Voices of the Holocaust

The Literature & Thought series contains literature that challenges the reader, promotes critical thinking, and encourages independent exploration of genres, themes, and issues.

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- Fantasy
- Humor
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- Mythology
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Could a Holocaust Happen Here?

The question above is the essential question that you will consider as you read this book. The literature, activities, and organization of the book will lead you to think critically about this question and to develop a deeper understanding of the Holocaust.

To help you shape your answer to the broad essential question, you will read and respond to five sections, or clusters. Each cluster addresses a specific question and thinking skill.

**Cluster One** How could the Holocaust happen? **Analyze**

**Cluster Two** How were victims oppressed? **Compare/Contrast**

**Cluster Three** Was there resistance? **Generalize**

**Cluster Four** Why should we remember? **Synthesize**

**Cluster Five** Thinking on your own

Notice that the final cluster asks you to think independently about your answer to the essential question—*Could a holocaust happen here?*
First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Communist.
Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for me
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.

—Pastor Martin Niemöller

(who spent seven years in concentration camps after protesting the Nazi mistreatment of Jews)
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ANTI-SEMITISM: A HISTORY OF HATE

Ant-Semitism means prejudice against Jews. People who are anti-Semites don’t want their children to marry or even be friends with Jews. Anti-Semites don’t like to buy from Jewish businesses. Some anti-Semites burn crosses on the lawns of Jewish homes and paint swastikas on their temples. They blame Jews for everything that’s wrong and believe Jews are too smart or too rich or own too much land.

If you were a Jew in ancient times, you might have been enslaved by the Egyptians. You couldn’t be a citizen in the ancient Roman Empire. If you were a Jew, Christians sometimes called you “Christ killer,” an allegation so inflammatory that it became the rallying cry of anti-Semitism for centuries.

If you were a Jew in the Middle Ages, you were often forced to live in a walled ghetto. Non-Jews didn’t want you to influence them or their children and merchants didn’t want your businesses competing with theirs. Outside the gates of your ghetto, you were required to wear an identifying badge.

At the outbreak of the plague called the Black Death (1348), you might have been accused of poisoning the water. If you were a Jew in 15th-century Spain, the Inquisition, a series of religious trials, could have expelled you or worse.

If you were a German Jew in 1879, you would have been a target of Wilhelm Marr who taught that Germans belonged to the Aryan “master race,” while Jews were by nature a “slave race.” Marr founded the League of Anti-Semitism to keep Germany from being “taken over” by Jews.

If you were a Russian Jew in 1881, pogroms, or organized attacks, might have caused you and hundreds of thousands of others to emigrate to the United States or to establish colonies in Palestine.

In 1923, an embittered, young soldier named Adolf Hitler was jailed for his part in a failed government coup. Hitler used his prison time to write Mein Kampf (My Struggle), a book filled with his plans for the creation of the Nazi party and world domination, his belief in Aryan superiority, and, most ominously, his fanatical anti-Semitism.

Upon release from prison, Hitler and a group of devoted followers began to preach the philosophy of Nazism. An explosive combination of economic depression in Germany and Hitler’s powerful blend of treachery and inflammatory
speechmaking led to his appointment as Chancellor in 1933. In 1934 he was elected president and named himself Führer or supreme leader.

Once in power Hitler turned anti-Semitism into an official government policy. Within a decade that policy had led to the murder of nearly 6 million European Jews as well as gypsies, intellectuals, homosexuals, handicapped Marxists, and other “enemies of the state.” While millions were murdered outright through the use of gas chambers and other methods of extermination, hundreds of thousands of others died from disease, starvation, and slave labor.

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945)
Führer und Reichskanzler.
He promised glory for the Germans and destruction for the Jews.

Oskar Schindler (1908-1974)
German businessman who first profited from the war but later became a hero by saving 1300 Jewish workers from the gas chambers.

Anne Frank (1929-1945)
Her diary, written while hiding from the Nazis, brought the horror of the Holocaust to the world.

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945)
Führer und Reichskanzler. He promised glory for the Germans and destruction for the Jews.

Simon Wiesenthal (1908-)
A Holocaust survivor, he gave up a career in architecture to become a relentless Nazi hunter.

Allied leaders meet at Yalta, in Russia. (From left) Winston Churchill (1875-1965) British Prime Minister; Franklin Roosevelt (1882-1945) U.S. President; Josef Stalin (1879-1953) Dictator of Soviet Russia.
# Major Events of World War II and the Holocaust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Adolf Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany</td>
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<td>1933</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Dachau concentration camp opens</td>
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<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>One-day boycott of Jewish shops and businesses; Gestapo (German internal security police) established</td>
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<td>1933</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Public burnings of books written by Jews, political dissidents, and others not approved by the state</td>
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<td>1933</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>Buchenwald concentration camp opens</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Jews barred from serving in German army</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>“Nuremberg Laws” passed. As a result, Jews no longer considered German citizens; Jews could not marry Aryans; nor could they fly the German flag</td>
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<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>Hitler proclaims himself Führer und Reichskanzler (Leader and Reich Chancellor)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Hitler annexes Austria</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>Germany invades Poland; World War II begins</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>Germany invades Denmark and Norway</td>
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<td>1941</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Germany invades the Soviet Union</td>
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<td>1942</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Haydrich outlines plan to murder Europe’s Jews; German 6th Army surrenders at Stalingrad</td>
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<td>1944</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>D-Day: Allied invasion at Normandy, France</td>
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<td>1945</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>Hitler commits suicide</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>First atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>Japan surrenders; end of World War II</td>
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You will find the following terms and definitions useful as you read and discuss the selections in this book.

**Aryan race**  “Aryan” was originally applied to people who spoke any Indo-European language (in India, western Asia, and Europe). The Nazis, however, primarily used the term to refer to people of Northern European racial ancestry—especially those with blue eyes and blonde hair.

**concentration camp**  Upon their ascent to power on January 30, 1933, the Nazis established concentration camps for the imprisonment of all “enemies” of their regime: political opponents, Jehovah’s Witnesses, gypsies, homosexuals, and other “asocials.” Beginning in 1938, Jews were targeted for internment solely because they were Jews.

**Final solution**  The cover name for the plan to destroy the Jews of Europe—the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” It began in December, 1941. Jews were rounded up and sent to extermination camps in the East. The program was deceptively disguised as “resettlement.”

**genocide**  The deliberate and systematic destruction of a religious, racial, national, or cultural group of people.

**ghetto**  The Nazis revived the concept of medieval ghetto in creating their compulsory “Jewish Quarter.” The ghetto was a section of a city where all Jews from the surrounding areas were forced to reside, surrounded by barbed wire or walls.

**Nazi**  From the German words for Na(tional-so)zi(alist). A nazi was a member or supporter of the National Socialist Party in Germany led by Adolf Hitler.

**propaganda**  Ideas or claims spread deliberately to further one’s cause or to damage an opponent’s cause.

**scapegoat**  A person or group that bears the blame for others. Scapegoating is the process of blaming others for one’s problems.

**Third Reich**  The German state during the Nazi period.
The Ball

HANS PETER RICHER

We ran along the street. Friedrich kept close to the houses; I
stayed on the curb. I threw the little rubber ball I’d been given
in the shoe store. It hit the center of the sidewalk and bounced
high. Friedrich caught it and threw it back to me.

“My father will be home any moment!” he called to me. “I must get
back soon. We’re going shopping today. Maybe someone’ll give me a
ball, too!”

I nodded and jumped over a manhole. I waited until a pedestrian had
gone by, then hurled the ball back to Friedrich.

Friedrich hadn’t been watching,

There was a crash,

The ball rolled harmlessly back to me.

Friedrich stared openmouthed at the smashed shop window. I went to
pick up the ball, not yet believing what had happened.

Suddenly the woman stood before us. She grabbed Friedrich’s arm
and began to screech,

Doors and windows opened. A crowd gathered.

“Thieves! Burglars!” the woman shouted.

Her husband stood by the shop door, hands in his pockets, smoking
a pipe.

“This good-for-nothing Jewboy here broke my shop window,” she told
everyone who cared to listen. “He wants to rob me.” She turned to
Friedrich. “But you didn’t quite make it this time, did you. Because I’m
always watching. I know you, you won’t get away from me. You pack of
Jews, they should get rid of you. First you ruin our business with your

Boy in front of a synagogue, Mukachevo (Ukraine), 1937.

SHORT STORY

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department stores, then you rob us on top of it! Just you wait, Hitler will show you yet!” And she shook Friedrich violently.

“But he didn’t do it!” I yelled. “I threw the ball, I broke your window. We didn’t want to steal!”

The woman looked at me, eyes large and stupid. Her mouth dropped open.

Her husband had swept the broken glass into the gutter. He collected the rolls of thread, the stars of black and white yarn, the balls of colorful embroidery yarn from the display case and carried them into the shop.

The woman’s eyes grew very small. “How dare you interfere? What are you doing here anyway? Away with you! You don’t think you have to protect this rotten Jewboy because you’re living in the same house, do you? Go on, beat it!”

“But I threw the ball!” I said again.

The woman lunged at me, without letting go of Friedrich. Friedrich cried. He wiped his tears on his sleeve, smearing his whole face.

Someone had called the police.

Out of breath and sweating, a policeman arrived on a bicycle. He asked the woman to tell him what had happened.

Again she told the story of the attempted burglary.

I tugged at his sleeve. “Officer,” I said, “he didn’t do it. I broke the pane with my ball.”

The woman looked at me threateningly. “Don’t you believe him, Officer?” she said. “He only wants to protect the Jewboy here. Don’t you believe him. He thinks the Jew’s his friend just because they live in the same house.”

The policeman bent down to me. “You don’t understand this yet, you’re too young still,” he explained. “You may think you’re doing him a favor by standing up for him. But you know he’s a Jew. Believe me, we grownups have had plenty of experiences with Jews. You can’t trust them; they’re sneaky and they cheat. This woman was the only one who saw what happened, so…”

“But she didn’t see it!” I interrupted him. “Only I was there, and I did it!”

The policeman frowned. “You wouldn’t try to call this woman a liar.”

I wanted to explain, but he didn’t let me.

He took Friedrich’s wrist from the woman and led him toward our house, followed by the woman and a long line of curious onlookers.

I joined the line.

Halfway there we ran into Herr Schneider.

Sobbing, Friedrich shouted, “Father!”

Astonished, Herr Schneider surveyed the procession. He came closer, said hello, and looked from one person to another, obviously puzzled.

“Your son—” said the policeman.

But the woman didn’t give him a chance to go on. In one burst she repeated her tale. The only part she left out this time was her insinuation about Jews.

Herr Schneider listened patiently. When she had finished, he took Friedrich’s chin in his hand and lifted his head so he could look into his eyes.

“Friedrich,” he asked seriously, “did you break the shop window intentionally?”

Friedrich shook his head, still sobbing.

“I did it, Herr Schneider. I threw the ball, but I didn’t do it on purpose!”

And I showed him my small rubber ball.

Friedrich nodded.

Herr Schneider took a deep breath. “If you can swear on oath that what you just told me is the truth,” he told the woman, “go ahead and register a formal complaint. You know me, and you know where I live!”

The woman did not reply.

Herr Schneider pulled out his purse. “Kindly release my son, Officer!” he said sharply. “I will pay for the damage at once.”