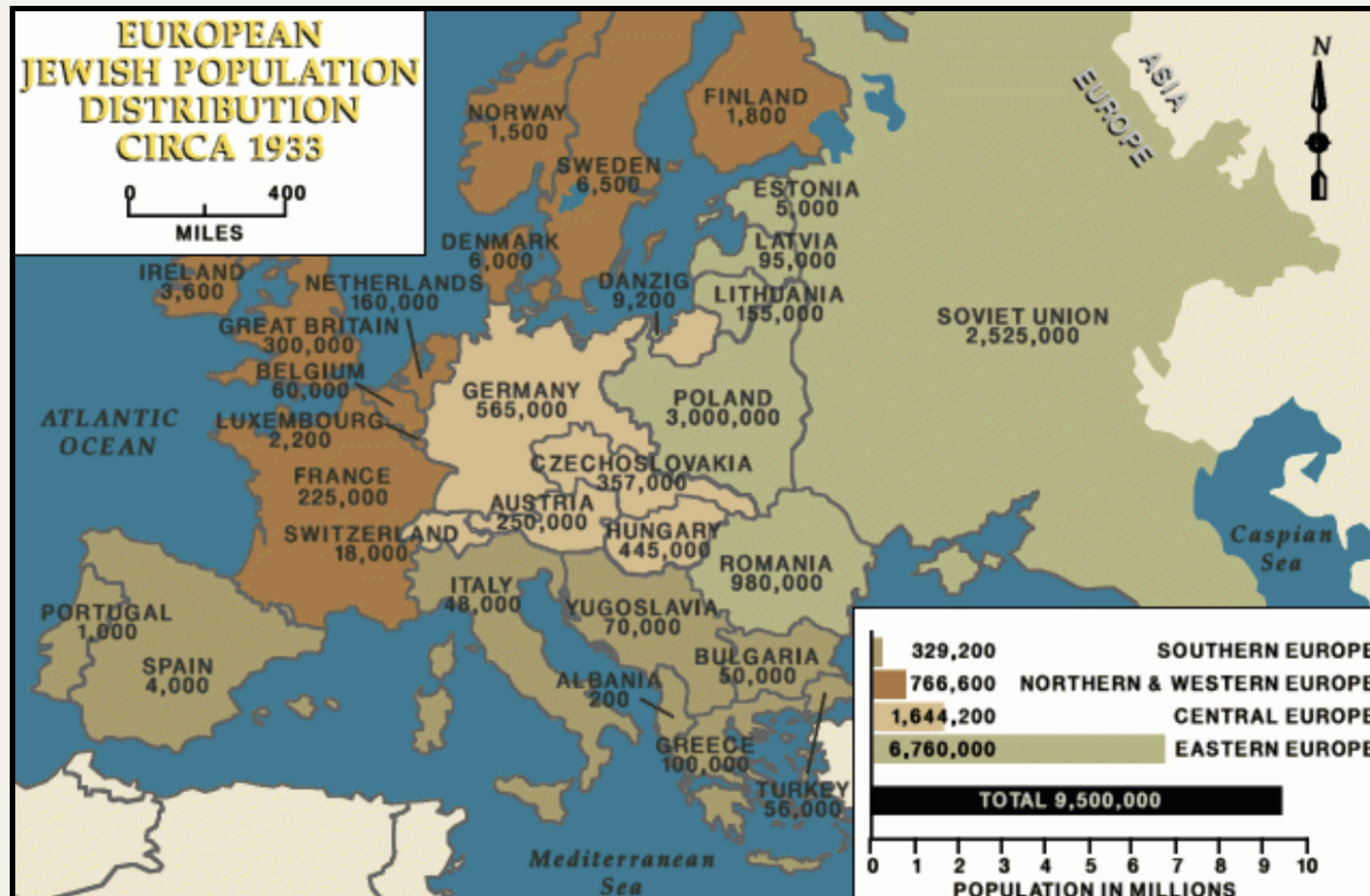
Collaborators

Hitler and the Nazis had a lot of supporters both inside and outside of Germany. These were **governments** as well as individual **citizens** who agreed with Hitler and wanted to help him carry out his plans. Some people helped because they were **afraid**, but many did it for **greed** or because they also hated Jews. A few good people took action to help, but most people were **bystanders** who remained silent.

Jewish Communities in Europe

In 1933, there were about **9.5 million** Jewish people in Europe. Jews had been living in Europe for over 2,000 years after they were exiled from Judea (Israel) by the Roman Empire in 70CE. In the whole world, there were only about 15 million Jewish people, so Europe was home to 60% of all of the world's Jews at that time.

There were Jewish communities in every European country and Jews were just like their neighbours, living normal lives, going to school and working in all kinds of jobs. Even though a lot of people had antisemitic attitudes towards Jews, they had lived in their home countries for generations and were loyal citizens, contributing to society and defending their country in World War I.



By 1945, **6 million Jews** had been murdered. This represented **2 out of every 3** Jews in Europe gone in only 12 years. The ones that survived lost their homes and became refugees.

Jewish life in Europe was destroyed.

Where did it happen?



Canada to Germany on Google Earth


The Holocaust began in Germany in 1933 and spread throughout Europe during World War II.


Why did it happen?

Hitler had strong views about what was wrong with the world and how things should be.
This is called having an ideology.


Hitler gave passionate speeches and explained his ideology in a book that he wrote called *Mein Kampf (My Struggle)*. Many Germans read his book and he developed a strong following because there were a lot of people who agreed with his ideology.
This is how Hitler became the leader of Germany and his ideas became official Nazi policy.

The Nazi ideology can be summarized in two words: RACE and SPACE

Race → **People** 

Space → **Land** 

Nazi Ideology - Part I

Race → **People** 

Race



The Nazis believed that all human beings were divided into different races, and that some races were superior (better) and some races were inferior (worse).

A person's race would determine nearly everything about them and it was something that could never be changed.

They said that German people were part of the Aryan race which was the "master" race. This meant that Aryans should be allowed to rule over all non-Aryans in Germany, and all around the world.

The main group of non-Aryans that they meant were Jewish people.

None of what the Nazis said about race is true. Scientists agree that there is no basis for separating people into different races. It's just an idea that people have created, not a part of nature or biology.

Believing that some people are better than others based on these ideas is called racism.



This poster depicts what the Nazis believed to be the ideal German family.



A German teacher proudly demonstrates the "Aryan" features of his student. German children were taught to hate and distrust Jewish children.

Race



Before the Nazis came to power, Jews had the same legal rights as their neighbours. They owned homes and businesses, went to school, worked, and defended their country in WWI just like other Germans. Many Jewish families had lived in Germany for hundreds of years.

The same was true in other countries in Europe at that time. Jewish people lived full lives and contributed to all of the communities in which they lived, even though they were often mistreated for being Jewish.

Hitler and the Nazis did not invent the idea of hating Jewish people.

Unfortunately, since the time of early Christianity over 2000 years ago, and continuing even today, Jewish people have been persecuted for following different religious traditions.

This is called antisemitism: prejudice against or hatred of Jews.

Antisemitism did not begin or end with the Holocaust, but the Holocaust was antisemitism in its most extreme form.

The Nazi type of antisemitism was different from older antisemitic ideas.

Instead of focusing on religious or cultural differences, Nazi antisemitism was based on the idea that Jewish people were a separate race that was a dangerous **THREAT** to the German people.

The Nazis used their power in the government to spread lies in the media about Jews to encourage the German people to go along with Nazi policies. This is called **propaganda**.

They showed drawings of Jews looking like devils, rats or insects, trying to control the world and destroy Germany.

By showing Jews as less than human, people would fear them and be willing to accept the actions of the Nazis against them.

For more information, see the presentation:

What is Antisemitism?



Race




The result of this extreme Nazi antisemitism was **genocide** - a crime where acts are committed with the intent to destroy an entire group of people. The word genocide did not exist before the Holocaust. It was created to describe the way that the Nazis attempted to destroy the Jews.

There were about 9.5 million Jews in Europe before the Holocaust.

The Nazis murdered about 6 million of them, including 1.5 million children.



Nazi Ideology - Part II

Space → **Land** 



Lebensraum (Living Space)



Because Hitler believed that the German people were the master race, he also believed that they should rule over the world. They had the right to take what they wanted and to do whatever they wished with any people that were in their way.

He wanted Germany to be more than a country. He wanted it to be an empire. To accomplish this goal, Hitler needed more land for *lebensraum* which means "living space".

Hitler wanted to conquer as much land as he could for his new empire but Germany had signed an agreement after World War I that they would not build up their military to fight against any other countries in Europe.

This agreement did not stop Hitler and he invaded other countries anyway.

After 6 years as leader of Germany, Hitler started World War II.



German Land Before WWII



German Occupied Land during WWII

World War II: 1939-1945

September 1939 Germany invades Poland

Great Britain, France, Canada, India, Australia, and South Africa declare war on Germany.

They are called the Allied Countries, or just the Allies.

September 1940 Japan enters the war

Japan signs a pact with Germany and Italy and they form the Axis alliance to fight together against the Allies.

June 1941 Germany invades Soviet Union

Going against a pact that he signed with the Soviet Union at the beginning of the war, Hitler decides to invade the Soviet Union, who declares war on Germany in return.

December 1941 United States enters the war

After trying to stay out of the war, the US is attacked by Japan at Pearl Harbor. They decide to join the allies to fight against the Axis alliance.

May 1945 Germany surrenders

The Allies and the Soviet Union defeat the German army. Hitler kills himself in a bunker rather than face being captured.

May 8, 1945 is declared VE (Victory in Europe) Day.

August 1945 Japan surrenders

The United States drops two atomic bombs on Japan, causing massive death and destruction.

August 15, 1945 is declared VJ (Victory over Japan) Day.

Canada and World War II



World War II was the worst war in human history, resulting in over 60 million deaths worldwide. It was also extremely important because it wasn't just about land. It was about protecting freedom.

Canada played a very important part in helping the Allies win the war against Nazi Germany. As a very small country (only 11 million people at the time), the rest of the world did not expect Canada to contribute as greatly as it did.

More than 1 million Canadians fought in the war.

More than 55,000 were injured.

More than 43,000 were killed.

On Remembrance Day each year, we remember our veterans who sacrificed to guard our democracy and to stop the Nazis from taking over the world.



How did the Nazis persecute Jewish people?

Since the Holocaust happened in many places, not all Jews had the same experiences. The types of persecution also changed over time. These are some examples of what the Jews endured under the Nazis.

Legal Discrimination



A passport stamped with a "J" to identify a Jew.

Public Identification and Exclusion



Jewish business owners force to carry signs to boycott Jewish businesses.

Organized Violence



A synagogue (Jewish place of worship) burns.

Antisemitic laws took away the rights of Jewish people to live as full citizens. Jewish children could no longer attend school. Adults were fired from their jobs.

Boycotts of Jewish businesses, public humiliations, and forcing Jews to wear a yellow star to identify themselves as Jews.

Kristallnacht, the night of Broken Glass
November 9/10, 1938.
The Nazis ordered attacks on Jewish people, businesses, and synagogues. 30,000 Jewish men are arrested.

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Displacement and Imprisonment



Without warning or explanation, Jews were removed from their homes and relocated to ghettos and concentration camps where conditions were very poor and many died of disease and starvation.

Plunder (Stealing)



A box full of gold wedding rings stolen from Jews.

The Nazis took all of the property, personal belongings, and valuables of the Jewish people. Using this wealth was an important part of their plan to expand their power.

Forced Labour



Jewish adults and children were forced to work for the German government and for private German companies as slaves.

What was the "Final Solution"?

Before 1941, many Jews died as a result of these earlier types of persecution - from starvation, diseases, and Nazi violence.

However, the Nazis didn't have an organized plan for mass murder of the Jews until 1941, when they invaded the Soviet Union.

The reason for this is that the Nazis realized that they had a bigger "Jewish Problem" than they had when they didn't occupy so many countries, because these new lands were home to millions more Jewish people.

Before the war began, the democracies of the world, including Canada and the United States, had decided that they were not willing to deal with the large number of Jewish refugees who were trying to escape the Nazis. They allowed only a very small number of Jews to immigrate. Canada had an official policy for Jews that has been called "None is too Many", which meant that they wanted no Jewish refugees at all.

Because of the actions of these countries, Hitler knew that there was nowhere for the Jewish people to go.



The Wannsee Conference

Hitler sent the top leaders in the Nazi party to have a meeting to strategize over their "Jewish Problem". They knew *what* Hitler wanted them to do. Their job was to figure out *how* to do it.

At that meeting, the Nazis planned out the "Final Solution" - the code word for the decision to murder every Jew in Europe.

What was the "Final Solution"?

The Nazis prided themselves on being organized. They planned the Final Solution as carefully as they could to make it as efficient as possible, meaning that they could kill as many people as possible in the least amount of time, with the least amount of effort and expense.

There were two main methods that they used: shooting and gassing.

Shooting

When they invaded Eastern Europe, the Nazis had help from many of the local communities who hated Jews as much as the Nazis did.

These collaborators would help the Nazis to round up all of the Jews in a town and march them out into the forest where they would be forced to dig a large pit. The Nazis would then shoot the people so that they would fall into the pit and die.

About 2 million people died in this way.

Gassing

The Nazis built special camps along the railroad that were used as killing centres. The victims arrived in packed cattle cars (trains meant for animals) and were killed right when they arrived. After locking them in a room called a gas chamber, Nazis would release poison gas inside the room. The gas killed everyone inside.

Afterwards, other Jewish prisoners were forced to remove the dead bodies and burn them in special ovens called crematoria.

What happened after the Holocaust?

As the Allied forces moved through Europe, they liberated victims from the Nazis. They were horrified by what they discovered in the concentration camps and by the conditions of the victims themselves who were so thin that they looked like skeletons.

Sadly, many of those victims still died after they were liberated because they didn't have the strength to get better after being starved and abused for so long.

For those victims that did survive, they were faced with rebuilding their lives by trying to see if any of their relatives had survived and figuring out where to live. Many tried to go back to the homes they once knew, but found that their homes had been taken over by others who were violently opposed to them coming back.

Most survivors realized that Europe was no longer a safe place to be. They became **refugees**, living in Displaced Persons camps for years while waiting to be able to emigrate somewhere and build a new life.



Where did they go?

The largest group of survivors wanted to go to **Palestine** which became **Israel** in 1948. As a Jewish state, it was the only place they felt they would be safe from antisemitism.

Many went to the United States and a smaller number came to Canada, settling in cities like Montreal and Toronto.

For more information about the Jewish connection to Israel, see the presentation:

What is Judaism?

Who are Holocaust survivors?



Survivor Max Eisen was an active speaker and author.



The identification number tattooed on Max's arm.



Max's avatar in Dimensions in Testimony. You can ask him questions and he will answer them with recorded testimony. Link in the resources.

We call the victims who lived through the Holocaust survivors. The trauma that they experienced affected them for all their lives and will continue to affect their families for generations.

Some survivors couldn't speak about their experiences because it was too painful but some survivors found purpose in telling their stories as often as possible. They believed that they were doing a service to humanity by telling what happened, by bearing witness to the truth. This is called testimony and it is a very important part of understanding the Holocaust.

Since the Holocaust ended nearly 80 years ago, there are very few survivors alive today to give their testimony.

We are fortunate to have thousands of hours of video recordings of testimonies that we can watch. New technologies are also providing opportunities for us to interact with the testimonies as if the survivors were here in person.

Selected Sources:

Please note: These links are for teachers, not students. Since these sites have a tremendous amount of material, there will be content that is not age-appropriate for Grade 6 students. Always preview and select materials before sharing your screen with your students.

- **UCL: Understanding the Holocaust: How and why did it happen?**
 - <https://holocausteducation.org.uk/research-page/publications/understanding-holocaust-happen/>
- **The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:**
 - <https://www.ushmm.org/learn>
- **Yad Vashem**
 - <https://www.yadvashem.org/>
- **Echoes and Reflections:**
 - <https://echoesandreflections.org/>
- **USC Shoah Foundation iWitness platform:**
 - <https://iwitness.usc.edu/home>
- **iWitness Dimensions in Testimony (Max Eisen and others):**
 - <https://iwitness.usc.edu/sites/dit>
- **Facing History and Ourselves Canada:**
 - <https://www.facinghistory.org/about/locations/facing-history-ourselves-canada>