Behind the Meeting

Read the Wannsee Conference for purpose and scope

SS24.HOS.14a "Explain the purpose and scope of the Wannsee Conference in 1942."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two phrases that show why officials met. Circle two phrases that show how far their plans reached.

What Happened at Wannsee?

1. On January 20, 1942, fifteen Nazi officials met in a villa beside Berlin's Wannsee lake. Reinhard Heydrich, a senior SS leader, called the meeting to coordinate what the Nazi regime called the "Final Solution of the Jewish question." This phrase hid a program of genocide, the planned murder of Europe's Jews. The meeting did not launch that murder. German forces had already shot large numbers of Jews in occupied Soviet territory, and a killing site at Chelmno had begun operating. Heydrich wanted ministries and SS offices to work together under SS leadership as the regime expanded its deadly policies.

2. The officials discussed how to identify Jews under Nazi racial rules and organize their removal from countries across Europe. Heydrich's figures counted about eleven million Jews, including people in countries Germany did not control, such as Britain. This sweeping estimate reveals the geographic reach of Nazi intentions, not the number of people the Nazis could immediately seize. German agencies would have different jobs: identifying people, arranging deportations, and handling legal questions about people with one or two Jewish grandparents or marriages between Jews and non-Jews. Those debates concerned how to carry out persecution, not whether Jews deserved rights.

3. A surviving record of the meeting, often called the Wannsee Protocol, uses phrases such as "evacuation to the East" instead of openly describing mass murder. It also discusses forced labor and says that those who survived would be "treated accordingly." The document shows officials coordinating a Europe-wide plan while disguising its violence in bureaucratic language. It does not record a vote to begin genocide or spell out every later killing method. Understanding both what the record says and what was already happening helps explain the conference's purpose: to align government offices behind the expanding genocide of Jews across Europe.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did Heydrich call the conference if the murder of Jews had already begun?

2. How does the estimate of about eleven million Jews show the scope of Nazi intentions?

3. How did the officials' discussion of agency jobs and Nazi racial rules serve the meeting's purpose?

4. Why would it be inaccurate to say the Wannsee Protocol records a decision to begin genocide?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an 80 to 105 word museum label correcting this mistaken claim: "At Wannsee, Nazi leaders first decided to murder Jews living in Germany." Explain the meeting's actual purpose, the scope of its plans, and one limit of what the surviving record proves.

ANSWER KEY

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two phrases that show why officials met. Circle two phrases that show how far their plans reached. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did Heydrich call the conference if the murder of Jews had already begun?	**He wanted ministries and SS offices to coordinate their work under SS leadership as the genocide expanded.**
2	How does the estimate of about eleven million Jews show the scope of Nazi intentions?	**It included Jews across Europe, even in countries Germany did not control, such as Britain.**
3	How did the officials' discussion of agency jobs and Nazi racial rules serve the meeting's purpose?	**It addressed how agencies would identify people, arrange deportations, and handle classification questions so they could carry out persecution together.**
4	Why would it be inaccurate to say the Wannsee Protocol records a decision to begin genocide?	**Mass murder was already underway, and the record shows coordination rather than a vote to begin genocide.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At Wannsee on January 20, 1942, Nazi officials did not first decide to murder Jews. Mass shootings had already taken place, and Chelmno was operating. Instead, Heydrich gathered officials to coordinate the SS and government agencies behind an expanding genocide. Their discussion reached far beyond Germany: an estimate of about eleven million Jews included people in European countries Germany did not control. Officials also discussed deportations and Nazi rules for classifying people. The surviving record uses coded language for violence. It does not document a vote to start genocide or describe every later killing method.

Accept responses that distinguish coordination from the start of genocide and recognize that the plans extended across Europe, including countries outside German control. Students may cite the record's coded language or its lack of detail about later methods as a limit.