



# Teachers' Notes

## Holocaust Unit

### Perpetrator

#### Before the Lesson Begins

- Print out Resources A, B, C & D & F

#### Resources Not Provided

- Pens

#### Lesson Overview

The focus of this lesson is perpetrators and the impact their negative acts have on those around them.

#### Introduction

#### Discussion Guidance

1. The story of victims in the Holocaust are important to show us the effects of prejudice – but the stories of perpetrators are too often avoided, and are important to understand the psychology behind bigotry. To favour a focus on the experience of one over the other is to miss important lessons.
2. There were many perpetrators of the Holocaust – with varying degrees of negative actions. Without the perpetrators, the Holocaust never would have occurred.

## Section 1: Who Are Perpetrators?

#### Activity Guidance

This quick activity is to allow the students to think on their feet & explore their instinctual feelings about perpetrators and their humanity.

#### Discussion Guidance

These questions are to allow the students to consider the differences in their perceptions of perpetrators and victims. The aim is to show that on a human level, there are few intrinsic difference between perpetrators and victims.

## Testimony identities

### *Resource A - Adolf Eichmann*

Adolf Eichmann was a German SS officer in charge of organising the logistics of the Holocaust. His actions resulted in the deaths of millions of people. After the war he escaped to Argentina where in 1960 he was captured by the Israeli secret service. After his lengthy trial he was found guilty and executed for his crimes on 31st May 1962.

### *Resource B - Odilo Globocnik*

Odilo Globocnik was an Austrian SS Officer who was in charge of administration of Operation Reinhard (the extermination of Jewish people in the General Government area of Poland). He oversaw the liquidations of the Warsaw Ghetto and organised the creation of Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec & Majdanek death camps. On 31st May 1945 He was captured by British forces in Italy but committed suicide that same day before he could stand trial.

### *Resource C - Primo Levi*

Primo Levi was an Italian Jewish chemist and in 1944 was deported to Auschwitz where he was imprisoned until liberation by the Soviets on January 27th 1945. After the war he wrote several highly acclaimed books about his experiences, philosophies and science, such as *If This Is Man* and *The Periodic Table*. On April 11th 1987 he was found dead at the bottom of an interior landing having fallen three floors.

### *Resource D - Janusz Korczak*

Janusz Korczak was the pen name of Henryk Goldszmit, a well known Jewish author in Poland before the war. During the war, he was imprisoned along with 450,000 other people in the Warsaw Ghetto where he established an orphanage to care for the countless parentless children. There he created an oasis in a desert of cruelty for his children. In 1942 the Nazis ordered the children be deported to Treblinka death camp, feeling that he could not abandon them, he chose to go to Treblinka death camp in August 1942 where he, along with the children, was gassed to death. Korczak's work formed the basis of the UN's right to a child.

## Section 2: The Crimes of Perpetrators

*Resource E* - In 1985 Claude Lanzmann made a 10 hour documentary about the Holocaust called *Shoah*. *Resource F* is an interview clip with SS Officer Franz Suchomel, which featured in the film. Suchomel agreed to an interview with Lanzman, but the film footage was acquired secretly from his camera men filming through the window. In this clip, he describes the arrival procedure and treatment of Jewish victims transported to the camp by train. Treblinka was a death camp in Poland, near Warsaw, which operated for 15 months from July 22nd 1942 - October 19th 1943. An estimated 850,000 people were murdered during the camp's operation.

### Slide 3

**NB:** At the beginning of the war, Suchomel was employed as a tailor in the German Army, before becoming a photographer for a forced euthanasia centre in Berlin, where his job involved photographing the disabled victims. His role in Treblinka began in 1942, where he was responsible for the transportation of Jewish victims to the camp and urging Jewish Women into the gas chambers with the words: "Dear ladies, quickly, quickly, quickly, the water gets cold." He was tried and charged as a war criminal in 1963, and convicted as an accessory to the murder of 700,000 Jewish people. He was sentenced for 6 years.

## Section 3: Being a Perpetrator

### Discussion Guidance

1. There are so many reasons why people act the way they do in unusual circumstances. These 'ordinary men' may have been influenced by hundreds of different factors, or simply one alone - perceived or factual. Here are just a handful of examples:
  - Peer pressure
  - Authoritative pressure (e.g. The Milgram Experiments)
  - Self-interest (climbing the ladder of authority within the Nazi party)
  - Anti-Semitism
  - Fear
  - Cultural tendencies
  - Mental illness (psychotic tendencies etc.)
  - Mental vulnerabilities (learning disabilities and people who are in some way unable to make decisions on their own)
1. Despite there being a variety of reasons why people do the things that they do, we believe that ultimately people are responsible for their own actions. Of course, in the case of mentally vulnerable people, the issue of ownership of responsibility is much more complex.
2. This question is to allow the students to discuss the reasons behind people's actions without arriving at a definitive 'answer'.
3. Yes. We are all capable of cruelty; while most of us will never become 'ordinary men', if we were placed in a similar position our capacity would be tested. As the story of prejudice demonstrates, under the right circumstances, our capacity for cruelty grows.

# Section 4: How do we become ‘Ordinary Men’?

## Activity Guidance

The aim of this activity is to chart the link between a less extreme wrong to an incredibly extreme example. Example – they may chart a story of prejudice that begins with bullying/cruel comments & ends with murder/suicide/gang violence/genocide.

Explain to the class there are different ways to be & different levels of being a perpetrator – but you don't have to kill/maim someone to be actively contributing to the story of prejudice. It's the smaller acts of cruelty that help create a culture that facilitates the larger acts, and allows such extreme behavior to be considered acceptable.

**NB:** It is important to note that the process from lesser examples of prejudice to more extreme examples is a long one. In the case of Jewish people in Europe it took hundreds of years of anti-Semitism to develop and become culturally entrenched before the Holocaust was possible. However, despite the length of the Story of Prejudice, it exists and even if we believe that we are at a ‘less extreme’ chapter’, we are still contributing to moving the story along.

