

“They’re not really people after all”



We should, say the Historical Association, be teaching difficult and emotive history in primary schools. Here **Jonathan Lear** finds a thoughtful and sensitive way to reflect on the Holocaust in KS2..

The teaching of the Holocaust is a statutory component of KS3 history; however, increasing numbers of primary schools are choosing to introduce children to this deeply challenging and sensitive subject. The context in which I work is one of huge diversity – a rich multicultural community. The opportunity to explore the dangers of extremism, divided communities and racism through the applied lessons of the Holocaust is not only important, but, in my opinion, essential. The sessions included pose a significant challenge for both children and teachers alike. The children are taken on a powerful journey that enables them to understand the potential consequences of the marginalisation of those perceived to be different.

Session 1 Assess children's knowledge

It is important that the children have a basic platform of knowledge before starting to learn about the Holocaust. This first activity allows the teacher to judge what prior knowledge the children have about World War 2, and also to begin the important process of questioning. For this activity I selected images of World War II. Photographs can be a great source of historical evidence but should be selected with care. The images I chose included depictions of troops marching, Hitler addressing crowds, rallies, flags, civilian images from England and Europe. In addition to these, I used some photographs from concentration camps. These were chosen with particular care and focused on images of people standing behind the fences of the camps. Images relating to atrocities or conditions in the camps tell us nothing about the people and are to be avoided. To teach this sensitively, our role is to bring our pupils closer to the victims rather than dehumanise them.

The session begins by showing the children a large image on the interactive whiteboard. After modelling the formation of a series of questions, the children work in pairs to discuss, comment and generate questions for the images on their

tables. As they start generating more and more questions, they record them on Post-it notes ready to feedback to the class at the end.

When discussing the questions that have been created, it is likely that there will be children in the class who may be able to give some answers. This provides a good opportunity to assess their knowledge and also pick up on any misconceptions they may have.

When the questions have been collected, they can be displayed alongside the images to create a working wall which can be referred to throughout the topic.

Session 2 Historical enquiry

The content of the second session will vary depending on the prior knowledge the children have demonstrated and also the questions generated. There are many potential lines of enquiry that could be explored, although it is important to have thought carefully about exactly what knowledge the children will need in order to better understand the events leading up to the Holocaust. The best questions to focus on relate to the Second World War itself, for example, ‘Why did it start?’, ‘When did it start?’, ‘Who was Hitler?’, ‘How did it end?’, and ‘How many countries were fighting?’.

There are a number of ways of to find this information; you may be fortunate enough to have a local museum where staff, who were knowledgeable about the Second World War, could visit school and answer the children’s questions. If this isn’t the case, another possibility is the Woodlands Junior School website which has lots of relevant and child friendly information on World War 2 (woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/homework/war). Ideally, the children would use a wide range of sources and any available artefacts. They could choose their own ways of recording pieces of information that would help to form a class timeline. If they’re available, dictaphones or similar digital recording equipment would allow children to create an

audio walk through the main events of the war. You may decide that this work is done over several sessions depending on how the children respond and the range of questions they choose to explore. The timeline that is created as a result of these sessions begins at 1939 with the start of the Second World War. This is deliberate as events that preceded this date, particularly in relation to the Holocaust, will be added later.

Session 3 Defining the Holocaust

This session begins by introducing the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* based on the book by John Boyne. In the opening scene we see images of Jewish people, who are wearing the yellow Star of David, being forced into the back of army lorries. After pausing the clip, the children are given time in pairs to discuss the scene – ‘Where are they going?’, ‘Why are they wearing the yellow star?’.

After discussion, the group is identified as being Jewish and the children are supported in identifying Judaism as a world faith. The teaching that follows is vital as it provides a link between an identified group of people and the images the children have seen of imprisonment (from the first session). The word ‘Difference’ is displayed on the board – the children use talk partners to discuss what the word means to them, this is then shared with the rest of the class. The second word is ‘Prejudice’. The children may need help in defining this, after which they use their talk partners to identify examples, however low level, of prejudice. Some children may draw parallels with other periods in history – Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King – whilst others may share personal experiences which will need sensitive handling.

After discussion, a horizontal line is displayed on the board with ‘difference’ and ‘prejudice’ at the left hand side. Remind the children of examples of low level prejudice and forms of social exclusion that would form the beginning of the continuum. Take them to the other extreme of the line (right hand side) and introduce the word ‘Holocaust’. This time, the definition is displayed and given to the children. There are variations in how the word ‘Holocaust’ is defined, the best version I found for this age group is as follows: ‘The systematic and deliberate mass murder of Jewish people and other persecuted groups.’

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. – George Santayana



**The first principle for educators
teaching about the Holocaust is
to do no harm. –
Dr Stephen D Smith**



After unpacking this with the children and ensuring that they understand the language used, they will usually want to ask questions. Ask them to share the questions with others on their tables and record them on a poster. Each group must then decide or vote on two questions that they would like to ask. It is best simply to allow the children to ask, and if the question is factual and appropriate, to give them an answer. It is however, important that they understand that the Holocaust still has little explanation and leaves a great deal of questions unanswered. It is equally important that the children do not, at this age, research the Holocaust using the internet. There are too many risks and as Dr Stephen D Smith MBE, founder of the Holocaust Centre states: 'The first principle for educators teaching about the Holocaust is to do no harm.'

At the end of the session, the children are taken back to the photographs showing groups of people behind the fences of a camp. Refer back to the original questions displayed on the working wall, many of which will have been answered.

Finish by using the line (continuum) from the board to emphasise the link between perceptions of difference, prejudice and the extremes of social exclusion as seen in the Holocaust.

Following this session, I have shown the children the rest of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. By this point they have enough of an understanding to become immersed in the story. The final scenes of the film can be upsetting and parents should be given the right to view the film for themselves and withdraw their children if they see fit.

Session 4 Developing understanding

This session, which could take a whole morning, aims to allow children to experience some of the events that shaped the beginning of the Holocaust from the perspectives of both the German and Jewish people. It leads onto a reflection on why making the right choice can be very difficult. The session begins with a trading game which simulates some of the events which formed the beginnings of the Holocaust. It is important that no reference is made to the work done on World War 2 or the Holocaust. For the session to be effective, the children must respond naturally during the game.

For this game you will need four sets of coloured stickers. The colours will represent:

- **Red:** British business
- **Blue:** Non British business
- **Yellow:** British customers
- **Green:** Non British customers

The identity of each group must not be revealed to the children until the game has finished. Divide the class in two and give half the class the role of 'Trader' and the other half 'Customers'. The 15 traders (in a class of 30) are then split into groups. Nine are given a red sticker (forming three groups of three) and six are given a blue sticker (two groups of three).

The customers are split with 10 being given a yellow sticker and five a green sticker. (For classes larger or smaller than 30, adjust the groupings as evenly as possible.)

Set up the classroom so that the five groups of traders (red and blue stickers) each have a table to use to set up their business. Each business is given the same amount of stock – small squares of paper showing a picture of a parcel. (The amount of stock is irrelevant and can be 'topped up' by the teacher during the game.)

The customers are given similar pieces of paper, this time showing an image of a 50p coin. The rules of the game are as follows:

1. The customers may only buy one item at a time, they will then have to go to another shop or join the back of the queue in the same shop.
2. All products cost £1.00; traders are not permitted to offer discounts or any incentives other than good customer service.

Start the game by allowing the customers to choose any business they wish. After a few minutes, levels of competitiveness will begin to rise, stop the children and check to see how businesses are doing.

The first change to the game comes in the form of a recession. Display a newsflash on the board which informs the children their products are now only worth half the amount (50p). Discuss with the children the impact of this news and then allow them to continue trading.

The second newsflash states that a new Government policy on trade means that customers wearing a yellow sticker must only shop in a red business. Allow the trading to continue.

A further newsflash tells of two children who have been arrested for shoplifting and sent to prison (two green stickered children – prepare these children before hand so they know what to expect). Continue the trading game for a few more minutes.

The final newsflash explains that 'Blue (stickered) businesses face job cuts' explain to the children that Blue businesses can no longer afford to pay staff and are forced to close. Allow the game to continue for a few more minutes before trading stops. By the end of the game, there are no Blue businesses open whilst Red businesses still have a large number of customers.

Questions generated by Jonathan's class...

- Who are these people?**
- Where are their parents?**
- What is Hitler speaking about?**
- Why are the people saluting?**
- Why are the children behind barbed wire?**
- What are they celebrating?**
- Where are they marching to?**
- Why was food rationed?**
- Why are there so many people?**
- What does the symbol on the flag mean?**
- What does the yellow star mean?**
- Why are these people in uniform?**
- When Hitler started being racist in Germany, why didn't the Germans get rid of him?**

Give the children time to calculate their profits and gauge the success of their business. When this is done, give each of the trading groups (red and blue stickers) a feedback sheet containing the following discussion prompts:

- What happened to your business during the recession?
- How did you feel?
- What happened to your business when the Government introduced the new trade policy?
- How did this make you feel?

Allow the groups to discuss, record their responses and feedback to the class. At this point it's a good idea to give the children a break – ideally a playtime before moving onto the next session.

The following work involves the teacher in role. In this case it is particularly challenging as it requires increasingly inflammatory statements to be made. Its success and impact relies on the trust and relationship between teacher and class. If delivered well, it is incredibly powerful. It is however, possible to teach without the role play element, a decision which is entirely up to the individual.

As the children come back in, sit them in their coloured groups (all red together etc.). Reveal the identity of the groups.

Show a real newspaper headline about the recession on the board (these are usually easy to come by using an image search).

Discuss with the children the trade policy that was introduced during the game (refer to newflash on interactive whiteboard). What happened to the British businesses? Draw out from the children that they enjoyed increased trade. At this point move into role as a powerful political speaker – it will help the children if you wear something that marks you out as being in role as either a politician or Government policy maker. Tell the children that this game has given us the answer to the recession – a way out for Mr Brown and his ministers. Tell the children of your proposal: 'British businesses should be protected and supported. Our country has to impose restrictions on Non-British business. Our priority is to British people.'

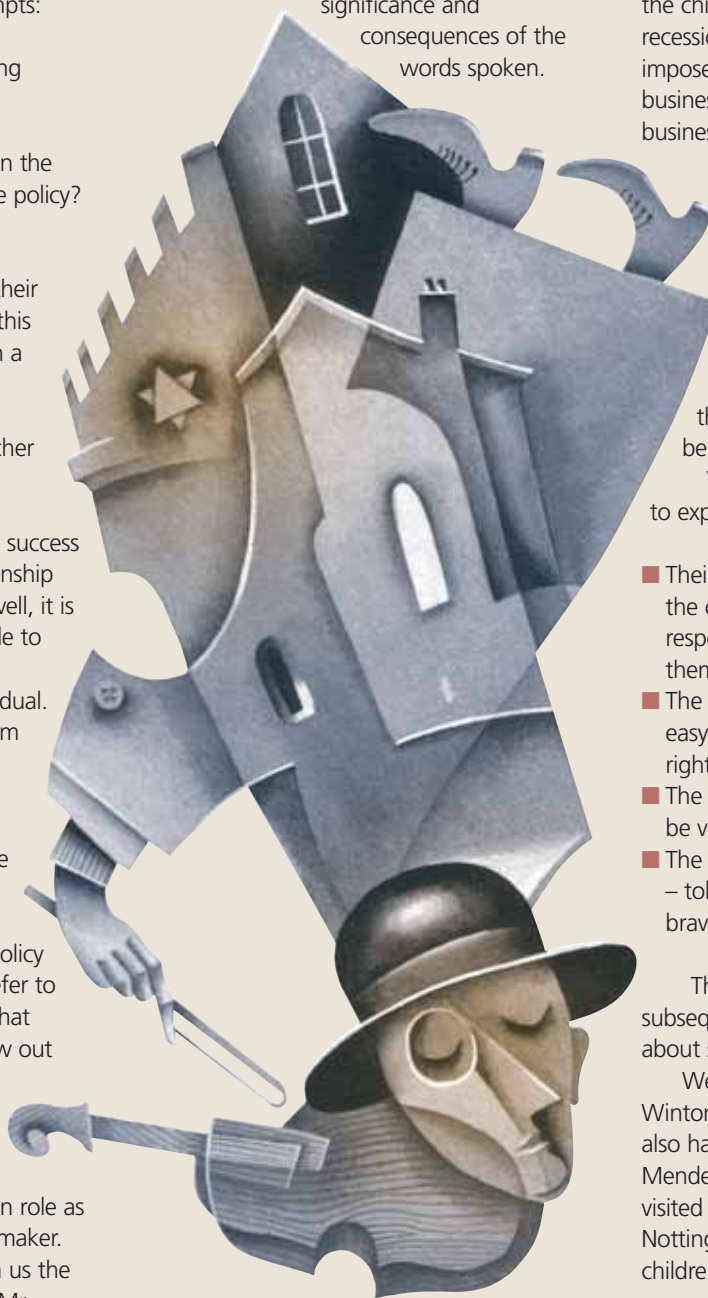
At this point attention is focused on Red and Yellow groups representing British business and British consumers, other groups are deliberately ignored.

Remind the groups that benefitted from the Trade Policy how they felt, refer to their feedback sheets. Continue to repeat the proposal with increasing passion - extra money for British businesses – we have to look after ourselves.

Ask the children rhetorically 'Why should non British workers be supported?' 'Why should immigrants be allowed to ruin British Businesses?' – 'Don't you see, they're not really people at all, they're not really people at all.'

The final line given by the teacher in role 'they're not really people at all' is taken from the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and is spoken

by Bruno's father, a Nazi Commandant, about the Jews. It will break the tension built up through the role play as children recognise having heard it before and realise the significance and consequences of the words spoken.



Display on the whiteboard the words 'The Holocaust did not happen overnight...' Begin to piece together the steps leading to the Holocaust and add this to the class timeline... Share with the children that in 1933, with Germany in recession, Adolf Hitler became the chancellor and imposed restrictions on Jewish businesses. Jewish businesses were closed down but lots of German businesses benefitted.

Explain that slowly, the civil rights and the human rights of Jewish people were eroded until there was nothing left – the beginnings of the Holocaust – the systematic removal of a race of people.

Refer back to the difference/prejudice continuum; make the link between the restrictions on trade and the discrimination of one group for the benefit of another.

What now follows is the opportunity to explore:

- Their experiences during the game – reassuring the children that their responses would be the responses of most ordinary people who found themselves in similar situations.
- The choices they made during the game – it is easy for children and adults to identify the right actions in hindsight.
- The reasons why making the right choice can be very difficult.
- The attributes needed to make the right choice – tolerance, a sense of justice, respect, the bravery and courage to speak out.

These themes may form the basis of several subsequent sessions. We went on to find out about some of the people who did speak out.

We learned about the bravery of Nicholas Winton and the 669 children that he saved. We also had the privilege to meet Steven Mendelsson, a holocaust survivor, when we visited the National Holocaust centre in Nottinghamshire, a trip that neither I nor the children will ever forget.

Put to the test

HAVING OBSERVED JONATHAN'S LESSON, JOHN CAPE, CO-DIRECTOR OF SCHOOLS, DIOCESE OF HALLAM, GIVES HIS VERDICT ON ITS IMPACT...

Every now and again you have a wonderful opportunity to witness teaching at its very best. During a recent lesson observation a great curiosity and interest emerged as I watched a very skilful practitioner actively engage with the children to experience some of the events that shaped the beginning of the Holocaust. Having little choice in the matter, I abandoned my notebook and pen and began to savour the experience that was unfolding before me. Children considered these events from the perspective of both German and Jewish people and with great enthusiasm launched into a trading game. This encouraged them to split into groups and participate in a variety of stimulating and activities. The room was filled with great interest and excitement as they had to buy goods, only one at a time, and it was not long before a

sense of competitiveness emerged as the children were presented with a range of different scenarios.

This lesson had a very powerful affect in demonstrating to the children the consequences of making choices and the consequences resulting from them. This was an outstanding lesson with some excellent vocabulary and discussion. They asked brilliant questions and helped each other to answer them, referring to the trade policy, newspaper headlines, newflashes etc. There was a great debate about the rights and wrongs of treating each other differently. The impact of this type of session is significant and witnessing a group of thirty Y6 children explore justice and the value of each and every individual is a powerful reminder of all that is good in education.