UCL CENTRE FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

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Being human?

Who was responsible for the Holocaust, and what does this mean for us today?

Key Questions:

1. **How widespread was responsibility for the Holocaust?**
2. **Why did some kill while others risked their lives to save their neighbours?**
3. **What did ordinary people know, what was their role, and what does this mean for our place in society today?**

Teaching Aims & Learning Objectives

- To challenge common myths, stereotypes and misconceptions about people during the Holocaust.
- To deepen understanding about how the Holocaust happened.
- To explore the levels of complicity necessary for genocides to happen, and implications for the modern world.
- To consider how more complex and nuanced pictures of the past can contribute to our understanding of society and human behaviour today.

Rationale

This lesson allows students to test their preconceptions about people in the past against real case studies. It reveals to them a far more complex understanding about how the Holocaust happened, the motivations of people in the past, and the many levels of complicity that are often neglected in accounts of the Holocaust which focus on stark moral lessons based on mono-causal explanations.

This wider complicity in turn raises important questions for our society today. The discussion of these difficult issues can be highly valuable both for citizenship lessons and for students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) development.

The 2016 UCL Centre research *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?* identifies a number of myths and misconceptions held by students which this lesson tries to address. Most notably:

- More than half (56.1%) of younger students (Years 7 to 9) believed that the Holocaust was solely attributable to Hitler.
- Most students believed that the German people supported Hitler and his actions because they were 'brainwashed', 'scared' or they 'did not know' about the Holocaust.
- Very few students appreciated that the Nazis and key Nazi ideas enjoyed significant, broad-based support across all sectors of the German population.

Key Information

- The lesson is intended for Year 9 students and above. It is devised for History classes, but the issues raised by a deeper understanding of the past also lend themselves to continued discussion in other subjects, particularly Citizenship, PSHE and Religious Education.
- Timings are suggested on the basis of a one hour lesson, but may need to be modified.
- The prior knowledge, preconceptions and assumptions of your students is at the heart of this lesson – the first part is designed to expose this prior thinking; the second to test it against the historical evidence; and the third to reflect on the implications of new knowledge and understandings. This links to a suggested Assessment Opportunity outlined at the end of the lesson.
- For this lesson you will need the accompanying 'Being Human?' PowerPoint, plenty of Blu Tack, and several packs of Post-it notes.
- On A4 paper, print and laminate the 'Being Human' case studies to produce a set of cards.
- On A4 paper, print and laminate the four 'Being Human?' headings – 'Perpetrators', 'Collaborators', 'Bystanders', 'Rescuers/ Resisters' to produce a set of cards. Stick these headings across the top of a clear blank wall. Your students will plot the case studies along a continuum from 'Perpetrators' to 'Rescuers' beneath the cards.
- Students should be seated in small groups to enable sharing and discussion of the case studies.
- Ensure there is plenty of room in front of the wall where the continuum will be constructed to ensure that all students can participate fully in the activity.
- The following lesson plan should be read and used in conjunction with guidance on the accompanying PowerPoint slides. Historical context and pedagogical guidance is also available in the Additional Information following the lesson plan.

Lesson Plan

Exposing prior thinking (10 minutes)

Ask students to think back to their earlier lessons, such as '**Authentic encounters**' – the study of Barney Greenman's wooden toy train and the story of the Greenman family. Return to the questions they asked at that time – Why and how did the murder of millions of people happen? What kind of person would kill a two-year-old child, his mother, and other innocent people?

What kind of people do students believe:

- Planned and carried out the programme of mass murder (the perpetrators)
- Helped and facilitated the genocide (the collaborators)
- Stood by and did nothing to help either the perpetrators or their victims (bystanders)
- Risked their lives to rescue Jews and/or to resist the Nazis (rescuers and resisters)

In plenary, take ideas about each group and note students' thinking on a separate piece of flip chart paper for each of the 'perpetrators', 'collaborators', 'bystanders', 'rescuers and resisters'. Summarise that taken together these ideas about the people involved contain an explanation of how the Holocaust happened. This is likely to be along the lines of:

> *Mad, evil, sadistic Nazis were helped to murder millions of innocent people by those who either agreed with what they were doing, were brainwashed by Nazi propaganda, or had no choice but to join in (or they themselves would have been killed), while many others either didn't know what was happening or were too frightened to try to stop it, except for a few very brave, kind and heroic individuals who risked their lives to save others.*

But how do we know if we have got this right? How good is our initial explanation of how the Holocaust happened, of why people in the past acted as they did and how can we test these ideas?

Draw out the idea that these preconceptions can be tested against actual case studies of real people.

Testing the hypothesis (25 minutes)

Working in small groups, students test their preconceived ideas against a wide range of detailed case studies. Each student reads a case study in depth and shares that story with other members of their group. Students discuss what role particular individuals or groups played and decide whether the cases should be categorised as perpetrators, collaborators,

bystanders, rescuers or resisters.

Students use information in the case study to explain motivation and action within the context of the time, noting down their ideas on Post-it notes which they stick onto the case studies to summarise the group's thinking.

Sticking the case studies on the classroom wall, students place each along a continuum under the headings 'Perpetrators', 'Collaborators', 'Bystanders' 'Rescuers and Resisters' which you have put up.

Rethinking and reformulating ideas (15 minutes)

Students take all of the Post-it notes on the case studies which have been categorised as 'Perpetrators' and stick these on the flip chart paper where you previously recorded their preconceptions about this group. This is repeated for each of the other categories.

Contrast the researched explanations on the Post-it notes with their original ideas. Are students satisfied with the original, working explanations of how and why people acted as they did?

In plenary, using the PowerPoint presentation facilitate a class discussion of a number of the case studies to enable deeper reflection. What further explanations begin to emerge for people's actions and behaviour, and how does this help to deepen our understanding about why and how the Holocaust happened?

Conclusion – genocide as a social act (10 minutes)

Using the final slide, revisit the story of Barney Greenman and explore questions of responsibility for and complicity in Barney's murder. At first, students will struggle to say who killed Barney Greenman because none of the case studies mention him by name. But as you continue to ask them to suggest an answer you will find that a number of possibilities are given – from the Nazi leadership who decided upon and planned mass murder, to the doctors who carried out the selections that sent Barney and his mother to the gas chamber, to the SS guards who poured in canisters of Zyklon B gas that poisoned them. Indeed, the more students consider this question, the wider the net of complicity appears to spread – to the 'race scientists' who seemed to legitimise Nazi ideology, the bureaucrats and office workers who helped to organise the genocide, the train driver who drove Barney's transport from Westerbork to Auschwitz, and the many people who profited from the plunder of their Jewish neighbours.

What implications does this web of complicity have for modern society and our role in it today?

Assessment opportunity

There is an opportunity to develop an assessment of student learning based on the three-part structure of the lesson.

- The first part is designed to expose prior thinking. You may consider how this may be captured, either in students' initial thoughts of the roles people played (as recorded on sugar paper at the start of the lesson) or in another way.
- The second part is to test this against the historical evidence. Here you may consider a way of showing how student thinking has shifted in light of the evidence about the roles people played.
- The third part is to reflect on the implications of new knowledge and understandings. Here you might ask students what implications can be drawn from this lesson. How does all of this address the question 'Who killed Barney Greenman?' and what does this mean for us today?

Engaging all learners

You can support students working with different attainment and literacy levels by careful distribution of the case studies. Some are more challenging than others, both in terms of literacy level and in the conceptual ideas that they contain. For some cases it is more difficult to decide which category they should be placed into. For example, it is clear that members of the Nazi hierarchy – Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich – were perpetrators, but in which category does Theresa Stangl belong?

There are opportunities for peer education in this activity, and you should decide upon the composition of each student group accordingly, perhaps pairing less assured readers with more confident peers. You could also circulate amongst the groups, monitoring conversations, explaining terms and concepts where necessary, suggesting new lines of thinking where appropriate, and helping students to develop their ideas. Teaching Assistants can support students in similar ways.

Students who complete the case studies quickly can be extended by examining the additional cases that have been put on the wall by other groups, considering whether they agree both with the categorisation (perpetrator, collaborator, bystander, rescuer/ resister) and with the explanation that their peers have given on the Post-it notes. Encourage them to add further thoughts on new Post-it notes while other students complete the initial task.

There is a list of key vocabulary for some of the case study cards to support student literacy and expand their vocabulary range.

Additional Information

Pedagogical guidance

Research indicates that even before students have studied the Holocaust many already have a well formed (but largely inaccurate) idea about how it happened (UCL Cente for Holocaust Education Student Survey: 2016, p.2). Young people have strongly held, preconceived ideas about the kinds of people who killed, rescued or did nothing: 'evil, mad Nazis', 'heroic, saintly' rescuers, and 'cowardly' or 'indifferent' bystanders. While this provides a straightforward explanation of what happened, one that fits with their existing view of the world, it is of course a gross oversimplification of a complex past. These stereotypes can unwittingly be reinforced by an approach to teaching which rushes to the 'lessons' of the Holocaust and neglects students' deeper historical understanding. Much Holocaust education reduces the Holocaust to a 'moral fable': a vehicle for warning about the dangers of racism and of doing nothing to confront it. While this undoubtedly has good intentions, some problems with this approach are:

- We do a disservice to our students by denying them a more complex understanding of the past.
- This kind of explanation misses many other factors which explain why many people became complicit in the Holocaust. Understanding these must be considered crucial for any attempts to prevent future atrocities.
- The causes of genocide are reduced to the morality of good and bad people and their individual choices, rather than taking account of structural factors which are also important in explaining mass violence.

This lesson continues the 'authentic learning' approach developed by the Centre – refusing to use the Holocaust to induct students into predetermined moral or social 'lessons', instead allowing them to test their own preconceptions, to explore the complexity of the past, and to reflect upon what they discover. It takes account of young peoples' prior thinking and invites them to test their initial ideas against the evidence of the past; it creates a cognitive dissonance as their expectations and beliefs are confounded; it then provides space for reflection and reorientation as students consider how to integrate their new knowledge into their existing understanding of the world.

The dissonance between what students initially believe and the historical reality they discover may be disorientating and unsettling. Many might prefer you to supply answers and meaning for them, as this provides a kind of catharsis and closure – it allows them to stop thinking about this troubling history.

We ask that you refuse to settle what should remain profoundly unsettling. It seems important that young people continue to struggle to make sense of this complex and emotionally challenging past as this process then opens a space for genuine learning: a re-evaluation of initial understandings and the possibility to move to more powerful ways of thinking about the world.

Pedagogically, it is also important that a lesson so focused on the perpetrators and collaborators concludes with a return to the victims, which is why the last slide takes students back to the story of Barney Greenman. This is intended to remind students that trying to understand the motivations behind such crimes is not a purely theoretical or academic exercise, nor a morbid fascination with people who commit horrific acts, instead we seek to understand why and how people participate in genocide because of the devastating effect on real people, on real lives – people such as the Greenman family. It may be that a better understanding can contribute to efforts to prevent similar atrocities in the future.

Historical context

Students should recognise that radical Nazi antisemitism was a primary cause, but by no means a sufficient explanation, of the Holocaust. Many who participated in the genocide were motivated by other factors, and it is also essential to understand the context in which decisions were taken.

Nazi hierarchy and decision making

Adolf Hitler's antisemitism was central to his worldview. He was convinced that Jewish people were the cause of all of Germany's problems, that Jews were a 'racial threat' to the 'Aryan' people, and that there was a worldwide Jewish conspiracy to destroy Germany. Hitler's obsession with the Jewish people is evident in his earliest political writing and speeches, it is there throughout his career and even to the end in his 'political testament'. While it is unlikely that Hitler planned mass murder from an early stage, his ideas and language set a tone in which others developed ever more extreme ways to 'solve' the so-called 'Jewish question'.

Heinrich Himmler was the head of the SS, the most extreme ideological wing of the movement. The SS staffed the concentration camps and death camps and made up the killing groups (Einsatzgruppen) that shot more than one million Jews and hundreds of thousands of Roma (Gypsies) in Eastern Europe. Though the ideologues were a small percentage of the German population, they became a driving force of the genocide: from the top decision makers, through to the middle 'managers' of the Holocaust (such as Arthur Greiser), through to SS men who carried out the killing. Radical Nazi antisemitism was a prime factor. The speech made by Himmler at Poznan (extracts of which are reproduced on the case study card) shows both his central involvement in the mass murder and also the ideological dimension of the killing.

That the Nazis even believed there was a Jewish 'question' or 'problem' to be solved again reveals the ideological heart of the genocide. That 'question' essentially was how Germans (as defined by the Nazis in racial terms) could live alongside the Jewish people, a people who the Nazis saw as a foreign race. The 'problem' for the Nazis was caused by the emancipation of

Jewish people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: traditionally Jews throughout Europe had been denied the same rights as their Christian neighbours and so were kept separate from the majority society. However, following emancipation Jewish people had taken their place in the mainstream and played a full part in social, cultural, economic and political life. For the Nazis this mixing – and particularly intermarriage – weakened the 'purity' of the 'Aryan race'. Furthermore, the Jewish 'race' was said to be parasitic and destructive. The solution to this perceived problem was, at first, to try to return Jewish people to their pre-emancipation position. Early Nazi laws excluded Jewish people further and further from German society, politics and the economy. You might refer students back to the '**What was the Holocaust?'** lesson to remind them of these laws and stages of persecution.

In 1939, following his coordination of Nazi forces involved in the 1938 November Pogrom (or *Kristallnacht*), Reinhard Heydrich was made head of the Central Office for Jewish Emigration, charged with finding a 'solution' to the 'Jewish question'. By 1940 it was thought this should be achieved by forcibly deporting Jewish people to a 'reservation' in Eastern Europe or to the African island of Madagascar. However, as German conquests of other European lands brought ever more Jewish people under Nazi control it became more and more unrealistic to transport such huge numbers of people outside of Germany's expanding territories. In 1941, with the invasion of the Soviet Union and with the authority of Hermann Göring, Heydrich ordered four Einsatzgruppen – SS killing squads – to follow the German army into the newly conquered territories and murder Jewish people wherever they could find them.

Consequently, the 'Final Solution to the Jewish question' was both ideological (driven by the 'logic' of their antisemitic ideas), and brought about by circumstances of the Nazis' own making – having to 'deal with' ever larger numbers of Jewish people due to the occupation of more European lands. In this context a decision was made to destroy the Jewish people altogether, and the plan drawn up by Heydrich to achieve this goal through European-wide mass murder was approved by Himmler and authorised by Hitler. The orchestration of total murder throughout the European continent was discussed by Heydrich with representatives from a number of Nazi Party and German governmental agencies at the Wannsee Conference on 20 January 1942.

Why did people carry out the decision to murder?

Within the Nazi elite it is clear that racial antisemitism was a driving force in the ever more extreme persecution of the Jewish people, which culminated in mass murder and genocide. However, it is not at all clear that many of those who carried out the persecution and killing were such enthusiastic anti-Semites, so how can we explain why they took part in the genocide?

Case studies included in this lesson show perpetrators who were not key decision makers but

who were among those intimately involved in different levels of the killing process:

- Police Battalion 101 (shot some 38,000 Jewish men, women and children in the East, and deported another 45,000 to the gas chambers)
- Dr Johann Paul Kremer (SS doctor who selected thousands of people for murder in the gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau)
- Arthur Greiser (Nazi in charge of an area of western Poland, who asked Himmler for permission to kill the Jewish people in his region)
- Albert Konrad Gemmeker (commandant of Westerbork, who deported Jewish and Gypsy families to their deaths in Auschwitz)
- Otto Moll (SS supervisor of the gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau)

Together these cases belie the myth that the killers and their accomplices had no choice but to participate in the genocide. Indeed, the idea that German soldiers, police or SS would be shot or sent to a concentration camp for refusing to kill Jews was proven to be a myth when defence lawyers after the war tried to find such examples in mitigation of their clients' actions. Despite combing tens of thousands of documents, these highly trained defence lawyers were unable to find a single case of anyone being shot or sent to a camp for refusing to kill Jews. To this day, no such case has ever come to light. On the contrary, we have ample testimony from men who state explicitly that this was not their fear. We also have a number of cases where people did refuse to kill Jews and did not suffer brutal punishment. Typically, such men were simply assigned other duties. Sometimes they were even sent home. (Note that non-participation in the killing should not be confused with active resistance. While no one was sent to a camp for refusing to kill Jews, others who rescued Jewish people or who organised and actively resisted the Nazi regime clearly were risking their lives.)

Collaborators and bystanders

It is important that students recognise that the Holocaust was not specifically German but rather a European phenomenon: the Nazis found willing perpetrators and collaborators in the mass murder of Jewish people in every country they occupied or were allied with. Notes accompanying each PowerPoint slide provide key issues and questions which arise from a range of case studies. It should become clear from the cases of Rene Bousquet, Theresa Stangl, the villagers of Mauthausen and Kelinspetersdorf, the office workers of the German Census Bureau, the townsfolk of Lorrach and others, that there was no need to hate anyone to become complicit in genocide. Many became involved through self-interest, greed, or conformity. It is important to discuss with students at what point someone moves from being a bystander to a collaborator.

Indeed, the 2016 UCL Centre student research found that the majority of students hold a Hitler-centric conception of events which belies the responsibility of others. Mary Fulbrook, in 'Reckonings' clearly states that 'Although Hitler was central, this system – in which millions of civilians perished – was not based on the ideas and actions of one man, or even just a small

circle. Hundreds of thousands of people were actively involved in one way or another… and millions more were knowledgeable about the violence.' It is important therefore that students recognise the crucial role of collaborators and that, as Koonz states, the claim that ordinary Germans knew nothing of what was happening is false: in fact 'knowledge about the genocide was available to anyone who cared to find it'.

Rescuers and resisters

Research by Nechama Tec has shown that there was little in common between the people who rescued. They came from different backgrounds, different social classes and political beliefs, different age groups, etc. The small selection of case studies presented in this activity is designed to highlight this diversity. Zofia Kossack and Irene Sendler, both prominent members of the Polish rescue organisation Zegota, were of different ages and had very different outlooks on life – Kossack a right-wing Polish nationalist, Sendler a left-wing socialist. Leopold Socha had a criminal background, Kurt Gerstein was highly religious, Otto Weidt was an anarchist in his youth. In terms of 'lessons' for today, a survey of the kinds of people who opposed the Nazis and those who rescued Jewish people does not provide an easy template for the beliefs and attitudes to which we are asking our students to aspire.

Perpetrators who saved lives

We should take care to help students see the difference between the rescuers (as diverse as they were) and perpetrators who sometimes chose to save Jews. It would be strange to place men such as Victor Capesius or Hans Biebow in the category of 'rescuers' with individuals such as Irene Sendler, Otto Weidt and the villagers of Le Chambon.

A key point emerging from the cases of Capesius and Biebow is that they were perpetrators who did not always and only kill, but who were capable of other acts. They show that it does not take evil or psychotic people to carry out mass murder and genocide. In other times and other circumstances each of these men may have led ordinary lives. But we should take care not to see them as 'tragic figures'. Neither was forced to participate – each faced choices and was responsible for their own actions.

The Nazi regime was remarkably accommodating to those who said that they could not carry out the killings – it actually made the genocide proceed more smoothly not to force people to take part in the murders.

Race science – further context

The so-called 'race science' of eugenics began in England with the work of Sir Francis Galton in the nineteenth century and quickly gained acceptance throughout the western world. It argued the human race could be improved in much the same way that farm and domestic

animals are selected and bred. By promoting more births among the upper classes, limiting the birth rate of the working classes, sterilising disabled people, and preventing the mixing of different human 'races' it was argued that 'hereditary defects' (including disability, criminality and anti-social behaviour) could be eradicated from human society.

In Germany in the 1930s and 40s, the ideas of the eugenics movement were bound to an ideology that made the rights and interests of the individual subordinate to the interests of the nation as a whole. Any who did not fit the Nazi view of the ideal society were to be treated as a disease or cancer in society to be cut out:

'Our starting point is not the individual, and we do not subscribe to the view that one should feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, or clothe the naked… our objectives are entirely different: we must have a healthy people in order to prevail in the world.'
— Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda, Nazi Party rally, 1938.

The Nazis took the 'logic' of the pseudo-science of eugenics to the most extreme forms of social engineering: rewarding German mothers who had large numbers of so-called 'Aryan' children; passing laws to ban sexual relations between 'Aryans' and the so-called 'inferior races' of Jews and Roma; and forcibly sterilising disabled people, black people and Roma. During the Second World War this 'purging' of German and European society was taken even further with the mass murder of German disabled people, the genocide of hundreds of thousands of Roma, and what today we call the Holocaust: the attempt to kill every Jewish person everywhere they could be reached.

All of this was 'legitimised' in the minds of the Nazis because they conceived of a world of perpetual struggle between the human 'races', one in which if the German nation was to prevail then its people must be 'racially fit'. The work of academics, research scientists and others working in the field of eugenics provided a veneer of respectability to the irrational hatred that Nazis and others had towards Jews and other minority groups.

German Census Bureau and railways – further context

Tens of thousands of people worked for the German Census Bureau and for the railways. These were complex and essential components of the Nazi genocides that allowed the registration, tracking, and deportation of millions of people to their deaths. How far were the people who worked for these organisations aware of the impact of their actions?

From all the data stored on the punch cards of the Hollerith machines, the workers of the German Census Bureau were instructed to pay particularly close attention to the column signifying a person's 'racial' category. In the context of living and working under an openly antisemitic regime, which declared the Jewish people as the cause of all the nation's misfortunes, brought in hundreds of anti-Jewish laws, and became ever more violent in its actions, it would have been impossible not to realise that each man, woman and child whose card was marked in such a way would be marked out for discrimination and persecution. By the Second World War with the registering of nationals in occupied countries, the dangers of

being identified as Jewish would be increasingly apparent. And yet still these workers diligently punched their cards.

For those who drew up the timetables of the deportation trains, who organised cattle wagons rather than passenger carriages to carry human beings, who sold one-way tickets to the SS for this 'Jewish cargo', it must have been clear that such journeys would be injurious to their health, to say the least. For all those along the train lines – the drivers, guards, platform staff and signalmen – who witnessed the horrendous conditions suffered by men, women, children and babies crammed into these cattle wagons, and the brutality of the SS guards who accompanied them, the violence of these transports was inescapable. Coupled with the rumours of mass murder in the East and the train loads of personal possessions, gold teeth and human hair that rolled from back from these occupied lands, it is hard to believe that individuals working for the railways were ignorant of the part they were playing in the process, even if they did not recognise the significance of their role or feel directly responsible.

For the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, genocide is possible in the modern world not only through the use of technology (the railway, the card sorting machines, poisonous gas) but also because many of our actions take place 'at a distance' from the people on which they impact, far away from where we live and work. Large projects are broken down into small tasks: people specialise on one part of the whole and so do not feel personally responsible for the overarching policy or goal. In such a system, Bauman argues, we are more able to separate our private from our public morality: we can be generous, kind and altruistic in our daily relations with people in our everyday lives (we can feel that we are 'good, normal people') while at the same time performing work or buying products that are connected to injustice, persecution and human misery.

Social psychologists (Goffman, 1959) have argued that our sense of ourselves (our identity, status, morality and self image) is in large part shaped and confirmed by how we are seen by others, including our colleagues and our peers. This self-image can be reinforced by being good at our work: turning up on time, being diligent, industrious, hard working and reliable – qualities for which we are trained and socialised at school and through other mechanisms. To what extent can this explain the tens of thousands of ordinary people highlighted in these case studies who could be said to have become complicit in the Nazis' genocidal projects?

Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development – suggestions for follow up discussions

Much Holocaust education tends to focus on using the past to teach moral lessons, asking young people to value diversity, to speak out against racism, to commit to liberal democratic values. These are good educational aims in themselves, of course, but do we need the gas chambers of Treblinka to know that racism is wrong? And is it possible that in selecting out such 'lessons of the Holocaust' that we neglect other, possibly more uncomfortable, truths that are revealed by a deeper understanding of the past?

There is a risk that oversimplified comparisons with students' everyday lives – bullying in the playground, racist abuse, examples of prejudice – 'domesticate' the Holocaust, make it manageable by turning it into a moral lesson that we and they already agree with. The 'lesson' given is the individual's responsibility to speak out against such abuses, rather than on reflecting on our own part in a global system in which mass human suffering continues.

Genocide is not a crime by one individual against another (although the actions of individuals are of course crucial), rather it is a social act – many people are involved, often playing a part at some distance away from the actual killing itself. The emphasis on individual moral behaviour – on speaking out against 'hatred', as much Holocaust education is reduced to – may miss deeper, structural causes within our polity, economy and society which are also factors in global human suffering.

A closer examination of the past reveals a shocking truth: you do not need to hate anyone to be complicit in genocide. This lesson has been designed to help young people to see something of the web of complicity between perpetrators, collaborators and bystanders necessary for such a vast crime to be committed, to discern the complexity of that picture, to understand the interconnectedness of different groups and actors, and that preventing genocide cannot be reduced to a mono-causal explanation.

We often place perpetrators and their collaborators into a framework that does not disrupt our view of the world overly much: they are explained away as 'evil', 'racist', or 'psychopathic sadists', or we tell ourselves that they had no choice – if they had refused to kill then they would have been shot themselves.

But case studies in this lesson reveal a far more troubling picture: there is not a single record of anyone being shot or sent to a concentration camp for refusing to kill Jews. However there were cases of people who refused and were simply given other duties. While Nazi antisemitic ideology was the driving motivation of many decision-makers and killers, others participated in mass shootings because of peer pressure, ambition or a warped sense of 'duty'.

Political and social outlook are not necessarily predictors of behaviour: we have examples of antisemites who risked their lives to save Jews, while others with more enlightened views did nothing. The silence of the public in the face of Nazi crimes came not simply because people were cowed by fear, but because they were bought by the regime – they enriched themselves through the looting of the Jewish people, flocking to public auctions where they bought the possessions of their deported neighbours. Many businesses profited by supplying products to the concentration camps or used camp inmates in their factories and workshops. In the agricultural sector: huge numbers of private, family-run farms also paid the SS for the use of slave labour.

Do we recognise that responsibility for genocide does not lie entirely with the 'other' – those who we see as different from ourselves, whether these be racists, psychopaths or sadists? An uncomfortable truth of the Holocaust is that complicity extended far wider than we may care to imagine. In a world of vast inequality social injustice and human exploitation, from which we in the northern hemisphere profit, the reasons for that complicity may be found rather closer to home.

What does this mean for the life choices of both students and teachers? If we take seriously our responsibility for helping to prevent mass suffering in the world then what does this mean for how we earn and spend our money, the careers we choose, the companies we work for, what we buy? How far should ethical issues inform these choices?

If we are genuinely committed to democratic values, then what are the implications for the classroom? – power structures within schools often are not models of democracy. Many people see schools and examinations as important ways to induct young people into the mainstream, of socialising them, prepare them for work, producing citizens who conform to dominant norms and values. But wasn't that same socialisation and conformity part of the explanation for complicity in the Holocaust? – the office workers of the German Census Bureau who turned up to work on time, worked hard and diligently, conscientiously punching data cards without reflecting upon their role in a broader system of persecution.

One general characteristic of the rescuers which Nechama Tec was able to identify is that many appear to have been out of the mainstream of society. Tec says they exhibit the quality of 'individuality', by which she means 'they are not constrained by the expectations and by the norms of their surroundings'. If we are seeking to use the rescuers as role models for our young people, then what are the implications of this for our educational systems? What sort of changes would be necessary in our educational system to create more 'outsiders' – those who are more ready to challenge authority and the prevailing norms? Is such an educational aim desirable?

These are difficult questions that young people could be invited to consider, and which may contribute to their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. These are also profoundly challenging issues for educators to engage with, for our schools as institutions to try to respond to. There could be great value in teachers and students exploring these questions together.

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Acknowledgements

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Additional editing by Andy Pearce

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Credits

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The IOE's Centre for Holocaust Education is jointly funded by Pears Foundation and the Department for Education.