

Name: _____ Class: _____

First They Came...

By Martin Niemöller
1950

Martin Niemöller (1892-1984) was a German anti-Nazi activist and Lutheran pastor. Niemöller initially supported Hitler, but he soon came to strongly oppose the Nazi party. From 1937-1945, Niemöller was imprisoned in two concentration camps and narrowly escaped execution. The following quotation was made by Niemöller and published in 1950. As you read, take notes on the author's use of repetition.

- [1] First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out — Because I was not a Socialist.¹
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out — Because I was not a Trade Unionist.²
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out — Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me.



"Suppression of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising" by Unknown is in the public domain.

"First They Came..." by Martin Niemöller. Copyright © 1950 by Martin Niemöller. For nonprofit educational use only.

1. A socialist is a person who believes that industries should be collectively owned or controlled by the government rather than by individual people and companies.
2. A trade unionist is a person who belongs to a trade union (a group of workers who have organized in order to advocate for better wages, better hours, etc.).

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes the message of the quote?
 - A. People should define themselves by their similarities, not by their differences.
 - B. Fear can cause people to stop caring about others or their suffering.
 - C. People should speak out when they see injustice, or they may risk experiencing it themselves.
 - D. Staying silent while witnessing a crime is the same thing as committing the crime.

2. PART B: Which of the following best support the answer to Part A?
 - A. "First they came for the Socialists" (Line 1)
 - B. "Because I was not a Trade Unionist" (Line 2)
 - C. "I did not speak out — Because I was not a Jew." (Line 3)
 - D. "Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me." (Line 4)

3. What does the phrase "because I was not" emphasize about the speaker?
 - A. The speaker is lonely and distanced from the rest of society, which is why he did not speak out.
 - B. The speaker is deeply sorry and wants to justify why he did not speak out against the arrests.
 - C. The speaker regrets not speaking out because he was not being targeted and ignored those who were.
 - D. The speaker is a selfish, prejudiced person who did not care about the suffering of other people.

4. How does the repetition used in the text contribute to its overall meaning?

Discussion Questions

***Directions:* Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.**

1. In the context of the quotation, what are the effects of following the crowd? Do you think the narrator failed to speak up because others did not? Do you think the narrator would have protested the arrests if others had? Use evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

2. After reading this text, do you think people have a personal responsibility to stand up for each others' rights and safety? What would you do if you saw a group being wrongfully targeted?

