

Handout

An Overview of the Nuremberg Trials

Directions: Below are eight descriptions of key events from the Nuremberg trials. Read each description, and then choose one or more statements from the Justice after the Holocaust Anticipation Guide handout that relate to the event. Write the statement number (1–8) from the anticipation guide on the line after the event to which it relates. Then, in the space provided on this handout, explain the connection that you see between the two.

1. Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin suggested executing 50,000 members of the German army. Winston Churchill, the British leader, thought that high-ranking Nazi leaders should be hanged. But other leaders thought they should go to trial.

Statement #: _____

2. The Allied countries agreed to put Nazi leaders on trial for two reasons: 1) to punish those responsible, and 2) to prevent future crimes against humanity. Those who organized the trials wanted future leaders to know that if they acted like Hitler and other Nazi leaders, they would be punished for their actions; they could not just get away with murdering their own citizens.

Statement #: _____

3. Beginning in November 1945, an international trial—a court case involving many countries—was held in the city of Nuremberg in Germany, so the trials were called the Nuremberg trials. The trials included judges and lawyers from each of the winning countries (Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union). The Nazi defendants also had lawyers to defend them. Some argued that it was unfair for the Allied powers to bring the Nazis to trial because they had not broken any laws. (At this point in time, there were no international laws forbidding a government from murdering its own citizens.)

Statement #: _____

4. Twenty-four men were indicted (charged with a crime) during the first set of trials at Nuremberg. These defendants included military leaders, Nazi Party leaders, and officers who worked at the concentration camps. Hitler and several other Nazi leaders were not indicted because they had committed suicide or escaped at the end of the war. Some lower-ranking officers, soldiers, and bureaucrats who participated in the Holocaust were indicted in later trials. Bystanders also were not put on trial at Nuremberg or in future trials.

Statement #: _____

5. The defendants in the first set of trials were charged with four types of crimes. One of these crimes was "crimes against humanity." One of the men charged with crimes against humanity was Julius Streicher. He was minister of propaganda of the Nazi Party. He was responsible for spreading hateful lies about Jews in the newspaper and in other forms, such as children's books.

Statement #: _____

6. Many Nazis charged with "crimes against humanity" argued that they were only following orders and that they had not broken any laws by their actions.

Statement #: _____

7. Nineteen of the defendants were found guilty in the first Nuremberg trial. Twelve were sentenced to death by hanging. Three were given life in prison, and four were given prison terms ranging from 10 to 20 years. In the three years that followed, many more trials of Germans were held in Nuremberg. By 1949, more than 200 German officials, including the highest-ranking surviving Nazi leaders, members of the Einsatzgruppen mobile killing units, and dozens of physicians and industrialists, were brought to trial for their roles in the war and in the mass murder of civilians. The vast majority were convicted and sentenced to death or given prison sentences of varying lengths.

Statement #: _____

8. After the war, the Allied powers also had to consider what Germany should do to “pay back” the survivors of the Holocaust and the families of the victims. After all, the Nazis had taken all of their money and property and had caused immeasurable suffering. A program was set up to provide money (reparations) to those who could prove they were victims of the Nazis, and Germany was supposed to give back stolen property to its rightful owners (if they were still alive).

Statement #: _____

9. After you have finished discussing each section and making connections to the anticipation guide, work together to complete a 3-2-1 activity, described below, that you will share in a class discussion.

A. Write **three** things you learned about the Nuremberg trials and the complexities of seeking justice after World War II and the Holocaust after reading this overview.

B. Write **two** questions that your group has about the Nuremberg trials and the complexities of seeking justice after World War II and the Holocaust after reading this overview.

C. Write **one** idea from this overview that you found particularly interesting or confusing (you can do this one individually).