ELA 7

BAM Holocaust background Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Hour\_\_\_\_\_

**World War I:**

World War I was fought in Europe, Asia, and Africa between July 28, 1914, and November 11, 1918. On one side were the United States, Russia, France, Great Britain, and their allies. The other side included Germany, Austria, Hungary, and their allies. The Nazis came to power after World War I largely because the existing German government was unable to solve severe postwar problems.

**World War II:**

The war fought mainly in Europe, Asia, and Africa from September 1, 1939 to August 14, 1945, is called World War II. It began when Hitler’s armies invaded Poland, and Britain and France came to the Poles’ rescue. Eventually the war involved most of the world. The major conflict was between Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union on one side, and Germany, Italy, and Japan on the other.

**What is the Holocaust?**

It has been said that because one man lived, 55 million people died. That man was Adolf Hitler, leader of the Nazi party and dictator of Germany from 1933 to 1945. An evil person with an unquenchable thirst for power, Hitler led his country and the world into a second global war that was a nightmare beyond comparison. No other war ever caused so much destruction and death.

Hitler waged war for two reasons: to rule the world and to make all conquered peoples the slaves of the “master German race.” He came very close to accomplishing both of those goals.

Most of the 55 million people who died in the war were soldiers, prisoners of war, and civilians living in combat zones. All these war-related deaths are called *casualties*. However, the Nazis killed one group of people not because they were the enemy, but because they were Jews. This was deliberate murder.

People had tried to destroy one another in wars before, but Hitler’s crime against the Jewish people was unique in scope, force, and organization. In fact, his crime provided our dictionaries with a new word, genocide. It means “the planned killing of an entire racial or cultural group of people.”

Why did Hitler have Jews murdered? His hatred of this minority group cannot be explained. It consumed his mind like a dreadful disease. For seven years after he came to power, he sent his men to harass Jews, steal their possessions, force them into slavery, and starve them. But slavery, he decided, was too good an existence for Jews.

In 1941 Hitler’s mania progressed: he decided Jews were even unfit for life. He ordered his Nazis to systematically kill every last Jew in Europe. He almost accomplished that goal, too.

The Allies brought the German armies to defeat just four years after Hitler’s order to kill. By then, six of the nine million Jewish men, women, and children of continental Europe were dead. One and a half million of the children had been under the age of 14. All the victims had been starved, tortured, shot, gassed, or burned to death. After the war, the Allies captured and punished many Nazi war criminals for this terrible crime.

The word *holocaust* means “a fire that causes total destruction.” Because this mass killing of Jews was like a great fire burning everything and everyone in its path, the term Holocaust is used to describe it.

Were Jews the only ones to suffer? No, brutal Nazi murders had extended to at least five million other innocents. Victims included Russians, Poles, Czechs, Slavs, Gypsies, and others whom the Nazis called “inferior races.” Gypsies were especially targeted for mass killings. The Hitlerites killed between 270,000 and 500,000 Gypsies of all ages seemingly without any pangs of conscience. Some historians estimate the loss of Gypsies living in Europe to be as great as 80 percent.

However, of all the 11 million victims, Jews alone were slated for annihilation. Hitler’s goal was to make the world *Judenrein,* or free of Jews. So, just for them, his killers formed searching parties. Only for Jews was a specific railway system organized to remove them from every European country under Nazi control. And especially for Jews were death camps in Poland designed with equipment to handle mass murder on a grand scale.

Was the Jewish slaughter solely a German crime? No; it was a Nazi crime. All Germans were not Nazis, nor were all Nazis Germans. Many Europeans besides Germans joined the Nazi party. Others who held prejudices against Jews collaborated with Nazi Jew hunters and turned in their Jewish neighbors. And still others in Europe and the free world who were in a position to help the victims stood by and did nothing. So the responsibility of the Holocaust crosses nationality lines and reaches beyond the actual perpetrators of the crime.

Adapted from, *The World of Anne Frank: A Complete Resource Guide* 1984, 1998, J. Weston Walch, Publisher