

Holocaust Memorial Day



Aim

To mark Holocaust Memorial Day by hearing about the experiences of a Holocaust survivor.

Context

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) takes place every year on 27 January. The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust states that the day is *'to remember the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, and millions more people murdered through the Nazi persecution of other groups and in the more recent genocides recognised by the UK government'*. These include the genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur.

27 January marks the day in 1945 when soldiers of the Soviet Union liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in Poland. More than six million men, women and children were murdered there.

The word 'Holocaust' has been widely used in English speaking countries since the end of World War II to describe the systematic murder by the Nazis of groups including Jews, Slavs, Romani people, people with disabilities, gay men and political opponents.

Holocaust Memorial Day was first held in the UK in January 2001. January 2025 will mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the theme of HMD will be 'For a Better Future'.

Possible discussion points before watching the video

- What do pupils understand the word 'holocaust' to mean?
- What do pupils understand Holocaust Memorial Day to commemorate?

- What do pupils understand by the word 'genocide'? (The word was coined by a Polish lawyer in 1944. It consists of the Greek prefix 'genos', meaning 'race' or 'tribe', and the Latin suffix 'cide', meaning 'killing'. The United Nations describes genocide as *'a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part.'*)
- What do pupils understand by the word 'ghetto'? (The OED defines a ghetto as *'any area occupied predominantly by a particular social or ethnic group'*. Under Nazi occupation Jews were routinely forced to live in ghettos).

The video

In the film TV presenter Emma-Louise Amanshia meets John Hajdu MBE to hear about his experiences of surviving the holocaust. John was born into a typical middle-class Jewish family in Budapest, Hungary, in 1937.

In 1940 Hungary entered the War allied to Nazi Germany, becoming part of the Axis powers. From the 1930s onwards Hungary's Jewish population had been subjected to various anti-Semitic laws. In 1944 Nazi Germany occupied Hungary and installed a puppet fascist government - the Arrow Cross party referred to by John in the film. From this time onwards Hungarian Jews were forced into ghettos and then deported from them to the Nazi death camps.

In the film John describes his own mother being taken away - to Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria - but how he himself survived deportation by the quick thinking of his aunt. John lived in hiding for some time before being forced to move to the Budapest ghetto. In early 1945 the retreating Nazis intended to destroy the ghetto and its occupants, but it was liberated by the Soviet army before the plan could be implemented.

After the War John was reunited with his mother. They lived for some years in post-war Hungary, but it remained a turbulent period, including a failed popular uprising against the communist

government and occupation by the Soviet Union. They escaped to Austria in 1956 and a year later they were able to move to the UK.

Possible discussion points after watching the video

- What do pupils recall of John's testimony? What facts stick out for them?
- Why do students think it's important to mark Holocaust Memorial Day?
- What ideas do they have for how they could participate in Holocaust Memorial Day? What could they do? (There are suggestions on the HMD Trust website. See 'Links').
- The UK provided a place of refuge for hundreds of Jewish children immediately before the outbreak of World War II and John Hajdu himself arrived in the UK as a refugee in 1957. Do countries like the UK have a duty to provide places of refuge for those fleeing conflict?

Bringing the assembly to a close

- As a means of discussing how genocide occurs and how countries might seek to combat it, you could share with pupils the **10 Stages of Genocide**. This framework was created by Gregory H Stanton, President of the organisation 'Genocide Watch', to describe the process by which genocide occurs. It begins with creating divisions between 'us' and 'them' and progresses through discrimination and persecution towards extermination. It is partly intended to show that genocide 'never just happens' and that there are identifiable steps, providing a rationale for intervention.
- The poem 'First they came' by Pastor Martin Niemöller is closely associated with Holocaust Memorial Day. You could prepare for the assembly by asking five students to memorise three lines each (for the 'Communist', 'Socialist', 'trade unionist', 'Jew', and 'me') and then asking them to stand and recite in turn at the end of the assembly.

The poem 'First they came'

*First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist*

*Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist*

*Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist*

*Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew*

*Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me.*

External links

The **Holocaust Memorial Day Trust** website:

- **John Hajdu's biography**
- **The 10 Stages of Genocide**
- **Participating in Holocaust Memorial Day**

The **Auschwitz-Birkenau** website offers information and educational resources about the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp.

The website of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UK) – 'UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, works to ensure that everybody has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge, having fled violence, persecution or war at home.'

Possible assembly framework

1. Entry

Play your chosen music as pupils enter. *[Display Slide 2 from the presentation].*

2. Introduction

Today / on *[day of week or date]* it will be Holocaust Memorial Day. Can anyone tell me what they understand the word 'holocaust' to mean? *[Gather responses].*

Today the word has come to define the systematic persecution by Nazi Germany of various groups - especially the Jewish people – during World War II. A persecution that ultimately led to the concentration camps and the deaths of several million people.

Holocaust Memorial Day takes place on 27 January each year because that date marks the day that Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp was liberated. Over one million people were killed in that one camp alone.

The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust describes the day as a day 'to remember the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, and millions more people murdered through the Nazi persecution of other groups and in the more recent genocides recognised by the UK government'.

And that's what we're going to do today - remember those people who died in the Holocaust by watching a short film about someone who survived it...

3. Play the video

The final words are: 'One way to do that is to hear from people who lived through it - people like John.'

The duration is: 6min 11sec.

4. After the video - time to talk

An opportunity to discuss pupils' responses to the film. See above.

5. Bringing the assembly to a close

Today we've been remembering the victims of the Holocaust in World War II. *[Events that happened exactly 80 years ago].*

The Holocaust shows us the very worst of humanity - brutality, hatred, racism, cruelty.

So the best way we can honour those who lost their lives during the Holocaust is to strive to make sure it never happens again.

It's important to realise that events like the Holocaust never 'just happen'. They begin with small steps, things that we can all recognise...like when people create divisions between 'us' and 'them'...when people are discriminated against and treated unfairly...when people turn a blind eye rather than call out unacceptable behaviour...

We're going to end with a short poem, called 'First they came'...

6. Poem: 'First they came' *[Display Slide 3].*

Either recite the poem or invite pupils to do so if you have prepared for the reading in advance.

7. Music

You could play suitable music as pupils leave in silence.