



Writing/Research Paper Topics

This guide is to assist teachers in assigning relevant Holocaust topics to research. (Do not ask students to discuss medical experiments. Instead, have students look at the intricacies of segregation in the USA, sterilization programs and Eugenics, which are largely American inventions.) The topics below allow students to: explore the magnitude and the personal nature of what happened; put people above statistics; show that Jews are not merely "victims," but human beings; not let the perpetrator frame the perspective of their study; and avoid simple explanations to this complex history. The categories are alphabetized.

ANITSEMITISM

1. What is the Oberammergau Passion Play? Why is it called, "The play that plagues the Jews"? (*Reform Judaism Magazine*, Summer, 2000.) What is the history of Passion Plays?
2. In 1946, after World War II had ended, a pogrom occurred in Kielce, Poland. Why did this happen?
3. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* has inspired antisemites throughout the world. It still figures prominently in the Militia Movement's literature and is quoted in Russia, Japan, and the Arab countries in the Middle East. What is its origin and why does it continue to have such influence?
4. What is the connection between Nazi antisemitism and the genocidal nature of extremist Arab terrorists? Research the role of the Grand Mufti Haj Amin el-Husseini and the "Muslim Brotherhood."
5. Beginning with the website www.MEMRI.org (Middle Eastern Media Research Institute) research the current mainline antisemitism in the Middle East. Perhaps compare it to Nazi antisemitism and historical Christian anti-Judaism.

ART

6. Richard Wagner's music is lauded throughout the world. Hitler revered his operas. Can we respect an artist whose spiritual, moral, or political, philosophies we abhor? Are there other examples of artists whose creativity is brilliant, but whose politics or behavior is despicable?
7. The Nazi Racial State sought both "blood purity" and social order. Discuss the Nazi attack on modern culture and artistic expression. Examine the historical context of the infamous *Entartete Kunst* (degenerate art) exhibition mounted by the Nazis in Munich in 1937. (It claimed that the underlying motivation was an extreme aesthetic aspiration to return beauty to the world.)
8. In September, 1941, more than 33,000 Jews were murdered at Babi Yar in the Ukraine. Soviet prisoners of war and Gypsies were murdered at the same site. Yevgeny Yevtushenko wrote a poem entitled *Babi Yar*. Examine and research the poem.
9. Discuss the life and work of any of the following: Dan Pagis, Primo Levi, Paul Celan, or Nelly Sachs.
10. Art was created in ghettos, and concentration camps, and by victims in hiding. It has also been created by survivors. There are many books about these art works and many topics you can explore.
11. Arthur Miller wrote *Incident at Vichy* and *Broken Glass*, two plays which responded to the events of World War II. Discuss how this American playwright views the Holocaust. Is he successful?

12. How has the Holocaust been discussed in film? Perhaps compare how different countries try to address the topic through film. (For example, do American films tend to put forward an optimistic vision or conclude with happy endings?)
13. Explore the life and work of Arthur Szyk.

BUSINESS

14. How did German business adapt itself to the goals of the Nazis?
15. Jews and non-Jews were used as forced laborers by the Nazis during World War II. We are now beginning to acknowledge that American companies such as IBM were also unwary accessories. Explore the part that this company as well as other American companies might have played in this chapter of history.

BYSTANDER

16. How do we prevent ourselves and future generations from being "Bystanders"?
17. Create your own definition of "bystander" during the Holocaust and assess and judge the level of responsibility of individual behavior based on three case studies of "bystanders."

CAMPS

18. Discuss the role of Dachau within the SS concentration camp system.
19. Who were the people placed in Nazi concentration camps from 1933-1936? How did the Nazis make the camp system "justified" to the German people?
20. By the beginning of 1936, the prisoner population of Nazi concentration camps had been reduced by about 75 percent and all but one of the original camps had been dissolved. How did the Concentration camp system change from 1937-1939?
21. When did the "extermination camps" become part of the Nazi camp system? Describe their locations and functions.
22. After "liberation" many survivors were forced into DP (Displaced Persons) camps. Why? What was life like in DP camps?

DENIERS

23. Deniers have tried to infiltrate college campuses by selling ads to college newspapers questioning whether the Holocaust actually occurred. Read Deborah Lipstadt's *Denying the Holocaust*. If you were the editor of a college newspaper, would you accept the ad questioning the veracity of the Holocaust?
24. David Irving, a British Holocaust denier, sued American professor Deborah Lipstadt and her British publisher, Penguin Books, for libel in a 2000 London trial that made headlines around the world. Lipstadt and Penguin not only won resoundingly, but also exposed the inner workings of the deniers, who distort history in order to promote antisemitism and white supremacy. Discuss the trial.

DIPLOMACY

25. How did the international diplomatic community react to Hitler in the 1930s?

EUGENICS/T4

26. The Eugenics Movement was popular during the 1920's and 1930's in Europe as well as the U.S. What is Eugenics, and how did it influence social policy during the 1920's and 1930's? *Crying Hands: Eugenics and Deaf People in Nazi Germany* by Horst Biesold might be an interesting source.
27. Discuss the Tuskegee experiments in the U.S.
28. Sterilization programs and Eugenics are largely American inventions. Before Nazi Germany, the U.S. led the world in forced sterilizations in the 1930s. Discuss the Eugenics movement in the United States.
29. What was the T4 "Euthanasia" Program? How did the Nazi doctors justify their actions? Did the German people support this program?
30. Why was the T4 program a critical step towards the "Final Solution"?

GENOCIDE

31. Research the German colonial war and genocide in SW Africa (Namibia) in 1904-1907. Was the treatment of the Hereros a first step toward the Holocaust?
32. Discuss the treatment of Aborigines in Australia and how Australians have reacted to this part of their history.
33. Examine the Armenian Genocide of 1915.
34. Who was Armin T. Wegner and what role did he play in both World War I and World War II?
35. Explore the goals and problems faced in implementing Nazi initiatives in Poland in 1939-1940 and how this accelerated the search for a "Final Solution to the Jewish Question?"
36. What are the similarities between the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide?
37. Why are nation-states still hesitant to intervene to stop genocides? (Samantha Power's *A Problem From Hell* is a good starting point.) Perhaps choose a particular contemporary genocide and examine why nation-states were reluctant to intervene.

GHETTO

38. What was the initial purpose of the ghettos established by the SS in Eastern Europe?
39. Why did people in the Warsaw Ghetto choose to fight and people in the Łódź Ghetto did not? Compare the way the two ghettos operated.
40. Choose one ghetto and describe what daily life was like for a particular month and year.
41. Janusz Korczak and the children of the Warsaw Ghetto.

HIDING

42. Judith Miller in her book, *One by One by One*, says that citizens of the Netherlands have created a cult of Anne Frank to hide their guilt about their actions during World War II. Do you agree with this conclusion?
43. Read Nechama Tec's, *Dry Tears* (or other survivor memoirs). Who protected her and her family? What were the motives of her rescuers and how did they succeed? What was it like for her to hide by "passing" as a Christian?

44. Renne Fritz, a Jewish child hidden in Belgium remarked, "I had been separated from my mother so long that mother didn't mean anything to me." Similarly, another hidden child remembered, "I didn't know my own name or why I was in an attic." Discuss the difficulties and personal impact of being a hidden child.
45. In the face of the terror and brutality of the Holocaust, many Jewish parents sought to save their children by placing them with friends, strangers, or institutions. What were the challenges they faced and how did they respond to these challenges? (Courtesy of USHMM.)
46. What were the similarities and differences between "hidden children" and "children on the run"?

HUNGARY

47. The Germans did not occupy Hungary until March 1944. But by 1939, Hungarian Jewish men were forced to join the Labor Service System. What happened to the members of these labor battalions?
48. In 1940, Elie Wiesel's town of Sighet changed hands from Romania to Hungary. Compare the treatment of Jews in Romania and Hungary in the 1940s.

JEWISH LIFE

49. Germany has been described as the "least antisemitic" country in Europe in the 1930s. What was German-Jewish life like in 1933?
50. Describe Hasidic life in pre-war Europe.
51. Choose one country in Europe and describe prewar Jewish life in that particular country.

NAZI GERMANY

52. What was the impact of the Enlightenment (18th, 19th century) on German culture and science?
53. Hitler was given power in 1933. German Jews were not arrested until November 1938. Who were the first victims of the Nazis and why? Why is the Bill of Rights so crucial for Americans?
54. Hitler was not elected, but did come to power constitutionally in 1933. Describe the reasons why Hitler was appointed Chancellor.
55. Discuss the April 1, 1933 Boycott in Germany. Discuss both short-term and long-term impacts.
56. Over 2000 laws were passed against Germany's Jews (.75% of the population in 1933). Branding in Germany (wearing of the star) did not occur until September 1941. Discuss the importance of the manipulation of law by the Nazi regime on both Jews and the surrounding population. How were Jews forced into "social death" in Germany?
57. Local governments and mayors initiated much of the early anti-Jewish legislation in Nazi Germany. Describe these initiatives and how they shaped the initiatives of the national government.
58. In 1934, Hitler ordered the "Night of the Long Knives," a purge of Ernst Röhm's SA Brownshirts. Why did Hitler decide to murder his former colleagues and what was the reaction to his murderous acts in Germany?
59. There was no uniform anti-Jewish policy in Nazi Germany until after *Kristallnacht* of November 1938. Contrast the levels of antisemitism in different regions of Germany before 1938.

60. How did German Jews react to the growing anti-Jewish legislation in their native country? Examine the activities of the Reich Union of Jewish Frontline Soldiers as a starting point.
61. Who were the *Mischlinge* and how did they fit into Nazi racial policy?
62. Discuss the Zionist Movement in Germany, 1933-1939.
63. What was the attitude of the SS to the Zionist movement?
64. What was *Kristallnacht* and why was it a watershed turning point in Nazi Jewish policy?
65. Explore the role of the German army (*Wehrmacht*) in the Holocaust. (Omer Bartov is an excellent source.)
66. Discuss the impact and influence of gender in Nazi Germany. Explore the topic from either the Nazi majority or the Jewish minority. For example, what was the impact on parenthood? How did males or females react to the growing isolation of German Jews?

NEXT GENERATION

67. Discuss the problems faced by children of survivors. Are there similarities with children of the perpetrators?

OTHER

68. Choose a country such as Palestine, Bulgaria, Romania, England, France, or Greece, and explore what happened to its Jewish citizens during World War II.
69. Gypsies, or Roma and Sinti; Jehovah's Witnesses; and homosexuals were persecuted by the Nazis. Chose one group and do research into what happened to its members.
70. The International Committee of the Red Cross has gotten negative publicity about its role during World War II. Why? An interesting resource is Drago Arsenijevic's *Voluntary Hostages of the SS*.
71. Discuss the difficulties of Aliya Bet ("illegal" immigration into Palestine during British mandate).
72. What was the Nisko and Lublin Plan for Jews (1939-40) and why did it fail?
73. What were the "Tactics of Deception" that Germans used?

PERPETRATORS

74. What were the *Einsatzgruppen*?
75. Who were the commanders of the *Einsatzgruppen*?
76. Examine the role of doctors and nurses in the T4 program.

REFUGEES

77. When England went to war, it interned enemy aliens, many of whom were Jewish refugees from Hitler's Germany. Two thousand men and boys were sent on the ship *Dunera* to Australia to be interned for the duration of the war. Read *The Dunera Internees* by Bezion Patkin. Analyze why Jewish refugees were treated this way.
78. Until England entered World War II, the British people accepted thousands of Jewish children on *Kindertransports*. Read about these transports. Did the United States accept child refugees?

79. The Evian Conference of 1938 closed the door on Jewish refugees seeking safe haven outside of Germany. Discuss why the conference and the motives of those dealing with refugee policy in the 1930s.

RESCUE

80. Discuss the rescue work of the Polish organization Żegota.
81. Discuss the activities of Jewish partisans in Eastern Europe during the Holocaust.
82. Chiune Sugihara was a Japanese diplomat who saved Jews. The Japanese were allies of the Germans, so why did he do this?
83. The residents of Le Chambon, France, saved thousands of Jews. Why?
84. The Danish people saved the majority of their Jewish population. What made the Danish experience different from other European countries?
85. Who are the "Righteous Among the Nations"? Who decides? Are any still alive? Choose one to describe in depth.
86. Ask why someone would risk his or her life to save Jews during World War II. What are the motives and characteristics of Rescuers? What are the different forms that rescue took?
87. Raoul Wallenberg's rescue activities.
88. What were the relationship of an individual Rescuer and the local Resistance network?
89. Define a "Resistance Network", in any country.
90. What is "moral courage" and how is it demonstrated?
91. Discuss the Resistance work of Jewish organization in France during the war, who were they, their history, changing roles?
92. Discuss the role of Jewish social workers in Resistance organizations in the South of France and in the Warsaw Ghetto.
93. What are "Jewish Rescuers" and what should be their relationship to "Jewish Resistance."

RESISTANCE

94. Who were the "moderates" or "good people" opposed to Hitler? Why were they not able to unite against him successfully? What are the lessons from this for future genocides?
95. The White Rose was a student anti-Nazi resistance group in Germany. Examine their activities. What motivated the students' resistance?
96. Was there any resistance to Hitler in Germany? How much resistance was generated specifically by the Holocaust?
97. There were partisan groups in the forests of Eastern Europe. Many of them would not help Jewish partisan groups and Jewish resistance organizations in the ghettos and concentration camps. Why?

98. Describe acts of "Resistance" outside of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, for example in France, Holland, Belgium, in the concentration camps. Who made up these Resistance movements?
99. Mordechai Anielewicz and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.
100. Explore the difficulties, successes, and failures of resistance in the death camps.
101. Spiritual resistance.

SURVIVAL

102. Explore the role of chance, luck, and fate in survival.

SPORT

103. Why was sport so important to the Nazi racial ideal? Discuss the Nazification of sport.
104. Examine the 1936 Berlin Olympics as an important venue for Hitler, the Nazi state, and the Nazi racial ideal.

THEOLOGY

105. Harry Cargas described himself as a "post-Auschwitz Catholic." What did he mean? Examine the ideas of Harry James Cargas.
106. Pope John Paul II has done more than any other Pope in confronting the Catholic Church's history of anti-Judaism and antisemitism. Examine the impact of his papacy on Catholic-Jewish relations.
107. How have various Protestant denominations responded to the events of the Holocaust?
108. We have seen that many moral dilemmas arose in the ghettos and the concentration camps. Rabbis were asked to respond to them. For example, we have read about Rabbi Shapiro in the Kovno ghetto. Think about these dilemmas and read about them and the Rabbis who responded to them. Discuss the choiceless choices faced by the victims and how their spiritual leaders either sustained them or were not able to.

UNITED STATES

109. What did Henry Ford have to do with the Nazis? Read *Henry Ford and the Jews* by Neil Baldwin, and ask why an American would be so influenced by Hitler and his beliefs.
110. Why did the United States close its doors to Jewish refugees? Why did President Roosevelt finally allow about 1,000 Jews to settle in Oswego, New York?
111. Compare African-American deaths in the USA between 1900 and 1940 and Jewish deaths in Germany. What were the reasons and the outcomes?
112. What were the activities of the German American Bund in the United States in the 1930s?
113. What was covered in United States newspapers? How early did the American public know what the Nazis were doing to the Jews and other victims? Who was filing these reports? How prominently and frequently did the articles appear?
114. Discuss the voyage of the *St. Louis* in the context of 1938. Why did it become "The voyage of the damned"? Were other Jewish refugees allowed into the United States at the same time? Why?

115. In 1939, the bipartisan Wagner-Rogers Bill died in Congress. It would have admitted 20,000 additional Jewish refugee children under the age of 14 into the United States from Germany and Austria. Discuss why this bill failed and explore U.S. antisemitism in the 1930s and 1940s. (Fr. Tom Coughlin's antisemitism is also an interesting starting point.)
116. The American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee are Jewish defense organizations which were created at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. Why were they needed, and how did they function, especially during World War II? Choose one organization and explore it in depth.
117. Discuss Henry Morgenthau Jr. and American rescue efforts through the War Refugee Board.
118. Examine the rescue activities of Varian Fry.
119. Why didn't the Allies bomb Auschwitz?

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