**How did Hitler Die?**

It's quite ironic that an aspiring artist was behind the almost complete annihilation of an entire race. What I am talking about here is the atrocities that were carried out by the Nazis against the Jews and the man I am referring to is none other than Adolf Hitler. This was the man who was refused recruitment in the army for being physically weak but rose to the heights of mobilizing an entire nation into the World War 2 and committed atrocities against Jews that robbed mankind of the last shreds of humanity.

Adolf Hitler was born on April 20, 1889 in the small Austrian town of Branau. Neither a popular student nor a bright child, Hitler was also refused admission to an art school in Vienna. It was during his years of poverty and rejection in Vienna that Hitler is believed to have developed his political views and anti-Semitic sentiments. He took advantage of the wave of anti-Semitism that was dominant in Europe around that time and used it to justify his brutal acts against Jews that he termed as 'cleansing' the world of those of impure breeding. There were many facets to the personality and events in this despot's life, but often his insane acts of cruelty shroud everything else. Here we intend to specifically address how Hitler died and the controversy that shrouds his death.

With the end of World War 2 nearing, defeat of Germany was evident. While the war raged on, Adolf Hitler along with Eva Braun, his girlfriend of long standing, took shelter in the subterranean bunker - *Führerbunker* on January 16, 1945. It was located below Hitler's Reich Chancellery in Berlin. As German forces suffered one loss after another in the hands of the Allied forces, it is said that Hitler suffered a nervous breakdown on April 22, 1945. By that time the Russian army had entered Berlin and were marching on to the center of the city to capture Hitler. Hitler consulted his physician Werner Hasse on the best way to commit suicide. Hasse suggested a dose of cyanide along with a gunshot to the head. On the suggestion of his physician, Hitler got doses of cyanide but paranoia seized him after he heard of the attempts of Henreich Himmler's to negotiate peace with the enemies. This was a big blow to Hitler's faith in his men and he started suspecting that the pills were fake. To test their authenticity, Hitler ordered the pills to be tried on his dog Blondii whom he was known to love a lot. The pet died due the poison in the capsules. Hitler's confidence further suffered a huge setback when he heard about the execution of his Italian ally, Benito Mussolini. He did not want to suffer the same fate as Mussolini and the execution of the Italian dictator made Hitler finalize his act of suicide.

On April 29, 1945 around midnight, Hitler married his long time girlfriend Eva Braun in his bunker with minimal ceremony. Later early morning Hitler is said to have signed his last will. He also granted permission for an attempt to breakout later that night to his general Helmuth Weidling. After having their lunch, Hitler and his new bride conveyed their last farewell to their men in the bunker and retired to his personal study at around 2:20pm. Witnesses report to have heard a loud gunshot at around 3:30 pm from the study. When Hitler's valet Heinze Linge opened the door of the study, he found the couple slumped on the sofa leaning away from each other. Hitler had a gunshot wound in his temple from which blood was oozing out. The smell of prussic acid, the gaseous form of cyanide, pervaded the room. Eva Braun did not have any physical injury. It was evident that she had died due to consumption of cyanide. Later reports confirmed that Hitler had also consumed cyanide.

**Hitler's Death: Controversy**

Did Hitler really commit suicide or fake his own death? The analysis of the skull with a bullet hole in it that the Russians used as evidence of Hitler's suicide was questionable. The analysis of the skull revealed that it was that of a woman aged between 20 to 40 years whereas on April 30, 1945 Hitler was 56 years old! Did that skull then belong to that of Eva Braun? She was 33 year old at the time of her death, but Hitler's valet reported that there were no signs of physical injury on Eva Braun. Nevertheless, the witnesses were Hitler's men and their part in faking Hitler's death can't be ruled out. Another line of story that gives credibility to the theory of Hitler staging his suicide is that he escaped to South America with other Nazis and lived in hiding until he died of stomach cancer. The world has known of so many Nazis that lived for years in hiding till they were discovered and tried for war crimes that they committed decades earlier. Hence Hitler having done the same is a possibility that can't be dismissed outright.

The new findings by American researchers have brought about a resurgence in the debate over Hitler’s death. While it is commonly believed that Hitler committed suicide, it is said that when Joseph Stalin was asked by the American President about Hitler's death, he could not confirm it due to lack of any physical evidence of the dictator's death. Is it possible that the story of Hitler's death that for so long had been considered by historians as a consequence of suicide will now have to be rewritten?

**Questions to Consider:** Please write out these questions on a separate sheet of paper. You may use one sheet for the entire group, but make sure that all of your names are on it.

1. How did Hitler react when he was unsure of the honesty of his men?
2. How do Historians believe that Hitler died?
3. Why is there a dispute over how Hitler died? What do some people think really happened?

As a group, be able to summarize this article for the rest of the class. If you would like to write a few bullet point notes to help you, feel free.