

The Nuremberg Trials

Unit by

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Grade-Level Applicability: 9 – 12

Overview and Background of the Unit

The Nuremberg project is part of an historical film studies class that I have written on World War II. The inclusion of the film *Nuremberg* and the examination of its historical accuracy are a vital part of the ultimate goal for the class. Much of what Americans know about history, unfortunately, comes from their exposure to “Hollywood” films. Introducing the students to original documentation and oral histories, or transcripts of such histories, will assist them in evaluating the film’s accuracy and, ultimately, the process undertaken in the Military Tribunal commonly known as the Nuremberg Trials. In the process of evaluating the film, it is my intent to refine the students’ abilities to analyze, synthesize and evaluate historical documents.

The Lessons of the Unit

1. Evaluating Holocaust-Related Websites

Day one will be spent examining a Holocaust website as a class activity. The teacher will guide the students through series of steps to determine the authenticity and legitimacy of the website. The next day will be spent in small groups examining a Holocaust website. This lesson will take 2 class periods to complete.

2. Readings on Nuremberg

Using materials from Facing History and Ourselves, the students will be confronted with issues about obedience to orders, the rules of war, and the establishment of international standards. A careful examination of the readings will provide much to discuss for the weeklong lesson. Having wrestled with these issues, the students will be prepared to analyze Nazi documents used in the military tribunal and, hopefully, draw conclusions about the benefits or international law and standards.

3. Nuremberg: Film Review

After spending 3 class periods viewing the film, the students will write a 1-2 page review discussing the accuracy, or inaccuracy, of the film. As a basis for determining accuracy, the students will refer to transcript documents found online, transcripts from

Interrogations by Richard Overy, the oral histories found in Witness to Nuremberg by Bruce A. Stave and Michele Palmer and information found in The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials by Telford Taylor. This lesson may be completed in 4 – 5 class periods.

4. *The Case Against the Defendant*

Having viewed the HBO film *Nuremberg* and determined its accuracy, the students examine the evidence available about a select defendant. Having determined the charges levied against the defendant, the students will construct an opening statement for the trial against the defendant or write a journalist's columns or radio broadcasts covering the case. This lesson occurs the third week of a four-week unit on Nuremberg in a semester film class on World War 2. Prior to beginning the unit the students will have learned how to analyze primary sources and websites. This lesson will take 5-7 class periods to complete if all work is done in class or 3 class periods if the research is conducted outside of the classroom

5. *Examination of the USHMM Website*

Using the information on the website, the students will examine the opening statement of General Telford Taylor. Having read the statement, they will select a "medical experiment" to research and prepare a ten-minute presentation for their classmates outlining the "experiment", those involved, and the sentences handed to the defendants. This lesson will take 5 class periods to complete.

