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Craig Nordquist

Adolf Hitler



Bruce Coleman, Inc.

STUDY GUIDE

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PROGRAM

Adolf Hitler is probably the most notorious man in the history of the modern age. Adolf Hitler was a gifted orator and skilled politician. He was able to unite Germany, disillusioned, defeated, and weak after the First World War, making them able to take on most of the industrialized nations of the world and almost win. We will look at the man who caused the deaths of over twenty million people. Showing the weaponry, clothing, and military artifacts from WWII help to show how the German Reich was able to wage such a war.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

A Cincinnati native, Craig "Deks" Nordquist is an Eagle Scout and has been active as adult leader in Scouting for over 14 years. He attended Finneytown High School and graduated with a BA degree in Military History and a minor in Archaeology from Miami University in 1977. Over the last 25 years, he has given over 250 lectures and performances to schools and organizations. Some of the more notable lectures have been to the West German military in Frankfurt on WWI, Cincinnati Art Museum on Vikings, and to the City of Cedar Rapids, Iowa on Romans. Hobbies are many, but include coin and artifact collecting and Roman, Viking, Revolutionary War, Civil War, WWI and WWII reenacting.

ADOLF HITLER

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was a German political and military leader and one of the 20th Century's most powerful dictators. Hitler converted Germany into a fully militarized society and launched World War II in 1939. He made anti-Semitism a keystone of his propaganda and policies and built the Nazi Party into a mass movement. He hoped to conquer the entire world, and for a time dominated most of Europe and much of North Africa. He instituted sterilization and euthanasia measures to enforce his idea of racial purity among German people and caused the slaughter of millions of Jews, Sinti and Roma (Gypsies), Slavic peoples, and many others, all of whom he considered inferior.

EARLY YEARS

Adolf Hitler was born in Braunau am Inn, Austria-Hungary, in 1889, the fourth child of Klara and Alois Hitler. Hitler's father worked his way up in the Austrian customs service to a position of considerable status, and as a result Hitler had a comfortable childhood. Hitler began school in 1900, and his grades were above average. It was decided that he would attend *Realschule*, a secondary school that prepared students for further study and emphasized modern languages and technical subjects. However,

Hitler and his father strongly differed about career plans. His father wanted him to enter the civil service; Hitler insisted on becoming an artist. As a result, Hitler did poorly in Realschule, having to repeat the first year and improving little thereafter.

During this time, Hitler began to form his political views: a strong sense of German nationalism, the beginnings of anti-Semitism, and a distaste for the ruling family and political structure of Austria-Hungary. Like many German-speaking citizens of Austria-Hungary, Hitler considered himself first and foremost a German.

The death of Hitler's father in January 1903 changed the family. The survivors' income was adequate to support Hitler, his mother, and his sister, but the absence of a dominant father figure altered Hitler's position in the family. He spent much time playing and dreaming, did poorly in his studies, and left school entirely in 1905 after the equivalent of the ninth grade.

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 came as an opportunity for Hitler, as his money was running out. He volunteered for a Bavarian unit in the German army and served the whole war. Though repeatedly decorated for bravery, he was never promoted beyond private first class. In a war of very high casualties, this is difficult to explain. Perhaps officers considered him a loner who could carry messages and perform other dangerous duties but who was unsuited to command men.

Hitler saw trench warfare as a form of the struggle for survival among races, a struggle that he was coming to see as the essence of existence. At the same time, his anti-Semitic feelings were growing extreme. When Germany was defeated in 1918, Hitler was lying in a military hospital, temporarily blinded by mustard gas. He decided Jews had caused Germany's defeat and that he would enter politics to save the country.

Hitler returned to Munich after the war. He was selected to be a political speaker by the local army headquarters, given special training, and provided with opportunities to practice his public speaking before returning prisoners of war. His speaking successes led to his selection as an observer of political groups in the Munich area. In this capacity, he investigated the German Workers' Party—one of the many nationalist, racist groups that developed in Munich in the postwar years.

BEGINNINGS OF THE NAZI PARTY

The German Workers' Party, later renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party (abbreviated NSDAP or Nazi Party), became Hitler's political focus. Here he found an outlet for his talents in political agitation and party organization. The party espoused essentially the same ideas Hitler had picked up in Vienna: violent racial nationalism and anti-Semitism. He also shared the Nazis' opposition to the liberal democracy of the German Weimar Republic, which had been established after the war.

Though still in the army, Hitler quickly became the new spokesman for the party. His talent for public speaking and the use of the local army's resources to generate publicity drew large audiences to events sponsored by an organization that had only 100 to 200 members. When he presented the party's official program to a gathering on February 24, 1920, there were almost 2000 present.

Hitler was discharged from the army the following month, and he soon attained dominance in the Nazi party. He was the party's most effective recruiter and, thanks to paid attendance at his speeches, its most successful fundraiser. When opposed within the party, he found ways to push out rivals and dissenters. Several times he did so by threatening to leave the party himself. Hitler obtained enough support to have himself chosen as *Führer* (absolute leader) of the party on July 29, 1921.

*Pictured:
Adolf Hitler, one of
the most powerful
dictators of the 20th
Century.*



RISE TO POWER

Hitler appealed to a wide variety of people by combining an effective and carefully rehearsed speaking style with what looked like absolute sincerity and determination. He found a large audience for his program of national revival, racial pride in Germanic values, hatred for France and of Jews and other non-German races, and disdain for the Weimar Republic. Hitler asserted only a dictatorship could rescue Germany from the depths to which it had fallen. His views changed only minimally in subsequent years and attracted increasingly larger audiences.

At the end of World War I, the Allies (those countries who had fought against Germany) had demanded that Germany pay reparations—that is, payments for war damages. The government refused to pay all that was demanded by the Allies. When Germany failed to pay enough, France and

Belgium occupied the coal mines in the Ruhr industrial area in west central Germany in January 1923.

In protest, the German government halted all reparation payments and called for passive resistance by all the workers in the Ruhr area. This resistance took the form of a general strike, with laborers throughout the Ruhr refusing to work. To pay the striking workers, and to make up for money lost due to the stoppage of coal production, the government printed huge amounts of new money. This vast increase in the money supply triggered runaway inflation, as the German currency rapidly lost value. People saw their savings become worthless, while the price of goods skyrocketed.

Faced with massive inflation and growing civic unrest, the German government abandoned passive resistance and attempted to work out a new agreement with the Allies. At this point, Hitler decided the time was right to start a revolution. His followers were becoming restless, and he feared that the opportunity to launch a coup might pass as the government worked out an agreement and ended inflation.

On November 8, 1923, Hitler and 600 armed members of the *Sturmabteilungen* (or SA, a Nazi paramilitary force) made their move. They marched on a Munich beer hall where Gustav von Kahr, head of the provincial Bavarian government, was addressing a public meeting. Hitler took von Kahr and his associates hostage and declared in von Kahr's name the formation of a new national government. Von Kahr was then released, and he immediately retracted the statement, outlawed the Nazi party, and ordered the Bavarian police to crush Hitler's revolution.

The so-called Beer Hall *putsch* (revolt) had failed. Hitler fled but was soon arrested and tried. In court he practically took over the proceedings, denouncing both the Weimar Republic and the Bavarian government. Hitler was sentenced to five years in prison for treason, but was released after less than one year.

MEIN KAMPF

While in prison, Hitler dictated the first volume of *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle, translated 1939); after his release he continued with a second volume. This work contained many of his basic ideas. Hitler believed that history was the record of struggles among races. He held that the superior Aryan race, centered in Germany, would be the final victor and would rule the world. But to win this struggle, Germany would have to be ruled by a dictator and would have to be racially aware. Racial awareness would come through a process of mobilizing the masses with propaganda that appealed to their feelings, not their reason, and aroused their hatred for all other allegedly inferior races, especially Jews. No class or other distinctions in German society mattered.

Another of Hitler's major ideas was the concept of *Lebensraum* (living space). He denounced as hopelessly stupid those German political parties

ARYAN – of or relating to a hypothetical ethnic type illustrated by or descended from early speakers of Indo-European languages; used in Nazism to designate a supposed master race of non-Jewish Caucasians having especially Nordic features

and movements that wanted to reverse the 1919 Treaty of Versailles and reclaim what Germany had then lost. Instead, Hitler argued that Germany needed large amounts of territory in which to expand, a need that he would meet by conquering territory and expelling or killing the local populations. Such measures naturally required wars, but not for political or economic objectives. Hitler's wars would be fought to win vast stretches of land on which German settlers would raise large families. Eventually more land would be needed, but the population would have grown sufficiently to provide the soldiers needed to replace the losses caused by war and to conquer more land. What would happen when the German settlers met on the other side of the globe was not explained.

REORGANIZATION OF THE PARTY

During his time in jail, Hitler had turned over direction of the party to Alfred Rosenberg. Rosenberg edited the party's newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter* (Popular Observer), but had no administrative ability. As a result, Hitler easily resumed complete control of the party upon his release in December 1924. In the years from 1925 to 1930, Hitler built up a network of local party organizations over most of Germany, and reorganized the SA. At the same time he organized the black-shirted *Schutzstaffel* (defense corps), or SS, to protect him, supervise and control the party, and perform police tasks.



*Pictured:
A Midnight
Schutzstaffel, or SS,
Ceremony. The SS
was the most feared
organization within
Hitler's National
Socialist Party,
responsible for
running the
concentration
camps during WWII.*

INCREASING POPULARITY

In 1928 Hitler began his attempt to build the power of the party by democratic means. In the 1928 election the Nazi Party received just under 3 percent of the vote, but during the campaign it had gathered a strong base. In 1929 a new settlement of the war reparations question, the Young Plan, was adopted, opening up the possibility of an early end to the remaining foreign occupation of a portion of Germany. Such an event might stabilize the republic, and in fear of this, the republic's opponents organized a national initiative against the plan. This initiative, which was financed by the German nationalist Alfred Hugenberg, provided Hitler with opportunities to speak throughout Germany. The initiative to stop the Young Plan failed, but Hitler had recruited new followers who not only believed his message but were also willing to finance the Nazi Party.

In late 1929 the first effects of the worldwide economic depression were felt in Germany. The last government of the Weimar Republic based

on a majority in the *Reichstag* (the German parliament) was not able to cope with the crisis and fell in March 1930. President Paul von Hindenburg appointed a new government led by Heinrich Brüning as chancellor (prime minister). However, Brüning and the Reichstag could not agree on how to resolve the crisis. Hindenburg dissolved the legislature and operated the government by emergency decree, rather than through the normal legislative procedure. In new elections held that September, the Nazis scored a great electoral breakthrough, increasing their representation in the Reichstag from 12 to 107.

The victory of the Nazi Party, which had campaigned vigorously for the repudiation of all of Germany's financial obligations, caused foreign investors to withdraw their money from Germany, and the German banking system collapsed due to lack of capital. As economic conditions worsened, the appeal of the Nazis was far more effective than that of other parties: The Nazis were the one group that claimed to have all the answers.

In elections held in 1932, the Nazis received more votes than any other party, and Hitler demanded that President Hindenburg appoint him chancellor. Though Hindenburg at first refused to appoint Hitler, a small group of men around the president urged him to do so. They felt that Hitler could be controlled and his popularity and talents could be used to further the interests of the government. On January 30, 1933, Hitler was sworn in as chancellor of Germany. Those who disliked the republic had persuaded the president to turn over authority to its sworn enemy.

THE NAZI REGIME

Immediately upon becoming chancellor, Hitler moved to consolidate his power. He persuaded Hindenburg to issue a decree suspending all civil liberties in Germany. A subservient legislature passed the Enabling Act, which permitted Hitler's government to make laws without legislative approval. The act effectively made the legislature powerless. Hitler then installed loyal Nazis in important posts in the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and the German provincial governments. He replaced all labor unions with the Nazi-controlled German Labor Front and banned all political parties except his own. The economy, the media, and all cultural activities were brought under Nazi authority. An individual's livelihood was made dependent on his or her political loyalty. Thousands of anti-Nazis were taken to concentration camps—the existence of which was widely publicized—and all signs of dissent were suppressed. A massive propaganda campaign celebrated the end of democracy in Germany, and huge, staged demonstrations gave the impression that everyone supported Hitler.

Existing social, economic, and professional organizations were quickly taken over by individuals either already in the party or who would quickly join it. For the most part, leaders of Germany's Protestant and Catholic churches rallied to the new government. Schools taught Nazi ideology.

Soon the spare time of the young was absorbed by the Nazi Party as well—boys were drawn into the Hitler Youth, and girls became members of the Nazi-led League of German Girls. The goal was to indoctrinate people into the party starting at a young age. By the summer of 1933, the Nazi Party was in complete control of the country.

REARMAMENT OF GERMANY

*Pictured:
At Nurnberg, Hitler
preached to the
assembled German
soldiers and the
Nazi party faithful
they were a
superior race that
deserved more than
they had.*

Starting in 1933, Hitler began the process of German rearmament and militarization that would eventually lead to World War II. Hitler's plans for conquest consisted of four distinct wars. The first war would be against Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic and Slovakia). He was certain that the Czechs would put up little resistance and Czech territory and resources could then be used to further his continuing plans for conquest. Hitler's second war would be against Britain and



France. He expected this to be the most difficult conflict, as these countries had defeated Germany during World War I. Hitler prepared for this war during the 1930s.

The third war would be against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), where Hitler planned to seize huge portions of territory for German settlement. However, Hitler badly miscalculated when he assumed the conquest of the USSR would be simple. His assumption was based on his belief that the Soviets, many of whom were of Slavic descent, were an inferior race controlled by the Jews under the guise of socialism. As a result, Hitler made no military preparations for that war and counted on a quick victory to provide Germany with the resources, especially the oil, needed for the fourth war, which was to be waged against the United States. Hitler felt that actually fighting the Americans would be easy, but technical preparations for the conflict had to be made well in advance because the United States was far away and had a large navy.

Despite Hitler's drive for German self-sufficiency he knew that Nazi forces alone could not overcome the major European powers—at least not at first—and he began to seek allies. Hitler had long hoped to win the support of Italy in any coming war. He admired Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, whose nationalistic and militaristic policies mirrored his own. This admiration was reciprocated, and in 1936, Hitler and Mussolini established the Rome-Berlin Axis. Hitler then turned to Japan as a possible ally against Britain and France. In 1940 the Rome-Berlin Axis was extended to include Japan and became the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis.

BUILDUP TO WAR

ANSCHLUSS

One of Hitler's primary goals had always been to unite all German-speaking people in Europe. To this end, Hitler strongly pursued *Anschluss* (union) between Germany and Austria. The latter country was the primarily German-speaking remnant of the old empire of Austria-Hungary, which had been dismembered after World War I. The union of Germany and Austria had been forbidden by the treaty that ended World War I, a restriction deeply resented in both countries. Hitler, himself an ethnic German of Austrian birth, had always expected to incorporate Austria into his German empire—an empire he named the Third Reich. Union with Austria would increase Germany's population, strengthen its army, and open an avenue to southeastern Europe.

Efforts to accomplish *Anschluss* by external pressure and an internal coup failed in 1933 and 1934. These heavy-handed tactics considerably dampened Austrian enthusiasm for union with Germany. By 1937 Hitler was openly threatening the Austrian government and massing troops along the Austrian border. In March 1938 the Austrian chancellor resigned and was replaced by a member of the Austrian Nazi Party. On March 12, Hitler ordered his army to march into Austria. They met no resistance, and the following day in Vienna, Hitler proclaimed the official union of Austria and Germany.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In early May 1938 Hitler decided to begin the first of his wars, that against Czechoslovakia. Hitler planned to crush Czechoslovakia, use its sizeable ethnic German population to enlarge his army, and expel or kill its non-German inhabitants. However, there was unexpected foreign pressure against an invasion. Mussolini urged Hitler to negotiate, and Britain took a firm stand in support of Czechoslovakia. Hitler called off the invasion in favor of negotiations, which ended in the Munich Pact. By the terms of this agreement, Czechoslovakia ceded to Germany portions of its land that were inhabited by ethnic Germans.

In the winter of 1938 and 1939 Hitler believed the time had come for war with France and Britain. Those countries hoped war could be avoided; the experience of World War I had convinced them that even a victorious war would not be worth the cost. As a result, leaders in London and Paris had worked hard to settle whatever international issues might arise and to escape war if at all possible. The signs that Germany was looking for further expansion even after the Munich Pact, however, led the British and French governments to decide in early 1939 that if Germany took action against any other country and that country resisted, they would go to war.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

Before attacking in the west, Hitler needed to secure two things: a quiet front on Germany's eastern border and allies against Britain and France. The first of these meant subordinating Hungary, Lithuania, and Poland to Germany. A change of government in Hungary favored Hitler's aims. He then successfully intimidated Lithuania into submitting to the Germans and annexed the formerly-German region of Memel, which had been ceded to Lithuania after World War I. The Poles, however, were unwilling to surrender without a fight. Hitler decided to conquer Poland first and then turn to the west. As for securing allies, Italy was willing but Japan hesitant.

In a reversal of his former anti-Communist stance, Hitler turned to the USSR. The Soviets had made offers of agreements in prior years, but Hitler had turned them away. Now, in Hitler's eyes, the USSR could help destroy Poland and then provide Germany with supplies while Nazi forces defeated Britain and France. Then Hitler would crush the Soviets. Consequently, concessions made to Soviet leader Joseph Stalin made no difference to Hitler—they would all be taken back later. Hitler offered Stalin whatever he wanted to get an agreement signed. The deal was signed on August 23, 1939. On Hitler's orders, the invasion of Poland began on September 1, 1939. Almost immediately, Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

WORLD WAR II

Polish resistance was no match for the German army, and the country quickly fell. Hitler had originally hoped to attack in the west in late 1939, but bad weather forced postponement. In the meantime the German navy urged an occupation of Denmark and Norway and war with the United States. Hitler agreed to the first, an operation conducted in April 1940, but preferred to postpone war with the United States until he could either complete construction of a navy large enough to fight the Americans or could acquire an ally who had one. In May and June of 1940, Hitler's forces routed the armies of the Netherlands, Belgium, and France.

Although Hitler failed to subdue Britain, he felt that by driving all resistance off the European continent he had effectively won the war in the west. He immediately accelerated the preparations for war with the United States and decided to attack the USSR in the fall of 1940. The British refusal to surrender confirmed his decision to attack the USSR; advice from the military led him to delay the invasion until late spring of 1941. Hitler believed the United States would come to Britain's aid, and a German invasion of the USSR would encourage Japan to attack the Americans before they had a chance to help the British. He also encouraged a Japanese attack by promising to join Japan in a war against the United States. Japan had the large navy Hitler felt he needed.

HOLOCAUST – a sacrifice consumed by fire; a thorough destruction involving extensive loss of life especially through fire; the mass slaughter of European civilians, especially Jews, by the Nazis during World War II.

*Pictured:
The crematorium is one of four at the Birkenau death camp in Poland, also known as Auschwitz II. It was used to incinerate the bodies of people killed in the camp's four gas chambers.*

The invasion of the USSR was launched in spite of Stalin's attempts to prevent it. Even though Hitler had been massing troops on the border with the USSR for several weeks prior to the invasion, Stalin insisted that Soviet forces should take no action that could provoke the Nazis. His policies proved futile, and the attack began on June 22, 1941. The Germans completely underestimated the USSR, however, especially the ability of its government to control and mobilize the country's resources. The Soviet army halted and then defeated the Germans in 1941 and crushed subsequent German offensives in 1942 and 1943.

THE HOLOCAUST

As his armies were rolling through Polish resistance, Hitler stepped up the elimination of peoples he saw as inferior to Germans. Shortly after their 1939 conquest of Poland, the Germans began killing thousands of Poles and driving thousands more out of their homes to make way for German settlers. The Nazis also herded Jewish Poles into city ghettos, killing thousands of them and condemning the rest to starvation. Within Germany, Hitler ordered a program to systematically kill handicapped Germans, and over 200,000 were eventually murdered.



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The German authorities planned to kill all Jews in the portions of the USSR they occupied and began the process in the summer of 1941. In late July 1941, Hitler decided to extend the systematic killing of Jews to all of German-occupied Europe. After the renewed German offensive in the USSR in October 1941 appeared to make great progress, he decided the time had come to go even further: All Jews on earth would be killed. However, the Nazis found that German police and soldiers who did the killing were often traumatized by the experience. To make the slaughter faster and less stressful, the Germans built specially designed death camps, primarily in occupied Poland, to which Jews and other prisoners from all over Europe were transported. These camps contained large gas chambers where hundreds of prisoners at a time could be quickly, easily, and impersonally murdered by poison gas.

In his public speeches, Hitler repeatedly referred to the killing of Europe's Jews but without detailing the process. Because the Allies halted Germany's forces, Hitler's global ambitions were not realized; however, of the approximately 18 million Jews in the world, one-third were killed in what came to be known as the Holocaust. The great majority of European Jews perished, a fact that Hitler boasted of in his last testament.

THE END OF THE WAR

By the time of the Allied D-Day invasion of Normandy, in northern France, in June 1944, the war was going very badly for Hitler. A series of losses to the Allies and failure to defeat the Soviets had left Hitler's armies severely weakened. Hitler's Germany had also changed a great deal. British and American bombers were devastating its industries and cities. The Germans who had reservations about Hitler's regime had begun to find some recruits.

Underestimating the Americans, Hitler launched his last reserves west into the Ardennes country of Belgium and Luxembourg in the Battle of the Bulge (December 1944-January 1945). He felt that despite massive Allied gains, a hard blow would cause popular support for the war in America to collapse, and would lead to the disintegration of the coalition arrayed against him. All he accomplished, however, was to draw away troops needed in the east, allowing the Soviet army's winter offensive to roll all the way to the gates of Berlin. Hitler decided to remain in the city, hoping to inspire its defenders and anticipating a breakup of the Allies' alliance. When neither of these hopes were realized, he appointed Karl Dönitz, the head of the navy and a devoted Nazi, as his successor. He then married his mistress Eva Braun and committed suicide in Berlin on April 30, 1945.

*Pictured:
Adolf Hitler (right)
and Italian dictator
Benito Mussolini
(left) became allies
in 1936.*



DISCUSSION

1. Name books, movies and TV shows about Adolf Hitler or set during WWII. How do they depict Hitler? How do they depict the war? From whose viewpoint?
2. Could another Hitler come to power? Why or why not? Where/in what country? In the United States?
3. What characteristics would you like a leader of a country to have? What characteristics do you think are necessary to succeed as a leader?
4. From the end of World War II to the 1990s, Germany existed as two countries – East Germany and West Germany. Why was the country split? What led to its unification?
5. At periods throughout history a group (either ethnic or religious) has been blamed for the problems in a country. Name examples when this has happened. Why was this group singled out? What were the ramifications for this group and the country as a whole?
6. The Nazis committed some of the worst “crimes against humanity” by systematically killing Jews and other people deemed undesirable. What are some of the lingering effects of the Holocaust? What recent events can be classified as “ethnic cleansing”? How are they similar or different than the Holocaust?
7. Discuss the following poem:

In Germany they first came for the Communists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.
Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.
Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Catholics,
and I didn't speak up because I was Protestant.
Then they came for me—
and by that time no one was left to speak up.

—Pastor Martin Niemöller, 1945