

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Poland's Important Role in World War II

LESSON PLAN 2

Title: *Invasion and Occupation of Poland by Hitler and Stalin: The First Two Years (1939-1941).*

Learning Objective: Students will be able to describe the major destructive actions Hitler and Stalin carried out against Poland in the first two years of the war, 1939-1941.

Learning Standards Addressed: As determined by Teacher.

Materials: Computer projector; PowerPoint slides, Teacher's Guide

Procedure:

1. Introduction:

- a. Inform students that this lesson outlines the major destructive actions Hitler carried out against Poles and Polish Jews, as well as the major destructive actions Stalin carried out against Poles. Hitler's destructive actions against Polish and other European Roma is described in Lesson 3.

2. Direct Instruction:

- a. **DESCRIBE THE TWO MAJOR ACTIONS HITLER CARRIED OUT AGAINST POLES IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS.**

- i. **DISPLAY SLIDE 2 (Hitler and Stalin Divide Poland Between Them).**

1. **Read summary paragraph below on Hitler's and Stalin's coordinated campaign to eradicate Poles on both sides of their demarcation line.**

- a. *Hitler and Stalin strongly believed Poland should not have been reestablished after World War I ended.*
- b. ***They planned their attack on Poland together and began eradicating Poles from their occupied areas.***
- c. *Hitler began by murdering tens of thousands of Polish intelligentsia and sending hundreds of thousands of others to concentration camps. (Read the names of the camps.)*
- d. *Stalin deported up to 1.5 million Poles to the gulags and slave labor camps.*
- e. *Hitler annexed his half of Poland to Germany and Stalin annexed his half of Poland to the Soviet Union. **Poland ceased to exist as a nation state.***

- ii. **DISPLAY SLIDE 3 (Hitler's Destructive Actions against Poles).**

- iii. **Summarize the main points of Slide 3.**

1. *The German invasion killed between 150,000 and 200,000 Polish civilians.*
2. *After the German invasion, there were mass arrests and murders of up to 100,000 Polish intelligentsia. This was a second step in Hitler's genocide of the Poles.*

3. *In the first two years of the war, Hitler imprisoned thousands of Poles in concentration camps designated specifically for Poles where many died. At the same time, Hitler imprisoned Polish Jews in German-run ghettos.*
4. *Hitler's order to his senior generals confirms that his plan for Poles was comprehensive genocide.*

b. DESCRIBE THE FIRST MAJOR ACTION HITLER CARRIED OUT AGAINST POLISH JEWS.

i. DISPLAY SLIDE 4 (Hitler's 1st Destructive Action against Polish Jews).

1. Read summary paragraph for Slide 4 below.

- a. *In the first two years of the war, the Germans established over 200 ghettos in German-occupied Poland and forced Polish Jews to relocate into them. To establish ghettos for Jews in the major cities, the Germans forcibly evacuated thousands of Poles from their homes.*
- b. *In each ghetto, the Germans established a Jewish Council to manage the needs of the people and carry out the orders of the Germans.*
- c. *To maintain order within the ghetto and enforce the Germans' orders, the Jewish Councils established Jewish Ghetto Police.*
- d. *Jews from other countries were later sent to these ghettos. Living conditions soon became unbearable as disease and starvation began taking the lives of many.*

c. DESCRIBE THE SECOND MAJOR ACTION HITLER CARRIED OUT AGAINST POLISH JEWS AND OTHER EUROPEAN JEWS.

i. DISPLAY SLIDE 5 (Hitler's 2nd Destructive Action against Jews - Operation Barbarossa).

1. Read summary paragraph below on Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union called "Operation Barbarossa".

- a. *In June 1941, nearly two years after joining with Stalin to destroy Poland, Hitler surprised Stalin by attacking the Soviet Union.*
- b. *His objectives were to create more Lebensraum for Germany and destroy Communism, which he hated. Hitler ordered Communist functionaries, which included Jews, to be executed.*
- c. *However, Germans soon expanded their campaign to include Jewish women and children.*

- d. *In less than half a year and by the end of 1941, about half a million Jews had been murdered in this new area that the Germans now occupied.*

d. DESCRIBE THE THREE MAJOR ACTIONS STALIN CARRIED OUT AGAINST POLES IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS.

i. DISPLAY SLIDE 6 (Stalin's 3 Destructive Actions against Poles).

1. **Read summary paragraph for Slide 6 below** on deportation of Poles, execution of up to 30,000 Poles in retreat, and execution of 22,000 Polish officers.
 - a. *To "ethnically cleanse" Poles from Soviet-occupied Poland, Stalin deported up to 1.5 million Poles to the gulags and slave labor camps, where up to one-half died because of the harsh conditions.*
 - b. *When Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa and attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Germans took over the Polish territory that the Soviets had occupied from 1939 to 1941.*
 - i. *Before retreating from the advancing Germans, the Soviets hastily executed up to 30,000 Poles whom they previously held in their prisons during the two years of Soviet occupation.*
 - c. *After Stalin invaded Poland in 1939, the Soviets took tens of thousands of Polish soldiers as prisoners. To prevent any future opposition by Polish military leaders, Stalin ordered the 22,000 Polish officers to be executed.*
 - d. *The mass execution the officers was carried out in April and May 1940. Although the killings also occurred in the Kalinin and Kharkiv prisons, the massacre is named after the Katyn Forest, where some of the mass graves were first discovered by German forces.*
 - e. *The killings were methodical. The condemned officer was handcuffed and led to a cell insulated with stacks of sandbags along the walls and a heavy, felt-lined door. The victim was told to kneel in the middle of the cell, and was then approached from behind by the executioner and immediately shot in the back of the head or neck. The body was carried out through an opposite door and laid in one of five or six waiting trucks, after which the next condemned was taken inside and subjected to the same fate.*

3. Guided Practice:

- a. Have students explain why Hitler targeted the Polish intelligentsia for extermination or why Stalin targeted the 22,000 Polish officers for extermination.
 - i. **Answer:** *In both cases, extermination of the leadership class would prevent an organized resistance against either occupying regime.*

4. Independent Practice:

- a. Have students describe their thoughts on how they might have survived the first deportation while in transit to the deep Soviet interior and from the harsh conditions of the labor camps and gulags. **(Alternatively, see Teacher Assessment below.)**
 - i. **Background.** *The first of four deportations occurred in February, 1940, during a typically harsh Polish winter and often in the dead of night. Taken from their homes with little notice, they were crammed onto cattle cars and, after a train journey of weeks during which many died, they were placed in slave labor camps. The conditions were appalling and many died. Just ten percent of those in the lead mines of Kolyma and gold mines of Yakutia survived. A second wave occurred in April 1940, most of whom were deported to Kazakhstan. A third wave in June–July 1940 totaled more than 240,000 and a fourth and final wave occurred in June 1941, deporting 300,000.*
5. **Teacher Assessment:** Time permitting and in lieu of Independent Practice, research testimonies of Polish deportees and present them to the class. After which, have students write an essay on one of the testimonies describing how they would have managed the conditions cited in the testimony.
6. **Teacher Reflection:** As applicable.

Reference information for Lesson 2 Slides

SLIDE 2: Hitler and Stalin Divide Poland Between Them

Source of graphic: U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. This map shows how Hitler and Stalin divided Poland between them. As shown in Slide 8 of Lesson 1, the secret protocol in the nonaggression pact divided Poland in half, with Hitler taking the western half and Stalin taking the eastern half. An important point is that Hitler annexed his half of Poland into Germany and Stalin annexed his half into the Soviet Union. As a result, Poland ceased to exist as a nation state.

SLIDE 3: Hitler’s Destructive Actions against Poles

Civilian deaths: Altogether, Hitler’s invasion caused the deaths of 150,000 to 200,000 Polish civilians. Source: Piotrowski, Tadeusz (1998). *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic, 1918–1947*. From Wikipedia; article titled “Invasion of Poland”; paragraph titled “Civilian deaths”.

Intelligenzaktion: Prior to Hitler's invasion, the German Abwehr (Intelligence Service) secretly collected the names of 61,000 Polish elite who were targeted for elimination. Ethnic Germans who were Polish citizens helped the German Abwehr develop the list of names, which was published as the "Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen" (Special Prosecution Book Poland). "The mass murder operations of the Intelligenzaktion resulted in the killing of 100,000 Polish people; by way of forced disappearance, the Germans imprisoned and killed select members of Polish society, identified as enemies of the Reich before the war; they were buried in mass graves which were dug in remote places." Source: Wardzyńska, Maria (2009). *Był rok 1939. Operacja niemieckiej policji bezpieczeństwa w Polsce. Intelligenzaktion* [English: The Year was 1939: Operation of German Security Police in Poland. Intelligenzaktion]. From Wikipedia; article titled "Intelligenzaktion".

Imprisonment in concentration camps: The camp system was one of the key instruments of terror, while at the same time it provided necessary labor for the German war economy. German-occupied Poland contained 457 camp complexes. Some of the major concentration and slave labor camps consisted of dozens of subsidiary camps scattered over a broad area. At the Gross-Rosen concentration camp, the number of subcamps was 97. The Auschwitz camp complex (Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, and Auschwitz III-Monowitz) had 48 satellite camps. The Stutthof concentration camp had 40 subcamps officially and as many as 105 subcamps in operation. From Wikipedia; article titled "German camps in occupied Poland during World War II". The Auschwitz I and Stutthof concentration camps were established specifically for Poles. Listed here are some of the larger camps in which there were substantial numbers of Poles.

Hitler's order to his senior generals before invading: This is an excerpt from the speech Hitler gave to his chief military commanders at his Obersalzberg home on 22 August 1939, a week before he invaded Poland. The speech details, in particular, Hitler's pending German invasion of Poland and his planned genocide of Poles. From Wikipedia; article titled "Hitler's Obersalzberg Speech".

Hitler's speech was as follows:

*Our strength consists in our speed and in our brutality. Genghis Khan led millions of women and children to slaughter – with premeditation and a happy heart. History sees in him solely the founder of a state. It's a matter of indifference to me what a weak western European civilization will say about me. I have issued the command – and I'll have anybody who utters but one word of criticism executed by a firing squad – that our war aim does not consist in reaching certain lines, but in the physical destruction of the enemy. Accordingly, I have placed my death-head formation in readiness – for the present only in the East – **with orders to them to send to death mercilessly and without compassion, men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language. Only thus shall we gain the living space (Lebensraum) which we need.** Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?*

SLIDE 4: Hitler's 1st Destructive Action against Polish Jews.

Poland's Jews were forced into German-run ghettos, most of which were established in 1940 and 1941. Many ghettos were sealed from the outside, walled off with brickwork, or enclosed with barbed wire. In the case of sealed ghettos, any Jew found leaving there could be shot. The Warsaw Ghetto, located in the heart of the city, was the largest ghetto in German occupied Europe, with over 400,000 Jews crammed into a very small area. The Łódź Ghetto was the second largest ghetto, holding about 160,000 people. With the crowded living conditions, starvation diets, insufficient sanitation, and lack of medical supplies, epidemics of infectious disease became a major feature of ghetto life. Because of these dire conditions, historian Timothy Snyder estimates that up to 800,000 Jews died in the ghettos. The information for this slide is derived from various sources, including the Wikipedia article titled "Nazi ghettos". It should also be noted that most Jews who died during the war were never prisoners in concentration camps. Source: Orth, Karin (2009). "The Genesis and Structure of the National Socialist Concentration Camps". *Early Camps, Youth Camps, and Concentration Camps and Subcamps under the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA)*. From Wikipedia; article titled "Nazi concentration camps", paragraph titled "World War II".

SLIDE 5: Hitler's 2nd Destructive Action against Jews - Operation Barbarossa.

With over 3.8 million German troops, Operation Barbarossa was the largest invasion force in the history of warfare. One of Hitler's directives, often referred to as the "Commissar Order", stated: "Bolshevism [Soviet Communism] is the deadly enemy of the National Socialist German people. This struggle demands a ruthless and strenuous crackdown on Bolshevik agitators, irregulars, saboteurs, and Jews, and the complete elimination of both active and passive resistance." Hitler ordered Bolshevik functionaries, which included Jews, to be executed; however, the Germans soon expanded their campaign to include Jewish women and children. Six months into the invasion of the Soviet Union, the four Einsatzgruppen units had already murdered more than 500,000 Soviet Jews, a figure greater than the number of Red Army soldiers killed in combat during that time. From Wikipedia; article titled "Operation Barbarossa"; paragraph titled "Racial policies of Nazi Germany".

SLIDE 6: Stalin's 3 Destructive Actions against Poles.

Deported up to 1.5 million Poles to Soviet slave labor camps. The first of four deportations occurred in February, 1940, during a typically harsh Polish winter and often in the dead of night. Taken from their homes with little notice, they were crammed onto cattle cars and, after a train journey of weeks during which many died, they were placed in slave labor camps. The conditions were appalling and many died. Just ten percent of those in the lead mines of Kolyma and gold mines of Yakutia survived. Source: *Poland Under the Communist Regime. A Report of The Situation in The Nation (1944-1949)* by Jolanta Mysiakowska-Muszynska and Wojciech J. Muszynski.

Executed up to 30,000 Poles while retreating from the Germans. Source: *Poland's Holocaust* by Tadeusz Piotrowski, (1998).

Executed 22,000 Polish officers at Katyn. "The Katyn massacre was a series of mass executions of nearly 22,000 Polish military officers and intelligentsia prisoners of war carried out by the Soviet Union, specifically the NKVD ("People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs", the Soviet secret police) in April and May 1940. Though the killings also occurred in the Kalinin and Kharkiv

prisons and elsewhere, the massacre is named after the Katyn Forest, where some of the mass graves were first discovered by German forces. The massacre was initiated after NKVD chief Lavrentiy Beria proposed to Joseph Stalin to execute all captive members of the Polish officer corps, which was secretly approved by the Soviet Politburo (the highest government authority) led by Stalin. Of the total killed, about 8,000 were officers imprisoned during the 1939 Soviet invasion of Poland, another 6,000 were police officers, and the remaining 8,000 were Polish intelligentsia the Soviets deemed to be "intelligence agents and gendarmes, spies and saboteurs, former landowners, factory owners and officials". The Polish Army officer class was representative of the multi-ethnic Polish state; the murdered included ethnic Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Polish Jews including Chief Rabbi of the Polish Army, Baruch Steinberg." From Wikipedia, article titled "Katyn massacre".