

# HOLOCAUST:

## RESISTANCE, RESCUE AND SURVIVAL

Overview and Intro to the Holocaust  
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We lived in a four-story walk-up in Amsterdam. The first thing I remember is waking up after midnight, hearing metal doors of the trucks slam and hearing the voices of German soldiers. “All Jews get out!” Kids screaming, mothers crying. My friends were missing from school the next day. The guys in the gray uniforms were bad ... but I didn't know the extent.

Mom told me later my Aunt Katy and Uncle Leo were gone. What does that mean? Then a few weeks later Grandma and Grandpa, gone. Then one day my father went fishing and my mother told me he was then gone.

Peter, a Holocaust survivor born in Holland and now living in the Seattle area, was seven years old in 1942 when he and his mother went into hiding.

Peter, a Jewish boy living in Holland during World War II, defied the odds — he survived while six million other European Jews were murdered by the Nazis. The Nazi party (National Socialist German Workers Party) was a fascist, nationalistic and anti-Semitic political party. The Nazi party was formed in 1919 and was led from 1921 to 1945 by Adolf Hitler.

### What was the Holocaust?

The Holocaust refers to a specific event during the 20th century. It was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and destruction of European Jewish people by the Nazis and their collaborators (helpers) between 1933 and 1945. While Jews were the primary target of Nazi hatred, the Nazis also persecuted and murdered Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Poles and

people with disabilities. Six-million Jews (two-thirds of the European Jewish population) and five million others were murdered in the Holocaust.

The term “Holocaust” originally meant a sacrifice that was totally burned by fire. The Hebrew word Shoah, which means “catastrophe” or “destruction,” is also commonly used to refer to the Holocaust.



The Holocaust led to the creation and definition of the word “genocide.” Genocide refers to the intention to murder or destroy an entire group of people because of their race, ethnicity, religion or political views. In 1948, the United Nations declared genocide a crime. Therefore, those people who actively participated in genocide were war criminals.

Many of us know a little bit about the Holocaust already. You may have read “The Diary of Anne Frank,” or seen the movies “Schindler’s List” or “The Pianist.” But do you know:

- What are the Nuremberg Laws? How can laws isolate and separate certain groups of people?
- Who were the victims of the Holocaust and what were their experiences?
- Did anyone resist?

- A few people helped to rescue the victims despite the serious risks involved. How did they do this and why did some people help while so many others did not?
- What happened at liberation in 1945? What were the different experiences at liberation?
- As a new generation, what is our responsibility?

As we follow this series of articles on the Holocaust and think about the above questions, we will learn that the Holocaust was not an accident in history — it happened because individuals, governments and organizations made choices that legalized discrimination and allowed prejudice and hatred. In the weeks to come, we will learn about social responsibility, moral courage and the importance of standing up to intolerance.

There are Holocaust survivors, liberators and witnesses living in Washington state. Some have agreed to share their stories and experiences with us. Their first-hand accounts personalize this history and give us unique insight into the events that occurred. The stories of survivors and witnesses to the Holocaust force us to ask, "What is my responsibility?"

## activities

1. Using the questions provided in today's article, discuss what you think the answers might be. Then, as a class, brainstorm your own set of questions that you would like answered during this unit. As a class, keep track of the answers to these questions and those you brainstorm over the next few weeks.
2. In this article, the author states that the Holocaust was not an accident in history but rather was the result of choices people made. Think about this statement and write a paragraph explaining what you think she meant by it. Then, look in today's Seattle Times for an article that describes an event that didn't just happen but was the result of choices people made. In your own words, summarize the article and identify at least two choices that could have made that would have resulted in a different outcome. What might the outcome have been if the choices were different?

Published APRIL 19, 2005



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