

TEACHER GUIDE: *Some Were Neighbors*

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 7–12

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary

TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 45-60 minutes (extensions available)

This thematic lesson builds on fundamental knowledge and explores a topic in-depth. See options for resources in the *Teacher Preparation* section of this lesson.

RATIONALE

Many believe only Hitler and high-ranking Nazi officials were responsible for the Holocaust. But a crime of such enormous scope and scale, with millions of victims across a vast geographical territory, required help from countless ordinary individuals. Few individuals decided to help or rescue their Jewish neighbors, friends, and coworkers. The fact that a small number of people helped reveals that choices were possible.

In this lesson, students will examine examples of individuals' choices from the "Neighbors" section of the *Some Were Neighbors* online exhibition and think critically about the fears, pressures, and motivations that might have shaped behaviors. For a broader exploration of the website, see the "Extension" section of this lesson.

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How did non-Jewish individuals respond to what was happening to their Jewish neighbors during the Holocaust?
- How did fears, pressures, and motivations shape their decisions?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the end of this lesson, students understand:

- The Holocaust would not have been possible without the active or passive participation of countless ordinary people.
- Ordinary people are not easily categorized into roles like [bystanders](#), [collaborators](#), or [rescuers](#), but rather their behaviors are fluid and could change based on a variety of circumstances. (*For guidance on definitions of terms, read the linked Holocaust Encyclopedia articles*).
- Various motives and pressures informed responses to the persecution of Jewish people.

TEACHER PREPARATION

- Read the *Holocaust Encyclopedia* article [How and why did ordinary people across Europe contribute to the persecution of their Jewish neighbors?](#)
- Explore [Some Were Neighbors](#) online exhibition. The exhibition explores the behaviors and roles of neighbors, teenagers, workers, police, friends, and teachers throughout Europe during the era of the Holocaust. This lesson focuses on the "Neighbors" section.
- Watch the video [Some Were Neighbors](#) (5:30) ([Transcript](#))

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- Review the student [handout](#). *Students could work in groups or individually.*
- *Optional:* For students who need additional background information on the Holocaust, view the “[WWII and the Holocaust](#)” animated map or assign a reading of the “[Introduction to the Holocaust](#)” article.

MODIFICATIONS

Technology and teaching strategies are suggested in the instructional sequence, however, the guide is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications for recording student responses.

LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS

- Activities can be completed in individual or group settings.
- The *Holocaust Encyclopedia* article and series are available in additional languages.
- Students can view similar content from the online exhibition in the Holocaust Encyclopedia [article](#) or the *Some Were Neighbors* [Poster Set](#) (available in additional languages.)

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE:

PREPARING TO EXPLORE THE ONLINE EXHIBITION

1. Explain:

- Many people across Europe participated in the Nazi regime’s persecution and murder of European Jews during the Holocaust. Even in once-peaceful, tolerant communities, people turned against their Jewish neighbors, while a rare few took risks to help those in danger. In this activity, we will explore the questions:
 - How did non-Jewish individuals respond to what was happening to their Jewish neighbors during the Holocaust?
 - How did pressures and motivations shape their decisions?

2. Share definitions:

- **Pressure**-strong influence or burden on the mind or emotions
- **Motivation**-reason for doing something

3. Ask and discuss:

NOTE: This activity is an introduction to encourage students to consider the many motivations and pressures they feel around choices in their own lives. Students should write answers on paper and reflect quietly. A consideration of motivations and pressures teenagers had during the Holocaust for various actions will follow.

- Think of two decisions you have made recently. What motivated or influenced you?
- Can you recognize the role of different pressures or motives on your choices?

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4. Explain:

We will use an online exhibition called *Some Were Neighbors* to examine actions taken during the Holocaust in one German city. First, we will watch a short overview video to provide context, or background information on the exhibition and what questions it explores.

Show the video: [Some Were Neighbors](#) (5:30) ([Transcript](#))

After the video, ask students:

- What kinds of actions and responses are described in the video?
- Thinking about pressures and motivations in your own lives, what do you think the final quote means? “Every individual makes decisions and...every decision is individual.”

5. Explore:

Next, students will explore the choices of people in a town in Germany called Lörrach featured in the online exhibition, [Some Were Neighbors](#).

Explain:

You will use the [handout](#) to research answers to the questions using information from three examples from the “*Neighbors*” category in the online exhibition.

- Follow the instructions on the [handout](#).
- **Distribute (or provide digitally) the student [handout](#).** *(Optional: Divide students into small groups)*

DISCUSSION AND FINAL REFLECTION

6. In small groups or as a whole class, discuss:

- What do these three examples suggest about the roles of ordinary people during the Holocaust?

Return to the key questions.

- How did some individuals respond to what was happening to their Jewish neighbors?
- How did fears, pressures, and motivations shape their decisions?

OPTIONAL

Learn more about the photographs and the individuals in them from this podcast, [12 Years That Shook the World: Watching from the Window](#).

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EXTENSION

Some of the content may not be age appropriate for your students, so it is important to become familiar with the site.

This extension should follow the previous lesson. Students can be assigned different sections of the online exhibition and address the questions on the handout.

Students use this graphic organizer [handout](#) to explore more of the roles and responses of different types of individuals during the Holocaust. Explain to students that they are only examining a few examples from different times and places, and not all actions or choices people made will be included. Remind students that **few individuals decided to help or rescue their Jewish neighbors, friends, and coworkers.**

1. Students, in groups or individually, use a graphic organizer [handout](#) to research answers to the key questions:

- How did some individuals respond to what was happening to their Jewish classmates, coworkers, neighbors, and friends?
- How did fears, pressures, and motivations shape their decisions?

2. Instruct students to explore the theme, then choose an example from the theme that they find important or powerful. The example may be a single image or film, or several paragraphs that tell the evolving story of an individual or family. Make sure to look before or after the chosen example to make sure they read/watch the whole story. *Some of the content may not be age appropriate for your students, so it is important to become familiar with the site.*

3. Have students share the themes they explored, focusing on:

- What might be the fears, motivations of, or pressures on those present for their actions? *(Note: This can be done as a jigsaw or as groups reporting to the whole class)*

4. Final reflection. Return to the key questions:

- How did some individuals respond to what was happening to their Jewish classmates, coworkers, neighbors, and friends?
- How did fears, pressures, and motivations shape their decisions?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

[12 Years That Shook the World Podcast: Watching from the Window](#)

[LESSON: Deconstructing the Familiar](#)

[Holocaust Encyclopedia Articles](#)

- [How and why did ordinary people across Europe contribute to the persecution of their Jewish neighbors?](#)
- [Bystanders](#)
- [Collaboration](#)
- [The Role of Civil Servants](#)
- [The Role of Academics and Teachers](#)

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- [The Role of the German Police](#)
- [Experiencing History](#)
- [Everyday Life: Roles, Motives, and Choices During the Holocaust](#)
- [Teacher Resources Some Were Neighbors: Choice, Human Behavior, and the Holocaust](#)