

Lernen aus der Geschichte e.V.

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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

Lesson 5

Rudolf Höss, commandant in Auschwitz from 1940 to 1943, wrote in his autobiography:

"On one occasion two small children were so absorbed in their play that they refused to let their mother tear them away from it.... The imploring look in the eyes of their mother, who certainly knew what was happening, is something I shall never forget. Those already in the gas chamber were becoming restive, and I had to act. Everyone was looking at me. I nodded to the junior non-commissioned officer on duty and he picked up the struggling children in his arms and took them to the gas chamber, along with their mother, who was weeping in the most heart-rending fashion. I pitied them so that I longed to vanish from the scene; yet I was not allowed to show the slightest trace of emotion.

I had to watch everything that happened. Whether it was day or night, I had to watch the burning of the corpses, the extraction of the teeth, the cutting of the hair, the whole grisly, interminable business hour after hour. I even had to stand in the ghastly stench for hours on end while the

mass graves were being opened and the bodies dragged out and burned.

I also had to look through a peephole into the gas chambers and watch the process of death itself, because the doctors wanted to draw my attention to it.

I had to do all this because I was the one to whom everyone looked, because I had to show them all that I did not merely issue the orders and make the regulations, but was also prepared myself to be present at whatever task I had assigned to my subordinates."

Jadwiga Bezwinska and Danuta Czech, (eds.). "KL Auschwitz Seen by the SS: Höss, Broad, Kremer." New York: Howard Fertig, 1984. Excerpt selected from the "Autobiography of Rudolf Höss," p. 104.

Classroom assignment:

- 1 What were Höss's duties as commandant of Auschwitz?
- 2 Describe Höss's personality based on this text. (Key points are sufficient.)
- 3 What kind of physical appearance do you imagine him to have?