


## When They Turn Your City Against You: the Anschluss, Kristallnacht, and the Jews. Lesson Plan



*“The Jewish bourgeoisie played an immeasurable role in Viennese culture, both by their cooperation and their promotion of it.... It was apparent that nine-tenths of what the world celebrated as Viennese culture in the nineteenth century was promoted, nourished, or even created by Viennese Jewry. In no other city was it easier to be a European.”*

– Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*

### Essential Questions

During the Holocaust, how did the Nazis transform public places in Vienna, and what did that transformation mean for the Jews who lived there?

How do personal stories add to, or affect your understanding of what occurred in Vienna?

### Rationale

Through personal stories, students will learn about Jewish life in Vienna before, during and after the Anschluss of March 13, 1938. In this way, they will learn how the Holocaust impacted the lives of people who identified so closely with the city they loved.

## Time Required

2-3 class periods

## Teacher Preparation

This lesson has four parts: 1) The Anschluss and responses; 2) Prewar Jewish life in Vienna; 3) Jewish Persecution and Humiliation; and 4) Postwar Jewish life in Vienna.

This lesson includes everything that you and your students should need to be successful towards answering the essential questions and much more. It includes necessary and helpful context, questions to address, diverse strategies and opportunities for discussion and assessment.

## Procedure

### Part I: The Anschluss and Responses

**Objective:** This part sets the stage for how the adulation of most Austrians contrasts with: 1) who/what isn't shown in the images and pictures presented, and 2) the effects of what the Anschluss, or "joining" meant for the Jews who lived in Vienna, Austria

#### Step 1

- a) Display [this map](#) for students to see, pointing to Austria. Ask students to offer what, if anything they know about the Holocaust in Austria. Does anyone know Austria's role, or circumstances in the Holocaust? Were people in Austria allies of the Nazis ... victims?
- b) Explain to your students that you are going to begin by showing them images of a place in Vienna, Austria today. Ask them to note in their journals what they see, and what, if anything, they wonder about.

*(note to teachers: the process and ensuing information will provide answers to most of the questions your students would pose here. Do not attempt to answer their preliminary questions at this time, as this is intended to be an inquiry/discovery)*

- c) [Open this link](#) to a series of Google Earth locations in Vienna. Display, and zoom into the Hofburg Palace location, only, at this time. The Hofburg Palace is located at Heldenplatz (Heroes' Square) in the heart of Vienna.

## Step 2

Tell students that on March 12, 1938, the Nazis entered Austria and annexed (connected, or joined) it to Germany the next day. This is known as the Anschluss. Show [this video](#), only 1:21 long. Before showing it to your students, ask them to note in their journals what they see in these images, who they see, and who they don't see. What does watching this video do to shape, or contribute to their early understanding of Austria and the Holocaust?

## Step 3

Here are different images, and one testimony excerpt, conveying responses of Austrians to Hitler's arrival and the Anschluss. Divide students into groups, with each group examining their assigned piece, recording in their journals what they find Surprising, Interesting and Troubling ([S-I-T strategy](#)) and discussing their thinking about the reaction of these Austrians to the arrival of the Nazis. Afterwards, ask one member of each group to share what piece they were assigned, and what they discussed about it in relation to these questions.

- 1: [Hitler at Hofburg/Heldenplatz photo](#)
- 2: [Testimony of Lucia Heilman](#), Austrian Jewish young woman
- 3: [Viennese crowd](#)
- 4: [Two photos of Viennese citizens](#)

## Step 4

Display [this short context](#) for students, and either read, or ask a student to read it aloud. Ask students to share what they have learned from this short paragraph about Austria and the Holocaust. Ask: how does this historical context add to, modify, or deepen their initial impressions formed from viewing the primary sources?

*Teachers:* For additional context about the *Anschluss* for you/your students, consider reading [this short article](#) by Facing History and Ourselves.

## Part II: Prewar Jewish Life in Vienna

**Objective:** Students will appreciate the integration and vibrancy of Jewish life in Vienna and the connection between Jewish people and this city so they can better understand what was ultimately lost, as well as what it was like for the place they lived and loved to be turned into sites of fear and persecution.

### Step 1

Ask students what they know, or can infer about Jewish life in Austria before the Holocaust. (note: if students had no previous knowledge, at least they can refer to what they learned from the testimony excerpt of Lucia Heilman in Step 3, Part I.)

Explain to your students that you are going to again begin by showing them images of different places in Vienna, Austria today. Ask them to note in their journals what they see, and what, if anything, they wonder about.

- a) First, [open this link](#) to a series of Google Earth locations in Vienna. Display, without necessarily zooming in, the Hofburg Palace location, and then its relation to: Augarten, Gausplatz and Park Prater.
- b) Display to your students these images of [Augarten](#) and [Augarten pool](#), [Gausstraße](#), and [Prater Park](#). Where possible, move your cursor so your students can gain surrounding visual context of these areas.

### Step 2

- a) **Journal and/or Turn and Talk.** Ask students to describe, first in their journals and then with a partner or in small groups, positive experiences or memories they have shared with family and/or friends at public places such as parks, pools, restaurants, schools and playgrounds. Ask what role these places have played in helping to shape their identity.

b) Here are four different testimony excerpts from Viennese Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Divide students into at least four groups, with each group member assigned to read and identify [3 takeaways, 2 questions/wonders and 1 quote](#) each student hopes to remember about their group's assigned survivor's testimony regarding their experiences living in Vienna before the war. Afterwards, ask one member of each group to share what person they were assigned, and what they learned and discussed about it in relation to Jewish life before the war in Vienna.

- 1: [Testimony of Lucia Heilman](#)
- 2: [Testimony of Kurt Rosenkranz](#)
- 3: [Testimony of Otto Suschny](#)
- 4: [Testimony of Hanny Hieger](#)

### Step 3

Display [this context](#) for students, and either read, or ask one or more students to read it aloud. Ask students to share what they have learned from this short contextual information about Prewar Jewish life in Vienna. Ask: how does this historical context add to, modify, or deepen their understanding of Jewish life before the Anschluss formed from considering the primary sources?

## Part III: Jewish Persecution and Humiliation

**Objective:** Students will understand how public spaces—in this case, the city of Vienna—became sites of persecution and torture for Jews after the Anschluss, turning every part of the Jews' beloved city into a place of fear. In addition, students will learn about some non-Jewish people who were kind and acted on behalf of their Jewish neighbors, complicating our understanding of the predominant Austrian support of Nazi ideology.

## Step 1

Display [this context](#) for students, and either read, or ask one or more students to read it aloud. Ask students to share what they have learned from this short contextual information about how Jewish lives and public spaces were affected after the Anschluss.

## Step 2

Here are four different testimony experts, including one video, from Viennese Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Divide students into at least four groups, with each group member assigned to read and identify [3 takeaways, 2 questions/wonders and 1 quote](#) each student hopes to remember about their group's assigned survivor's testimony regarding their experiences after the Anschluss in Vienna. Afterwards, ask one member of each group to share what person they were assigned, and what they learned and discussed about it in relation to Jewish life and the transformation of public spaces following the Anschluss in March 1938.

- 1: [Kitty Schrott](#)
- 2: [Gerda Feldsberg](#)
- 3: [Julius Chaimowicz](#)
- 4: Video: [Eric Richmond](#) (IF you can't access/play the video as is, [click here](#), scroll down to Eric Richmond "Kristallnacht," and play from 1:58-4:58.)

## Part IV: Postwar Jewish Life in Vienna

**Objective:** Students' understanding of the deep connection Viennese Jews felt towards Vienna will be reinforced. They will also learn about the complicated rebuilding of Jewish life that happened (and continues to happen) there.

**Opening exercise:** In your journal, write your answer to this question: Given the experiences you read about—from the cheering crowds welcoming the Nazis into Austria to the stories of Jewish daily life to how Jews were treated after the Anschluss, why do you think some survivors returned to Vienna after the Holocaust

ended in 1945 and many didn't? Describe the challenges and issues you imagine survivors might consider in making this decision.

**Open Google Earth:** Go to the Stadttempel.

o What do students notice about the location of this synagogue? (Answer: it's in the middle of the city, surrounded by apartments. This is why it was not completely destroyed on Kristallnacht.)

o Still, they destroyed the inside (show [photo of interior of synagogue after Kristallnacht](#)).

If you like, scroll through several of the slides so students can see the entrance to the synagogue as well as the inside.

***Facts for teacher:***

- 140,000 Austrians had to flee the country for “racial reasons”; 65,000 who could not escape were murdered. By the end of 1945, the more than 5,500 of Jews who had survived in VIE were joined by camp survivors and returnees from exile. (from: personal notes from Elizabeth Anthony's lecture, Virtual Centropa Summer Academy 2020)
- Today the core Jewish population of Austria is estimated to be just above 10,000, consisting of people who would explicitly identify themselves as Jews, the highest number of Jews observed in Austria since the 1960s. About 86% of all Austrian Jews reside in Vienna. Only 19% of all Austrians live in Vienna. (from <https://eurojewcong.org/news/communities-news/austria/new-demographic-study-of-austrian-jewry/>)

**Small groups:** Assign small groups and, in each, students together look at the photos and read out loud the photo descriptions and interview excerpts in all these texts (taking turns):

- [Lily Tauber](#)
- [Hannah Fischer](#)

- [Oskar Rosenstrauch](#)
- [Otto Suschny](#)

Together, students make a list of the reasons these people returned to Vienna after the war, and discuss the questions:

- Do these reasons for returning to a place where people hated them surprise you? Why/why not?
- According to these excerpts, how were Jews treated by Austrians?
- In what ways did the survivors' experiences in Vienna during the Holocaust shape their future lives?

**Entire class:** As a class, discuss and reflect on all of the above (post-war life, reasons why people returned, what they did for a living, how they were treated by Austrians when they returned, their reflections on living for many years in Austria after the Holocaust). From the photos and excerpts:

- o List on board the reasons people returned.
- o What questions would you ask them if you could meet them?

### **Postscript: Jews in Vienna in the early 21st Century**

- In July 2011, Vienna hosted the Maccabia games, the biggest Jewish sports event in Europe since 1945. Maccabi is a worldwide Jewish sports league in which Jews participate around the world. 2,000 Jewish competitors from 35 countries participated in 17 sports in Vienna in 2011.
- The opening ceremony was held in front of City Hall in Vienna, across from Heldenplatz/Hofburg Palace, where Hitler was welcomed by thousands of Austrians.
- President of the Republic of Austria, Dr. Heinz Fischer, among the supporters. [Opening Ceremony Video](#), held outside of City Hall. [Article from The New Austrian](#), which ends with this statement by the Austrian ambassador to the United States, "*Over 2,000 Jewish athletes came to Vienna to compete in the Games and experience Austrian hospitality and friendship. We*



*take this trust as a great token of friendship. We see these games in Vienna as a milestone in the renewal of an active and thriving Jewish life in Austria."*

Sources: Three articles from July 2011 that quote Jews who attended the Maccabi games in Vienna.

- "[Jews Who Fled Nazis Return for Vienna Games.](#)" Shields, Michael. Reuters. July 12, 2011.
- "[At Maccabi Games in Vienna, symbolism—and the Opposite Sex.](#)" Gruber, Ruth Ellen. Jewish Telegraphic Agency. July 11, 2011.
- "[Maccabi Games in Vienna Reflect Pain and Hope for One Local Survivor,](#)" Sheila Wilensky. Arizona Jewish Post. August 18, 2011.

**Three groups:** Divide the class into three groups (or assign each student one article for homework). Each group reads one of the above articles and answers the following questions:

- What was the historical meaning of holding the Maccabi games in Vienna in 2011?
- What did it mean to *Jews* to hold the games in Vienna in 2011? Why do you think it had such deep meaning for them?
- The Maccabi Games were held almost 70 years after the end of WWII. To what extent did the Holocaust end for Jews at the end of WWII? Explain your answer.

Discuss as a class—compare different comments from articles and also include the reflections of those who returned to Vienna after the war about how they felt as Jews living in Vienna/Austria for the rest of their lives.

### **Culminating activities**

Consider one of the following options to empower students to demonstrate their learning by reflecting upon what they have learned from this lesson.

**Option 1:** This lesson endeavored to help students answer the following two essential questions:

During the Holocaust, how did the Nazis transform public places in Vienna, and what did that transformation mean for the Jews who lived there?

How do personal stories add, or affect your understanding of what occurred in Vienna?

Ask students to respond to one – or both of these questions in writing, using evidence to support their considered responses.

**Option 2:** Final journal/reflection prompts:

- When does an historical event like the Holocaust end for the people who lived through it?
- In what ways do the events of the Holocaust impact people today?
- Why do you think historical events continue to impact people throughout their entire lives?