



“Who were the Perpetrators of the Holocaust?”

Introduction

It is natural for learners to question “who was to blame?” for the events of the Holocaust. Yet, as our historical knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust increases so too does the circle of responsibility and culpability. In turn, we come to realise that “blame” may not be so easily assigned. The belief that perpetrators of the Holocaust were somehow intrinsically “evil” and/or otherworldly may be comforting, but evidence suggests that they were more notable for their ordinariness. Perhaps it is this ordinariness that we must examine if significance and meaning of the Holocaust is to be understood.

Given the nature of the *Einsatzgruppen*’s activities, it is strongly advised that this lesson in particular is not taught in isolation but is integrated into a wider context and coherent programme of teaching. Teachers must exercise extreme caution in exposing younger pupils within the Key Stage 3 age range to the actions referred to in this lesson. 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, 1.2a, 1.3a, 1.4a, 1.5a

Key Processes: 2.1a, 2.1b, 2.2a, 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, 1.6a, 1.6b,

Range and Content: 3i

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 two core aims:

- To acquire knowledge and understanding of who was involved in the perpetration of the Holocaust
- To reflect on the characteristics and personalities of the perpetrators

By the end of the lesson, all pupils will have acquired knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and characteristics of some of the perpetrators of the Holocaust, and the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen*. Most pupils will have begun to interpret this information and identified the diversity of perpetrator beliefs and characteristics. Some pupils will have evaluated the significance of the absence of a “stereotypical” perpetrator, and started to reflect on the implications of this.

Materials

For this lesson the minimum teachers will require is a subscription to the WW2history.com website and a sufficient number of the two worksheets “Perpetrators” and “*Einsatzgruppen*”. It is suggested that these two sheets are photocopied up to A3 size.

Starter Activity

- Depending on your subscription, show or ask pupils to view the film clip “What Was the Mentality of the Perpetrators?”

- Provide pupils with the worksheet “Perpetrators”. Instruct pupils to complete this individually or in groups using the information contained within the film clip. The teacher may wish to provide lower ability pupils with transcripts of the film.

- Ask pupils to discuss the following before feeding-back into a class discussion:

a) What did the perpetrators of the Holocaust believe?

b) Did perpetrators have common characteristics? If so, what were these?

c) Is there such a thing as a stereotypical perpetrator?

Activity

- Explain that “perpetrators” of the Holocaust existed in various forms and in various guises. Some were leading politicians, others officials, and others still were “ordinary men”. An example of those who were on-the-ground and directly involved in the killing was the *Einsatzgruppen*.

- Depending on your subscription, show or ask pupils to read the “Key History” sections “*Einsatzgruppen* in Poland” and “*Einsatzgruppen* in the Soviet Union”. As pupils work through these either individually in groups or as a class, tell them to highlight essential

points relating to who the *Einsatzgruppen* were, what they did, where they did it, when they did this, and how.

- Distribute the “*Einsatzgruppen*” worksheet. With the above key information highlighted, instruct pupils to complete the chart using bullet-points. Gather feedback from pupils and compare these remarks with points raised in previous discussions on perpetrator beliefs and characteristics.

Plenary

- Depending on your subscription, play or ask pupils to listen to the testimony of Petras Zelionka. How do Zelionka’s words and attitudes compare to the class’s views of who the perpetrators of the Holocaust were? In what ways do people such as Zelionka challenge our understandings of perpetrators of the Holocaust?

- Read, show or distribute the poem “All There is to Know About Adolf Eichmann”. Ask pupils what this and other information encountered during the lesson teaches us about the perpetrators of the Holocaust.