



*Unit*

*Topic*

**World War II**

**Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps**

*\*The texts used for the lesson contain graphic details. Use your best judgment on whether to use these texts with your students.*

## *Lesson Plan*

### *Aim*

To recognize the experience of an American soldier by reading accounts of liberation.

### *Rationale*

The liberation of Nazi concentration camps is often mentioned in the progression of World War II lessons, but it is rarely discussed in detail. It is important and right to recognize the American soldiers and our allies who took on the heart-wrenching duty of rescuing prisoners from concentration camps. The warning of Dwight D. Eisenhower to record this atrocity is one that every person should know, which is why it begins this lesson. This lesson brings another opportunity for students to get to know the American soldier and the bravery that comes with being one. After this lesson, the word “liberation” will become more than just a vocabulary term; it will become a feeling.

### *Student Learning Objectives*

Students will be able to connect with the experiences of the soldiers who liberated Nazi concentration camps by analyzing their accounts.

### *Civics Connection*

- How have people in power affected political, social, and economic developments regarding the freedom and protection of their people?
  - Why is this topic one of particular importance for participation in a democratic society?
- \*See the Civics Connection Through Questioning guide in Civics for more ideas.*

### *Vocabulary*

Liberation  
Holocaust  
Concentration Camp  
Dwight D. Eisenhower



## Materials and Resources

*\*The texts used for the lesson contain graphic details. Use your best judgment on whether to use these texts with your students.*

1. Text/Handout: Liberation

<http://www.holocaust-trc.org/the-holocaust-education-program-resource-guide/oh-no-it-cant-be/>

2. Text/Handout: "Oh No, It Can't Be"

<http://www.holocaust-trc.org/the-holocaust-education-program-resource-guide/oh-no-it-cant-be/>

**Additional resource with link access:** <http://holocaustremembrance.org/History.shtml>

## Procedure

### Do Now:

What was General Dwight D. Eisenhower's concern according to his quote?

**"I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to 'propaganda'."**

**-Dwight D. Eisenhower**

[Quote Source: <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/eisenhowers/quotes>]

### Lesson:

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The teacher will conduct a read-aloud with students of the text "Liberation" to discuss the horrors of the concentration camps and the real experience of those who entered them to help the prisoners to freedom. The class may discuss parts that stood out to them or shocked them after the reading. Discuss two questions that follow: "What did liberation mean for the prisoners?" "What did liberation mean for the soldiers who rescued them?" Answers should go beyond simple responses and lead into the need for a force of good in the world to combat those that are evil.

### Collaborative/Independent Work:

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Students will read accounts of soldiers who participated in the liberation from the text "Oh No, It Can't Be." After identifying the main idea and the best supporting detail, students will discuss which account impacted them the most.

(Continue on to the extension activity if time allows.)

### Share:

Students will discuss the accounts and their reactions.

### Close:



Students will independently explain the meaning of the following quote. Then, the class should discuss their responses.

“When you put on a uniform, there are certain [responsibilities] that you accept.”  
-President Dwight D. Eisenhower

### *Modifications*

The teacher may modify texts and/or provide background information depending on what was learned prior to this lesson.

### *Extension*

Notice that the introduction quote is from General Dwight D. Eisenhower and the closure quote is from President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Students should research how President Dwight D. Eisenhower became president. They should create a list of questions and use those to conduct their research. For example, students should research: What were Eisenhower’s main goals as President? How did his experiences influence these goals?

### *Notes*

*\*Use discretion for activities according to what is appropriate for your class.*

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## **Liberation**



## **The act of setting someone free from imprisonment or oppression.**

When the Allied Forces invaded Germany at the end of World War II, few of the combat veterans were prepared to cope with the horrors they encountered during the liberation of the concentration camps. The inhumane conditions and the torturous treatment of the prisoners only further revealed the true cruelty and brutality behind Hitler's leadership and the reign of the Nazi Party.

The Allied troops encountered countless survivors who were so weak, diseased, and malnourished that they could barely walk or carry out their basic life functions. Beginning on July 23, 1944 and continuing through 1945, they discovered the dead by the thousands everywhere: in mass graves, stacked as firewood, scattered about the grounds, and even sharing bunks with the living. While touring the camps, the Allies exposed the gas chambers and the crematories used by the Nazis to enforce the "Final Solution," Hitler's decision to exterminate the Jewish community.

Each discovery deeply affected the hearts and the minds of the soldiers. Grown men and veterans of battle broke down and wept at the horrors seen in the camps. The pain and suffering felt by the inmates was universal: it superseded any language or ethnic barrier.

The prisoners also reacted in many different ways to their liberation. In some camps, they ran out to joyously meet their emancipators and to see if their release was true. Others stayed within their living quarters, afraid to come out and insecure with their new freedom.

The Allies offered to the survivors what guidance and support they could at the time. The liberators were deeply moved by the experience. The Allied reactions included tears, horror, denial, patriotism, and hatred for the Nazis. Overall, a cold anger welled up in the Allied troops for the German citizens. As camp after camp was liberated, the civilians insisted that they had not known of the atrocities that lay within. It was obvious, however, that the camp's stench and the odor of the crematories had carried for miles over the countryside.

1. What did liberation mean for the prisoners?

3. What did liberation mean for the soldiers who rescued them?

LIFE, LIBERTY & EDUCATION

**“On, No, It Can’t Be”**



### Accounts of the Experience of Liberation

<p>“My first impression of it was the odor. The stench of it was all over the place and there were a bunch of very bewildered, lost individuals who came to me pathetically at the door in their unkempt uniforms to see what we were doing and what was going to be done about them. They were staying at the camp even though their guards and staff had fled because they didn’t know where to go or what to do. They had heard news that the Americans had taken over that area and they were waiting for somebody to turn their back straight again and they were just lost souls at that time. Well, my feeling was that this was the most shattering experience of my life.”</p> <p><b>-John Glustrom 333<sup>rd</sup> Engineers</b></p>	<p>Main Idea:</p>          <p>Best Supporting Detail:</p>
<p>“When we walked through those gates...I saw in front of me the walking dead. There they stood. They were skin and bone. They had skeletal faces with deepset eyes. Their heads had been clean shaved. They were holding each other for stability. I couldn’t understand this. I just couldn’t. So I walked around the camp; I wanted to...understand more. I saw mounds of little children’s clothing. Little children who didn’t survive. I saw.. all of those things that belong to little children. But I never saw a child....If this could happen here, it could happen anywhere. It could happen to me. I often wonder what I would have done if in 1939, my family and I had been caught up in this and for all those years nobody, not nobody, would help us. I would have been a bitter man...”</p> <p><b>Leon Ball of the 183<sup>rd</sup> and liberator of Buchenwald</b></p>	<p>Main Idea:</p>          <p>Best Supporting Detail:</p>
<p>As we entered the camp, the living skeletons still able to walk crowded around us and, though we wanted to drive farther into the place, the milling, pressing crowd wouldn’t let us. It is not an exaggeration to say that almost every inmate was insane with hunger. Just the sight of an American brought cheers, groans, and shrieks. People crowded around to touch an American, to touch the jeep, to kiss our arms — perhaps just to make sure that it was true. The people who couldn’t walk crawled out toward our jeep. Those who couldn’t even crawl propped themselves up on an elbow, and somehow, through all their pain and suffering, revealed through their eyes the gratitude, the joy they felt at the arrival of Americans.</p> <p><b>Captain J.D. Pletcher, 71<sup>st</sup> Division at Gunskirchen</b></p>	<p>Main Idea:</p>          <p>Best Supporting Detail:</p>

