

In this lesson, students will consider how individuals, institutions, and governments acted as bystanders during the Holocaust.



QUESTION EXAMINED

**HOW DID GOVERNMENTS,
INSTITUTIONS, AND
INDIVIDUALS ALLOW THE
HOLOCAUST TO OCCUR?**

Subject
Social Studies

Grades
9-12

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THEMES Anti-Semitism, Fear, Bystanders

RESOURCES INCLUDED

FOR TEACHERS

- Context for this lesson
- Tips for Using This Resource
- Key Terms / Vocabulary
- Focus Questions
- Big Understandings
- Teaching Point
- Objectives
- Materials
- Procedure
- Word Map Handout
- Document Analysis Graphic Organizer

FOR STUDENTS

- Word Map Handout
- Document Analysis Graphic Organizer
- Paper copies or digital access to documents

*Cover Image:
Photograph of
antisemitic graffiti
applied between June
15–20, 1938 at the
furniture store of A[dolf]
Brünn jr. Berliner Allee
29-31, Berlin-
Weißensee, Jewish
Telegraphic Agency, CJA,
7.103, 4*

EXTERNAL LINKS

[About the Leo Baeck Institute & the 1938Projekt](#)

[Key Dates: Jews Under the Nazi Regime 1933–1939](#)

CONTEXT FOR THIS LESSON

Why study bystanders?

This lesson explores the choices that various individuals, institutions, and governments made in response to anti-Semitic and state-sponsored violence against Jews during the Holocaust. Students will first be introduced to the word bystander. Then, students will review and analyze a variety of primary and secondary sources, paying attention to people's decisions and motivations during this time. Finally, students will discuss and reflect on the role of bystanders in allowing the Holocaust to occur.

This lesson asks students to consider the motivations of different historical actors. An “historical actor” is a term that historians apply to people from the past while studying their actions. It asks the historian to consider past actions within the context of how people saw things at the time. It does not mean sympathizing with actions taken, or identifying with actions taken. Instead, it asks historians to observe the past to make sense of what was done.* Framing an inquiry in this way leads to a more nuanced understanding of people's actions, and the limits of what they could know about how things would turn out.

Fostering this type of historical empathy also allows students to better apply this study to their own lives. By seeking to understand the decisions and actions of people in the past, we can study the different factors that motivate people, recognize those motivations in ourselves, and learn to make more informed choices in our own lives, asking ourselves the questions:

What are the choices we are making to act or not to act? When are we in the position of being bystanders?

*Adapted from *Why Won't You Just Tell Us the Answer: Teaching Historical Thinking in Grades 7 – 12* by Bruce Lesh. (US: Stenhouse Publishers, 2011)

CONTEXT FOR THIS LESSON, cont.

Background information from the Leo Baeck Institute exhibition *1938Projekt: Posts from the Past*, curated by Magdalena M. Wrobel, Ph.D

The Leo Baeck Institute was founded in 1955 by leading German-Jewish émigré intellectuals who were determined to preserve the vibrant cultural heritage of German-speaking Jewry that was nearly destroyed in the Holocaust. They named the Institute for Rabbi Leo Baeck, the last leader of Germany's Jewish Community under the Nazi regime.

Today, the Leo Baeck Institute — New York | Berlin (LBI) is devoted to preserving and promoting the history and culture of German-speaking Jewry. Its archival, art, and library collections tell the story of Jews in German and world history. As Jews enjoyed growing social and political empowerment in the 19th century, they played a significant role in shaping art, science, business, and political developments in the modern era with leading figures including Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, and Franz Kafka.

In the 20th century, German and Austrian Jews fought in the First World War to demonstrate their patriotism and further their quest for social equality. Following the war, the Weimar Republic provided more opportunities for advancement. After the Nazis rose to power in January 1933, Jews were persecuted, and by 1938 it was clear that Jewish life in Germany, as they knew it, was no longer possible.

Today, as right-wing populism gains new followers around the world, the personal narratives and private thoughts recorded by German and Austrian Jews in letters and diaries from 1938 take on new meaning. They can tell us much about a minority's struggle for civil rights and social integration, as well as the tremendous achievements that follow when such struggles are successful. They also offer a warning about the disastrous consequences of discrimination, exclusion, and persecution.

TIPS FOR USING THIS RESOURCE

1938Projekt TIMELINE

For this lesson, students will be examining artifacts posted on the 1938Projekt website. The 1938Projekt was created by the Leo Baeck Institute in 2018, eighty years after the events of 1938, to address the question of how one grasps the mixture of shock and disbelief felt by the victims of the Nazi regime. Over the course of 2018, the Institute posted a collection of letters, diaries, documents, and photographs saved by German and Austrian Jews and their families which are housed in the archives of the Leo Baeck Institute New York | Berlin and those of several partner institutions. These sources were uploaded daily to the 1938Projekt site—one for each day in 1938, corresponding to the dates of the 2018 calendar year. The materials illustrate the range of reactions and emotions of individuals and families in response to quickly changing events under the Nazi regime and the struggles they faced to escape Germany and Austria in order to survive. In addition to the daily posts, significant world events are described alongside the calendar entries to provide a broader context for the individualized stories.

Before teaching this lesson, take some time to familiarize yourself with the site's layout.

To begin:

1. Explore the 1938Projekt website by scrolling through daily entries within each month to gain a chronological understanding of the events revealed through artifacts on the site.
2. Follow the hyperlinked dates in the list of artifacts included in this lesson. This will lead you to more in-depth information about the artifacts themselves and the people who created them.
3. Keyword search on the 1938Projekt website to find artifacts or themes that connect to particular topics, places, and individuals.

KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

Appeasement	The policy of making concessions to an aggressive country to avoid conflict
Bystander	A person who is present for an event but does not take part in it or action against it
Persecute	To treat someone with hostility or ill will because of their identity

FOCUS QUESTIONS

What is a bystander?

How did people in 1938 Germany act as bystanders?

BIG UNDERSTANDINGS

- A bystander is someone who is present for an event but does not take part in it or action against it
- Many people, institutions, and governments acted as bystanders in 1938 because of fear, greed, indifference and the desire to maintain power.
- When faced with similar situations and motivations, we can choose to stand up against injustice.

LEARNING TARGET

I can analyze historical documents to understand the role of government, institutions, and individuals in allowing the Holocaust to occur.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will unpack the definition of a bystander
2. Students will analyze documents about different bystanders in Nazi Germany
3. Students will discuss and reflect on the role of bystanders in allowing the Holocaust to happen and the role that bystanders play in the world today.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- [Timeline: Jews Under the Nazi Regime 1933 – 1939](#)
- Copies of Word Map Handout
- Copies of Document Analysis Graphic Organizer
- Hard copies or access to digital copies of the following documents:
 1. [“Change of Heart,” April 8th Entry on 1938Projekt Website](#)
 2. [“The Crowd Looked on Quietly,” June 20th Entry on 1938Projekt Website](#)
 3. [“Rejection Letter,” July 11th Entry on 1938Projekt Website](#)
 4. [“Hitler Appeased at Munich,” History.com Website](#)

PROCEDURE

WARM-UP

Begin the lesson by having students respond to the following prompt:

Think of a time when you witnessed something wrong or unjust. How did you respond? How do you wish that you had responded?

Have students share with small groups or share-out with the whole class.

You may want to provide your model response to this question so that students understand the type of answer you are looking for and to model vulnerability for the class.

FRAME

Frame the lesson for students by explaining its purpose. You can use the script below or explain in your own words.

Today we are going to review documents from the time leading up to the Holocaust and World War II. We are going to consider how countries, groups, and individuals acted as bystanders during this time, and how their actions (and inactions!) allowed for the persecution of Jews, ultimately leading to the Holocaust.

CONTEXT

If students are unfamiliar with the Holocaust or events surrounding the Holocaust, review the Timeline “Jews Under Nazi Regime, 1933 – 1938” resource (linked in Materials section above). You can read through the document as a whole class, in small groups, or independently.

Explain to students that today we are going to be studying the role of bystanders in allowing the Holocaust to happen. Provide the dictionary definition of a bystander to students. Have students complete the “Word Map Handout” to reinforce their understanding of the term.

MINI LESSON: VOCAB REVIEW

You may consider asking students to reflect on times they and others have been bystanders in their own lives, in current events, or in history.

PROCEDURE, cont.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Explain to students that they will review a total of four primary and secondary sources about different people's experiences during 1938. All of these documents will mention a bystander. Explain that it is their job to identify who the bystanders are and what their motivations are for being bystanders.

Introduce the Document Analysis Graphic Organizer to students. It is recommended that teachers model filling out the graphic organizer either by providing a completed row or by going through one document together as a whole class.

Students will then engage with the rest of the documents and complete the graphic organizer about them. This can be done in several ways:

- Have students complete a **jigsaw activity**, in which each student becomes an expert in and completes their graphic organizer about one document. Students will then share out their findings.
- Have students engage in **station work**, where they rotate round the room to different stations. Each station should have one document. As students visit each station, they will fill in their graphic organizer.
- Have students engage in a **gallery walk**, in which each document is posted around the classroom. Students will circulate and fill out their graphic organizer as they circulate.

Have students respond to the following questions by writing in their journals, discussing in groups, or sharing-out as a whole class:

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

- Which document stood out to you the most? Why?
- What were the different reasons that people acted as bystanders during this time?
- The documents come from a variety of perspectives: Governments, institutions (such as religious organizations and companies), and individual citizens. In what ways are these groups similar? In what ways are these groups different?
- Predict: How did all of these actions (or inactions) contribute to the Holocaust?
- Have you ever experienced something similar? Explain.
- What can we learn about bystanders from this time that we can apply to our own lives?

HANDOUTS

WORD MAP



Dictionary Definition:	My Definition:		
Synonyms:	Antonyms:	BYSTANDER	Draw a Picture:

HANDOUTS

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS GRAPHIC ORGANIZER



Document Title and Author	Summary Describe the main idea of the source	Perspective Who in the source acted as a bystander? How do you know?	Analysis Why did this person/group act as a bystander during 1948

