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## THE HELP STORY – STUDY GUIDE

**The Holocaust** - The term refers to the systematic anti-Semitic persecution and murder of six million Jewish people in Europe by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933, when the Nazis came into power in Germany, and 1945, when they were defeated by the Allied powers.

**Anti-Semitism**— or hostility toward, and discrimination against Jews—existed long before the Holocaust. For hundreds of years in many different countries Jews faced suspicion, envy, and hatred for various reasons, including rejection of their religion and envy of their economic and educational successes.

In 1933 anti-Jewish feelings were intensified by the Nazi Party leader, Adolf Hitler. He believed Germans were superior to everyone in general, and Jews in particular. To keep the German people pure, and get them space for expansion, the Nazis set out to rid Germany—and later every territory the Nazis came to occupy —of its Jewish population.

Anti-Jewish propaganda encouraged Germans to exclude and persecute Jews. The government took away their rights and property. Under the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, they were stripped of citizenship, and marriage between Jews and non-Jews was prohibited. In 1938 stigmatization and persecution culminated in an event called Kristallnacht—which means “Night of the Broken Glass.” Jews throughout Austria and Germany were viciously attacked, and their home were invaded, small businesses vandalized, and hundreds of synagogues burned. Close to a hundred Jewish people were killed, and 30,000 Jewish men were briefly imprisoned and “urged” to emigrate. (No Depression-wracked countries, however, would receive them).

After occupying western Poland in 1938, and starting WW11, the Nazis forced hundreds of thousands of Jewish people out of their homes and into over-crowded ghettos. As they were surrounded by barbed wire and high walls to prevent escape, ghetto dwellers soon struggled with disease, poverty, and starvation. When in 1941 the Nazi empire expanded throughout Europe, Jews in all other countries were brought into ghettos. Conditions became so bad many ghetto dwellers died there.

Late in 1942 ghetto dwellers were sent by train to forced labor camps and concentration camps. They were tightly packed inside sealed freight cars, with no room to even move around. Temperatures were freezing during the winter, and extremely hot during the summer. Often trapped for days with no food, water, or access to a bathroom, many died in transport as a result of illness, starvation, or suffocation.

Upon arrival at the camps, the prisoners were typically forced to stand in front of Nazi Doctors who swiftly selected about 90 percent to soon be killed and about 10 percent to live a little longer as slave laborers. As such they worked in factories, mines, offices, and workshop. Grievous mistreatment had many die from beatings, disease, exhaustion, and/or starvation.

**Killing Centers** - Beginning in 1942 the Nazis adopted a plan called the “Final Solution,” whereby they would systematically murder Jews in large numbers. The first attempts to gas Jews took place inside vans. These mobile

killing units were used to kill hundreds of thousands of prisoners. However, the vans did not kill as many people as the Nazis wanted, so permanent gas chambers were built at the death camps.

Until 1945 Jews (the 90 percent) were transported to six Death Camps (Belzec, Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek, and Auschwitz-Birkenau) specifically designed to quickly gas prisoners whose bodies were then incinerated in camp crematoriums. Auschwitz-Birkenau, in Poland, the largest Death Camp, may have been the site of more than a million murders (including that of one and half million children).

**Fighting Back** - Many Jewish victims actively fought back against their mistreatment. For instance, there were a number of uprisings in the ghettos and death camps. In 1943, Jews at the Treblinka camp staged an uprising where they set fire to the camp, killed about 40 guards, and allowed some of the prisoners to escape. Another uprising happened in 1944 at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where a group of men and women used explosives to blow up one of the crematoria.

Jews also engaged in armed resistance against German forces. In the camps a Jewish Underground secretly punished collaborators and hid stolen arms for use in a possible uprising. Outside the camps armed groups hiding in forests rescued hundreds of camp escapees who would have otherwise died. These forest guerillas also killed Nazi soldiers and sabotaged trains and bridges.

Non-militant resistance buffered against dehumanization, raised hope, and saved lives. In the ghettos, despite fierce Nazi bans, Jewish teachers at risk of life secretly taught classes in their living rooms, doctors made house calls after curfew, and teenagers smuggled in desperately needed food and medicine. In the camps, despite fierce Nazi bans, Jewish prisoners secretly aided one another complete work assignments, plotted escape efforts, punished informers, and smuggled clothing, food, and medicine from camp warehouses into the barracks. Much of this was altruistic in nature, and kept faith with ancient Judaic Ideals.

**The End of the War**. In 1945, as Allied forces got close to the camps, the commanders forced prisoners to walk miles to other locations. On these Death Marches, thousands died from exhaustion, exposure, and starvation, or were shot by guards when they could not keep up.

On May 9, 1945, Germany surrendered. Most Jewish prisoners, however, died before they could be liberated. Survivors lost homes and families, and were left with physical and mental scars.

Many temporarily lived in displaced persons camps set up by the Allied powers and the United Nations. Later, a large number immigrated to Israel. Others dispersed around the world, and in 1957, the last Displaced Persons Camp closed.

**Remembering the Holocaust**. Around the world Holocaust Museums help Jews and non-Jews remember the Holocaust and try to prevent anything like it from occurring again. In 1959 Israel set aside a special day, *Yom HaShoah*, to memorialize the event. It includes listening to stories of survivors, lighting candles to remember victims, and the sounding nationwide of a two-minute siren, during which everyone stands at silent attention to remember the victims.

**Altruism**. The act of doing something to deliberately help another person, for that person's sake alone, and not in the expectation of getting any type of reward.

There are many different theories about what makes us altruistic. Some researchers insist genetics play a role. We are hardwired to help out help others in order to ensure the survival of the human species. We are more likely to act altruistically towards close relatives since their survival increases the chances of shared genes being transmitted to future generations.

Another genetic theory is that humans are biologically predisposed to have empathy for others, and that this makes them identify with other people and want to help those people when they are in need.

Other researchers argue that deep down, altruism is actually motivated by the desire to help oneself, even if one doesn't realize it. People are motivated to act altruistically because it makes them feel good. Some research studies support this theory as they show that altruistic behavior activates the pleasure centers of the brain.

Still another theory about altruism is that both the way people are socialized, and the type of society they live in, have a significant impact. For example, in a society where altruism is encouraged, people might feel social pressure or a moral obligation to help less fortunate others.

Attention also goes to how society can get people to act more altruistically, as by encouraging empathy and understanding.

## **GLOSSARY**

**Allied Powers/Axis Powers:** During World War II the Allied Powers (China, France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States, along with Canada, Netherlands, Mexico, Poland, and Yugoslavia) defeated the Axis Powers (Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Totalitarian Japan, along with Bulgaria, Hungary, Iraq, Finland, and Thailand).

**Anti-Semitism:** An ancient and contemporary prejudice against Jewish people, it takes the form of bullying, condemnation, discrimination, physical harm or verbal attacks. It is now prohibited by law in almost all advanced nations, and opposed by all major religious faiths.

**Aryan:** Hitler believed a person's abilities and behavior were determined by ancestry. He thought 100% German ancestry ("Aryans") was superior to all others, and that Germans were therefore destined to rule first Europe, and later the world.

**Concentration Camps:** There were more than 90 large concentration camps spread across Europe. Conditions were deliberately inhumane, and disease, torture, over-work, and starvation took the lives of most prisoners. Almost all the camps, however, had a secret Jewish underground that tried to alleviate suffering, blunt dehumanization, and aid the Help Story.

**Death Camps:** Six camps located in Poland were developed to murder, on arrival, Jewish victims who had been transported there from Nazi-operated ghettos. Unsuccessful uprisings occurred in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Sobibor, and Treblinka, but over 3,100,000 Jews were killed in the six camps before the war's end.

**Death Marches:** Forced to retreat from advancing Allied troops, the Nazis compelled their Jewish prisoners to walk great distances to other Nazi camps under horrific conditions (no food or water, no protective clothing,

etc.). Stragglers were shot on the spot. Hitler may have hoped to trade these close-to-death, severely weakened prisoners, his "property," for captured Nazi officers and/or to use them as slave laborers back in Germany.

**Deportation:** Millions of Jews were forcibly removed from their homes and sent first into ghettos, and later transported in sealed cattle car trains, over many days without food or water, to concentration camps, labor camps, and death camps.

**Displaced Person Camps:** From the war's end in 1945 through the late 1950s about 250,000 Jewish camp survivors lived in several hundred camps operated by the Allied Powers. They organized a Central Committee to promote their well-being. Severe anti-Semitism discouraged their returning to such homelands as Croatia, Poland, and Hungary. Many survivors relocated instead, most to Israel, and others to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States.

**Einsatzgruppen:** Often called "Death Squads," these special units of German auxiliary police followed closely behind invading German Army units to murder by rifle over a million Jews in the Ukraine, infants through oldsters.

**Final Solution:** This term was used from 1941 on by the Nazis for the intended annihilation of about nine million European and North African Jews, and of all Jews world-wide thereafter. By the end of the war in 1945, about 65 percent of the Jews in Europe - 6 million people - had been murdered.

**Gas Chambers:** In the Death Camps were very large sealed rooms in which prisoners were exposed to a poisonous gas that suffocated them within 15 minutes. Their bodies were then burned in camp crematoriums.

**Ghettos:** In cities all over Europe, more than 1,000 walled-off neighborhoods were used between 1941 and 1943 to imprison Jewish victims. Over-crowding, starvation, and epidemics of contagious fatal diseases took a high toll. Revolts occurred in about 100 ghettos, led by militant Jews seeking to join nearby forest partisan units. As in the camps, most ghettos had Jewish undergrounds that planned escapes and secured help.

**Holocaust:** This term refers to the systematic persecution and mass murder of approximately 6 million Jews by Hitler's Nazi Germany. It is also known as "The Shoah." Five million other victims, such as homosexuals, the mentally and physically disabled, and certain Slavic people (Poles, etc.) were also murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators.

**Holocaust Museums:** Hundreds of educational institutions around the world tell the Holocaust story from the perspective of Jewish victims. All promote cultural awareness, education and research, and solemnly honor both the deceased and the survivors alike. Attention goes to both the Horror and also the Help Story. Prime among these museums are the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in DC, and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel. Several million people annually visit them, school youngsters are largest bloc.

**Labor Camps:** Over 40,000 slave labor camps were created across Europe to provide prisoners to work in mines, factories, and workshops throughout Europe, including Germany. Extreme work under starvation conditions took many lives, especially in the mines.

**Nazis:** They were members of an authoritarian political party led by Adolf Hitler that in 1933 gained control of Germany. In 1939 they started the Second World War, and by 1945 they had overrun 24 European nations. They promised Germany their Third Reich government would last 1,000 years. Instead, it surrendered in 1945 to the Allied Powers, and it has been disavowed now by almost all of the German people. Over 50,000,000 lives were lost in the European war (and about 36,000,000 lives in the Pacific war).

**Nuremberg Trials:** A series of 13 trials to bring Nazi war criminals to justice were held between 1945 and 1949 by the Allied Powers in Nuremberg, Germany. More than a hundred defendants were judged guilty of "crimes against humanity." In the aftermath a Code of Ethics was formulated to protect future war victims, and, much later, an International Criminal Court was developed.

**Partisan Militant Resistance:** As many as 20,000 to 30,000 Jewish escapees from ghettos or concentration camps succeeded in joining as fighters in irregular resistance groups hidden deep in forests across Nazi-occupied Europe. There they successfully engaged in guerilla warfare and sabotage. Members provided Help Story care for less fortunate others, especially the youngest and oldest among them. Nazi opposition was fierce. (See the movie "Defiance").

**Righteous Gentiles:** "Righteous Among the Nations" is an honorary title used since 1963 by Israel to salute over 26,000 non-Jews who for altruistic reason risked their lives and that of their families to save European Jews during the Holocaust. Israel adds about 100 new names to the list annually. These men and women showed extraordinary courage and compassion. Their example demonstrates anyone can make a desirable Help Story difference.

## **Timeline**

- 1933: Hitler is appointed as German chancellor.
- 1934: After German president Paul von Hindenburg dies, Hitler assumes complete control of Germany.
- 1935: The Nazi Party introduces the Nuremberg Laws which prohibit Jews from marrying Germans, and takes away their German citizenship.
- 1936: Jewish doctors are banned from practicing in German institutions.
- 1938: During an attack known as the Night of Broken Glass (Kristallnacht), Nazis destroy Jewish houses and businesses, and beats and kills Jewish men, women, and children; Jewish students are expelled from German schools.
- 1939: Nazi Germany invades Poland and World War II begins; The first Polish ghetto is established.
- 1940: The Auschwitz concentration camp is established.
- 1941: Germany declares war against Russia and the United States. Much of Europe and North American is occupied by Germany; The "Final Solution" is developed; The Chelmno camp opens. It is the first camp to use gassing to kill Jews on a large scale.
- 1942: The mass extermination of Jews in gas chambers takes place in camps throughout Germany.
- 1944: Allied forces launch a huge invasion of Europe, landing on the coast of France, and going on to advance across Europe. The invasion helps turn the tide of the war against Germany. Soviet troops advance into Europe from the east.
- 1945: As Soviet forces approach his bunker in Berlin, and Hitler realizes that Germany is defeated, he and his wife Eva Braun commit suicide. Germany surrenders to Soviet forces. Allied forces enter the camps and

free those prisoners left alive. They see evidence of the mass killings that have taken place. Overall, more than 6 million Jews have been killed.

- 1945-1949: A series of 13 trials in Nuremberg, Germany, are carried out in order to bring Nazi war criminals to justice. More than a hundred defendants are tried, with some sentenced to death, and others to imprisonment.

## Online Resources

- Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. <http://en.auschwitz.org>
- History: The Holocaust. <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/the-holocaust>
- Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team. <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/toc.html>
- The Holocaust Explained. <http://www.theholocaustexplained.org>
- Jewish Virtual Library. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>
- STEALTH ALTRUISM. <http://www.stealthaltruism.com>
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://www.ushmm.org>
- Facing History and Ourselves. <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-holocaust-and-human-behavior/holocaust-range-responses>

## Books

- Paul R. Bartrop (2020). *The Holocaust: The Basics*. New York: Routledge.
- Daniel C. Batson (2019). *A Scientific Search for Altruism: Do We Only Care About Ourselves?* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Waitman Wade Beorn (2018). *The Holocaust in Eastern Europe: At the Epicenter of the Final Solution*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Saul S. Friedman (2004). *A History of the Holocaust*. Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell.
- Jeff Hill (2006). *The Holocaust*. Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics
- ARTHUR B. SHOSTAK (2017). *STEALTH ALTRUISM: FORBIDDEN CARE as JEWISH RESISTANCE in the HOLOCAUST*. London, UK: ROUTLEDGE.

## Holocaust Memoirs

Well over 10,000 are available in English. Especially recommended are those written by Livia Bitton-Jackson, Eva Brown, Thomas Buergenthal, Charlotte Delbo, Alexander Donat, Helen Farkas, Anne Frank, Viktor E. Frankl, Moshe and Elie Garbarz, Rena K. Gelissen, Kitty Hart, Magda Herzberger, Lillian and Denis Judd, Ann Kirschner, Gerda W. Klein, Ruth Kluger, Janusz Korczak, Primo Levi, Helen Lewis, Joy E. Miller, Manya F. Perel, Gisella Perl, Hadassah Rosensaft, Henrik Skorr, Dora A. Sorell, Lawrence Sutin, and Elie Wiesel. Each brings out a special aspect of the Help Story.

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