



What was the Importance of “Operation Barbarossa” to the Holocaust?

Introduction

The invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany on June 22 1941 was a major turning point in the history of the Holocaust. Code-named “Operation Barbarossa”, the invasion resulted in a catastrophic escalation in Nazi policy towards the Jews in Eastern Europe and is regarded by many historians as prompting a transition from killing on a large scale to systematic mass murder. Understanding the importance of this event is crucial to comprehending 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 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

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

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

Curriculum Opportunities: 4d

Aims and Learning Outcomes

The lesson has two core aims:

- To reinforce and develop existing knowledge and understanding of the invasion of the Soviet Union
- To encourage analysis and interpretation of the historical significance of Operation Barbarossa

By the end of the lesson, all pupils will have expanded their historical knowledge and understanding of Operation Barbarossa and have an appreciation of the importance of this event to the history of the Holocaust. Most pupils will also be able to identify the consequences that the invasion had for Nazi policy, and have considered the nature of conflict and the impact this had on people's lives. Some pupils will have reflected on what the invasion reveals to us about the Holocaust and those who were involved in its perpetration.

Materials

For this lesson, the minimum teachers will require is a subscription to the WW2history.com website, a data projector and a class set of the accompanying invasion "report sheet". Ideally, pupils will have access to computer terminals either individually or in small groups but should this not be the case the teacher will need to adjust the lesson accordingly.

Starter Activity

- Depending on your subscription, show or ask pupils to have in front of them the WW2 timeline positioned between May 1941 to July 1941.
- Distribute the report sheet. Working individually or in pairs allow pupils a few minutes to try and complete the first box and note down at least 3 things they know in the box “information we already have”. Explain that this information can be obtained by hovering over any number of the icons on this page of the website.
- Compile the “facts” identified by pupils. Collectively record these on a class version of the report sheet which is visible for all.

Activity

- Explain to pupils that their main task will be to find out as much information as they can about “Operation Barbarossa”, in order to complete their report sheet. Highlight that they are not to complete the last two boxes on the sheet.
- Demonstrate to pupils that they can collect the relevant information through 3 different sources: by looking at the timeline, by viewing the video “What was the attitude of the Nazis towards the Jews? Part 2”, and by reading the “Key Moment” text entitled “Einsatzgruppen in the Soviet Union”.
- Depending on your subscription and the dynamics of the group, encourage pupils to work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. If you do not have an institutional subscription and can only display the website via an interactive whiteboard, it will be necessary to progress through the sources as a class.

- Ask pupils to feedback their findings, noting salient points on class version of the report sheet.

Activity

- Describe to pupils how indications of the impact that Barbarossa had on Nazi policy towards the Jews can be identified in the ways in which Auschwitz-Birkenau developed during 1941.

- Show, or ask pupils to view, the timeline film clip “How did Auschwitz Develop – 1941”. Using this information, ask pupils to complete the final two boxes on the report sheet.

- Encourage pupils to feedback their thoughts on the relation of Auschwitz-Birkenau to the invasion of the Soviet Union, the significance of the experiments on Soviet POWs and the importance of Operation Barbarossa to the Holocaust.

Plenary

- Via an interactive whiteboard, display the paragraphs relating to Hans Fredrich, member of the 1st SS Infantry Brigade, found on the “Key Moment: Einsatzgruppen in the Soviet Union”.

- As a class discuss what Fredrich’s words reveal to us about life during the initial months of the invasion of Soviet Russia, and the people involved in the perpetration of the genocide.