

# **Picturing Kristallnacht**

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Type of School: Reform movement congregational school, United States  
Course: Post B'nei Mitzvah Program, one day per week  
Category: Holocaust  
Grade Level: 8<sup>th</sup> grade  
Length of Lesson: one hour

## **Summary**

This lesson commemorates Kristallnacht by having students examine how it was a turning point in the treatment of Jews in Germany and Austria. Taught within the context of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Holocaust curriculum, the goal of the lesson is to personalize for students what happened by starting with their own photographs as a way connect to young Jews in Germany and Austria before the Nazi rise to power. We then used Centropa interview excerpts and photographs to learn first-hand memories of Kristallnacht.

## **Background Lesson Information**

1. Context for the Lesson – This was taught in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, supplementary school Holocaust class.
2. Enduring Understandings
  - a. Young Jews, whose lives were similar to our own, experienced Kristallnacht and the Holocaust.
  - b. Kristallnacht was an important turning point in the treatment of Jews under the Nazis.
3. Goals and Objectives:
  - a. Knowledge acquired:
    - i. Students will understand how Jewish lives in Germany and Austria changed as a result of Kristallnacht.
  - b. Skills:
    - i. Storytelling: Students will learn storytelling skills and how to be sensitive to the particular stories of Holocaust survivors and victims.
  - c. Feeling: Students will better understand that history happens to individuals, to have a sense of the impact of large historical events on individual lives. From this students will develop:
    - i. a sensitivity and empathy towards those whose lives have been impacted by events beyond their control.

- ii. an understanding that there is a name and face to everyone who lived through and died in the Holocaust.

4. Centropa resources:

- Film: Central Europe: Introduction, found at <http://centropastudent.org/?typ=sprache&fLang=ENG&movID=21&nID=78&q=m&PHPSESSID=63dda37ae334ee8d09d12a32a9602e11>
- Centropa homepage – [www.centropa.org](http://www.centropa.org)
- Centropa interview excerpts and PowerPoint of photographs of Kristallnacht. (See attached documents.) These texts and photographs, and others related to Kristallnacht, can also be found on the Centropa web site.
- Other primary resources and materials: Student childhood pictures

5. Background skills/lesson.

Students will have learned some of the basic events of the Holocaust. Ideally, before this particular lesson students will have learned about the Nazi rise to power and the Anschluss, the invasion of Austria in March 1938.

### The Lesson

Pedagogy. This lesson includes the following pedagogies:

- Class discussion
- Presentation
- Group activities

Motivating students and parents. Students were instructed to bring a picture of themselves from a happy event they remember; parents were sent several reminders. No one was told why they needed the photograph, creating some curiosity in both students and parents and providing a natural opportunity for parents to discuss what they learned in class with their children.

Body of Lesson.

*Introduction:*

- Students come into class with their photographs and we asked, “What do you use photographs for?” Students talked about where they keep their photographs and what they use them for (hang on wall, to remember people we care about and good times, etc).
- Then we introduced the idea of using photographs to learn about history, and show the Centropa film “Introduction: Central Europe” both to introduce Centropa as an organization and to show how photographs can be used to learn history.
- Provide students with basic facts of Kristallnacht, using some of the photos in the attached PowerPoint, to create a timeline of events leading to and during Kristallnacht.

*Creating a connection:*

Each student comes to the front of the class, shows the photo they brought, and answers the following question about the photo:

- a. Where were you when the picture was taken?
- b. Who is in the picture?
- c. What is happening?
- d. What are two positive adjectives to describe what you felt?

As students present, the teacher writes all the adjectives on the board. (One student did not bring a picture so he was asked to visualize a picture at home, describe it and answer the same questions.)

Then, students viewed childhood photographs of Centropa survivors and they were asked to describe what the children were feeling in the photographs. These adjectives were added to the board.

*Kristallnacht Memories:*

Students then broke into four small groups of 3-4 students each. Each group was given a different account of what happened on Kristallnacht (we used narratives from Chaimowicz, Feldsberg, Kritzer, Steiner – all on the Centropa November Pogrom web site: <http://november1938.centropa.org>), and also under Teaching Materials at [www.centropa.org](http://www.centropa.org), as part of the Picturing Kristallnacht lesson. The group assignment was to read the story and be prepared to retell it in their own words. After 10 minutes the whole group came together and did the following:

- A representative from each group told their survivor's story, and we projected that person's photograph onto the screen while the story was recounted.
- After dramatically erasing all the positive words on the board, the teacher then reviewed the stories with the whole class and asked students for two adjectives from each group to describe what it might have felt like for the Jews whose stories they read. In contrast to the first group of adjectives, these were quite negative.

*Concluding activity:*

As a way for students to reflect on what they learned, we concluded the lesson with a discussion of what the "take-away" was for them. Many responded that they felt a stronger understanding and connection to Kristallnacht after learning about a survivor's real-life experience.

Other questions to discuss include:

- Why is Kristallnacht considered a turning point in the Holocaust history?
- How did Jewish life change as a result of Kristallnacht?
- What do the Centropa photographs tell you about the lives of the Jews at that time?

## Reflections

- The Introductory video is an outstanding trigger for this lesson/discussion.
- Teaching this lesson was exhilarating. The students were very engaged as they eagerly talked about the pictures they brought. Most common picture was a Bar/Bat Mitzvah photo. 8<sup>th</sup> graders LOVE to talk . . . and especially about themselves. Their enthusiasm transferred beautifully to the childhood pictures of survivors, which they could easily relate to – even though they were in black and white.
- There were 14 students present. If the class were much bigger, it might have been much more challenging for the teacher to get through the lesson in one hour and more daunting for the students to listen longer to each other's descriptions of their photograph. With a larger class, we recommend breaking students into smaller groups and have students present their photos to the group. Then, the entire class can provide the adjectives to write on the board and the lesson can proceed as described.
- I would not erase the adjectives we initially put on the board (about their feelings in their own photos). Rather, I would use two colors for the adjectives – one color for those words used to describe their own photos and another color for the words describing the experience of Kristallnacht. This way, students can visually see the range of emotions.
- I co-taught this with the regular teacher – an English teacher by day. He did a great job of getting students to use colorful vocabulary (the word 'nice' was outlawed!).