Lesson Plan – War in the East and the move towards the 'Final Solution'

Introduction

Student age range: 14-16

Subject: History

Time required: 50 minutes

Overview:

This lesson introduces students to two critical and interconnected aspects of World War II: the German military campaign on the Eastern Front and the implementation of the Final Solution. Students will explore the ideological motivations behind Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, and how it provided the context for the systematic genocide of European Jews.

Essential questions:

- Why did Germany invade Poland and Russia?
- What was the Final Solution?
- How did the Final Solution evolve?

Learning Objectives

- Students will learn about Germany's push towards the East.
- Students will learn about the evolution and planning of the Final Solution.

Key issues/concepts:

- Cause and effect
- Significance

Materials:

White board and marker

Lebensraum video - https://youtu.be/3TQ9NOwINBY?si=4lxECCAd8bwnHzti

Handout – Three Documents about the Final Solution OR Worksheet – The Final Solution

Teaching notes:

The part of this lesson dealing with the Final Solution can be handled in either of two ways:

1. Students work independently to answer the questions on the **Worksheet – The Final Solution**; OR
2. Class discussion, led by the teacher, to answer the questions on the **Worksheet – The Final Solution**.

As these are difficult concepts, it is recommended that teachers use class discussion to move through the questions. The answers are provided below.

Glossary:

- Final Solution
- Wannsee Conference
- *Judenfrei*
- *Einsatzgruppen*

Lesson Instructions

ONE – Starter Activity (5 minutes)

Teacher asks: 'What do you already know about Nazi policies towards Jews prior to 1939?' Brainstorm on the board: Nuremberg Laws, radicalisation, Kristallnacht, ghettos.

TWO – Lebensraum and Racial War (10 minutes)

Teacher introduces the idea of *Lebensraum* by showing this short video (1min 5sec).

Students use the dot points at the end of the video (at 59secs) to make notes under the heading: Reasons for German expansion to the East.

Teacher exposition: Germany has control of Poland and its 3 million Jews by the end of 1939. Nazi leadership consider the existence of these and other Eastern European Jews as a problem which requires a solution. When Germany invades the Soviet Union in June 1941, they begin utilising *Einsatzgruppen* (death squads) to kill Jews.
Teachers may ask students to write this paragraph in their notebooks.

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THREE – Three documents to tell a story (30 minutes)

If students are answering the questions independently: distribute the **Worksheet – War in the East and the Move towards the 'Final Solution'**, which includes the documents and the questions.

If teacher is using class discussion to answer questions: distribute the **Handout – Three Documents about the Final Solution**, or display the documents to the class, one at a time.
Teacher uses the following questions to lead discussion towards the appropriate conclusion. (Teacher may allow short periods for students to research specific answers eg what were Einsatzgruppen?; Who were Goering and Heydrich?)

Questions about the Three Documents:

Document One – Secret Map

1. What is this document?
   A map
2. Which areas are shown?
   The Baltic states and Belorussia
3. The title of the map is *"Jewish Executions Carried out by Einsatzgruppen A"*. What were Einsatzgruppen?
   Killing squads
4. What are the symbols beside the numbers?
   They are coffins, representing numbers of dead.
5. What are the numbers?
   They indicate how many Jews have been executed by 1941.
6. The bottom line says *"The estimated number of Jews still on hand was 128,000."* Why might the Nazis want to know this number?
   In order to effectively plan for their elimination.
7. These figures relate to late 1941. What does this tell you about German policy towards the Jews of this area in 1941?
   Germany was already pursuing a policy of killing Jews before the official implementation of the Final Solution.

Conclusion: Beginning in Russia in 1941, Germany was engaging in the organised killing of Jews. The murders were perpetrated by death squads known as Einsatzgruppen.

Document Two – Goering Memorandum

1. This memorandum was sent from Goering to Heydrich. Who were those two men in the context of the Nazi hierarchy?
   Goering was second in command, inferior in power only to Hitler himself. Heydrich was head of the SS, which was tasked with the implementation of the Final Solution.
2. Note the date of the memorandum. Put it in the context of the war in the East.
   This is nearly two years after the invasion of Poland, and just over a month after the invasion of Russia.
3. Find a quote that sums up the point of the memorandum.
   "I hereby charge you with making all necessary preparations, with regard to organisational and financial matters, for bringing about a total solution of the Jewish question…"
4. What is the real meaning of this memorandum?
   It shows the beginning of the Final Solution. Goering is telling Heydrich to begin organising the murder of Europe's Jews.

Extension question: Goering uses the euphemism 'total solution of the Jewish question' and doesn't use words like 'murder' or 'eliminate'. Why is this the case?

Conclusion: The Final Solution begins with this memorandum on July 31 1941, giving Heydrich the green light to proceed.

Document Three – Protocol of the Wannsee Conference

Teacher exposition: The Wannsee Conference was a meeting of high-level Nazi officials held on January 20, 1942.

1. What is listed in the left hand column?
   European nations
2. What is the difference between the A group and the B group?
   A list countries have already been invaded by Germany, but B list countries have not.
3. What do the numbers represent?
   Jewish population
4. Estland (Estonia) is listed as 'judenfrei' – what does that mean?
   Free from Jews. The Jewish population of Estonia had already been murdered.
5. What was the purpose of this chart at the Wannsee Conference?
   To help plan for the murder of all those Jews.
6. What does this indicate was the purpose of the Wannsee Conference?
   To make plans for the murder of the Jews of Europe.

Conclusion: Nazi officials met at Wannsee to discuss the practical arrangements for the murder of European Jewry. This is known as the Final Solution.

Extension Question: contestability

Some historians claim that the Wannsee Conference was where the Nazis decided to murder the Jews of Europe. Others claim the decision had been made before the meeting at Wannsee. If the latter is true, why was the meeting significant, and what was its effect on the Final Solution? Discuss. In your response, refer to at least one of the Documents.

Summary Question

Reading all three documents together, what can you conclude about the evolution of the Final Solution?

FINISHING UP

Students write in their notes: The 'Final Solution' was the last stage of the Holocaust. It refers to the state-run murder of Europe's Jews.

Modifications:

A further video resource for higher level learners is available here.

Related lessons

After this lesson, we recommend you teach about Concentration Camps and Death Camps. You can find plans for this, and other Holocaust lessons, at this link.

Click here to see a suggested plan for teaching a full unit about the Holocaust.