



“Auschwitz is the symbol of the Holocaust”. Agree or Disagree?

Introduction

In 1979 Auschwitz was inscribed on the World Heritage List, and in 2009 a record number of over 1.3 million people visited the site to learn from and commemorate the Holocaust. For many, Auschwitz is regarded as the symbol of the Nazi destruction of European Jewry; at once an icon and a microcosm of the Holocaust. This leads us to the question: why is this the case? What do we learn about the Holocaust by this focusing on Auschwitz? Or conversely, are there ways in which the significance we place on this one camp actually leads us to neglect of other important strands of the history and lessons of the Holocaust?

In itself, the following lesson does not constitute Holocaust education, but it does provide an example of how WW2history.com can be an invaluable resource to teachers delivering the Holocaust in schools. It is designed for use with pupils aged 13 and over, and has been primarily formulated in line with the National Curriculum for History Scheme of Work Unit 19: How did the Holocaust Happen? It can be used by teachers to meet the following requirements of the history programme of study for Key Stage 3:

Key Concepts: 1.1a, 1.1c, 1.2a, 1.3a, 1.4a, 1.5a, 1.6c

Key Processes: 2.1a, 2.1b, 2.2b, 2.3a, 2.3b,

Range and Content: 3a, 3b, 3i, 3j

Curriculum Opportunities: 4a, 4d, 4e

This lesson could also be used by teachers wishing to make cross-curricular links to Religious Education, English, Citizenship for it can meet the following requirements of the programme of study for Key Stage 3:

Religious Education

Key Concepts: 1.5a

Curriculum Opportunities: 4d, 4e

English

Key Concepts: 1.1a, 1.1b, 1.2a, 1.4a, 1.4b, 1.4c

Key Processes: 2.1a, 2.1e, 2.1f, 2.1g, 2.1h, 2.1i, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.2d, 2.2e, 2.2f, 2.3a, 2.3o, 2.3r, 2.3s

Range and Content: 3.1b, 3.1e, 3.3b, 3.3d

Curriculum Opportunities: 4.1b, 4.1c, 4.1e, 4.1f, 4.2a, 4.2c, 4.3a,

Citizenship

Key Processes: 2.1c, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.2c, 2.2d

Curriculum Opportunities: 4a, 4c, 4i, 4j

Aims and Learning Outcomes

The lesson has three core aims:

- To reinforce and develop existing knowledge and understanding of Auschwitz
- To encourage analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the chronological evolution of Auschwitz and its relation to the history of the Holocaust

- To evaluate the prominence of Auschwitz in understandings of the Holocaust

By the end of the lesson, all pupils will have expanded their historical knowledge and understanding of the development of Auschwitz. Most pupils will also have considered what can be learnt about the Holocaust through studying the history of Auschwitz and how the camp may be a symbol of the Nazi genocide of Europe's Jews. Some pupils will have reflected on the history of Auschwitz in the broader context of other events of the Holocaust, and formed an evaluation of the ways in which the camp's development can and cannot be seen as a microcosm of the genocide.

Materials

For this lesson teachers will require a subscription to the WW2history.com website and a sufficient number of information cards and envelopes to be distributed among the class.

Starter Activity

- Divide the class into six groups. Introduce the lesson with brief explanation of the lesson title: in 2009, over 1.3 million people visited Auschwitz to learn about and to remember the Holocaust. Some argue that this is evidence that Auschwitz is the symbol of the Holocaust, and this will be considered during the course of the lesson.
- Explain that in order to think about the lesson's question, we need to learn about history of Auschwitz. To do this, each group will use various sources of information so as to build up knowledge of what happened at Auschwitz between 1940 and 1945. The "twist" is that they will not be given all of this information at once and will need to work together to find out the history of the camp.

Activity

- Each group is given four envelopes, numbered 1940, 1941, 1941-2 and 1943. Inside each envelope are a number of cards containing information on the development of Auschwitz relevant to that particular year. Within their groups, pupils must sort through this information in order to complete the relevant boxes on the worksheet.
- As the groups are undertaking this task, one member from each group must be elected as a researcher. Depending on the facilities and technical amenities available to the teacher, three researchers are then required to access a computer with a full subscription to WW2history.com. Once on the website, they need to work together and find the two films "How did Auschwitz develop - 1944" and "How did Auschwitz end - 1945". The researchers then view these films, noting down the most salient information. Once both videos have been viewed, researchers return to their groups and feedback this "new" information. The three

remaining researchers then repeat the task. To view the two films once should take no more than ten minutes.

Plenary

- Having completed the above activity, each group feeds back to the class on their findings. The teacher may wish to organise this process by allocating one box to each group.
- With the worksheets completed, groups spend a few minutes discussing the lesson's title question before the teacher opens this up to whole class debate. Questions to stimulate this discussion could include:

What aspects of the Holocaust do we possibly ignore by focusing on Auschwitz?

How important were other camps such as Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec and Chelmno?

What role was played by the Einsatzgruppen in the Holocaust?

Where did the Holocaust begin? Where did it end?