

Teacher's Guide To Using "Hitler's Unwanted Children: Children and Young People with Disabilities In Nazi Germany" In Classrooms

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Introduction

This article tells the story of the thousands of children and young people who were victims of Nazi brutality. In addition to Jewish and Gypsy children, children and young people who were disabled as well as adolescent non-conformists were isolated, imprisoned in state hospitals and work camps and thousands were murdered. Their story adds to our understanding of the kind of thinking that culminated in the Holocaust. This article discusses how schools were changed under the Nazis, how well known rehabilitation centers were destroyed and the growing inhumanity of the Hitler regime.

The persecution and genocide of vulnerable children and young people were part and parcel of Nazi racism and biological science and they were the first victims of Nazi genocide. The development of technology used in death camps took place in the hospitals and institutions which housed children and adults with disabilities..

Students will learn to appreciate the values of democratic societies with awareness of the need to protect and safeguard the rights of vulnerable citizens. There is a connection between how society treats its most vulnerable people and its basic social values.

People with disabilities are an oppressed minority. People with disabilities are now organizing to protect their own rights. They face many barriers to social acceptance in our own society. Architecture and transportation often prevent them from meaningful participation and being independent. This situation is gradually improving with increasing social acceptance. In Nazi Germany, not only were they not accepted, they were singled out to be victims of genocide.

The story of children and young people with disabilities provides a unique insight in to the damaging effects of discrimination as well as the importance of safeguarding the rights of vulnerable people and their families.

This guide contains suggested themes for classroom activities and discussion.

Themes for Classroom Discussions

Conformity

Conformity was very important to Nazi leaders. This was the reason for taking control of all German schools. Schools became propaganda mills. Obedience and Hitler worship were encouraged. Teachers had to prove they were “Aryans”.

The pressures to conform caused many problems between young people and their families. Peer pressure was used to promote conformity. Free recreation programs were used to instill a love of militarism, marching, and feelings of superiority. The Nazi imposed rigid conformity through propaganda and punishment.

Ordinary German people began to distrust their neighbors and fear for their children. Children were encouraged to spy on their teachers and report them to the authorities. There was no tolerance for differences of opinions.

How did the Nazi use oppression of vulnerable or different people to enforce conformity?

What were the pressures on teen-agers to conform to Nazi beliefs? How was this accomplished?

Are there pressures towards conformity on teen-agers today? What are they?

Are people with disabilities fully accepted in our community?

How are positive social attitudes best developed? Authoritarianism and Nazism

Compare the powers of our civil government with that of Germany.

How did the Nazis succeed in making the population subservient?

Discrimination

How does singling out one group of people for victimization assist the imposition of control on the entire community?

How can we develop positive social attitudes towards all the people who live in our communities?

Students with disabilities are being included in our schools. What can we do to help them integrate into society?

The Rights of People with Disabilities

The Nazis regarded people with disabilities as sub-human and unhuman. They were carriers of "hereditary diseases" and a threat to the health of the nation. Nazi racial and genetic science was used to justify the segregation, imprisonment and killing of people with disabilities who they described as "useless mouths."

Nazi scientists, doctors and teachers participated in enforcing Nazi racial laws. Science was used to disguise patently false ideas of racial and genetic superiority. Children and young people were taken out of schools. The Nazis destroyed the finest system of rehabilitation in the world in the process.

How did the oppression of minority groups enable the Nazis to establish control over the population? How was German biogenetics used to impose conformity and create fear among the people? How can we help people with disabilities in our society attain recognition of their rights? Do we hold negative attitudes towards young people with disabilities? Do we practice segregation in our schools? Who do we segregate? Are students with disabilities being segregated in our schools today?

Life in Institutions

In the United States and Canada there are still a few closed institutions. What is life like for those who must live in institutions?

Activities

The activities suggested for preparation are offered as a sampler for possibilities for the classroom. It is hoped that these suggestions will make the topic an interesting one for students of different ages.

1. Have students read a biography of a person with a disability. This will enable students to think about individuals, understand disabilities, and focus on individual people. There are many excellent books about children and young people with disabilities.

Suggested Readings

My Left Foot, Christy Brown

Teacher, Helen Keller

I Raise My Eyes to Say Yes .Ruth Sienkiewicz-Mercer and Steven B. Kaplan

No Apologies: A Guide to Living with a Disability, Written by the Real Authorities- People with Disabilities, Their Families and Friends.,

Florence Weiner.

2. Have students meet in small groups to explore one of the themes. The groups will share their ideas with the whole class.

3. Dramatization

Students will dramatize how it feels to live in an institution.

Students will prepare monologue on how it feels to be discriminated against.

Students will dramatize role of Nazi physicians. Students will dramatize family life under the Nazis.

4.. Class will discuss differences between organization of Nazi schools and compare them with their own schools.

5.. Class will discuss why efforts at rescue were so difficult. A few examples of successful rescue can be discussed.

6. Students will collect some examples of ways in which ethics is used to guide present day practices and experiments on people.

7. Students will discuss their feelings about the article and what they think is needed to safeguard the rights of vulnerable people.

8. Have students look up the Disability Rights movement on the internet and address issues that concern people with disabilities today.