

**DACHAU
CONCENTRATION
CAMP**



DACHAU CONCENTRATION CAMP

Description

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of the Dachau Concentration Camp, the experiences of camp prisoners throughout its history and how the camp is seen today both by Germans and by the rest of the world.

Subjects

European History, World History, US History, English, Humanities

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- [Dachau Concentration Camp](#)

Essential Questions

- What was the Dachau Concentration Camp?
- Why was it created in 1933?
- How did the camp's role change by the late 1930s?
- What role did the camp play in Hitler's "Final Solution of the Jewish Question"?
- How is Dachau seen today, both by Germans and by the world?

Academic Summary

A man lay dead just in front of the gate. A bullet through his head. One of the Germans we had taken lifted him out of the way and we dismounted and went through the gate into a large cement square about 800 squares surrounded by low black barracks and the whole works enclosed by barbed wire. When we entered the gate not a soul was in sight. Then suddenly people (few could call them that) came from all directions. They were dirty, starved skeletons with torn tattered clothes and they screamed and hollered and cried. They ran up and grabbed us. Myself and the newspaper people and kissed our hands, our feet and all of them tried to touch us. They grabbed us and tossed us into the air screaming at the top of their lungs. I finally managed to pull myself free and get to the gate and shut it so they could not get out. Then I felt something brush my shoulder and I turned to the left of the two block house guarding the gate to find a white flag fluttering square in my face and on the end of it inside the house eight Germans.

I looked around the house and entered. I got the same question, are you an American Officer and said Yes. They turned over their arms, pistols and rifles to me and I told them to sit tight. I then went back outside and sent my driver to get the Jeep. Then I went back into the Germans and took their arms and sent the pistols to my Jeep (I gave all away but two). When I came back out the General was there and the people inside the enclosure were all in the large square shouting and crying. Then a terrible thing happened. Some of them in their frenzy charged the barbed wire fence to get out and embrace us and touch us. Immediately they were killed by an electric charge running through the fence. I personally saw three die that way. Our troops arrived about that time and took the rest of the guards, Germans (who during all this time had remained in the towers around the prison.) A number of them and I sincerely regret that I took the eight prisoners that I did after a trip through Camp which I shall describe in a minute.

Well the General attempted to get the thing organized and an American Major who had been held in the Camp since September came out and we set him up as head of the prisoners. He soon picked me to quiet the prisoners down and explain to them that they must stay in the Camp until we could get them deloused, and proper food and medical care. Several newspaper people arrived about that time and wanted to go through the Camp so we took them through with a guide furnished by the prisoners. The first thing we came to were piles and piles of clothing, shoes, pants, shirts, coats, etc. Then we went into a room with a table with flowers on it and some soap and towels. Another door with the word showers lead off of this and upon going through this room it appeared to be a shower room but instead of water, gas came out and in two minutes the people were dead. Next we went next door to four large ovens where they cremated the dead. Then we were taken to piles of dead. There were from two to fifty people in a pile all naked, starved and dead. There must have been about 1,000 dead in all.

Then we went through a building where fifty men were guarded in a room the size of your kitchen. There were hundreds of typhus cases and all through the Camp men cheered us and tried to touch us. Incidentally many of the dead and living showed signs of horrible beatings and torture. It is unbelievable how any human can treat others as they were treated. One wasted little man came up and touched my sleeve and kissed my hand. He spoke perfect English and I asked him if he were American. He said no, Jewish and that he was one of the very few left that thousands had been killed. He had been there six years. He was twenty-eight years old and looked to be sixty years old. The German I took prisoner are very fortunate they were taken before I saw the Camp. I will never take another German prisoner armed or unarmed. How can they expect to do what they have done and simply say I quit and go scot free. I know now why our men kick and abuse the German prisoners. They are not fit to live.

William Cowling, 1st Lt. 42nd Infantry, US Army, Letter to his parents, 30 Apr 1945

DACHAU, Germany, April 30. -- (AP)--

The U.S. 42nd and 45th divisions captured the infamous Dachau prison camp today and freed its 32,000 captives.

Two columns of infantry, riding tanks, bulldozers and Long Tom rifles - anything with wheels - rolled down from the northwest and surprised the S S (Elite Corps) guards in the extermination camp shortly after the lunch hour.

Score (sic) of S S men were taken prisoners and dozens slain.

The Americans were quickly joined by "trusties" working outside the sprawling barbed wire enclosure. Poles, Frenchmen and Russians seized S. S. weapons and turned them against their captors. Jan Yindrich, British war correspondent, and I saw things that greeted our soldiers - 39 open-type railroad cars standing on a siding which went through the walls of Dachau camp.

At first glance the cars seemed loaded with dirty clothing. Then you saw feet, heads and bony fingers. More than half the cars were full of bodies, hundreds of bodies.

Two SS guards fired into the mass (of prisoners), betraying their presence.

American infantrymen instantly riddled the Germans. Their bodies were hurled down into the moat amidst a roar unlike anything ever heard from human throats.

Almost 100 naked bodies were stacked neatly in the barren room with cement floors (the mortuary). They had come from a room on the left marked "shower bath."

Howard Cowan, Associated Press Report, Chicago Herald-American newspaper, Monday, 30 Apr 1945

Tuesday 1 May 1945

DACHAU is no longer a name of terror for hunted men. 32,000 of them have been freed by the 42d Rainbow Division. The crimes done behind the walls of this worst of Nazi concentration camps now live only to haunt the memories of the Rainbowmen who tore open its gates and first saw its misery, and to accuse its SS keepers of one of the worst crimes in all history.

When Infantrymen of the 42d Division fought their way into Dachau against fanatical SS troops who met deserved violent deaths along the moats, behind the high fences and in the rail yards littered with the bodies of fifty car-loads of their starved victims, these hardened soldiers expected to see horrible sights. But no human imagination fed with the most fantastic of the tales that have leaked out from the earliest and most notorious of all Nazi concentration camps could have been prepared for what they did see there.

The keen descriptive powers of a score of ace correspondents who entered the camp while the battle of liberation was still in progress, and through whose eyes the whole world looked upon that scene, could not do justice to this story. Seasoned as they were by long acquaintanceship with stark reality, these trained observers gazed at freight-cars full of piled cadavers no more than bones covered with skin and they could not believe what they saw with their own eyes.

Rifleman accustomed to witnessing death had no stomach for rooms stacked almost ceiling-high with tangled human bodies adjoining the cremation furnaces, looking like some maniac's woodpile.

And when an officer pressed thru mobs of forgotten men of all nations inside the electric barbed wire enclosure and entered a room where lay the dying survivors of the horror trail, (sic) he wept unashamedly as limp ghosts under filthy blankets, lying in human excreta, tried to salute him with broomstick arms, falling back in deathly stupor from which most would never rouse.

42nd Rainbow Infantry Newsletter, 01 May 1945

On 29 April 1945, during the last days of the Second World War, as Hitler's "Thousand Year Reich" was collapsing after only 12 years, units of American troops from the 42nd Infantry, 45th Infantry and 20th Armored divisions liberated the Dachau Concentration Camp on their way to Munich. As soldiers approached the camp, they were horrified at what they saw: over 32,000 prisoners in a camp built for 5,000. Most of the living were emaciated and weak, obviously victims of torture and mistreatment. Many were on the verge of death.

The Dachau concentration camp had been around since the beginning of Hitler's Reich. Opened on 22 Mar 1933 by then Munich Chief of Police Heinrich Himmler, the camp was originally set up to handle political prisoners and to relieve the growing problem of overcrowded prisons across Germany. Included in this population were over 2000 Catholic priests who opposed Hitler's policies. Dachau would go on to serve as a model for other camps set up by the Nazis over the next decade, not only in Germany, but in German-occupied lands as well. By the end of the 1930s, as Germany entered the Second World War, Dachau was running full force as a labor camp for German and Austrian Jews specializing in the manufacture of munitions. One its most famous prisoners was Princess Sophie Hohenberg of Austria, daughter of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who was held there from 1938 (after the Anschluss) to 1945 (in somewhat better conditions than the other prisoners).

By 1942, when then SS chief Himmler was put in charge of carrying out the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question", Dachau had become more of an extermination camp

than one focused on labor (although not a full-fledged “death camp” akin to Auschwitz). Over the next three years, thousands of prisoners died of disease, beatings or starvation, or were executed by camp guards. American troops reported finding train cars full of dead prisoners when the camp was liberated in 1945.

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of the Dachau Concentration Camp, the experiences of camp prisoners throughout its history and how the camp is seen today both by Germans and by the rest of the world.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the basic facts of the Nazi’s “final solution to the Jewish question.”
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the story behind the Dachau Concentration Camp.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Dachau is seen by Americans and the world today.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What accounts for hatred and brutality towards others? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed below. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Brief Overview of the Holocaust Dachau (20 min)
- Video – Dachau Documentary (30 min for all 3 parts)
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles about Anne Frank and the Holocaust taking notes as appropriate. (15 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles for homework before class to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Assign different readings to different student groups.
- For advanced, AP or IB students, reading Elie Wiesel’s book Night is appropriate.
- Group Activity – Discussion on Dachau and the Holocaust. (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail the history of the Dachau Concentration Camp, its place in the Holocaust and how Germany and the world see Dachau today.

Extension

On tour: Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site

While on tour, students traveling in Bavaria will have the opportunity to visit the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, where they can see for themselves the horrors of Hitler's "Final solution", including the roll call area, the prison barracks and the crematorium area. The camp today has been preserved as a memorial to those who lived, worked, suffered and died in concentration camps throughout Germany and the German-occupied lands. There are guided tours and a documentary film (restricted to age 12+). Please prepare students for what they will see, as visiting Dachau can be an emotionally trying and traumatic experience for many adults and young people.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.nizkor.org/hweb/camps/dachau/
The Nizkor Project: Dachau (website) – contains primary and secondary sources on Dachau and other concentration camps, including primary sources detailing the use of prisoners at Dachau for medical experiments in 1942.
- www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005214
Dachau (website) – from the United States Holocaust Museum
- www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/dachautoc.html
Concentration Camps: Dachau (website) – from the Jewish Virtual Library. Contains primary and secondary sources on all the major concentration camps, including Dachau.
- www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/dach-early.htm
The Early Days of Dachau (website) – from the History Place. Details what Dachau was like in 1933-34.
- www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/dachau.htm
Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site (website) – by Professor Harold Marcuse, Department of History, University of California Santa Barbara. Highly recommended for students and teachers – contains excellent primary and secondary sources, including photographs, newspaper articles and some of the professor’s own writings on Dachau.
- www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de/
KZ – Gedenkstaette Dachau (website) – official website for the Dachau Concentration Camp memorial (in English).
- www.evesmag.com/dachau.htm
Dachau, May Day, 1945 (article) – primary source, written many years after the fact, from Don Rodda, a soldier who helped liberate Dachau.
- remember.org/witness/cowling.html
1st Lt. William Cowling: Report from the Dachau Liberation (primary source)
- www.ibiblio.org/cizewski/felixa/dachau/d1.html
“Dachau Gives Answer to Why We Fought” (article) – primary source from the 45th Division News 13 May 1945
- www.cbsnews.com/pictures/dachau-remembered-80-years-later/
Dachau remembered – 80 years later (website) – primary source photographs from Dachau in 1945 and 2013
- www.holocaustresearchproject.org/othercamps/dachau.html
Dachau: The 1st Concentration Camp (website) – from the Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team
- www.scrapbookpages.com/DachauScrapbook/
Dachau Concentration Camp (website) – outstanding primary and secondary sources. Highly recommended for teachers and students.
- www.thirdreichruins.com/dachau.htm
Third Reich in Ruins: Dachau Concentration Camp (website) – great photographs from 1945 and today.
- <http://www.brownell.edu/>

file.cfm?resourceid=573&filename=Holocaust%20Details%2Eppt
Holocaust PowerPoint – from Mark Smith, AP European History teacher at Brownell Talbot School in Omaha, NE.

- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2 minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCi_PLI-rJs
Dachau Concentration Camp – Documentary – Part 1 (video)
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQvB3sLER34
Dachau Concentration Camp – Documentary – Part 2 (video)
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Xpnl-YyafI
Dachau Concentration Camp – Documentary – Part 3 (video)

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dachau_concentration_camp
Dachau Concentration Camp – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Final_solution
Final Solution – Wikipedia article about the “Final solution to the Jewish Question”
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/germany/country_profile
On the Road: Germany (country profile) – from Passports Educational Travel
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/germany/munich
On the Road: Munich – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/world-war-ii-fall-of-france-1940
World War II (1939-1945) – Fall of France 1940
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/world-war-ii-drancy-concentration-camp
World War II (1939-1945) – Occupied France: Drancy Concentration Camp
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/dachau-concentration-camp
World War II (1939-1945) – Dachau Concentration Camp
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/auschwitz
Auschwitz
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/oskar-schindler-and-the-list
World War II (1939-1945) – Oskar Schindler: the List
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/thenetherlands/anne-frank-diary
Anne Frank: Lost Child of the Holocaust

Key Terms

- Concentration camp
- Dachau Concentration Camp
- Final Solution to the Jewish Question
- Holocaust
- Nazi
- Political prisoner

