

LESSON PLAN

An American in 1938

Contextualize the experience of Americans in the late 1930s by highlighting the social and economic facts of the day and examining news artifacts from the era.

 30-60 min  Grades 9-12

DOMAIN	SUBJECT	TOPIC
Responsibility	Political Roles	America and the Holocaust

Enduring Understanding

Americans were aware of the rise of Fascism in Europe during the years prior to the Holocaust and many supported this movement.

Essential Questions

1. Why does the public respond the way it does to information about tragedies and events that happen in other parts of the world?

Readiness

 10 min

Ask students whether they can identify how their opinions about the world are shaped. What are the things that influence their perception of what is going on?

Then, set the stage for what Americans would have been experiencing in 1938. Ask your students, what do they know about the US in 1938? Its economy? Sports? Life? How did people at that time get their information- newspapers, movies, radio? How might their views of the world have been shaped?

Input

 20 min

Have students watch the video [American Newsreels](#) from USHMM's Americans and the Holocaust exhibit website. Begin by watching the first 2:15, through the Silver Shirts newspaper campaign.

Prompt students to consider the content of the first two minutes in large discussion or via pair-and-share.

1. What kind of messaging is being promoted by Senator Dies, Father Caughlin and the Silver Shirts?
2. If you believe these messages, what kind of opinion might you form about refugees, Jews, etc. ?

Continue watching the video through 4:45, with the meeting of Mussolini and Hitler and then stop to ask questions about the information being distributed in America:

1. Were Americans informed about the rise of fascism in Europe?
2. Was the American Government interested in responding to conflict or aggression around the world? Why not?
3. How do you see these two first sections interacting with one another? Given the tone of the first section and the information from the second, what kind of opinion might someone form about America's role in the world?

Output

 15 min

Finally, watch the last two minutes of the video, which is an excerpt from March of Time which gave Americans a glimpse into life in Nazi Germany. After the video, ask students to draft short answers to these questions and either generate discussion from them or collect as an assignment:

1. What is the message of March of Time?
2. Knowing what we know about America in 1938, how might a citizen have responded to this information? Would they have been inspired to act or to stay out of it?
3. Looking back from the present day, what parts of March of Time seem like red flags for what is to come in the next 7 years?