



The first year

What experiences did Leon have after 'liberation'?

Key Question: What experiences did Leon have after 'liberation'?

Teaching Aims & Learning Objectives

- To extend and expand knowledge and understanding of Leon's story
- Develop an appreciation of the concerns and priorities of survivors after the war
- Reflect upon how survivors were perceived and understood as they returned 'home'

Rationale

In the first '**Legacy of the Holocaust**' lesson – '**Liberation**' and '**Home**' – students were encouraged to think about how certain words and the ideas behind them have been impacted by the Holocaust. Complicating students' understandings of these concepts was a core concern, for in many ways this was one of the enduring legacies of the Holocaust: such was its nature that it fundamentally changed the fabric of cultural life and human existence.

These are not easy notions to grasp. The oral histories of Anna Bergman and Leon Greenman were essential in this regard for they both humanised the history and made challenging, abstract ideas more tangible. This approach is continued in this second lesson. Here, students' awareness of the human impact of the Holocaust and the flux created in its aftermath are deepened by honing in on the experiences of Leon in the first year after the war.

Key Information

- The lesson is intended for Year 9 students and above. It is ideally suited to a History classroom.
- Timings are suggested on the basis of a one hour lesson, and may need modifying accordingly.
- The lesson presupposes prior study into the history of the Holocaust. It is envisaged the lesson will be used in conjunction with the lesson '**Liberation**' and '**Home**'.
- Exploratory, independent enquiry characterises this lesson. Students will be completing a series of tasks: to ensure all activities are completed, you may wish to use set timings for these to maintain momentum and keep the class focused.
- Students will be analysing primary source material. It is presumed they will already have experience of source analysis. They will also require sufficient copies of the following materials: Instruction cards, Sorting cards, The Evening Standard, the Invitation to Leon/Dutch letter and the map of Europe.
- There is no PowerPoint accompanying this lesson. Audio-visual equipment is needed to play the extract of Leon speaking and the 1945 BBC sound recording.

Lesson Plan

Returning home (5 minutes)

Recap on prior learning from the previous lesson '**Liberation**' and '**Home**'. Play to the class the film extract of Leon speaking about arriving home. Ask students to estimate how long after he was able to leave the camp Leon actually arrived at his father's house. This will be returned to later.

Leon: From Liberation to London (45 minutes)

Explain to students they will be reconstructing Leon's experiences during the first year after his release. This may be undertaken in pairs or in small groups. As they conduct this enquiry, they will be completing various tasks and engaging with a variety of material. To help record their findings, students make notes on their findings as they pass through each activity. A spider-diagram could be used for this purpose.

'Liberation':

Students should begin with the first instruction card which describes the precise moment Leon was 'liberated'. Ask them to discuss the questions, compiling either individual or group answers to the questions on the card.

The Journey 'Home'/Sorting Task:

For this task students will be sorting the cards into chronological order thus creating a timeline of Leon's journey back to Rotterdam and then on to England. You may suggest they undertake this activity with a map, which has key place names marked on it. Additionally students might draw the route Leon took onto this map. When the timeline is completed, direct them to the questions on the instruction card.

Reflecting on evidence:

Highlight to students the need to deepen their understanding of some of the events identified in the sorting activity. As per the instruction card, direct students to explore the following source materials in order:

- The Evening Standard 1945
- Sound file from the BBC
- Letter from the Dutch Head of the Concentration Camp Bureau to Leon
- Leon's first invitation to speak about his wartime experiences

Living with the memory

Drawing on what they now know of Leon, students should reflect on his decision to speak about his experiences. As well as considering when and why people chose to do this, students could also consider why some never felt able to talk at length about what happened to them.

Plenary (10 minutes)

Collect feedback from students on the activities they have completed. This may be done by moving procedurally through the questions students have answered or by asking groups of students to present on one element of Leon's experiences. In either case encourage students to raise questions about the experiences Leon went through in the year after his 'liberation' and identify any particular issues which strike them. Students may raise – or you might wish to highlight – the following:

- The length of time it took Leon to make his journey home
- How and where his imprisonment is explained and described by the *Evening Standard*
- Reasons why Leon might have given his testimony so soon after reaching his fathers' house

Engaging all learners

Some students may find the exploratory nature of the lesson's central activities challenging. To overcome this, materials could be given to students gradually as and when they complete each activity. Alternatively, the exercises and materials could be divided up among the class so that small groups focus specifically on one aspect of 'Liberation to London'. So as to aid focus, students may benefit from being given a framework for recording information such as a table or grid which is completed as they move through the activities.

Extension work could include further investigation into some of the places and agencies referred to in the materials. Student could for instance conduct research into sites like Buchenwald and organizations such as the Red Cross. They could also be encouraged to think more deeply about their own metacognition by evaluating for example what questions need to be asked of newspapers, or the value of letters when reconstructing history.

Further information

This lesson is the second in a series of lessons entitled '**Legacy of the Holocaust**'. Leon's post-war life is further explored in the lesson **Surviving survival**.

Additional Information

Pedagogical guidance

By focusing on the experience of an individual, this lesson exemplifies some of the core principles of effective Holocaust pedagogy: it helps to rehumanise history, and enables students to access the past through making a tangible connection with one person. However, Leon was – in many ways – an exceptional individual. As much as his experiences during ‘The first year’ reflected common issues shared by many survivors, they were equally distinctive. Just as there was no one, universal, Holocaust ‘experience’, so the same was true for its survivors. This does not invalidate studying one individual, of course; rather it highlights the need to be cautious in our generalisations, and aware of the diverse and complex ways in which the Holocaust continued to effect people after liberation.

Primary source material is invaluable for helping students understand and appreciate these realities. But sources require contextualisation and analysis. Steps can be taken to help students with this – from providing information where necessary, to guiding them towards certain lines of enquiry. Yet these approaches to the past are best taught and learnt over an extended period of time. They are part and parcel of developing students with inquisitive minds and critical thinking skills.

The student-centred tasks which make up the bulk of this lesson present the opportunity for students to practice and hone such competencies. The teacher therefore must be particularly reflexive to the needs of the students as they work through the material. Through observation and informed questioning you have the opportunity to conduct formative assessment of students’ learning, while directed, purposeful interventions will help shape the quality of the students’ enquiries.

Acknowledgements

Lesson plan & materials created by Kay Andrews

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