

LESSON PLAN

The Devil's in the Details

Students will explore just how complex the Nazi effort was to destroy European Jews, as well as the vague or subtle language used to describe how to implement a systematic genocide within Europe.

 30-60 min  Grades 9-12

DOMAIN	SUBJECT	TOPIC
The Holocaust	Final Solution	Wannsee Conference

Enduring Understanding

The genocide of 6 million Jews stemmed from gradually escalating violence beginning in the 1930s. It required the cooperation of numerous facets of German government and society, and took its final organized form from a 90 minute meeting. Using data gathered from previous experiments, the meeting discussed how to best approach mass murder with the lowest monetary and psychological cost.

Essential Questions

1. How could so many parts of society be interested in actively participating in genocide?

Readiness

 5 min

Ask the students how extensive they believe the planning and execution of the Holocaust may have been – i.e, what kind of organization and resources they believe Nazi authorities used to make the Holocaust a reality.

Input

 15 min

Walk the students through the resource, [Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution](#) by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. Have each student take notes on the different examples of government departments they may or may not have expected to have attended the meeting, the goals of the attendees, as well as euphemisms (words used as a less problematic substitute for terms such as “evacuation to the east” instead of “extermination”, etc), aspects or details that were discussed within the meeting that they may or may not have expected to come up.

Output

 30 min

Lead the class in a discussion about the different actors at play during the Wannsee conference. Depending on how much time you have for this discussion, answer some (or all) of the questions below.

1. Which participants may have surprised them and why?
2. What was the range of occupations and professions required to implement the Holocaust?
3. What does it say about how broadly participation in the genocide must have been, not only by the government but also by those working for different departments and the military?

4. Did the planned size and location of the Holocaust, such as inclusion of Irish or UK Jews within their planned genocide, surprise them?
5. Did they expect that things such as distinctions for decorated WWI soldiers or Jews of “mixed descent” to come up?
6. What kind of subtle language did Heydrich use to hide their plans, and why?
7. What are some outcomes that we can see from this conference taking place, such as the implementation of Zyklon B gassing as the primary method of murdering people during the Holocaust?

Teacher Tip:

Because of the specialized nature of the Wannsee Conference, teaching this lesson with another lesson within the Holocaust domain is recommended. Students should have a basic understanding of the Holocaust prior to this lesson.