THE HOLOCAUST

Thursday, January 27, is International Holocaust Memorial Day, a day of remembrance for the millions of Jews and others killed in the Holocaust.

The Holocaust was the mass murder of six million Jews and thousands of other people right before, and during, World War II.

The killings took place in Europe between 1933 and 1945. They were organized by the German Nazi party which was led by Adolf Hitler.

The Nazis were racists. Most of their victims were killed because they belonged to certain racial or religious groups which the Nazis wanted to wipe out. This kind of killing is called genocide.

The largest group of victims were Jewish people. Nearly 7 out of every 10 Jews living in Europe were killed in the Holocaust.

The Nazis also murdered Gypsies, handicapped people, Jehovah's Witnesses (a religious group), and anyone who spoke out against Hitler.

Ghettos:

At the start of the war in 1939 the Nazis moved many hundreds of thousands of Jews into very small, overcrowded areas of cities called ghettoes.

They were not allowed to leave, and if they tried to leave, they would be executed (killed).

Many died of starvation because they didn't have enough food, and others died of disease because the living conditions were very poor - there were hardly any toilets and sewers, and no heating during the winter.

Concentration camps:

The Nazis also set up huge prisons called concentration camps - where prisoners were starved, often tortured, and worked to death.

Jews, prisoners of war, and other people who opposed the Nazis were sent to these camps.

Conditions inside the camps were appalling, and starvation and disease were very real dangers.

When, in 1945, British troops entered the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen in Germany, they found 60,000 starving survivors and many

thousands of unburied dead bodies. Many of those found alive were to die in the weeks and months after the liberation.

Extermination camps:

In 1942 the Nazis set up six extermination camps in Poland which used specially-built poison gas chambers to kill people.

The largest of these was Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Around 2.7 million Jews were murdered there during 1942 alone. This was the most intense period of killing in the Holocaust.

Holocaust Memorial Day:

International Holocaust Memorial Day marks the anniversary of the liberation (freeing) of the Auschwitz concentration camp by soldiers of the Soviet Army in 1945. It is observed every year on January 27th.

The day is an international show of respect for all victims of the Holocaust— as well as for victims of other genocides around the world. It helps to educate people about the terrible events of the Holocaust and to teach us how important it is to be tolerant (accepting) of other people and their beliefs.

Marking the day also helps to make sure that the Holocaust is not forgotten so that nothing like it will ever happen again.

The Butterfly:

We are going to read a true story about a little girl whose mother was part of the French Underground. Before Hitler's Germany was finally defeated in 1945, it had conquered many countries, including France. France was occupied by the German army from 1940 until 1944. During this time, brave members of the French Underground hid Jews from the Nazis at great risk to themselves and their families.

1. What was the Holocaust?

2. Why is it important for people to learn about and to remember the Holocaust?