An Invented Hierarchy

Read how a false racial idea shaped Nazi ideology and policy.

SS24.HOS.6a "Describe the concept of the "Aryan Race" in Nazi ideology."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two claims Nazis made about the "Aryan race," circle a phrase that shows why those claims were false, and number two ways the idea shaped Nazi actions. Use your marks to trace the idea from belief to policy.

The Nazi Idea of an "Aryan Race"

1. In Nazi Germany, a schoolchild might read a lesson claiming that people belonged to separate, unequal races. Nazi leaders called one supposed group the "Aryan race" and placed it at the top of an invented racial order. They often pictured the ideal Aryan as tall, blond, and blue-eyed, especially someone with northern European ancestry. Yet Nazi officials did not require every person they counted as Aryan to have those features. Their categories were political inventions, not scientific facts. Race cannot be divided into fixed biological ranks, and no ancestry makes a person naturally more valuable or capable than another.

2. The word "Aryan" once referred to peoples and languages connected to parts of South and Central Asia, not to a superior biological race. Nazi ideologues twisted the word to suggest that Germans they considered "racially pure" belonged to a master race. They claimed that this group had created great civilizations and that mixing with people they labeled inferior would weaken it. These claims had no scientific basis. Nazis especially cast Jews as an imagined racial enemy, even though Jewish identity includes religion, culture, and ancestry. Under Nazi rules, a person's family background, not personal beliefs or appearance, could determine how officials classified that person.

3. The idea did not stay in speeches or schoolbooks. In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws stripped German Jews of citizenship and banned marriages between Jews and people classified as having "German or related blood." Nazi officials used ancestry records to enforce such distinctions, treating human worth as something a government could assign. Their racial hierarchy also targeted Roma and Sinti people and others through persecution. During World War II, Nazi antisemitism drove the genocide of six million Jews. Calling the "Aryan race" a Nazi invention matters: the term names a false belief used to justify exclusion and violence, not a real division of humanity.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Nazis describe the place of the supposed “Aryan race” in their racial order?

2. How did Nazi ideologues change the meaning of the word “Aryan”?

3. Why could someone classified as Aryan under Nazi rules look different from the Nazis' pictured ideal?

4. How did the Nuremberg Laws put the Nazi idea of racial difference into practice?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label of 70 to 95 words for a display about a Nazi-era school lesson. In your own words, explain what Nazi ideologues meant by “Aryan race,” why it was not a scientific fact, and how the belief helped justify one specific Nazi policy.

ANSWER KEY

An Invented Hierarchy

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HOS.6a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two claims Nazis made about the "Aryan race," circle a phrase that shows why those claims were false, and number two ways the idea shaped Nazi actions. Use your marks to trace the idea from belief to policy. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Nazis describe the place of the supposed "Aryan race" in their racial order?	**They placed it at the top of a supposed racial hierarchy and claimed it was a master race.**
2	How did Nazi ideologues change the meaning of the word "Aryan"?	**They turned a word connected to peoples and languages in South and Central Asia into a label for a supposedly superior biological race.**
3	Why could someone classified as Aryan under Nazi rules look different from the Nazis' pictured ideal?	**Officials did not require the pictured features. Their invented categories could depend on family background rather than appearance.**
4	How did the Nuremberg Laws put the Nazi idea of racial difference into practice?	**They stripped German Jews of citizenship and banned marriages between Jews and people classified as having "German or related blood."**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A lesson like this taught children to see neighbors through a false racial ranking. Nazi leaders imagined an "Aryan" master race, associated especially with northern European ancestry, and claimed it was superior. No scientific evidence supports dividing people into races with unequal human worth. This myth helped the regime portray Jews as outsiders. Under the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, Jewish Germans lost citizenship, and marriages between Jews and people the state called of "German or related blood" were forbidden. The lesson turned prejudice into something that looked like knowledge.

Accept answers that clearly distinguish Nazi claims from facts. For the museum label, look for an accurate description of the supposed hierarchy, a rejection of its scientific basis, and a specific link to Nazi policy.