



Educator's Guide

Capturing Eichmann: Operation Finale

In 1961, Israel captured one of the greatest villains of the 20th century, the architect of “The Final Solution,” Adolf Eichmann. Israeli agents, undercover in Argentina, found him there under an alias and clandestinely brought him to Israel for trial. For many, his capture sparked excitement and pride, but for some, his capture brought condemnation. The trial gave voice to Holocaust survivors and brought their experience into Israel’s national consciousness. This video discusses Israel’s initiative, process and action. It grapples with the international response and big questions: Why did the sovereign state of Israel feel compelled to try Eichmann, when he committed crimes against all Jews even before Israel’s existence? Was Israel justified in breaking international law for this purpose? Why was this trial an inflection point in how the Holocaust was discussed for Israelis and Jews across the world.

Video: <https://unpacked.education/video/the-full-story-behind-operation-finale/>

Further Reading

1. Ofer Aderet, “An Inside Look at Israel's Operation to Capture Nazi Criminal Adolf Eichmann” <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5213995>
2. Dr. Françoise S. Ouzan, “The Eichmann Trial and American Jewry: A Reassessment”, <http://jcpa.org/article/the-eichmann-trial-and-american-jewry-a-reassessment/>
3. Yad Vashem website, “Operation Eichmann: Eichmann Escapes to Argentina” , https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/eichmann/operation_eichmann.asp
4. Israel State Archives, “The Eichmann Trial--Documentation at the ISA” , <http://www.archives.gov.il/en/chapter/behind-scenes-eichmann-trial/>



Review - Did the students understand the material?

1. Who coined the phrase “the banality of evil” and what does it mean?
2. Why were some countries and individuals upset about Eichmann’s capture?
3. What impact did the Eichmann trial have on Israeli society?
4. In what country did Eichmann reside after the Holocaust?
 - a. Venezuela
 - b. Argentina (correct answer)
 - c. Germany
 - d. Austria
5. Which famous Nazi hunter was instrumental in finding Eichmann?
 - a. Simon Wiesenthal (correct answer)
 - b. David Ben-Gurion
 - c. Efraim Zuroff
 - d. Jacob Blaustein

Discussion Questions

1. Israel decided, to the chagrin of some American Jewish leaders, to try Eichmann in Israel despite the fact that his crimes place in Europe before Israel even existed. What do you think of this decision? Explain why it made sense to do it in Israel, and why it might have made sense to do it in Europe.
2. In capturing Eichmann abroad and smuggling him into Israel, Israel technically broke international law. Is this justified in light of what Israel accomplished? Can breaking the law be OK under certain circumstances? Consider the Heinz Dilemma when discussing this question
3. In his testimony, Eichmann claimed he was just doing his job, like everyone else. Evidence proved otherwise and he was executed. But his claim begs the question: Should a person be punished for following orders, or only if one planned the results? Does intention matter?



Reflection Questions

1. In deciding to try Eichmann in Israel, David Ben-Gurion had a clear educational objective, saying, “Israeli youth should learn the truth of what had happened to the Jews of Europe between 1933 and 1945.” Why do you think this was such an important lesson to Ben-Gurion, who himself did not go through the Holocaust?
2. Israelis, and people around the world, were shocked when Israel announced that it had captured Eichmann. What do you think this moment meant to Holocaust survivors around the world? What feelings do you imagine they felt?
3. For many Holocaust survivors, the Eichmann trial gave voice to their experiences and opened up the floor for them to recount their personal horror stories. Previously, the Holocaust had been a taboo topic in nascent Israel, which was set on creating a new, invincible Jew. Are there any topics in your life that you feel are “taboo”? What are they and why are they not spoken about?