



Introduction to 'The Note'

A story of kindness and resilience from the liberation of Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp.

Key Stage 3

Years: 9 and above

Subject:

History

Time required:

Approx. 60 minutes

Teaching aims and learning objectives

To provide an appropriate historical overview of aspects of the Holocaust.

To support students to understand the impact of the Holocaust on ordinary people.

To find out: who was Naomi Kaplan? An opportunity to learn from one woman's story.

To understand the part Oxfordshire's soldiers played in the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

Rationale: a local story with an international impact.

This lesson aims to provide an introduction and basis for our teaching resource 'The Note'. We recommend it should be introduced to students at a point when they already have a foundational understanding of the Holocaust and is best used at the end of a unit of study on this subject.

It builds on knowledge which students gain through their historical study, and introduces key characters from the story of The Note. This unique story allows students to perceive the Holocaust – events of a vast scale - through the lens of two human beings caught up in events. A story with a powerful local aspect, it follows a soldier from the Oxfordshire Yeomanry, Arthur Tyler, who acted to help Naomi Kaplan, one survivor of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

Key Information

PowerPoint presentation

For this lesson, you will require the accompanying PowerPoint. This includes embedded films of Naomi talking about her experiences. Each slide includes supporting notes for the teacher. This resource contains a more detailed PowerPoint walkthrough in a separate section. The walkthrough elaborates on the lesson plan, should teachers find it useful.

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At-a-glance lesson plan

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'Introduction to The Note ' Lesson Plan

What was the Holocaust? Drawing from existing learning (10 minutes)

Begin by recapping student's knowledge about the Holocaust. (Supporting historical notes are included in 'the supplementary information' for reference – see 'Historical Context').

Look at the picture of the Pitel Family on slide 2. The photograph is a link to Yad Vashem, where you will find an interactive activity based on the photograph. This can be clicked to find out what happened to each of the people in the photograph. Together, find out who, from the photograph, survived the Holocaust.

Slide 3: Review this map of the Jewish Holocaust death toll as a percentage of the total pre-war Jewish population by country/region. Take a few moments to help students understand the scale of the genocide involved in the Holocaust, and the impact it had on the Jewish people of Europe.

Introducing Naomi (10 minutes)

Use **Slides 4-8** to help students to learn about one of the daughters in a Polish family: Naomi Kaplan (married name Naomi Warren).

Slides 4-5 depict family portrait from before the war. Note Naomi's family and their names.

Look at the portrait of Naomi before the war (**Slide 6**). Explain how Naomi came to be caught up in events we now call the Holocaust.

- Naomi had wanted to go to university in England, but Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 made this impossible.
- When Soviet troops occupied Naomi's town, her father Samuel tried to flee. He was arrested and sent to a prison camp in Siberia.
- Naomi got married in 1941 to a young doctor, Alexander Rosenbaum, whom she met on the train.
- But when the Nazis took Poland over completely in 1941, Naomi and Alexander, her mother, and her brother and his wife, all suffered persecution as Jews.

Naomi's story (15 minutes)

Play the film on **Slide 7**: it is Naomi's story of arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau; her mother's actions which saved her life, and her impressions of camp life. The film is courtesy of the Holocaust Museum Houston.

Using the further film clips on **Slide 8**, also courtesy of the Holocaust Museum Houston, explain to students that two years after arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Naomi was transferred to Ravensbrück then to Bergen-Belsen. She worked cleaning the rooms of SS soldiers. She was very close to other girls she knew from Ravensbrück, who were now working in the kitchens at Bergen-Belsen. They helped her survive.

Slide 9 focuses on what was happening in the outside world in the latter part of Naomi's incarceration. Introduce the students to the Oxfordshire Yeomanry who had been advancing through Europe.

About Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp

If required, use the additional information section in our 'supplementary information' section to outline the conditions at Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp in April 1945.

Reflecting and responding (25 minutes)

Use the image on **slide 10** by Eric Wilfrid Taylor, a soldier who was part of the forces who liberated Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. Ask the students what they see and together, collect evidence from this source.

Discuss how Eric Taylor found a way to record what he saw, and how putting pen to paper can be a powerful way to respond to such events. **Oxfordshire Yeomanry soldier Arthur Tyler found a very small but very powerful way to make a difference. This will be the focus of the next lesson.**

Demonstrate to students how to create a notebook from a sheet of A4 paper using these instructions:



On each page, in quick sketches or words or both, record one thing which has stayed in their memory from the story. Students don't have to fill every page (they can fill as many as they are comfortable with). This will serve as a note and a reminder for the next session.

Homework task

Send students home with the task of finding a note – no matter how informal – and bringing it to the next session.

PowerPoint Walkthrough

Introduction

Begin by recapping student's knowledge about the Holocaust.

Questions:

- When did it take place?
- Who are the Jewish People?
- How many Jews lived in Europe in 1933? And how many in Germany?
- How many Jews were left in Europe after the war? And how many in Germany?
- How diverse were the Jewish communities at that time?
- Who were the perpetrators in the Holocaust? Who were the collaborators?
- What was their ideology of antisemitism?
- What was the 'Final Solution'?

Guideline answers are included in our supplementary information for reference – see 'Historical Context'.

Slide 2: An interactive photograph of the members of the Pitel family



Access the Yad Vashem site where there is an interactive photograph of the members of the Pitel family, a large Jewish family from Parczew, in Poland. Discuss when this picture might have been taken, given the evidence in the photograph. When students have gleaned all they can by examining the photograph, use the interactive link on the Yad Vashem site to click on the faces of the family and supply context.

Questions:

- What happened to the members?
- How many survived the Holocaust?

Invite students to look at every face and imagine what might have become of each of these people had they survived – the children they may have had, what they could have contributed to the world, had the Holocaust been prevented.

Slide 3: Map of the Jewish Holocaust death toll



Review this map of the Jewish Holocaust death toll compared to the total pre-war Jewish population by country/region.

Take a few moments to help students understand the scale of the genocide involved in the Holocaust, and the impact it had on the Jewish people of Europe.

Slides 4 and 5: A photograph of the Kaplan family



Show students this image, of another family caught up in the Holocaust. It depicts a family portrait from before the war, showing the Kaplan family.

Context: Explain that Naomi Kaplan was born in 1920 in Poland. She was from a family who put a high value on education: they believed that while money and status could be taken away, learning stayed with you.

Slide 6: A photograph of Naomi Kaplan as a young woman



Explain how Naomi came to be involved in the Holocaust.

Context: Naomi had wanted to go to university in England, but Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 made this impossible. When Soviet troops occupied Naomi's town, her father Samuel tried to flee but he was arrested and sent to a prison camp in Siberia. Naomi got married in 1941 to a young doctor, Alexander Rosenbaum, whom she met on the train.

But when the Nazis took Poland over completely in 1941, Naomi and Alexander, her mother, and her brother and his wife, all suffered persecution as Jews.

Slide 7: Film of Naomi talking about arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau



Share Naomi's journey through Auschwitz-Birkenau and Ravensbrück for a short period before going to Bergen-Belsen. Listen to her talk about the loved ones she lost at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Context: Her mother, husband and sister-in-law all were murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Her mother's quick thinking ensured that she lived. There was a system when Jewish people arrived at a concentration camp: those arriving were sorted into a smaller group of able people who could supply labour, and a larger group of people who would be sent to the gas chambers.

Play the film: it is Naomi's story of arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau; her mother's actions which saved her life, and her impressions of camp life.

Slide 8: Film of Naomi talking about arriving at Ravensbruck and the importance of friends



Share Naomi's journey through Ravensbrück and Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp. This is followed by Naomi's observations of the importance of friends in the camps.

Context: Naomi worked cleaning the rooms of SS soldiers. Explain to students that two years after arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Ravensbrück, Naomi was transferred to Bergen-Belsen. She was very close to other girls she knew from Ravensbrück, who were now working in the kitchens at Bergen-Belsen. They helped her survive.

Slide 9: 'B' Troop, one of the groups of Oxfordshire Yeomanry soldiers who went into Bergen-Belsen



Question: While Naomi was experiencing this, what was happening in the outside world?

Context: The Oxfordshire Yeomanry were territorial soldiers – that meant that in peacetime, they were part-time. In peace time, examples of their occupations included clerks, working at banks, the local car factory; at least one of the soldiers (Tony Ginger) grew up on a farm. Since October 1944, these soldiers had been advancing with the Allied forces, reclaiming France, Belgium and Holland and bringing with them freedom. On 26 March 1945, the Oxfordshire Yeomanry crossed the Rhine into Germany. They sent out patrols who rounded up many Germans who were taken prisoner. And since they were in the area, they were asked to assist with the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, which was still behind enemy lines.

Slide 10: Painting: 'A Young Boy from Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp' by Eric Wilfrid Taylor



Ask the students what they see and together, collect evidence from this source.

Context: A reminder that liberating soldiers responded in very different ways. The soldiers of the Oxfordshire Yeomanry were angry and outraged. They were horrified. They felt sick, and hopeless. They had not been prepared to take over a camp full of starving and ill survivors. They did not know what to do to help, and not all their actions were helpful – they gave food to survivors too ill to eat.

One soldier of Arthur's unit could often be found staring blankly at the trenches as they were filled. His friends would come every now and then and try to get him to move away. Another lost patches of his hair from the shock of being in the camp.

Eric Taylor found a way to record what he saw, and this shows how one soldier, who was witness of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, expressed his response to the events there. It is said he began by sketching the huge numbers of dead, but turned his attention to the living; and this is his sketch of one survivor. Putting pen to paper can be a powerful way to respond to such events.

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Supporting Notes

Engaging all learners

This lesson is focused on mainly visual images and films, and as such is designed for a range of abilities and needs. This session is not about supplying answers, but about asking effective questions. As the teacher is the model for effective questioning, their style of questioning, without supplying answers, is a key element of this lesson. Questions may at times need to be reframed to ensure clear understanding for anyone with limited English or additional learning needs. They may need to be reinforced through writing on post it notes, cards or small whiteboards. Noting questions on cards can also provide opportunities for synthesis and reflection. These can be attached to an image of the note to aid any recording carried out later.

The final task, creating a small notebook from an A4 sheet of paper, may require a limited number of these to be ready prepared for anyone with additional motor skill needs.

Additional Information

Pedagogical guidance: 'Reading' an object from history is a key historical skill, and this takes students away from the history books to learn the historian's process. Teachers ask the students to look carefully at the evidence from each source and use this to add layers to the background narrative. In this way students are free to build their own picture; they are motivated to find out the context.

It was using just this approach that, during the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020, Dr Myfanwy Lloyd began to search for Naomi, using the letters sent to Arthur Tyler and the addresses he collected in Bergen-Belsen camp in 1945. It was Dr Lloyd who reconnected Naomi's children, Helen, Benjamin, Geri and Naomi's wider family to 'Dear Mr Tyler', of the Oxfordshire Yeomanry, who helped Naomi after the liberation of Bergen-Belsen.

Historical context

The following information aims to provide students with required historical context at different stages of the lesson.

When did the Holocaust take place?

The Holocaust took place during World War II. It was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, although the oppression of Jews by the Nazis began as early as 1933.

Who are the Jewish People?

Jewish people have a shared history, culture, and religious tradition, originating from the ancient Israelites of the Middle East. Judaism, their religion, is one of the oldest monotheistic faiths in the world, centred around the belief in one God and the Torah as their sacred text. The Jewish people are highly diverse, both historically and in the present day, encompassing various cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions shaped by geography and time.

How many Jews lived in Europe in 1933? And how many in Germany?

In 1933, approximately 9.5 million Jews lived in Europe, representing about 1.7% of the continent's total population. Around 500,000 of them lived in Germany, making up less than 1% of the German population at that time.

How diverse were the Jewish communities at that time?

Jewish communities in Europe were highly diverse in 1933, with variations in language, customs, religious practices, and levels of assimilation. Jews lived in both rural and urban areas, with significant communities in Eastern Europe, such as Poland and the Soviet Union, and smaller, more assimilated populations in Western Europe.

Who were the perpetrators in the Holocaust? Who were the collaborators?

The primary perpetrators of the Holocaust were the Nazis, led by Adolf Hitler and the SS, along with other branches of the German government and military. Collaborators included local authorities and individuals from occupied countries such as France, Hungary, Romania, and Poland, who assisted in identifying, deporting, and killing Jews.

What was their ideology of antisemitism?

Nazi antisemitism was rooted in racist ideology, viewing Jews as an inferior race and a dangerous threat to society. It depicted Jews as corrupt, morally degenerate, and responsible for Germany's economic and social problems. This form of antisemitism combined traditional religious prejudice with pseudoscientific racial theories.

What was the Final Solution?

The Final Solution, implemented by the Nazi regime between 1942 and 1945, was the plan to exterminate all Jewish people in Europe. It led to the murder of approximately six million Jews, which represented around two-thirds of the Jewish population in Europe at that time. The Nazis carried out this genocide primarily in death camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, and Sobibor, where people were systematically killed in gas chambers. Over a million children were among the victims, and the Nazis also targeted other groups, including the Romani people, disabled people, and political opponents. The Final Solution was coordinated by high-ranking Nazi officials at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 and was a key part of the Holocaust, the broader genocide carried out under the Nazis' rule.

About Bergen-Belsen concentration camp just before liberation

Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, just before its liberation by British forces on April 15, 1945, was in a state of catastrophic disorganization and chaos due to the Nazis' retreat and overcrowding from forced evacuations of other camps. Features of the camp included

- **Severe Overcrowding:** originally intended for about 10,000 prisoners, by early April 1945, the camp held over 60,000 inmates, many of them sick or dying.
- **Rampant Disease:** the camp was a breeding ground for infectious diseases, particularly typhus, tuberculosis, dysentery, and scabies, which were widespread among the prisoners.
- **Minimal Food Supply:** food rations were almost non-existent, and many prisoners were surviving on as little as 500 calories per day, leading to severe malnutrition.
- **Lack of Sanitation:** there was virtually no clean water or proper sanitation. Latrines were inadequate, leading to unspeakably filthy conditions, and the camp was infested with lice and other vermin.
- **Mass Deaths:** by the time of liberation, approximately 13,000 corpses lay unburied around the camp. Thousands had already died in the weeks leading up to liberation due to starvation, disease, and neglect.
- **Halt in Operations:** Bergen-Belsen was not originally a death camp like Auschwitz-Birkenau, but in its final months, SS guards abandoned any pretence of care for the prisoners.
- **Evacuees from Other Camps:** many of the prisoners at Bergen-Belsen in 1945 were evacuees from other camps in Eastern Europe, sent westward as the Allies advanced.
- **Division into Sections:** Bergen-Belsen was divided into several sections, including a camp for Jews, a camp for political prisoners, a "Star Camp" for Dutch Jews, and a camp for foreign civilians used for exchanges. However, as the situation deteriorated, these divisions became less distinct.

- Failure of SS Control: As British forces approached, the SS began to abandon the camp, though some remained. The camp's commander, Josef Kramer, was captured shortly after liberation and became infamous as the "Beast of Belsen" for his role in its horrific conditions. After the end of the war Kramer and other SS guards were tried and executed for their role in the mass death at Bergen-Belsen and other camps.

Acknowledgement



Image courtesy of Holocaust Museum, Houston

This resource was made possible by the generosity of Naomi's extended family: the Warren, Brandon, Spector and Roper families, to celebrate the life of Naomi and the ongoing positive impact that her legacy leaves in the world.



FIND OUT MORE

Find out the full story of Naomi and Arthur, and see the original letters in a permanent exhibition at:

Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum

Park Street.

Woodstock

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