STUDY GUIDE FOR
SOPHIE SCHOLL: THE FINAL DAYS

PRODUCED BY:
Vicky Knickerbocker
Outreach Coordinator at the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, TWIN CITIES CAMPUS
SOPHIE SCHOLL AND THE WHITE ROSE: A CASE STUDY IN DISSENT in NAZI GERMANY

CURRICULUM GUIDE for the film, Sophie Scholl: The Final Days, authored June, 2006 by Vicky Knickerbocker and edited by Dr. Stephen Feinstein

Introduction:

Today in Germany, one of the most popular heroes is Sophie Scholl. She is greatly admired for the bold and courageous actions she took to defy the Nazi regime. She and several other members of the White Rose, including her brother Hans, clandestinely published and distributed anti-Nazi literature. Between the early summer of 1942 and February 1943, people in cities in the South of Germany and in Austria found leaflets in their mail boxes calling for protests against the Nazi regime. On February 19, 1943, Hans and Sophie took a great risk by placing copies of a sixth leaflet produced by the White Rose Group in the deserted halls of the University of Munich. After a janitor spotted them, they were arrested by the Gestapo. Sophie, her brother Hans and Christoph Probst were soon tried and executed.

The recent film, Sophie Scholl: The Final Days, directed by German director Marc Rothemund, reconstructs the last six days of her life. Based on actual trial transcripts and official police records, this film dramatizes her arrest, her interrogation, her imprisonment, her trial, and her execution.

This film reminds its viewers that German resistance did occur and that young adults played prominent roles in the German resistance movement. It is also a reminder of how difficult resistance can be in a dictatorship. Even democracies have problems with law enforcement against minorities and dissenters. Therefore, the White Rose case study can be valuable to teach not only about the Nazi era, but also about issues surrounding law, dissent, patriotism and the price that is paid for standing up against what might be termed an “evil” regime.

This film is a tribute to Sophie and the other members of the White Rose who exposed social injustices others chose to ignore. Using the power of the pen, these college students published information that challenged Nazi ideology and encouraged people to think and act more independently. Watching this film will help increase public awareness of how this student activism occurred and how it was confronted. According to the Nazis, these students were “social misfits” and “criminal deviants.” Thus, many of them were condemned to die as traitors. A good portion of this film dramatizes how the Nazis manipulated the criminal justice system to their own advantage. Viewing these court scenes will increase viewers’ knowledge that even judges and lawyers played a crucial role in perpetuating Nazi tyranny. Most significantly, it raises the question of “should one be obedient to laws that violate human rights, and are such rights universal?”
The film encourages its viewers to think critically about what it means to take a stand on the side of what society usually considers morally positive issues.

It implicitly urges that future generations of students be taught to respect, appreciate, and celebrate cultural differences rather than fear, hate, or despise them.

This teacher’s guide has been designed to promote the educational merit of this film.

Pre-Viewing Activities:

As noted, this film’s primary focus is on the last six days of Sophie’s life. Thus, this film does not provide a great deal of historical narrative about events that took place before Thursday, February 18, 1943. To increase students’ understanding of what motivated these students to act in such a defiant manner, it is important for teachers to provide some additional information about the social, political, legal, and economic conditions that fostered the rise of the Nazi party and subsequently prompted German resistance. Here are three educational resources that are recommended to help teachers achieve these educational objectives:

2. For the Holocaust use the site constructed by the Florida Center for Instructional Technology at: [www.fcit.usf.edu/holocaust](http://www.fcit.usf.edu/holocaust).
3. Encourage students to visit an interactive learning site entitled, “Mapping the Holocaust” created by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to further strengthen their understanding of the historical events that took place during the Nazi era and their diverse impacts on people’s lives.
4. Share the following historical narrative with your students to enhance their awareness of how Hans and Sophie Scholl first got involved in the resistance movement and why other students supported them in resisting the Nazi Regime. The information used to compose this historical narrative was obtained from the following resources:

WEB SITES AND BOOKS ABOUT THE WHITE ROSE:

3. The book, *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose* written by Annette Dumboch and Jud Newborn
5. [http://www.historyplace.com/pointsofview/white-rose1.htm](http://www.historyplace.com/pointsofview/white-rose1.htm)
6. Sites involving White Rose personalities:

   a. [http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERschollH.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERschollH.htm), Hans Scholl
   b. [http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERschollS.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERschollS.htm) Sophie Scholl
   c. [http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERprobst.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERprobst.htm), Christoph Probst
Between 1939 and 1943, the German students who came to make up the White Rose, Sophie Scholl, Christoph Probst, Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell, Jurgen Wittenstein and Willi Graf attended the University of Munich.

This close-knit group of friends shared many common interests in music, art, medicine, and theology. Together, they listened to music, went to the theatre, hiked through the mountains, enjoyed skiing, drank wine, and conversed about controversial authors and banned books. They also attended scholarly lectures given by Professor Huber, professor of Philosophy, Psychology and Musicology at the University of Munich and discussed with him their anti-Nazi views.

As Nazi terror and brutality escalated in Germany and other parts of Europe, these students decided to take more action. After reading a copy of Bishop Galen's sermon condemning the killing of inmates in hospitals, gas chambers and asylums in what the Nazis called the “T-4” program (sometimes erroneously called euthanasia), Hans stated, “Finally someone has the courage to speak”.

The Catholic bishop of Munster, Clemens August (Count von) Galen was an outspoken critic of the Nazis. In July, 1941, he stood up in his church and expressed spiritual outrage about the Nazi’s T-4 killing program which resulted in the murder of many handicapped people. According to Nazi ideology, the handicapped and those with genetic disorders from birth were “degenerates: and “life unworthy of life.” More than 100,000 people were killed within Germany itself, Germans who were “Aryans” but who did not fit the ideal biological description of an Aryan.

Bishop Galen declared this selective breeding “was against God’s commandments, against the law of nature, and against the system of jurisprudence in Germany” Bishop Galen’s sermons were transcribed, reproduced, and circulated widely throughout the country of Germany. (Dumbach & Newborn, pp. 67-68).

Galen’s protest encouraged Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell to publish their own anti-Nazi literature. In June, and July of 1942, Alexander Schmorell and Hans Scholl wrote the first four leaflets of the White Rose. Christoph Probst helped to draft the texts.

These illegal documents were distributed throughout central Germany. They were left in telephone books in public phone booths, mailed to professors and students, and taken by courier to other universities for distribution. This social activism was extremely difficult and dangerous to carry out as stationery and stamps were severely rationed at the time. If one bought any of these items in large quantities one would have become instantly suspect. Transporting these leaflets to other cities was also very risky because trains were constantly patrolled by military police, who demanded identification papers of any male of military service age. Anyone traveling without official marching papers was taken into custody immediately and faced dire consequences.
The leaflets bore the title: "Leaves (leaflets) of the White Rose." All four leaflets carried the same message: They mentioned the mass extermination of Jews and Polish nobility, as well as other atrocities committed by the Nazis and the SS. However, it is important to note that their main focus was NOT on the Holocaust, rather the resistance to Nazi dictatorship.

The leaflets were mailed from various cities, to confuse Nazi authorities. These messages were written to undermine a belief in Hitler and to provoke feelings of doubt and shame. They called for "self-criticism," - "liberating German science," - "freeing the spirit from the evil," - a "rebirth of German student life to make the university again a living community devoted to the truth." (http://www.historyplace.com/pointsofview/white-rose1.htm)

In May of 1942, Sophie enrolled at the University of Munich to study biology and philosophy. When she discovered the secret activities of her brother, she confronted him about the serious risks he was taking. In spite of these dangers, she realized there was no turning back when she told Hans and his friends to "be performers of the word" and "not just listeners." She would now join them as an active co-conspirator. (Dumbach and Newborn, p. 60)

After serving as medics on the Russian front, several members of the White Rose published the fifth leaflet titled, “A Call to all Germans!” The fifth and sixth leaflets have the same main title, “Leaflets of the Resistance in Germany”, but different subtitles, “A Call to Action” and “Fellow Students”. In November, 1942, Kurt became involved when he was shown a draft of the fifth leaflet by Hans Scholl which he helped edit. He drafted the sixth leaflet by himself.

In addition to publishing these leaflets, Hans, Alex and Willi engaged in another type of civil disobedience. On three separate evenings in February of 1943, they painted slogans on the walls of the Munich University and neighboring buildings. They wrote "Down with Hitler", "Hitler Mass Murderer", "Freedom", and drew crossed-out swastikas.

The most celebrated members of the White Rose were:

*Hans Scholl

*Sophie Scholl

*Christoph Probst

*Alexander Schmorell

*Willi Graf

*Kurt Huber

Short biographical sketches of all of these individuals based on a White Rose Foundation pamphlet entitled "The White Rose" can be found at: http://www.jlrweb.com/whiterose/

**WHY DID THIS GROUP RESIST AND OTHERS NOT?**
Why did these group members resist when others did not? To answer this question, I would encourage teachers to share the following excerpt from a reflective essay written by George J. Wittenstein, M. D. a former member of the White Rose with their students. (http://www.historyplace.com/pointsofview/white-rose1.htm)

George J. Wittenstein’s Testimony

“We were students, and students, throughout history, have been idealistic, rebellious, and willing to take chances: rebellious against existing order, against old and empty conventions (the United States and Europe experienced their share of it in the Sixties). Most of our group had been members of the "Bündische Jugend." These were youth organizations (somewhat similar to the Boy Scouts,) which had come into being around 1908 in Europe and were particularly strong in Germany. In essence they grew out of a disillusionment of young people with the old established order, and with schools, which had failed them badly, as well as rebellion against overbearing parents. They were infused with typically German romanticism. Their ideals and stated goals were: personal freedom, self-imposed discipline, and strict adherence to highest moral and ethical principles.

“These students came from bourgeois families. Their parents were opposed to Hitler, which must have influenced them to a large degree.

“Most of us were medical students, except for Sophie Scholl, who majored in biology and philosophy. We shared a common interest in and a deep love for the arts, music, literature, and philosophy. Most of us had Jewish friends or classmates, who were evicted or deported or who had suffered in the "Crystal Night" pogrom (November 9-10, 1938 in Germany and Austria).

“It all began, if you will, in the winter of 1938/39: Those who served their compulsory two year army service and planned to enter medical school were consigned to a "Sanitätskompanie," a training school for medics, for their final six months. This is where I met Alexander Schmorell: he was multi-talented, a gifted sculptor deeply interested in literature and music; he was born in Russia, to a German father, a physician, and a Russian mother. We soon discovered our similar political leanings, and became close friends. Some of you may have read in one of the books about the White Rose, what Alex Schmorell said to me, pointing to the door of our room in the barracks: "Maybe ten years from now there will be a plaque on this door which will read: 'This is where the revolution began'."

“By the following spring (1939) most of us enrolled at the University of Munich. There were two days of required political indoctrination, which no one took seriously. Although fraternities had been dissolved and incorporated into the National Socialist Student Organization, we felt exhilarated by the degree of freedom one enjoyed as a student, compared to what lay behind us: namely six months of "Arbeitsdienst" (a compulsory paramilitary work service in uniform), followed by two years of military service. Yet, most kept their opinions to themselves in view of the palpable sense of oppression, of being watched, and the ever looming threat of concentration camps.
“Still, student unrest was smoldering. For example, at the end of the summer semester, the leader of the Nazi student organization (for the state of Bavaria) ordered a convocation, in which he informed us that we were ordered to spend our summer vacation bringing in the harvest, otherwise we would not be permitted to re-enroll for the fall semester. There were demonstrations, students at the chemistry department set off stink bombs, and the Gestapo (secret police) was brought in.

“Shortly after World War Two was unleashed by Germany's invasion of Poland (on September 1, 1939) most medical students were drafted, housed in barracks, and required to attend classes in uniform. In the beginning, this was carried out in typically Prussian manner: students were crowded into barracks, up to ten to a room, which made studying extremely difficult; marching to class in columns in the morning, returning the same way in the evenings. Eventually the absurdity and impracticality of this became obvious, and more freedom was permitted; we were allowed to live in private quarters, and to even wear civilian clothes during our senior year. Only Saturday morning roll call and drill remained mandatory. Many of us would not show up, and friends would respond for those missing during roll call, shouting "here" when their names were called.

“In this student company I introduced Alex Schmorell and Hans Scholl to each other.”

To find out more about how these young people met and why their social activism grew, teachers might want to review Chapters 1-6 in the book, Sophie Scholl and the White Rose.

**Viewing Activities:**

Listed below are several important scenes with time code references and supplemental educational activities that could be used by teachers to address crucial questions addressed by this film:

**Question #1 - “What type of resistance activities did the members of the White Rose initiate?”**

Pause the film at **03:43** just as copies of the sixth leaflet are being reproduced and stuffed into envelopes. Ask the students where this illegal activity is occurring and why only a few people are involved in it. Read aloud their finished product. A copy of it can be found in Sophie Scholl and the White Rose (p. 201)

Ask students what the main message(s) of this leaflet was and who its primary audience was. Also, ask students what these group members decided to do with the copies they had made. Did they agree about what should be done with these copies or any extras? Why did they need to be so careful and cautious?

**Question #2 - “Why did the resistance activities of the White Rose terminate?”**
Pause the film at **13:40** just as Jacob Schmidt, a middle aged custodian is yelling, “You’re under arrest!”

Ask students who was this custodian and what gave him the right to arrest Hans and Sophie? Where did he ultimately take them and why did they go with him without much fuss? Was the custodian a loyal citizen following the law? Why was he so fanatical about stopping Hans and Sophie?

Pause the film at **14:25** as Robert Mohr is ordering them to be taken to the Gestapo Headquarters and Hans pulls a piece of paper, rips it up, and attempts to stuff it in his mouth. At this point, ask your students why Hans did this?

Provide them with copies of this document which was the draft of the seventh leaflet and read it out loud. Explore with them when it was written, by whom and for what purpose. A copy of it can be found in *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose* (p. 204).

Ask students to note how additional evidence is obtained against the members of the White Rose.

**Question #3 – “Who were considered “enemies of the state” in Nazi Germany?”**

Pause the film at **29:45** just as Sophie is being stripped searched and advised by her future cell mate, Else Gebel to destroy any incriminating evidence she may have on her person, now.

Ask your students to do some additional research about Else Gebel to find out who she was, why she was imprisoned, and what prompted her to befriend Sophie. Explore with your students why Else and Sophie were both considered “enemies of the state” in Nazi Germany. Who else did the Nazis consider to be an “enemy of the state?”

To acquaint your students with other Germans who opposed Nazi tyranny, teachers can download an educational document called “Resistance during the Holocaust” which is published by the National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. Pages 40-44 of this document specifically address the topic of resistance in Nazi Germany.

An educational website offering additional information about German resisters is: [http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERresistance.html](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERresistance.html)

Note that National Socialism had political enemies, racial enemies, religious enemies, artistic enemies and sexual enemies. Differentiate how dangerous each group might be?

**Question #4 – “What was the Nazi Response to this Student Movement?”**

The Nazis’ response to this student protest was swift and brutal. Following their arrest at the University of Munich on Thursday, February 18, 1943, Hans and Sophie were taken to Gestapo Headquarters where they were questioned and interrogated incessantly for four days. There are
several scenes featured in this film which depict Sophie being subjected to this harsh and brutal interrogation.

Although both Hans and Sophie denied any initial involvement, they both confessed after they were shown incriminating evidence the Gestapo had found—including a large bunch of eight-pfennig stamps and a letter to Hans which matched the handwriting on the sheet of paper Hans had attempted to destroy earlier. However, neither Hans nor Sophie implicated anyone else.

While viewing these scenes, students could be asked to explore in greater detail how these confessions were obtained by Nazi officials and whether they were obtained legally. Some of the following questions may be used to prompt this class discussion.

1. What types of questions was Sophie asked?
2. Was she threatened, intimidated, or harmed by her interrogators?
3. Was she coerced into signing a confession?
4. Was the interrogation a form of mental torture?
5. Where and when did these interrogations take place?
6. Who was present when these interrogations took place?
7. Did she have a lawyer?
8. Were these interrogations recorded?
9. Was she deprived of any of her basic human needs while these interrogations took place?
10. Did she have any choice to participate in these interrogations?

Students will also gain some valuable insights about Sophie from watching this part of film as she remains extremely composed during the course of these lengthy and intense interrogations. The following scene can be used to highlight Sophie’s calm yet defiant personality.

In this interrogation scene, Robert Mohr tries to save her life by persuading her to claim that she was not personally responsible for her actions. Sophie responds to this offer of leniency by assertively stating that she was not led by her brother and that she indeed knew the consequences of her actions. She rejects Mohr’s “National Socialist” worldview that Hitler is a noble leader who should be respected and admired for the great things he has accomplished by replying, “You’re wrong. I would do it again—because I am not wrong. You have the wrong worldview.” (Dumbach and Newborn, p.151)

On Monday February 22, 1943, all three of these student protestors were taken to the “People’s Court” where they faced charges of high treason. The People’s Court (Volksgerichtshof), a creation of the Nazi Party was feared for its denial of justice and cruelty. The trial lasted only three hours. These trial proceedings were presided over by Roland Freisler, President of the People’s Court who is reported to have ranted and raved, screamed, and jumped to his feet numerous times, acting more like a prosecutor than a judge. Throughout these demoralizing trial proceedings, the court-appointed defense counselors did not make any effort to speak up for or defend the accused. This was not a trial that most Americans would recognize as legitimate.
Pause during these court scenes and ask your students whether these students receive a fair trial. Point out to them that the judge had unlimited powers, he shrieked, he screamed, made wild accusations, and lashed out at the defendants. The only witnesses called were for the persecution, but none for the defense. (Prosecution witnesses included Gestapo interrogators, Mohr and Mahler, and the custodian, Jakob Schmidt who had already received a 3,000 reichmark reward and a promotion in the university system.). The judge pronounced the verdict himself, which was a death sentence within a matter of 4 hours. (Dumbach and Newborn, p. 157)

Consider the following:

*Is there any trial procedure like this in American history?*

*Talk about historic problems of rights of African-Americans and Native Americans in American courts, as well as problems with lynchings and internment of Japanese-Americans. *

*Talk about the issue of the legitimacy of the death penalty. *

This colorful poster which has been produced by Zeitgeist Films and is available from Posteritati dramatizes the defiant voice of Sophie Scholl. She was the only one who refused to remain silent while this bogus trial was being conducted.

During these court proceedings, Sophie courageously interrupted and contradicted the President of the People’s Court, Roland Freisler (known for his perversion of justice) by saying, “You know as well as we do that the war is lost. Why are you so cowardly that you won't admit it?”
She also boldly defended this group’s deviant actions by proclaiming that “what we have said and what we have written is what so many people believe only they don’t dare to speak up.”

Ask your students what prompted her to speak up when so many others chose not to.

At 1:30 p.m., Freiser ordered that Hans, Sophie, and Christoph be given death sentences. Three hours after their trial ended, all three were executed by guillotine at the Munich Stadelheim prison. Hans and Sophie were buried in Perlach Cemetery in south Munich on February 24, 1943.

*What is a guillotine?*

*When was it invented?*

*Is its use considered cruel and unusual punishment?*

Ask your students why the Nazis tried and executed these three student protestors so quickly.

Following their deaths, four additional trials were held between April and October of 1944. Several other collaborators of the White Rose were executed including Kurt Huber, Alexander Schmorell, Willi Graf, and Hans Leipelt. Others were imprisoned for aiding and abetting the activities of the White Rose. In one case, Marie-Luise Jahn was sentenced to a 12 year term in a maximum-security penitentiary for reproducing and distributing copies of the sixth leaflet and for collecting monies to support the destitute widow of Professor Huber.

**Post Viewing Activities:**

After viewing this film, teachers are encouraged to discuss with their students a number of key issues:

1. why it is important to remember this story and how the memory of the White Rose is and can be historically commemorated.
2. In this follow up discussion, teachers can further examine why it was necessary for these students to protest and what happens when a government restricts the freedom of speech and other civil liberties.
3. Students can be asked to compare the social activism of these students to other groups of protestors who dared to oppose repressive governmental policies/structures. This comparison exercise will increase students’ awareness that social activism occurs in diverse ways and is carried out by a wide variety of people, including many determined and committed college students. It will also identify the social and cultural context that has prompted some to resist while others remain passive.
4. One way to begin a class discussion of this type is to use the following quotes made by Professor Kurt Huber, Hans Scholl, and Sophie Scholl.
“A state that suppresses all freedom of speech, and which by imposing the most terrible punishments, treats each and every attempt at criticism, however morally justified, and every suggestion for improvement as plotting to high treason, is a state that breaks an unwritten law. “ (Kurt Huber)

“There is a point at which the law becomes immoral and unethical. That point is reached when it becomes a cloak for the cowardice that dares not stand up against blatant violations of justice.” (Kurt Huber)

“Long live the Freedom!” (Hans Scholl)

“We will not be silent. We are your bad conscience. The White Rose will not leave you in Peace.” (Leaflet four authored by Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell)

“What we have said and what we have written is what so many people believe only they don’t dare to speak up.” (Sophie Scholl)

As the members of the White Rose were not the only ones to resist Hitler and the Nazi Regime, it is important to explore other types of anti-Nazi resistance, including the following:

* Communist and Social Democratic opposition to the Nazis before January 1933.
* Stauffenberg Plot (July 1944 Bomb Plot)
* Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the resistance of the Confessing Lutheran Church.
* Jewish Resistance-Partisans.
* Ghetto and Concentration Camp Uprisings
* Partisan Unites Across Europe and National Resistance in each country: Norway, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Poland, Soviet Union, Baltic States, Danubian states that were even allies of Germany for a while. (Note this is complex history.)

PROJECT: CAN YOU FIND SIMILAR QUOTES AND EVENTS FROM AMERICAN HISTORY?

* What is in the American Bill of Rights and how are these rights protected?
* Case of John Peter Zenger (1795)
* Sedition Act (1798)
* Espionage Acts (1917) and the Sedition Act (1918)
* Jim Crow Segregation Laws in the United States. See, for example:
  * http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/resources/lessonplans/hs_es_jim_crow_laws.htm

To stimulate a class discussion about other Germans who opposed Nazi tyranny, teachers could refer to an educational document mentioned earlier, “Resistance during the Holocaust” which is published by the National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. Pages 40-44 of this document specifically address the topic of resistance in Nazi
Germany. As this educational pamphlet also provides other examples of armed and unarmed resistance carried out during the Holocaust, particularly by Jews and other victims, it could be used to compare Jewish and German resistance during the Nazi era. Age and gender differences could also be highlighted in this discussion.

More contemporary examples of student activism can be accessed from the Facing History and Ourselves' website which is: http://www.facinghistorycampus.org/Campus/reslib.nsf/DownloadsSG?OpenForm

Additionally, students could be encouraged to do some additional research on their own to discover how the memory of the White Rose has preserved historically. The following resources will help them begin this investigation process. There are also many other articles, speeches, poems, and essays that have been written about the members of the White Rose and their historical contributions. Several commemorative sites exist as well.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FILMOGRAPHY

A selection of books about the White Rose; in English:

Annette E. Dumbach, Jud Newborn, Shattering the German Night: The Story of the White Rose (Hardcover), Little Brown

Newborn, J., Dumbach, A, Sophie Scholl and the White Rose, One World Publishing


Websites which discuss the White Rose; Sophie Scholl; Hans Scholl:

www.jlrweb.com/whiterose/index.shtml White Rose information site
www.us-israel.org/jsource/Holocaust/rose.shtml The White Rose - a lesson in dissent
www.whiteroseinternational.org Political activism group inspired by The White Rose  http://home.t-online.de/home/079142612-0001 Hans und Sophie Scholl site

Feature films about the White Rose and Sophie Scholl:

Percy Adlon's Fünf letzte Tage The Last Five Days (1982), Die weiße Rose (1982), directed by