

# The holocaust – college



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A subject most people would like to forget but shouldn't. People must find out as much as possible about it so history won't repeat itself. Millions of Jewish men, women, and children, of all strata were persecuted because of what? Nothing besides the fact that they were Jewish.

Most Jews living in Germany, Austria, Poland, France or practically anywhere else in Europe were sent to concentration camps. There they were either tortured or killed. In The book Devil in Vienna, by Doris Orgel, Inge a young, intelligent Jewish girl is faced with the same types of problems. Being Jewish at that time was no small problem. Instead of worrying what to wear the next day, she would have to worry about whether or not her family would be safe or taken to a concentration camp. Inge not only had to face the problem of keeping her family together, she had to find a way to maintain a friendship with her best friend Lieselotte.

Lieselottes father was a Nazi and forbade her to keep any contact with Inge, but the two girls would always find a way to see or write to each other even when things were rough. Inges father also began to disprove of their friendship and pretty soon if either one were to mention the others name she would be punished. Yet the girls refused to forget each other. One day Inge received the news. She was to move away to Yugoslavia to escape Hitlers regime. The girls promised to never forget each other and they never did; even long after the war was over.

I think Doris Orgel did a wonderful job in portraying these girls as people who would forget their differences and what others said in order to maintain a close bond. I think She did this well because she lived in Austria at that same

time and had to leave several of her friends when she escaped to Yugoslavia. If one were to look through the pages of a few holocaust books, they would be sickened and would have to force themselves to continue.

Horrorful accounts of genocide, abuse, starvation, and death fill the pages of these books telling stories about the suffering of Jews in concentration camps. Concentration camps were setup throughout Europe for one single purpose: to get rid of Jews. Many of these camps were kept secret in order to keep people from acting against them.

The people who did know about the existence of these camps most likely were not aware of the number of killings and the horrible living conditions. Jews who were sent to concentration camps did not know what was coming to them. Camp living conditions were atrocious. People sent to the camps were fed the very bare minimum, never bathed, were frequently beaten, given the worst sleeping quarters, and killed in mass numbers by carbon monoxide gassing, shooting and being cremated alive. The people in charge of the camps were allowed to do anything they pleased, no matter how violent and abusive.

Often they would make Jews do embarrassing and painful things just out of pure hatred, such as walk around naked, dig their own grave before being shot, and work until they would die.

It may not seem true, but it is all too real, and it was caused almost single-handedly by Hitler. Adolf Hitler, the man who was ultimately responsible for having thousands of Jews executed, was born on April 20, 1889 in Austria-Hungary, one of five children from his father's third marriage (three died

during childhood). He grew up in what we now call a “ broken home”. His father was a violent ill-tempered man who would frequently resort to beatings to silence his children. His mother spoiled him with material goods, maybe out of maternal anxiety. Although Hitler was never encouraged to try his best, he was punished when he did not do well.

This may explain why he acted the way he did when he grew up. Hitler did not do much better at school than he did at home. He was a poor student, not because he wasn't intelligent but rather because he never applied himself. His teachers often complained that he was lazy and disrespectful.

In 1905, two years after the death of his father, as his situation at home worsened, Hitler dropped out of school. After leaving school Hitler would spend his days roaming around the streets and drawing anything which sparked his interest. Eventually he met Kubizek, the man who would end up being his only true friend. Kubizek recalled Hitler as a very disturbed young man with a gentle caring side. Hitler finally decided to apply to art school, but when he was not accepted there he fell into a deep depression and began to plot revenge against anyone who had done any wrong to him.

He would go to anti-Semitic meetings in abandoned taverns and basements and eventually became the president of one of those organizations. Anti-Semitic organizations grew larger with time and before long Hitler got to run most of them. Members of anti-Semitic organizations believed that Jews were bad and Germans were good and would not stop at anything to carry out their beliefs. Hitler became totally obsessed with anti-Semitism and although he said some outrageous things, for one reason or another people listened.

Hitler had one main dream and that was to conquer the world starting with his homeland, Austria.

Austria was once a peaceful country, with sweeping hillsides and quiet towns until one day - the day Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany. Soon he started invading neighbor countries, and Austria was one of the first to feel its horrible effects. This however did not happen suddenly and without warning.

For several years the Austrian government was slowly deteriorating as its socialist government was losing its grip of power.

The Heimwehr, a fascist paramilitary organization was gaining strength and eventually took over. After proposing a plebiscite in 1938, Kurt von Schuschnig was forced to resign by Hitler, and all other political parties were abolished, except for the Fatherland Front. The Anschluss (annexation) of Austria was completed on March 12, 1938, before the plebiscite had a chance to take place. A Nazi government immediately took over, and Austria was divided into seven administrative districts.

This was around the time the holocaust began. In the meantime, the Austrian economy continued to move in a downward slope. Austria remained occupied by Germany during the entire Second World War. In 1943, with the Allies beginning to push the German army backwards, an independent Austria was considered one their goals.

The Moscow Declaration signed by the US, Great Britain and the USSR stated this principle.

By early 1945 the Eastern part of Austria was liberated by the Soviet army, with the Western part following a few months later. With the end of World War II, Austria became free of Nazism, independent, neutral and began to rise once again. Its industry, which had totally collapsed as result of the war, was helped with funds from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, and the country started prospering again. While Skimming through a few research books, I came across a very startling fact. While Jewish people were in concentration camps, they were forced to dig their own mass graves then stand in front of it to get shot in the head and fall in the pit that they dug.

Any Jews who were chosen to live had to pick up corpses of dead people strewn about the camp and either bury them or cremate them. I also learned that there were over one million Jewish men, women, and children who were sent to concentration camps. However, not even two thirds of those Jews ever made it out alive. Not all of the Jewish who were slain were killed in concentration camps several of them were killed in public or sent to mobile gassing chambers set up in vans.

once in those chambers, they inhaled carbon monoxide and other poisonous gasses. I always thought that the Holocaust was a sad event, but the further along I got on my project, the harder it became to continue. I learned that not only Jewish people were sent to concentration camps, but also Gypsies, Blacks or anyone else who opposed the Government or Hitler. These people were not treated as poorly as Jews were, but still received beatings and were faced with partial starvation.

Many people would hide Jewish families in their homes, churches and businesses. Those who did were wonderful people because by doing this they put their own lives and families in danger. Anyone who was caught hiding a Jewish person from the Nazis faced serious consequences. They were either sent to jail or killed.

The most interesting thing I learned was that although Adolf Hitler was an antisemitist, his father and other relatives were Jewish. Therefore, Hitler had a lot of Jewish blood. (He was almost one half Jewish.) He also had brown hair and brown eyes. This does not comply with his belief that the model German has blonde hair and blue eyes.

His belief in this was so strong that he even had people killed only solely based on the fact that they did not meet "German Standards". He was a very confusing man and very few people understood his reasoning, but for some reason no one seemed to argue when he decided to eliminate Jewish people from German society by sending millions of them to concentration camps.

The book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, had very detailed accounts of the horrendous acts committed upon Jewish people by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Chapter by chapter was filled with facts and real life accounts of Jews and Germans during that time period. It was very formally written and a bit hard to comprehend, but it was also very informative. Chapter five spoke of different ways of deceiving Jews into death.

The camp officers would use such tactics as claiming the Jews were to go into a room in which to shower in when in fact those rooms were gassing

chambers. Once in the chambers, the Jews were exposed to toxic amounts of carbon monoxide and other potent gasses and chemicals after a few breaths of air whomever was in those chambers would die. Chapter nine was about the believed model German characteristics. Almost all others who did not fit the standards were considered to be bad and inferior to those who did meet the standards.

The perfect German person to many people (mostly Hitler) was wealthy, blonde haired, blue eyed and definitely not Jewish.

This is a paradox because Hitler himself had brown hair and brown eyes. His father was Jewish which makes Hitler part Jewish as well. This book supported most of the facts in the book Devil in Vienna which proves that it was historically accurate. It however did not back up certain incidents in the book. This is most likely because these events were not actually recorded or did not even take place but other similar events were recorded.

Doris Orgel probably took facts from the recorded events and created her own fictional scene. Although this project was very time consuming, it taught me a lot about the history of the Holocaust era. The book Devil In Vienna was very informative and historically accurate, yet it was entertaining enough to keep me interested in my reading.

It supported my research on how Jewish people in Austria were discriminated against during the events leading up to and during the Holocaust. The food that Inge and other characters in the book ate were the same type of food many Jewish people ate back then and still do.



These dishes are meatless dishes prepared in a certain way it is called kosher food. The events that took place in the book such as the Plebiscite of Austria, and the Anschluss.(When the Nazi Germans took control of Austria.) actually did take place in real life.

The author of the book, Doris Orgel was accurate in describing major and minor events which took place in the 1930's in Vienna, Austria. One event that is described in the book is the Anschluss.

This was when Adolf Hitler and the Nazis took control of Austria, forcing the chancellor, Schuschnigg, to resign and the national plebiscite to be canceled. The plebiscite was supposed to be deciding on Austria's independence, but since Hitler wanted to conquer Austria he did everything he could to prevent it from taking place. All of the facts the author listed in the book were supported by the research I did in the library. I think she did a fantastic job of depicting the character's thoughts and emotions throughout the Holocaust just as a Jewish person at that same time period would feel.

In conclusion, I feel that I gained a better understanding of the Holocaust. I also learned to manage my time during research days. I feel that this project was a great step towards high school and its many long and difficult assignments. I feel that I have done a good job and put forth a great effort in this assignment.

I hope all of my hard work will pay off not only with a good grade but with a new knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. I believe I will come away from this with great sense of accomplishment and relief.

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