**Spartacus Educational Classroom Activity**

# Hitler's Early Life

<http://spartacus-educational.com/ExamRHU1.htm>

[Adolf Hitler](http://spartacus-educational.com/GERhitler.htm) was born on 20th April, 1889, in the small [Austrian](http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWinAustria.htm) town of [Braunau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Braunau_am_Inn" \t "_blank)near the German border. Both Hitler's parents had come from poor peasant families. His father [Alois Hitler](http://spartacus-educational.com/GERhitlerA.htm), the illegitimate son of a housemaid, was an intelligent and ambitious man and was at the time of Adolf Hitler's birth, a senior customs official in [Lower Austria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lower_Austria).

Hitler's mother, [Klara Polzl](http://spartacus-educational.com/GERhitlerK.htm), was a maid in Alois's household until their marriage on 7th January, 1885. As they were second cousins they had to apply for episcopal dispensation to permit the marriage. The first of the children of Alois's third marriage, Gustav, was born in May 1885, to be followed in September the following year by a second child, Ida, and another son, Otto, who died only days after his birth. In December 1887 both Gustav and Ida contracted [diphtheria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diphtheria) and died within weeks of each other. On 20th April 1889, Klara gave birth to her fourth child, Adolf. Edmund was born in 1894 but lived only six years. The fifth and last child, [Paula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paula_Hitler), was born in 1896.

Adolf Hitler did extremely well at primary school and it appeared he had a bright academic future in front of him. Hitler later referred to "this happy time" when "school work was ridiculously easy, leaving me so much free time that the sun saw more of me than my room". He was also popular with other pupils and was much admired for his leadership qualities. His religious mother sent him to the monastery school at [Lambach](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lambach" \t "_blank), where she hoped that he would eventually become a monk. He was expelled after he was caught smoking on the monastery grounds.

Hitler began his secondary schooling on 17th September, 1900. The attention he had received from his village teacher was now replaced by the more impersonal treatment of a number of teachers responsible for individual subjects." Competition was much tougher in the larger secondary school and his reaction to not being top of the class was to stop trying. His father was furious as he had high hopes that Hitler would follow his example and join the Austrian civil service when he left school. However, Hitler was a stubborn child and attempts by his parents and teachers to change his attitude towards his studies were unsuccessful.

##### Primary Sources

#### (Source A) [Adolf Hitler](http://spartacus-educational.com/GERhitler.htm), quoted by [Herman Rauschning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_Rauschning), [*Hitler Speaks*](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Hitler-Speaks-Political-Conversations-Adolf/dp/1428600345/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1383230465&sr=1-1&keywords=Hitler+Speaks) (1939)

They (teachers) had no sympathy with youth; their one object was to stuff our brains and turn us into erudite apes like themselves. If any pupil showed the slightest trace of originality, they persecuted him relentlessly, and the only model pupils whom I have ever known have all been failures in later-life.

#### (Source B) [Adolf Hitler](http://spartacus-educational.com/GERhitler.htm), [*Mein Kampf*](http://spartacus-educational.com/GERmein.htm) (1925)

Dr. Leopold Potsch, my professor at the Realschule in Linz, embodied this requirement to an ideal degree. This old gentleman's manner was as kind as it was determined, his dazzling eloquence not only held us spellbound but actually carried us away. Even today I think back with gentle emotion on this gray-haired man who, by the fire of his narratives, sometimes made us forget the present; who, as if by enchantment, carried us into past times and, out of the millennial veils of mist, molded dry historical memories into living reality. On such occasions we sat there, often aflame with enthusiasm, and sometimes even moved to tears. What made our good fortune all the greater was that this teacher knew how to illuminate the past by examples from the present, and how from the past to draw inferences for the present. As a result he had more understanding than anyone else for all the daily problems which then held us breathless.

#### (Source C) Dr Eduard Humer, one of Hitler's teachers, interviewed in 1923.

I can recall the gaunt, pale-faced youth pretty well. He had definite talent, though in a narrow field. But he lacked self-discipline, being notoriously cantankerous, wilful, arrogant, and bad-tempered. He had obvious difficulty in fitting in at school. Moreover, he was lazy... his enthusiasm for hard work evaporated all too quickly. He reacted with ill-concealed hostility to advice or reproof; at the same time, he demanded of his fellow pupils their unqualified subservience, fancying himself in the role of leader.

**(Source D)** Adolf Hitler in 1899



#### (Source E) [Konrad Heiden](http://spartacus-educational.com/Konrad_Heiden.htm), [Der Führer – Hitler's Rise to Power](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Fuehrer-Hitlers-Rise-Power/dp/B0006BSNNO/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1383549619&sr=1-3&keywords=Konrad+Heiden+Der+Fuehrer%3A+Hitler%27s+Rise+to+Power) (1944)

If we look into his laziness, it seems to have concealed fear of his fellow men; he feared their judgment, and hence shunned doing anything which he would have had to submit to their judgment. Perhaps his childhood furnishes an explanation.... Adolf Hitler hated his father, and not only in his subconscious; by his insidious rebelliousness he may have brought him to his grave a few years before his time; he loved his mother deeply, and himself said that he had been a "mother's darling". Constantly humiliated and corrected by his father, receiving no protection against the mistreatment of outsiders, never recognized or appreciated, driven into a lurking silence - thus, as a child, early sharpened by hard treatment, he seems to have grown accustomed to the idea that right is always on the side of the stronger; a dismal conviction from which people often suffer who as children did not find justice in the father who should have been the natural source of justice. It is a conviction for all those who love themselves too much and easily forgive themselves every weakness; never are their own incompetence and laziness responsible for failures, but always the injustice of the others.

#### (Source F) [Louis L. Snyder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Leo_Snyder), [Encyclopedia of the Third Reich](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Encyclopedia-Third-Wordsworth-Military-Library/dp/1853266841/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1401958635&sr=1-1&keywords=Louis+L.+Snyder" \t "_blank) (1998)

Hitler's mother was a quiet, hardworking woman with a solemn, pale face and large, staring eyes. She kept a clean household and labored diligently to please her husband. Hitler loved his indulgent mother, and she in turn considered him her favorite child, even if, as she said, he was moonstruck. Later, he spoke of himself as his mother's darling. She told him how different he was from other children. Despite her love, however, he developed into a discontented and resentful child. Psychologically, she unconsciously made him, and through him the world would pay for her own unhappiness with her husband. Adolf feared his strict father, a hard and difficult man who set the pattern for the youngster's own brutal view of life... This sour, hot-tempered man was master inside his home, where he made the children feel the lash of his cane, switch, and belt. Alois snarled at his son, humiliated him, and corrected him again and again. There was deep tension between two unbending wills. It is probable that Adolf Hitler's later fierce hatreds came in part from this hostility to his father. He learned early in life that right was always on the side of the stronger one.

#### (Source G) [Joachim C. Fest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joachim_Fest), [The Face of the Third Reich](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Face-Third-Reich-Portraits-Leadership/dp/1848857039/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1401958937&sr=1-1&keywords=The+Face+of+the+Third+Reich) (1963)

Adolf Hitler was evidently an alert pupil of average gifts whose abilities were thwarted by lack of self-discipline from an early age and a tendency towards an easy going, irregular way of life... Almost all his reports rate his industriousness as "uneven", and in mathematics, natural history, French and even German his work is considered "unsatisfactory". The report of September 1905 rates his history, in which he was supposed to have been ahead of the whole class, as only "satisfactory"; in gymnastics alone he is rated "excellent"; on the whole this report was so unsatisfactory that he left the school.

##### Questions

Question 1. According to Source A, what was Hitler's opinion of his schoolteachers?

Question 2: Does Source B support Hitler's opinion expressed in Source A. If not, can you give any reasons for this?

Question 3: Hitler often boasted that he was very good at history at school. Which source raises doubts about Hitler's claim that he was good at history?

Question 4: Do the authors of Sources C, E and G agree about the personality of Adolf Hitler?

Question 5: After reading Source F, describe the impact that Hitler's parents had on him.

Question 6: Read about [Konrad Heiden](http://spartacus-educational.com/Konrad_Heiden.htm) and then explain if he is a reliable source of information on Adolf Hitler.