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Case Study Data Sheet 6

The Holocaust: Heidi's Dilemma

Background

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was chief of the German Nationalist Socialist Party (Nazi) from 1920 and Chancellor of the Reich from 1933. He held absolute power in Germany and pursued an aggressive, expansionist foreign policy, which led to the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Under Hitler, Germany controlled much of Europe. However, a turning point in the war came in 1943, and by 1945 America and her allies were able to stop Hitler and defeat Germany.

Using the concept of race struggle as the prime force behind human history, Hitler and his followers implemented the most systematic, wide-spread and destructive anti-Semitic policies ever known. While other "non-Aryans" also were subjected to persecution and abuse, Hitler saved his special hatred for the Jews. Jews were depicted as the source of all of Germany's ills and problems. They were viewed as an evil race whose ultimate aim was to destroy the "Aryan" race and dominate the world. The elements of this myth were previously used by German and Austrian anti-Semites at the end of the 19th century; and, in general, anti-Semitism had been common throughout Europe for centuries. Hitler's plan, however, was the most devastating: the total extermination of the Jews. Hitler personally followed and controlled this "final solution" to the "Jewish Problem."

The Holocaust, the massive genocide of six million Jews, is one of the most tragic periods of Jewish history and for all humanity as well. Millions of Jews lived under Nazi rule. Tortured by anxiety, insecure in the present, unable to anticipate the future, Jews were helpless in the face of a machine ready to crush them. Many of the victims had made important contributions to their countries in fields such as science, law, medicine, and the arts. Nonetheless, young or old, rich or poor, educated or ignorant, every Jew was condemned.

The extermination of the Jews in Nazi-controlled territories was carried out in a number of ways. The Jewish victims became slave laborers to be worked to death or shot. There were mass executions of men, women, and children who were forced to dig their own graves. Gold crowns on teeth were knocked out to enrich the German treasury. Fat from human bodies was converted to soap and human skin was made into lampshades, etc. Millions were gassed or burned alive in ovens.

Hitler attempted to keep the destruction of the Jews a secret. Sophisticated methods of deception, fraud, and camouflage were employed to prevent the Jewish community and others from learning of the massacres. The very monstrosity of the events made it seem unbelievable. Despite the secrecy, the truth about the destruction of the Jews was known to certain party and government officials quite early, and stories gradually spread throughout Germany.

Helping a Jew or other minority member could mean death to the person who exhibited such courage. Still, there were countless individual acts of sacrifice and heroism by Jews and non-Jews during this period. Denmark and Holland were two nations who took active roles in helping their Jewish citizens.

The Situation

Heidi is a young Dutch girl who lives in a small house in Amsterdam with her family. She has a best friend named Greta, but lately she has not seen too much of her and when she does see her, Greta is quiet and withdrawn. Heidi wonders if it is because of Germany's new leader, Hitler, and his policies. Greta is Jewish. Heidi has heard the bad things that are being said about the Jews. She does not believe them, because she knows Greta is a good person. One day they do manage to talk, and Greta becomes very upset and finally tells Heidi about the awful persecution and ugly abuse that is going on. In fact, one of Greta's uncles has just been arrested for daring to speak out against Hitler. No one knows what has happened to him. Greta has heard stories of Jews being taken away in the night and never being heard of again. Greta and her family are living in fear. Upset and feeling sorry for her friend, Heidi invites Greta home for dinner.

That night after Greta leaves, Heidi tells her family what Greta has said about the ugly things done to Jews, simply because they are Jews. Heidi's parents are aware of Hitler's particular hatred for the Jews, but they believe it is not wise to speak out against the new order. They do not want to put their own family in jeopardy and so they tell Heidi it would be best not to associate with Greta.

A few hours later Heidi answers a knock on the door. It is Greta and she looks terrified with tears streaming down her face. "Heidi, I went home after dinner—my family was gone, but their dinner was still on the table, and there were spots that look like blood by the door. They have been taken, I know it. What can I do now? I have no place to go. Will you help me?"

Heidi must make a big decision. There is a secret room in the attic where Heidi often goes to be alone. She is afraid for Greta and wants to help her. But she knows her own family's safety will be in danger if she helps her friend. What should Heidi do? Should she take Greta to the secret room? Should she ask her family to help?

* *Take out your Individual Report Form and read the directions.*

Holocaust Questions

- I. If your decision was to get involved (and to help Greta):
 - A. How would you help Greta? Would you hide her in the secret room?
 - B. Would you tell your parents?
 - C. If Greta had another place to stay, an aunt's house, would you suggest she go there after a few days?
- II. If your decision was not to get involved (not to help Greta):
 - A. If your family encouraged your friendship to Greta, would your decision have been different?
 - B. If Greta asked you to help her hide for just a few days, until she could make arrangements to go to her aunt's in another city, would your decision have been different?
- III. The basis of the Holocaust was a myth conceived by Hitler to promote his policies at the expense of the Jews. How does one expose this myth?
- IV. What actions would have helped to save the Jews:
 - A. Speaking out against the regime?
 - B. Helping Jews and other minorities to escape?
 - C. Spreading word of the atrocities to other lands?
 - D. Other:
- V. The monstrosity of the crimes made the Holocaust seem unbelievable. What actions could/should be taken by individuals or countries to prevent this type of disaster from happening again?
- VI. What would you risk your life for? Under what circumstances, if any, would you put your family in jeopardy?

Individual Report Form

Name: _____

I. After reading the case study, complete part I (A and B) independently before going on to group discussion.

A. Case Study Data Sheet # _____

Title of Case Study _____

Name of bystander in this case _____

B. Your Decision...

1. What was your decision?
2. How did you reach your decision?
3. What is likely to happen as a result of your decision?

II. Appoint one person to be the group leader. The group leader will lead discussion. Begin your discussion only after all group members have answered the questions in part I.

A. Group Discussion

1. What was the issue in the case?
2. What decision did each individual in your group reach?
3. Turn to your Case Study Data Sheet. Beginning with part I., discuss each question as a group, and write answers to each question on the back of this form.

III. Stop! Your teacher will conduct a Group Leader Panel.

Discussion

IV. After the Group Leader Panel Discussion, answer the following questions on the back of this sheet.

A. On Reflection...

1. Did the discussion by the small group and panel change your opinion on this issue? If so, explain.
2. When should someone take a stand?
3. What are some conflicts that may arise that could make it difficult for someone to take a stand?
4. Can you recall any situations when you have been a bystander? What was the situation and what did you do?
5. Do citizens have a responsibility toward their fellow citizens? If so, how much?