

***Introduction to the Holocaust:
Historical Context for “The Boy in the Striped Pajamas”***

01. World War II: How the Holocaust Came into Fruition

- Before WWII begins, **ADOLF HITLER** gains power in 1933.
- Hitler is a **DICTATOR**: a ruler with total power over a country.
- He believes that Jews, and other groups of people were the cause of Germany’s problems and that Germans were members of the perfect race of human beings (**ARYANS**).
- He enacts **THE NUREMBERG LAWS**: laws put in place to take German citizenship away from the Jews and other individuals in order to create the perfect race.
- He also established the Schutzstaffel (SS): Hitler’s elite military force under the **NAZI PARTY**.
- Jews were identified by the Nazi Party in two ways:
 1. **GRANDPARENTS**: A person with 3 or 4 Jewish grandparents was considered a Jew.
 2. **RELIGION**: A grandparent was considered Jewish when they themselves followed the Jewish religion.
 - The Nazi regime required individuals to prove their grandparents’ racial identities. To do so, people used religious records. These included baptism records, Jewish community records, and gravestones

Characteristics of Judaism

1. **GOD**: There is one god who is all-powerful and all-knowing.
2. **THE TORAH**: Similar to the Bible, it is the holy book that Jews follow.
3. **HEBREW**: The Torah and their prayers are typically written and spoken in Hebrew.
4. **SYNAGOGUES**: Similar to churches, this is where Jews come to worship.
5. **RABBIS**: Similar to priests, they are the heads of the Jewish religion.

KEY

6. **THE MESSIAH:** They do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but they believe that Jesus was a prophet instead.
7. **THE STAR OF DAVID:** Symbol of Judaism (Hitler later makes the Jews wear this symbol on their clothing).

November 9-10, 1938: Kristallnacht, or “The Night of Broken Glass”

- This was the official “declaration of war” from Germany against the Jews. It was a night of widespread **VIOLENCE** against the Jewish people.
- It was meant to look **UNPLANNED**, but in reality, it was the leaders of the Nazi Party that organized it with Hitler’s support.

World War II Begins...

- WWII begins in 1939 and shortly after, Jewish **GHETTOS** are created.
- Jews were confined in specific areas so they would not “**CONTAMINATE**” the pure parts of Germany.
- They had their own justice systems, tall walls, poverty, and crowded conditions.

02. The Holocaust: The History of the Genocide

- In 1941, Hitler enacted “**THE FINAL SOLUTION.**”
- The Final Solution was the Nazis’ codename for the plan to murder all European **JEWS.**
- They started off as mass shootings, but eventually evolved into **DEATH CAMPS** with gas chambers.

The Differences Between:

1. **CONCENTRATION CAMPS:** Designed for mass murder; housed the gas chambers.
2. **DEATH CAMPS:** Prison-like facilities where Jewish people were forced to work.

The Numbers

- **35,000,000 (35 MILLION):** Total number of victims... there could be more
- **6,000,000+ (MORE THAN 6 MILLION):** Jewish victims
- **? (UNKNOWN):** Non-Jewish victims

KEY

- The Nazis kept records, but many Holocaust Centers include **CIVILIANS** in this count.

Some Common Misconceptions

- Hitler's Role: Make sure to not discount the many **COLLABORATORS** that contributed to the ideas that Hitler enacted.
- America Wanted to Save the Jews: There was never an official order to save the Jews. They did it out of the kindness of their hearts.
- Hitler Was Jewish: Due to Hitler's **FATHER** being illegitimate, there is no proof that he was.
- The Death of Hitler's Mother by a Jew: Hitler had no ill will towards the Jewish doctor that treated his mother... he wished all Jews were like him.
- Jews Are a Race: Race is a social construct... and Jews being a race is a **NAZI** concept.
- Hitler's Death: There is not a lot of evidence that indicates how Hitler died, but we do know that he died in his **BUNKER**. Most historians agree that Hitler and his wife Eva bit into a cyanide pill and Hitler eventually shot himself.
- All Concentration Camps Were Death Camps: Not every camp had a **GAS CHAMBER**, and not every camp was a work camp. Some were killed upon arrival and some worked until they died.
- All Jews Received **TATTOOS**: Some Jews had their numbers sewn onto their **CLOTHES**, which you will see in TBITSP

Fighting Back

- Contrary to popular belief, the Jews did fight back.
- There were **UPRISINGS**, riots, escape attempts, etc.
- There were some non-Jewish people who helped **HIDE** Jewish people from the Nazis.
 - Ex: **ANNE FRANK**
- There were many reasons as to why these resistances did not work:
 1. Lack of resources
 2. **MALNOURISHED**
 3. Betrayal

4. **FEAR**

Liberation of the Camps

- The Allies (France, Great Britain, The United States, The Soviet Union) freed the camps between **1944-1945**. They did this by launching military attacks. The Allies, although shocked by the extent of it, knew that something was going on. Again, there were no orders given to free these camps.
- **THE NUREMBERG TRIALS** (1945-1949) happened as a result of punishing Nazi war criminals.
- **ISRAEL** was established in 1948 as a result of the Jews losing their European homes. Due to Israel being mentioned in the Torah as a home for the Jews, the Allies "**GIFTED**" Israel to them. This is why there are so many fights over Israel today.

03. The Boy in the Striped Pajamas Context

Historical Context for the Novel

- The Boy in the Striped Pajamas is a **HISTORICAL FICTION** novel that was written in 2006.
- The novel takes place during the same time period as **THE HOLOCAUST** (obviously before liberation in 1944).
- The novel is written through the perspective of a **GERMAN** 9-year-old boy whose father is a **SOLDIER** of Hitler's SS.
- The purpose of the novel: To **LEARN** from history and remember the tragedy.

Themes

1. **INNOCENCE**: Bruno is a young boy who is unaware of what is going on. He loses his childlike innocence throughout the novel as he discovers what his father is responsible for in Hitler's army.
2. **FRIENDSHIP**: Bruno makes an unlikely friend, showing that friendship has no limits.
3. **PREJUDICE**: Jews have faced prejudice for thousands of years. Bruno explores how Jews are treated by people who he thought were kind.

04. Learning from History: What Can We Learn From Tragedy?

Why Study the Holocaust?

KEY

- To ***HONOR*** the survivors and victims.
- To ***UNDERSTAND*** the dangers of hatred and prejudice.
- To ***RECOGNIZE*** the importance of standing up against injustice.
- To ***ENSURE*** that these tragedies never happen again.
- To ***PROMOTE*** tolerance, empathy, and respect for all human beings.