

THE WORLD THAT WAS BERND STEVENS: IDENTITY, RESILIENCE, AND RESISTANCE

Time: 90-120 minutes (2 class periods, or can be condensed to 1 extended period)

Audience: Grades 8–12 (Middle School and High School)

Student Outcomes

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand the concept of identity and recognize how it evolves through experiences and circumstances
2. Analyze Bernd Stevens' shifting identities across four distinct life stages using primary source artifacts and testimonies
3. Explore themes of resilience, belonging, loyalty, and resistance in the context of WWII and refugee experiences
4. Examine the motivations and experiences of Jewish refugees who fought for the Allied forces
5. Create a personal identity storyboard that reflects on their own multifaceted identity and its development over time
6. Reflect on what it means to maintain identity during times of persecution and upheaval

Aligned Standards (California Common Core)

English Language Arts:

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2** – Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.9** – Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9 / W.11-12.9** – Draw evidence from texts and media to support analysis and reflection
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1** – Engage effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing one's own clearly
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3** – Write narratives using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences

History and Social Studies:

- **CA HSS Standard 10.8** – Students analyze the causes and consequences of World War II
- **CA HSS Standard 8.10.7** – Explain how the war affected combatants, civilians, the physical environment, and future warfare

Visual Arts (Secondary):

- **VA:Re9** – Evaluate visual sources using multiple criteria, including historical significance, perspective, and purpose

Acknowledgment: This curriculum is a project of the California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education, established by the JFCS Holocaust Center, with support from the California Department of Education, Marin County Office of Education, the State of California, and the Diane & Guilford Glazer Foundation.

Context

This lesson invites students to explore identity through the lens of Holocaust survivor Bernd Stevens, a Jewish refugee who fled Nazi Germany and later served as an OSS (Office of Strategic Services) intelligence agent. Through primary source artifacts — photographs, identity documents, and survivor testimony — students will trace how Bernd's identity transformed across four distinct periods: pre-war Germany, during Nazi persecution, wartime military service, and post-war American life.

Essential Understandings:

- Identity is multifaceted, dynamic, and constantly shaped by personal choices, family, culture, and historical events
- Jewish refugees who fled persecution often made extraordinary choices to resist hatred and fight for freedom
- Primary source artifacts reveal the human dimension of history and provide evidence of how individuals navigated impossible circumstances
- Surviving and thriving after trauma requires resilience, adaptation, and the maintenance of core values and identity
- Understanding personal identity helps us empathize with historical figures and recognize universal themes of belonging and purpose

Bernd Stevens Biography

Bernd Stevens was born in Munich in 1920 to a middle-class German Jewish family. His family ran an optometry business, and he grew up in a vibrant Jewish community. His life changed rapidly in 1933, as the Nazis gained power in Germany. At the age of 15, he had qualified as an alternate for the German Olympic Gymnastics Team but was removed due to his Jewish identity before the 1936 Berlin Olympics. During Kristallnacht, a government-organized attack on Jewish life in Germany, an 18-year-old blonde-haired and blue-eyed Bernd blended himself in with the mobs attacking Jewish-owned businesses in order to break into his family's own storefront to take the valuables out of their store safe before others could. His father was arrested and their business and income were lost. The family began writing in desperation to strangers in the US with their same last name, begging for someone to help them and sponsor their visas. Bernd was able to flee Germany with a secured sponsorship and arrived in America on the last ship that left Italy.

Bernd settled in Tennessee, and once the US entered World War II, Bernd enlisted in the US Army to "save whatever Jews could be saved". He was later recruited into the Office of Strategic Services (the OSS), the precursor to the CIA. Because of his German language skills and background, he became part of a group of Jewish OSS agents referred to as the "Jewish Five". Bernd was sent on covert missions in Europe, including parachuting into Nazi-controlled territory

under a false identity named Peter Hartley. He was given an alias and false documents to conceal his national and Jewish identities. After being captured by the Gestapo, he experienced a series of escapes, recaptures, and ultimately an unusual turn of events in which he interacted with German officers as the war was collapsing. The officers accused him of being Jewish, because he was circumcised, and Bernd successfully convinced the officers that 'all men in America are circumcised, not just the Jews'. He was able to negotiate his own release due to the impending end of the war. Eventually, he and his unit played a role in facilitating local German surrender and transmitting intelligence to help Allied forces.

After liberation, Bernd learned that his father and brother had been murdered in the Holocaust, while other family members survived and reached the United States. He returned to civilian life, settled in California, became an accountant, married, and had children. He was awarded a Purple Heart and Bronze Star, and, later in life, he was recognized for his wartime service and awarded the Congressional Gold Medal. His family did not learn the details of his work in the OSS for many years, until his missions had been declassified. Many of Bernd's personal items from his time serving during the War are on display at Holocaust Museum LA.

Materials

All materials are formatted as Google Slides (view-only or force copy) and Google Docs with "Anyone can view" permissions:

- [Google Slides Presentation](#): Timeline of Bernd Stevens' life; photographs and artifacts from each life stage; historical context on Jewish refugees and the OSS; Iceberg Theory of Identity
- [Handout 1: Personal Identity Map Storyboard Instructions](#): 6-panel storyboard instructional template for students to create their own identity narrative
- [Handout 2: Safe-In/Safe-Out Reflection Worksheet](#)
- [Handout 3: Preparing to Hear a Survivor Worksheet](#)
- [Handout 4: Bernd Stevens' Artifact Analysis Worksheets](#): Guided group activity with questions and artifact analysis
- [Handout 5: Identity Mapping Activity](#): Definitions, instructions, and templates for creating identity maps
- [Handout 6: Identity Map Template](#)
- [Handout 7: Grading Rubric for Personal Identity Map Storyboard](#)
- Timeline of Key Events During the Holocaust (Provided Below)
- Glossary of Key Terms (Provided Below)
- [Holocaust Museum LA – Bernd Stevens Collection](#): Full digital archive of artifacts and documentation

Glossary: Key Academic Vocabulary

Students should understand these terms before engaging with the lesson:

- **Identity**: The mix of traits, roles, experiences, beliefs, and cultural heritage that makes a person unique; includes both visible characteristics and hidden dimensions
- **Iceberg Theory of Identity**: A conceptual framework showing that identity operates on two levels: visible surface characteristics (appearance, clothing, language, behaviors) and

hidden, deeper dimensions (beliefs, values, family history, experiences, emotions)

- **Multifaceted:** Having many different aspects, sides, or dimensions
- **Resilience:** The ability to recover from difficulty, adapt to change, and maintain core values and sense of self despite hardship
- **Refugee:** A person forced to flee their home country due to war, persecution, or disaster. Protected under international law
- **Persecution:** Systematic harassment, discrimination, or violence directed at a group of people
- **Antisemitism:** Hostility toward or hatred of Jews as a religious or ethnic group, often accompanied by social, economic, or political discrimination
- **Kennkarte:** German identification card used during WWII to mark and track citizens, including Jews. The prominent "J" marked Jews for persecution
- **OSS (Office of Strategic Services):** A U.S. intelligence agency formed during WWII to conduct espionage and support resistance movements; predecessor to the CIA
- **Testimony:** A firsthand account or personal story, often given by a witness to historical events
- **Primary Source:** Original documents, artifacts, or accounts created during or immediately after an event

See full glossary at the end of this lesson plan.

Differentiation

For English Learners:

- Provide vocabulary preview and word bank with key terms before the lesson
- Pair EL students with strong readers or bilingual peers for artifact analysis and discussion activities
- Offer simplified versions of handouts or use visual supports (images, timelines, diagrams) alongside text
- Allow students to respond in home language during reflection activities, with translation support
- Provide sentence frames for discussions and written responses (e.g., "Bernd's identity changed when..." / "I noticed in this photograph that...")
- Use the video testimony clip (with captions if available) as an alternative to text-heavy materials

For Students with Special Education Needs:

- Break the lesson into smaller segments with movement breaks between activities
- Provide graphic organizers to structure note-taking and analysis (e.g., T-charts, identity webs)
- Use visual supports (large photographs, color-coded timelines, labeled diagrams) alongside text
- Offer choice in assessment format (written response, oral presentation, artistic creation, multimedia project)
- Allow extended time for reading, analyzing artifacts, and creating the storyboard
- Pair students with peer mentors or provide one-on-one support during group activities
- Simplify guiding questions or provide multiple-choice prompts

For Accelerated Learners:

- Provide unedited primary source documents and encourage deeper textual analysis
- Ask students to research and compare the experiences of other Jewish refugees who served in WWII (e.g., soldiers in the British Army, Free French forces, Soviet Red Army)
- Challenge students to investigate the OSS's role in WWII intelligence operations and how refugee agents contributed
- Have students explore the broader context of Displaced Persons (DPs) after WWII and the challenges of resettlement
- Encourage students to create a multimedia presentation or podcast episode on Jewish resistance and resilience during WWII
- Invite students to conduct comparative analysis: How did Bernd's experience differ from other survivors? What factors enabled his resilience?

Universal Supports:

- Provide clear, written instructions for all activities
- Use multimodal learning (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, written)
- Offer choice in grouping structures (pairs, small groups, whole class)
- Build in reflection time and opportunities for students to process emotions
- Normalize the use of "pass" or "take a break" during sensitive discussions

Assessments

Students will demonstrate their learning through multiple formative and summative assessments:

Formative Assessments:

1. **Safe-In/Safe-Out Reflection** ([Handout 2](#)) – During Introduction
 - Students identify personal coping strategies and safety measures for engaging with challenging content
2. **Think, Feel, Learn, Remember** ([Handout 3](#)) – During Introduction
 - Students record initial thoughts and emotions about hearing a survivor's story
3. **Artifact Analysis Worksheet** ([Handout 4](#)) – During Group Activity
 - Students answer guided questions about primary source photographs and documents from Bernd's life
 - Teacher circulates to monitor comprehension and identify misconceptions
4. **Group Presentation** – During Sharing Out
 - Groups present their analysis of artifacts and identity mapping to the class
 - Teacher assesses depth of understanding and quality of evidence-based reasoning
5. **Exit Ticket / Reflection** – End of Lesson
 - Students respond to: *"How did Bernd's identity change throughout his life? What surprised you most about his story?"*
 - Options: Written response, quick sketch, or verbal response to a partner

Summative Assessment:

Personal Identity Map Storyboard ([Handout 1](#)) – Choice Board:

Students complete the 6-panel storyboard reflecting on their own identity development. They can choose to:

- **Focus on one major theme:** How has a specific aspect of identity (cultural heritage, language, family role, personal values) shaped who they are?
- **Trace a transformation:** Show how a significant life event changed their perspective or sense of self
- **Explore multiple identities:** Illustrate the different roles they play (student, friend, family member, athlete, artist, etc.) and how these come together to form their whole identity

Grading Rubric for Personal Identity Map Storyboard

Lesson / Activity: Step-by-Step Plan

Content Warning

Before beginning this lesson, provide students with the following context:

"Due to the themes of violence, hatred, discrimination, and persecution that this lesson addresses, it is recommended that students receive advanced notice. This lesson explores Nazi persecution of Jews, including the use of identification documents to mark and isolate Jewish people. While we will discuss these difficult topics, we will do so through the lens of a survivor's resilience, courage, and resistance. We will also celebrate Bernd Stevens' contributions to the fight against Nazi tyranny. This is part of an ongoing conversation about how hatred affects communities and how individuals respond with courage and hope. If at any point you feel you need to take a break, please let me know. Your well-being is important."

Introduction (15–20 minutes)

Step 1: Safe-In/Safe-Out Activity (5 minutes)

- Distribute [Handout 2: Safe-In/Safe-Out Reflection Worksheet](#)
- Explain: *"Before we hear Bernd's story, we're going to create a safe space for this conversation. A 'Safe-In' is something that helps you feel grounded and ready to engage. A 'Safe-Out' is a strategy you can use if you need a break."*
- Examples:
 - **Safe-In:** Deep breathing, sitting with a supportive peer, having water, remembering why this story matters, looking at a meaningful object
 - **Safe-Out:** Asking to step out, raising your hand for a break, journaling quietly, moving to a designated calm space, taking a walk
- Students write 1–2 Safe-Ins and 1–2 Safe-Outs on their worksheet
- Collect these (keep on file; remind students of them throughout the lesson)

Step 2: Introduction to Survivor Testimonies & Identity (5 minutes)

- Explain: *"Today we're going to learn about Bernd Stevens, a Holocaust survivor and a hero in a different way — he didn't just survive; he fought back. His story is important because it shows us how identity can change and adapt, and how one person's choices can make a difference. Survivor testimonies are primary sources, real accounts from real people. They help us see the human side of history."*
- Show [Handout 3: Preparing to Hear a Survivor](#) – Think, Feel, Learn, Remember Activity

- Read aloud or have students silently reflect:
 - **Think:** What do you already think about this topic?
 - **Feel:** What emotions come up for you?
 - **Learn:** What do you hope to learn?
 - **Remember:** Why is it important to remember these stories?
- Students complete their worksheet individually (3 minutes)
- Optional: Invite 2–3 volunteers to share one word from their reflection

Opening Discussion: What Is Identity? (10–15 minutes)

Activate Prior Knowledge with Guiding Questions:

Ask students to think-pair-share on the following prompts:

1. *"What does the word 'identity' mean to you? What makes you, you?"* (Allow 1–2 minutes for pair discussion; invite 2–3 responses)
2. *"Can identity change over time? What kinds of events or experiences might change how you see yourself?"* (Encourage personal examples or hypothetical scenarios)
3. *"Can a person have more than one identity at the same time?"* (Clarify: Yes—we all have multiple roles and identities: student, friend, family member, athlete, artist, etc.)



Teacher Note: Use responses to gauge student understanding of identity as multifaceted and dynamic. If students struggle, offer examples:

- A student can be a daughter/son, a soccer player, a math tutor, and an artist all at once
- Someone's identity might shift when they move to a new country, start a new school, or experience a major life event
- External circumstances (like discrimination or persecution) can force identity changes, but internal values can remain constant

Introduction to the Iceberg Theory of Identity (8–10 minutes)

Present the Iceberg Model:

Display the **Iceberg Theory of Identity** using your Google Slides presentation. Explain: *"Identity is like an iceberg. What people see on the surface—your appearance, clothing, the way you speak—is only a small part of who you really are. Most of your identity is hidden below the surface. Your beliefs, values, family history, culture, experiences, and emotions make up the deeper parts of your identity. These hidden parts are often the most important and most powerful."*

Iceberg Breakdown:

Surface Level (Visible):

- Physical appearance
- Clothing and style
- Language/accent
- Behaviors in public

Below the Surface (Hidden but Powerful):

- Beliefs and values
- Family background and history

- Cultural traditions
- Personal experiences
- Emotions and feelings
- Hopes and dreams
- Fears and struggles
- Religious or spiritual beliefs



Teacher Note: *"During times of persecution, like what Bernd experienced, people often have to hide the deeper parts of their identity to stay safe. They might change how they look, speak, or act—but their true identity is still there, hidden below the surface. Understanding this helps us see why identity is so important and why people fight so hard to protect it."*

Discussion Question:

- *"What parts of Bernd's identity do you think were visible, and what parts do you think he had to hide during Nazi persecution?"*

Mini-Lecture & Historical Context: Bernd Stevens' Life (20–25 minutes)

Step 1: Timeline & Overview (10 minutes)

Present using the [Google Slides Presentation](#):

Bernd Steinitz: Born in Germany, 1920s

- Born into a German Jewish family in Munich
- Grew up in a thriving Jewish community
- Was an accomplished skier and athlete
- His identity: German, Jewish, athletic, educated, hopeful for the future

The Rise of Nazism & Persecution (1933–1940)

- As Hitler rose to power, life changed dramatically for German Jews
- Antisemitic laws stripped Jews of rights, jobs, and citizenship
- Jewish children were expelled from schools
- At age 15, Bernd was removed from the German Olympic Ski Team because of his Jewish identity
- Identification documents (like the Kennkarte) were marked with a prominent "J" to identify Jews for persecution
- During Kristallnacht (1938), Bernd risked his life to save his family's business valuables
- His father was arrested; the family business was destroyed
- Bernd's identity became dangerous—his Jewish identity made him a target
- His identity: Persecuted, fearful, hidden, searching for escape

Escape & Military Service (1940–1945)

- Bernd managed to escape Germany and fled to the United States in 1939
- He settled in Tennessee and tried to rebuild his life
- When the U.S. entered WWII in 1941, Bernd enlisted in the U.S. Army
- He was recruited into the OSS (Office of Strategic Services)—a covert intelligence agency
- He was trained as a spy and given a false identity: "Lt. Peter Hartley"
- He used his language skills, intelligence, and bravery to fight against the Nazis
- He parachuted into Nazi-occupied Europe on dangerous missions
- When captured by the Gestapo, he was able to negotiate his own release
- His identity: Soldier, spy, refugee, avenger, fighter for freedom

Post-War Life in America (1945–2019)

- After the war, Bernd learned that his father and brother had been murdered in the Holocaust
- He changed his name to "Bernd Stevens" and built a new life in California
- He became an accountant, married, and raised children
- He maintained his Jewish identity and heritage while building an American life
- For decades, his OSS work was classified; his family didn't know the full story
- In his later years, he became a public speaker and advocate, sharing his story with students and communities
- In 2019, at age 98, he received the Congressional Gold Medal for his wartime service
- His identity: American, businessman, educator, survivor, witness, storyteller, hero

Group Activity: Artifact Analysis & Identity Mapping (25–35 minutes)

Step 1: Divide into Groups & Assign Life Stages (2 minutes)

Divide students into 4 groups.

Assign each group one of the following time periods from Bernd Stevens' life:

- **Group 1:** Pre-War Germany (1920s–1933)
- **Group 2:** Nazi Persecution (1933–1940)
- **Group 3:** OSS Service & Military (1940–1945)
- **Group 4:** Post-War America (1945–2019)

Step 2: Artifact Analysis (10–15 minutes)

Distribute [Handout 4: Bernd Stevens' Artifact Analysis Worksheet](#) to each group.

Instructions for Groups:

- Examine the photographs and documents assigned to your time period
- Discuss and answer the guided questions provided in your handout
- Use specific details from the artifacts to support your answers
- Think about the historical context and circumstances Bernd faced during this time



Teacher Note: Circulate among groups to facilitate discussion, ask clarifying questions, and support analysis. This is an opportunity for formative assessment—listen for evidence of deep thinking and historical understanding.

Step 3: Create an Identity Map (8–10 minutes)

Each group creates a visual identity map for their assigned time period using [Handout 5: Identity Mapping Activity](#). This can be:

- A web diagram with Bernd's name in the center and branches showing different aspects of his identity
- A character analysis chart
- A visual representation on poster paper or digital format

Identity Map Should Include:

- **Name(s):** What was Bernd called during this period?
- **Roles:** What were his primary roles or identities?
- **Beliefs/Values:** What did he believe? What mattered to him?

- **Appearance/External Markers:** How did he present himself? How was he marked or identified by others?
- **Nationality/Citizenship:** Where did he belong (or not belong)?
- **Internal Conflicts:** What internal struggles or contradictions did he face?
- **How He Was Seen:** How did others perceive him during this time?
- **Surface vs. Hidden Identity:** What parts of his identity were visible? What parts were hidden below the surface?

Sharing Out & Class Discussion (20–25 minutes)

Step 1: Group Presentations (12–15 minutes)

Each group presents their identity map and artifact analysis to the class (2–3 minutes per group).

Presentation Guidelines:

- Describe the artifacts your group analyzed
- Explain how Bernd's identity changed during this period
- Share one key insight about how external circumstances or personal choices shaped his identity
- Ask the class one reflection question



Teacher Tips:

- Affirm each group's work and insights
- Ask clarifying questions to deepen understanding
- Connect presentations to the larger narrative of Bernd's life
- Make connections to the Iceberg Theory of Identity: *"What parts of Bernd's identity were visible during this period? What parts were hidden?"*

Step 2: Whole-Class Reflection Discussion (8–10 minutes)

Facilitate a discussion using the following prompts:

1. *"How did Bernd Stevens' identity shift across these four time periods?"*
2. *"What was within Bernd's control? What was outside his control?"*
3. *"Were some parts of his identity more important than others? Which parts stayed constant, and which changed?"*
4. *"Can one person hold multiple identities at the same time? How did Bernd do this?"*
5. *"How did Bernd protect or adapt his identity to survive? How did he use his identity as a weapon against hatred?"*
6. *"What does Bernd's story teach us about resilience and resistance?"*
7. *"Looking at the Iceberg Theory of Identity, what do you think was most important about Bernd's identity, the visible parts or the hidden parts? Why?"*

Facilitation Tips:

- Use wait time (allow 5–10 seconds of silence for thinking)
- Affirm student responses and build on their ideas
- Encourage students to reference specific artifacts or details from their analysis
- If discussion lags, share a brief teacher reflection or re-read a powerful moment from Bernd's story
- Encourage students to make connections: *"Who can add to what [student name] said?"* or *"Does anyone have a different perspective?"*



Personal Identity Map Storyboard Activity (30–40 minutes)

**This is the summative assessment and can be done in class or as homework (or split across both).*

Step 1: Introduction to Storyboard Activity (3–5 minutes)

Explain: *"Now that we've explored Bernd's changing identity, you're going to reflect on your own. You'll create a 6-panel storyboard that tells the story of your identity, how you've changed, grown, and become who you are today. This is your personal story."*

Display or share the [Handout 1: Personal Identity Map Storyboard Instructions](#) with students.

Step 2: Review the 6 Panels (5 minutes)

Walk through each panel:

1. **Beginning: Core Influences** – Draw yourself with symbols or images showing an important part of who you are (family, culture, beliefs)
2. **More Roles and Influences** – Show a scene that represents discovering new sides of yourself
3. **New Insights or Change** – Illustrate what you learned or realized about yourself at this stage
4. **A Turning Point** – Show a life event or influence that changed you most
5. **Identity Comes Together** – Draw what this stage looks like; what have you learned about yourself?
6. **Who I Am Now** – Show how all parts of your identity come together to shape who you are today

Provide Examples:

- Panel 1: A child with parents, grandparents, cultural symbols (food, language, holidays)
- Panel 2: The same child at school, making friends, discovering interests
- Panel 3: A moment of realization or growth (learning something new, overcoming a fear)
- Panel 4: A turning point (moving to a new place, a family event, a challenge)
- Panel 5: Reflecting on what these experiences taught you
- Panel 6: A representation of the whole person today, with all identities woven together

Step 3: Student Creation (20–30 minutes)

Students work individually to create their 6-panel storyboard using:

- Blank paper or digital template (provided in Handout 1)
- Markers, colored pencils, or digital art tools
- Written reflections for each panel (use prompts from Handout 1)

Teacher Role:

- Circulate to offer encouragement and support
- Ask guiding questions: *"What's important about this part of your story?" / "How did this experience change you?" / "What parts of your identity are visible, and what parts are hidden?"*
- Provide sentence starters if students struggle with writing:
 - *"At the start, I noticed..."*
 - *"I started to realize..."*
 - *"A turning point happened when..."*

- *"After this, I started to..."*
- *"At this point, my identity changed because..."*
- *"In this final stage, my identity comes together because..."*

Differentiation During Activity:

- **EL Students:** Provide word banks, sentence frames, or allow responses in home language first
- **Special Education:** Offer graphic organizers, simplified prompts, or allow shorter responses
- **Accelerated:** Challenge students to make explicit connections to Bernd's story or to explore

Supplemental Resources

- [Anti-Defamation League: The Identity Iceberg](#): Interactive resource & visual explanation of how identity operates on visible and hidden levels¹
- [SAMEDIA: The Personal Dimension of Identity](#): Academic article on identity formation and development²
- [USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia – Jewish Refugees](#): Information on Jewish refugees and their experiences during WWII
- [Yad Vashem – The World Remembers](#): Survivor testimonies and historical documentation
- [Holocaust Museum LA – Bernd Stevens Collection](#) – Full archive of artifacts, photographs, and documents
- [Holocaust Museum LA: Inside the \(Acid-Free\) Box: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at the Bernd Stevens Collection](#): Video exploring artifact preservation and the Bernd Stevens collection at the Holocaust Museum LA



¹ Anti-Defamation League, "The Identity Iceberg," interactive resource, accessed June 15, 2026, <https://adl.org/sites/default/files/The-Identity-Iceberg-WEB-Student/story.html>

² SAMEDIA, "The Personal Dimension of Identity," PDF article, accessed June 15, 2026, <https://www.samdia.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ARTICLE-Personal-Dimension-of-Identity.pdf>.

KEY TIMELINE OF THE HOLOCAUST



Glossary

Allied Forces: The coalition of countries that fought against the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) during World War II (1939–1945). The core Allied powers were the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and China. Their victory ended the war and led to the formation of the United Nations.

Antisemitic/Antisemitism: Hostility toward or hatred of Jews as a religious or ethnic group, often accompanied by social, economic, or political discrimination.

Aryan/Aryanism: The term the Nazis developed to identify the "pure, German race." It was used to describe non-Jewish objects and people. Jews who had "Aryan papers" often possessed forged documents to hide their identity. Failure to produce valid documents could lead to arrest or worse.

Ashkenazi: Jews descended from medieval Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe. They developed distinct religious customs, spoke Yiddish, and make up the majority of the global Jewish population today. The community was heavily impacted by the Holocaust.

Axis Powers: The alliance of Germany, Italy, and Japan during WWII. They sought territorial expansion and were defeated by the Allied Forces in 1945.

Bar Mitzvah: A Jewish coming-of-age ceremony for boys at age 13, marking their religious and moral responsibility. The female equivalent is Bat Mitzvah, usually at age 12 or 13.

Child Survivor: An individual who was under the age of 18 either at the start or end of the Holocaust and survived under extraordinary circumstances.

Citizenship: Legal status as a member of a country with associated rights and responsibilities.

Concentration Camp: Camps used by the Nazis for imprisonment, forced labor, and mass murder of Jews and others. There were over 40,000 camps and ghettos across Europe.

Death Camp: Six camps in Nazi-occupied Poland (Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek) where mass exterminations were carried out, mostly of Jews.

Diaspora: The dispersion of a people from their homeland; refers to communities living outside their ancestral homeland.

Discrimination: Unjust or prejudicial treatment of individuals based on their membership in a particular group.

Farhud: A violent pogrom against Jews in Baghdad, Iraq, on June 1–2, 1941. Influenced by Nazi propaganda, it marked the beginning of increased persecution of Iraqi Jews.

Genocide: Coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944, the term describes the deliberate, systematic attempt to destroy a group of people, often based on race, religion, ethnicity, or nationality.

Gestapo: The official state secret police of Nazi Germany, responsible for surveillance, terror, and mass murder.

Ghetto: Originally from 16th-century Venice, the term was later used by the Nazis to describe confined urban areas where Jews were forced to live before being deported to camps.

Hanukkah (Chanukah): An eight-day Jewish holiday celebrating the rededication of the Second Temple and the miracle of oil lasting eight days. Celebrated with menorah lighting and traditional foods.

Hatikvah: Hebrew for "The Hope," it is Israel's national anthem, expressing the Jewish longing to return to and live freely in their ancestral homeland.

Holocaust: The systematic, state-sponsored genocide of 6 million Jews and millions of other minorities by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945.

Iceberg Theory of Identity: A conceptual framework showing that identity operates on two levels—visible surface characteristics (appearance, clothing, language, behaviors) and hidden, deeper dimensions (beliefs, values, family history, experiences, emotions).

Identity: The mix of traits, roles, experiences, beliefs, and cultural heritage that makes a person unique; includes both visible characteristics and hidden dimensions.

Kennkarte: German identification card used during WWII to mark and track citizens, including Jews. The prominent "J" marked Jews for persecution.

Kosher: Jewish dietary laws (Kashrut) outlining which foods are permitted and how they must be prepared and consumed.

Kristallnacht: Usually referred to as the "Night of Broken Glass." It is the name given to the violent anti-Jewish pogrom of November 9th and 10th, 1938. Instigated primarily by Nazi party officials and the SA (Nazi Storm Troopers), the pogrom occurred throughout Germany, annexed Austria, and the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia.

Ladino: A Judeo-Spanish language historically spoken by Sephardic Jews. It combines medieval Spanish with Hebrew, Turkish, and other regional languages.

Multifaceted: Having many different aspects, sides, or dimensions.

Nazi: Member or supporter of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, which ruled Germany under Adolf Hitler from 1933 to 1945.

Nuremberg Laws: The Nuremberg Laws (or Nuremberg Race Laws) defined German citizens as people "of German or related blood." Although Judaism is a religion and a culture, the Nazis defined Jews as a separate race. German Jews who had lived in Germany for generations lost their citizenship, were denied basic rights, and prohibited from marrying or having relationships with German non-Jews.

OSS (Office of Strategic Services): A U.S. intelligence agency formed during WWII to conduct espionage and support resistance movements. Predecessor to the CIA.

Passover (Pesach): A Jewish holiday commemorating the Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt. Celebrated with a Seder meal and the telling of the Exodus story.

Persecution: Systematic harassment, discrimination, or violence directed at a group of people.

Pogrom: The organized destruction of a certain group of people. Used to describe acts of violence and persecution against Jews throughout history. The word is derived from Russian, implying "havoc" and "to harm."

Primary Source: Original documents, artifacts, or accounts created during or immediately after an event.

Purim: A joyful Jewish holiday celebrating the events in the Book of Esther, when Jews were saved from persecution in ancient Persia. Marked by costumes, charity, and feasts.

Refugee: A person forced to flee their home country due to war, persecution, or disaster. Protected under international law.

Resilience: The ability to recover from difficulty, adapt to change, and maintain core values and sense of self despite hardship.

Resistance: Active opposition or defiance against oppression, persecution, or tyranny; can take many forms, from armed combat to spiritual and cultural resistance.

Sephardic: Jews descended from the Iberian Peninsula. After expulsion from Spain and Portugal, they settled in areas like the Ottoman Empire and spoke Ladino.

Shabbat: The Jewish Sabbath, a day of rest and worship from Friday evening to Saturday evening, marked by candle lighting, meals, and prayer.

Star of David: A symbol of Judaism that was used by Nazis to mark and isolate Jews during the Holocaust, requiring them to wear yellow or blue stars in public.

Stereotype: A fixed, oversimplified belief about a group of people that ignores individual differences.

Synagogue: A Jewish house of worship where services, prayer, and community gatherings are held.

Testimony: A firsthand account or personal story, often given by a witness to historical events.

Visa: Official permission granted by a country allowing a foreigner to enter, stay in, or travel through that country.

World War I: Also called "The Great War," it lasted from 1914 to 1918. It introduced modern warfare and left Europe politically and economically destabilized. The harsh Treaty of Versailles led to conditions that helped fuel WWII.

World War II (WW2): A global war from 1939 to 1945 involving most of the world's nations. Fought between the Axis and Allied powers, it resulted in massive destruction, the Holocaust, and significant geopolitical changes.

Yiddish: A language spoken by Ashkenazi Jews, combining Hebrew, German, and Slavic elements. It was widely used in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust.

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