

Section 7: Escalating Violence

Essential Questions

- *How do perpetrators of injustice and violence gain power? How do the actions or inactions of others increase the power of a perpetrator? What actions can people take to decrease a perpetrator's power?*
- *How do you know when is the right time to stand up against injustice? How might an individual's answer to this question be different from a nation's answer?*
- *What does it mean to be included in a nation's universe of obligation? What happens to those who are outside of any nation's universe of obligation?*

Lessons

Section 7 includes the following lesson:

- Lesson 18: Kristallnacht - The Night of the Pogrom

Overview

Thus far this case study has led students to examine how the Nazis used laws, propaganda, the education system, and other means to systematically discriminate against and dehumanize Jews and other targeted groups. As a result, these groups were effectively isolated from membership in German society. In this section, we explore how this discrimination and isolation laid the groundwork for government-organized violence against Jews in the pogrom of November 1938 — an event that became known as Kristallnacht.

The materials and questions we explore in this section encourage students to consider what it means to be outside a nation's universe of obligation. What responsibility, if any, does a state have to the people living within its borders? What can happen when a nation does not live up to this responsibility? Do other nations, then, have any responsibility to intervene? Holocaust scholar Richard Rubenstein summarizes the vulnerability of excluded groups when he writes, "no person has any rights unless they are guaranteed by an organized community with the power to defend such rights."¹ Indeed, by studying Kristallnacht, we learn that when a state not only fails to protect a group of people but also actively enforces policies that discriminate against that group, violence against innocents can become accepted behavior no matter if it originates from the citizenry or the government itself.

The resources included in this section bring into sharper focus the role of individual choices against the backdrop of powerful social forces such as propaganda, fear, prejudice and opportunism. The materials and activities in this section have been designed to help students build more complex answers to questions such as: Why did neighbor turn against neighbor? To whom did individuals, groups, and nations feel responsible? What dilemmas did people confront when making their decisions? What factors influenced their choices?

All of the concepts we have studied in this course thus far – identity, bureaucracy, conformity, prejudice, nationalism – are tools that help us address these questions. When thinking about the factors that give rise to an environment that tolerates, and even encourages, violence requires us to consider a variety of causal factors: political, economic, psychological (human behavior), and ideological (antisemitism). Similar issues are with us today as governments and legal systems still struggle with how to respond when other governments turn against their own people. When is the right time, if ever, to intervene? As individuals, we are faced with dilemmas about our responsibilities to those outside of our immediate family or community. Whose job is it to protect that student who is ostracized from his peers? How can we tell when labeling people and categorizing them into distinct groups is helpful or harmful? Reflecting upon the factors in Nazi Germany that laid the foundation for state-sanctioned violence and nurtured a context where neighbor turned against neighbor gives us tools we can use to recognize conditions in our communities that might lead to intolerance and injustice and extends the focus of our study from understanding to prevention.

Background Information

To support the teaching of this section, we strongly recommend reading or viewing the following resources:

- Chapter 6 in the resource book, *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*.

Lesson 18: Kristallnacht - The Night of the Pogrom

Essential Questions:

- *What is a turning point? How do you know when an event is a turning point? How do you recognize when something has gone too far?*
- *What does it mean to be included in a nation's universe of obligation? What happens to those who are outside of any nation's universe of obligation?*
- *To what extent do people of one nation have a moral obligation to help people facing persecution in another country?*

Included Resources:

- 18.1 – Timeline: Escalating Violence (1933-1938)
 - 18.2 – Reading: Stateless People
 - * 18.3 – Reading: The Night of the Pogrom
 - * 18.4 – Readings: The Impact of Kristallnacht
 - * 18.5 – Poem: “The Hangman”
- * = core resource

Introduction:

In the late 1930s, many Jews who lived in Germany, and German-occupied territories, spoke of their situation as a “narrowing circle”. In previous lessons, students have learned about the systematic exclusion of Jews in Nazi Germany through government policies, laws, and other social changes. By 1938, the number of options available to Jews in Nazi Germany grew even smaller, eventually leading to the government-organized violence of Kristallnacht.

This lesson follows the path towards this state-sanctioned violence. The lesson begins with a timeline designed to provide an overview both of the Nazi’s escalating violence towards Jews and their increasing hostility towards the other countries of Europe. Next, in the reading, “Stateless People,” students will learn about the unwillingness of other countries to take in Jews wishing to leaving the Reich, further isolating them and leaving them increasingly vulnerable to violence. “The Night of the Pogrom” recounts the violence of Kristallnacht on November 9-10, 1938, as well as the events that provided the opportunity for the Nazis to unleash the pogrom. “The Impact of Kristallnacht” includes several short readings telling the stories of those victimized as well as those individuals and nations faced with important moral choices in responding to the attacks on Jews. The lesson concludes with the poem, “The Hangman,” an allegory about the consequences of ignoring injustice.

Journal and Discussion Prompts:

Some teachers have found these prompts helpful to initiate reflections and class discussions about this lesson:

- What does it mean to have rights? What protects our rights? To what extent were these protections present (or absent) in Nazi Germany?

- Which country do you think of as *your* country? What are the advantages of being from that country? For instance, what does one gain from being an *American*?
- Consider the following statement: “A government has the responsibility to protect the lives of people living within its borders, whether they are citizens or not.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

Additional Recommended Resources:

Videos (Available from Facing History Library):

- *Into the Arms of Strangers*
- *I’m Still Here*
- *America and the Holocaust*
- *The Hangman*

Readings (Available in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*):

- “Hitler’s ‘Saturday Surprises,’” pages 253-256
- “Taking Austria,” pages 257-258
- “Appeasing Hitler,” pages 261-263

Resource 18.1:**Timeline: Escalating Violence (1933-1938)*****Creating Context***

After replacing democracy in Germany with dictatorship, the Nazis began to ignore the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, rebuilding the nation's military might and becoming hostile to its neighboring countries. Simultaneously, the Nazis increasingly isolated Jews and other "enemies of the state," leading to the violence of Kristallnacht. This timeline traces the events that signaled increasing danger to Jews under Nazi rule as well as the steps that led to the outbreak of World War II.

Knowing the following terms will improve your understanding of this reading:

Anschluss	passport
emigration	Kristallnacht
Sudetenland	aryan
Reichstag	concentration camp
chancellor	

January 30, 1933 — Adolf Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany in a negotiated deal.

February 27, 1933 — The Reichstag (parliament) building is set on fire. Hitler quickly blames the communists, a rival political party.

February 28, 1933 — Hitler uses the emergency power of the president to issue two laws. The first law allows the government to search and confiscate private property and read private mail. The other law allows the Nazis to arrest anyone belonging to rival political parties, especially communists.

March 22, 1933 — Dachau concentration camp opens for housing political prisoners.

April 1, 1933 — Boycott of Jewish shops and businesses.

April 7, 1933 — Laws for Reestablishment of the Civil Service barred Jews from holding civil service, university, and state positions.

April 26, 1933 — Gestapo (Nazi secret service) established.

May 10, 1933 — Public burning of books written by Jews, political dissidents, and others not approved by the state.

August 2, 1934 — Hitler is elected Führer (Leader and Reich Chancellor). Armed forces must now swear allegiance to him.

March 8, 1935 — In the name of "defense," Hitler announces he is rebuilding the German air force, reinstating the draft, and re-arming the country in violation of the Treaty of Versailles. *To learn more about Hitler's defiance towards the Treaty of Versailles, read "Hitler's 'Saturday Surprises,'" pages 253-256 in Holocaust and Human Behavior.*

May 31, 1935 — Jews barred from serving in the German armed forces.

September 15, 1935 — “Nuremberg Laws”: anti-Jewish racial laws enacted; Jews no longer considered German citizens; Jews could not marry Aryans.

March 3, 1936 — Jewish doctors barred from practicing medicine in German institutions.

March 7, 1936 — Germans march into the Rhineland (on the border with France), previously demilitarized by the Versailles Treaty. *To learn more about Hitler’s defiance towards the Treaty of Versailles, read “Hitler’s ‘Saturday Surprises’,” pages 253-256 in Holocaust and Human Behavior.*

July 15, 1937 — Buchenwald concentration camp opens.

April 26, 1938 — Mandatory registration of all property held by Jews inside the Reich.

March 13, 1938 — Anschluss (incorporation of Austria): all antisemitic decrees immediately applied in Austria. *To learn more about the annexation of Austria, read “Taking Austria,” pages 257-258 in Holocaust and Human Behavior.*

July 1938 — Evian Conference: Delegates from 32 countries meet in Evian, France to discuss the increasingly dangerous situation for Jews in German-occupied territories. Most countries, including the United States and Britain, decided not to extend immigration quotas to allow more Jews to enter their countries. *To learn more about Hitler’s defiance towards the Treaty of Versailles, read Resource 18.2, “Stateless People.”*

August 1938 — Adolf Eichmann establishes the Office of Jewish Emigration in Vienna to increase the pace of forced emigration. Jews are required to add the names Sarah and Israel on all legal documents, including passports.

August 3, 1938 — Italy enacts sweeping antisemitic laws.

September 29, 1938 — Britain, France, and Italy agree to give the German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia, called the Sudetenland, to Germany in an effort to avoid war. *To learn more about the annexation of the Sudetenland, read “Appeasing Hitler,” pages 261-263 in Holocaust and Human Behavior.*

October 5, 1938 — Following request by Swiss authorities, Germans mark all Jewish passports with a large letter "J" to restrict Jews from immigrating to Switzerland.

October 28, 1938 — 17,000 Polish Jews living in Germany expelled and their property is confiscated; Poles refused to admit them; 8,000 are stranded. Two of these Jews are the parents of Herschel Grynszpan.

November 7, 1938 — Herschel Grynszpan assassinates German diplomat Ernst von Rath in Paris.

November 9, 1938 — German state police and security agents (the SS and SA) and Nazi officials coordinate attacks against Jews across Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland; 200 synagogues are destroyed; 7,500 Jewish shops are looted; 30,000 male Jews are sent to concentration camps. Jews are told they must pay millions of dollars for the damage “they” have caused. This event is

called Kristallnacht, “Night of the Broken Glass.” *To learn more about Kristallnacht, read Resource 18.3, “The Night of the Pogrom,” and Resource 18.4, “The Impact of Kristallnacht.”*

November 12, 1938 — Decree forcing all Jews to transfer retail businesses to Aryan hands. *To learn more about new discriminatory policies towards Jews after Kristallnacht, read Resource 18.4, “The Impact of Kristallnacht.”*

January 30, 1939 — Hitler publically announces, “If war erupts it will mean the extermination of European Jews.”

March 1939 — Germany invades Czechslovakia.

September 1, 1939 — Germany invades Poland.

September 3, 1939 - France, Britain, Australia and New Zealand declare war on Germany. World War II officially begins.

18.1 Comprehension & Connections

1. This timeline summarizes a significant amount of historical detail about the Nazi’s isolation of and escalating violence towards Jews. What were the steps to isolation? When did it start? When did it turn to violence? Cite events and details from the timeline to support your answer.
2. How was the isolation of Jews in Nazi society and the escalating violence towards them connected?
3. In the 1930’s, Hitler repeatedly violated the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, yet the other European powers, intent on avoiding a new war, chose not to confront Germany over the violations. Which events in the timeline might have led to a confrontation with other European nations?
4. Review what you learned in Section 4 about the impact of World War I on the nations who fought. What evidence, especially about the impact of World War I, can help explain why other countries avoided confrontation with Hitler in the 1930’s? What other factors might explain their avoidance?
5. What is the connection between laws discriminating against Jews, propaganda designed to portray Jews as “the other”, and organized acts of violence, such as Kristallnacht, that target Jews? Does discrimination and propaganda make violence inevitable? Is there an event in the timeline after which violence seems unavoidable?
6. In the readings that follow, you will learn more about Kristallnacht and its impact. Based on the information from this timeline, what questions do you have about

Kristallnacht? Record them in your journal so that you can refer to them later.

Using Resource 18.1

Providing *Essential* Historical Context

This timeline includes historical events that are crucial for students to know about in order to understand the impact of Kristallnacht and the escalating violence within Nazi Germany as well as the increasing tensions between Germany and other European nations. In particular, it is important for students to know about

- Additional anti-Jewish legislation in Germany after the Nuremberg Laws
- Hitler’s repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles
- The German annexation of Austria (known as the Anschluss)
- The German acquisition of the region of Czechoslovakia known as the Sudetenland

It is essential that you incorporate this important historical context into your course. This need not consume large periods of class time; you might share this context you’re your students in one or two short lectures. If you prefer a more student-centered approach, you might divide up this material so that students can first work in expert groups around one topic from the list above and then disseminate their knowledge to each other using the [Jigsaw](#) strategy.

The following readings and resources can be used as the basis of a short lecture, or they can be given directly to the class:

- “Hitler’s ‘Saturday Surprises’,” p. 253 in [Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior](#)
- “Taking Austria,” p. 257 in [Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior](#)
- [Map of Germany and Austria at the time of the Anschluss](#) (USHMM website)
- “Appeasing Hitler,” p. 261 in [Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior](#)
- [Map of the Sudetenland](#) (USHMM website)
- [“Anti-Jewish Legislation in Prewar Germany”](#) (from the USHMM website)

Human Timeline Activity

One way to help students visualize how Germany did not go from being a democracy to a dictatorship overnight is through a [human timeline](#) activity. You might use the timeline in Reading 17.1, adapting or combining items as necessary to meet the needs of your students. Even better is to have students create their own timeline items based on key events from the above readings. In preparation for this activity, we suggest placing each of the events on an index card or an 8 1/2 x 11” sheet of paper, along with the date when it occurred. Then assign students (individually or in pairs) one timeline event to present

to the class. Handout 17.1 (included below) includes questions that can help students prepare for their timeline presentations.

Video: *Into the Arms of Strangers*

The documentary [*Into the Arms of Strangers*](#) tells the story of the kindertransport – the relocation of nearly 10,000 children from Germany and German-occupied Europe, most of them Jewish, to Britain that took place between Kristallnacht and the beginning of World War II. The beginning of this film provides an overview of life in Nazi Germany from the perspective of middle-class Jewish children. As these child refugees (now adults) share how their lives slowly changed as a result of Nazi policies, the documentary also provides relevant historical information about several of the events in the timeline above. While the film does not represent the lives of all German-Jewish children, some of whom grew up in villages and farms as opposed to cities, it does help us think about how the lives of Jewish children changed under the Nazis. We suggest stopping this clip at 14:40, before the “children” recall memories of Kristallnacht. Students can record notes in a [two-column](#) format. Or, you could use the [3-2-1](#) strategy, asking students to record 3 historical facts, 2 questions the film raises for them, and one connection to something they have learned about human behavior.

Resource 18.2:

Reading: Stateless People***Creating Context***

Consider the following questions, and record your thoughts in your journal before reading:

- Which country do you think of as *your* country?
- What are the advantages of being from that country? For instance, what does one gain from being an *American*?
- How do you think your life would change if the country where you are from told you that you no longer belonged there? What consequences might result? What rights might you lose?

Knowing the following terms will improve your understanding of this reading:

Anschluss	arbitrary
refugee	uninhabitable
deportee	Adolf Eichmann

In his book *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler argued that “the race question not only furnishes the key to world history, but also to world culture.” He went on to say, “There is absolutely no other revolution but a racial revolution. There is no economic, no political, no social revolution. There is only the struggle of the lower races against the dominant, higher races.” As Hitler expanded eastward, he applied these ideas of race to the peoples he now ruled. Austria’s two hundred thousand Jews were the first to discover what that meant.

Within weeks of the Anschluss, observers were reporting hundreds of antisemitic incidents throughout the nation. Some noted the sharp increase in suicides, as thousands of Jews tried desperately to emigrate only to find stumbling blocks wherever they turned. Their difficulty in leaving “Greater Germany” could not be blamed on the Nazis. The Nazis were more than eager to see the Jews go as long as they left their money and possessions behind. Indeed in just six months, Adolf Eichmann, a young SS officer who made himself an expert on the “Jewish question,” had pushed 50,000 Jews out of Austria. The problem lay with other nations. They had no interest in accepting thousands of penniless Jewish refugees.

Shortly after the Anschluss, United States President Franklin Roosevelt called for an international conference to discuss the growing refugee crisis. In July 1938, delegates from thirty-two nations met in Evian, France. There, each representative expressed sorrow over the growing number of “refugees” and “deportees,” boasted of his nation’s traditional hospitality, and lamented its inability to do more in the “present situation.” The British noted that many refugees wanted to go to Palestine, which was under British rule. They would like to admit them, but in view of the ongoing conflict between Jews

and Arabs, it was not a practical solution. The French claimed that their country had already done more than its fair share. The Americans noted that Congress would have to approve any change in immigration. The delegates spoke in general terms and few referred to refugees as Jews.

Only one representative addressed the real issue. M. J. M. Yepes of Colombia told the delegates that there were two central questions. One was a question of fact that each nation had to answer for itself: “How many refugees would it admit?” The other question involved a matter of principle: “Can a state, without upsetting the basis of our civilisation, and indeed, of all civilisation, arbitrarily withdraw nationality from a whole class of its citizens, thereby making them stateless persons whom no country is compelled to receive on its territory?”

Yepes went on to say that as long as the central problem was not decided, the work of the conference would not be lasting and a dangerous example would be set – an example that in his view would make the world “uninhabitable.” Most delegates did not want to deal with either issue.

As the Jewish observer from Palestine, Golda Meir, who later became prime minister of Israel, was not allowed to speak. She later wrote. “I don’t think that anyone who didn’t live through it can understand what I felt at Evian – a mixture of sorrow, rage, frustration, and horror. I wanted to get up and scream at them, ‘Don’t you know that these so-called numbers are human beings, people who may spend the rest of their lives in concentration camps, or wandering around the world like lepers if you don’t let them in?’ Of course, I didn’t know then that not concentration camps but death camps awaited the refugees whom no one wanted.”²

At the Evian Conference, only the Dominican Republic agreed to accept Jewish immigrants. The nation’s leader, Rafael Trujillo Molina, hoped that Jews would marry local inhabitants and “lighten” the race. He also believed that Jews were good at making money and would therefore be an asset to his country. He granted visas to one thousand Jews who were to live in Sosua, a special community established for them. After the conference, Hitler concluded, “Nobody wants these criminals.”

18.2 Comprehension & Connections

1. The countries who sent representatives to the Evian Conference recognized that the Jews in Germany were increasingly in danger. What were their responses to this fact? Use evidence from the reading to support your answer.
2. Which countries’ responses to the danger Jews faced in Germany were most surprising? Which were most troubling?
3. Countries are sometimes referred to as *states*. How does Yepes define a stateless person? What might happen to one who is stateless? Review your response to the Creating Context prompt above as you think about your answer.

4. How did the countries that attended the Evian Conference define their universes of obligation? What reasons did they give for their definitions? Use evidence from the reading to support your answer.
5. What are immigration laws? What purpose do they serve? Why do most nations have them?
6. What might be some reasons why nations, including the United States, did not ease immigration quotas to allow more European Jews into the country – even when they were aware that Jews were facing poverty, discrimination and violence? What roles do you think nationalism, racism, and antisemitism might have played?
7. Under what circumstances, if any, do you think a nation should ease immigration restrictions for a particular group of people?
8. Should a state be allowed to withdraw citizenship for an individual? For a whole group of people? If so, under what conditions?

Using Reading 18.2

Discussing Statelessness

The concept of being stateless is important for students to grasp, yet it might be abstract for some students. Use the Creating Context prompt for a short discussion before reading to help students consider the benefits and protections that one receives by being accepted as a citizen of a country. During and after reading you could use the [levels of questions](#) or [text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world](#) teaching strategies to structure students' reading. Or, you could use this reading as the basis of a lecture.

Resource 18.3:
Reading: The Night of the Pogrom

Creating Context

What is a *turning point*? Create a working definition in your journal,

As you read the resource below about the night of violence against Jews that came to be known as Kristallnacht, consider whether or not this event was a turning point. What evidence in the resource supports your view?

Knowing the following terms will improve your understanding of this reading:

antisocial
expel
pogrom

At the Evian Conference, the delegate from Colombia raised a fundamental question, “Can a state, without upsetting the basis of our civilization, and indeed, of all civilization, arbitrarily withdraw nationality from a whole class of its citizens, thereby making them stateless persons whom no country is compelled to receive on its territory”? It was a question that went unanswered that July. By November, the failure to answer it would lead to yet another crisis.

Throughout 1938, Hitler and his top officials accelerated their campaign against his primary enemy, the Jews. The first step was the mandatory “Aryanization” of Jewish businesses. Up until then, it was voluntary. But now the Nazis required that all Jewish-owned companies be sold to “Aryans,” usually at a fraction of their value. Then in June, the Nazis rounded up Jews “previously convicted” of crimes to remove the “criminal element” from the population. Although many were guilty of nothing more than a traffic violation, about five hundred men described as “antisocial” were sent to a concentration camp at Buchenwald, a town near Weimar, Germany.

In August, a new law required that all Jews have a “Jewish first name” by January 1, 1939. If the name chosen was not on a list of approved “Jewish first names,” the Nazis would add “Israel” to the man’s name and “Sarah” to the woman’s. In September, the government announced that Jewish lawyers could no longer practice their profession. A month later, at the request of Switzerland, which was bombarded by Jews trying to leave Germany, the Nazis began to mark the passport of every Jew with the letter J. The Nazis then turned their attention to Jews who were not German citizens. Their first target was Russian Jews.

After the Nazis expelled every Jew who held a Russian passport, the Polish government feared that Jews with Polish passports would be next. To keep them from returning to Poland, the nation required that they secure a special stamp for their passports. The order

affected about seventy thousand Jews living in Germany. Although few wanted to return to Poland, they needed passports to emigrate to any other nation. Yet when they tried to get the required stamp, Polish officials turned them away.

The crisis came to a head when the Polish government announced that October 31 was the last day it would issue stamps. On October 26, the Nazis responded by expelling all Polish Jews. When Poland refused to accept them, thousands of men, women, and children ended up in refugee camps near the German-Polish border. Among them were the parents of seventeen-year-old Herschel Grynszpan.

Grynszpan was living in France at the time. Angry and frustrated by his inability to help his family, he marched into the German Embassy in Paris on November 7 and shot a Nazi official. When the man died two days later, the Germans decided to avenge his death. The night of November 9-10 came to be known as Kristallnacht (“Night of the Broken Glass”) outside Germany and as the Night of the Pogrom within the nation. That night the Nazis looted and then destroyed thousands of Jewish homes and businesses in every part of the country. They set fire to 191 synagogues, killed over ninety Jews, and sent thirty thousand others to concentration camps.

Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s minister of propaganda, held a press conference the next day. He told reporters that Kristallnacht was not a government action but a “spontaneous” expression of German dissatisfaction with the Jews. “It is an intolerable state of affairs that within our borders and for all these years hundreds of thousands of Jews still control whole streets of shops, populate our recreation spots and, as foreign apartment owners, pocket the money of German tenants, while their racial comrades abroad agitate for war against Germany and gun down German officials.” Two days later, the government fined the Jewish community one billion marks for “property damaged in the rioting.”

18.3 Comprehension & Connections

1. This reading describes the events leading up to Kristallnacht. *Go back and underline any important details about Kristallnacht and the events that preceded it.* In your journal, write down any additional questions you have about the events described in this reading.
2. The Germans call Kristallnacht the “Night of the Pogrom.” A *pogrom* is a government-organized or inspired massacre of a minority group, particularly of Jews. It is a Russian word that literally means “riot” or “destruction.” Over one hundred years ago, the nobles of St. Petersburg demanded that the “people’s wrath” be vented against the Jews. The peasants in the nearby town of Elizanetgrad responded with the first pogrom in modern times. A Russian writer has described the subsequent murders, rapes, and looting as the “unending torture” of a religious and ethnic minority. Was Kristallnacht a pogrom? What evidence suggests it was planned? What evidence suggests that the murder of the Nazi official was an excuse for a riot not its cause? To what extent was the Nazi

response to the murder opportunistic?

3. At the time of the first pogrom, the Russian government blamed the Jews for the violence. Whom did the Germans blame? How did racism, nationalism, and antisemitism make it easier for the Nazis to blame the Jews?
4. Trace the steps that led to Kristallnacht. How did each prepare the public for state-sanctioned violence against a minority within the nation? What attitudes and values allowed people to remain silent when their neighbors were deprived of citizenship?
5. What is the significance of the name Kristallnacht? How does the name cloud the fact that it was more a night of broken lives than of broken glass?
6. What happens when a government not only fails to protect those who live within its borders but also commits acts of violence against them? To whom can those people turn to for help?

Using Reading 18.3

Essential Primary Source Documents

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) website provides access to [images of the telegrams sent by the SS headquarters](#) to local police squads with instructions for coordinating the violence on Kristallnacht. These documents can play a crucial role in building student understanding of Kristallnacht and why many historians consider it a turning point. These documents also provide important information that will help students answer Question #2 above more fully.

When you share these documents with your students, consider the importance of the fact that this nationwide pogrom represented the first time that violence against Jews in Nazi Germany was centrally coordinated by the Nazi government. We strongly encourage you to share this resource with your students.

Two additional pages on the USHMM website "[Kristallnacht: The November 1938 Pogroms](#)" contain a variety of additional resources, including photographs and maps, which lend helpful historical context:

- ["Kristallnacht: A Nationwide Pogrom, November 9-10, 1938"](#)
- ["Kristallnacht: The November 1938 Pogroms"](#)

We recommend that you review these resources to deepen your understanding of Kristallnacht, and, when possible, share these resources with the class.

Say Something Literacy Strategy

This reading introduces a significant amount of new history (especially for those who

have not yet studied World War I) in a few paragraphs. Some students may find that the density of information in this reading makes it challenging to comprehend. Therefore, you may need to allow for extra time to read and process this reading in class.

One strategy that is designed to improve comprehension of challenging texts is *Say Something*.³ Have students read the text together in pairs. At the end of each paragraph, the students will pause and do one of the following:

- Make a prediction
- Ask a question
- Clarify something that is confusing
- Comment on what is happening in the reading
- Connect what is happening the reading to something else they know about

If students are unable to accomplish any of these tasks, then that is a sign they need to re-read the paragraph, then ask for help.

Analyzing Cause and Effect

In order to help students analyze the events and factors that led to Kristallnacht, you can have them create a graphic organizer in their journals. An [iceberg diagram](#) is one type of graphic organizer that is appropriate for this reading. This strategy will help students isolate the basic facts about Kristallnacht from its underlying causes.

Resource 18.4:**Readings: The Impact of Kristallnacht*****Creating Context***

Review what you learned earlier in this course about the concept of *universe of obligation*, then consider the following statements:

- A government has the responsibility to protect the lives of people living within its borders, whether they are citizens or not.
- Nations have a moral obligation to accept refugees fleeing persecution.

Which do you agree with? Why or why not? Discuss your responses with your classmates.

This resource includes several readings describing the impact of Kristallnacht. These readings include accounts of the experiences of the victims of the pogrom, the range of choices that people faced when the violence broke out, the reactions of other nations, and the Nazi response to the public outcry after the events of November 9-10, 1938. Keep your answers to the questions above in mind as you explore the documents. Does the information in these readings strengthen your positions, or prompt you to reconsider them?

Knowing the following terms will improve your understanding of this reading:

**Reichmarks
restitution**

**Heinrich Himmler
bureaucrat**

The Impact of Kristallnacht: Reading A

(Excerpted from *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, pages 19–23.)

Twelve year-old Klaus Langer, a Jew from from Essen, Germany, wrote the following words in his diary as the violence of Kristallnacht unfolded:

November 11, 1938

The past three days brought significant changes in our lives. On November 7 a German [diplomat] was assassinated in Paris. He died two days later. The day following, on November 10. . . came the consequences. At three o'clock the synagogue and the Jewish youth center were put on fire. Then they began to destroy Jewish businesses. . . . Fires were started at single homes belonging to Jews. At six-thirty in the morning the Gestapo came to our home and arrested Father and Mother. Mother returned after one and a half hours. Dad remained and was put in prison. . . .

We . . . returned to our neighborhood by two o'clock . . . When I turned into the front yard I saw that the house was damaged. I walked on glass splinters. . . . I ran

into our apartment and found unbelievable destruction in every room. . . . My parents' instruments were destroyed, the dishes were broken, the windows were broken, furniture upturned, the desk was turned over, drawers and mirrors were broken, and the radio smashed. . . .

In the middle of the night, at 2:30 A.M., the Storm Troopers [also known as the Brownshirts] smashed windows and threw stones against store shutters. After a few minutes they demanded to be let into the house. Allegedly they were looking for weapons. After they found no weapons they left. After that no one was able to go back to sleep. . . . I shall never forget that night. . . . Books could be written about all that had happened and about which we now begin to learn more. But, I have to be careful. A new regulation was issued that the Jews in Germany had to pay one billion reichmarks for restitution. What for? For the damage the Nazis had done to the Jews in Germany. . . .

November 16, 1938

A number of events occurred since my last entry. First, on November 15, I received a letter from school with an enclosed notice of dismissal. This became [unnecessary] since that same day an order was issued that prohibited Jews from attending public schools. . . .

December 3, 1938

Taking up this diary again is not for any pleasant reason. Today, the day of National Solidarity, Jews were not allowed to go outside from noon until eight at night. Himmler . . . issued an order by which Jews had to carry photo identity cards. Jews also are not permitted to own driver's licenses. The Nazis will probably take radios and telephones from us. This is a horrible affair. Our radio was repaired and the damaged grand piano was fixed. I hope we can keep it. But one can never know with these scums.

18.4 Reading A - Comprehension & Connections

1. Langer was an eyewitnesses to the events of Kristallnacht. How does his account differ from the official Nazi government view described in Resource 18.3? Use evidence from both readings to describe the differences.
2. Many Jews saw Kristallnacht as a turning point. What is a turning point? What evidence from his diary suggests that Langer viewed Kristallnacht as a turning point?

The Impact of Kristallnacht: Reading B

(Excerpted from “The Night of the Pogrom,” pp. 263-267 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

Frederic Morton, a writer whose family fled from Vienna shortly after Kristallnacht, never forgot that night. He wrote:

The day began with a thudding through my pillow. Jolts waked me. Then, like an alarm clock, the doorbell rang. It was six in the morning. My father, my mother, my little brother and I all met in the foyer, all in our robes. We did not know yet exactly what. But we knew. We were Jews in Vienna in 1938. Everything in our lives, including our beds, stood on a cliff.

My father opened the door on Frau Eckel, the janitress.
“They are down there...they are throwing things.” She turned away. Went on with her morning sweep. Her broom trembled.

We looked down into the courtyard. Pink-cheeked storm troopers chatted and whistled. Chopped-up furniture flew through the window.

The troopers fielded the pieces sportively, piled them into heaps. One hummed something from “The Merry Widow.”

“Franz! Run somewhere!” my mother said to my father.

By that time we’d gone to the window facing the street. At the house entrance two storm troopers lit cigarettes for each other. Their comrades were smashing the synagogue on the floor below us, tossing out a debris of Torahs and pews.

“Oh, my God!” my mother said.

Something overwhelming wanted to melt down my eyes. I couldn’t let it. All this might not be real as long as real tears did not touch my face. A crazy last-resort bargain with fate.

“All right,” my father said. “Meanwhile we get dressed.”

Meanwhile meant until they come up here. No other Jews lived in the building. It had no back door. But as long as I could keep my tears down, I could keep them down. While they were destroying down there, they would not come up here. As long as the shaking of the floor continued, the axe blows, the sledgehammer thuds, we might live.

I had gym for my first class. I laced on my sneakers. I knew I never would see school that morning. I didn’t care that I knew. I only cared not to cry. I tried to pour my entire mind into the lacing of my sneakers.

We met in the living room. We saw each other dressed with a normality made grotesque by the crashing of the perdition downstairs. It stopped. The shaking and the thudding stopped. Silence. A different sound. Heavy, booted steps ascending. I relaxed my sneakers.

My father had put on his hat. “Everybody come close to me,” he said. “My two sons, you put your hands on top of your heads.”

We put our hands on top of our heads, as hats. My father put his arms around all our shoulders, my mother’s, my brother’s, mine.

“Shema Yisroel,” my father said. “Repeat after me: Shema Yisroel Adonoy Elohenu Adonoy Ehod...” [“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One...”]

The doorbell rang. Once. Ever since the Anschluss, we’d rung our doorbell twice in quick succession to signal that this was a harmless ringing, not the dreaded one.

Now the dreaded ring had come.

“Hansi, you go,” my father said.

“No!” my mother said.

“Hansi is the only one they might not hurt on sight,” my father said. “Hansi, go.”

My brother, a tiny blond eight-year-old, an Aryan-looking doll, went. A minute later he returned. Behind him towered some 10 storm troopers with heavy pickaxes. They were young and bright-faced with excitement. Ten bridegrooms on their wedding day. One had freckles. How could a freckle-faced man kill us? The freckles kept me from crying.

“House search,” the leader said. “Don’t move.”

We all stood against the wall, except my father. He placed himself, hat still on, a foot in front of us.

They yanked out every drawer in every one of our chests and cupboards, and tossed each in the air. They let the cutlery jangle across the floor, the clothes scatter, and stepped over the mess to fling the next drawer. Their exuberance was amazing.

Amazing, that none of them raised an axe to split our skulls.

“We might be back,” the leader said. On the way out he threw our mother-of-pearl ashtray over his shoulder, like confetti. We did not speak or move or breathe until we heard their boots against the pavement.

“I am going to the office,” my father said. “Breitel might help.”

Breitel, the Reich commissar in my father’s costume-jewelry factory, was a “good” Nazi. Once he’d said we should come to him if there was trouble. My father left. My mother was crying, with relief, with terror; she cradled against herself my little stunned brother. I turned away from her. I swore I would do something other than cry.

I began to pick up clothes, when the doorbell rang again. It was my father.

“I have two minutes.”

“What?” my mother said. But she knew. His eyes had become glass. “There was another crew waiting for me downstairs. They gave me two minutes.”

Now I broke down. Now my father was the only one not crying. His eyes were blue glass, relentlessly dry. His kiss felt stubbly. He had not shaved this morning. After one more embrace with my mother he marched to the door, turned on his heel, called out.

“Fritz!” I went to him, sobbing.

“Stop!”

I couldn’t stop.

Harshly his hands came down on my shoulders.

“If I don’t come back – avenge me!”

He was gone. The fury of his fingers stung. It burned into my skin a sense of continuity against all odds. I stopped.

Four months later he rang our doorbell twice, skull shaven, skeletal, released from Dachau, somehow alive.

Forty years later, today, he is practicing the tango with my mother in Miami Beach. My little brother Hansi is chairman of the political science department at Queens College. I am a writer in America with an American family. We are atypically lucky. But to this day we all ring our American doorbells twice.⁴

18.4 Reading B - Comprehension & Connections

1. Morton was an eyewitness to the events of Kristallnacht. How does his account differ from the official Nazi government view described in Resource 18.3? Use evidence from both readings to describe the differences.
2. Why was it so important to Morton to avoid crying? What effect does this detail have on the impact of his story?
3. Morton writes, “Everything in our lives, including our beds, stood on a cliff.” What does he mean? What signs does he provide in his account that indicate that Kristallnacht is a turning point?

The Impact of Kristallnacht: Reading C

(Excerpted from “Taking a Stand,” pp. 268-269 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*. An [extended and enhanced version of this reading](#) is available on the Facing History & Ourselves website.)

German Jews saw Kristallnacht as a turning point. So did many “Aryan” Germans. They also made important choices that night and in the days that followed. Dan Bar-On, an Israeli psychologist, describes the decision one family made:

It was the autumn of 1938. Andre was twelve years old and lived with his parents in a small town in northern Germany. One evening he came home from his youth movement meeting.

“Daddy,” he said to his father, “we were told at the meeting that tomorrow we are supposed to throw stones at the Jewish shops in town. Should I take part?”

His father looked at him. “What do you think?”

“I don’t know. I have nothing against the Jews – I hardly know them – but everyone is going to throw stones. So what should I do?”

Their conversation proceeded, the son presenting questions to his father, the father turning the questions back to his son.

“I understand,” said Andre. “You want me to make up my own mind. I’m going for a walk. I’ll let you know what I’ve decided when I come back.”

When Andre returned a short while later, he approached his parents, who were sitting at the table.

“I’ve made up my mind, but my decision involves you too.”

“What is it?”

“I’ve decided not to throw stones at the Jewish shops. But tomorrow everyone will say, ‘Andre, the son of X, did not take part, he refused to throw stones!’ They will turn against you. What are you going to do?”

His father’s sigh was one of relief tinged with pride. “While you were out, your mother and I discussed this question. We decided that if you made up your mind to throw stones, we would have to live with your decision, since we had let you decide, after all. But if you decided not to throw stones, we would leave Germany immediately.”

And that is what they did. The following day, Andre’s family left Germany.⁵

18.4 Part C - Comprehension & Connections

1. Summarize the dilemma that Andre and his family faced. How did they make their decisions? Why do you think the father let Andre make the choice? What values and beliefs shaped their choices?
2. What opportunities and benefits would Andre, and others faced with the same choice, have experienced if he decided to join with others throwing stones?
3. What were the short-term consequences of Andre's choice? What were the long-term consequences? What does Andre and his family's decision tell you about their "circle of responsibility"?

The Impact of Kristallnacht: Reading D

(Excerpted from “Taking a Stand,” pp. 268-269 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*. An [extended and enhanced version of this reading](#) is available on the Facing History & Ourselves website.)

Other Germans made other choices. Some protested by resigning their membership in the Nazi party – though many made it clear that they were not objecting to antisemitism but to mob violence. Others sent anonymous letters of protest to foreign embassies. Still others quietly brought Jewish families food and other necessities to replace items that had been destroyed. Neighbors told one Jewish woman that helping her was a way to “show the Jews that the German people had no part in this – it is only Goebbels and his gang.” Most Germans, however, responded much the way Melita Maschmann did. She lived in a small suburb of Berlin and knew nothing of Kristallnacht until the next morning. As she picked her way through the broken glass on her way to work, she asked a policeman what had happened. After he explained, she recalls:

I went on my way shaking my head. For the space of a second I was clearly aware that something terrible had happened there. Something frighteningly brutal. But almost at once I switched over to accepting what had happened as over and done with, and avoiding critical reflection. I said to myself: the Jews are the enemies of the New Germany. Last night they had a taste of what this means... With these or similar thoughts, I constructed for myself a justification of the pogrom. But in any case, I forced the memory of it out of my consciousness as quickly as possible. As the years went by, I grew better and better at switching off quickly in this manner on similar occasions.⁶

Maschmann was not alone in placing the night in perspective. Dietrich Goldschmidt, a minister in the Confessing Church, explains that for most Germans “the persecution of the Jews, this escalating persecution of the Jews, and the 9th of November – in a sense, that was only one event, next to very many gratifying ones. Here the famous stories of all the things Hitler did come in: ‘He got rid of unemployment, he built the Autobahn, the people started doing well again, he restored our national pride again. One has to weigh that against the other things.’”⁷

18.4 Part D - Comprehension & Connections

1. Summarize the dilemma that Melita Maschmann faced. How did she make her decision? What values and beliefs shaped her choices?
2. What is Maschmann’s explanation for how she lived with her choice?
3. What opportunities and benefits would be experienced by those Germans who chose to participate in the violence of Kristallnacht or remain silent about it?
4. What were the short-term consequences of each choice described in the reading?

The long-term consequences? For example, what do you think happened to non-Jews who resigned from the Nazi party? Tried to emigrate? Protested? What does each decision tell you about the person's "universe of responsibility"?

5. Evaluate Goldschmidt's explanation of why public outrage did not last long. Did the good outweigh the "other things"?

The Impact of Kristallnacht: Reading E

(Excerpted from “World Responses,” pp. 270-272 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

Newspapers around the world reported Kristallnacht. The story filed by Otto D. Tolischus of the New York Times was typical of many.

A wave of destruction, looting and incendiaries unparalleled in Germany since the Thirty Years War and in Europe generally since the Bolshevik revolution, swept over Greater Germany today as National Socialist cohorts took vengeance on Jewish shops, offices and synagogues for the murder by a young Polish Jew of Ernst von Rath, third secretary of the Germany Embassy in Paris.

Beginning systematically in the early morning hours in almost every town and city in the country, the wrecking, looting and burning continued all day. Huge but mostly silent crowds looked on and the police confined themselves to regulating traffic and making wholesale arrests of Jews “for their own protection.”

All day the main shopping districts as well as the side streets of Berlin and innumerable other places resounded to the shattering of shop windows falling to the pavement, the dull thuds of furniture and fittings being pounded to pieces and clamor of fire brigades rushing to burning shops and synagogues. Although shop fires were quickly extinguished, synagogue fires were merely kept from spreading to adjoining buildings.⁸

18.4 Part E - Comprehension & Connections

1. How would you evaluate the beginning of Tolischus’s report? Is it accurate? Is it objective? What is the role of a journalist in reporting atrocities to the public? What are a journalist’s most important responsibilities?
2. How does Tolischus’s use of the word *vengeance* affect the impact of his story?
3. If you were a reporter tasked with finishing this story, what additional information would you include? Who would you interview? What perspectives on these events would you want to include?

The Impact of Kristallnacht: Reading F

(Excerpted from “World Responses,” pp. 270-272 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

People everywhere were outraged. As the Archbishop of Canterbury (the leader of the Church of England), Cosmo Gordon Lang, wrote in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, “There are times when the mere instincts of humanity make silence impossible.” Thousands of Americans agreed. They showed their outrage at huge rallies held in support of German Jews. In reporting these events to Berlin, the German ambassador expressed a fear that these protests might jeopardize the Munich agreement.

Although Kristallnacht strained the policy of appeasement (the agreement between European nations that allowed Germany to annex the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia), it did not end it. When members of Britain’s Parliament pressed Neville Chamberlain to condemn the pogrom, he simply verified that newspaper reports were “substantially correct.” He also acknowledged “deep and widespread sympathy” for those who were made “to suffer so severely” for the “senseless crime committed in Paris.”

Similar attitudes in France led the editor of a newspaper called *La Lumière*, to warn, “In the past, when we protested against massacres in Ethiopia, China, Spain, we were told, ‘Silence! You are warmongering.’ When we protested against the mutilation of Czechoslovakia, we were told, ‘Keep quiet! You are a war party.’ Today, when we protest against the contemptible persecution of defenseless Jews and their wives and children, we are told, ‘Be silent! France is afraid.’”⁹

The only world leader to take a stand was Franklin D. Roosevelt. He did so only after a number of individual and groups had urged him to speak out. On November 15, six days after Kristallnacht, he opened a press conference by stating, “The news of the last few days from Germany has deeply shocked public opinion in the United States. Such news from any part of the world would produce a similar profound reaction among American people in every part of the nation. I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth-century civilization.” Although he announced that the United States was withdrawing its ambassador to Germany, he did not offer to help the thousands of Jews now trying desperately to leave the Third Reich.

Few Americans criticized Roosevelt’s stand. According to a poll taken at the time, 57 percent of all Americans approved the recall. But 72 percent did not want more Jewish refugees in the United States and over half opposed aid to refugees who wished to settle elsewhere.

18.4 Part F - Comprehension & Connections

1. How did England, France, and the United States respond to the events of Kristallnacht. What reasons did they give for their action or inaction?

2. Which of the responses to Kristallnacht from other nations are most striking to you? Why? Use specific evidence from the reading to explain your answers.
3. Do you think other nations have a responsibility to speak out when a government harms those who live within its borders? Do other nations have a responsibility to do more than speak out? What other options do other nations have?
4. What did the Archbishop of Canterbury mean when he said, “There are times when the mere instincts of humanity make silence impossible”? What are those “instincts”? Do all humans have them? At what times is silence impossible?
5. What does the word *civilization* mean in the context of President Roosevelt’s statement. What does his use of the word imply about how he viewed the violence in Germany?
6. What does the poll suggest about the way many Americans defined their country’s universe of obligation? What does it suggest about the limits of people’s outrage?
7. Compare the way people responded to Kristallnacht in Germany with responses abroad. What similarities do you notice? What differences seem more striking?

The Impact of Kristallnacht: Reading G

(Excerpted from “The Narrowing Circle,” pp. 272-273 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

German leaders also reacted to Kristallnacht and the public outcry that followed. On November 10, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels called a press conference “to remove certain misunderstandings that appear to have their way into reports sent abroad.” He warned that if Jews continued to spread “exaggerations of yesterday’s happening, of the kind contained in the accounts and leading articles of the American press, then they would defeat their own ends, and they would be digging the graves of the Jews in Germany.”

Most government officials, however, were opposed to Kristallnacht and other “undisciplined individual actions.” Indeed, the Night of the Pogrom was the last occasion when Jews had to fear street violence in Germany. After Kristallnacht, writes Richard Rubenstein, “the hoodlums were banished and the bureaucrats took over.” In the weeks that followed, key Nazi officials, led by Heinrich Himmler, saw to it that measures against the Jews were strictly “legal.” On November 15, the bureaucracy excluded all Jewish children from state schools. By December 6, Jews could no longer walk or drive in certain parts of every major city. Jews who lived in those areas had to have a police permit to go home. Jews were advised to move and perhaps even exchange residences with “Aryans” who lived in “Jewish sections of town.”

At about the same time, the government announced that Jews could no longer attend German universities. A few days later, Himmler prohibited them from owning or even driving a car. Jews were also banned from theaters, movie houses, concert halls, sports arenas, parks, and swimming pools. The Gestapo even went door to door confiscating radios owned by Jewish families.

18.4 Part E - Comprehension & Connections

1. A number of Jews who lived in Germany in the late 1930’s spoke of a “narrowing circle.” What do you think they meant? What evidence is there that their “circle” was narrowing?
2. What does Rubenstein mean by the statement that “the hoodlums were banished and the bureaucrats took over”? What are hoodlums and bureaucrats? What power does each group have to change society or create fear?
3. How significant was the decision to banish the “hoodlums” and let the bureaucrats take over? How do you think the outcry over the events of Kristallnacht affected the decision? Was Kristallnacht a turning point for the Nazis?

Using Resource 18.4

Taking a Position

Before reading and discussing this resource, you might prepare students by using the statements in Creating Context as the basis for a [Barometer](#) or [Four Corners](#) activity. As students read this resource (as well as others in this lesson), ask them to highlight evidence they find to support their positions. After students have had a chance to explore the documents and accounts included in this resource, consider repeated the the [Barometer](#) or [Four Corners](#) activity to gauge whether or not students' positions have changed.

Exploring and Analyzing the Impact of Kristallnacht

The readings in this resource can be used to explore the impact of Kristallnacht in a variety of ways. If you have enough time available in class, you could certainly have the class read them in succession, discussing and reflecting in their journals on the Comprehension and Connections questions that follow each reading.

Many teachers find it more efficient to structure this lesson as a [Gallery Walk](#) or [Jigsaw](#) activity with students working in small groups. If students are working with the readings in this way, they can still discuss the Comprehension and Connections questions associated with each reading before moving to the next stage of the activity.

Regardless of how you structure the activity, Handout 18.4 (below) provides a simple format for collecting information from the readings and beginning to analyze the choices individual made in response to Kristallnacht.

Writing a News Report

In 1938, most people around the world would have learned about Kristallnacht from a news report either on the radio or in a newspaper. One way for students to synthesize and analyze what they have learned about Kristallnacht is to craft their own news story for print or radio about the events that transpired. The readings in Resource 18.4 provide the raw materials students will need: basic facts, official government responses both from Germany and around the world, and first-hand accounts.

A variety of primers on writing for newspapers and radio are available on the web. The following sites can get you started:

- Newspaper: [Scholastic's News Writing Home Page](#)
- Radio: [Newscript.com](#)

If you have the technology available, consider encouraging your students to record their radio stories as podcasts.

Using Videos to Explore the Impact of Kristallnacht

The following videos may be used to support or extend the readings in this section:

Into the Arms of Strangers

If you have already started showing this documentary and paused at 14:40, you can start again from this spot (otherwise, show the first twenty minutes of the film). For the next few minutes, “children” recall their experiences on “The Night of the Broken Glass.”

I’m Still Here

Klaus Langer’s diary (excerpted in Reading A) is published in the compilation entitled *Salvaged Pages*. Portions of Langer’s and other young people’s diaries from the compilation are also dramatized in the video *I’m Still Here*. You might show your students the short clip from the video (2:56-4:44) that includes the excerpt from the reading above. (Facing History has developed a [study guide](#) for this video.)

America and the Holocaust

The first 30 minutes of this episode of American Experience examines the reaction in the United States to Kristallnacht, immigration policies of the time, and American antisemitism. It also includes the story of the voyage of the St. Louis, a ship of Jewish refugees that sailed for Cuba, only to be turned back by both Cuba and the United States. (Facing History has developed a [study guide](#) for this video.)

Handout 18.4 - Kristallnacht: The Range of Choices - Note-taking guide

As you read about different responses to Kristallnacht, complete this chart.

Reading # or name	Name of individual or group	How did this person or group respond to Kristallnacht? Include specific details from the text.	What were the consequences of this decision?

Resource 18.5:
Poem: “The Hangman”

Creating Context

Before November 1938, violence against Jews in Nazi Germany had been sporadic and regional. Kristallnacht marked the first time such violence was centrally organized by the Nazi government, with citizens across Germany participating. This is why many historians see Kristallnacht as a turning point.

How did the Nazis create a society in which such violence was possible? Reflect on the history you have learned in this course so far before reading “The Hangman,” a poem by Maurice Ogden. The poem is an allegory that can help us consider what happens when injustice goes unchecked.

Knowing the following terms will improve your understanding of this reading:

diffident
gallows
scaffold

usurer
infidel
henchman

An [enhanced version of this reading](#) is available on the Facing History & Ourselves website.

“The Hangman”

by Maurice Ogden

1.
 Into our town the Hangman came,
 Smelling of gold and blood and flame –
 And he paced our bricks with a diffident air
 And built his frame on the courthouse square.

The scaffold stood by the courthouse side,
 Only as wide as the door was wide;
 A frame as tall, or little more,
 Than the capping sill of the courthouse door.

And we wondered, whenever we had the time,
 Who the criminal, what the crime,
 That Hangman judged with the yellow twist
 Of knotted hemp in his busy fist.

And innocent though we were, with dread
 We passed those eyes of buckshot lead;
 Till one cried: “Hangman, who is he
 For whom you raise the gallows-tree?”

Then a twinkle grew in the buckshot eye,
And he gave us a riddle instead of reply:
“He who serves me best,” said he,
“Shall earn the rope on the gallows-tree.”

And he stepped down, and laid his hand
On a man who came from another land.
And we breathed again, for another’s grief
At the Hangman’s hand was our relief.

And the gallows-frame on the courthouse lawn
By tomorrow’s sun would be struck and gone.
So we gave him way, and no one spoke,
Out of respect for his hangman’s cloak.

2.
The next day’s sun looked mildly down
On roof and street in our quiet town
And, stark and black in the morning air,
The gallows-tree on the courthouse square.

And the Hangman stood at his usual stand
With the yellow hemp in his busy hand;
With his buckshot eye and his jaw like a pike
And his air so knowing and businesslike.

And we cried: “Hangman, have you not done,
Yesterday, with the alien one?”
Then we fell silent, and stood amazed:
“Oh, not for him was the gallows raised...”

He laughed a laugh as he looked at us:
“...Did you think I’d gone to all this fuss
To hang one man? That’s a thing I do
To stretch the rope when the rope is new.”

Then one cried “Murderer!” One cried “Shame!”
And into our midst the Hangman came
To that man’s place. “Do you hold,” said he,
“With him that’s meant for the gallows-tree?”

And he laid his hand on that one’s arm,
And we shrank back in quick alarm,
And we gave him way, and no one spoke
Out of fear of his hangman’s cloak.

That night we saw with dread surprise
The Hangman's scaffold had grown in size.
Fed by the blood beneath the chute
The gallows-tree had taken root;

Now as wide, or a little more,
Than the steps that led to the courthouse door,
As tall as the writing, or nearly as tall,
Halfway up on the courthouse wall.

3.

The third he took – and we had all heard tell –
Was a usurer and infidel, And:
“What,” said the Hangman, “have you to do
With the gallows-bound, and he a Jew?”

And we cried out: “Is this one he
Who has served you well and faithfully?”
The Hangman smiled: “It's a clever scheme
To try the strength of the gallows-beam.”

The fourth man's dark, accusing song
Had scratched out comfort hard and long;
And “What concern,” he gave us back,
“Have you for the doomed – the doomed and black?”

The fifth. The sixth. And we cried again:
“Hangman, Hangman, is this the man?”
“It's a trick,” he said, “that we hangmen know
For easing the trap when the trap springs slow.”

And so we ceased and asked no more,
As the Hangman tallied his bloody score;
And sun by sun, and night by night,
The gallows grew to monstrous height.

The wings of the scaffold opened wide
Till they covered the square from side to side;
And the monster cross-beam, looking down,
Cast its shadow across the town.

4.

Then through the town the Hangman came
And called in the empty streets my name.
And I looked at the gallows soaring tall

And thought: “There is no left at all

For hanging, and so he calls to me
To help him pull down the gallows-tree.”
And I went out with right good hope
To the Hangman’s tree and the Hangman’s rope.

He smiled at me as I came down
To the courthouse square through the silent town,
And supple and stretched in his busy hand
Was the yellow twist of them hempen strand.

And he whistled his tune as he tried the trap
And it sprang down with a ready snap –
And then with a smile of awful command
He laid his hand upon my hand.

“You tricked me, Hangman!” I shouted then,
“That your scaffold was built for other men....
And I no henchman of yours,” I cried.
“You lied to me, Hangman, foully lied!”

Then a twinkle grew in the buckshot eye:
“Lied to you? Tricked you?” he said, “Not I
For I answered straight and I told you true:
The scaffold was raised for none but you.

“For who has served me more faithfully
Than you with your coward’s hope?” said he,
“And where are the others that might have stood
Side by your side in the common good?”

“Dead,” I whispered; and amiably
“Murdered,” the Hangman corrected me;
“First the alien, then the Jew...
I did no more than you let me do.”

Beneath the beam that blocked the sky,
None had stood so alone as I –
And the Hangman strapped me, and no voice there
Cried “Stay!” for me in the empty square.¹⁰

18.5 Comprehension & Connections

1. What does the image of the growing gallows suggest about the Hangman’s

power?

2. Why does the Hangman say, “I did no more than you let me do.”? What evidence is there in the poem that this is true? Is there any evidence that this is not entirely true?
3. What choices were open to the townspeople when the Hangman arrived? What choices were left by the time he had finished his work in the town? Was there a way to stop the Hangman? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. What is the meaning of the Hangman’s riddle: “‘He who serves me best,’ said he, ‘shall earn the rope on the gallows-tree’”?
5. What is a *bystander*? Review your answer to this question from “The ‘In’ Group” (Resource 5.1). What does “The Hangman” suggest about the power and responsibilities of bystanders?
6. How does the poem relate to Germany in the 1930s? To society today? Use evidence from previous readings or your journal to support your answer.
7. In 1933, Martin Niemoeller, a leader of the Confessing Church, voted for the Nazi party. By 1938, he was in a concentration camp. After the war, he is believed to have said, “In Germany, the Nazis came for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak for me.” How is the point Niemoeller makes similar to the one Maurice Ogden makes in “The Hangman”? What line in “The Hangman” best summarizes Niemoeller’s quotation?
8. In 1776, Thomas Paine said, “He that would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy from oppression, for if he violates this duty, he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself.” What does Paine mean? In your journal, rewrite this quotation in your own words. How is the point that Paine makes similar to the one Niemoeller makes? What line in “The Hangman” best connects to Paine’s quotation? How does Paine define his universe of responsibility?

Using Resource 18.5

Reflection & Discussion

The poem, along with the quotations from Niemoeller and Paine in *Comprehension and Connections* are at the heart of the moral dilemmas a Facing History and Ourselves

course seeks to explore. Even though the imagery in the poem, and the language in the two quotations, can be challenging to some readers, it is important for them to wrestle with these ideas before they continue to learn the history of the Holocaust. Make sure students have time to reflect, write, and share their ideas with each other about the meaning of “The Hangman,” how it relates to the history of Nazi Germany, and how it applies to their lives today. [Think-Pair-Share](#) and [Learn to Listen/Listen to Learn](#) are both effective strategies for discussing this reading.

Video: The Hangman

A highly-stylized, animated interpretation of [The Hangman](#) is available from the Facing History library and it also can be viewed on YouTube. Many teachers find that this video deepens the discussion of the poem. Teachers who have used the film indicated a need to show it more than once (it is about 10 minutes long) to allow their students the opportunity to identify and analyze the many symbols. After viewing the film, students might discuss the filmmaker’s artistic decisions, such as why he turned the animated people into paper dolls.

¹ DM

² Golda Meir, *My Life* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1975), 158.

³ Kylene Beers, *When Kids Can’t Read: What Teachers Can Do* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 105-110.

⁴ Frederic Morton, “Kristallnacht,” *New York Times*, 10 November 1978 (Op-Ed page). Copyright 1978 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.

⁵ Dan Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence*, 1.

⁶ Melita Maschmann, *Account Rendered*, 56-57.

⁷ Quoted in Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 142.

⁸ Otto D. Tolischus, “The Pogrom,” *New York Times*, 19 November, 1938.

⁹ Quoted in Anthony Read and David Fisher, *Kristallnacht; The Unleashing of the Holocaust* (Peter Bedrick Books, 1989), 155.

¹⁰ Maurice Ogden, “The Hangman,” Regina Publications.