

What Did Americans Know About Kristallnacht?

Inspired by the interactive nature of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's most recent exhibition (*Americans and the Holocaust*), the education staff at the Jewish Museum of Maryland have developed an engaging and academically rigorous lesson plan. This lesson asks your students to take on the role of historian and work with primary source documents to answer the big question: What did Americans know about Kristallnacht? The lesson provides scaffolding for students to evaluate their own prior knowledge/hypothesizes on the topic, to learn about the differences between primary and secondary sources (and why historians use both), and to interpret real primary sources from historical American newspapers. At the end of the lesson are several extension activities from which to choose that ask students to evaluate their newfound knowledge and bring multiple sources to bear in an in-depth discussion or argumentative essay.

This lesson is designed for a classroom that has just begun studying World War II and the Holocaust, and looks specifically at articles describing Kristallnacht. While we have chosen Kristallnacht for the topic of this lesson, the scaffold of this lesson could be used for almost any historical event. At the end of this lesson plan we have provided a list of other well-documented events/topics during the Holocaust and provided a variety of resources to find additional primary sources.

This lesson was designed with the high school student in mind, but the questions and scaffolding could easily be adapted into an accessible lesson for middle school students. Additionally, we have also provided some thoughts for variations you can add to this lesson when you bring it into your classroom. While these are certainly not the only modifications you can make, we hope they will provide a helpful starting point for making this lesson fit to your students' needs.

Essential Question: What did Americans know about Kristallnacht?

Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn how historians approach, research, and write about a big question, in this case, students will be putting this into practice by answering the question “What did Americans know about Kristallnacht?”
- Students will learn the distinction between primary and secondary sources and how historians interpret these sources differently.
- Students will learn how to interpret primary sources by investigating its historical context, authorship, argument, and bias.
- Students will learn what historical Americans newspapers on the East Coast published about Kristallnacht.
- Students will learn to work with multiple, sometimes conflicting sources, to draw conclusions about history.

Standards: See attached document

Materials:

- “What did Americans know about the Holocaust” packets (these include: primary vs. secondary sources worksheet and primary source document scaffold).
- Copies (electronically or paper) of these newspaper articles:
 - “Anti-Jewish Riots Sweep Reich to Avenge Diplomat’s Killing” from the *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.) November 10th 1938
 - “John L. Lewis Names Hitler a Mad, Blood-Thirsty Wolf” from *The Voice* (Cumberland, MD) November 17th 1938
 - “Opinion: It Sounds Familiar” from the *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD) November 19th, 1938
 - “Opinion: Germany’s Beam – Our Mote” from the *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD) November 26th 1938
 - “Observer Describes Wrecking of Jewish Shops in Berlin” from *The Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.) November 10th, 1938
 - “Goebbels Tells Jews in America to Keep Quiet” from *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.) November 12th, 1938
 - “Nazi Reprisals Believed Doom of Jewish Life” from *the Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, MD) November 11th, 1938
 - “No Regret Voiced” from *The New York Times* (New York City, NY) November 12th, 1938
 - “For a Diplomat’s Murder Nazi Germany Takes an Awful Revenge on Its Jews” from *LIFE Magazine* (New York City, NY) November 28th, 1938
 - “World Protests Against Nazi Persecution Continue” from *The Baltimore Jewish Times* (Baltimore, MD) December 9th, 1938
 - “Pogroms Pay! Behind the Anti-Jewish Terror in Germany” from *The Baltimore Jewish Times* (Baltimore, MD) November 25th, 1938
 - “No Light, No Shadow – Only Darkness” from *The Baltimore Jewish Times* (Baltimore, MD) November 11th, 1938
- “Primary vs. Secondary Sources” video from minnesotahistory, ([link](#))

- “Kristallnacht’: The November 1938 Pogroms” from Facing History and Ourselves ([link](#))
- Sticky notes

Procedures:

1. **Activating Strategy:** Have students partner up with someone sitting near them and give each pair a sticky note to share. Students will brainstorm together how they each learn about national and international news (through the television, social media, etc.) The pairs will evaluate which of these methods they use the most, write their answer down on a sticky note, and place it on a blackboard/whiteboard. The teacher will then read aloud some of the student answers. After sharing some of the student answers the teacher will explain how during the 1930’s and 1940’s the majority of Americans received their news through local and national newspapers. The teacher will then introduce the activity: interpreting America’s historical newspapers like a historian to learn what Americans knew about Kristallnacht. (5 minutes)

VARIATION: Alternatively, have students individually fill out an electronic poll and share the real-time statistics with your students. (5 minutes)

2. **Primary and Secondary Sources:** Ask the students what they think the differences are between primary and secondary sources and will then show the “Primary vs. Secondary Sources” video from the minnesotahistory channel (Minnesota Historical Society) on YouTube. After they watch the video, have them individually answer the questions on page three of their packet. Review the answers to check for understanding, and then have the students work with their partner to brainstorm answers to the questions on page three. Once students have finished brainstorming answers, bring the class back together to share their answers. (15 minutes)

3. **Kristallnacht Secondary Source:** Ask students to individually brainstorm what they already know about Kristallnacht, and what they would like to know. Students will then share their prior knowledge and what they would like to know with a partner sitting near them. Give the opportunity for students to share both their prior knowledge and question with the class. Then have students, watch the “Kristallnacht’: The November 1938 Pogroms” video from Facing History and Ourselves ([link](#)). As they watch, ask students to write down what primary sources they see used in the video, and one new thing that they learned about Kristallnacht. After watching the video, take a class poll to see how many students believe that Americans knew about Kristallnacht, and how many believe that Americans did not know about it. (12 minutes)

4. **Work in Pairs:** Have students get into pairs. Each pair gets a randomly assigned historic, American newspaper article about Kristallnacht. The pair will work together to read the newspaper article and answer the scaffolding questions in the “Reading a Primary Source Document” section of the packet. They should stop when they get to the part titled “The Which.” (30 minutes)

VARIATION: Students find their own primary sources using a ProQuest database, History Unfolded, the University of Maryland Historical Newspapers Project, the Google Historical Newspapers Archives, or the LIFE magazine archives. (60 minutes)

5. **Work in Groups:** After answering the questions about their own article, the pair should group up with another pair in the classroom with a different article. Students should then begin comparing and contrasting the article, paying particular attention to differences in facts, argument, and attitude. As a group, they should fill out the Venn diagram to assist their analysis. (10 minutes)

6. Plan and Presentation: Once the students have compared their articles, they should begin planning a short (3 minute or so) presentation on their two articles. The students should address how their article differed from the secondary source video they watched (Facing History and Ourselves), and how the two articles approached the same subject differently. (Depending on number of groups, approximately 20 minutes)

7. Discussion: Ask students if, based upon what they saw written in the American newspapers, they agree with this statement from the Facing History and Ourselves film:

“The international response was outrage, but it should have been more, we should have done more than we did. The U.S. recalled its ambassador temporarily; we didn’t break up diplomatic relations with Germany... It’s a glass half empty, half full. I mean clearly there’s international outrage, but on the other hand clearly the international community didn’t do enough at this point.” (7 minutes)

VARIATION: Essay Prompt: Rather than an in-class discussion, use the same question and have students craft an argumentative essay (in-class or out of class) using the article that they analyze to support their claim. (30 minutes)

VARIATION: Research Project: Give students the opportunity to choose a new event (based on the list provided on the Unfolding History webpage). Then have the students research articles from historical American newspapers on their new topic and write an essay answering the question of: Did Americans know about [new topic]? Depending on how long you wish the research project to last, you can scaffold students along the way by requiring them to fill out the “Reading a Primary Source” graphic organizer for each new article and provide a detailed outline before writing the essay. Additionally, how long you wish the research project to last will determine how many articles you ask them to interpret (minimum 2, maximum 5). Students can research using a ProQuest database, History Unfolded, the University of Maryland Historical Newspapers Project, the Google Historical Newspapers Archives, or the LIFE magazine archives to find their new articles. (multiple days out of class)

Other Potential Holocaust Related Topics:

- Nuremberg Laws (1935)
- Evian Conference (1938)
- First Reports of the Final Solution (1942)
- Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1943)
- First Reports of Auschwitz/Birkenau (1944)
- See more ideas at [History Unfolded](#)

Teacher and Research Resources:

- Primary Sources
 - [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: History Unfolded](#)
 - [Google Historical Newspapers Archive](#)
 - [University of Maryland: The Maryland Historic Newspapers Project](#)
 - [LIFE Magazine Archives](#)
 - [Enoch Pratt Library](#)
 - [Baltimore County Public Library](#) (has access to the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Baltimore Sun, Washington Post, and the Baltimore Afro-American)
 - [Jewish Museum of Maryland Collections](#) (Baltimore Jewish Times)
- Secondary Sources
 - [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Holocaust Encyclopedia](#)
 - [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Americans and the Holocaust Exhibit](#)
 - [Yad Vashem: Holocaust Resource Center: Lexicon](#)
- General Resources:
 - [Yad Vashem Educator Resources](#)
 - [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Resources for Educators](#)
 - [Centropa: Teaching Materials](#)
 - [Facing History and Ourselves: Educator Resources](#)
 - [Echoes and Reflections](#)

Common Core Standards:

General Language Arts:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in the text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific words choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in the text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Grade 6 Reading: Informational Text:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.6.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.6.2: Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgements.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.6.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.6.9: Compare and contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person)

Grade 7 Reading: Informational Text:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.7.1: Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as references drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.7.4: Determine the meanings of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.7.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.7.9: Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.

Grade 8 Reading: Informational Text:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.8.2: Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.8.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific words choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.8.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.8.9: Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.

Grade 9-10 Reading: Informational Text:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.9-10.2: Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific detail; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.9-10.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

Grade 11-12 Reading: Informational Text:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.11-12.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.11-12.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and context contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

History/Social Studies Grades 6-8:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas of information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6: Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8: Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgement in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9: Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

History/Social Studies Grade 9-10:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6: Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9: Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

History/Social Studies Grade 11-12:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2: Determine central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines *faction* in *Federalist* No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6: Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event of issue by addressing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8: Evaluate the authors' premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea of event, noting discrepancies among sources.

MSDE Social Studies Standards and Framework Grade 6-8:

MSDE Modern History

Standard 2.0 Peoples of the Nations and World: Students will understand the diversity and commonality, human interdependence, and global cooperation of the people of Maryland, the United States, and the world through both a multicultural and historic perspective.

Standard 5.0 History

- Unit Crisis and Global Acceleration 1890-1994
- Unit Question: How did accelerated competition lead to global conflicts?
 - World War II: Is war inevitable?
 - Students will analyze how regional tensions and interregional competition led to World War II by:
 - Explaining the rise of authoritarian leaders and how they utilized technology and propaganda to seize power in Italy, Germany, Spain, the Soviet Union, and Japan.
 - Historical Concepts:
 - State building, expansion and conflict
 - Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems
 - Development and transformation of social structures
 - Examining how the quest for territory and Western appeasement led to the expansion of German, Italian, and Japanese power.
 - Historical Concepts:
 - State building, expansion, and conflict
 - Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems

- Analyzing the state-sponsored atrocities perpetrated by governments in Europe and Asia during World War II
 - Historical Concepts:
 - Development and interaction of cultures
 - State building, expansion, and conflict
 - Development and transformation of social structures

Unit 6.0 Skills and Processes: Students shall use reading, writing, and thinking processes and skills to gain knowledge and understanding of political, historical, and current events using disciplinary and inquiry literacies.