**World War II and the Holocaust Research Prompts**

**Joseph Goebbels**

When Adolph Hitler gained authority in the German government, he had plans for the genocide of all of the Jewish people in Europe and beyond, as well a massive expansion of his power throughout the world. But he knew that he could not announce these plans to the German people. He needed to project positive images of the Nazi regime, focused on national pride and the virtue of undying loyalty. He found the perfect person to help him achieve this: Joseph Goebbels. Goebbels had been associated with the Nazis since the early 1920s. He eventually devoted himself to Hitler completely and began a propaganda campaign that would be instrumental in helping Hitler hold total control over Germany. Goebbels used censorship, exaggeration, and complete lies to make the Nazis seem like warriors for a noble cause. He remained loyal to Hitler even after Hitler took his own life at the end of the war. **In your project, prove that Hitler could not have succeeded in waging his war or his genocide against the Jewish people without Joseph Goebbels. In what way was Goebbels more powerful than Hitler?**

Your project should address the following:

* How did Goebbels meet Hitler? Why did the two men disagree about the future of the Nazi Party at first?
* Explain how Goebbels used propaganda to get support for the destruction and killing of Kristallnacht?
* Give examples of censorship that Goebbels enacted. Why didn’t Goebbels want people reading non-German books and listening to non-German radio stations? How did Hitler enforce Goebbels’ censorship?
* Discuss the concept of the ―Big Lie‖ technique of propaganda. How did Goebbels use this technique?

**Hitler Youth**

Hitler understood that in order to be successful in war and in dictatorship, he had to win the hearts and minds of the children who would soon be his most devoted soldiers. Hitler aimed to create a ―master race‖ of Germans that would be unstoppable. Throughout the war, he used propaganda to recruit and brainwash German children to fight for his cause. The Hitler Youth programming focused on German pride and teaching children to hate the Jewish people as sub-humans who would destroy them. He used false science to convince children that they were racially superior. He also required that children join after 1936. **In your project, explain why the Hitler Youth was able to convince millions of German children that Hitler was right. Why was the Hitler Youth so important to Hitler’s mission?**

Your project should address the following:

* Trace the history of the Hitler Youth from the Nazi Youth League of the 1920s to the climax of Hitler’s power. How did the organization evolve?
* Explain the types of activities and lessons that Hitler Youth in the Jungvolk and the HJ participated in. How were the children disciplined, trained, and encouraged?
* What was the role of girls in the Hitler Youth?
* What would the boys in the Hitler Youth do once they had become young men?

**Kristallnacht**

In1938, Hitler and the Nazis were spreading anti-Semitic propaganda and waiting for the perfect opportunity to launch their campaign against the Jewish people. On November 7, 1938, Herschel Grynszpan, a seventeen-year-old Jewish boy living in Paris, assassinated the Third Secretary of the German Ambassador to France, Ernst vom Rath. It was relatively easy for Hitler and his propaganda minister, Goebbels, to ignore the fact that Grynszpan murdered vom Rath because he was seeking revenge—just weeks before, Herschel’s father and other members of his family, along with many other Jewish families, had been forced out of their home in Germany, loaded onto a train, and dropped at the border of Poland. In the days that followed, Nazis burned synagogues, destroyed Jewish businesses, killed about a hundred Jewish people, and sent about 26,000 of them to concentration camps. The event was known as Kristallnacht. **In your project, examine how both Germans and leaders of other countries reacted to Kristallnacht. Prove that Kristallnacht made Hitler more confident about his plan for the mass killing of the Jewish people.**

Your project should address the following:

* Why did Grynszpan murder vom Rath? What action by the Nazis had forced Grynszpan’s family out of Germany?
* How did the Nazi-controlled media present the events of Kristallnacht? Were there any Germans who stood up against what the Nazis did?
* Discuss the Wagner-Rogers Bill that was presented to Congress in America after Kristallnacht. Why was it rejected?
* How did treatment of the Jewish people change in Germany after Kristallnacht?

**Blitzkrieg**

Warfare tactics in World War II would drastically change from the last world war. Soldiers who had fought in the trenches during the Great War were used to waiting and staging periodic attacks, after which they would regroup and prepare for the next battle. Hitler proposed that new technologies could make possible a constantly mobile fighting force. He relied on the ideas of Heinz Guderian to develop and execute *blitzkrieg*, or ―lightning war‖ tactics, at the start of the war. Blitzkrieg can be defined as a tactic that uses a constant, targeted, offensive strike to shock the enemy into confusion and submission. The German invasions of Poland in 1939 and France in 1940 are said to be examples of blitzkrieg warfare, and the U.S. used blitzkrieg tactics under General Patton in 1944. However, there is some debate as to whether the Polish invasion was actually an example of blitzkrieg or just a strategic use of new military technologies. **In your project, compare and contrast the use of blitzkrieg tactics by the German and American armies. How did this strategy change the way the war was fought on both sides?**

Your project should address the following:

* Examine new technologies, such as tanks and military aircraft. Why were these technologies important to blitzkrieg warfare?
* Who is Heinz Guderian and how did Hitler find him? How did Guderian prove that blitzkrieg would work, even when military officials doubted him?
* Discuss American use of blitzkrieg under General Patton. Prove that Patton’s strategies were true blitzkrieg.

**British Evacuations**

In late August of 1939, the British government initiated the first of several voluntary evacuations of children, women, and people with disabilities. After the invasion of Poland, the British believed that the Germans posed a serious and immediate threat to their major cities. However, the period between September of 1939 and April of 1940 saw no bombing by the Germans. This period became known as the ―Phoney War.‖ By the time the Germans launched their invasion of France in 1940, most British evacuees had returned home. Children would be evacuated again prior to the Battle of Britain later that year and once more in 1944. Overall, three-and-a-half million children were evacuated. The mental and emotional effects on British children were sometimes devastating because neither the children nor the parents knew exactly where the children were going or how long they would be gone. Children were generally sent to the British countryside, but some were sent overseas. **In your project, prove whether or not the British evacuations of children were necessary and effective. Was it worth it to remove children from their homes to help save their lives?**

Your project should address the following:

* Explain problems with organization and procedures in the first evacuation. Did the government fix these problems in later evacuations?
* Why didn’t all of the civilians evacuate? What groups were selected to evacuate and why?
* Discuss some examples of the experiences of evacuee children. How did a country family become qualified to billet a child from the city? Were there background checks? Did the government check on the children?
* How were children reunited with their parents after the war?

**Battle of the Atlantic**

During World War II, naval battles, especially in the Atlantic, were very important. Great Britain, being an island, had to get its supplies and weapons from across the ocean. The Germans had a great weapon to use against the Allies: the U-boat. U-boats were submarines that had the capability to attack and sink battleships and other Allied ocean liners that carried food, supplies, and men to Great Britain and continental Europe. **In your project, explain how the Allies defeated Germany in the Battle of the Atlantic. How did they win against the German U-boats?**

Your project should address the following:

* What is a wolf-pack? Why were wolf packs so effective against the Allies in the Atlantic?
* Explain how the strategy for dealing with U-boats changed from the beginning to the end of the war. What was a convoy and how did it help against attacks?
* Did the Allies have submarines? Why didn’t they use more submarines in the Battle of the Atlantic?

**Nazi Concentration Camps**

The most disturbing and heartbreaking events of World War II occurred in the thousands of Nazi concentration camps in Germany and the occupied territories. Millions of Jewish people died in the camps, especially after 1942, when Hitler set into motion the ―Final Solution‖ and developed death camps where prisoners were systematically killed in gas chambers. Despite evidence that the United States and the Allies had the potential capabilities to bomb death camps such as Auschwitz, they did not bomb the camps. When the camps were liberated in 1944 and 1945, many of the prisoners had already been evacuated from the camps, forced to walk in ―death marches‖ into the interior of Germany. **In your project, prove what the Allies knew about the atrocities occurring in Nazi concentration camps before the liberation, and argue whether or not they could have done more to liberate or destroy the camps.**

Your project should include the following:

* What evidence did the Americans and other Allied forces have that concentration camps existed? Discuss aerial photographs and intercepted communications from the enemy.
* How did the Nazis hide the existence of death camps from the public and from the enemy?
* Discuss the U.S. decision not to bomb Auschwitz. What were the reasons that they said an attack would not work?
* Discuss other sources of information, such as reports by escapees. Why was this evidence largely ignored or passed over?

**Military Air Forces in World War II**

British military aircraft during the war was inferior to Germany’s air forces, both in number and in technology. The RAF, or Royal Air Force, was established in 1918 and would play a major role in the war. During the Battle of Britain in 1940, the RAF defended Britain from a major invasion by the Germans. RAF commander Arthur Coningham transformed the role of the RAF from simply a defense force for ground troops to an offensive force. American pilots also joined the RAF, with some joining before the United States officially declared war in December of 1941. **In your project, explain why the RAF was important to the victory of the Allied forces during World War II. How did the air battles and missions of the RAF change the way air forces were used for all future wars?**

Your project should address the following:

* Prior to World War II, how were British aircraft used in war? When was the RAF created and why?
* Discuss the aircraft used by the RAF during World War II. How did British planes differ from those of the German Luftwaffe?
* What was Operation Sea Lion, and how did the Battle of Britain help to prevent it from being carried out?
* Discuss how Arthur Coningham changed the role of the RAF, and describe some important missions carried out by the RAF.

**Fall of France**

Along with Britain, France was one of the first countries to declare war on Germany after the invasion of Poland. They set up a defensive force, the Maginot Line, to repel an invasion from Germany. However, the Germans came through Belgium to invade France, and the concentration of forces at the Maginot Line was useless to stop the Nazis. In 1940, France surrendered to Germany, having lost more than 85,000 men already. The country would not be reclaimed for the Allies until the Normandy invasion of 1944. **In your project, prove whether or not the surrender of the French in 1940 was unavoidable. Identify the major problems with their plan for the Maginot Line, and show how these problems led to the fall of France.**

Your project should address the following:

* Why did the French think that the Maginot Line would work? Discuss their experiences in World War I.
* Explain the German strategy in the Battle of France. How was it different than in previous wars?
* What economic factors made it harder for the French to fight back? Discuss the depression in France.
* French general Charles de Gaulle said, ―France has lost a battle. But France has not lost the war!‖ Explain how the French contributed to the Allied effort after the fall of France.

**Soviet Union in World War II**

The Soviet Union played a major role in World War II. In 1939, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin signed a treaty with Germany to agree that the two countries would not go to war with each other. The treaty was important at the start of the war because it helped the Nazis. When Germany invaded Poland, the Soviet Union did not come in and help Poland. Instead, the Soviets claimed their part of the defeated nation. It seemed that Germany and the Soviet Union had a perfect alliance. However, Stalin and the Soviets were not prepared when Hitler broke the treaty in 1941. On June 2, 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Hitler had used the treaty to help him get away with invading Poland without facing war from the Soviets. But after 1941, Stalin and the Soviets were on the side of the Allies against Germany. Stalin called the conflict the ―Great Patriotic War.‖ Near the end of the war, Soviet victories against the Germans helped to win the war for the Allies. **In your project, prove whether or not Stalin’s image of the Great Patriotic War was accurate. Was the Soviet Union really an innocent victim of Nazi aggression?**

Your project should address the following:

* Explain what Hitler said about the Soviets in his book, *Mein Kampf*. How does this prove that Hitler began planning to invade the Soviet Union as early as 1925?
* Explain how Stalin had terrorized his people prior to the outbreak of war. Focus on the Great Terror/Great Purge of the 1930s and the collectivization of agriculture.
* Discuss the terms of the 1939 Treaty of Non-Aggression. What was the ―secret protocol,‖ and what did it promise to the Soviet Union?
* Discuss the similar treaty that the Soviet Union signed with Japan, the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact. When was this treaty signed and why?

**Resistance Operatives during the Holocaust**

Fighting back against the highly organized Nazis during the Holocaust was extremely risky. Those who assisted the Jewish and other minority groups would be killed if they were discovered. However, many brave people across Europe took the chance in order to save lives. Whether by armed revolt, underground rescue and escape operations, or other means, all of the resistance operatives fought against the murder of millions of people. **In your project, compare and contrast three resistance movements: the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Polish resistance, and the Bielski Otriad.**

Your project should address the following:

* Who were the leaders of each resistance movement? What qualities did each leader have that made people follow them? What happened to each leader in the end?
* Briefly describe the major actions of each of the resistance forces. Were they successful in their missions?
* How did each of these resistance movements inspire others to stand up against the Nazis? Prove whether it was worth it for each of the resistance groups to fight.

**Oskar Schindler and Irena Sendler: Holocaust Heroes**

During the war, most Germans who were not Jewish either joined with the Nazis or remained indifferent to the deportation of Jewish people to concentration camps. Some wanted to help but were too scared to risk their lives by defying the Nazis. However, some brave individuals did take the chance, and their efforts saved thousands of lives during the Holocaust. Two of these individuals were Oskar Schindler and Irena Sendler. **In your project, compare and contrast Schindler and Sendler. Explain how, despite their different backgrounds, they both gave everything they could to save innocent lives.**

Your project should address the following:

* What did Schindler and Sendler do for a living at the beginning of the war? How would their positions help them to save Jewish people during the Holocaust? How were Schindler and Sendler different?
* Describe how Sendler worked to save lives. Why might some Jewish people have refused Sendler’s help?
* How did Schindler’s opinions about the Nazis change throughout the war? Besides protecting Jewish people, how else did Schindler’s factory betray the Nazis?
* How did the stories of Schindler and Sendler come to be known after the war? Why is it important to tell their stories?

**Erwin Rommel and Operation Valkyrie**

Erwin Rommel was at one time said to be Hitler’s favorite general. In Africa, he nearly succeeded in advancing all the way to Cairo. But Rommel took chances because he did not carry out assassination orders that Hitler gave. He tried to convince Hitler to surrender in 1944, when it was becoming clearer that the Allied forces were gaining control in the war. That same year, leaders of the German Home Guard attempted to assassinate Hitler in a plot called Operation Valkyrie. There is disagreement among historians as to whether Rommel participated in the plot. When Operation Valkyrie failed, the plotters were sentenced to death or sent to concentration camps. Hitler forced Rommel to commit suicide for his suspected role in the plot. **In your project, prove whether Rommel helped plot to kill Hitler in July of 1944.**

Your project should address the following:

* Give evidence that Rommel supported the Nazi regime. Trace his history as a Nazi leader.
* Give evidence that Rommel opposed Hitler’s goals in the war and that he had a part in a conspiracy against Hitler.
* Trace the events of Operation Valkyrie. What was the plan, and why did it fail?
* Why did Rommel choose to commit suicide rather than be sentenced to death?

**General Patton: “Old Blood and Guts”**

American general George Patton is famous for his bravery, his skill in strategizing and leading troops in dangerous operations, and most of all, for his toughness. He insisted that the troops under his command stayed clean shaven and well-disciplined at all times, and he preached for the troops to be merciless to the enemy. However, the toughness that made his troops admire him also got him in trouble. While visiting wounded soldiers in a military hospital during the war, Patton slapped a man who was suffering from combat fatigue, or ―shell shock.‖ He did not believe that post-traumatic stress disorder was a valid reason to be admitted for treatment, and he told military hospitals not to admit men for medical care for this reason. The incident got Patton relieved of his command. **In your project, prove whether General Patton deserved to be relieved of his command for slapping and reprimanding a shell-shocked soldier. Could Patton have been suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder himself?**

Your project should address the following:

* Trace Patton’s military career during the first and second world wars. What were his greatest achievements as a general? Was he ever wounded? What horrors had he seen?
* Discuss how Patton treated the troops under his command. Was he well respected? Why or why not?
* Did the United States recognize post-traumatic stress disorder as a mental illness in 1943? How did they treat the condition?
* Discuss other incidents when Patton’s outspokenness got him in trouble.

**Battle of Iwo Jima**

The Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945 was one of the deadliest and most strategically important combat missions in the war. Allied naval, air, and ground forces all played a role against the Japanese, who were ready and waiting for the attack. The famous photo of the American flag being raised atop Mount Suribachi symbolized the will and determination of American soldiers who defeated the odds to win the island. **In your project, explain why victory at Iwo Jima was so important to the Allies and why it was so difficult to win.**

Your project should address the following:

* What was unique about the Japanese strategy at Iwo Jima? Why was holding the island so important to the Japanese? How did they propose to win?
* Why didn’t bombing by Allied aircraft and naval vessels have much effect on the Japanese? Describe the trench system on the island.
* How did the Allied forces eventually win the battle? What was the most important factor in their success?
* How was the island of Iwo Jima used after the Allies captured it?

**Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Atomic Bomb**

In 1945, the Allies were ready to encapsulate their victory in World War II. Germany had already surrendered, Hitler was dead, and yet the Japanese held out. Meanwhile, in America, scientists had been racing to develop a new type of weapon that would be capable of causing massive damage to the enemy. Since 1942, the Manhattan Project aimed to develop an atomic bomb before Germany. In 1944, the U.S. had the technology, but no one knew whether the atomic bomb would be necessary to use. The United States hoped for a peaceful surrender by the Japanese. When the Japanese refused to sign the Potsdam Declaration in July of 1945, the stage was set for the atomic bomb to be put to use. The next month, American leaders dropped atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing hundreds of thousands of people and bringing an end to World War II. **In your project, prove whether the use of the atomic bomb against Japan was necessary.**

Your project should address the following:

* What sparked U.S. interest in developing an atomic bomb early in the war? What was Albert Einstein’s role in promoting the development?
* What was the Manhattan Project? Who invented the atomic bomb?
* Discuss reasons why the U.S. did not run a trial detonation of the atomic bomb.
* Why did the United States opt to drop the bombs rather than continue the war with other weapons? What were Japan’s tactics in warfare, and why did the Americans worry that many U.S. soldiers would die unless the bomb was dropped?
* What were the immediate and long-term effects of the bombings on the Japanese population?