

## **Lesson 10: Heil Hitler: Confessions of a Hitler Youth**

### **Optional Lesson**

#### **1 Class Period + Follow-Up Discussion Time**

**Reading Skills:        Making Connections**  
**Building Schema**

#### **Purpose:**

*Heil Hitler: Confession of a Hitler Youth* is the video testimony of Alfons Heck. Heck was a devoted member of the Hitler Youth. His testimony touches upon many concepts of Holocaust study including the following:

- The elation of German citizens of the Rhineland when the region was remilitarized on March 7, 1936.
- Racial science classes taught to him in school. Heck’s understanding of belonging to the “master race.”
- Heck’s memories of watching the antisemitic film, *The Eternal Jew*.
- Joining the Hitler Youth and the Hitler Youth oath.
- Attending the Nazi Party Rally in Nuremberg as a Hitler Youth. Heck was one of 50,000 boys chosen to attend out of the 8 million members of the Hitler Youth. He left that he belonged to “a vast and important movement” and “belonged to Hitler, body and soul.”
- Heck’s impressions of Kristallnacht, which he calls “a frenzy of hatred.” He describes the destruction of a synagogue and desecration of Torah scrolls. He watched violence toward people he had known all of his life. He says that Kristallnacht was “the end of German innocence. We could not maintain that we didn’t know what was in store for the Jews.”
- Heck describes the first deportation of Jews from his hometown. He describes his indifference to their fate feeling that it was “such a shame that they were Jews.” He felt the deportations were a just measure – necessary for the survival of Germany.
- Heck discusses a few pivotal points in the war and the role of the Hitler Youth in the war effort. He describes the Hitler Youth as the last ditch defense of Germany’s home territory and the elation of his unit when they shot down an Allied plane. He says that he was not afraid to die because of his fanaticism. He had been indoctrinated to win the war or die. Even after Hitler’s suicide, the Hitler Youth kept on fighting.
- He describes being captured by the Allies and being forced to watch films of Nazi atrocities. He could not accept the truth of what he was seeing and began to laugh. He describes being treated harshly by his Allied captors.
- Heck tells about going to Nuremberg to listen to evidence against the defendants during the War Crimes Trials. He was particularly interested in the testimony of the leader of the Hitler Youth who said, “I have trained youth for a man who became a murderer a million times over.” Heck says that he felt implicated in the murders because he had served Hitler just as fanatically. He also felt a deep sense of betrayal and realizes that he was the victim of a kind of brainwashing.

- At the conclusion of the film, Heck says that the Nazis perpetrated a form of child abuse upon millions of German children.
- At the conclusion of the film, Heck gives a chilling warning about whether or not he thinks the Holocaust could happen again.

This film is riveting. It is very unusual to hear from a former Nazi who does not try, in any way, to defend or deny his involvement with the Nazis. Heck accepts full responsibility for the role he played in the Holocaust. He is committed to educating people so that history might not repeat itself.

Materials Needed:

A VHS or DVD of *Heil Hitler: Confession of a Hitler Youth*

Process:

I have tried in the past to give students a note-taking assignment to complete as they watch this film. I have found that the assignment mostly just gets in the way. The film is so engaging that I never have problems with students who do not pay full attention. It is also loaded with details, so the task of taking notes is ominous. I generally choose to just show the film and trust that the main ideas will stick with the students.

One strategy you might try is to choose a few points where you pause the film to discuss concepts conveyed to that point. Be aware, however, that you will not be able to show the entire film in one 45-minute class period if you stop. If you show the entire film in one period, be prepared to do some follow-up discussion the next class period or interspersed with other lessons throughout the unit.