Inside Wannsee

Read how a government meeting helped coordinate genocide.

TOT.C.7.6 "Explain the purpose of the Wannsee Conference and its role in the Final Solution."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details showing that the killing had begun before Wannsee, and circle two details showing what officials met to coordinate.

What Happened at Wannsee?

1. On January 20, 1942, fifteen Nazi officials met in a villa beside Lake Wannsee near Berlin. Reinhard Heydrich, a senior SS leader, called the meeting to coordinate government agencies in what the Nazis called the "Final Solution of the Jewish question." This phrase hid a plan to murder Europe's Jews. The meeting did not start the killing or mark the original decision to commit genocide. By then, German forces and their collaborators had already shot large numbers of Jews in occupied Soviet territory, and killings using gas had begun at Chełmno in occupied Poland. The conference addressed how to organize an ongoing crime across Europe.

2. At Wannsee, Heydrich outlined a plan to deport Jews from across German-controlled Europe to the east. He presented a list estimating about eleven million Jews in European countries, including places Germany did not control. Representatives of ministries and Nazi offices discussed how their agencies would help carry out deportations and how Nazi racial rules would classify people with Jewish ancestry. Their discussion connected records, transport, and administrative authority to mass murder. Officials used bureaucratic language, including "evacuation," that concealed violence. The meeting helped align offices whose cooperation was needed to identify, seize, and transport people.

3. A surviving set of meeting minutes, prepared by Adolf Eichmann and circulated afterward, records the discussion but does not state every killing method openly. Its vague language can make the meeting appear to be routine government planning. In fact, coordination made it easier for the Nazi state to extend its campaign of deportation and murder. The Final Solution was not carried out at a single meeting; it developed through decisions and actions before and after Wannsee. Understanding the conference means explaining its specific role: it brought officials together to coordinate participation in a genocide already under way, rather than marking the first act of genocide.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why is it inaccurate to say the Wannsee Conference started the killing of Europe's Jews? Use evidence from the passage.

2. What did Heydrich want the government agencies at Wannsee to coordinate, and how would that serve the Final Solution?

3. How did the language officials used obscure the purpose of their planning?

4. Why did representatives from several ministries and Nazi offices attend, rather than only one office?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 90 word museum label that corrects this claim: "The Wannsee Conference was where Nazi officials first decided to kill Europe's Jews." Explain what had already happened and why the meeting still mattered, using at least two specific details from the passage.

Inside Wannsee

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details showing that the killing had begun before Wannsee, and circle two details showing what officials met to coordinate. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why is it inaccurate to say the Wannsee Conference started the killing of Europe's Jews? Use evidence from the passage.	**Mass shootings in occupied Soviet territory and killings using gas at Chełmno had begun before the conference.**
2	What did Heydrich want the government agencies at Wannsee to coordinate, and how would that serve the Final Solution?	**He wanted agencies to coordinate the identification, seizure, and deportation of Jews across Europe as part of a plan for mass murder.**
3	How did the language officials used obscure the purpose of their planning?	**Bureaucratic terms such as "evacuation" made plans connected to mass murder sound like routine government work.**
4	Why did representatives from several ministries and Nazi offices attend, rather than only one office?	**Identifying, classifying, seizing, and transporting people required cooperation among offices with different responsibilities.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A visitor might think the Wannsee Conference began the Holocaust, but mass shootings and killings using gas had already begun before January 1942. At the meeting, Heydrich and representatives of government offices discussed deporting Jews across Europe and coordinating the agencies involved. The list estimating about eleven million Jews shows the plan's vast reach. Their administrative language hid mass murder behind words such as "evacuation." Wannsee mattered because it helped organize participation in an ongoing genocide, not because it launched the killing.

Accept responses that distinguish coordination at Wannsee from the earlier start of mass killing and connect the meeting's administrative planning to the Final Solution. Student wording need not match the passage.