

## Adolf Hitler Return to the Teacher's Guide

### Adolf Hitler

#### Synopsis

Adolf Hitler, a charismatic, Austrian-born demagogue, rose to power in Germany during the 1920s and early 1930s at a time of social, political, and economic upheaval. Failing to take power by force in 1923, he eventually won power by democratic means. Once in power, he eliminated all opposition and launched an ambitious program of world domination and elimination of the Jews, paralleling ideas he advanced in his book, *Mein Kampf*. His "1,000 Year Reich" barely lasted 12 years and he died a broken and defeated man.

#### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

Students will learn:

1. Facts about Hitler's life and the historical events which occurred during that time.
2. Hitler's view of history, his theory of race, and his political goals.
3. Hitler's use of anti-Semitism to advance his career and to consolidate power.
4. How a political leader was able to manipulate the political system in a democracy and obtain autocratic power.

#### CHAPTER CONTENT

##### Hitler's Early Life

Adolf Hitler was born on April 20, 1889, the fourth child of Alois Schickelgruber and Klara Hitler in the Austrian town of Braunau. Two of his siblings died from diphtheria when they were children, and one died shortly after birth. Alois was a customs official, illegitimate by birth, who was described by his housemaid as a "very strict but comfortable" man. Young Adolf was showered with love and affection by his mother.

When Adolf was three years old, the family moved to Passau, along the Inn River on the German side of the border. A brother, Edmond, was born two years later. The family moved once more in 1895 to the farm community of Hafeld, 30 miles southwest of Linz. Another sister, Paula, was born in 1896, the sixth of the union, supplemented by a half brother and half sister from one of his father's two previous marriages.

Following another family move, Adolf lived for six months across from a large Benedictine monastery. The monastery's coat of arms' most salient feature was a swastika. As a youngster, Adolf's dream was to enter the priesthood. While there is anecdotal evidence that Adolf's father regularly beat him during his childhood, it was not unusual for discipline to be enforced in that way during that period.

By 1900, Hitler's talents as an artist surfaced. He did well enough in school to be eligible for either the university preparatory "gymnasium" or the technical/scientific Realschule. Because the latter had a course in drawing, Adolf accepted his father's decision to enroll him in the Realschule. He did not do well there.

Adolf's father died in 1903 after suffering a pleural hemorrhage. Adolf himself suffered from lung infections, and he quit school at the age of 16, partially the result of ill health and partially the result of poor school work.

In 1906, Adolf was permitted to visit Vienna, but he was unable to gain admission to a prestigious art school. His mother developed terminal breast cancer and was treated by Dr. Edward Bloch, a Jewish doctor who served the poor. After an operation and excruciatingly painful and expensive treatments with a dangerous drug, she died on December 21, 1907.

Hitler spent six years in Vienna, living on a small legacy from his father and an orphan's pension. Virtually penniless by 1909, he wandered Vienna as a

transient, sleeping in bars, flophouses, and shelters for the homeless, including, ironically, those financed by Jewish philanthropists. It was during this period that he developed his prejudices about Jews, his interest in politics, and debating skills. According to John Toland's biography, Adolf Hitler, two of his closest friends at this time were Jewish, and he admired Jewish art dealers and Jewish operatic performers and producers. However, Vienna was a center of anti-Semitism, and the media's portrayal of Jews as scapegoats with stereotyped attributes did not escape Hitler's fascination.

In May 1913, Hitler, seeking to avoid military service, left Vienna for Munich, the capital of Bavaria, following a windfall received from an aunt who was dying. In January, the police came to his door bearing a draft notice from the Austrian government. The document threatened a year in prison and a fine if he was found guilty of leaving his native land with the intent of evading conscription. Hitler was arrested on the spot and taken to the Austrian Consulate. Upon reporting to Salzburg for duty, he was found "unfit...too weak...and unable to bear arms."

#### Hitler's World War I Service

When World War I was touched off by the assassination by a Serb of the heir to the Austrian Empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Hitler's passions against foreigners, particularly Slavs, were inflamed. He was caught up in the patriotism of the time, and submitted a petition to enlist in the Bavarian army.

After less than two months of training, Hitler's regiment saw its first combat near Ypres, against the British and Belgians. Hitler narrowly escaped death in battle several times, and was eventually awarded two Iron Crosses for bravery. He rose to the rank of lance corporal but no further. In October 1916, he was wounded by an enemy shell and evacuated to a Berlin area hospital. After recovering, and serving a total of four years in the trenches, he was temporarily blinded by a mustard gas attack in Belgium in October 1918. Communist-inspired insurrections shook Germany while Hitler was recovering from his injuries. Some Jews were leaders of these abortive revolutions, and this inspired hatred of Jews as well as Communists. On November 9th, the Kaiser abdicated and the Socialists gained control of the government. Anarchy was more the rule in the cities.

#### Free Corps

The Free Corps was a paramilitary organization composed of vigilante war veterans who banded together to fight the growing Communist insurgency which was taking over Germany. The Free Corps crushed this insurgency. Its members formed the nucleus of the Nazi "brown-shirts" (S.A.) which served as the Nazi party's army.

#### Weimar Republic

With the loss of the war, the German monarchy came to an end and a republic was proclaimed. A constitution was written providing for a President with broad political and military power and a parliamentary democracy. A national election was held to elect 423 deputies to the National Assembly. The centrist parties swept to victory. The result was what is known as the Weimar Republic. On June 28, 1919, the German government ratified the Treaty of Versailles. Under the terms of the treaty which ended hostilities in the War, Germany had to pay reparations for all civilian damages caused by the war. Germany also lost her colonies and large portions of German territory. A 30-mile strip on the right bank of the Rhine was demilitarized. Limits were placed on German armaments and military strength. The terms of the treaty were humiliating to most Germans, and condemnation of its terms undermined the government and served as a rallying cry for those who like Hitler believed Germany was ultimately destined for greatness.

#### German Worker's Party

Soon after the war, Hitler was recruited to join a military intelligence unit,

and was assigned to keep tabs on the German Worker's Party. At the time, it was comprised of only a handful of members. It was disorganized and had no program, but its members expressed a right-wing doctrine consonant with Hitler's. He saw this party as a vehicle to reach his political ends. His blossoming hatred of the Jews became part of the organization's political platform. Hitler built up the party, converting it from a de facto discussion group to an actual political party. Advertising for the party's meetings appeared in anti-Semitic newspapers. The turning point of Hitler's mesmerizing oratorical career occurred at one such meeting held on October 16, 1919. Hitler's emotional delivery of an impromptu speech captivated his audience. Through word of mouth, donations poured into the party's coffers, and subsequent mass meetings attracted hundreds of Germans eager to hear the young, forceful and hypnotic leader.

With the assistance of party staff, Hitler drafted a party program consisting of twenty-five points. This platform was presented at a public meeting on February 24, 1920, with over 2,000 eager participants. After hecklers were forcibly removed by Hitler supporters armed with rubber truncheons and whips, Hitler electrified the audience with his masterful demagoguery. Jews were the principal target of his diatribe. Among the 25 points were revoking the Versailles Treaty, confiscating war profits, expropriating land without compensation for use by the state, revoking civil rights for Jews, and expelling those Jews who had emigrated into Germany after the war began.

The following day, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion were published in the local anti-Semitic newspaper. The false, but alarming accusations reinforced Hitler's anti-Semitism. Soon after, treatment of the Jews was a major theme of Hitler's orations, and the increasing scapegoating of the Jews for inflation, political instability, unemployment, and the humiliation in the war, found a willing audience. Jews were tied to "internationalism" by Hitler. The name of the party was changed to the National Socialist German Worker's party, and the red flag with the swastika was adopted as the party symbol. A local newspaper which appealed to anti-Semites was on the verge of bankruptcy, and Hitler raised funds to purchase it for the party.

In January 1923, French and Belgian troops marched into Germany to settle a reparations dispute. Germans resented this occupation, which also had an adverse effect on the economy. Hitler's party benefited by the reaction to this development, and exploited it by holding mass protest rallies despite a ban on such rallies by the local police.

The Nazi party began drawing thousands of new members, many of whom were victims of hyper-inflation and found comfort in blaming the Jews for this trouble. The price of an egg, for example, had inflated to 30 million times its original price in just 10 years. Economic upheaval generally breeds political upheaval, and Germany in the 1920s was no exception.

The Munich Putsch

The Bavarian government defied the Weimar Republic, accusing it of being too far left. Hitler endorsed the fall of the Weimar Republic, and declared at a public rally on October 30, 1923 that he was prepared to march on Berlin to rid the government of the Communists and the Jews. On November 8, 1923, Hitler held a rally at a Munich beer hall and proclaimed a revolution. The following day, he led 2,000 armed "brown-shirts" in an attempt to take over the Bavarian government. This putsch was resisted and put down by the police, after more than a dozen were killed in the fighting. Hitler suffered a broken and dislocated arm in the melee, was arrested, and was imprisoned at Landsberg. He received a five-year sentence.

Mein Kampf

Hitler served only nine months of his five-year term. While in prison, he wrote the first volume of Mein Kampf. It was partly an autobiographical book (although filled with glorified inaccuracies, self-serving half-truths and outright revisionism) which also detailed his views on the future of the German people.

There were several targets of the vicious diatribes in the book, such as democrats, Communists, and internationalists. But he reserved the brunt of his vituperation for the Jews, whom he portrayed as responsible for all of the problems and evils of the world, particularly democracy, Communism, and internationalism, as well as Germany's defeat in the War. Jews were the German nation's true enemy, he wrote. They had no culture of their own, he asserted, but perverted existing cultures such as Germany's with their parasitism. As such, they were not a race, but an anti-race.

"[The Jews'] ultimate goal is the denaturalization, the promiscuous bastardization of other peoples, the lowering of the racial level of the highest peoples as well as the domination of his racial mishmash through the extirpation of the folkish intelligentsia and its replacement by the members of his own people," he wrote. On the contrary, the German people were of the highest racial purity and those destined to be the master race according to Hitler. To maintain that purity, it was necessary to avoid intermarriage with subhuman races such as Jews and Slavs.

Germany could stop the Jews from conquering the world only by eliminating them. By doing so, Germany could also find Lebensraum, living space, without which the superior German culture would decay. This living space, Hitler continued, would come from conquering Russia (which was under the control of Jewish Marxists, he believed) and the Slavic countries. This empire would be launched after democracy was eliminated and a "Führer" called upon to rebuild the German Reich.

A second volume of Mein Kampf was published in 1927. It included a history of the Nazi party to that time and its program, as well as a primer on how to obtain and retain political power, how to use propaganda and terrorism, and how to build a political organization.

While Mein Kampf was crudely written and filled with embarrassing tangents and ramblings, it struck a responsive chord among its target those Germans who believed it was their destiny to dominate the world. The book sold over five million copies by the start of World War II.

#### Hitler's Rise to Power

Once released from prison, Hitler decided to seize power constitutionally rather than by force of arms. Using demagogic oratory, Hitler spoke to scores of mass audiences, calling for the German people to resist the yoke of Jews and Communists, and to create a new empire which would rule the world for 1,000 years.

Hitler's Nazi party captured 18% of the popular vote in the 1930 elections. In 1932, Hitler ran for President and won 30% of the vote, forcing the eventual victor, Paul von Hindenburg, into a runoff election. A political deal was made to make Hitler chancellor in exchange for his political support. He was appointed to that office in January 1933.

Upon the death of Hindenburg in August 1934, Hitler was the consensus successor. With an improving economy, Hitler claimed credit and consolidated his position as a dictator, having succeeded in eliminating challenges from other political parties and government institutions. The German industrial machine was built up in preparation for war. By 1937, he was comfortable enough to put his master plan, as outlined in Mein Kampf, into effect. Calling his top military aides together at the "Führer Conference" in November 1937, he outlined his plans for world domination. Those who objected to the plan were dismissed.

#### Hitler Launches the War

Hitler ordered the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938. Hitler's army invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, sparking France and England to declare war on Germany. A Blitzkrieg (lightning war) of German tanks and infantry swept through most of Western Europe as nation after nation fell to the German war machine.

In 1941, Hitler ignored a non-aggression pact he had signed with the Soviet

Union in August 1939. Several early victories after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, were reversed with crushing defeats at Moscow (December 1941) and Stalingrad (winter, 1942-43). The United States entered the war in December 1941. By 1944, the Allies invaded occupied Europe at Normandy Beach on the French coast, German cities were being destroyed by bombing, and Italy, Germany's major ally under the leadership of Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, had fallen.

#### Hitler's Last Days

Several attempts were made on Hitler's life during the war, but none was successful. As the war appeared to be inevitably lost and his hand-picked lieutenants, seeing the futility, defied his orders, he killed himself on April 30, 1945. His long-term mistress and new bride, Eva Braun, joined him in suicide. By that time, one of his chief objectives was achieved with the annihilation of two-thirds of European Jewry.

#### VOCABULARY

Anarchy - The absence of government or law in a society.

Demagogue - A person who gains power through impassioned public appeals to the emotions and prejudices of a group by speaking or writing. Free Corps - A paramilitary organization of German World War I veterans who organized to oppose Communist insurgency.

Fuhrer - A leader, especially one exercising the absolute power of a tyrant.

Hitler's title as leader of the Nazi party, and Chief of the German state.

Imperialism - A foreign policy which includes the taking of territory by force or coercion.

Lebensraum (Living Space) - A German term indicating the Germans' imperialistic designs on Europe. It also refers to the additional territory deemed necessary to the nation for its economic well-being.

Mein Kampf - "My Struggle" in German. A book written by Hitler while in prison which became the standard work of Nazi political doctrine.

Nazism - The abbreviation for National Socialist German Worker's Party. The fascist dictatorship under Adolf Hitler in Germany from 1933-1945.

Paramilitary - Describing an organization which operates in the style of an army, but in an unofficial capacity, and often in secret, such as the S.A.

Putsch - A revolt or uprising.

Reparations - Payments made by a defeated country to the victors to make amends for losses suffered.

S.A. - The Sturmabteilung (Stormtroopers), also known as the "brown-shirts." It was the Nazi paramilitary arm under the command of Ernst Rihm. It was active in the Nazi battle for the streets against members of other German political parties and was notorious for its violent and terroristic methods.

Swastika - An ancient symbol in the form of a twisted cross which was adopted by the Nazi party as its logo in the 1920s.

Third Reich - The Third Empire. It refers to Hitler's name for his German Empire as a successor to the 1st Empire of the Roman Emperors (First Reich) and the Empire of Bismarck in 19th century Germany (Second Reich).

Weimar Republic - The German democratic government from 1919-1934 formed after Germany's defeat in World War I. Its capital was located in Berlin.

#### ACTIVITIES

Research the early childhood of several left-wing and right-wing dictators.

Are there any similarities?

Compile a list of demagogues in U.S. history. What issues were they promoting, and to what prejudices did they appeal?

Research Hitler's family tree. How valid are the views of some historians that Hitler had Jewish ancestors who did not pass Hitler's test for being of "pure Aryan" stock?

View a videotape of a speech by Hitler with English subtitles. Would the content of this speech have any relevance today? Follow this speech with an

"instant analysis" network TV broadcast. If television had been available and had covered Hitler's speeches, how different would the coverage have been in Hitler's Germany compared to that which would occur in the United States today?

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

If Hitler were alive and able to visit your classroom today, what questions would you ask him? How would you think he would have answered these questions?

Why did ex-soldiers join the Free Corps?

Why was it significant that Hitler and the German Workers' Party were able to purchase a newspaper?

Why was it significant that The Protocols were published in a newspaper?

Who owns the various newspapers which are available in your community, including those distributed for free?

How influential are newspapers in shaping the opinions of those who read them?

#### EVALUATION

1. Define the following:

swastika

fuhrer

Mein Kampf

Demagogue

Lebensraum

putsch

S.A.

2. What was the Third Reich, and what were the first two "Reichs"?

3. What was the Weimar Republic, and how did its type of government differ from what succeeded it under Adolf Hitler?

4. What was the "Free Corps" and what role did it play during the political upheavals in post-World War I Germany?

5. What were the economic conditions in Germany during Hitler's rise to power?

6. Name three of Hitler's foreign policy goals, as outlined in Mein Kampf.

7. What did Hitler discuss at the "Führer Conference" in November 1937?

8. What were Hitler's first three territorial objectives? Describe whether they were taken politically or militarily.

9. How and when did Hitler die, and what was the status of the Third Reich at the time?

10. Describe Hitler's views about the Jews and how he came to hold these views.

#### TEACHING STRATEGIES

Read to the class poignant excerpts from William Shirer's, *The Nightmare Years*, which discusses Hitler's rise to power and life in Germany prior to World War II.

Lead the class in a discussion of values: what they are, how we use them to conduct our behavior, how they originate and change, and how we pass them on from generation to generation. Compare and contrast the differences between the values which we feel are important to those who live in a democracy and those values which were important to Adolf Hitler.

Read the excerpt, "Tomorrow Belongs To Me" from Ellen Switzer's *How Democracy Failed*. This excerpt deals with the corruption of the minds and values of children.

Lead the class in a discussion of what is meant when someone talks about another person by saying, "He is an Adolf Hitler," and if this is ever a fair metaphorical reference.

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