

Lesson: Introduction

Alfred Steer, War Crimes Trials Participant Responsibility and Justice

Target Audience:

Grades 9-12

Curriculum Connections:

American History, World History, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Government, and Language Arts

Materials for Lesson:

- [“War Crimes Trials”](#) and [“Nuremberg Defendants”](#) articles
- [Map of the Major European War Crimes Trials, 1943-1947](#)
- Excerpt from the poem “Posthumous Rehabilitation” by Tadeusz Różewicz
- Alfred Steer’s 30-minute visual history testimony
- Alfred Steer’s biography
- “Responsibility and Justice” student-activity handout
- Discussion questions
- Testimony glossary

Time Requirement:

1-3 class periods

Student Objectives

- To use viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret Alfred Steer’s visual history testimony.
- To develop a basic understanding of the International Military Tribunal (IMT) and the Nuremberg defendants.
- To identify some of the participants of the IMT, who are central to Alfred’s testimony and discuss why he may have found them so memorable.
- To research and discuss how justice has or is being served in post-Holocaust examples of genocide, such as in Rwanda.

Lesson Overview

Teachers will introduce the lesson by discussing with students that in the aftermath of the Holocaust, one of the ways in which justice was pursued was by conducting **war crimes** trials. Teachers will use the Historical Introduction section to provide a brief context for the war crimes trials and the **Nuremberg defendants**. Then, through the use of Alfred’s testimony and lesson materials, students, with teacher guidance, will reflect on the concepts of responsibility and justice as they relate to the Nuremberg trials and the Holocaust. Teachers are also encouraged to use the post-viewing discussion questions to examine Alfred’s testimony for deeper meaning and contemporary connections.

Standards Addressed

To align this lesson with state content standards, teachers may visit **Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning** (McRel) for an ‘Online Compendium’ of K-12 content-area standards, which were selected from various state standards and from professional subject-area organizations. McRel national standards include **Historical Understanding, United States History, World History, Civics, Language Arts, and Behavioral Studies**.

Historical Introduction

Assign and/or discuss the articles **“War Crimes Trials”** and **“Nuremberg Defendants”** from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s *Holocaust Encyclopedia* to provide students brief background information on the war crimes trials conducted after World War II. Students should also examine the **Map of the Major European War Crimes Trials, 1943-1947** for additional historical context.

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Previewing Focus

Write the following lines on the board from the poem, “Posthumous Rehabilitation” by Polish poet Tadeusz Różewicz, involved in the Polish resistance during World War II:

**“...guilty are those who ran away
and those that stayed
those who were saying yes
those who were saying no
those who said nothing
the dead are taking stock of the living
the dead will not rehabilitate us”**

(Extract from ‘Posthumous rehabilitation’ is taken from “Tadeusz Różewicz: They Came to See a Poet, Selected Poems” translated by Adam Czerniawski. Published by Anvil Press Poetry in 2004)

Have students free-write for about five minutes in response to the excerpt from the poem.

POSSIBLE PROMPTS: What does the title of this poem suggest? What do the author’s words in the first stanza imply about complicity and guilt in the Holocaust? What, then, is the significance of the poem’s last two lines? Afterward, allow students to share but only by quoting their own writing.

Transition

Students should see that Tadeusz Różewicz is addressing the concept of responsibility and guilt in the Holocaust. By including all possible reactions (saying yes, saying no, saying nothing), he tells us that everyone shared some responsibility. Teachers then might extend the conversation to justice. Although everyone might have shared responsibility in some way, was everyone guilty of a crime?

The International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg, sought legal, international, unprecedented justice for “crimes against humanity.” Dr. Alfred Steer was head of the language division and supervised all interpreters at the tribunal, so he had a unique insider’s view of the proceedings. For more background on simultaneous translation, see [**Translation in the Courtroom**](#) from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s *Holocaust Encyclopedia*.

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Viewing Activity

Before students view Alfred Steer's testimony, teachers may want to briefly introduce him by quoting from the introductory text card in his testimony:

“Alfred Steer was born May 30, 1913, in Lansdowne, Pennsylvania. In his testimony, Dr. Steer recalls his experiences as one of the individuals charged with setting up the multilingual interpretation system employed by the International Military Tribunal.”

Hand out the “Responsibility and Justice” activity for students to complete while they view Alfred's abridged 30-minute visual history testimony. Students should be instructed to pay close attention to the various names that Alfred mentions in his testimony, as well as consider what he is illustrating through his stories about them. In combination, or as a separate activity, teachers can also prepare students to further examine Alfred's testimony by use of the discussion questions below.

It is also useful to have students examine Alfred's narrative style itself to discuss ways in which his style contributes to the overall poignancy of his testimony.

POSSIBLE PROMPT: How do Alfred's verbal and nonverbal communication techniques contribute to meaning? (*Sample answer: Many aspects contribute to Alfred's effectiveness as an interviewee, such as the confident tone of his voice, the tempo/pacing of his narrative, his descriptive word choice and use of examples and stories, as well as his eye contact, posture, and facial expressions.*)

Postviewing Focus

In small groups, students should share one of the names from Alfred's testimony and offer the point Alfred is making by including that person in his testimony. Then, they should discuss the meaning of Alfred's closing statement, and their opinions of it: “What we did at Nuremberg, I think, is of epochal importance. We, for the first time in human history so far as I know, set up a court that sat in moral judgment, legal judgment on the people that started and pursued a war. This is a landmark, I think, in human civilization, at least, I'm hoping it is.”

Lesson: Discussion Questions

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Discussion Questions

The following comprehension/discussion questions were created for use with Alfred's testimony. They may be used in addition to the lesson or apart from it.

1. What were Alfred's impressions of Germany and its people while he was studying abroad in 1935? *(Sample answer: He liked Germany, he liked "basic" Germans, but he was horrified by Hitlerism. He was scornful of the antisemitism he witnessed but knew that antisemitism wasn't limited to Germany. He was terrified of Nazism's potential end result.)*
2. What made Alfred a good candidate for participation in the International Military Tribunal and what was his role? *(Sample answer: Alfred had been to Germany prior to the war, so he was somewhat familiar with the German people, culture, and language. He had also been a professor of languages and had taught German, French, and English before the war.)*
3. What were Alfred's expectations for the interpreters and translators he employed? Why? *(Sample answer: Alfred expected, among other things, that they would translate verbatim what they heard and that the court record would only maintain its integrity in doing so. He expected them to be precise and professional, and to maintain the highest degree of confidentiality in the work they did at the trials.)*
4. What is Alfred's perception of Hermann Göring, the highest-ranking Nazi official tried at Nuremberg? What happened to Göring? *(Sample answer: Alfred describes Göring as a lecher and a criminal but an extremely charismatic, magnetic personality, who quickly assessed how he could manipulate the prosecuting attorney (Chief of Counsel for the United States Robert Jackson). Although Göring was eventually convicted and sentenced to be hanged, he killed himself with poison in his cell before the sentence could be carried out.)*
5. How does Alfred describe Julius Streicher, another defendant? What happened to him? *(Sample answer: Streicher was the editor and publisher of the "Jew-baiting journal" Der Stürmer that had published hideous lies and featured regular cartoons meant to inflame readers by portraying Jewish men as predators who preyed on young, innocent German women. Streicher was found guilty and was executed.)*

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6. Discuss ways in which the photo and film evidence presented, according to Alfred's testimony, may have impacted the final decisions that were rendered in the trials. *(Sample answer: In the presentation of the film evidence, Dr. Gilbert darkened the room so as to better showcase the graphic footage but according to Alfred, he also lit up the defendants' faces to capture their reactions to the atrocities onscreen. Both the footage and the defendants' reactions to it had to be factors in the ultimate rendering of the decisions, and because he was a psychologist, Dr. Gilbert must have known it would be, in Alfred's opinion.)*
7. Julius Streicher was sentenced to death by the IMT for "crimes against humanity." What was his crime, and how did he perpetrate it? *(Sample answer: Streicher edited and distributed his antisemitic propaganda newspaper, Der Stürmer, to hundreds of thousands of Germans. For his influential role in inciting hatred and violence, he was sentenced to death and hanged on October 16, 1946.)*
8. Should a person like Streicher, who, by most accounts, never personally murdered anyone, be convicted of crimes against humanity and executed? Why or why not? *(Sample answer: Answers will vary. Most students will recognize that one doesn't have to fire a shot to be complicit in or responsible for a crime. He enthusiastically and willfully served up the propaganda and lies to the German public in order to gain support for the Führer and Nazi policies, especially antisemitic policies and actions.)*
9. Hermann Göring was convicted by the International Military Tribunal on four counts (crimes against peace, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and conspiracy to commit such crimes.). Before the sentence could be carried out, however, he killed himself. Was justice served or was justice denied? Why? *(Sample answer: Answers will vary on this question, as some would see his conviction on all counts as justice; some may point out that either way, he still died for his crimes, while some would say justice was denied because he should have had to face both the world and his executioners.)*
10. In addition to Streicher and Göring, 20 other "major" war criminals were tried at the IMT on charges of crimes against peace, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and conspiracy. According to the pre-lesson contextual reading, what was the outcome for the other 20? *(Sample answer: ten others were sentenced to death, three to life imprisonment, four to prison terms ranging from ten to twenty years, and three were acquitted.)*

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11. Consider Alfred's final words in his testimony: "What we did at Nuremberg, I think, is of epochal importance. We, for the first time in human history so far as I know, set up a court that sat in moral judgment, legal judgment on the people that started and pursued a war." Through his lens, how was justice served as a result of the IMT's proceedings? (*Sample answer: Alfred sees the role of the Nuremberg trials as something much bigger and far-reaching than the outcome itself. He considered it a landmark moment in human history—just as the Holocaust itself was.*)
12. Many of the defendants at Nuremberg claimed either they didn't know what was happening or that they were following the orders of a higher authority. Construct a possible response to that argument. (*Answers will vary. Teachers will want to make sure that students understand that much of the evidence used to prosecute the defendants was created by or for the Nazi government, of which many of the defendants were a part. Evidence consisted of Nazi propaganda films and extensive Nazi records, which clearly documented many of the crimes; Allied films taken after liberation were used as evidence. In terms of defendants' claims that they were just following orders, Chief of Counsel for the United States Robert H. Jackson, was said to have relied heavily on the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 as argument against those claims. Teachers could choose to extend this question by asking students a provocative question, such as: To whom does one ultimately owe one's loyalty?*)
13. Why should so much care and consideration go into the translation, printing, and distribution of the court record and supporting documents from the IMT? In the larger sense, why is such accuracy and precision needed in the creation of any historical record? (*Sample answer: Studying precisely who said what helps us to better understand past events and helps us to make decisions in the present. As Alfred says, the court at Nuremberg was of "epochal importance," so the records should accurately reflect that. In a larger sense, some of our most treasured historical documents include transcripts of great speeches—Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches, etc., so it is important that the records of such events maintain the highest degree of accuracy and integrity.*)
14. Not everyone sees the outcome of the war crimes trials following the Holocaust in the same light. How might it also be viewed? (*Sample answer: Many would say in considering the scope and magnitude of the Holocaust, literally thousands could have been tried for their crimes, both large and small, yet relatively few were ever held legally accountable for their crimes for a variety of reasons.*)

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15. In addition to conducting trials, what are other ways in which justice can be accomplished for victims? *(Sample answers: Private and public apologies, restorative justice, community service, and restitution, etc.)*
16. In the wake of the Rwanda Tutsi genocide in 1994, in 2001 the Gacaca court was established to pursue justice in a number of ways: bearing witness, speeding up prosecution, and reconciliation of all Rwandans in order to heal and build unity. After conducting a little research, discuss with classmates the pros and cons of this justice system. *(Sample answer: The Gacaca court has some of its roots in traditional law enforcement in Rwanda, so it's not an unfamiliar concept for Rwandans. Its goals are laudable because it is good for both victim and perpetrator that trials be conducted as quickly as possible and to promote healing and moving forward. Some drawbacks are that not every perpetrator is adequately punished, and some victims are endangered for bearing witness. Additionally, sometimes perpetrator and victim end up living side by side, which can have mixed results.)*
17. How are the world in general and the United States specifically handling the current humanitarian crisis in Darfur? *(Sample answer: The recent request for an ICC indictment of Sudanese President Omar Bashir on crimes against humanity and genocide changes the dynamic of the Darfur conflict. The international community is currently debating over whether to suspend ICC prosecution of Bashir or to use the threat of prosecution to make concrete progress on bringing peace to Darfur. For more information on this topic, go to the [**Genocide Intervention Network**](#).)*

Biographical Connection

Once students have watched Alfred Steer's testimony and completed the activity and/or discussion questions, teachers may wish to print and hand out Alfred's biographical profile for students to read as a closing activity.

SUGGESTED PROMPTS: Compare and contrast how Alfred's story is transmitted through the two forms of media: visual history testimony and written biographic profile. What content information, if any, is unique to each medium? What is the advantage of each medium? Are there any disadvantages? Which medium do you prefer? Why?

Lesson: Glossary

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Glossary

The following glossary has been created to assist students and teachers with potentially unfamiliar words, phrases, or concepts in Alfred's testimony.

Der Stürmer² ("The Stormtrooper"), virulently antisemitic newspaper established in 1923 by Julius Streicher. In 1938, Streicher's *Der Stürmer* reached its high point in terms of circulation.

Fyfe, Sir David Maxwell² A British prosecutor at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg.

Göring, Hermann¹ Born in Rosenheim, Germany (1893-1946) Göring served in World War I and distinguished himself as a fighter pilot. In 1922 he joined the Nazi Party. He was elected to the Reichstag in 1928, and in 1932 he was elected speaker of the House. In 1935 he was made commander of the Luftwaffe. After the *November Pogrom*, Göring was put in charge of the "Jewish question." On January 24, 1939, he issued orders for the establishment of the Central Office for Jewish Emigration. On July 31, 1941, Göring ordered Reinhard Heydrich to "carry out all preparations with regard to the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe." The ineffectiveness of the Luftwaffe during the war eventually lowered Göring's stature in Hitler's eyes, and shortly before the war ended he was dismissed from all his posts and from the party. Göring was captured by the Allies and sentenced to death at the IMT in Nuremberg. On October 15, 1946, he committed suicide.

International Military Tribunal (IMT)¹ During the war, the Allied powers (the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union) agreed in a series of meetings that the Nazis and their allies would be held accountable for acts of brutality against military personnel and civilians, which violated international agreements on the conduct of war. In London, on August 8, 1945, the Allies created the charter for an International Military Tribunal (IMT), which was to convene in Nuremberg. The IMT tried twenty-two of Nazi Germany's political, military, and economic leaders. The defendants were accused of committing and conspiring to commit crimes against the peace (i.e., waging aggressive war), war crimes (violations of the laws and customs of war), and crimes against humanity (chiefly, the murder of civilians). The judgment, delivered on September 30, and October 1, 1946, sentenced twelve of the defendants to death. Seven received terms ranging from life imprisonment to ten years, while three were acquitted.

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Jackson, Justice Robert Houghwout¹ Born February 13, 1892, Spring Creek, Pennsylvania. President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed him to the Supreme Court in 1941. Jackson served as United States Chief of Counsel for the prosecution of Nazi war criminals at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, Germany, from 1945 to 1946. He died October 9, 1954, in Washington, D.C.

Quaker¹ Quakers or Society of Friends, also called Friends Church, is a Christian group that arose in England and the American colonies in the mid-17th century. Also known as Quakerism, it represents the extreme left wing of the 17th-century English Puritan movement. Friends was founded in England by George Fox (1624-1691), a nonconformist religious reformer.

Shoah³ A Hebrew word meaning “catastrophe,” referring to the Holocaust

Streicher, Julius¹ Born in Augsburg, Bavaria, Streicher (1885-1946) was an SA official and founder of the antisemitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*. Streicher also organized the April 1933 boycott against Jewish businesses and helped to create the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. He was arrested by the Americans on May 23, 1945, and tried at the Nuremberg IMT; he received the death sentence in 1946.

War Crimes¹ Criminal acts (e.g., torture, murder, looting, etc.) committed by individuals and organizations against an enemy, prisoners of war, or civilians in wartime, which violate international agreements or that are adjudged to be offenses against humanity.

War Crimes Trial Participants¹ People who took part in trials of alleged perpetrators of war crimes and/or crimes against humanity committed during World War II and/or the Holocaust.

Source of Definitions

¹ USC Shoah Foundation’s Visual History Archives Search Terms and Definitions

² The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum online glossary, *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, and/or photo archives.

³ *Echoes and Reflections: a Multimedia Curriculum on the Holocaust*

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Extension Activities

If time permits, teachers might consider, including the following additional activities:

1. **Nuremberg Defendants Activity** (to print activity, see Lesson Materials on the **Alfred Steer, War Crimes Trials Participant** webpage): Students should break into small groups to complete the “Closing Address” activity in conjunction with the handout, **The Nazi Defendants**. Students should be prepared to share with the larger group which defendant Chief of Counsel for the United States Robert H. Jackson, is describing in his **closing remarks**. The class should discuss Justice Jackson’s larger point about the defendants’ responsibility and guilt. Teachers will want to ensure students understand that Justice Jackson, by way of his closing remarks at Nuremberg, makes the defendants’ arguments that they were only following orders or were unaware of events both unbelievable and unacceptable defenses in the eyes of the world.
2. **International Humanitarian Law**: So that students may gain a better understanding of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), it is necessary that they research the history of the Geneva Conventions. The following extension exercise will give students a basis for understanding IHL:

First, students should read the first six articles of the **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide**.

Students should also read the key issues of the **Geneva Conventions**. Then ask the following questions about these core documents of international humanitarian law:

- 1) Why do you think these documents were written?
- 2) When were they written?
- 3) What is considered to be an act of genocide?
- 4) What will happen to people who commit an act of genocide?
- 5) Does it matter if they are government officials?

For more information, read some background on **International Humanitarian Law** and the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**.

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3. **The Nazi Hunter:** After the Nuremberg trials, the search for Nazi perpetrators was far from over. Some perpetrators began new lives in the United States, while others found Nazi sympathizers willing to give them sanctuary in South America. Simon Wiesenthal dedicated his life to the pursuit of these criminals. Some were brought to justice after being discovered by their victims, but still others managed to avoid capture. Research Wiesenthal's quest to bring Nazi war criminals to justice. Some questions to consider:
- 1) Which famous Nazis fled Germany to avoid trial?
 - 2) Where were they found?
 - 3) What happened to Joseph Mengele, the *Angel of Death*, who performed countless medical experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz?

References

The following is a list of the full Internet addresses used in this lesson:

1. **War Crimes Trials:** <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005140>
2. **Nuremberg Defendants:** <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10007654>
3. **Map of the Major European War Crimes Trials, 1943-1947:** <http://www.ushmm.org/lcmedia/viewer/wlc/map.php?RefId=EUR61030>
4. **Translation in the Courtroom:** <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=es&ModuleId=10007148>
5. **The Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928:** <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/imt/kbpact.htm>
6. **Genocide Intervention Network:** <http://www.genocideintervention.net/>
7. **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide:** <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/x1cpcpg.htm>
8. **Geneva Conventions:** <http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/genevaconventions>

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9. **International Humanitarian Law:**
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/justice/education/reading5.html>
10. **Universal Declaration of Human Rights:**
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/justice/education/human_law.html
11. **Closing Address before the International Military Tribunal:**
<http://www.roberthjackson.org/Man/theman2-7-8-2/>

Additional Resources

The following online resources offer teachers lesson ideas and are helpful for continuing a study of the Holocaust and war crimes:

1. **PBS Online: The Trial of Adolf Eichmann, a companion site for the PBS documentary of the same name:**
<http://www.remember.org/eichmann/study.htm>
2. **The Red Cross Resource Guide on International Humanitarian Law for Educators, a study guide for teachers on IHL, which includes lesson plans and activities:**
<http://www.redcross.org/museum/images/IHLAct4.pdf>