

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Poland's Important Role in World War II

LESSON PLAN 3

Title: *Atrocities and Genocide: Hitler's Mass Murders of Poles, Polish Jews, and Polish Roma; Stalin's Mass Murder of Poles.*

Learning Objectives: Students will be able to describe the human cost of the atrocities and genocidal actions carried out by Hitler and Stalin in the remaining years of the war, 1942-1945. Students will be able to describe the five actions that constitute genocide.

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 enormity of lives lost because of the atrocities and genocidal actions of the Germans and Soviets in the remaining years of the war, 1942-1945. In addition, inform students that this lesson identifies the five actions that constitute genocide.

2. Direct Instruction:

- a. **DESCRIBE HITLER'S AND STALIN'S BRUTALITIES AND GENOCIDAL ACTIONS CARRIED OUT AGAINST POLES.**

- i. **DISPLAY SLIDE 2 (Hitler's and Stalin's Genocide of Poles (1942-45)).**

1. **Read summary paragraph for Slide 3 below.**

- a. **Introduction.** *In the remaining three and-a-half years of the war, Hitler continued his acts of genocide against the Poles. At the same time, most Polish deaths caused by Stalin were the result of starvation, disease, and physical exhaustion in slave labor camps.*

- b. **Hitler's genocidal actions** included the following:

- i. **Over 800 villages destroyed** and up to 20,000 villagers murdered.
- ii. **Thousands of Poles died in concentration camps** designated specifically for Poles.
 1. *Auschwitz I – 75,000*
 2. *Gusen – 50,000*
 3. *Sachsenhausen – 20,000*
 4. *Gross-Rosen – 40,000*
 5. *Neuengamme – 17,000*
 6. *Dachau – 10,000*
 7. *Stutthof – 65,000*
 8. *Ravensbrück – 17,000 Polish women*

iii. **Warsaw Uprising – 185,000 civilians were killed as were 17,000 Home Army soldiers.**

1. *The Warsaw Uprising (1 August – 2 October 1944) was a major operation by the Polish underground resistance (Home Army) intended to liberate Warsaw from German occupation.*
2. *As the Soviet Red Army advanced toward Warsaw, the Germans began retreating from the city. However, Stalin halted the Red Army's advance at the outer edge of the city, which enabled the Germans to regroup their forces and defeat the Polish resistance.*
3. *Two particularly ruthless German units, **the Dirlewanger Brigade and the Kaminsky Brigade**, operated as execution squads and carried out brutal massacres of civilians, regardless of age or sex, which included thousands of children.*
4. *The Germans also strapped Polish women to the fronts of their tanks as they advanced toward resistance strongholds, forcing the Poles to hold fire.*
5. *Home Army hospitals were destroyed and patients, doctors, and nurses inside were immediately shot.*
6. *The Warsaw Uprising lasted for 63 days and nights, cost over 200,000 lives, **which was the equivalent of an American 9/11 every day.***

c. **Stalin's genocidal actions** included the following:

- i. *Deported 1.5 million Poles to slave labor camps in Russian where up to half died because of the harsh conditions.*
- ii. *Executed 22,00 Polish officers at Katyn.*

b. **DESCRIBE HITLER'S BRUTALITIES AND GENOCIDAL ACTIONS CARRIED OUT AGAINST POLISH JEWS.**

i. **DISPLAY SLIDE 3 (Hitler's Genocide of Polish and European Jews).**

1. **Read summary paragraph for Slide 3 below.**

- a. **Introduction.** *In the remaining three and-a-half years of the war, Hitler also continued his acts of genocide against Polish*

*Jews and Jews of other European countries. Most of these other countries formed collaborationist governments and operated under German control; some were allies of the Germans. These countries rounded up their Jews and deported them to Hitler's extermination camps in occupied Poland. Some of these countries formed militias and killed their Jews. **Poland was the only country that did not carry out these actions. Poles also died in the extermination camps and were never workers in them.** At the same time in the ghettos, many Polish Jews and Jews of other European countries died from starvation and disease. Historian Timothy Snyder estimates 800,000 Jews died in the ghettos.*

b. Hitler's genocidal actions included the following:

i. Many thousands of Jews died in the extermination camps.

1. Camps specifically for Polish Jews ("Operation Reinhard")

- a. Belzec – 434,500*
- b. Sobibor – 170,000*
- c. Treblinka – 870,000*

2. Camps for European Jews

- a. Auschwitz-Birkenau – 960,000*
- b. Majdanek – 72,000*
- c. Chelmno – 152,000*

ii. Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

- 1. Introduction.** *The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (19 April – 16 May 1943) was an act of armed resistance by Polish Jews aided in part by members of the Polish resistance (Home Army). The Germans had been deporting Warsaw Ghetto Jews to the Treblinka extermination camp and the German order was given to "liquidate" (destroy) the ghetto. As the Germans entered the ghetto to complete the deportations, they were ambushed by Jewish insurgents and were forced to retreat. The Germans later returned and crushed the resistance.*
- 2.** *Up to 7,000 Jews were killed during the uprising while another 7,000 were deported to Treblinka. The remaining 42,000 were deported to concentration and forced-labor camps, where most died. The Warsaw*

Ghetto Uprising was the largest Jewish revolt during World War II.

3. *Members of the Polish resistance (Home Army) fought and died helping the two Jewish ghetto groups fight the Germans. (See factual details in “Reference information for Lesson 3 Slides”, Slide 3.)*

c. DESCRIBE HITLER’S BRUTALITIES AND GENOCIDAL ACTIONS CARRIED OUT AGAINST POLISH ROMA.

i. DISPLAY SLIDE 4 (Hitler’s Genocide of Europe’s Roma).

1. Read summary paragraph for Slide 4 below.

- a. **Introduction.** *In addition to Slavs and Jews, Hitler classified the Roma as sub-humans (Untermenschen). The Roma, also called Romani, Sinti, and sometimes Gypsies (the latter is considered a pejorative term), originated in northern India. Many live in Europe, especially in the Slavic-speaking lands of central Europe and the Balkans.*
- b. **Of the 2 million Roma in Europe, the total number of victims who were killed by genocide is estimated at 1.5 million.** *The majority of Roma were murdered by the Germans but were also aided by Croatians, Serbians, Czechs, Slovakians, Finns, Italians, French, Hungarians, and Romanians.*
- c. **In Poland, August 2 is the day of commemoration of the Roma genocide.** *This date was chosen because on the night of 2 to 3 August 1944, almost 3,000 Roma were killed at the Auschwitz concentration camp.*

d. DESCRIBE THE FIVE ACTIONS THAT CONSTITUTE GENOCIDE. PROVIDE EXAMPLES COMMITTED AGAINST POLES, POLISH JEWS, AND POLISH ROMA BY HITLER AND STALIN.

i. DISPLAY SLIDE 5 (The Five Acts of Genocide).

1. Read summary paragraph for Slide 5 below.

- a. **Introduction.** *The term “genocide” was created during World War II in 1944 by Rafal Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer whose interest was spurred on after learning about the Armenian genocide and finding out that no international laws existed to prosecute the Ottoman leaders who had perpetrated these crimes.*
- b. *In 1948, the United Nations held a Genocide Convention and, based on Lemkin’s work, defined genocide as consisting*

of any of the following actions committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, as such:

- i. Genocide Action 1. Kill group members.**
 - ii. Genocide Action 2. Forcibly transfer a group's children to another group.**
 - iii. Genocide Action 3. Prevent births within a group.**
 - iv. Genocide Action 4. Cause serious bodily or mental harm to group members.**
 - v. Genocide Action 5. Impose living conditions that cause physical destruction of the group.**
- ii. DISPLAY SLIDE 6 (Genocide of Poles, Jews, and Roma - Examples).**
 - 1. Read summary paragraph for Slide 6 below.**
 - a. Introduction.** *The following are examples of genocide committed against Poles, Jews, and Roma.*
 - i. Genocide Action 1. Kill group members, in whole or in part.**
 - 1. Hitler's mass shootings of Poles and Polish Jews.*
 - 2. Hitler's Gassing of Polish Jews and Polish Roma.*
 - 3. Stalin's mass shootings of Poles.*
 - ii. Genocide Action 2. Forcibly transfer a group's children to another group.**
 - 1. Up to 200,000 Polish children were kidnapped for Germanization under the Lebensborn program. Only 25,000 were returned after the war.*
 - iii. Genocide Action 3. Prevent births within a group.**
 - 1. Polish women who were slave laborers in Germany were forced to have abortions.*
 - 2. Newborns in Auschwitz were drowned or starved.*
 - iv. Genocide Action 4. Cause serious bodily or mental harm to group members.**
 - 1. Medical experiments on Polish Jews and Polish Roma at Auschwitz.*
 - 2. Medical experiments on Polish women prisoners at Ravensbrück and Polish priests at Dachau.*
 - v. Genocide Action 5. Impose living conditions that cause physical destruction of the group.**

1. *Deaths of Poles, Polish Jews, and Polish Roma in concentration and extermination camps.*
2. *Deaths of Polish Jews and other Jews in German-established ghettos.*

e. SUMMARIZE HITLER’S GENOCIDE POLICY FOR EUROPEAN JEWS, POLES, AND ROMA. PROVIDE THE RESULTING DEATH TOLL FOR EACH GROUP. FOR POLES, INCLUDE THE DEATH TOLL CAUSED BY STALIN.

i. DISPLAY SLIDE 7 (Genocide of Poles, Jews, and Roma - Examples).

1. Read summary paragraph for Slide 7 below.

a. Hitler’s policy for European Jews and Roma:

Comprehensive genocide.

b. Hitler’s policy for Poles. *Comprehensive genocide over a*

***longer period of time.* This is because Hitler needed Polish slave laborers to support Germany’s wartime industry. Also, a small number of Poles would be needed to serve as slave laborers in the new German empire established by Hitler’s Lebensraum ideology.**

c. Death Tolls of Hitler’s (and Stalin’s) genocidal actions:

i. Polish Jews – 2.9 million

ii. Poles – 2.8 million (by Hitler and Stalin)

iii. Poland’s total deaths – 5.7 million (by Hitler and Stalin)

iv. Other European Jews – about 3 million (by Hitler and allied/collaborating countries)

v. European Roma – 1.5 million (by Hitler and allied/collaborating countries)

3. Guided Practice:

- a. Of the three subhuman racial groups against whom Hitler committed genocide (Poles, Roma, and Jews), have students present their thoughts on whether or not Hitler’s genocidal actions against one group should be considered more important or significant than the others. If some students think so, ask them to identify the group and explain why.

4. Independent Practice:

- a. Have students name three genocide actions carried out against Poles, Polish Jews, and Polish Roma.
- b. Have students name the one genocide action that Hitler only carried out against Poles.

5. Teacher Assessment: As applicable.

6. Teacher Reflection: As applicable.

Reference information for Lesson 3 Slides

SLIDE 2: Hitler's and Stalin's Genocide of Poles (1942-45)

Hitler's Genocidal Actions against Poles.

Over 800 villages destroyed; up to 20,000 Polish villagers murdered: In what the Germans called "pacification operations", more than 800 Polish villages were destroyed and up to 20,000 villagers were killed in an effort to inflict terror on the civilian population. The goal of the German pacification operations was to prevent and suppress the Polish resistance. Among the victims were infant children, women, fathers attempting to save their families, farmers rushing to rescue livestock from burning buildings, hospital patients, and victims already wounded. Completely destroyed were 554,000 farms and 8 million dead cattle and horses. From Wikipedia; article titled "Pacification actions in German-occupied Poland". Some of the "pacified" villages became extinct.

Thousands of Poles died in these concentration camps: Auschwitz – 75,000; Gusen – 50,000; Sachsenhausen – 20,000; Gross-Rosen – 40,000; Neuengamme – 17,000; Dachau – 10,000; Stutthof – 65,000; Ravensbrück – 17,000 Polish women. From Wikipedia; article titled "Nazi crimes against the Polish nation"; paragraph titled "Camps and ghettos". It should 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".

1944 Warsaw Uprising – 185,000 civilians killed; 17,000 Home Army soldiers killed: The Warsaw Uprising (1 August – 2 October 1944) was a major operation by the Polish underground resistance (Home Army) intended to liberate Warsaw from German occupation. As the Soviet Red Army advanced toward Warsaw, the Germans began retreating from the city. However, Stalin halted the Red Army's advance at the outer edge of the city, which enabled the Germans to regroup their forces and defeat the Polish resistance. Two particularly ruthless German units, the Dirlewanger Brigade and the Kaminsky Brigade, operated as execution squads and carried out brutal massacres of civilians, regardless of age or sex, which included thousands of children. The Germans also strapped Polish women to the fronts of their tanks as they advanced toward resistance strongholds, forcing the Poles to hold fire. Home Army hospitals were destroyed and patients, doctors, and nurses inside were immediately shot. The Warsaw Uprising lasted for 63 days and nights, and cost over 200,000 lives, which was the equivalent of an American 9/11 every day for over two months. Various sources were used to compile this summary. Recommended reading: *Warsaw, 1944; Hitler, Himmler, and the Warsaw Uprising*, Alexandria Ritchie. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

Stalin's Genocidal Actions against Poles.

1.5 million Poles were deported to Soviet slave labor camps; up to half died from starvation, disease, and physical exhaustion: Source: *The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollections of*

Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersed Throughout the World, Tadeusz Piotrowski (ed.), McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004.

Mass shootings of 22,000 Polish officers at Katyn Forest in the Soviet Union: Source: *The Katyń Massacre: Current Research*. Editors: Damian Bębnowski and Filip Musiał of the Janusz Kurtyka Foundation, Poland. Description: Current as of 2018, it consists of an introduction by Bębnowski and Musiał followed by eight papers presented at the 2017 international conference on Katyń in Warsaw hosted by the Kurtyka Foundation.

SLIDE 3: Hitler's Genocidal Actions Against Polish and European Jews.

Hundreds of thousands died in the extermination camps: Sources for camp deaths: US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and Yad Vashem. Source for Warsaw Ghetto Uprising deaths: USHMM. Recommended reading for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: *The Polish Underground State, 1939-1945*, Stefan Korbonski, *Eastern European Quarterly*, Boulder, Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1978. Chapter XVIII is titled "Jews Under Occupation" and describes how the Polish Home Army equipped and trained the ZZW and ŻOB, the two groups of ghetto fighters. Excerpts follow:

"Beginning in January 1943, officers of the Home Army and representatives of the Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB), held meetings to plan for joint action on both sides of the ghetto walls at the outbreak of the uprising. Three Polish units led by Captain Jozef Pszenny (pseudonym Chwacki), were to break through the ghetto walls, attacking the Germans on the Aryan side and blowing up the walls with explosives. Since it was assumed from the start that the Ghetto Uprising must inevitably end in disaster, this action was planned to open the way for retreat of the Jewish fighters. At this time, the Home Army delivered to the ŻOB 1 light machine gun, 2 submachine guns, 50 handguns (all with magazines and ammunition), 600 hand grenades with detonators, 30 kilograms of explosives (plastic, received from airdrops), 120 kilograms of explosives of own production, 400 detonators for bombs and grenades, 30 kilograms of potassium to make Molotov cocktails, and great quantities of saltpeter to make gunpowder. The ŻOB also received instructions on how to manufacture bombs, hand grenades, and incendiary bottles, how to build strongholds, and where to get rails and cement for construction."

"On April 19, the first day of the uprising, three Home Army units commanded by Captain Pszenny took up their posts near the ghetto walls on Bonifraterska Street and attempted to blow up the walls with mines. Detected prematurely, they attacked the Germans, while four sappers tried to get to the wall with mines. Unfortunately, two of them were killed on the spot – Eugeniusz Morawski and Jozef Wilk – while a third sustained wounds in both legs. Captain Pszenny ordered his men to retreat and withdrew, taking along four wounded men and detonating the mines on the street; the explosion tore to shreds the bodies of Morawski and Wilk. Several Germans were killed during the engagement but the attempt to blow up the wall ended in failure. The next day, a unit of the People's Guard of the Polish Workers Party led by Franciszek Bartoszek attacked the German machinegun post near the ghetto wall on Nowiniarski Street. Two SS-men were killed. On April 22, a detachment of the Home Army, commanded by Wieckowski, routed a unit of the Lithuanian auxiliary police near the ghetto walls. On Good Friday, April 23, a Home Army unit led by Lt. Jerzy Skupiński, attacked the gate in the ghetto wall at Pawia Street. They had orders to blow up the gate. Two German sentries were killed at the gate but, under heavy barrage of fire from the Germans converging from all sides, the Home Army soldiers had to withdraw, killing on their way four SS and police officers whose car happened to cross their path."

"A particularly daring action was undertaken by a unit of the Corps for Security, commanded by Captain Henryk Iwanski. From the very first days of the Warsaw ghetto's existence, Captain Iwanski's brother, Waclaw, and his two sons, Zbigniew and Roman, maintained contact with the Jewish Military Union (ŻZW), providing them with arms, ammunition, and instructional materials, smuggled through the sewers or in carts that brought lime and cement into the ghetto. When the uprising began, a ŻZW unit occupied positions on Muranowski Square, which was to become the scene of the bloodiest fighting. On the first day of the uprising, a Polish and Jewish flag were raised over this sector. They were clearly visible from the Aryan side and created a deep impression on the Polish population of Warsaw. The

commander of the Jewish unit on Muranowski Square, Dawid Moryc Apfelbaum, sent a message to Captain Iwanski informing him that he had been wounded and asking for arms and ammunition. The next day, Iwanski and 18 of his men (including his brother Waclaw and his two sons Roman and Zbigniew) made their way into the ghetto by way of a tunnel dug from a cellar of a house on 6 Muranowski Street. They brought arms, ammunition, and food for Apfelbaum's men and, seeing the utter exhaustion of the Jewish fighters, relieved them at their posts and repelling repeated German attacks. The same tunnel was immediately used to evacuate the Jewish wounded to the Aryan side. Later on, Iwanski's brother and both his sons were killed during the fighting and Iwanski himself was seriously wounded. After the collapse of the uprising, Iwanski's men carried him back through the tunnel, taking along 34 Jewish fighters fully armed."

SLIDE 4: Hitler's Genocide of Europe's Roma

An estimated 1.5 million of Europe's 2 million Roma were killed. From Wikipedia; article titled "Porajmos".

These countries aided Hitler in eradicating European Roma. From Wikipedia; article titled "Porajmos"; paragraph titled "Persecution in other Axis countries and occupied countries".

Of Poland's estimated 50,000 Roma, 8,000 were killed. From Wikipedia; article titled "Porajmos"; paragraph titled "Estimated number of victims".

SLIDE 5: The Five Acts of Genocide. From Wikipedia; article titled "Genocide Convention"; paragraph titled "Definition of genocide".

SLIDE 6: Genocide of Poles, Jews, and Roma – Examples. Each of the five acts of genocide are provided with factual examples. It should be noted that four of the acts of genocide were committed by Hitler against Jews and Romani; however, Hitler committed all five acts against Poles.

SLIDE 7: Genocide and its Toll in Human Lives

Hitler's Policy for Jews and Roma. As is evident by the four genocidal acts defined by the 1948 United Nations Convention on Genocide and perpetrated by Hitler, his policy for Jews and Romani was comprehensive genocide.

Hitler's Policy for Poles. As is evident by the five genocidal acts formally defined by the 1948 United Nations Convention on Genocide, and perpetrated by Hitler, his policy for Poles was comprehensive genocide that would be implemented over a longer period of time. This is evidenced by the approximately 2.5 million Poles who were deported to Germany to work as slave laborers in support of Hitler's war effort. A handful of Poles was also needed to serve as slave laborers in the new German empire that would be established by implementing Hitler's Lebensraum ideology.

Genocidal Toll of Lives. Various sources cited in Wikipedia were used for the numbers of deaths of each group. Poland's death toll in World War II was proportionately the highest of any country. The following is an excerpt from Wikipedia, article titled "World War II casualties of Poland":

"Around 6 million Polish citizens perished during World War II: about one fifth of the pre-war population. Most were civilian victims of the war crimes and crimes against humanity during the occupation by Germany and the Soviet Union."