

History, Weimar and Nazi Germany

Lesson 27

## **Why were young people so important to the Nazi Party?**

Miss Shanks



## What were the aims of Nazi policies towards the young?

**Hitler** believed that young people were crucial to the longevity of the **Third Reich**. He envisioned that the **Third Reich** would last for a thousand years, but he knew he wouldn't be around for that length of time. So for this to happen he would need the young people of Germany to support the Nazi Party and continue these ideas. There were two main areas in which **Hitler** targeted the German youth, **education** and **youth groups**.



The Nazis believed that policies towards boys and girls in Nazi Germany should be different. They saw their **contribution to the Reich as equally important**, but as having different roles and **strengths to offer**. Girls were expected to be raised to be strong and healthy in order to become **housewives and mothers**. Whereas boys were expected to be strong and healthy in order to **work** and support the German economy and to fight in the **German army**.



Therefore, boys and girls joined different youth groups. From the age of 10 boys joined the **German Young People** until the age of **14** when they then joined **Hitler Youth**. Whereas German girls joined the **Young Maidens** at the age of 10 until they were **14** and then they joined the **League of German Maidens**.



# Hitler Youth

The **Hitler Youth** was designed to build character, military skills, physical abilities and political awareness amongst the boys within Germany. Members of the **Hitler Youth** had to **swear an oath of loyalty** to the **Führer**. They were also expected to **report anyone who was critical** or disloyal to **Hitler** or the Nazis, this included their parents or teachers. The Nazis wanted to make sure that young people were physically as fit as possible. Therefore, activities within the group were heavily focused on exercises like **hiking and camping** as well as taking part in activities that would train them for their future roles as workers or soldiers.



Therefore, many activities in the **Hitler Youth** were designed to train members for the **military**. Members wore **military style uniforms**. They practised **map reading, military drills** and were **trained in shooting small weapons** like rifles. In order to prepare German boys to be **obedient** and **loyal** some were plunged into ice-cold water, forced to do lengthy exercises in harsh weather or harshly punished for failing to follow orders.



# League of German Maidens

There were some similarities between the **Hitler Youth** and the **League of German Maidens**. Members of the **League of German Maidens** were also expected to take part in political activities such as **attending rallies**, **swear an oath of loyalty** to the **Führer** and reporting anyone who made anti-Nazi comments. Girls also took part in physical activities like the boys, such as **hiking**, **camping** and **marching**.



Even though there were some similarities between the activities the girls and boys would take part in, there were also several differences. Firstly, girls in the **League of German Maidens** wore a uniform of a **blue skirt with a white blouse and marching shoes**. Their tasks were heavily focused on preparing the girls to be **housewives and mothers** so they did not receive military training; instead they were given domestic training. Girls were trained to **cook**, to **make beds**, to **iron and sew**, skills which were considered necessary to prepare these girls to become future **housewives**. Whilst in the **League of German Maidens** they would also be given lessons around the importance of choosing an **Aryan** husband. This was in order to try and continue this race which the Nazis viewed to be superior, typically portrayed as having blonde hair and blue eyes.





# How successful were Nazi policies towards the German youth?

- **Membership** to Hitler Youth **increased** from **5.4 million in 1936 to 8 million** in 1939.
  - Many young people **enjoyed** the exciting and interesting activities, such as **camping and hiking**.
  - Some of the young people also enjoyed the uniforms and **a sense of belonging to something** that seemed powerful. For others it gave them a great **sense of friendship**.
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- Some of those who joined the Hitler Youth found the **activities boring**, especially the emphasis on military drills.
  - By the end of 1938 at least **3 million youngsters had not joined** the Hitler Youth.
  - There was some opposition to youth groups - **The Edelweiss Pirates** and **Swing Youth**.
  - Some **adults were concerned** about youth groups teaching children to have loyalty to the Nazis rather than loyalty to their families.



# Glossary

**Aryan** - People of European descent who are often born with blonde hair and blue eyes. The Nazis viewed Aryans as the superior race.

**Führer** - A title used by Hitler after 1934 which combined the powers of the President and the Chancellor.

**Hitler Youth** - A Nazi youth group in which **boys** aged 14-18 would attend.

**League of German Maidens** - A Nazi youth group in which **girls** aged 14-18 would attend.

**Oath** - A promise made.

**Third Reich** - The name which refers to Germany under Nazi rule between 1933 and 1945.



# Comprehension Questions

1. What changes did Hitler make to youth groups in 1936?
2. What did Hitler aim to achieve with his policies towards the German youth?
3. Why could Nazi policies towards the youth be considered a success?
4. Why could Nazi policies towards the youth be considered a failure?
5. **Challenge question:** How far do you agree that Nazi policies towards the German youth were the same for both girls and boys?

***You could use the following sentences to help structure your answer***

*It could be seen that Nazi policies towards the German youth were the same for both boys and girls. This is because...*

*However, it could be argued that the Nazis did not have the same policy for both girls and boys in Germany. For example...*

*Overall, I mostly agree/disagree that...*

