

LESSON PLAN

Organizing the Final Solution

Students will read and examine a copy of the minutes of the Wannsee Conference, which helped to determine the fate of European Jews and remains one of the most damning pieces of evidence about the intentions of the Nazis in committing genocide.

 30-60 min  Grades 9-12

DOMAIN	SUBJECT	TOPIC
The Holocaust	Final Solution	Wannsee Conference

Enduring Understanding

The genocide of European Jews was meticulously planned by Nazi authorities; it required the cooperation of numerous facets of German government and society, such as the military, the railroads, immigration offices, etc.

Essential Questions

1. What kind of people participated in the Wannsee Conference to coordinate genocide?

Readiness

 5 min

Give a short background of events leading up to the Wannsee conference. Make sure to mention that mass killing of European Jews had already begun, but it was not as widespread or organized. Give a list of the different people attending the conference, [found here](#), as well as their jobs, to show the variety of different governmental agencies who were brought together to cooperate in genocide.

Input

 15 min

Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5. Provide each group with a copy of the [Wannsee conference minutes](#). Give the groups 15 minutes to read through the minutes and ask them to highlight words or phrases used in relation to the fate of Jewish populations (i.e. “evacuation to the East”). If students are unsure, a good example would be the phrase “Jewish question” itself as it is not readily apparent that the “Jewish question” means “How do we get rid of European Jews?”

Output

 30 min

Lead the class in a discussion following the words and phrases that students highlighted. Explain these terms and phrases, and what they really meant (i.e. “evacuation to the East” meaning “being sent to a concentration or death camp”). Make sure to point out phrases that may have been overlooked.

Finish the discussion with an overview of what we can learn from this document, including relevant questions; this document shows that numerous government authorities were in cooperation in an effort to carry out this genocide:

1. Did any of the participants surprise or confuse the students? If so, why or why not?

2. How does this document show that Nazi leadership felt the necessity to tread carefully?
3. What does this mean? For example, could this indicate that the leadership knew what they were doing would be met with criticism? Criticism from whom? The German population, international groups? Both?
4. Point out the succinct, unemotional nature of the discussion and how it directly contrasts with the subject matter. Does it strike you as odd that someone could so emotionlessly discuss the genocide of an entire group of people?
5. What does this say about how Nazis felt about Jewish people?

Teacher Tip:

This final question would make an excellent Segway into the lesson on Finding Home.