
A space called 'Treblinka'

The chaos of genocide and evolution of the
Holocaust

Key Question: What happened at Treblinka July-December, 1942?

Teaching Aims & Learning Objectives

- To develop historical knowledge and understanding of the Treblinka death camp
- To position Treblinka within a spatial and temporal context
- To inculcate new ways of looking at Treblinka, and by extension the Holocaust

Rationale

Research by the Centre into teaching practices (2009) highlighted the absence of 'Operation Reinhard' from the vast majority of classrooms, indicating most students were not encountering this foundational aspect of the Holocaust in their formal learning. Our most recent research into students' knowledge and understanding (2015) has revealed some of the consequences of this absence, with students demonstrating an impoverished understanding of the genocide's spatial dimensions and its temporality; displaying misconceptions of the camp system and experiences within different camps; and exhibiting a fixation with Auschwitz.

These findings are concerning on account of the implications they carry for students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. They run counter to advances in historical scholarship and miss potentially dynamic learning opportunities created by recent advances in Holocaust archaeology and geography. This session seeks to address some of these realities by focusing on events at the Treblinka death camp during a specific period of time. Through this enquiry, students gain deeper understanding of the evolution of the Holocaust, and powerful insights into the very nature of genocide.

Key Information

- This session is specifically devised for History classrooms. The nature of some of the material means it is most suitable for Year 10 students and above.
- Some of the following activities could feasibly be completed within a one hour lesson, but to allow students to make sense of the material available, it is strongly suggested as much time as possible is given.
- Prior knowledge of Treblinka is not needed; indeed, it is presumed that although students may have some knowledge of the Holocaust, they will have little to no familiarity with the word 'Treblinka', let alone awareness of what took place there.
- You will need the accompanying PowerPoint, and the various sources associated with each stage of the activity. A full list of these is provided in the Additional Information section. The following lesson plan should be read in conjunction with the pedagogical guidance provided in the Additional Information section and the questions found in the PowerPoint.

Lesson Plan

Looking and seeing

Divide the class into an even number of small groups, give each group a number, and provide them with a large piece of sugar paper. Onto their paper ask students to write the word 'TREBLINKA'. Explain to students they will be exploring what happened in this particular space, at a particular time, in the not-too-distant past.

Give each group both 'Schöne Zeiten' envelopes. Instruct those with an odd number to open only envelope A and those with an even number to open only envelope B. Explain groups should work through the questions on slide 3 of the PowerPoint, recording their conversations on their sugar paper.

Using Slide 4 of the PowerPoint, invite feedback from the class, beginning with envelope A and moving to envelope B. As you do so, do not confirm nor deny the accuracy of students' ideas. After both halves of the class have fed back, have the groups open the envelope they did not examine and consider Slide 5 of the PowerPoint. Ask the class:

- What do we know about this place?
- What questions do we have?

Some students may question the origin and purpose of the photographs they have been looking at, and/or be confused by the words 'Schöne Zeiten'. Refrain from revealing who took these images and why at this stage, as students will be able to discover for themselves in the later activity 'Mining information'. Instead, encourage students to record their questions on their paper.

Examining traces

If not raised during feedback, suggest that so far little is known about the people who inhabited this space called 'Treblinka'. Why were they here? Where did they come from? What did they do whilst they were at 'Treblinka'?

Introduce the idea that clues may be found by examining material and physical traces of the past which remain today. Provide groups with the envelope marked 'Traces'. As they examine the material, instruct them to discuss the questions on Slide 6 of the PowerPoint. Note students could continue to record their findings on their large sheet of paper.

Co-ordinate feedback by working through Slides 7,8 and 9 of the PowerPoint, following the notes for each slide to guide the direction of enquiry. Be sure not to reveal what each object is and where it comes from immediately: rather, drip-feed information as students respond to the questions you pose.

Conclude this activity by asking what earlier ideas the 'traces' have helped to confirm or refute, and what new queries they raise. Emphasise the need to position the artefacts they have examined in more context, and note the possibility students' ideas and conclusions may need revisiting later in light of new evidence.

Mapping a space

Recap the distance students have travelled so far: beginning only with the name 'Treblinka' and a few images, they have discovered some of the features of this geographical space, and unearthed through material traces some information about the people who once inhabited it. As well as formulating hypothesis and tentative ideas they have also generated questions about who did what at Treblinka, why and when.

Suggest further answers lie in utilising one of the techniques human beings have developed to make sense of the world around them: namely, maps. Give each group the envelope marked 'Maps'. Explain each map should be examined in turn, and then viewed as a collective. Again, you may want groups to record their discoveries on their sugar paper.

Utilise the questions on Slide 10 as a means of coordinating feedback. You may wish to also move through each map in turn as per Slides 11, 12 and 13 of the PowerPoint. Press students to account for the differences between the maps, and whether this is problematic. As you reveal the origin of each map, float the idea they reflect different perspectives, from different times, for different purposes. This does not invalidate them, but confirms we need to consult multiple perspectives when trying to construct the past.

Mining information

Indicate to students they now have quite a lot of information about Treblinka: they can now put together quite a detailed picture of the physical features of the camp, can make some assertions about what happened here, and can say somethings about the people who inhabited the space. However, there remains a lot of uncertainty and conjecture: they still don't know why this place was created, when, or where it was. They also know little of the human experiences within the camp.

Explain to students their task is to now try and answer some of these questions by reconstructing the early history of the camp. They will need to need to 'mine' an array of material in order to answer two key questions (shown of Slide 14):

- What happened at Treblinka between 23 July and 28 August 1942?
- What was 'reorganisation', why was it deemed necessary, and what did it lead to?

Indicate to students how you want them to record their enquiry: perhaps on their sugar paper, as a bullet-point list, or maybe as a separate spidergram. Give the groups the envelopes marked 'Accounts', 'Profiles' and 'Information cards'. Encourage them to develop their own strategies for approaching this task: some may wish to sort the sources sequentially, others might prefer to position materials in relation to one another, and others still may want to simply read through and make notes. As you circulate among the groups, use some of the possible points for discussion outlined in the Additional Information below.

Chaos and reorganisation

Co-ordinate class discussion by taking each key question in turn, starting with Slide 15. You may wish to play the slide through, asking students to consider what the numbers relate to, or you could refrain from doing so until the class has fed back on its enquiry. Be aware students may have questions relating to various sources and pieces of information. Allow as much time as possible to explore these, but ensure the key questions on the slide are addressed.

It is critical students come to understand why deportations to Treblinka were temporarily halted at the end of August: that, simply put, the mechanics of genocide were such that they led to utter chaos, total disorder and absolute collapse. There were very real human consequences to this, for which the 'Accounts' material is particularly useful (as are the 'Schöne Zeiten' photographs, whose origins may now have been discovered by some students). To rectify the situation, the camp was 'reorganised' – not to alleviate or redress the experience of the victims, but to realise the objectives of the perpetrators. This begs the question: how successful was 'reorganisation'?

Plenary

Display Slide 9 of the PowerPoint – you might also distribute printed copies of this slide. After a few moments, collect ideas about the nature of the Höfle Telegram – what might be its purpose? What do the various numbers and letters refer to?

Guide students through the telegram, displaying Slide 10 and using the Additional Information to help you. The communiqué raises a host of questions – from issues related to Allied knowledge and response, through the measures of secrecy employed by the perpetrators, and out on to the centrality of Operation Reinhard to the Holocaust. It also powerfully demonstrates how deadly Treblinka had become in just a matter of months; simply put, 'reorganisation' had been a great success: by the end of 1942, Treblinka was a highly effective death camp.

Whilst the Höfle Telegram confirms that killing became an extremely systematised, almost industrial process, much of the material examined in this session tells a very different story: one of disorganisation, breakdown and pandemonium. Moreover, the sources also expose the human dimensions of this – from those who perished, those who survived, and those who committed genocide. To end, you might want to ask what has to happen to create a situation where something like the Höfle Telegram or the 'Schöne Zeiten' photographs are created in the first place.

Draw the threads of the lesson together by asking students to consider what the events at Treblinka in the second half of 1942 reveal about the nature of genocide and the evolution of the Holocaust. This could form the basis of a class debate in a follow-up lesson or a piece of written homework.

Engaging all learners

Some students may struggle with the amount of material they need to engage with – particularly in the 'Mining information' stage. To counter this, teachers may find it beneficial to divide the material amongst the class and then employ a market-place activity to share findings. Providing students with, or encouraging them to construct, a timeline scaffold may also prove effective. Although the lesson materials have been consciously designed to accommodate for a variety of learning styles, there may be students who require more support when working through the textual sources. Teacher differentiated distribution of these sources could be employed, just as some of these could be laminated or photocopied so that students are able to highlight key information.

Students needing to be stretched could be led towards exploring what happened at Treblinka after 31 December 1942. It is likely a number of students will have picked up on references to events which fall outside of the lesson's timeframe – the Treblinka revolt is one such example. Utilising websites such as [USHMM](#) and the [Holocaust Research Project](#) students could undertake independent research into what happened at Treblinka during 1943.

Further information

This session builds on and adds further substance to students' learning from the Centre's 'What was the Holocaust?' session. Similarly, teachers may also wish to incorporate some individuals explored in this lesson into aspects of the 'Being Human?' activity.

Additional Information

Pedagogical guidance

Enquiry-based approaches to teaching and learning about the Holocaust see the student positioned at the centre of the pedagogical process and can lead to powerful and enduring experiences. They provide opportunities for students to explore and develop their substantive and conceptual knowledge, and to move towards higher levels of thinking.

To be successful, however, such strategies require careful structuring. It is not enough to simply provide students with material and ask them to find something out; instead, the questions which overarch and underpin the enquiry must be achievable, intelligible and directly related to the information students are being asked to explore. To these ends it can prove useful to employ a staged approach, whereby students move towards their ultimate objectives by way of smaller, inter-related tasks, each building on and reinforcing its precursor.

This schema is clearly visible in the framework of the lesson. The first three activities – which could, if desired, be contained within one lesson – develop out of one another, helping students to construct a substantive and conceptual scaffold of Treblinka. This framework provides them with a context into which they can posit the large amount of information they are asked to ‘mine’, and in turn begin to answer the key questions about what happened at Treblinka in the second half of 1942. As they undertake this activity, students will come across information which does not appear to ‘fit’ or seem directly relevant; there are, for instance, references to the Treblinka revolt and to the eventual fate of the site once the death camp was closed. These inclusions are intentional, not to confuse students but rather to pique interest and gesture to other periods in the history of the site. Such avenues could be explored in more detail by students through homework activities, structured research exercises and follow-up lessons.

Just having informed and considered frameworks is not, of course, guaranteed to bring about effective student enquiry. For this, the teacher must assume a facilitating role wherein they not only guide groups individually through formative questioning, but also help to provide the class as a whole with momentum and direction. Whilst a number of orientating questions have been built-in to the lesson and the materials, teachers will need to supplement these; particularly as students work through the first three activities. They will also need to couple reflexive questioning with the provision of key information at relevant junctures – as seen, for instance, in the activity involving ‘Traces’.

Space and time

When thinking about and thinking with history, space and time have a symbiotic relationship. Developing students’ awareness of this nexus is a core concern of the lesson, for an appreciation of how events and occurrences relate to their spatial and temporal context is essential for encouraging nuanced knowledge and understanding and a more sophisticated historical consciousness.

Treblinka is an excellent case study for examining the important interrelations of space and time, and the imperative of doing so when talking about the Holocaust. As students will discover the death camp was constructed some time after Treblinka I, but the two camps had a very close relationship with one another. Physically they were linked by railway, while the quarry between the two sites would eventually prove very important in attempts to remove all traces of the machinery of death. Although not on the same scale as the death camp,

Treblinka I was also the site of atrocity and suffering – as recent archaeological findings has clearly shown. Indeed, pioneering archaeology conducted by Caroline Sturdy Colls at Stratford University is fundamentally changing our knowledge and understanding of both camps individually and together as a holistic geographical space. We now know, for instance, that the boundaries of Treblinka II were much larger than previously thought, that the area around the camps is peppered by mass graves, and that the calibration of the Upper Camp at Treblinka II requires some revision. What is essential for our comprehension of the steps and stages by which the space called 'Treblinka' changes and developed, of course, is temporal understanding.

Historical Context: Operation Reinhard

In order to understand the creation of Treblinka and some of the reasons why its first five months of operation were quite so murderous, it is essential to have an awareness of the policy in which it was positioned.

Operation Reinhard – so named by way of 'tribute' to Reinhard Heydrich, Head of the Reich Main Security Office and one of the architects of the Holocaust, who died in June 1942 as a result of wounds inflicted by Czech partisans – was the programme to kill around 2 million Jews living within occupied Poland. The origins of the policy can be traced to the autumn of 1941 and were first formed in the context of mass shootings in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union, conducted by the Einsatzgruppen. At this time genocide in 'the East' was largely localised and lacking in cohesion; commonly it took the form of shooting at close quarters, although with the turn to autumn mobile gas vans were beginning to be used. This method drew upon the experiences of the so-called 'Euthanasia Programme' which, despite officially being called to a halt by Hitler in August 1941 had morphed into Action 14f13 – the selection of concentration camp prisoners by medical commissions, and their murder in the former institutions of the Euthanasia Programme.

Around September/October 1941 the notion of fixed, stationary gassing installations came to the mind of leading officials. An infrastructure was put in place by Himmler, with SS General Odilo Globocnik charged with overseeing a programme that would not simply kill Polish Jewry but would also exploit them as slave labour and expropriate them. These objectives required bureaucracy and killers.

The former centred on Lublin, where the headquarters for the programme were based under the administration of relatively small group of personnel. Implementing the policy however posed serious logistical challenges, meaning that the circle of bureaucratic administration broadened much further to envelop local police, railway companies, and various other civil organisations. As for the latter – the killing – this required sites, which were at once relatively isolated yet close to major transport arteries, and willing individuals. The Euthanasia

Programme provided a major reservoir of labour: as much as it produced individuals with the technical 'know-how' of the mechanics of mass murder, it also spawned a group of people seasoned in the realities of killing. In actuality, numerically this group was small: killing centres tended to be staffed by around 20-30 SS men, supplemented by Ukrainian auxiliaries who had received training at the Trawniki camp.

In November 1941 construction work on the first death camp began at Belzec. The camp became operational in March 1942, acting as a hub for Jews from the south of Poland. Jews from other areas, together with some Poles and Gypsies, were also transported to Belzec prior to the camp's closure in December 1942. By then, some 430,000 people had been killed in the camp. Belzec was, in many ways, an experimental laboratory. The camp's physical arrangement and its modus operandi served as a template for the other Operation Reinhard camps – Sobibor, and Treblinka.

At the same time as transports began to arrive at Belzec, construction work began at Sobibor in the east of the country. By the middle of April an experimental gassing took place, with the camp becoming fully operational a month later. Murder ensued at a fast pace: aided by improvements made in light of issues encountered at

Belzec, the camp had already claimed some 100,000 lives by July 1942. Indeed, it was partly because of the high volume of transports that some deportations to Sobibor were temporarily suspended that summer to allow for repairs to be made to the railway track. When deportations resumed in October, additional gas chambers increased the camp's capacity. By the time the camp was closed 12 months later – partly due to an uprising by the prisoners – up to 250,000 people had been murdered at Sobibor.

The third Operation Reinhard camp was Treblinka. Opening in late July 1942, the first weeks of the camp's existence was marked by a ferocious and ultimately unsustainable rate of killing. Part of the reason for this was the re-routing to Treblinka of transports originally intended for Sobibor, though arguably the main explanation lay with the camp's commandant Dr. Irmfried Eberl. Eager to impress, Eberl massively miscalculated the number of transports Treblinka was able to receive. As a result, the camp increasingly struggled to cope with the continual influx of new arrivals and quickly the whole machinery of the camp broke down. Trains soon stacked up behind one another, death became disorganised, and looting and plunder for personal gain was commonplace. Amidst such disarray, Eberl had no choice but to admit his failings to his superiors in Lublin.

The suspension of deportations to Treblinka in late August 1942 thus spoke of the chaos of genocide. Out of this the policy of 'reorganization' was implemented – initially under the directorship of Christian Wirth. A figure who rarely features in most cultural memories of the Holocaust, Wirth was a major player in Operation Reinhard and his imprint was indelible on Treblinka from September 1942. Under his protégé Franz Stangl, Treblinka dramatically grew in efficiency; so much so that by December 1942 Hermann Höfle could report that Treblinka had claimed the lives of 713,555 individuals.

Treblinka remained operational until August 1943. By then somewhere in the region of 900,000 had been murdered at the site. The eight months between the Höfle telegram and the final gassing at Treblinka was thus markedly different to the first five months of the camp's history. There were long stretches of time when no transportations arrived at the camp, and whilst such periods were nerve-wracking for those Jews who had been kept alive to work in the camp they also prompted anxiety among the perpetrators, for whom the prospect of being moved to the front line was a recurrent concern. Both perpetrator and victim therefore had an interest in Treblinka remaining active, and this led to such initiatives as the beautification of the camp. There were other tasks to complete, including exhuming and burning the remains of the dead following Himmler's order of March 1943. For many prisoners, ever-fearful of what tomorrow would bring, escape remained at the forefront of their minds. On 2 August 1943 a long-planned revolt took place: around 200-300 Jews managed to escape the camp, although many were soon re-captured.

From September through to November 1943 Treblinka II was dismantled. Salvageable material was transported out of the camp, whilst all else was destroyed. It is likely that at this time large quantities of gravel from the quarry were used to level over the physical remains of the gas chambers. This helps to explain why by the time of the arrival of the Red Army in August 1944 what had really taken place at Treblinka was not readily apparent.

Originally, Operation Reinhard was to be completed by the end of 1942. In the event, the programme was formally completed in November 1943, when Himmler wrote to Globocnik accepting the latter's closing report and thanking him for his efforts. By the time it was terminated, the Operation had claimed the lives of somewhere in the region of 1,700,000 Jews and had produced loot upwards of \$800,000,000 in today's money.

Treblinka and the evolution of the Holocaust

Within popular culture the Holocaust is often characterised by its perceived industrialism, with 'factories of death' seen to be emblematic of what distinguishes the Holocaust and what casts its perpetrators as evil incarnate. It is true, of course, that a distinctive feature of the extermination of European Jewry was the

utilisation of modern, factory-line procedures, techniques and technologies, for the purposes of mass killing; however, focussing solely on these aspects risks overlooking other dimensions of the genocide and taking no account of how events evolved and developed over time.

The creation of stationary, fixed gassing installations housed within purpose-built camps marks a fundamental moment of transition not just in the history of Nazi policy towards the Jews of Europe, but in the annals of mankind. It is perhaps no wonder then that our eyes are literally and figuratively drawn to the physical vestiges of these structures as they reached their nadir with the combined gas chambers and crematoria complexes of Auschwitz-Birkenau. However, long before Auschwitz-Birkenau claimed the vast majority of its victims, the death camps of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka had served their purpose and completed their designated task. These centres were not only significantly different from Auschwitz-Birkenau; they were, in some very important respects, the essential precursors for that hybrid metropolis.

To understand how the Holocaust evolved and developed, and how a place like Auschwitz-Birkenau was possible, we must look at what came before. Tellingly, each of the Reinhard camps represented an 'improvement' on its predecessor: mistakes were made, 'lessons' were learnt, different approaches and techniques were tried and tested, and through it all the willingness of people to engage in murder came ever-more starkly into contrast. Seen from this angle, Treblinka was for all intents and purposes the most 'perfected' and honed of the Reinhard camps. It is all the more telling therefore that Treblinka collapsed into disorder and disarray a matter of weeks after opening.

By developing students' knowledge and understanding of what happened at the Treblinka death camp during the first five months of its existence we can begin to offer powerful correctives to a number of assumptions about the Holocaust and how it proceeded. That despite the chaos seen in late summer 1942 the camp had still claimed the lives of over 700,000 people by the end of the year is testament to the ferocity of murder – a truth which required not only organization, structures, and frameworks, but relied on human agency to make this possibility a reality.

Through a study of Treblinka we are perhaps confronted with our own shortcomings and inadequacies in how we look at approach 'the Holocaust'. Barbarism and horror are words which – quite rightly – are often ascribed to the Holocaust, but their meaning and their manifestation can be lost and marginalised in a field of vision which only sees the genocide as something which is necessarily smooth and clear-cut in its enactment

Further information on specific activities

Further information on specific activities

The title *Schöne Zeiten* is taken from the name given to a photograph album owned by Kurt Franz. Translated as 'good times' or 'good days', the images are personal photographs of Treblinka taken during Franz's time there. The first set of photographs includes images of Barry, the St. Bernard trained by Franz to attack prisoners together with buildings and animals associated with the zoo constructed in the camp. The second set of photographs includes images of armoury, a warehouse, and guards with the excavator used in the camp to dig pits for burnings and burials. To identify each photograph, please see the notes which appear with each slide.

Traces

These personal possessions and material were unearthed by archaeologists undertaking excavations at the Treblinka death camp. Like all physical traces from history these objects do not speak for themselves, but rather become 'evidence' once positioned in a context and used to support claims we make about the past. As your

students encounter these materials there are multiple lines of questioning and enquiry you could pursue: you or your students may make note of how most of these objects have specific gender-associations with them, and this could open up thinking into the experience of women within Treblinka and during the

Holocaust more generally. Although a generality, it is fair to say that women did tend to have a different experience to men at Treblinka: they were separated from their men-folk, and would also invariably be the last to see children and younger siblings. Exploring the female experience of the Holocaust can thus throw up a host of important and complex issues for consideration. You or your students may also wish to consider what the nature of the material possessions suggests about their owners' – on the one hand in terms of what was important to them, and on another in relation to the social and cultural background that these individuals may have had. Ideas will have to remain tentative and somewhat speculative here, and teachers should be mindful of discouraging students to conclude that because some jewellery and related items have survived, all victims were necessarily wealthy. A more compelling interpretation is that which asks why we only have these objects and not others: what does it say, for instance, that out of the hundreds of thousands who perished at Treblinka, we only have a relatively small number of personal effects? This would seem, if anything, to underline how the vast majority of victims were not 'haves' but in fact 'have nots'.

The discovery of the material objects deepens our knowledge and understanding of the actual killing sites themselves. In the case of the hair clips, for example, their location runs counter to the historical canon which indicates such possessions would ordinarily have been removed within the camp's reception area, as part of the 'processing' of female arrivals. This is not to say scholarly understanding is incorrect, but it does indicate that some women were still wearing these hair clips right up to the very end of their lives. This could be accounted for in various ways. It could be explained as a simple oversight on the part of those who oversaw the movement of women destined for the gas chambers, for example, or it might be read as an indicator of a systemic flaw in the processing procedure itself. Indeed, when the sheer volume of hair clips is taken in to consideration, the possibility arises that the mass of hair clips is actually testament to the speed with which women moved through the camp into the extermination area, leaving no time for the perpetrators to check they had performed such perfunctory tasks as removing their hair clips.

Similar, but also different, potentialities are raised by the presence of jewellery at the site of the gas chambers. Bearing in mind the perpetrators' eagerness to steal any objects of possible monetary value, it is likely these materials found their way to this part of the camp solely because their owners went to lengths to hide them; since this exercise was in a sense successful, one might ask whether such acts be understood as instances of defiance, even resistance.

Finally, the unearthing of the floor tiles allows us a privileged insight into the inner workings of the gas chambers – privileged, of course, since the destruction and subsequent burial of these buildings reflected how these were spaces not meant to be seen by posterity. The yellow and orange tiles students encounter in this session were undoubtedly one of the major finds of recent archaeological work at Treblinka, for they corroborate eyewitness descriptions of the floor tiles found within the gas chambers. These tiles, manufactured by the non-Jewish ceramics company Dziejowski and Lange, were found prior to World War II in Jewish ritual bath houses – although this does not account for what appears to be a Star of David in the centre of the tile themselves; in actuality, and in a peculiar quirk of the historical record, this is not a Star of David but rather part of the manufacturers logo. What is unclear is whether these particular tiles were taken to Treblinka from former buildings, or delivered to the camp directly from the manufacturer. In either case, the presence of the tiles speaks both to the structure of the gas chambers and the lengths the perpetrators went to in order to confuse the people sent to them of their intended fate.

Maps

Cartography has a long and established history and remains one of the principal ways in which mankind makes sense of the world. In this regard maps are always representations and as such they can serve as windows on to the individuals and collectives which create them. The maps included in this session serve a dual purpose: as much as they help to move learning on by confirming certain key ideas and raising new questions, the maps also illustrate the importance of thinking in more sophisticated and reflexive ways about how we look and what we see. As obvious and logical as this sounds such abstract reasoning is not necessarily easy for some students to grasp hold of; be sure then to allow plenty of time for students to explore and reflect on the maps, and to consider their implications. There may be for instance longterm value to be had in getting students to simply compare and contrast the maps, listing similarities and differences, before trying to move them towards considering just what the maps reveal, show and mean.

Mining information: Information cards

It is quite possible students will have various questions as they look at the materials in this activity. If time is short, you may wish to ask students to make a note of these so as to return to them later.

It may surprise students to learn that there were in fact two camps at Treblinka. In itself this is an excellent opportunity to highlight to students the complex nature of the camp system in Nazi Europe, and to draw distinctions between the two different camps at Treblinka. At the same time, and following in the steps of recent archaeological research, this is also a chance to suggest the extent to which the space called 'Treblinka' can be thought of holistically as a geographical area characterised by atrocity and mass suffering.

Students may be perplexed by the language of the Himmler Order – in particular the reference to 'resettlement'. It is necessary of course to emphasise this actually meant death and not simply 'settling' somewhere new; in this way, you can illustrate the use of euphemisms by the regime and ask students to consider why they were employed.

The notice at Treblinka II was originally displayed on a board located at the ramp of the camp, for new arrivals to see when they got off the transports. Significantly, as part of 'reorganization', the notice was removed; instead, this information was announced to people as they entered the camp. It is not entirely clear why this move was made, but one possibility is this avoided the scenario where people swarmed around a notice board to read what was written.

Ganzmüller's note on deportations from Warsaw to Treblinka shines a light on the involvement of different agents and agencies in the implementation of genocide. The Secretary of State's report was in response to pressure from Himmler's office to account for reported difficulties transporting Warsaw's Jews and rectify the situation. As much as underlining the bureaucracy of genocide it also points to the wide circle of involvement which extended beyond those working in the death camps. It also shows the velocity with which deportations were arriving at Treblinka in the first few weeks of the camp's existence. With this in mind, students may be guided towards considering the tone with which the note is written.

The Transport Order of late August is another illustration of the use of euphemisms, but also gestures to the chaotic situation of Treblinka at this time. The directive was introduced as part of the process of bringing order to the camp, effectively giving priority from September to deportation trains and limiting the amount of passenger traffic in the area. Of course what this reveals is that prior to the Order 'normal' trains would pass through Treblinka at the same time as 'special evacuation trains'. Moreover, since deportation transports had to wait their turn at the Treblinka main station – increasingly for longer periods of time throughout August – it is

more than likely that members of the general public were witness to the wagons and their distressed 'passengers'. You could explore with students what questions this raises about knowledge of the Holocaust and people's responses.

Mining information: Accounts

The accounts are provided to enable your students to acquire a human insight into events at Treblinka during the July to early September period. Although they are not intended to be organised in a particular sequence, it is possible to arrange the accounts in such a way that there is a movement from the first deportations, through victims' experience inside the trains, to their arrival and treatment at Treblinka. Students may note there are multiple voices in these accounts, with perspectives of victim, perpetrator and 'bystander' all present. This is very much in keeping with the lesson's emphasis on the importance of adopting a multi-perspectival approach in order to gain the fullest understanding of the past.

Students may well find a number of the scenes and scenarios described in these accounts disturbing. If we think solely in terms of pictures painted by words then there is little doubt that Franz Suchomel's account is especially horrific, and to be sure the teacher will need to be sensitive to the responses students have to this. However, the 'horror' of the Holocaust does not necessarily solely reside in the visual images it evokes: there are other accounts here which are unnerving and/or traumatic for their own reasons. You might for instance point to how Dr. Eberl talks about his 'work' to his wife, and the demands he makes of her; alternatively, you could draw attention to the way in which Josef Oberhauser and Franz Stangl describe the chaos of late summer; or much and more could be said about the impossible situation faced by Adam Czerniakow – the head of the Jewish Council in the Warsaw ghetto who ultimately decided to take his own life rather than meet the demands of the Nazis. All of these accounts thus can be used to raise an array of issues and questions.

Mining information: Profiles

A number of the individuals presented in the 'Profiles' also have voices in the 'Accounts' materials. As part of their sifting, you could encourage students to match relevant cards together so as to help put some 'names to faces'.

Students may pick up (or you might wish to highlight) how the 'Profiles' represent a crosssection of people somehow connected with events at Treblinka. Their background and their position vis-à-vis Treblinka naturally has a bearing on their perspective of the camp: for example perpetrators such as Stangl, Wirth or Franz might be able to give us insights into the operation and organization of the camp the likes of Krzepicki or Wiernik may not, but likewise these victims offer us windows on to events which the Nazis would not have anyone look through. Similarly Ząbecki offers us an unprecedented view 'from the outside', though what he can tell us about what transpired within Treblinka is somewhat limited. Students should again see then that no one person can – or should be expected to – reveal and explain what happened at Treblinka and why.

A number of the 'Profiles' refer to events beyond the key questions of what happened in Treblinka during late summer 1942 and what reorganization entailed. The story of Wiernik's escape from Treblinka opens onto the revolt of August 1943, for example, whilst Franz talks about events during and after the camp's closure. You could use these references as the basis for other enquiries.

Höfle Telegram

As with other members of Operation Reinhard – Christian Wirth and Odilo Globocnik in particular – Hermann Höfle is an important historical figure who rarely figures in our thinking about the Holocaust. As Globocnik's

deputy, Höfle was involved in all aspects of the administration of Operation Reinhard. In was in this capacity that Höfle sent the radio telegram of 11 January 1943 shown on Slide 9 of the PowerPoint.

There are two parts to the telegram. The first is an incomplete message sent to Adolf Eichmann, then a leading figure in the Reich Main Security Office. The second is a complete message sent to the Deputy Commander of the Security Police in Krakow – Lieutenant Colonel Heim. In essence, this was a report on the progress of Operation Reinhard, with the distribution of victims between the death camps. It reveals that as of the 31 December 1942 1,274,166 people had been killed. Murder was concealed by the term 'arrivals'. The camps were each signified by the first letter of their names: 'B' for Belzec, 'S' for Sobibor and 'T' for Treblinka. The letter 'L' was short for Lublin – a concentration camp better known as Majdanek. Unlike the three other camps, Majdanek was not build solely for extermination though more for convenience than design it did serve as a killing site towards the end of 1942.

It is important to note that the telegram contains an error, and teachers may wish to see if students identify this. The error relates to the second figure given for Treblinka – listed as 71355. In fact, when all of the other figures are totalled and cross-referenced with the grand total (zusammen) it becomes clear the figure should read 713,555.

Accounting for this error takes us to when and where the telegram originates from. The image shown on the PowerPoint is a transcription of a message intercepted by British intelligence in January 1943. The first transcription of the correspondence sent to Eichmann is incomplete because it was not fully intercepted; the statistical error for Treblinka in the second message was likely to have been either a typing error or mistake in decoding.

The telegram did not lead to any specific response from the British or the rest of the Allies. Indeed, it was only discovered in 2000 when it was released by the Public Record Office with various other declassified materials. Explaining why no action was taken in light of the telegram raises major questions related to Allied knowledge of and responses to the Holocaust. Some have suggested there was no reaction to the telegram as it was not understood what the letters 'B', 'S', 'T' and 'L' stood for. It is difficult to prove or disprove this argument. However, as teachers explore the issues which arise from the telegram, they may draw students attention to the Joint Allied Declaration of 17 December, 1942. This pronouncement, which was published and delivered simultaneously in the Allied capitals, was the first time the Allies publically condemned the Nazi regime for 'carrying into effect Hitler's oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe'. Teachers could ask how do we position the Höfle telegram in relation to this Declaration?

Acknowledgements

Lesson plan and materials created by Andy Pearce

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