



What to Do

Read the introduction and excerpt below, then write your thoughts on the facing page.

How we act tells a lot about who we are; whether we choose to take action or do nothing, every choice we make has consequences. Here is an excerpt that shows how a lack of courage when facing tough choices led to worldwide tragedy.

No One Left

Martin Niemöller was one of Germany’s leading preachers in the 1930s during the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. At first, he welcomed Hitler and the Nazis. He thought they could help renew the country. But he soon turned against them as they put their hateful plans into action. Group after group was arrested, imprisoned, and millions were killed.

Niemöller finally spoke out and was arrested himself. In 1937, he was sent to a concentration camp. World War II began in 1939, and by the time it ended in 1945, the Nazis had murdered millions, including some six million Jews. In history, this is called The Holocaust.

“No One Left” is a statement often attributed to Niemöller. The groups identified below—Communists, Socialists, trade unionists, Jews—could be substituted with the name of any group. “No One Left” describes the tragic result of choosing to do nothing, of being a bystander who defines other people as “different.”

First they came for the Communists and I did not speak out—because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the Socialists and I did not speak out—because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.

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 out for me.

EXPLORE YOUR IDEAS

1. In “No One Left,” why was there “no one left to speak out for” the writer?
2. What’s the message of “No One Left”?
3. Do you think such a situation could happen in our world today? Why or why not?



MAKE IT YOUR OWN

In the 1930s the German National Socialist government knew that the first step in destroying a community (or a nation) was to emphasize differences, create and publicize stereotypes, and practice discrimination. Once a community or nation is divided into “us” and “them,” it can and often will fall apart or even be destroyed.

A community cannot be divided if it is...

- built on tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect
- built and sustained by people who choose to act together for the good of all
- protected by people willing to respond to challenges with “decency, dignity, and a sense of brotherhood,” in the words of Congressman John Lewis (see page 4).

Think about what is happening right now in your classroom, your school, your neighborhood, your town or city, your country, and the world. What challenges are these various communities facing? What choices can you make to strengthen these communities? What are the consequences of not acting? Use the chart below to organize your answers.

| Challenges in the Communities Where I Live | Actions I Can Take To Strengthen These Communities |
|--|--|
| Classroom | |
| School | |
| Neighborhood | |
| Country | |
| World | |
| Consequences of Not Taking Action: | |