

Lesson Plan – The Development of Labour and Death Camps

Introduction

Student age range: 14-16

Subject: History

Time required: 50 minutes

Overview:

This lesson addresses the camp system that was developed during the Holocaust. Labour camps provided slave labour for the Reich and its war effort, while death camps were built explicitly for the industrialised murder of Jews and other enemies of the Nazi state.

Essential questions:

- What were labour camps?
- What were death camps?

Learning Objectives

- Students will learn about the structure of the camp system and its role in the Holocaust
- Students will understand the difference between labour camps and death camps
- Students will learn about conditions in camps

Key issues/concepts:

- Continuity and change
- Significance

Materials:

Whiteboard and marker

Laptop and projector (or printed copies of the image for analysis in Step Two)

Handout – Survivor Testimonies – printed or distributed online

Teaching notes:

Teachers should be aware that this lesson contains material which may be disturbing to students. Teachers should therefore ensure that the classroom remains a safe space, where students are able to express their emotional response to the material. Teachers should also advise students of where they can seek support if they feel disturbed or overwhelmed by the subject matter.

For the same reason, teachers should not give students broad independent research tasks about this topic. There is a high risk that if students enter relevant search terms online, they will be confronted with disturbing material.

NB. The 'See Feel Think Wonder' visible thinking routine in Step Two is adapted from Project Zero, at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. [See here](#) for more Project Zero thinking routines.

Glossary:

- Labour camp
- Concentration camp
- Death camp
- Final Solution
- Shoah
- Dehumanisation
- Deportation
- Liquidation

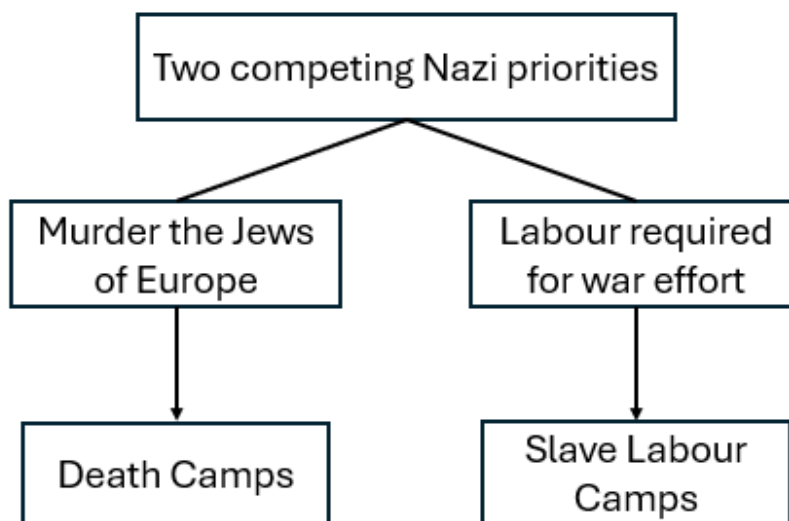
Lesson Instructions

ONE – Introduction to the camp system (10 mins)

Teacher writes a question on the board for discussion: Why did the Nazis keep any Jews alive?

The answer is: Jews were retained as a slave labour force.

Teacher displays the following, or draws it on the board:



Students copy the chart into their notes. Discuss.

Teacher should clarify that there were six death camps, designed for the specific and sole purpose of murdering Jews and other enemies of the state. They were:

- Chelmno
- Majdanek
- Belzec
- Auschwitz
- Sobibor
- Treblinka

TWO – Life in a camp – ‘See Feel Think Wonder’ Visible Thinking Routine (10 minutes)

Teacher shows one of the two artworks below. (The Olère painting may be too confronting for some classes, in which case, use the drawing by Kościelniak.)

Discuss each element of the thinking routine in turn:

- What do students *see*?
- What does it make them *feel*?
- What do they *think* is represented in the image?
- What do they *wonder* about (ie what would they like to know more about)?

For the fourth element, ‘wonder’, the teacher should provide the answers where possible. It is not appropriate for students to conduct independent research in this area, as they are likely to be confronted with disturbing material. If the teacher doesn’t know the answer, an appropriate response is “That’s a great question, and I don’t have a good answer for you at the moment. Let me do some research and answer you next lesson.” Teacher should ensure they begin the next lesson by answering the question.

Option One: Painting by Olère



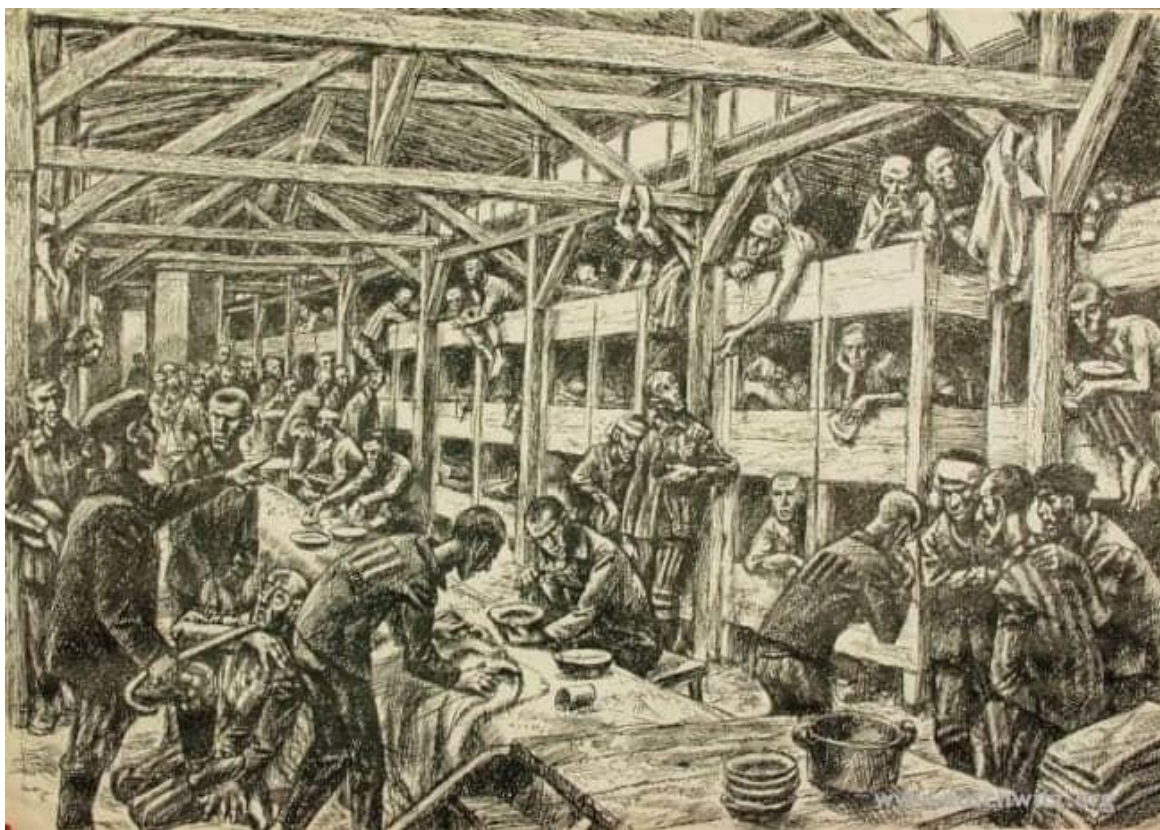
Painting by David Olère, a Polish-French Jew and survivor of Auschwitz.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41283370> Trigger warning: this site contains disturbing images

Some notes on the Olère painting:

- Arbeit Macht Frei means 'Work sets you free'. It was a slogan displayed above the entry gates of Auschwitz and other camps.
- The central building is the crematorium, with a large chimney, from which images of murdered Jews float. These people are young, old, male and female.
- The figure on the right is an SS guard.
- The famous entry to Auschwitz is visible, centre-left.
- There is a guard tower, centre-right.
- The sign in the bottom left corner says 'Warning' with a skull symbol.
- Behind the guard's boots is a gas canister, of the type used to murder victims in the gas chambers.
- The fire is burning a Christian text (possibly a bible), a Jewish Star of David, and a torah (Jewish bible) scroll. The Hebrew writing on the scroll says 'baruch atah adonai', which means 'Blessed are you, my Lord god'.
- Near the centre of the painting, a guard oversees two prisoners pushing a cart. This image is very similar to photographs of prisoners transferring dead bodies.

Option Two: Drawing by Kościelniak



Inside of a male barrack in Birkenau

Author: Mieczysław Kościelniak

Small feather, Indian ink, paper, 70 x 100 c, Warsaw 1972. Collections of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

Some notes on the Kościelniak drawing:

- Image of prisoners in their barracks at Birkenau (a major sub-camp of Auschwitz, also known as Auschwitz II)
- Overcrowding
- Men are in uniform
- Some look emaciated
- Uncomfortable bunk beds
- Scary guard or kapo harassing prisoner (figure with pointed finger, bottom left)
- Possessions: bowls
- Central table
- Extra information: The prisoner sitting on the bunk on the right is not wearing shoes. We know that shoes were a vital possession, and could be determinative of survival. Prisoners guarded their shoes closely to prevent theft. This man either has no shoes, or has put them on his bunk behind him so he can protect them while he sleeps.

THREE – Survivor Testimony (25 minutes)

Students engage with the survivor testimonies on the [Handout – Survivor Testimony](#).

Teachers can choose any of these options:

- Read through the testimonies together as a class, calling on individual students to read
- Students read the testimonies independently
- Students form groups of three, and each student reads one testimony to the rest of the group

After reading all the testimonies, students assess the similarities and differences between the survivors' experiences. They can do this in paragraph form, or as a table.

Extension question: 'Survivor testimonies do not include the voices of the dead.' Discuss.

FINISHING UP

Exit ticket or reflection task: What is one thing you learned about the camp system today?

Modifications:

If teachers are unable to display the image for analysis in Step Two, it can be printed and distributed to the students.

Additional Resources

[Project Zero](#)

Survivor Testimonies from the UK's [Holocaust Centre North](#)

Related lessons

After this lesson, we recommend you teach a lesson focusing on sources from Auschwitz. Alternatively, you can move on to address the varied implementation of Nazi policy in different parts of the world. You can find these, and other Holocaust lesson plans, at [this link](#).

[Click here](#) to see a suggested plan for teaching a full unit about the Holocaust.