

# TEACHING HISTORY THROUGH THE USE OF WORLD WAR II MEMORIALS

Pedagogical Guide

# CONFRONTING MEMORIES

Confronting Memories explores the phenomenon of historical memory and how historical events shape countries and societies today, focusing on multiperspective history education. The programme creates a space for meaningful dialogue with diverse perspectives on the history of the 20th century and brings together conflicting views in search of common ground.

The CSF e.V. is an independent network of thematically diverse NGOs, established as a bottom-up civic initiative. Its goal is to strengthen cooperation between civil society organisations and contribute to the integration of Russia and the EU, based on the common values of pluralistic democracy, rule of law, human rights and social justice.





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# Introduction

Kristina  
Smolijaninovaite

Since its initiation in 2020, the Confronting Memories programme has devoted its work to generating dialogues through history to help build bridges and promote peace. Its methodology is centred around multiperspectivity as a strategic approach to teaching students how to understand other perspectives on history in addition to our own.<sup>1</sup> Within the framework of this programme, various media have been created and events organised to serve this purpose: the exhibition 'Different Wars' that examines how World War II is depicted in school textbooks in six countries; short films on the commemoration of World War II and an observation on the current war in Ukraine; public discussions; webinars; summer schools for history educators; and now this pedagogical guide.

The contributors to the programme are history teachers, historians, civil society representatives, non-formal educators, and creative producers from across Europe.<sup>2</sup> It is our goal to find common ground to unite us in our mission to develop empathy towards one another. This mission is all the more urgent in light of the continuous challenges posed by polarisation in political standpoints as well as civil and military conflicts in the region.

This pedagogical guide focuses on World War II and its commemoration in Europe, as shared experiences of the conflict as well as contested historical legacies continue to influence us all. The same war is remembered differently in different countries, which has given rise to many different cultures and practices of remembrance, based on national identity. These differences have in turn led to differences in the way the narrative of the war is taught in different states and European regions. In Western Europe, the narrative is usually focused on one aggressor – Nazi Germany – and a coalition of allies fighting against it, with the Holocaust being a central focus of remembrance. In Central and Eastern Europe, the picture is more complex. For many, liberation by the Red Army meant the start of another form of totalitarian subjugation. Commemoration practices in Central and Eastern Europe, which focus on the crimes of Stalinism, are therefore fundamentally different from commemoration practices in the West.

National history and identity is usually the reference point and the ultimate concern in teaching history at schools and educational institutions. In our programme, multiperspectivity is at the core of the approach in selecting and developing materials for history lessons on World War II, in order to go beyond strictly national narratives of history. To this end, this pedagogical guide provides tools to teach complex histories through selected World War II memorial sites in Europe.

<sup>1</sup> Multiperspectivity refers to either 1) various present-day views on/interpretations of a specific historical event/period, or 2) different perspectives over time on a specific historical event/period (pasts-presents-futures). See Pedagogical Recommendations for a full discussion of the term.

<sup>2</sup> In this guide and the programme Confronting Memories as a whole, Europe refers to geographical Europe, including all countries from Norway to Greece and Portugal to Russia. In 2023 the programme will broaden to include additional Eastern Partnership countries, among them Armenia and Georgia.



We chose to work on memorial sites, as their integration into the physical landscape provides a tangible link to the past that allows students to experience history more immediately through physical encounter and interaction. Through a memorial site, one is easily engaged and persuaded that whatever history presents is not just imagined but tangible. Learning about the past can be challenging: whereas history has to be constructed by historians through meticulous and rational research aiming at objective retelling, memory is subjective and emotional. Memorial sites and places of remembrance usually emerge from public collective memory, at local, national, and international levels. Their importance to a given society marks them as sacred places that people feel bound by duty to connect with. Moreover, memorials are closely related to commemoration ceremonies and processions, making them a vivid expression of the policies of the state or political regime to which they belong.

This guide also discusses the debates surrounding the intersecting and conflicting memorial landscapes of World War II in Europe, identifying the challenges in creating a common European memory of the war (see 'The Landscape of Memory and Memorials of World War II in Europe'). At the heart of these debates is the question of whether a unified European memory is even possible. This guide provides several strategies, most importantly the need to accept and engage with the diversity of memories, an approach that requires developing empathy towards the Other and makes the practice of self-critical reflection a prerequisite for mutual recognition. Additionally, this essay provides a wider overview of the European memorial and museum landscape, to showcase remembrance strategies, limitations and failures that will hopefully be helpful and enriching to history educators.

History educators and historians worked jointly on this guide with such complexities in mind to present eight powerful examples of contrasting World War II memorial sites from Germany, Moldova, Poland, and Russia. Their task was not to present the best-known memorial sites, but rather to provide some inspiring examples to educators that illustrate the diversity of memorials emerging from this conflict. The selected examples fall under the following four categories, also elaborated upon in the following chapter:

- Official memorials of military campaigns
- Official memorials of victims
- Museums dedicated to historical events
- Unofficial memorials / private initiatives

Additionally, this guide outlines pedagogical recommendations for the use of memorials as a teaching tool that history educators may choose to apply and adapt to their own specific teaching context and country. In the 'Pedagogical Recommendations' section we suggest three types of teaching strategies:

- Classroom-based learning activities
- Classroom and visit-based learning activities
- Visit-based learning activities

With the publication of this pedagogical guide on the teaching of World War II through the use of memorials, we hope to facilitate dialogue and raise awareness on multiperspectivity between history teachers and non-formal educators on the remembrance of this global conflict, and to enhance trust-building processes across borders, going beyond the scope of national narratives. Together with its learning activities based on memorial sites, this guide offers recommendations that can be adapted for history classes, workshops, and other similar educational activities.

Addressing uncomfortable episodes of history through our educational practices – inside and outside the classroom – can create pathways to facilitate critical and open discussions of our national histories, with the goal of promoting such core values as human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

This guide is available in four languages – English, German, Polish, and Russian – to make it as useful and accessible as possible to different groups of educators.



# The Landscape of Memory and Memorials of World War II in Europe

Christoph  
Meißner

With 60-80 million lives lost worldwide, World War II remains the deadliest war in human history. Through the extreme violence it unleashed, the conflict left scars on national identities that are still reflected in national, collective, and individual memories today. In Europe, these memories are particularly disparate due to the widely different experiences of the war. Contested views are expressed most visibly in the memorial landscape of the continent. This chapter first aims to look at the politics of remembrance of World War II in Europe and the possibilities of a pan-European memory, and second, attempts to categorise Europe's often confusing memorial landscape. It will be proposed that there are two major memory circles which are codependent in the European politics of memory: the Holocaust; and Stalinist crimes. While the memory of the Holocaust has become the central symbol of the war in Western Europe, it is overshadowed by the experiences of Stalinist violence in Eastern European countries. Only Russia, whose own memory of the victory in the "Great Patriotic War" glorifies the fallen victims, does not really fit into these circles. As will become clear, due to many overlapping national and regional memories, such a proposal can only be an approximation, which by no means claims to be comprehensive.

## European memory and its challenges

Swiss writer Adolf Muschg wrote in a 2003 essay on European identity: "What holds Europe together and what divides it is essentially one thing: common memory."<sup>1</sup> With this simple but very precise sentence, he summarised an endless debate that has been unfolding since the end of the Cold War about a European memory and a common history of the European countries. Since the early 1990s, historians and curators have tried and failed to conceptualise a common museum of European history, not least because of the diverse and heterogeneous perspectives of individual countries (and even within an individual country, perspectives are not necessarily homogeneous in themselves). These contested memories continue to shape the memory of World War II to this day, while politicians try to form a common narrative which holds the European Union together. Despite this, according to the thesis of Claus Leggewie and Anne Lang, European states have been able to agree on a common core subject of memory: the remembrance of the Holocaust and its overcoming.<sup>2</sup> Germany assuming responsibility for this crime, as a result of a long and intensive

<sup>1</sup> Muschg, A. (2003). "“Kerneuropa”. Gedanken zur europäischen Identität ["Core Europe". Thoughts on European identity], *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 31 May, <https://www.nzz.ch/article8VX08-Id.258918>, accessed 20 November 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Leggewie, C. (2011). *Der Kampf um das europäische Gedächtnis. Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* [The Battle for European Memory. A Battlefield is Visited], C.H.Beck: München.

debate in the post-war period, was a fundamental factor, thus clearing the way for the development of a complex understanding that combined the perpetrator's and victim's narratives. However, in the post-war period this also gave the states of Europe the opportunity to externalise crimes and forget issues such as collaboration and other related crimes perpetrated in their respective countries during the war.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from this core subject, however, it was difficult to define a common European horizon of remembrance. The discussion was somewhat nationalised, and concerned the number of victims, as well as occasional narratives of collaboration or resistance. As the French historian Ernest Renan said in his famous lecture 'What is a Nation?' at the Sorbonne in 1882: "[...] suffering in common unifies more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort."<sup>4</sup> To forget the dark and inglorious aspects of one's own history plays a decisive role not only in individual remembrance, but also in shaping the collective memory of a group of people and nations. To quote Renan again: "Forgetting – I would even go so far as to say the misrepresentation of history – is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality."<sup>5</sup>

If we accept Renan's analysis, then the national experiences and memory of the European states after World War II, which differed and diverged not just marginally but overtly from one another, could not and still cannot be brought together in a common narrative which goes beyond the memory of the Holocaust as a trans-European phenomenon.

## The Holocaust as the central focus of the memory of World War II

The fact that the Holocaust was able to become the central focus of remembrance at all is largely due to the universalisation of Holocaust remembrance in the 1990s and 2000s, which was pursued primarily on a political level. The efforts reached a climax at the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in 2000, which was held on the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and attended by historians, politicians, and heads of state from 46 countries. In the final declaration, all participating states pledged:

"Together we must uphold the terrible truth of the Holocaust against those who deny it. We must strengthen the moral commitment of our peoples, and the political commitment of our governments, to ensure that future generations can understand the causes of the Holocaust and reflect upon its consequences."<sup>6</sup>

This laid an important foundation for the future status of Holocaust remembrance in EU member states. Half a decade later, in 2005, these principles were once again laid down on a supranational level when the European Parliament adopted the resolution 'On the

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Judt, T. (1992). 'The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe', *Daedalus*, 121 (Fall 1992), pp. 83–119.

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Renan, E. (1882). *What is a Nation?*, 11 March, Sorbonne, Paris.

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Ibid.

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'Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust', *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, 29 January 2000, [https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/stockholm\\_4csilver.pdf](https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/stockholm_4csilver.pdf), accessed 20 November 2022.

remembrance of the Holocaust and on anti-Semitism and racism', building on the final declaration of the Stockholm Conference. This resolution called on member states, above all, to fight against xenophobia and racism. In addition, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on 27 January 1945 played an important role in the resolution, which declared this date as 'European Holocaust Remembrance Day', a day now celebrated in all member states.<sup>7</sup> The resolution was followed on a global level by a UN declaration on 1 November 2005 which declared 27 January as 'International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust'. This declaration also rejects any form of Holocaust denial and encourages member states to actively preserve sites used by the Nazis during the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the EU and UN were able to agree on such a resolution in 2005 shows once again the hegemonic status the Holocaust had assumed in the Western and Transatlantic world since the 1980s. However, compared to the knowledge in Western European countries of their own victims and history, that of the victims of World War II in Eastern Europe receded into the background. Next to the Holocaust, there was no room for the millions of murdered and starved Polish and Soviet prisoners of war, or for the approximately one million starved civilians during the blockade of Leningrad, which lasted over 900 days between September 1941 and January 1944. Even when the Holocaust was discussed, it was always seen through a national focus or through the example of Auschwitz. This was done without the wider contextualisation that considers that most war crimes during World War II took place in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the impact on the region, and the remembrance of the multiple and intersecting victim groups.

The Holocaust is still the defining fixed point of memory in the EU today. This unique focus in the common memory of World War II was not called into question at the time of the Union's eastward growth in 2004 or 2007 with the associated inclusion of the Eastern European space of experience and memory;<sup>9</sup> after all, the Baltic states had already been active members at the Holocaust Conference in Stockholm in 2000. However, the inclusion of the states of Central and Eastern Europe now added experience of the crimes of Stalinism, which in the following years established itself as another circle of remembrance alongside the core Holocaust remembrance in the EU.

<sup>7</sup> 'European Parliament resolution on the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and racism', *Official Journal of the European Union*, P6\_TA(2005)0018, 27 January 2005, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX-:52005IP0018&qid=166418298%209193&from=EN>, accessed 20 November 2022.

<sup>8</sup> 'Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 1 November 2005 – 60/7', *United Nations*, A/RES/60/7, 21 November 2005, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/487/96/PDF/N0548796.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed 17 January 2023.

<sup>9</sup> In 2004, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Malta, and Cyprus joined the EU. In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined.

## Stalinist crimes as a part of the memory of World War II

Their specific histories and memorialisation practices, which diverged from those in the West, prompted the newly admitted Eastern European countries to try and make their voices heard in the remembrance policy network of the EU. Their core request was for adequate remembrance of the crimes of Stalinism, which, according to the assessment of these countries, were to be equated with the crimes of the National Socialists. The argument, especially in the Baltic states and Poland, was that both were equally criminal regimes. This perspective is understandable against the background of the Hitler-Stalin Pact (known in Eastern Europe as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) and the resulting division of Central and Eastern Europe between the spheres of interest of National Socialist Germany and the Soviet Union, and the violent crimes that accompanied it. However, this perspective acknowledges that many historiographical questions remain unresolved, and that simply equating both crimes addresses neither the inner complexities of either regime, nor their respective acts of violence.

Nevertheless, this view has resonated, and continues to resonate, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. This continued resonance is emphasised by the states' commemoration policies and cultures of remembrance, which rarely consider the multi-layered nature of historiographical findings. Thus, the states of Central and Eastern Europe took on the inclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact within the framework of a common European memory as their primary historical-political project. This undertaking has been pursued by the political circles of the different states with admirable perseverance until the present day, and a number of successes are evident.

The first was Resolution No. 1481, the 'Need for international condemnation of the crimes of totalitarian communist regimes' of 25 January 2006,<sup>10</sup> but this was superseded by the resolution 'European conscience and totalitarianism' adopted by the European Parliament on 2 April 2009.<sup>11</sup> This resolution certified the declaration of the Parliament on 23 August 2008 – the anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939. The declaration adopted the proposal of the Prague Declaration 'On European Conscience and Communism', which was signed on 3 June 2008 by several prominent European politicians, former political prisoners, and historians, to make 23 August a European day of remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian dictatorships in Europe in the 20th century. Since then, it has formally stood on an equal footing with Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January. But this equivalence is only formal. In reality, 27 January continues to receive much more attention than 23 August, especially in Western Europe. This circumstance reflects a fundamental ignorance and lack of awareness on the part of Western European remembrance communities towards the experiences of Eastern Europeans.

The last major success enjoyed by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was the European Parliament resolution 'On

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'Resolution 1481 – Need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes', *PACE*, 25 January 2006, <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/xref/xref-xml2html-en.asp?fileid=17403&lang=en>, accessed 17 January 2023.

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'European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism', *Official Journal of the European Union*, P6\_TA(2009)0213, 2 April 2009, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2009-0213\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2009-0213_EN.html), accessed 20 November 2022.

the importance of European historical consciousness for the future of Europe' of 2019.<sup>12</sup> In this, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was acknowledged as the starting point of World War II, thus attributing blame to both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the resolution accused the Russian government of whitewashing communist crimes, glorifying the Soviet totalitarian regime, and using history as a weapon in the information war against Europe. In its concluding paragraphs it urges Russian society to educate itself about this "tragic past". Here too, from a historiographical point of view, we must follow the plea for differentiation and not generalisation that is characteristic of this resolution. The key question for historians is how these resolutions on remembrance policy usually find their way through parliament unchallenged. The adoption of the resolution was accompanied by a widespread absence of scholarly consultation and social debate, at least in the German-speaking world.<sup>13</sup>

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'European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe', *Official Journal of the European Union*, P9\_TA(2019)0021, 19 September 2019, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0021\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0021_EN.html), accessed 20 November 2022.

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For more on this discussion see, for example, Drăgulin, A. & Ciobanu, M. (2019). 'History is not an "Option". Collective memory and ideological fragmentation in Europe', *Revista Română de Studii Eurasiatice*, XV(1-2), pp. 171-192; Pistan, C. (2020). 'Collective Memory in the context of European integration processes. Some critical reflections on the EU politics of remembrance', *De Europa*, 3(2), pp. 21-38; Barile, D. (2021). 'Memory and integration. The European Parliament's 2019 resolution on European remembrance as a case study', *Journal of European Integration*, 8(43), pp. 989-1004.

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See Hoffmann, D. L. (ed.) (2022). *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, Routledge: New York.

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Putin, V. (2020). 'The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II', *The National Interest*, 18 June, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/vladimir-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982>, accessed 20 November 2022.

## Russia, the Holocaust, and Stalinist crimes

A third circle of memory primarily concerns Russia. In Russia, it is above all the narrative of victory in the Great Patriotic War – which began on 22 June 1941 with Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union and ended on 9 May 1945 with the surrender of the Wehrmacht – that shapes the World War II memory landscape; a landscape which ignores Soviet responsibility for the start of the conflict in September 1939. In the process, something akin to a cult of victory has been created in the seven decades since the end of the war, which includes the hero-worship of the victims and ultimately justifies the horrors of the war through its victorious result.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the domestic political benefits of this narrative for Russia, such a development can be read as an answer to the remembrance policy initiatives of the Central and Eastern European states, who try to make the Soviet Union jointly responsible for the outbreak of the war. Moreover, these states consider the liberation from Nazi occupation in 1944 merely as the beginning of a new Soviet occupation which lasted until the regime's collapse in 1991. It is therefore not surprising that Russian President Vladimir Putin, in reaction to the aforementioned resolution 'On the importance of European historical consciousness for the future of Europe', felt compelled to respond a year later with his own essay on "the real lessons of World War II".<sup>15</sup> In this text, he rejected the responsibility of the Soviet Union for the outbreak of the war and instead blamed Poland, further arguing that the Baltic states had voluntarily joined the Soviet Union in 1940 and that, in any event, the Soviet Union had saved the whole world. Of course, the Hitler-Stalin Pact was not mentioned in this example of blatant historical distortion.

Other victim groups and Soviet nationalities and ethnicities assumed a subsidiary role in this glorification of a narrowly defined "Russian" victory and the accompanying liberation of Europe from fascism. Over the last three years, however, the global trend in



memory politics towards self-victimisation can also be observed in the Russian Federation. From a heroic victory, the memory has evolved into a narrative of victimhood with a strong emphasis on the notion of genocide. For example, in October 2022 the St. Petersburg City Court recognised the blockade of Leningrad by the German Wehrmacht from 1941-1944 as a genocide against the Soviet people.<sup>16</sup> With the promotion of this tendency, the Russian Federation appears on the one hand to want to join this trend in memory politics in order to mitigate its status of a pariah, and on the other hand, against the background of a supposed “genocide” of the Russian population in the Donbass, this legitimises the war of aggression against Ukraine; then, as now, soldiers are dying in order to avert genocide and defeat “evil”. Victims of the Holocaust are thus largely overshadowed in the official view of history.<sup>17</sup>

It is all the more painful for the victims and their relatives, then, that there is no place left in Russia’s culture and politics of remembrance for the horrors of the Gulag, which claimed about four million lives. These crimes have been admitted by the Russian state, but their commemoration has not been promoted in any way and has been completely suppressed in the recent past.<sup>18</sup> In December 2021, the Russian Federation showed that it was no longer interested in coming to terms with this chapter of its own history by issuing a court order to ban Memorial International, the only independent organisation conducting research on the victims and the apparatus of the Gulag.

## Is there a European memory of World War II?

This schematic threefold division of European memory spaces to World War II, all mutually dependent and built upon one another, is by no means sufficient to depict the memory landscape of Europe in all its complexity. Nevertheless, such a division can help cut a swath through the thicket of memories and, by focusing on the politics of remembrance, more readily highlight the contrasts. It is by no means intended to level out the disparate memories of World War II. Rather, a unity in diversity should be allowed for, which is what the final part of this section pleads for. It will deal with a central question: is a unified European memory possible?

Jewish victims of the Holocaust have received increasing attention from the general public since the 1980s, while the victims of Stalinism, who were deported, tortured, exploited, and murdered as forced labourers, have not yet been given an appropriate place in European memory. But how can these different circles of memory be brought together?

To this end, we should first let go of the idea of a common, uniform, and harmonious European memory and shift our thinking more in the direction of the motto of the EU: “United in diversity”. A coherent European history of World War II must therefore be more than just the sum of all its national and regional parts; we should

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See ‘Горсуд Петербурга признал геноцидом блокаду Ленинграда’ [The St. Petersburg City Court recognised the siege of Leningrad as genocide], *Interfax*, 20 October 2022, <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/868761>, accessed 20 November 2022.

As early as 2020, a court in the Novgorod region recognised the massacre of civilians in the village of Zhestyanaya Gorka in 1942-1943 as a genocide. In August 2021, the Pskov Regional Court followed by recognising the crimes committed by Nazi Germany in the region as genocide against the Soviet people.

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See Zeltser, A. (2019). *Unwelcome Memory. The Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem: Jerusalem.

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See Bogumil, Z. (2018). *Gulag Memories. The Rediscovery and Commemoration of Russia's Repressive Past*, Berghahn: New York/Oxford.

accept and engage with the diversity of memories. If you don't know about a person's past, you cannot talk to them about their future. For this, however, empathy towards the other and a praxis of self-critical reflection are fundamental prerequisites. Only those able to put themselves in the other's shoes to take on and understand alternative perspectives can develop empathy. Therefore, a multiperspective and dialogical approach is needed when looking at Europe's manifold memory spaces.<sup>19</sup> Another prerequisite for this approach is developing a precise knowledge of how one's neighbours deal with history. Ultimately, a multiperspective and dialogical approach requires a consensus on the forms of dealing with history and conflicts of memory. At a bare minimum, this consensus should avoid offsetting debts and a competition between victims, e.g. debating who suffered more. Such an approach means, crucially, that it shouldn't be an option to redeem one's own debt with the debt of another, as this attitude leads to a relativisation of one's own guilt. The Hungarian writer Peter Esterhazy characterised this in 2004 as follows: "Covering one's own crimes by referring to German crimes is a European habit. Hatred of the Germans was the foundation of the post-war period."<sup>20</sup> Opening up a competition between victim groups or national suffering leads to marginalisation.<sup>21</sup> Promoting one group as having suffered the most means overshadowing or even calling into question the suffering of another. Neither approach is in the interest of upholding the pluralistic memory politics that have prevailed in the last three decades since the end of the Cold War (at least in Western Europe).

A second and even more important prerequisite is the fact that peaceful resolution of memory conflicts always happens on the basis of the mutual and reciprocal understanding that there is no exclusive memory that has precedence over others. A common discussion is only possible if all agree on the premise that history must not be weaponised to legitimise acts of war in the present. Even agreeing on such a small and necessary basic consensus is difficult, as shown by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In this war, historical myths and alleged grievances that initially triggered a "war of memories"<sup>21</sup> in Central and Eastern Europe are now used as a pretext to question the European peace order through a military invasion.

Nevertheless, European civil society and politicians should not despair. There are enough examples in recent history of projects that had and still have a multiperspective dialogue as their goal. The 'Confronting Memories' programme is one such successful example. Teachers, historians, and civil society activists from different Eastern European countries meet to shed light on the contrasting ways history is viewed and, at the same time, understand one another's thinking and actions. Another important initiative is the European Network for Remembrance and Solidarity (ENRS). Founded in 2005, the organisation supports academic research, educational projects, and promotional events through a network of international scholars and ENRS partner institutions. These two examples of initiatives can thus provide a model for a larger remembrance policy framework.

<sup>19</sup> Dialogical remembering is contrasted with antagonistic remembering, which seeks to find a way of dealing with the past in which some demand that others ultimately recognise their view, thus formulating a claim to absoluteness

<sup>20</sup> See Assmann, A. (2006). *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* [The Long Shadow of the Past. Remembrance Culture and Politics of History], C.H.Beck: München, p. 268.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the term 'memory wars', see *ibid.*

A European collective memory of World War II must be as diverse as its nations and cultures; it should not be regulated by resolutions passed in the European Parliament and certainly cannot successfully be imposed by acts of state and routine remembrance rituals. A uniform memory is therefore neither possible nor desirable, as it can only be incomplete and therefore highly selective. Rather, it is necessary to acknowledge history's contradictions and establish a basis for coexistence in the present and the future through the complex elucidation of the past.

German political scientist Claus Leggewie wrote about the “European battlefield of memories”.<sup>22</sup> Ending this war of memories would require highlighting the importance of the Holocaust without placing it upon such a high pedestal that it downplays the systematic extermination of “class and national enemies” in countries under the Soviet sphere of power. This aspiration requires a broader knowledge not only of our own national history, but also of the history of our neighbours. Therefore, the final plea is as simple as it is logical. What is needed in the future is an even greater transnational and multiperspective approach to history teaching, so that pupils are given the ability to develop empathy towards other lived historical experiences right from the start. Such a goal may sound idealistic and difficult to implement in the reality of public European classrooms – but it is certainly worth a try.

## The European memorial and museum landscape – attempting an overview

The European memorial landscape is just as heterogeneous as its remembrance landscape. Pierre Nora wrote: “Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. [...] Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again.”<sup>23</sup> This tension becomes clear in the fact that memory is connected to *places* and history to *events*. Individual memories are thus incorporated into collective memory through the establishment of places of remembrance and memorial sites with the aim of preserving them for future generations and preventing these narratives from disappearing into oblivion. With the extinction of the generation of contemporary witnesses, interpersonal communicative memory is transferred into a wider collective memory and crystallised in physical spaces that take on a new and important function. Collective memory aims to provide future generations with a historical and moral compass. We cannot know how memory will change in the future, considering new contexts and debates. Therefore, an overview of the current memorial landscape can only ever be a selective snapshot of the present, and the following section is thus only one attempt to categorise memorials.

22

Leggewie, C. (2011). *Der Kampf um das europäische Gedächtnis. Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* [The Battle for European Memory. A Battlefield is Visited], C.H.Beck: München.

23

Nora, P. (1989). ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations*, 26(Spring), pp. 7–24.

## Official memorials of military campaigns

The first category of memorials pertains to those built on sites that were crucial to military operations and battles. World War II was a dynamic war that affected essentially all of Europe, as well as parts of Asia and Africa. As such, it left behind a large number of sites that fit this description. The majority of monuments and memorials that fall into this category, however, are found in Eastern Europe. There, the Wehrmacht and other National Socialist paramilitary organisations waged a merciless war of annihilation. But the ranks of the Red Army also suffered immense losses on the battlefields because of Soviet war tactics, which were not designed to spare the lives of individual soldiers. Large memorial complexes were erected on the sites of major battles to commemorate both the victims and the conflict itself, notably in Brest, Stalingrad and Kursk, or near Minsk and Kyiv (see Learning Activities and Annex II).

Their monumental size celebrates the victory of the Red Army and the liberation of the Soviet fatherland from the horrors of the German occupying regime. These memorials are by no means mere relics of the Soviet past, since the installations in Şerpeni (Republic of Moldova) and Rzhev (Russian Federation) were built long after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is not surprising that these monumental new complexes were mainly built on territories formerly part of the Soviet Union and have been widely accepted there. After all, as mentioned in the first section, the heroic narrative was the defining element of the Soviet commemorative culture, which in part continues to this day. If this narrative was becoming fragile after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has radically changed since Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, in the course of which the Baltic states and Poland have torn down a large number of Soviet victory memorials, e.g. in Riga and Narva.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast with these monumental complexes, there are countless military cemeteries of differing sizes. Even within this category there is a great disparity in commemoration practices. The American military cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, located on the famous Omaha Beach, commemorates around 10,000 soldiers who fell during the Normandy landings in June 1944, with 10,000 white crosses. By contrast, Soviet military cemeteries usually have large mass graves and only a small number of individual graves. Some of the mass graves are not even marked as such and it is unclear how many soldiers are buried in them. This anonymity is particularly obvious at the Soviet memorial in Berlin-Treptow, inaugurated in 1949, where there is no indication of the graves' location, nor is there any individualisation of the victims (although their names are known). In contrast, German military cemeteries, which are maintained and still erected by the German War Graves Commission, consist mostly of stone crosses and plates on which the names of the fallen soldiers are inscribed. This is a permanent work in progress, because bodies are still being found to this day.

These two groups (memorials and graves) commemorate the soldiers who died on the battlefield. But soldiers did not only die in battle, as is the widespread assumption. Prisoners of war (POWs) constitute

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Henley, J. (2022). 'Estonia removes Soviet-era tank monument amid Russia tensions', *The Guardian*, 16 August, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/16/estonia-removes-soviet-era-tank-monument-amid-russia-tensions-narva>;

'Latvia tears down a controversial Soviet-era monument in its capital', *New York Times*, 26 August 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/26/world/europe/latvia-soviet-monument.html>

a large and underrepresented victim group due to the sheer number of soldiers that took part in the war. With more than three million dead whilst in captivity, i.e. 60 percent of all captured, Soviet POWs are the largest victim group of Nazi violence, behind the victims of the Holocaust.<sup>25</sup> In the collective memory, both in former Soviet countries and the rest of Europe, they are unfortunately largely forgotten. Thus, the POW camps, so called Stalag (*Stammlager*, main camp) for rank soldiers and Oflag (*Offizierslager*, officers' camp) for officers, in which the soldiers were gathered after their capture, and in some cases subjected to serious crimes, have become places of remembrance that should be given special attention. Crucially, the strict separation between military and civilian victims becomes inevitably blurred and can no longer be maintained among this group of memorial sites. In the case of the German Reich, these camps were often concentration camps for other victim groups of the Nazi regime (e.g. Neuengamme near Hamburg) and forced labour camps, in which prisoners were also interned.<sup>26</sup> The same can be observed in post-Soviet territories, where camps of the Gulag system were also filled with German POWs.

## Official memorials of victims

The blurred boundaries between different categories of military victims draw attention to a second commemoration category, that of civilian victims. Concentration and extermination camps, but also urban ghettos for Jewish victims, often stand out in people's mental maps as the most well-known memorial sites. In this guide, Auschwitz-Birkenau and the ghetto in Chişinău represent this tendency (see Learning Activities). However, when teaching about the industrial-scale mass murder of the Jews, educators must also talk about its preface, which can be characterised as the 'Holocaust by bullets'. This phase is especially significant in Central and Eastern Europe, where thousands of Jews were shot in large massacres. The memorial site to the Babyn Yar massacre in Kyiv in September 1941, when more than 36,000 Jews were killed in one day by Germans and their Ukrainian helpers, is probably the most well-known symbol of these earlier crimes (see Annex II).

To this day, many of these sites remain on the outskirts of the memory culture surrounding World War II, and some are not even marked. In Ukraine, a cooperation project between German and Ukrainian memorial sites has set itself the goal of tracking down these places and marking them.<sup>27</sup> The universalisation of the Holocaust and its important place in the memory cultures of European states both support taking the business of commemoration in this direction. However, the victims of massacres in camps and cities were by no means only Jews, and this prompts us to take a closer look at other victim groups that have been largely overlooked in the European memorial landscape. For example, in the centre of Berlin, within walking distance of the world-famous Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, there are further memorials dedicated to the murdered Sinti and Roma, to

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See Blank, M. & Quinkert, B. (2021). *Dimensions of a Crime. Soviet Prisoners of War in World War II*, Museum Karlshorst: Berlin.

26

Otto, R. & Keller, R. (2019). *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im System der Konzentrationslager* [Soviet Prisoners of War in the Concentration Camp System], New Academic Press: Vienna.

27

For the results of the project, see 'Protecting Memory. Protecting and Memorialising Holocaust Mass Graves in Ukraine', [https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/wp-content/uploads/ERINNERUNG-BEWAHREN\\_ENGLISCH.pdf](https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/wp-content/uploads/ERINNERUNG-BEWAHREN_ENGLISCH.pdf), accessed 20 November 2022.

Another important German/Ukrainian project which has already produced remarkable results is 'Erinnerung lernen' [Learning Memory], <https://erinnerung-lernen.de>, accessed 20 November 2022.



the murdered homosexuals and non-gender conforming individuals, and to those murdered by euthanasia – victims of the National Socialist racial ideology, killed in the course of the T4 action. This example suggests pathways to recognise other groups of victims, and this, step-by-step, is being done in many places all over Europe, not only in Berlin.

Outside cities and camps, in so-called ‘burnt villages’, other victims of war crimes are also commemorated by memorials. In many cases, these crimes of intimidation were meant as revenge for the resistance actions of partisans during German occupation, resulting in the destruction of entire villages.<sup>28</sup> The best-known and most famous memorial in this category is in Katyń, Belarus.<sup>29</sup> This memorial, opened in 1969, commemorates the destruction of 5,295 Belarusian villages. However, its fame is limited to Eastern Europe; in Western Europe, the commemoration of ‘burnt villages’ focuses on the Oradour-sur-Glane memorial, similarly referring to the fate of a village destroyed by the National Socialists. Listing all the places and groups of victims of National Socialist violent crimes remains an unattainable task, but it is important to note that there are memorials, places of remembrance or simply commemorative plaques across all European countries.<sup>30</sup>

It is not uncommon for the memory of resistance to the occupation regime (Nazi Germany and/or the Soviet Union) to play a prominent role in national remembrance, as a source of collective pride and patriotism. This can be observed particularly in the territories occupied by the Soviet Union in 1939, notably in the Baltic states and Ukraine. Some of these states had an overwhelming double experience of occupation. The first Soviet occupation between 1939 and 1941 was followed by the German occupation after the start of the German war against the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944. With the retreat of the German army, it was followed by the first or second Soviet occupation, which lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Both legacies are an important part of the memorial and museum landscape. One example of Nazi crimes in the Baltic region is Salaspils in Latvia, located some twenty kilometres from Riga. The so-called ‘work education camp’ and the ‘extended police prison’ were both constructed in the winter of 1941–1942 under inhumane working conditions by Jewish men who had been deported from the German Reich. It was the largest camp in the Baltic region not only for civilian prisoners from Latvia, but also political prisoners of different nationalities. Today’s memorial was erected in 1967. Seven larger than life sculptures stand on the former roll-call grounds of the camp, symbolising the suffering of the victims, but also the tenacity and success of local anti-fascists in their fight against the National Socialist regime. In contrast, the memorial at Torņakalna railway station in Riga addresses the history and legacy of Stalinist crimes. This memorial, which is dedicated to the deportations of the Stalinist regime from Latvia in 1941, was opened by the Latvian president Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga in 2001 to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event. The group of sculptures in the centre of the composition is supplemented with stones engraved with the names of different places of exile (Vorkuta, Omsk, Vyatlag, Karaganda, etc.)

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For examples see Davies, F. & Makhotina, K. (2022). *Offene Wunden Osteuropas. Reisen zu Erinnerungsorten des Zweiten Weltkriegs* [Open Wounds of Eastern Europe. Travels to places of remembrance of the Second World War], WBG: Darmstadt, pp. 195–220.

29

See Rudling, P. A. (2012). ‘The Khatyn Massacre in Belorussia: A Historical Controversy Revisited’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 1(26), pp. 29–58.

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For an overview of memorial sites connected not only with the Holocaust, but other victim groups as well, see the ‘Information Portal of European Sites of Remembrance’, <https://www.memorialmuseums.org/europe>, accessed 20 November 2022.

## Museums dedicated to historical events

As designated sites of learning and cultural preservation, museums must be strictly separated from memorials and places of remembrance. In memorials, the focus is on commemorating the history of a place and the people who once lived or died there, which is why they are predominantly located in authentic historical places. On the other hand, according to a definition proposed by the statutes of the International Council of Museums (ICOM):

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.<sup>31</sup>

It follows that these institutions do not necessarily have to be located in 'authentic' places or spaces of historical significance, e.g. Le Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris or the Jewish museums in Berlin and Warsaw. This pedagogical guide uses the example of the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst (see Learning Activities). The museum is located at the historical site where the German Wehrmacht signed its surrender on 8/9 May 1945, and the permanent exhibition focuses on the German war of annihilation against the Soviet Union. The museum does not commemorate a particular group of victims like a memorial. Rather, it focuses on the end of the war as a redemptive moment, at the same time not forgetting the victims that the war claimed. Other museums similarly attempt to provide a wider perspective of World War II without excluding the commemoration of its victims – for example, in Gdańsk, Kyiv, Minsk, and Moscow.

Stalinist crimes also feature in museums, notably in the famous Museum of Occupation in Riga, as well as the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius, itself located in a building that was once both the headquarters of the KGB and the Gestapo. These two museums succeed in focusing both on the National Socialist past and the era of Soviet occupation. Similarly, the House of Terror in Budapest has adopted the same approach, displaying from the very first room the joint commemoration of the victims of both dictatorships side by side. From a didactic point of view, this is unfortunately not necessarily successful, as the approach inevitably leads to a comparison of victims which, as mentioned, should be strictly avoided.

## Unofficial memorials / private initiatives

The institutionalised memorial landscape made of monuments, memorial signs (plaques), and museums, is supplemented by less public and informal civil society commemoration. This pedagogical guide provides the example of the Stumbling Stones (*Stolpersteine*), a civic initiative founded in Germany in 1992, which has set as its goal the concrete, individual remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust.

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'Statutes as amended and adopted by the Extraordinary General Assembly on 9th June 2017', *International Council of Museums*, [https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2017\\_ICOM\\_Statutes\\_EN.pdf](https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2017_ICOM_Statutes_EN.pdf), accessed 20 November 2022.

Over the last three decades, this initiative has spread across the entire continent, and today we can find these small places of remembrance across thirty European countries. From 2014 its counterpart, the Last Address (*Poslednij adres*) campaign developed in Eastern Europe to remember the victims of Stalinism, has followed a similar path. (see Annex II) In both cases, a small stone or plaque is placed in front of the last known place of residence of the victim. These unofficial places of remembrance, which are nevertheless supported or at least tolerated by political authorities and society, have found their way into the culture of remembrance of European states despite or because of their roots in civil society.

## Conclusion

This chapter's panorama of memorial sites highlights the diversity of memories and remembrance practices, but also the diversity of the crimes. There is a constant need for the revitalisation and balancing of remembrance so that the victims of World War II are not forgotten. This is now more important than ever against the backdrop of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. This war, too, tears open wounds and leaves new scars which, like those of World War II, will go down in European memory and require collective healing. Remembrance must not degenerate into an end in itself but must have mutual and historical understanding as its goal, to recognise the suffering and destruction that war and occupation bring. The central concern of remembrance lies in its consequence: to draw conclusions from the past for the present in order to shape a common future in a peaceful and democratic Europe. We should never lose sight of this, despite all our differences about history and memory.





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# Pedagogical Recommendations

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Olivia Durand  
Benny Christensen

World War II memorials can be used as teaching tools as part of wider history education programmes. However, the pedagogy used when working with them depends very much on each country's approach to the study of history in schools. This monument-focused methodology provides teaching options that range from the visual study of memorials in textbooks to the physical integration of such memorials in lessons through visits aimed at developing citizenship competences. This chapter introduces teaching strategies that mobilise students' analytical and cooperation skills, with the ultimate goal of enhancing their understanding and respect for different perspectives and opinions of World War II, as well as their capacity for cross-cultural understanding in general.

# General pedagogical recommendations

The following paragraphs outline pedagogical recommendations that educators may choose to apply and adapt to their own specific teaching context. These recommendations are meant to provide a general blueprint for teaching the history of World War II through memorials and monuments. They do not aim to address all the nuances of the European memorial landscape (or indeed non-European memorials).

## Preliminary discussions

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→ Discuss why and for whom memorials need to be built

This preliminary discussion raises the question of the purpose of memorials and the identity of the people or events that they commemorate. The discussion does not need to focus on a specific memorial. Instead, it should try to mobilise existing knowledge of local, national, or international monuments among students. This is in order to enter into a wider conversation about memorialisation.

The educator can complement the discussion with a short list of monuments that can show the plurality of narratives that memorials might seek to commemorate. These could be, for example, legacies of fascism, communism, colonialism, inter-ethnic tensions, race- and gender-based violence, military conflicts, human rights abuses, and other relevant subjects. Among the learning activities, the discussion of the Stumbling Stones (and its companion, the Last Address in post-Soviet countries – see Annex II) can be a good example of an initiative that seeks to commemorate a plurality of victims. Similarly, France's Mémorial de la France Combattante could be the start of a conversation on the connections between the legacies of Europe's colonial empires and the authoritarianism fought in World War II.

→ Discuss how politicians have used or misused memorials in the past, and how we can also see that happening in the present

This preliminary discussion raises the question of the utilisation and exploitation of memorials, in particular by political regimes. It aims at fostering the idea that conflicts over memorials are rooted in present political, social, and economic inequalities and tensions as much as they are based on diverging understandings of history.

The educator can ask students why the selected memorial was built in the past and what need it sought to answer at the time, then ask again what need the memorial might be fulfilling in the present (and whether its purpose has changed). Similarly, students can discuss what political goal the construction/removal/demolition of a memorial served in the past and whether this process of memorialisation through monuments serves the same purpose in the present. The educator

can use the controversy around the two memorials to the Katyn massacre located in Poland and Russia as an example of this divide, with a discussion of the past and present use of these memorials for political purposes. The learning activity can be the start of a reflection of the concept of truth in history and how the establishment of memorials is always politically motivated, though the motivations vary.

### Independent research

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- Providing students with a research agenda during classroom learning using IT facilities prior to the visit

The educator can provide the students with a research agenda during classroom learning, with a pre-circulated list of trustworthy IT resources (Project Gutenberg<sup>1</sup> provides free e-books; depending on the country, websites of national archives often provide directories of trusted websites and educational blog posts about their collections) and vetted public history texts (for instance, The Conversation<sup>2</sup> publishes short journalistic articles written by academics). The aim of the research activity is to reinsert the selected memorial within its own historical context ahead of the onsite visit, and to analyse the wider causes and effects of its construction. For example, students can be tasked with reading case studies of contested monuments on the Contested Histories website,<sup>3</sup> which features over 400 sites around the world, or do a simpler fact check through online encyclopaedias (i.e. Encyclopaedia Britannica or others based on the country).

Depending on the age/study level of the students, the educator can provide more detailed questions about the information that they should be looking for: dates, places, statistics, etc.

- Providing students with a selection of primary source materials about the memorial prior to the visit

In addition to/instead of IT-based research, the educator can compile a selection of primary sources (texts from newspapers, interviews, excerpts of historians' work, caricatures, photographs, radio or video segments, etc.) which can provide the base for an intertextual analysis of the event/individual/group commemorated by the memorial.

This activity would enhance critical analytic skills that are essential in approaching sites of commemoration, while also providing an opportunity for autonomous learning. An example of this could be the German *Trümmerfrauen* (rubble women). The educator can request the students to collect a variety of source materials to be used in a presentation and comparison of *Trümmerfrauen* statues and highlight their use over time for political purposes.

<sup>1</sup> Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/>, accessed 24 January 2023.

<sup>2</sup> The Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/europe>, accessed 24 January 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Contested Histories, <https://contestedhistories.org>, accessed 23 January 2023.

### → Visual Analysis

Both onsite and/or in the classroom, students should be encouraged to analyse memorials through their visual materiality: the educator can invite them to think about a selected memorial's dominant shapes; the materials and colour schemes chosen; the emotions its physical features inspire; the location of the memorial in the city/country but also within its own street/square; and reflect on how style can have an impact on the ideas conveyed.

Statues (e.g. National Memorial to the Winter War in Helsinki, Finland; Monument to the Women of World War II, in London, UK; and Brest Fortress Memorial Complex in Brest, Belarus – all in Annex II) are probably the best examples with which to start a visual analysis with students.

### → Narrative Analysis

Although not all monuments are figurative, they all commemorate the story of individuals or groups, heroes, or victims. The educator can ask students to identify visually which people and groups are being memorialised, speculate on the reason, and discuss which stories are being told and given prominence through their inscription onto a monument (and which ones might be missing).

The Karlshorst Museum in Berlin, Germany, is one such example, as it will make students think about the presentation of history in the past, present, and future, and make them question what is worth remembering and why (see Learning Activities).

### → Analysis of Symbols

Ultimately, this approach will lead the educator and their students to an analysis of the symbols (i.e. commonly understood signs used to represent a particular person, group, idea, value, or quality) displayed on the monument. Both through iconography and through the identity(ies) of those memorialised, they can jointly interrogate what values are upheld through the construction of the memorial. These values may be important for local/regional/national identification in the past and the fostering of a sense of community. Past and present disputes surrounding memorials and monuments can similarly indicate that these values are not comprehensive or provide a limited view of the history and the communities involved. For instance, the high density of local war memorials to veterans can inspire a strong sense of regional and national identity as well as community pride – it was especially the case with memorials erected in the direct aftermath of World War I, for a conflict which was in the living memory of many during World War II.<sup>4</sup>

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See, for example, Veterans Affairs Canada (2022). 'Canadian National Vimy Memorial', <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/vimy>, accessed 18 January 2023.

In addition to the suggestions above, students must understand that no memorial is fully removed from other monuments. That is, memorials are created in a time and place. As such they draw upon shared cultural understandings – for example, the importance of forests in Germany, or of formal gardens in the UK. There are cultural and societal norms to commemoration that influence memorials, as well as networks of symbols that connect them. Thinking about memorials and monuments invites students to understand the similarities and divergences between the visited site and other examples, and in this process to start thinking transnationally. Comparison allows students to start thinking about how memorialisation differs between societies and over time.

Going beyond national stories in this way helps foster multiperspective approaches among students. This is an attitude which is equally useful on a single site (where several narratives may be in evidence) or across borders, to understand how different groups, states, and political regimes commemorate similar events.

### Multiperspectivity: The advantages of asking for multiple perspectives when teaching about World War II memorials

In the following, two definitions of ‘multiperspectivity’ will be used. Multiperspectivity as:

- Various present-day views on/interpretations of a specific historical event/period
- Different perspectives over time on a specific historical event/period (pasts-presents-futures)

Various present-day views on/interpretations of a specific historical event/period

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World War II is still one of the most studied topics in history education. Every new textbook adds another interpretation, and resources used in studying the topic will vary according to the perspectives highlighted in teaching it.

World War II memorials constitute a particular kind of source, since they generally need textual support to be studied in a productive way. This support will mostly be in the shape of acquiring textbook knowledge. But it can also take the form of reading about debates around their erection or views on them over time. Without textual support, memorials can still be used, e.g., as a starter, by prompting students for immediate analysis and/or emotional reactions.

Different present-day views on a memorial will often be rooted in cultural or political beliefs and will be disseminated in students’ worlds via media, communities, families, etc. In the history classroom,

introducing and challenging a variety of present-day views, some of them perhaps opposites, demands that the teacher provide resources that use (or misuse) history to argue their present-day position. A good knowledge of the historical circumstances of the memorial is very important, and learning strategies such as 'compare and contrast' can be used.

Studying a memorial that may be a sensitive topic in the students' wider world through a multiperspective approach may present challenges to the classroom learning strategies, but also provides opportunities to strengthen students' citizen-building competences in areas such as analytical and critical thinking skills, empathy, conflict-resolution skills, and tolerance of ambiguity.

#### Different perspectives over time on a specific historical event/period (pasts-presents-futures)

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Relics from World War II, such as camps, battlefields, or cemeteries have been used as memorials and interpreted for political purposes ever since. They can be used in the classroom, e.g. by a sample of text-book extracts from various periods since 1945 in one country, or from countries with various political regimes from 1945 and until the present time. Using a multiperspective approach gives learners insight into changes over time in the ways a specific era, generation, or ideology have been viewed, and the approach will inform students that there are no absolute truths in history, even if they are often told so outside (or inside) the classroom.

Classroom use of post-World War II memorials such as monuments can also benefit from a multiperspective approach. Such memorials will have been created in a particular post-war situation, in which a society or part of a society had a particular motive to initiate the erection of the monument, and in many cases such memorials have been re-interpreted over time. Teachers may use either physical evidence of re-interpretations (removals, re-shaping, new inscriptions or plaques, etc.) or resources that explain, argue, or discuss changes. By studying a variety of opinions and arguments over time, students will learn that memorials are continually being used or misused, and they may reflect on how their generation is using their versions of memorials as well as envisage how future generations will interpret World War II memorials.

Applying such multiple perspectives will add to the development of competences such as knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication, analytical and critical thinking skills, skills of listening and observing, and valuing cultural diversity.

## How do you teach about memorials in a classroom or during a visit?

In general, one could suggest 3 ways of teaching about memorials:

- Classroom-based learning activities
- Classroom and visit-based learning activities
- Visit-based learning activities

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### Classroom-based learning activities

Depending on the nature of the curriculum, the overall aims of the learning programme, and the topic and intended outcomes of the Learning Activity, a classroom-based lesson can be planned and developed according to various didactic angles. By 'didactic angle' is meant a learning strategy that the teacher decides to use for a lesson, or a series of lessons.

One didactic angle is a *perceptual angle*, such as:

- Initiation (starting) stage (e.g., preparatory work, use of preparation, brainstorming)
- Comprehension stage (different levels of understanding and using understanding)
- Reflection stage (including assessment in class by students, or students and teachers, such as the group discussion activities outlined in the Learning Activities)

Another didactic angle can be linked to preparatory work and classroom learning strategies, such as individual work, individual presentations, pair work, group work, class work – and presentations (oral or written) that are results of the selected learning strategies. An example of this angle could be that in groups, students study separate sources on the debate on a memorial. They make notes, and then present to the other groups the main points of the sources, using these presentations as a starter for a class discussion on the memorial as an example of the use and misuse of history.

A classroom-based learning activity on memorials can be structured in many ways. It may be based on textbook learning of a specific topic (like World War II), generally supported by historical sources of which images of memorials can be featured. Memorials may also become the focal point of a sequence of learning, e.g. by starting out with an image of a memorial, and then supporting the analysis and further use of the memorial by adding textbook knowledge and relevant sources.



When an onsite visit is possible, it may well add value to the classroom study of memorials in various ways.

### → Before the visit

The didactic angles stated above will still be relevant. In general, students will be more curious about an onsite visit to a memorial when they have prepared in-depth for the visit. If students are given preliminary tasks, such as presentations to do during the visit, and provided with time to prepare them in the classroom, they are likely to demonstrate a higher degree of motivation during the preparation phase. An example of a presentation: 1) describe the memorial's physical characteristics, 2) use your knowledge from your textbook to explain how the memorial is an important source for us, and 3) read aloud the inscription on the monument and present your view as to whether or not the inscription is meaningful to young people today. Group work is a good strategy here, especially in a large class where the teacher will want more than one student presentation in the course of the same visit. Within the group there may be different tasks to prepare for the presentation, including the distribution of roles and the description of each role, as well as planning the preparation time and giving feedback on group members' presentations. Tasks like these may enhance students' autonomous learning skills, cooperation skills, and willingness to take responsibility.

### → During the visit

Student presentations when visiting memorial sites can be quite different from presentations in the classroom, as can the learning outcomes.

Firstly, the presentation will happen in a public sphere, often in the open air. To make the communication to classmates successful, the student must gather the group of classmates in a secluded spot and speak in a clear and direct way to make sure that the content is clearly received. Secondly, with cases such as monuments, the physical shape adds the possibility of moving from angle to angle to highlight artistic and cultural interpretations at the same time as conveying the historical content. This means that students will need to plan to use the information they prepare, so that it can interact with aspects of the site. The targeted learning outcomes of the onsite visit will include competences such as knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication, as well as skills of listening and observing.

### → After the visit

Back in the classroom, time for class assessment/reflection of the learning activity will be needed in order to make visible the extent to

which the targeted learning outcomes were met. The teacher may plan the reflection session to centre first on the students' voices, either via group work or as a class. They may present and discuss how successful the pre-visit lesson was for the on-site activities, and what might be fine-tuned for a future visit. Students may be encouraged to assess how well their respective oral presentations were delivered, and perhaps assess the quality of their own contributions. For instance, the learning activity on Moldova's Șerpeni memorial provides several worksheets to guide students through the description of the monument, a photo quest, and questions for reflection.

A post-visit lesson is also important for reflections on the memorial as a historical source about the past in the present. How well did it work as an additional source for the students studying the topic? How might it be interpreted by future generations of students or visitors in general? Written feedback may also be used here.

### Visit-based learning activities

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A visit-based learning activity will often include a guided tour, but it can also be planned and executed by the teacher. A visit may be used to support past learning, or it may be used as a starter for the next topic. The visit is not a substitute for preparatory in-class teaching and independent learning – it is important to keep in mind that the information received during a tour/guided visit will only be partially retained. The educator (if possible, in conjunction with the guide) needs to identify 2-3 key points/questions they want their students to keep with them after the visit which would not have been as evident in the classroom. For instance, in visits to camps, questioning the idea of scientific neutrality and how it became a tool for racist policies; or the industrial character of the concentration and extermination camps.

## Conclusion

Post-war societies have changed politically and culturally over time, and as these societies have changed, World War II memorials have continued to play an important role in them. Both war-period and post-war memorials have been and are still used, for example to support or challenge interpretations of World War II relative to political or cultural circumstances.

Therefore, it is imperative that school history teaching commits itself to learning about World War II memorials in a way that confronts the misuse of memorials, while at the same time activating students' competences in critically analysing the narratives upheld by these memorials. Ultimately, this pedagogical approach to history teaching aims to support and strengthen young people's respect for diversity and cross-cultural understanding.



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# Learning Activities

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In the following pages, eight learning activities based on eight memorial sites from Germany, Moldova, Poland, and Russia are presented. They were created by educators and experts from these countries and tested at an international summer school in Łódź, Poland, in August 2022. The focus group that tested the guide consisted of history teachers from Belarus, Germany, Moldova, Poland, Russia, and Ukraine, as well as a facilitator from Denmark and experts from England and Lithuania.

The learning activities are designed to be adapted. Using the pedagogical recommendations, they can be applied to memorial sites in your countries. Alternatively, they can be used to teach about memorial sites in other countries. For a list of memorial sites to serve as inspiration, see Annex II.

Some of the activities are classroom-based, some are visit-based, and others can be utilised both in the classroom and as part of a visit. For a discussion of the pedagogical recommendations surrounding these approaches, see 'Pedagogical Recommendations'.

It is important not to take these learning activities in isolation: they require some prior knowledge of World War II (any specific knowledge required is mentioned under 'Pedagogical recommendations' in the respective activity) and should not be taught without making sure that a class is ready to discuss the themes and topics addressed therein. Please read through the learning activity carefully before using it, and feel free to adapt it to your own country and classroom.

# Museum Berlin-Karlshorst

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Memorials in the past,  
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A forgotten page  
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Learning Activity

## Şerpeni Bridgehead Memorial

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Perspectives on WWII  
war memorials

Visit-based  
Learning Activity

# Concentration / Extermination Camps

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Lessons from the camps,  
or learning about violations  
of basic human rights

Visit-based  
Learning Activity

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## Monument to the Katyn Massacre

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Human rights,  
the distortion of history  
and the Katyn lie

Classroom-based  
Learning Activity

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## Pavlov's House & Gerhard's Mill

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Reminders of the devastating  
consequences of war

Visit- or  
Classroom-based  
Learning Activity

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## Rzhev War Memorial

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The 'hushing-up'  
of history

Classroom-based  
Learning Activity

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# Museum Berlin-Karlshorst

## Memorials in the past, present and future

### Visit-based Learning Activity

This learning activity is designed to be based around a visit to a museum. The students will learn how to develop a critical view of how history is represented in museums. They will also think about what is worth exhibiting, what is worth remembering, and why.

Author	Christoph Meißner, Heinrich Heine University, Düsseldorf, Germany
Age	15+
Approximate Time	90 min
Key question	What can the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst teach us about the presentation of history in the past, present, and future?



# Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Train their analytical and critical thinking skills.
- Use empathy to understand the historical past and the different ways it is viewed in the present.
- Use the past and the present to form opinions on the future.

## Pedagogical recommendations

The Museum Berlin-Karlshorst is a very complex place where much can be discovered. The museum has hosted three permanent exhibitions so far, and has undergone many transformations since its foundation in 1967.

To undertake this learning activity, students should have a minimum knowledge of memory culture surrounding World War II in Eastern and Western Europe. For example, they should have learned that the period from the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 to the signing of the surrender of the Wehrmacht on 8/9 May 1945 is remembered in the post-Soviet states as the Great Patriotic War, rather than World War II. It would also be desirable to discuss the different dates of 8 and 9 May 1945 with the students in advance, i.e. why a different commemoration date is used in different countries, or at least give them this as preparation. All these preparations can be included as preparation to be done at home or in a maximum 20-minute session in class in preparation for the trip. The learning activity should not be undertaken without this prior knowledge, as this would reduce the students' spirit of discovery and understanding of the activity.

## Activities

As preparation for the learning activity, students receive a handout that briefly describes the history of the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst and contains two quotes about the museum from different times (see Appendix I). They should use it to familiarise themselves with the history of the museum.

### Stage 1

Discussion of the preparatory work

10 minutes

In a brief discussion the students discuss the outcomes of their preparatory work with a guide from the museum. They will get to know if their conclusions are shared by the guide and conclude that there are various interpretations of the history of the museum and what has been exhibited over time. Considerable attention in the second part of the preparatory work is paid to the self-image of the museum in different times.



## Stage 2

### Interpretation of photos

5 minutes

In groups of 4, the students are given one of three historical pictures of the museum from the 1967 Soviet exhibition (see Appendix II). Each group receives a different picture; if there are more than 3 groups, some will receive the same picture. The preparatory handout, which the students should bring with them to the museum, can help them understand the context. They will get time to look at the pictures, and if there are any ambiguities, they can ask a museum guide questions about how to interpret them.

## Stage 3

### Exploring the museum

30 minutes

In the same groups of 4, students head into the museum and look for the spaces in the museum they have seen in the photos. They should document (taking photos with their mobile phones) how these spaces are used today, what objects are presented, and what significance they have in the overall concept of the current exhibition. At the same time, they should think about what the original intentions of the museum makers were and why these objects are present in the museum. In the next stage, they will have to do a short presentation to their peers about what they have noticed.

## Stage 4

### Presentation and discussion

20 minutes

Still in the museum in a separate educational room (a room that most museums have in which to carry out educational activities with groups), the students present the historical and current pictures in a comparison in front of the class and discuss with their classmates the question of using the past in the present: what might the past be used in the present for, and how might it be used?

## Stage 5

### Final discussion

25 minutes

In the same educational room, moderated by the teacher, the students discuss what a future exhibition in the museum on the topic of the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union could look like. Which media could be used, and which historical components of the museum need to be included? They will also discuss the value of memorials and museums in different times: What is worth exhibiting, what is worth remembering and why?

# Assessment

Based on the above stages, assessment can be carried out by the teacher continuously during the visit to the museum.

## Stage 1

By listening to groups when they discuss the homework: how useful are the student's preparatory notes?

## Stage 2

To what level does the student use observational and analytical skills? How much can the student distinguish between important and unimportant information? How much does the student contribute? How skilled are the students in cooperating and working together as a group?

## Stage 3

How good is the student at presenting group results and discussing them in front of the class? Was the student willing to take part in the discussion?

## Stage 4

Was the student willing to take part in the discussion, and able to use the acquired knowledge in order to consider a possible future?

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## Glossary

Rearmament – the process of equipping military forces with new weapons; in this context, Germany was rearming itself after World War I, in direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles.

Wehrmacht – the armed forces of Nazi Germany between 1935 and 1945.

# Preparatory handout for students

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Read the text and two quotations below to get to know about the history of the museum. Think about the different historical periods the museum has existed in; what was the intention and self-image of the museum during these periods, and what view of the past did it try to communicate?

The building which now houses the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst was built in the late 1930s and was initially a Wehrmacht school during the German rearmament. It suffered little destruction during the war and was therefore a suitable location for the four victorious powers to sign the surrender. From May 1945, the head of the Soviet occupation administration in Germany resided in the building. The Soviet Union used the building for various purposes until 1962. In the course of extensive celebrations in the Soviet Union commemorating the 20th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War, the Soviet army decided to develop the building into a museum. In 1967, the 'Museum of the Unconditional Surrender of Fascist Germany in the Great Patriotic War' was finally opened. It was primarily intended to serve the Soviet soldiers in Germany and was a place where the "heroic deeds" of the Red Army on its way to the liberation of Germany were exhibited. Until 1990, the museum was in Soviet hands, and was only opened to German visitors in the 1970s. Even the language of the exhibition remained exclusively Russian for a long time. With German reunification and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Germany, the question of the museum's future arose. Both Germany and the Russian Federation were keen to continue the project together. In 1997 and 1998, the two major World War II museums from Belarus and Ukraine joined the association. The mission of the museum was to inform visitors about the German war of annihilation against the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1945, and to convey the history of German-Soviet relations in the 20th century in a jointly developed exhibition. After a final revision of the permanent exhibition in 2013, the museum now shows different perspectives on German-Soviet history in the 20th century. With its multinational board of trustees from Germany, Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine, the museum is unique in Germany, and facilitates encounters and exchanges about history and memory in the past and present.

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“The museum has 14 exhibition rooms. Numerous exhibits testify to the heroic struggle of the Red Army against the occupiers [Nazi Germany], to their role in liberating Europe from Hitler’s fascism [...]. The exhibition shows that the Red Army soldiers came as class brothers who liberated the German people from fascism. Today, German-Soviet friendship is a matter of the heart for citizens in the German Democratic Republic.”

Brochure Gedenkstätte Berlin-Karlshorst, 1984

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“Museum Berlin-Karlshorst is located on an historic site. It is a byword for the end of World War II in 1945 and the post-war period in Europe. Today, the museum presents various points of view on German-Soviet history in the 20th century. It is unique in Germany for having a multinational board of trustees. The museum facilitates encounters and an interchange of thoughts about history and its past and present commemoration.”

Slogan of the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst, 2021

# Photos from the 1967 exhibition

## The 'Lenin Room'

Brochure Berlin-Information (ed.) (1984). *Gedenkstätte Berlin-Karlshorst* [Memorial Site Berlin-Karlshorst], Berlin: Berlin-Information.



## Part of the permanent exhibition, 1967

Brochure Berlin-Information (ed.) (1990). *Музей истории безоговорочной капитуляции фашистской Германии в войне 1941-1945* [Museum of the History of the Unconditional Surrender of Nazi Germany in the War of 1941-1945], Berlin: Berlin-Information, p. 22.



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**Museum entrance, 1967**

Brochure Berlin-  
Information (ed.) (1984).  
*Gedenkstätte Berlin-  
Karlshorst* [Memorial  
Site Berlin-Karlshorst],  
Berlin: Berlin-  
Information.



# Stumbling Stones

## Examples of victim commemoration

### Classroom-based Learning Activity

Using the Stumbling Stones project as an example, students will learn about the memorialisation of different victim groups. They will also discuss which groups are not commemorated now, and which groups they believe should be remembered in the future. The learning activity is aimed at classroom teaching but can easily be adapted for a memorial visit.

Author	Christoph Meißner, Heinrich Heine University, Düsseldorf, Germany
Age	15+
Approximate Time	45 min
Key question	What can the Stumbling Stones teach us about the remembrance of repressions and their victims in the past, present, and future?



# Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Learn tolerance, cultural diversity, and empathy for the victims of the Holocaust during World War II.
- Think critically about the presentation of the past in memorials coming from citizen-led or grassroots initiatives.
- Train their analytical and critical thinking skills.
- Use empathy to understand the past and the way it is viewed in the present.
- Use the past and the present to form opinions on the future.

## Pedagogical recommendations

The Stumbling Stones is a civil society project that aims to commemorate victims of the mass murder committed by the National Socialist regime. It is a memorial integrated into the urban landscape in the form of small stones set into the pavement. This memorial and its complex history form the basis of this learning activity.

In order to carry out this learning activity, it is important that the students have a basic knowledge of National Socialism, its ideology and crimes; above all, knowledge of the Holocaust is a fundamental prerequisite. It is only on the basis of this knowledge that students can reflect on the questions of which groups of victims should be remembered. Carrying out such a learning activity without this prior knowledge should be avoided, as this can lead to an overwhelming demand on the students and a failure to achieve the outcomes of the learning activity.

## Activities

To prepare for the lesson, the teacher selects 5-6 Stumbling Stones using the Stumbling Stones website or their own knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The selected examples of Stumbling Stones should cover the diversity of the various victim groups. An excursion to see nearby Stumbling Stones is also an option.

As preparation for the learning activity, students are given:

- 1) a text with background information about the Stumbling Stones (see Appendix I); and 2) an interview with Gunter Demnig, who initiated the project, in which he outlines his motivations (see Appendix II). Using the materials, students will learn about the initial ideas of Demnig, and they should think about whether the stones are still relevant for contemporary Holocaust remembrance. The preparation should be carried out individually before the lesson.

<sup>1</sup> Official Stumbling Stones Website, <https://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/home/>, accessed 23 January 2023.



### Stage 1

Discussion of the preparation

5 minutes

In groups of 3, students discuss the preparatory exercise and what motivated Demnig to expand the Stumbling Stones project from the first stone (which was a memorial to one specific date) to victims of the Holocaust and later to a range of victims of National Socialist tyranny.

### Stage 2

Discussion and comparison of Stumbling Stones

20 minutes

In groups of 3, students compare and discuss two Stumbling Stones handed out to them in terms of design and the information provided on the blocks (see Appendix III for some examples). Here the students also discuss whether the Stumbling Stones are an adequate form of memory. The basis for this is the knowledge acquired in the preparatory work and subsequent discussion.

The aim is to get students thinking about whether this form of remembrance is relevant today.

### Stage 3

Discussion of the future

10 minutes

Based on their reflections in Stage 2, students next look to the future and discuss their thoughts about which categories of victims should be remembered in the future and which ones have already been forgotten today. This is a plenary session.

### Stage 4

Final reflection

10 minutes

Finally, guided by the teacher, the class discusses to what degree the learning objectives were met during the lesson, and what the students personally have learned. A starting point for the discussion could be the core question: What can the Stumbling Stones teach us about the remembrance of repressions and their victims in the past, present, and future?

# Assessment

Below are several points that can be used as a suggestion of how the teacher may assess the learning activity during the lesson:

- At what level does the student use observation and analytical skills? How well do they distinguish between important and unimportant information?
- How well thought through is the student's contribution to the homework discussion? Is it clear that they have thought about the subject at home?
- How much does the student contribute?
- How skilled are the students in cooperating and working together as a group?
- How do the students handle the quotes and reflect on them critically?
- Was the student willing to take part in the discussion and able to use the acquired knowledge to consider a possible future?

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## Glossary

Auschwitz Decree – a decree signed by Heinrich Himmler on 16 December 1942 ordering the deportation of all Sinti and Roma living in the German Reich with a view to completely destroying them.

Plaque – an ornamental tablet, typically of metal or wood, that is fixed to a wall or other surface in commemoration of a person or event.

Reichspogromnacht – a pogrom against Jews, carried out by the SA (Nazi paramilitary troops) as well as civilians on 9/10 November 1938. The windows of Jewish-owned shops, buildings and synagogues were smashed, giving the violence its other name of Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass.

Yad Vashem – the official memorial site to the victims of the Holocaust in Israel.

# Background information on the Stumbling Stones project

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The Stumbling Stones project was initiated in 1992 by artist Gunter Demnig. It consists of small memorial plaques laid in the ground intended to commemorate the fate of people who were persecuted, murdered, deported, expelled, or driven to suicide during the National Socialist era in Germany. On 16 December 1992, the 50th anniversary of Heinrich Himmler's order to deport "gypsies" (the so-called Auschwitz Decree), Demnig set the first stone in the pavement in front of Cologne's historic town hall. In the following years, Demnig developed the project to include and represent all persecuted groups. On 4 January 1995, more stones were laid in Cologne on a trial basis without permission from the authorities. Later, the laying of the stones was officially approved and thus acquired an official character. This subsequently developed into the world's largest 'decentralised memorial'. As a rule, the inscriptions on the golden stones begin with the phrase "Here lived", followed by the name of the victim and the year of their birth; the year of deportation and place of death are also usually noted. The Stumbling Stones are set into the pavement directly in front of the last known place of residence of the victim. In April 2022, Demnig laid the 90,000th stone. Apart from Germany, Stumbling Stones have been laid in 29 other countries so far, including the Netherlands, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. There are also isolated Stumbling Stones in Russia, Ukraine, France, and Romania. They do not, however, do justice to the scale of persecution in these countries. The Stumbling Stones are usually maintained and cleaned by local residents, who also lay flowers and light candles on commemorative days such as 9 November.

Source: Adapted from 'Stolpersteine', *Wikipedia*, <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stolpersteine>, and official Stumbling Stones Website, <https://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/home/>, accessed 17 February 2023.

# Interview with Gunter Demnig

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Mr Demnig, how did you come up with the idea of laying Stumbling Stones for victims from the Nazi era?

There was preliminary work in Cologne in May 1990, namely a written mark on the street: May 1940, 1,000 Roma and Sinti. In May 1940, 1,000 Roma and Sinti were deported from several large West German cities. You could say that these deportations were like a dress rehearsal for the later deportation of the Jews. That was the trigger to bring the names back to where the horror began, where the people had their homes and were taken away.

This then gave rise to the idea of laying Stumbling Stones?

The basic idea was to bring back the names. The first idea was to screw a classic plaque on the wall. For the project in Cologne, I had the great fortune to meet a Jew from Leipzig who worked at WDR [West German Broadcasting]. He said to me, "Gunter, you want to screw memorial plaques for Jewish victims on the walls of houses? Forget it. 80 percent, if not 90 percent of the house owners would never agree to that."

What conclusion did you draw from that?

I remembered Rome and St. Peter's Basilica. There you walk thoughtlessly over the tomb slabs where there really are bones underneath. So, I went to the Museum of Sepulchral Culture to find out more. There I was told that when people walk over gravestones, it increases the honour of the person who is buried there. I must admit, at first, I had some reservations. I wrote to the Jewish community in Cologne and asked for advice. Nine months later, the rabbi invited me and said something similar could be done. These are not gravestones, but merely memorial stones. He also told me, "A person is only forgotten when his name is forgotten."

Do Stumbling Stones have another advantage over memorial plaques?

After the first stones were laid in Cologne, I went to my car. When I turned around again, I saw the first passers-by stop. Anyone who sees the stone and wants to read the text on it has to bow towards the victim. This is another aspect that I had not thought about at the beginning.

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Why is it important to you to remember the victims of the Nazi era?

I think it's especially important for the younger generation. We work a lot with school pupils, and I notice that they experience a different history lesson through the Stumbling Stones. For example, they might open a book and read: "Six million Jews were murdered in Europe alone." If they investigate further, they find out that there were another six million, maybe even eight, who were murdered by the Nazis for other reasons. That is an abstract figure. It remains unimaginable. But when the pupils then come to grips with the fate of a family in their own environment, they really get to know what happened there. It's a completely different kind of history lesson. And I have noticed that young people are interested in the subject. They want to know how something like this could happen in the land of poets and thinkers. But we also do it for people who ask themselves today, why don't I have a grandmother or great-grandmother?

When did you lay the first Stumbling Stone?

The first stone was laid in 1992, but the project really got going for me in 1996 in Berlin, during a time when I was going through a lot of difficulties. We did it illegally at first. We wouldn't have got permission because stumbling or falling is taken seriously. A secondary school pupil, interviewed by a reporter after the stones had been laid, found a very good way of expressing their experience of the stones. The reporter asked, "But Stumbling Stones are dangerous, don't you fall on them?" And the pupil replied, "No, you don't fall, you trip with your head and your heart."

What happened after you really started with the Stumbling Stones in Berlin in 1996?

In 1997 there was an artists' meeting near Salzburg. There I laid the first two stones for murdered Jehovah's Witnesses. Then there was a break, and from 2000 onwards things really took off with the permits, almost simultaneously in Berlin and Cologne. There are now almost 1,300 places in Germany and 1,500 all over Europe where we have laid Stumbling Stones.

How many Stumbling Stones have you laid so far?

Source: Dohme, A. M. (2020). 'Ein ganz anderer Geschichtsunterricht' [A completely different history lesson], *Weser Kurier*, 12 October, <https://www.weser-kurier.de/bremen/stadtteil-vegesack/gunter-demnig-verlegt-stolpersteine-fuer-opfer-der-ns-zeit-do-c7e3djb0fe7q15fqwqrd>, accessed 28 June 2022.

So far, we have laid more than 80,000 stones all over Europe, in a total of 26 countries. The basic idea behind it was that wherever the Wehrmacht, the SS, or the Gestapo did their evil deeds, Stumbling Stones should also appear there symbolically. Visitors recognise the stones, and that too is interesting. Then they go to Rome and realise that it happened there too. It works the other way round as well: a class trip to Berlin, the pupils see the stones in Hamburger Straße, come home and ask what happened here in our town. These are the effects that I find important and where I have to say that it must therefore continue. Just in case, I have also set up a foundation so that it will continue in any case.

# Examples of Stumbling Stones

**The first Stumbling Stone, laid in 1992 in front of the historic town hall in Cologne**

Photo: Horsch, Willy,  
CC BY 3.0, Wikimedia  
Commons, File:Köln-  
Stolperstein-Rathaus-024.  
jpg



By order of the Reichsführer SS of 16.12.42 - Tgb. No. I 2652/42 Ad./RF/V. - Gypsy mongrels, Roma Gypsies and non-German-blooded members of Gypsy clans of Balkan origin are to be selected according to certain guidelines and sent to a concentration camp in an action lasting a few weeks. This group of persons is referred to in the following as 'Gypsy persons'. They were sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp (Gypsy camp) family by family, irrespective of the degree of mongrelisation.

**Stumbling Stone for Werner Bab**

Photo: OTFW, Berlin,  
CC BY-SA 3.0,  
Wikimedia Commons,  
File:Stolperstein\_  
Schönhauser\_Allee\_187\_  
(Prenz)\_Werner\_Bab.jpg



Here lived Werner Bab, born 1924, deported, Auschwitz, Mauthausen, KZ Ebensee, survived

Schönhauser Allee 187, Berlin,  
laid 20 August 2010

Werner Bab, a boarding school pupil, moved back to Berlin after the Reichspogromnacht in 1938, tried to escape to Switzerland in 1942, but was arrested by

the Gestapo and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. He survived and was liberated by the US Army on 6 May 1945 in the Ebensee concentration camp.

**Stumbling Stones for  
Paul Ludwig Angress &  
Selma Angress**

Photo: Richter,  
Franz, CC BY-SA 3.0,  
Wikimedia Commons,  
File:Stolperstein\_Paul\_  
Ludwig\_Angress\_  
Bötzowstraße\_20\_0023.jpg

File:Stolperstein\_  
Selma\_Angress\_  
Bötzowstraße\_20\_0024.jpg



Here lived Paul Ludwig Angress,  
born 1879, deported 1.3.1943,  
murdered in Auschwitz



Here lived Selma Angress,  
born 1890, deported 3.3.1943,  
murdered in Auschwitz

Bötzowstraße 20, Berlin,  
laid 7 August 2014

Paul Ludwig Angress, born on 13 November 1879 in Peiskretscham (Polish: Pyskowice), son of Bertha Brauer and Jacob Angress; married Selma Mannheimer on 3 May 1921 in Frankfurt am Main, they had two sons together (both born in Berlin, Hans on 24 August 1922 and Robert on 14 March 1924); last entry in the Berlin address book of 1939 with the occupational title 'commercial agent'; deported on 1 March 1943 from Berlin to Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is known from the information in the central database of Yad Vashem that their son Shimon (formerly Robert) Angress survived the Holocaust. The laying of the Stumbling Stone took place in the presence of the Angress's descendants who had since moved to Israel.

Selma Mannheimer, born 10 October 1890 in Frankfurt am Main, daughter of Jeanette Blumenthal and Abraham Mannheimer; married Paul Ludwig Angress on 3 May 1921 in Frankfurt am Main; forced labour at Osram in Berlin from 25 October 1940 to 27 February 1943; deported on 3 March 1943 with the 33rd Osttransport from Berlin to Auschwitz-Birkenau.



## Stumbling Stone for Heinz Behrendt

Photo: Richter, Franz,  
CC BY-SA 3.0,  
Wikimedia Commons,  
File:Stolperstein\_Heinz\_  
Behrendt\_Mendelssohn-  
stra%C3%9Fe\_3\_0768.  
jpg?uselang=de



Here lived Heinz Behrendt,  
born 1919, deported 14.11.1942  
Minsk, 1943 Maly Trostinec,  
1944 Flossenbürg, death  
march, liberated/survived

Mendelssohnstraße 3, Berlin,  
laid 24 June 2015

Heinz Behrendt, later Chaim Baram, born on 5 August 1919 in Berlin, died in 1975 in Kibbutz Naan in Israel. Married first to Charlotte Behrendt, née Rotholz, and later to Sara Baram, née Holländer. Deported on 14 November 1941 with the 5th transport to Minsk. From there to Maly Trostenez concentration camp, Majdanek extermination camp, Budzyn labour camp near Krasnik, Mielec labour camp, Wieliczka, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Flossenbürg concentration camp. From there he was forced on the death march to Dachau. Liberated by American troops on 25 April 1945, Heinz Behrendt gave himself the name Chaim Baram. He went to Israel, married again and had four children with his second wife. In 1961, he testified in the trial against SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann. He never set foot on German soil again. Heinz Behrendt is one of the few survivors of the Minsk Ghetto.

A total of eight other family members lived in the basement flat, and additional Stumbling Stones were laid for them in 2017. The apartment building was demolished at the end of the 1960s and replaced by new flats in the 1970s.

The person who laid the Stumbling Stone for Behrendt has laid three more Stumbling Stones in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg (Rosa Schlagk, Herta Henschke, Hedwig Peters) and five Stumbling Stones in Berlin-Friedrichshain (Jenni Bukofzer, Samuel Bukofzer, Luise Bendit, Leo Bendit, Aron Bendit).



## Stumbling Stone for Hans Bloch

Photo: OTFW, CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia Commons, File:Stolperstein\_Stra%C3%9F-burger\_Str\_19\_(Prenz)-Hans\_Bloch.jpg



Hans Bloch, born 1904,  
escaped 1939, England

Straßburger Straße 19, Berlin,  
laid 27 November 2018

Hans Bertold Bloch, a merchant, born on 26 December 1904 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, son of Anna and Karl Bloch; married Gertrud (Gertrude) Hebel in Berlin-Schöneberg in 1936; at the time of the 1939 census, the couple lived at Barbarossastraße 40 in Berlin-Schöneberg; according to the Berlin address book, he already lived there immediately after his marriage. In June 1939, Hans Bloch emigrated to Great Britain with his wife.

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Source: Pieper, O. (2019). 'Stolpersteine. Eine Verneigung vor den Verfolgten' [Stumbling Stones. A bow to the persecuted], *Deutsche Welle*, 7 May, <https://www.dw.com/de/stolpersteine-eine-verneigung-vor-den-verfolgten/a-48638303>, accessed 25 July 22

**“A human is not forgotten until his name is forgotten”**

Gunter Demnig

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Source: 'Wie Stolpersteine an Opfer des Nationalsozialismus erinnern' [How Stumbling Stones remind us about the victims of National Socialism], *NDR*, 30 November 2022, <https://www.ndr.de/geschichte/Wie-die-Stolpersteine-an-NS-Opfer-erinnern,stolpersteine123.html>, accessed 18 January 2023

**“The memory of people who had to experience persecution and degradation before they were horribly murdered [is] trampled on”**

Charlotte Knobloch (Former chairwoman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany)

More information on Stumbling Stones in Berlin can be found on the 'Stolpersteine in Berlin' website (Stolpersteine in Berlin, <https://www.stolpersteine-berlin.de/de/projekt>, accessed 24 January 2023)

# Monument to the Victims of the Chişinău Ghetto

## A forgotten page of history

### Classroom-based Learning Activity

This learning activity is designed to introduce students to a forgotten and hidden page of local history – that of the Jews in Chişinău. Walking through the streets of the capital, very few people know that a ghetto existed in the centre of Chişinău in 1941-1942. The aim is for students to learn more about these events through the monument dedicated to the victims of the ghetto.

Title	A forgotten page of history: the Chişinău ghetto
Author	Victoria Pila, Prometeu-Prim Lyceum, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova
Contributor	Alexandru Seu, Mihai Eminescu Lyceum, Edineţ, Republic of Moldova
Age	16-19
Approximate Time	45 min (+ 45 min preparatory work)
Key question	How does the Chişinău ghetto illustrate the tragedy of the Jews during World War II?



# Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Reconstruct the history of a place to understand how the way people lived in the past forms a link with a community's present and future.
- Combat prejudices concerning, and stereotypes of, religious and ethnic minorities.
- Learn tolerance, cultural diversity and empathy for the victims of the Holocaust during World War II.
- Understand historical concepts such as continuity and change, cause, and consequence.

## Pedagogical recommendations

This lesson is part of a series of topics taught in class on World War II. It should be carried out after students have already learned about the most important aspects of the war and the specifics of the Holocaust. The lesson is about local history, but it is directly related to the events of 1941-1942 and the tragedy of the Jews in the 20th century.

Students will analyse historical texts, memoirs of survivors, period photographs, and take a virtual tour through the Chişinău ghetto.

## Activities

In preparation for the learning activity, students receive an exercise (see Appendix I). They should read the texts about the Chişinău ghetto and the history of Moldova's Jewish population before World War II.

### Stage 1

Preparatory work consolidation	10 minutes
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Students should work in small groups of 3-4 and answer the following questions based on the texts they read in preparation.

Questions for Text A:

- 1 What were the professions of the Bessarabian Jews?
- 2 Why did Jews predominantly live in cities?
- 3 Why did the Russian and Romanian authorities persecute the Jews?
- 4 Why were Jews considered suspicious in Romania between
- 5 World War I and World War II?

## Questions for Text B:

- 1 For what purpose was the Chişinău ghetto designed?
- 2 How do you think the local population reacted to the construction of the ghetto?
- 3 Why did the Romanian authorities decide to deport the Jews to Transnistria?
- 4 Were the Romanian authorities carrying out German orders or promoting their own anti-Jewish policy?

### Stage 2

Analysis of photos

10 minutes

In the same groups, students should look at the photos and answer the questions (see Appendix II).

### Stage 3

Stereotypes

10 minutes

According to a study conducted by the Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and for Ensuring Equality (2018), Jews are not among the most rejected social groups in Moldova (see Appendix III). However, there are a number of stereotypes about them. Students should look at the table and, in small groups, discuss whether a similar study conducted in the late 1920s or early 1930s would have shown the same results.

### Stage 4

Analysis of a monument

15 minutes

Students are given the photo and text about the Monument to the Victims of the Jewish Ghetto to study (see Appendix IV). They should answer the questions below, which the teacher should project onto the board:

- 1 How does the history of the Chişinău ghetto illustrate the tragedy of the Jews in World War II?
- 2 In 2018, Victor Popovici, project manager at the Agency for Inspection and Restoration of Monuments, brought two international commemorative projects to Moldova. The first, initiated in Germany, involves the installation of 'Stumbling Stones' in front of houses where victims of Nazism lived. And the second, suggestively named 'Last Address' in Russian, involves the installation of plaques on the facades of houses where victims of Stalinist repression lived. Do you think they are necessary in our country? Why/why not?
- 3 Is it good to have a memorial like this?
- 4 Has this lesson made you think of how you, as a young citizen, but also a future adult, should think about minorities and how to treat them?

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## Glossary

Bessarabia – a region in eastern Europe that was ruled successively (from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century) by the Principality of Moldavia, the Ottoman Empire, Russia, Romania, the Soviet Union, Ukraine, and the independent Republic of Moldova. It is bounded by the Prut River on the west, the Dniester River on the north and east, the Black Sea on the southeast, and the Chilia arm of the Danube River delta on the south.

The Iron Guard (also known as the Legionary Movement) – an anti-democratic, anti-communist and anti-Semitic political party in Romania between 1927-1940.

Ion Antonescu – a Romanian marshal and statesman who became dictator of the pro-German government during World War II.

Pogrom – an organised massacre of a particular ethnic group, in particular that of Jewish people in Russia or eastern Europe.

Transnistria – a region now lying between Moldova and Ukraine. Its name means beyond the Dniester River, and it was part of Romania from 1941-1944.

Wehrmacht – the armed forces of Nazi Germany between 1935-1945.

# Preparatory handout for students

Read the information about the Jewish community in Moldova before World War II (Text A) and a short description of the Chişinău ghetto (Text B).

## Text A

The first Jews appeared on the territory between the Prut and Dniester rivers in the 1st century CE with the Roman legions who had conquered the ancient territory of Dacia. From the 15th century, Moldova was an important transit stop for Jewish merchants travelling between Constantinople and Poland. By the 18th century, several permanent Jewish communities had been established in urban settlements like Orhei, Soroca, Beltsi, and Ismail. Most of the Jews were engaged in trade. The 1803 census indicates that there were Jews living in all 24 Moldovan cities, as well as in many villages and towns. In 1836, the Jewish population of Bessarabia had grown to 94,045, and by 1897 already numbered 228,620, representing 11.8% of the province's population. In 1897 the Jewish population of Chişinău constituted almost half of the entire population (50,237, or 46% of the population). Pogroms were not uncommon: one in 1903 was particularly notable and caused international outrage. Thousands of Moldovan Jews emigrated, and the United States publicly condemned the massacre and imposed trade restrictions against the Russian Empire, of which Moldova was a part.

In 1918, Bessarabia (the eastern part of Moldova) became part of Romania. The Jewish community in the area was given Romanian citizenship and was able to open Jewish day schools, though they were generally considered suspicious in the eyes of the Bucharest authorities, who saw them just as the other minorities of Bessarabia: potential agents of Moscow. In the 1930s in Romania, an anti-Semitic movement developed, which was visible in education, politics and social relationships. During the worldwide economic crisis at the beginning of the decade, the Iron Guard, a revolutionary fascist movement, and other anti-Semitic organisations witnessed a steady growth in popularity. In 1934, a law was passed that forced businesses to employ at least 80% Romanian workers. This law represented the first step towards harsher legislation to come: the suspension of newspapers owned by Jews; the annulment of railway passes of Jewish journalists; the annulment of all licences granted to Jews to sell alcohol in rural areas; and a law for the revision of their citizenship status. The already existing anti-Semitic legislation was extended by the Marshal Ion Antonescu dictatorship, including expropriation of Jewish property. After Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941, the commercial and industrial property of the Jews of Bessarabia was confiscated; they were forced to wear the Star of David, and ghettos were established for “eastern Jews”.

Sources: ‘Moldova’, JGuideEurope, <https://jguideeurope.org/en/re-gion/moldova/>, accessed 12 June 2022.

Scheib, A., ‘Moldova Virtual Jewish History Tour’, Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/moldova-virtual-jewish-history-tour>, accessed 12 June 2022.

On 16 July 1941, Romanian troops entered Chişinău together with units of the 9th Army of the Wehrmacht. The exact number of Jews remaining in the city at the time is not known. Some had been deported by the Soviet government before the war; some were evacuated or drafted into the Red Army. The rest could not imagine what awaited them. On 24 July 1941, the governor of Bessarabia, General Voiculescu, issued an order to create camps for Jews from the countryside and to establish the Chişinău ghetto. The ghetto was established in the lower part of the city; there were only two entrances. The population was doomed to starvation. The commandant of the ghetto prohibited selling products to the Jews until 11am, and after this hour they could no longer be obtained anyway. The number of deaths caused by malnutrition and illnesses reached 10-15 per day and were included in reports as “death by natural causes”. Some peasants, disregarding the risks, brought food. The Jews were left to their fate and sold their things on the market, as it was practically the only way of survival. In the mornings, Romanians and Germans came to the ghetto and took men, women, and children for domestic work. Employers not only did not pay them, but did not feed them either. The commandant noted down the disobedient ones, and at the first opportunity the “guilty” disappeared forever.

According to data from 19 August 1941, there were 9,984 Jews in the ghetto (2,523 men, 5,261 women, 1,160 girls and 1,040 boys). In the middle of September, there were almost a thousand more people in the ghetto. Of the 11,525 prisoners, there were 4,168 men, 4,476 women and 2,901 children. This increase in population was due to the fact that Jews from the surrounding settlements were gathered into the Chişinău ghetto.

The Chişinău ghetto was one of several ghettos set up in this period. The establishment of the ghettos and the camps was the precursor to an attempt by the Romanians to “cleanse” Bessarabia and Bukovina (a region north-west of modern-day Moldova) of “the Jewish elements” via mass deportations from the camps and ghettos across the country to the other side of the Dniester.

From 5 August 1941, Jews of the city were required to wear the Star of David. The deportation of Jews to Transnistria, an area between the Dniester and Bug rivers, began on 8 October, and during the deportations from Bessarabia, the sheer criminal incompetence, lack of preparation, and extreme callousness of the Romanian military resulted in a staggering death rate among the Jews. The Jews were deported on foot, and those who could not keep up with the forced marches (mostly the sick, the elderly and children) were shot on the spot by Romanian and Ukrainian guards. The most sinister camps were Bogdanovka and Ahmetchetka where Jews died of starvation or were executed. As records were destroyed by Romanian and Nazi authorities before the arrival of the Soviet Red Army in 1944, there are little or no data about the inmates of these camps.

Source: ‘Life in Chişinău ghetto’, *JewishMemory*, <http://jewishmemory.md/en/life-in-chisinau-ghetto/>, accessed 12 June 2022.



# Photo analysis task

Look at the photos and answer the questions beneath.



**Jews being gathered  
in the Chişinău ghetto,  
1941**

Photo: Bundesarchiv, CC BY-SA 3.0,  
Wikimedia Commons,  
File:Bundesarchiv\_ Bild\_183-B12267\_Kis-  
chinjow,\_festgenom-  
mene\_Juden.jpg

- 1 How many people were there in the ghetto?
- 2 Which nationality were they, as far as you can see?
- 3 How old are they?
- 4 How are they dressed?
- 5 What are they waiting for?
- 6 What might they be thinking about?
- 7 What was their ultimate fate?

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In pairs, describe the living conditions in Chişinău ghetto.

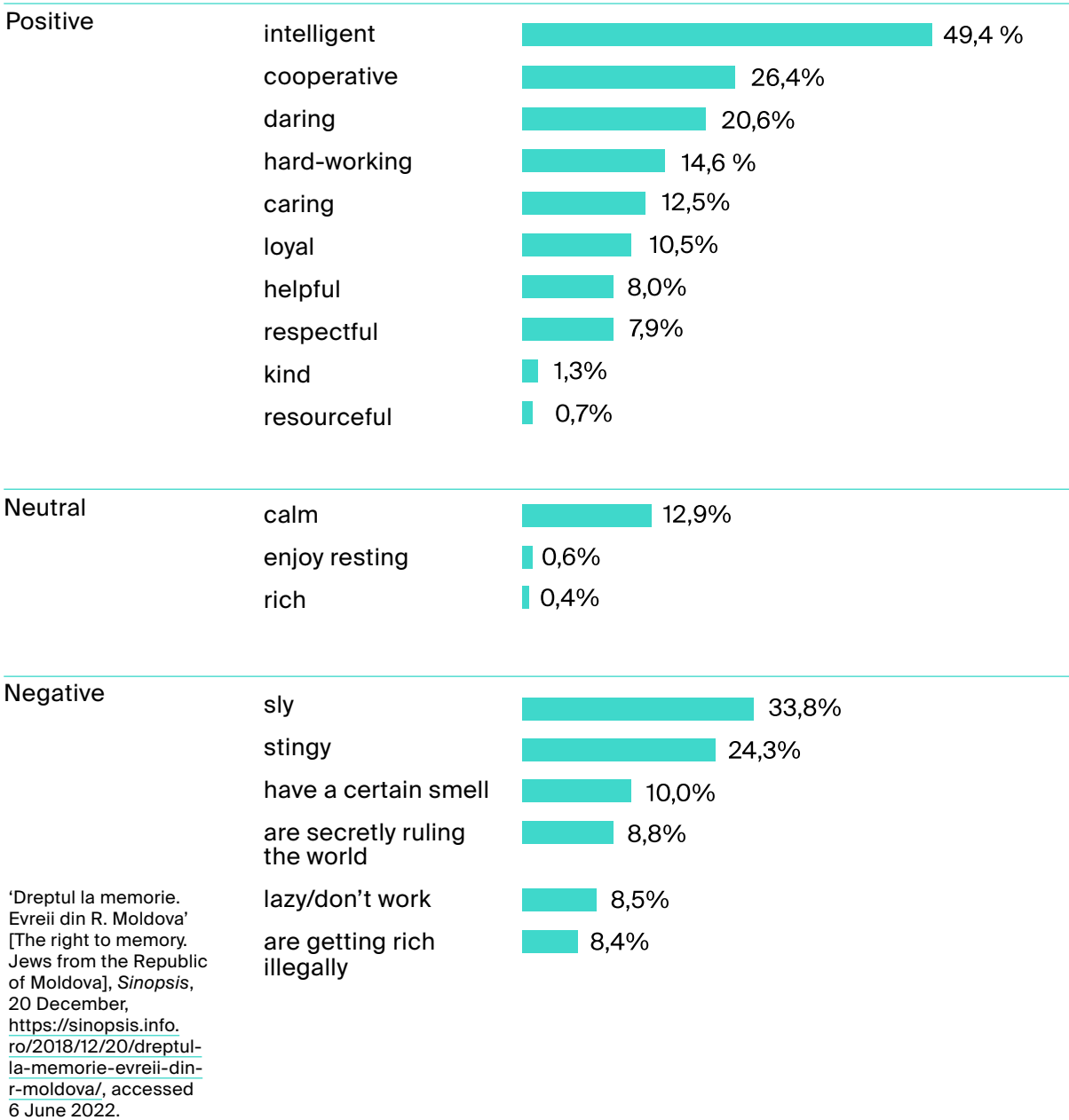


**The Chişinău ghetto,  
1941**

Photo: Bundesarchiv,  
CC BY-SA 3.0, Wiki-  
media Commons,  
File:Bundesarchiv\_  
Bild\_183-B13327,\_Kis-  
chinjow,\_Ghetto,\_  
Geb%C3%A4ude.jpg

# Stereotypes about Jews in Moldova

Study by the Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and for Ensuring Equality on perceptions of Jews in Moldova (2018)



# Monument to the Victims of the Jewish Ghetto



Photo: Kristina Smolijaninovaitė, all rights reserved

The monument to the victims of the Jewish ghetto on Jerusalem Street marks the spot of the main entrance to the former ghetto established in the lower part of Chişinău in July 1941, shortly after German and Romanian troops entered the city. Over 11,000 people – men, women and children – were brought there. The monument pays tribute to the Jews imprisoned and murdered in the ghetto during World War II. It was erected on 22 April 1993 and designed by sculptor Naum Epelbaum and architect Simeon Shoihet. The monument was built with funds from I. Simirean, a private businessman, and the Jewish Agency ‘Sohnut’. The memorial’s centrepiece is a large bronze figure of the prophet Moses, with his left hand on his heart and his right hand holding the Scripture. The statue stands on a pink granite pedestal and is set against a broken red granite wall, at the centre of which is a void in the shape of a shattered Magen David (Star of David). The inscription – in three languages: Hebrew, Romanian, and Russian – on the back of the monument, reads: “Martyrs and victims of the Chişinău ghetto! We, the living, remember you!”

In 2013 the monument was vandalised – a fascist swastika was drawn on the memorial stone. In 2016, at the initiative of the President of the Jewish Community of the Republic of Moldova Alexandr Bilinkis, the monument was renovated and refurbished.

Every year on 27 January there is an official memorial rally to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust.

# Serpeni Bridgehead Memorial

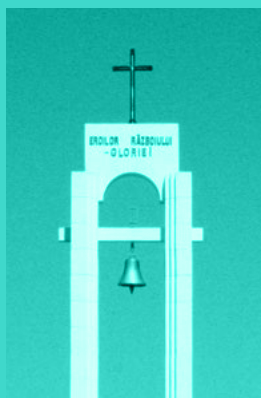
## Perspectives on WWII war memorials

Classroom-based  
Learning Activity

The idea of this lesson is to learn about one of the most important battles in Moldova: the Jassy-Kishinev operation.<sup>1</sup> Students will take part in a field trip and carry out activities to discover local history and understand how geographical factors can influence historical events. During the visit students will be given tasks to work on in small groups. They will complete an observation sheet to understand the influence of geographical factors on the course of the battles in the Jassy-Kishinev operation. Students will also identify several types of monument and explain their significance, discovering how soldiers from Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine lost their lives here. Finally, they will reflect on the importance of historical monuments on the collective memory of a people and nation.

<sup>1</sup> Kishinev is the city now known as Chişinău; the official English name for the military operation is 'the Jassy-Kishinev operation', and this official name will be used throughout when referring to the operation.

Author	Victoria Pila, Prometeu-Prim Lyceum, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova
Contributor	Alexandru Seu, Mihai Eminescu Lyceum, Edineţ, Republic of Moldova
Age	15+
Approximate Time	45 min preparation + 120 min visit (travel time not included)
Key question	Why might a World War II monument be constructed 60-70 years after the war?



## Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Learn the significance of the Jassy-Kishinev operation during World War II
- Identify several types of historical monument in a complex such as the Șerpeni Bridgehead and describe their significance
- Learn the influence of local geographical factors on historical events
- Train their understanding of historical concepts such as continuity and change, cause and consequence, through the study of historical monuments

## Pedagogical recommendations

The teacher should bear in mind that this lesson is designed as part of the World War II curriculum and covers the radical turn of events exemplified by the advance of Soviet forces in South-Eastern Europe in August 1944. The teacher should incorporate relevant information about this topic. It is important to mention that people from the territory of the Republic of Moldova fought on both sides: the Soviet Army and the Axis Powers.

Students will learn about the Jassy-Kishinev operation in class. The bus ride to the destination will be used by the teacher to explain details of the troop movements and to form working groups in the field. During the visit they will receive tasks to discover various monuments and their significance, reflecting on the importance of historical sites. Students will complete a monument observation sheet, then they will work in small groups for a photo quest activity, and finally they will answer some questions.

It is important to mention that the monument is recent, so students need to understand that history is still being made today through research, for example recent excavations have uncovered unidentified remains of soldiers.

## Activities

- Preparation Activities

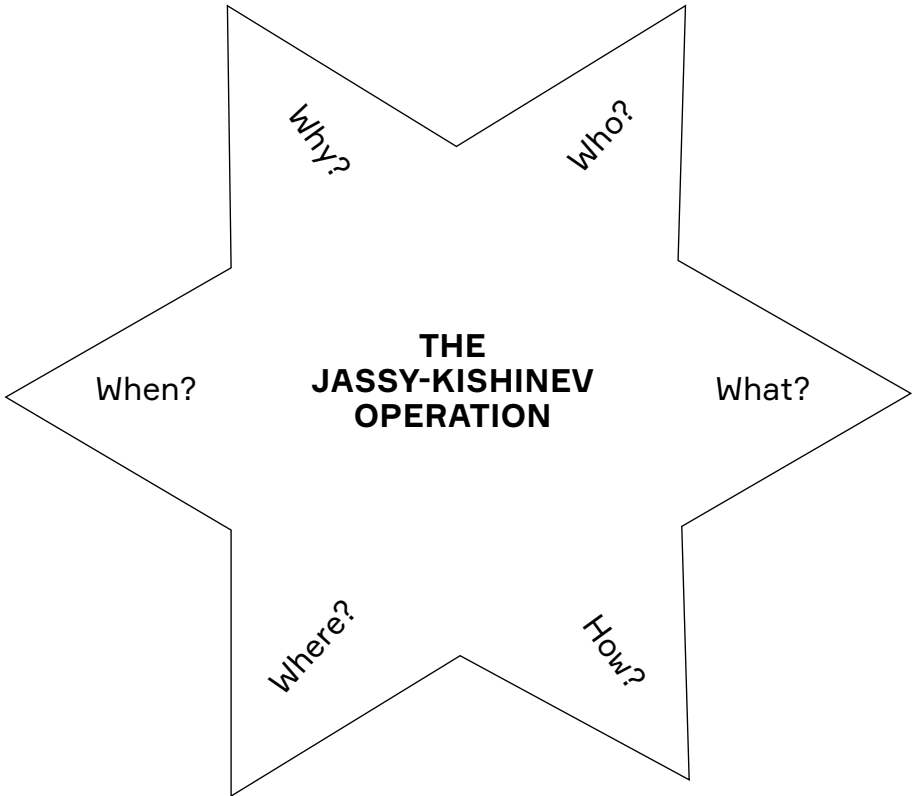
### Stage 1

Learning about the Jassy-Kishinev operation

15 minutes

Students should read the text about the Jassy-Kishinev offensive operation and study the map (see Appendix I). Using the information they learn, they should complete the star chart. The teacher can either project the chart or draw it themselves on the board.

'Starbursting Technique:  
Evaluating New Ideas',  
Designorate, 19 March,  
<https://www.designorate.com/starbursting-method/>, accessed 11 July  
2022.



Stage 2	
Comparison of answers	10 minutes

In groups of 3, students compare answers to the star and try to understand any differences.

Stage 3	
The memorial site	15 minutes

In groups of 5, students read the description and study the photos of the site (see Appendix II), and try to answer the following questions:

- 1 Why do you think the complex was only opened in 2004?
- 2 Why do you think people from different countries financially supported this project?
- 3 Why was Şerpeni considered a “strategic bridgehead” by the Soviet Army?

Stage 4	
Preparation for visit	10 minutes

At the end of the preparatory lesson, the teacher should give instructions on what will happen during the visit and how students are supposed to behave.



## Stage 5

### Exploration and Observation

75 minutes

At the memorial site, students will be given free rein to walk around and explore. Each student will complete a monument observation sheet during the visit (see Appendix III). As a group, students should explore the territory of the memorial site and carry out a photo quest (see Appendix IV). The teacher should be present to prompt and answer any questions the students might have. If possible, a guide should give a short tour.

## Step 6

### Reflection

15 minutes

The reflection sheet should be completed by each student after the trip (see Appendix V). In groups of 3, students should compare and discuss their answers to the reflection sheet either before getting on the bus home, or in the classroom in a following lesson. Photos taken during the visit can be used on the school's official website or in a subsequent summary lesson.

## Glossary

Axis Powers – the coalition led by Germany, Italy, and Japan during World War II. They opposed the Allied Powers, consisting mainly of Great Britain, France, the United States, the Soviet Union, and China.

Bridgehead – a strategically important area of ground around the end of a bridge or other place of possible crossing over a body of water.

Red Army – the army and air force of the Soviet Union during World War II.

Stalin's ten blows – the ten successful strategic offensives conducted by the Red Army in 1944 during World War II.



# Information about the Jassy-Kishinev operation

The Jassy-Kishinev operation was part of the Soviet offensive in 1944 on the Eastern front, also named The Battle for Romania, included by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin as part of his 'ten blows'. The first offensive in the area was part of Stalin's strategy of projecting Soviet military power and political influence into the Balkans in April – June 1944.

The second offensive in August, named after two major cities, Jassy (Romania) and Kishinev (Chişinău, Republic of Moldova) was a Soviet offensive against the Axis forces. The operation entailed prolonged heavy fighting on the current territory of the Republic of Moldova. The offensive resulted in the encirclement and destruction of the German forces, allowing the Red Army to resume its strategic advance further into Eastern Europe. For the Germans, this was a massive defeat, comparable to the defeat at Stalingrad. Other results of this battle were the removal of Romania from the war and its joining of the Allies, and the re-annexation of territory between the rivers Dniester and Prut by the Soviet Union, which lasted for another 47 years.

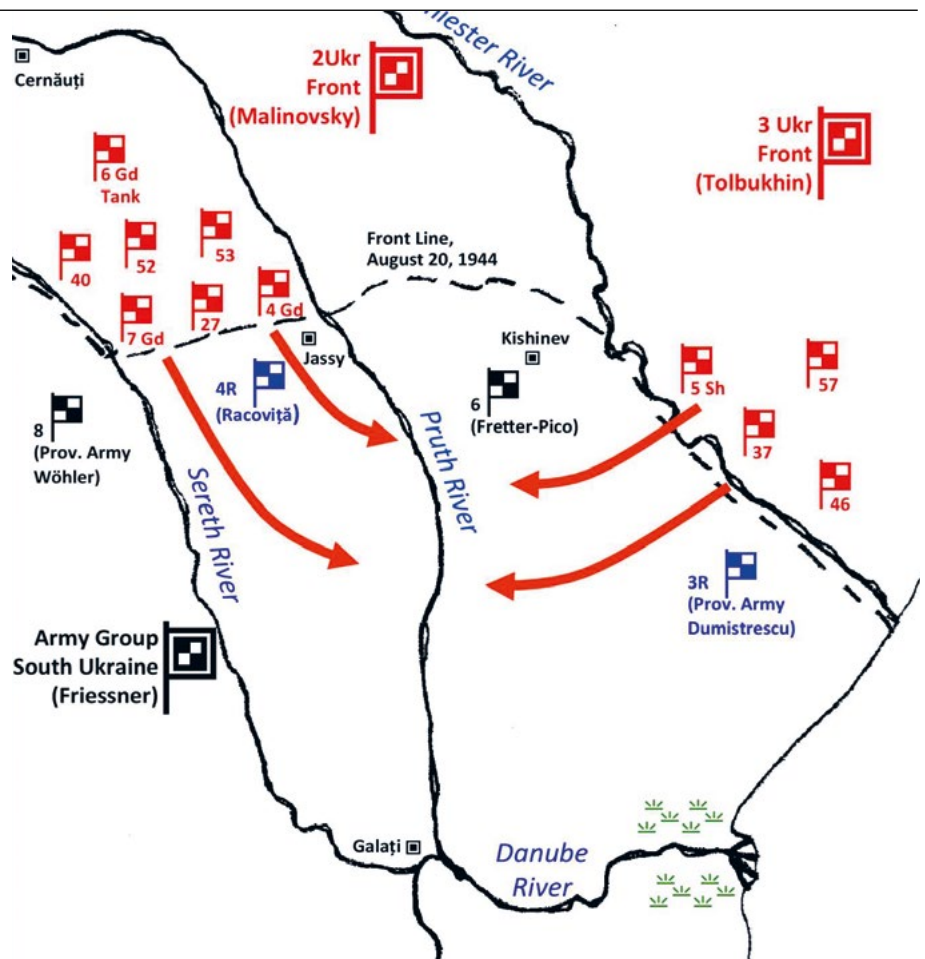
On 23 August 1969, on the 25th anniversary of the Jassy-Kishinev offensive, a liberation monument at the Academy of Science of Moldova was opened. It has since been renovated three times, in 1975, 2014, and 2019. A second monument in the village of Chitcani was opened on 9 May 1972 and is currently on the site of a mass graveyard, where 1,495 soldiers who died during the operation are buried.

The Şerpeni Bridgehead Memorial was opened in 2004. The complex was built to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Moldova from fascist rule, in memory of the Soviet soldiers who died during the Jassy-Kishinev operation. Two years later, on 9 May 2006, after restoration, the Eternity Memorial Complex in Chişinău was reopened, acting as the main Soviet war memorial in Moldova.

Source: Adapted from 'Second Jassy-Kishinev Offensive', Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_Jassy%E2%80%93Kishinev\\_offensive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Jassy%E2%80%93Kishinev_offensive), accessed 11 July 2022.

**Map of  
Jassy-Kishinev  
operation**

Image © 2018 Robert  
Citino, all rights reserved



# The Șerpeni Bridgehead Memorial

Șerpeni,  
Anenii Noi district,  
Republic of  
Moldova

70 km east of Chișinău, on the right bank of the Dniester River, one can find a special memorial of historical and national importance, which was erected in memory of the heroes who died during the Jassy-Kishinev operation of 1944 to free Chișinău from fascist occupation. The Șerpeni battle was one of the cruellest in World War II even if it represented just a small episode of the war.

The memorial was erected on the site of a strategic bridgehead on the high right bank of the Dniester, which was liberated by troops of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts of the Red Army. In 1985, according to witnesses, a mass grave of Soviet soldiers was found in the village of Șerpeni. In October 1985, the authorities of the Republic of Moldova decided to build a memorial to the military victory at the site, and to rebury the remains of these Soviet soldiers.

A competition to design the memorial was held and the winner was the architect Leonid Grigorashchenko. The construction of the memorial complex was carried out between 1995 and 2003. Dozens of people from Russia and Ukraine provided substantial support during the finalisation of the construction. On 22 August 2004, the memorial complex was opened by the architect S. Shoikhet and sculptor S. Ganenko. The official inauguration ceremony was attended by veterans from the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and others. A year later, a veteran delivered a speech at the complex in which he compared it to the Mamayev Kurgan in Volgograd and the Brest Fortress in Belarus.

## The Şerpeni Bridgehead Memorial, 2009

Photo: VargaA, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons, File:Şerpeni\_II\_World\_War\_Memorial\_0151.jpg



## The Şerpeni Bridgehead Memorial, 2022

Photo: © Marcus Chavasse, all rights reserved



# Monument observation worksheet

Describe the location of the monument, the surrounding environment and geographic context, including landmarks and/ or topographical information	Geographic/ physical context
Describe the size, general layout, general spatial organisation, etc. of the site	Site description
Describe the monument's structure, form, style, materials, etc.	Description (exterior or surface features)
Include some specific inscriptions, photos, references from the internet	Specific details

# Photo quest

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Walk around the memorial complex. Find and take photos of the following parts. Describe them in detail and explain what they contribute to the site.

Arc of Glory

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Mausoleum with Eternal Flame

---

Chapel of Pain

---

Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

---

A specific cross in the cemetery (your choice)

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# Questions for reflection

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What objectives did I set for this visit?

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How did experiencing the memorial site  
compare to studying it in class?

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How did I feel during the visit?

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What goals were pursued by the decision-makers  
when building this monument?

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Is this memorial site relevant to me  
as a young citizen of Moldova?

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Are monuments an important part of history today?

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# Concentration / Extermination Camps

## Lessons from the camps, or learning about violations of basic human rights

### Visit-based Learning Activity

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Allport was an American scientist associated with Harvard University. In his research, he noticed that crimes committed in the world, such as the extermination of Jews during World War II, were preceded by hate speech, exclusion, and discrimination against some social group or stratum, which he illustrated as a Pyramid of Hatred. It has 5 degrees: hate speech, avoidance, discrimination, physical violence, and extermination. Allport's Scale measures the manifestation of prejudice in a society. It is explained in more detail below. See also Allport, G. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*, Cambridge: Addison-Wesley.

The proposed activities are a reflection on human behavior towards others, the violation of basic human rights, such as the right to life, freedom (of speech, conscience, religion), dignity, non-use of torture. The way violators progress in stages from the use of verbal violence to extermination will be explored by the students using the example of the Holocaust. An important element of the classes will be a visit to a memorial site: a former Nazi concentration/extermination camp such as Kulmhof, Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Sachsenhausen, Bergen-Belsen, or Gross-Rosen. Students will not only learn the history of the formation of the concentration camp network, but also about rules of behaviour and possible emotional reactions during the visit. After the visit, during the lesson, they will have the opportunity to talk about emotions and their own reflections and learn about the so-called 'Pyramid of Hatred' towards various nationalities, ethnic groups, and minorities, as described by Allport.<sup>1</sup> Students will be able to consider how violence can be counteracted, and violations of human rights and democratic principles.



Author	Anna Skiendziel, Complex of Technical and Secondary Schools No. 2, Katowice, Poland
Age	15-20
Approximate Time	45 minutes preparation + 180-240 minutes visit (travel time not included) + 45-90 minutes reflection
Key question	How did genocide and crimes against humanity manifest themselves during World War II, and how can we prevent them in the future?

## Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Learn about the values of human rights and human dignity through discovering the history of the concentration camps and the conditions in which the prisoners lived.
- Learn about the stories of the survivors and develop empathy as well as learn about the feelings that may accompany a visit to a memorial site.
- Develop an attitude of respect for human rights and assume an attitude of responsibility in making decisions that may affect the fate of other people.
- Develop the ability to work in a group and draw conclusions from historical accounts and sources.
- Know and understand the process of violating democratic values, by being shown that anti-Semitism and xenophobia can lead to exclusion, discrimination, and genocide. They will understand the role of propaganda before and during the war.
- Reflect on democracy and the rule of law, identifying the circumstances where these values are threatened, and reflect on their own role and responsibilities, and their own potential to be influential.

## Pedagogical recommendations

The teachers should be familiar with the place that they will visit with the students. If the teachers have not been to that particular camp before, they should visit similar camps closer to their place of residence by way of preparation. Learning about the Holocaust should be adapted to the age and maturity of the students. Teachers know their pupils best, and they can talk with the guide before visiting.

Preparation for the visit requires not only learning the history of the place, but also emotional preparation and behavioural tips. A visit to a memorial site is not a trip, such as to the mountains. It would be best if the trip were a separate school visit, not an element of an entertaining trip.

It is important to talk with students after the visit and reflect. The Holocaust should be a warning and an example of how violations of human rights, the principles of democracy, and xenophobia may lead to extermination and genocide.

# Activities

## Preparation Activities

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In preparation for the learning activity and the trip, each student should watch one of the accounts of Holocaust survivors (see Appendix II for sources). Before watching, they should write down their answers to these questions:

- 1 What do you expect to hear about?
- 2 How do you expect to feel while watching?

After watching, they should write down their reflections and feelings; the questions below can be used as a guide.

- 1 What did you feel while reading? Did you experience any new emotions?
- 2 What made the biggest impression on you? Why?
- 3 What do you remember the most?

See Appendix I for a transcript of Lydia Tischler's story, in case students have difficulties in accessing another account.

### Stage 1

#### Introduction

15 minutes

The teacher starts with an outline of the history of concentration/extermination camps in the Third Reich with the help of the following graphics. Showing the timeline is important for students to see that the whole machine didn't start with the outbreak of the war or in 1940 in Auschwitz. The system of identification also shows that prisoners of the camps did not belong to one national or religious group, etc. The teacher should show students maps and comment on them, showing the stages of creating the entire network of camps (16 camps and 900 subcamps).

### Stage 2

#### Emotion maps

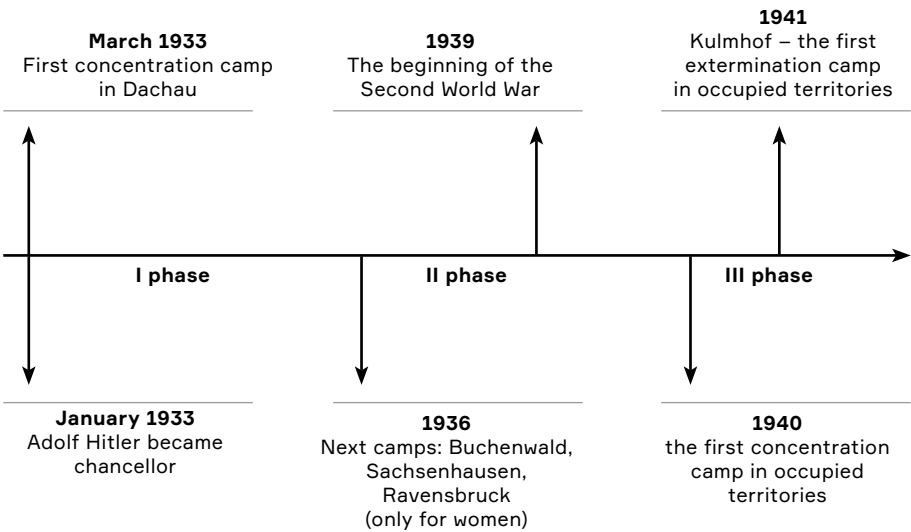
20 minutes

After the lecture, the teacher divides the students into small groups. Their task is to create their own maps of emotions based on the emotions they felt while watching/reading interviews with witnesses. They will then be able to compare their maps with their feelings after returning from the memorial site. Robert Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions (see p. 85) can help.

In the classroom, compare the feelings of individual groups. One of the students is responsible for telling what the group's conclusions were. The teacher marks specific emotions on the Wheel of Emotions.

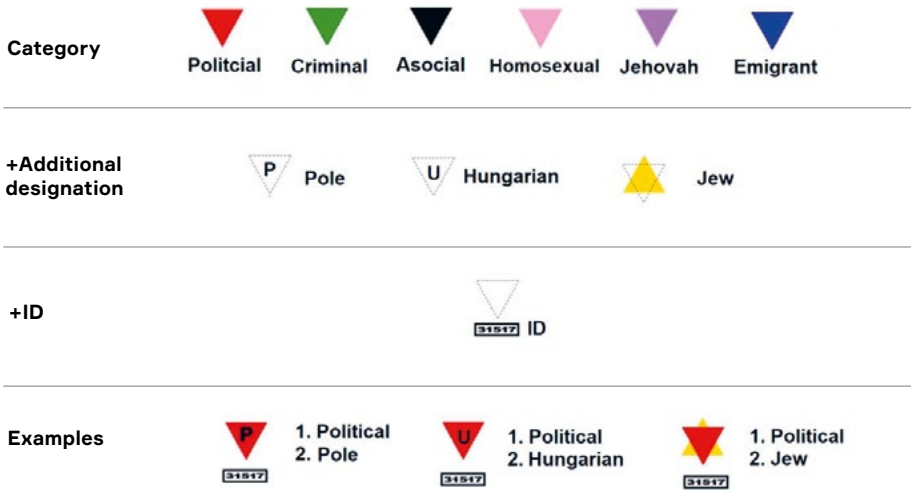
Outline of the history of concentration/extermination camps in Nazi Germany

Image © Anna Skiendziel and Laura Klimaite-Lusa



System of identification in German camps

Image: GermanCamps, CC BY 4.0, Wikimedia Commons, File:Wikipedia\_system\_of\_identification\_German\_camps.png



Major German occupation (concentration) and death (extermination) camps within so-called Greater Germany in 1941-1944

Image © Institute of National Remembrance, all rights reserved, <https://en.truthaboutcamps.eu/>



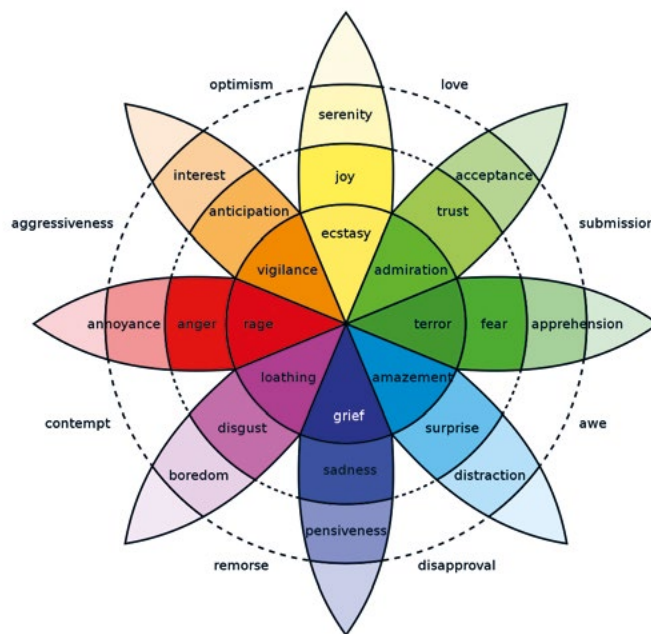
This stage is very important and should not be avoided. It is very likely that the students will be in a place like this for the first time; it is necessary to talk about behaviour.

The teacher must talk with students about emotions. They have the right to emotions, crying, fear. They can leave an exhibition at any point, e.g., if they don't want to see something. During the visit, students should know they can always approach the teacher, talk to them, comment on their feelings and observations.

The teacher should remind the students that it isn't a pleasure trip but a visit to a memorial site, museum or cemetery.

#### Robert Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions

Image: Machine Elf 1735, Public domain, Wikimedia Commons, [File:Emotion\\_classification#/media/File:Plutchik-wheel.svg](#)



#### Visit Activities

The teacher should not be overly active during the visit. Sometimes it is mandatory for a group to be accompanied by an official guide. They will tell the story of the place, show the exhibitions, or ask the students questions. Students should not be set specific tasks, and instead should concentrate as much as possible on this place of memory, on their emotions, on reflection, and not on the mechanical performance of tasks.

At the end of the visit, the teacher asks for a 2-3-minute summary from the students and asks about their emotions. If students have questions about a place of remembrance or want to know something more, the teacher should give them the space and opportunity to ask about anything connected with the visit.

### Stage 1

#### Reflection (obligatory)

45 minutes

It is necessary to organise an entire lesson after the visit and work through what the students saw and felt. In the beginning, the teacher leads an introductory conversation about the students' emotions, and asks if they talked to someone about visiting the memorial site, e.g. a parent, sibling, or friend. Then the teacher returns to the questions introduced in the homework activity:

- What did you feel? Did you experience any new emotions?
- What made the biggest impression on you? Why?
- What do you remember the most?

Depending on the situation and class, the teacher can use the form of open discussion (1) or use online tools (2).

- 1 Students pair up and share their answers to the questions. Then – using the snowball method<sup>1</sup> – the pairs form fours and exchange their reflections. Two more groups merge and four becomes eight. Finally, one person from the group presents what happened in their group, what the responses and feelings are.
- 2 The second proposition is to use the Mentimeter app.<sup>2</sup> It allows for anonymous individual sending of responses. It gives a sense of security, and students can submit any answer without pressure or fear. Finally, the teacher can display the answers and their comments on them.

Regardless of the form of summary, the teacher should refer to the pre-visit emotion map exercise. Together, students can compare and discuss if anything has changed and why.

### Stage 2

#### Pyramid of Hatred (optional)

45 minutes

A visit to a memorial site is not only a study about this place and history, but it is supposed to have a universal message, showing the mechanisms that lead to extermination. Therefore, an important aspect after the visit is to show them how such a process can work. Using Gordon Allport's Pyramid of Hatred, the teacher explains that what the students saw and learned about did not appear suddenly, but that it was a long process.

At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher may ask: *Why has there been genocide and mass killing in Rwanda, Yugoslavia and Ukraine even after the experience of the Holocaust? How could this have happened?*

<sup>1</sup> Book Units Teacher (2019). 'Snowball Technique – A Teaching Strategy', <https://bookunitsteacher.com/wp/?p=5826>, accessed 23 January 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Mentimeter, <https://www.mentimeter.com>, accessed 23 January 2023.

The teacher presents the Allport pyramid using the example of the Holocaust and explains the path from hate speech to extermination. After discussing the mechanism, the students should discuss if they might find similar situations and groups where the pyramid of hatred could apply in the present day. Use the following questions to support discussion:

Easier questions:

- 1 Do you know any other examples where the Allport pyramid applies?
- 2 Do you know any group that is facing negative comments, avoidance, or physical attacks?
- 3 How can people react to and resist such mechanisms on their own?
- 4 What can/should we do?
- 5 Does one person's resistance make sense?

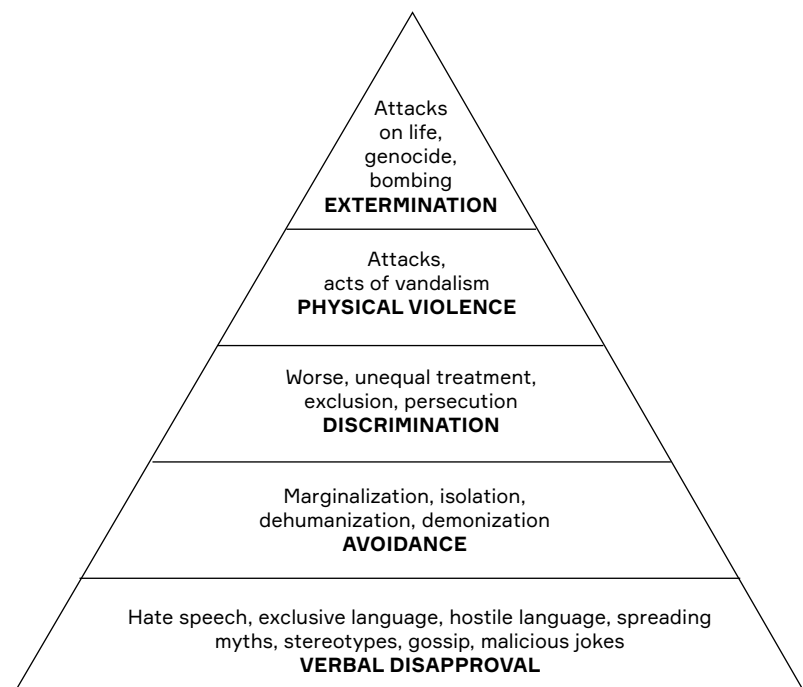
More advanced questions:

- 1 Should knowledge about the persecution of Jews and their establishments be passed on and disseminated now?
- 2 Do you know examples of statements/texts that deny the Holocaust?
- 3 What were the attitudes of the world community that witnessed the extermination of Jews?
- 4 Do these questions apply only to Jews? Have we been, or are we, witnessing persecution, tragedies of other nations, ethnic groups, or minorities?

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**Pyramid of Hatred.**  
**Allport, Gordon (1954)**

The Nature of Prejudice,  
Cambridge: Addison-  
Wesley





## Homework exercise

Source: 'Auschwitz, 75 years on: "Do not be indifferent", says death camp survivor Marian Turski', YouTube France 24 English, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaPF\\_gOjHxk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaPF_gOjHxk), accessed 12 July 2022.

After the visit: Based on Marian Turski's speech (see left) and your own knowledge, please try to write, in about 200 words, an answer to the following: *What conclusions can contemporary people draw from the experience of the Holocaust?*

## Assessment

Before the lesson, each student should watch one of the accounts of Holocaust survivors. After watching, they should write down their reflections and feelings. The teacher can check the comprehensiveness of the students' homework.

During the lesson and the visit, it is not the teacher's role to assess. They might assess the students' engagement during the lesson but bear in mind the potentially new and overwhelming environment.

The teacher can assess the short essay based on formal criteria, e.g. strength of the arguments. Content-wise, the teacher can judge the impact of their lesson and the effect that it had on the students.

## Glossary

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Avoidance – dehumanising and isolating individuals and social groups.

Hate speech – dissemination of negative stereotypes combined with hostile, harmful language.

Discrimination – unequal treatment by both individuals and state institutions.

# Lydia Tischler's story

Read Lydia's story and think about the following questions:

- 1 What did you feel while reading?  
Did you experience any new emotions?
- 2 What made the biggest impression on you? Why?
- 3 What do you remember the most?



This is a photo of me in my first year of school. There are about 38 children in this class, out of whom 6 survived. My name is Lydia Tischler. I'm 88 years old. From September '42 until May '45, I was in various concentration camps.

What was your experience of Auschwitz?

Auschwitz was hell. Auschwitz was really hell. We were on the last but one transport to Auschwitz. In the last transport were all the prominent people from Terezin who went straight into the gas chamber. There were about 50 of us in a cattle truck with a bucket. That was it. We arrived in the middle of the night and in Auschwitz you could smell the fear. You really could smell the fear. And we had to go through selection. Mengele, of whom you may have heard, was standing there and he looked at you and then sent you to the left or to the right. The left was the side for living and the right was the side for gas. I knew that our mother... because she didn't come to the left, she went to the right. But after the war I sort of hoped that maybe she was in some displaced persons' camp. You know, that she wasn't dead. That somehow, by a miracle, she escaped. We were herded into a huge hall and told to undress. And then somebody came and shaved all our hair. And then

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we were herded into another room where we sat on benches like in a theatre. And by then, people who had been there for some time told us, you know, you will go to the gas chamber, and so we sat there and, I must say, I sat there and didn't know whether it would be water or gas. It was water. I remember when I came to Auschwitz, to a room where they took everything away from us, there was a wooden board with all the nationalities that were in the camp. And I think on top, I don't think there were any English people, or any French. And the bottom two were the Gypsies and the Jews. And I remember, I have to remember this. For some reason it seemed to me important where they were putting us.

How did you cope from day to day?

I just took every day as it came. I worked in the market gardens. We were sometimes able to smuggle some of the fruit. For instance, cucumbers, if they were nicely bent, you could stick them into your bra and bring them into the camp. And, luckily, nobody was taking our clothes off to see what we had hidden. Potatoes you could put in your stockings. Tomatoes were not safe because they could squash and then that was it. Paradoxically, I got acquainted with cultural life while I was in Terezin. You know, all of the well-known actors, musicians, writers, professors were also in the camp. So, there was a rich cultural and intellectual life, as far as it was possible. I heard Verdi's Requiem for the first time in my life in Terezin. I would not have heard it if I had been at home at the age of 12 in Ostrava. Life, for people like me, wasn't the worst. It was much worse for older people who felt the hunger and felt, you know, they had already had a life that they were deprived of.

What do you think about people who've denied the Holocaust over the years?

Usually, when a person denies something, it's because he feels he has to deny it, because he's a nasty man and he doesn't want to feel nasty. So, he has to deny that anybody – you know, he perhaps would have liked to do it himself. This is how I understand, when people have to deny the horrors. In fact, when I came to England, I managed to find a school, and went to Brondesbury and Kilburn high school for girls. And when the girls heard where I came from, and they asked me questions, I thought, "How can they ask me these questions? They've seen the films". But, when I studied psychology, I understood that, when things are so outside human experience, you really can't believe it. We coped. I discovered late on when I studied psychology and psychoanalysis how useful defences are. You know, you could believe it and not believe it. You kind of told yourself, "No, they made a mistake. It can't be true." So people just went to Auschwitz and very few survived. I think one person escaped from Auschwitz, a Czech man who escaped and nobody believed him, what he told them.

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As a survivor how do you want the Holocaust to be remembered?

The best way to remember it would be if people could learn from this experience so that it's not repeated. And, in fact, it's noteworthy that I've never felt that I needed to get revenge myself. I also haven't felt like a victim. They didn't succeed in making me a victim. I'm a survivor, which is something very different. We thought of them as inhuman but, I think, they never made me feel that I'm less than human. I could, you know, I had to put up with what they did to me. You know, when they told me to undress, if I said "I don't understand" they'd have shot me or, I don't know what they would have done. And although the Germans were able to take away all my belongings – almost everything, except my life, they left me alive. But, you know, whatever could be removed from my body, they removed from my body – they couldn't remove my soul. My soul, they couldn't remove my integrity, my inner self. That I managed to maintain. All of us have, you know, all of us have the capacity to be sadistic and horrible to other people. We manage to not do it, you know, but the potential for destructiveness is in all of us. I actually believe that people are born – well, they're born neither good nor bad and that the badness is a result of the way someone is treated as a child. I believe that if you're treated well as a child, you can't become a Hitler.

Source: 'Holocaust survivor interview, 2017', *YouTube Channel 4 News*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lpTceEE3d8>, accessed 12 July 2022.

# Recommended reading and further research for teachers

→ We recommend the following sources to prepare for a trip to a concentration or extermination camp:

(PL) 'Zalecenia i wskazówki dotyczące edukacji na temat II wojny światowej i Zagłady' [Recommendations and tips for education about World War II and the Holocaust], *POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews*, <https://polin.pl/pl/aktualnosci/2021/01/25/zalecenia-i-wskazowki-dotyczace-edukacji-na-temat-ii-wojny-swiatowej-i>, accessed 24 January 2023.

(EN) Białecka, A., Oleksy, K., Regard, F. & Trojański, P. (eds.) (2010). *European pack for visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum: Guidelines for teachers and educators*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, [https://auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/auschwitz/inne/european\\_pack\\_for\\_visiting\\_auschwitz.pdf](https://auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/auschwitz/inne/european_pack_for_visiting_auschwitz.pdf), accessed 24 January 2023.

→ These resources can be useful for primary sources:

(EN) 'Institute of National Remembrance: Truth about Camps' – information about concentration/extermination camps in occupied Poland, <https://en.truthaboutcamps.eu/>, accessed 24 January 2023.

(EN) 'Holocaust Encyclopedia' – articles, digitised collections, critical thinking and discussion questions, lesson plans, oral histories, videos, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/en>, accessed 24 January 2023.

(EN) 'Centropa' – archive with biographies, interviews, photos and documents from Holocaust victims and survivors, <https://www.centropa.org/en>, accessed 24 January 2023.

→ Interviews with witnesses and former prisoners can be found here:

USC Shoah Foundation YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/c/USCShoahFoundation>, accessed 24 January 2023.

'Torchlighters 2020', Yad Vashem YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLj1tRCohZ-q810in5phasNJfgwxMR-cl3PK>, accessed 24 January 2023.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/c/holocaustmuseum/videos>, accessed 24 January 2023



# Monument to the Katyń Massacre

## Human rights, the distortion of history and the Katyń lie

### Classroom-based Learning Activity

1

The Katyń lie came to be known about after 11 April 1943, when the Germans revealed that they had found the mass graves of Polish officers murdered by the Soviets. The USSR firmly denied responsibility and blamed the Third Reich. See Przewoźnik, A. & Adamska, J. (2011). *Zbrodnia katyńska. Mord, kłamstwo, pamięć* [The Katyń Crime. Murder, Lies, Memory], Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

The lesson is related to the monument commemorating the victims of the Katyń massacre, a mass killing of Polish military officers and POWs by the NKVD in 1940 on the territory of the Soviet Union. The monument is located at the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw. Two issues are raised during the lesson: on the one hand, students learn the history of the Katyń massacre and about the violation of international law; on the other hand, the concept of the Katyń lie<sup>1</sup> is brought up, that is, how and why the Soviet Union tried to cover up the crimes over the years.

Author	Anna Skiendziel, Complex of Technical and Secondary Schools No. 2, Katowice, Poland
Age	15-20
Approximate Time	90 minutes, or two lessons each of 45 minutes (see Stage 3 below)
Key question	How can the history of the Katyń massacre be used to illustrate the way monuments are used to try and hide war crimes?



# Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Understand the value of human rights and the importance of respect for human dignity through the history of the Katyń massacre.
- Develop critical skills in approaching historical information and sources.
- Understand that there may be different perspectives on the same events in history.
- Understand that past events can be useful to understand the present and help to build the future.
- Develop analytical thinking skills.

## Pedagogical recommendations

The lesson should be carried out after World War II has already been taught and discussed in the classroom. Students should have a basic understanding of what happened during and after World War II as well as basic notions of international law and human rights.

The Katyń Monument encourages discussion of human rights, values, disinformation, and historical lies. There is no need to visit the site directly for students to understand the topic better.

## Activities

### Stage 1

Introduction

5 minutes

The teacher briefly explains the aims of the lesson and why the Katyń issue is an important one.

### Stage 2

Photo comparison & discussion

25 minutes

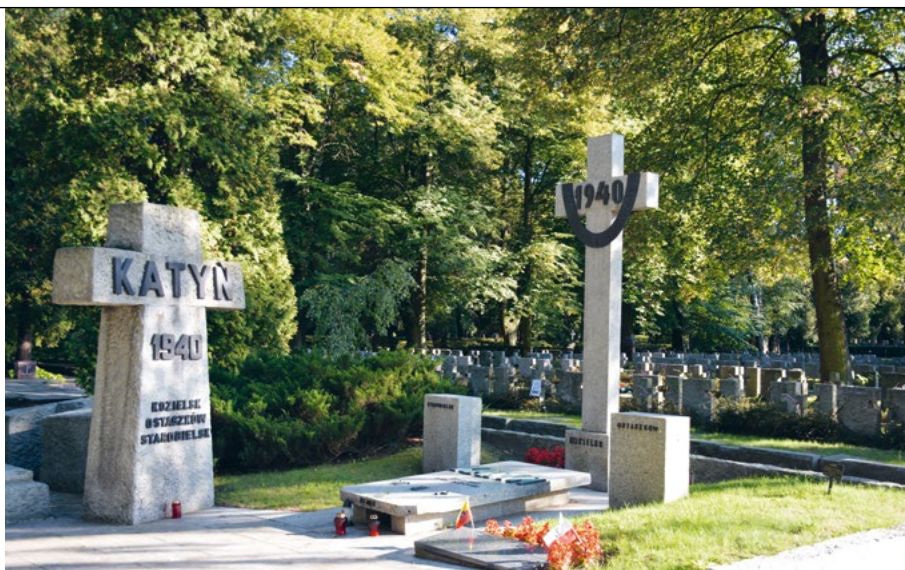
The lesson begins by showing two photographs of the Katyń Monument. One photo comes from The Powązki Cemetery, Warsaw (Poland 2016), the other from Katyń (Soviet Union 1988).

Students are divided into groups of 3 and examine the photos. Under the guidance of the teacher, the students try to answer the questions below in order. After each question, the composition of the groups is changed. In each group students write down the responses so that they can compare them with their final answers. Each time they can also discuss the results and conclusions from previous groups.



**The Katyń Valley in  
Powązki Cemetery,  
Warsaw, Poland**

Photo: R. Eugeniusz,  
CC-BY-SA-3.0, Wikimedia  
Commons, File:Sady  
Żoliborskie, Warszawa,  
Poland - panoramio -  
Roman Eugeniusz (1).jpg



**A plaque with an  
inscription attributing  
the crime to the  
Germans, placed by the  
Soviets at the cemetery  
of Katyń, 1988**

The text on the  
monuments reads:  
*Victims of fascism –  
Polish officers shot by  
the Nazis in 1941*

Photo: Katyń Museum  
collection



- 1 What do you see in the photos?
- 2 Are there any differences between the monuments in the photos?
- 3 What event do the monuments commemorate?
- 4 Why do you think the date was changed to 1941 in one of the photos?
- 5 Does it matter that someone wanted to change the date of the Katyń massacre? Who would care about it and why?

After the group work is completed, the class discusses the answers to the fifth question. The discussion will also be an introduction to a short lecture by the teacher about the Katyń lie and why the Soviet Union propagated the lie.

### Stage 3

Lecture about the history of the Katyń lie

15 minutes

The teacher should explain the history of the lie, making sure to include the following points.

- The discovery of mass graves in the Katyń and elsewhere by the Germans in 1943 (after their attack on the USSR)
- The denial by the USSR and the USSR's blaming of the Germans
- The research of Nikolai Burdenko's Soviet commissions
- The exclusion of the Katyń massacre from the Nuremberg trial Censorship in the press and in schools during the communist period
- The act of self-immolation of the former Home Army soldier Walenty Badylak in Kraków in 1980 against hiding the truth about Katyń<sup>1</sup>

The map can be used to aid understanding of the topic (see Appendix I), and the sources in Appendix III can be used to learn more about the history.

At this point, the first 45 minutes should be up. It is a suitable point to end the first lesson if the learning activities are to be split into two lessons. If not, it is a good time for a break.

### Stage 4

Recap

10 minutes

<sup>1</sup> 'A cry of protest against concealing the truth about Katyń. The self-immolation of Walenty Badylak', *Libra Institute*, 21 March 2019, <https://www.librainstitute.org/a-cry-of-protest-against-concealing-the-truth-about-katyn-the-self-immolation-of-walenty-badylak/>, accessed 18 January 2023.

The next part of the lesson (or the second lesson, if the material is divided into two) begins with the teacher showing again the photo of the monument built in Katyń.

The teacher asks: *Why would the Soviet Union want to erect this type of monument with such an inscription as late as 1988?* The question will also help recall the content of the previous lesson. It also introduces to the students the Polish perspective and Polish efforts to find the truth about the Katyń massacre.

## Stage 5

History of the monument

10 minutes

After recalling the content of the first half of the lesson (the previous lesson if the material is divided), teachers display or give students a text about the history of the monument in Powązki (see Appendix II). After reading in pairs, the students make notes on the difficulties in commemorating the Katyń massacre.

## Stage 6

Discussion

10 minutes

Next, the teacher returns to the photo of the monument in Powązki and the fifth question: *Does it matter that someone wanted to change the date of the Katyń massacre? Who would care about it and why?* Students are now asked to compare their current answers with those from the beginning of the lesson (or from the first lesson if the material is divided). The teacher and the students discuss human rights and values during and after the war.

## Stage 7

Reflection

15 minutes

At the end of the lesson, there is a short reflection/discussion. The following questions can be used to lead and support the discussion:

- 1 Why are we discussing this topic?
- 2 What conclusions can we draw when discussing the Katyń massacre?
- 3 Why is a critical approach to assessing sources and information important?

## Assessment

Below are several points that can be used as a suggestion of how the teacher may assess the learning activity during the lesson:

- 1 At what level does the student use observation and analytical skills? How much can they distinguish between important/primary and unimportant/secondary information?
- 2 How much does the student contribute?
- 3 How skilled are the students in cooperating and working together as a group?

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## Glossary

Federation of Katyń Families – a Polish non-governmental organisation that brings together activists from all over the country, with the goal of commemorating the victims of the Katyń massacre and cherishing the memory of Polish victims of communism in the USSR.

The Home Army (Polish: *Armia Krajowa*, or AK) – the biggest resistance movement in German-occupied Poland during World War II. The Home Army was formed in February 1942 from the earlier *Związek Walki Zbrojnej* (Armed Resistance).

Martial law – the state of emergency introduced on 13 December 1981 throughout the Polish People's Republic, contrary to the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic. It was suspended on 31 December 1982 and lifted on 22 July 1983.

NKVD (Russian: *Народный комиссариат внутренних дел*) – the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs. Established in 1917, the agency was initially tasked with conducting regular police work and overseeing the country's prisons and labour camps in the USSR. It was responsible for the mass extrajudicial executions of citizens and conceived the GULAG network of camps.

The Security Service – an institution established to protect state security and public order in the People's Republic of Poland.

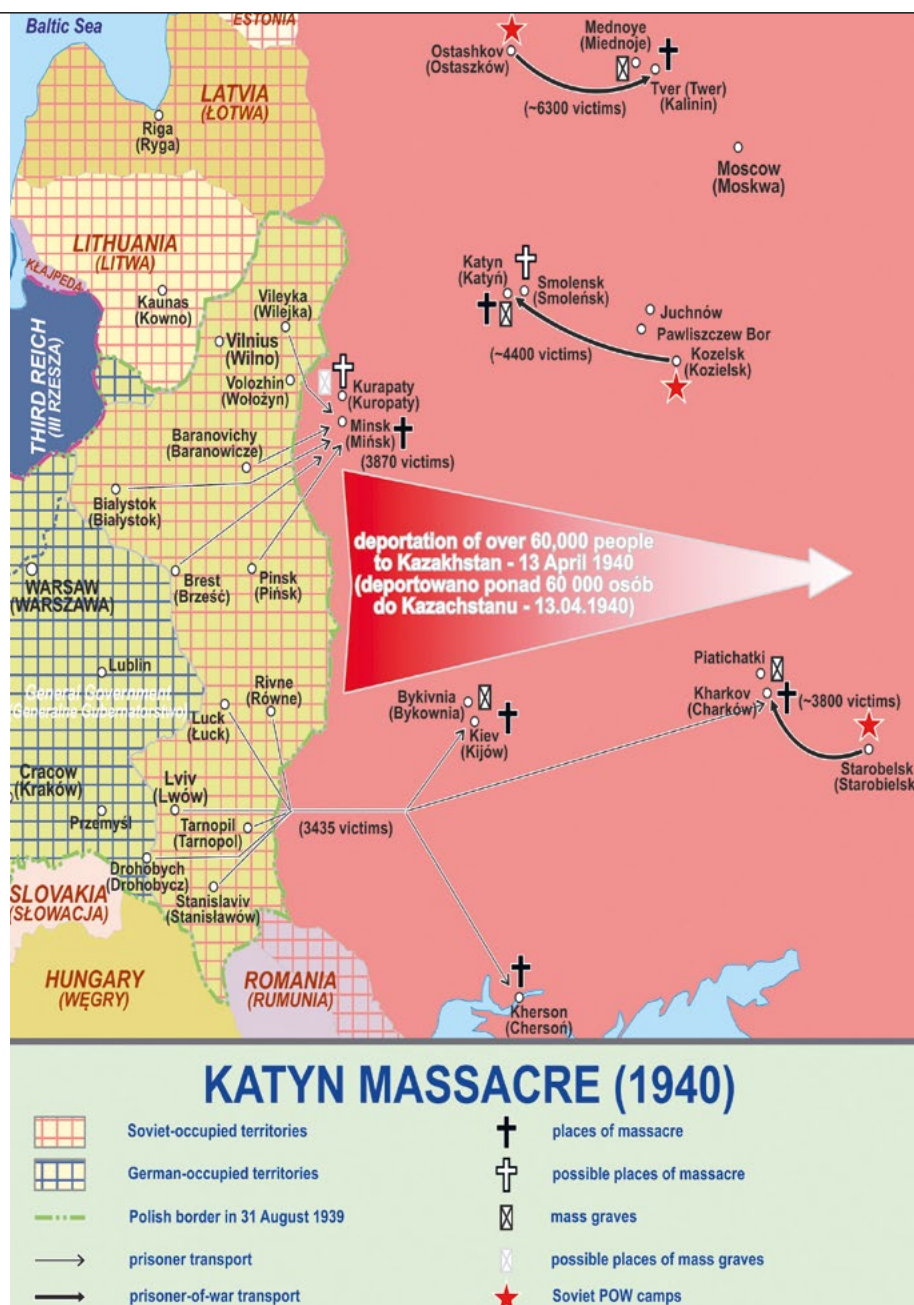
Stefan Niedzielak (1914-1989) – a Roman Catholic priest, chaplain of the Home Army and WiN, co-founder of the Katyń Families.

WiN or *Zrzeszenie Wolność i Niezawisłość* (English: Freedom and Independence Association) – a Polish underground anticommunist organisation founded on 2 September 1945 and active until 1952.

Władysław Badylak (1904-1980) – a soldier of the Home Army, a retired Krakow baker who chained himself to a historic well in the Krakow market square, poured gasoline over himself and set himself on fire. His act was a protest against the silence of the authorities about the Katyń massacre.



# Map of the massacre of Katyn



Author: Lonio17, CC BY-SA  
4.0, [Wikimedia Commons](#),  
File:Katyn\_a.png

# The history of the monument's construction in Powązki

Since the 1950s, attempts have been made to commemorate the victims of the Katyń massacre in the places where monuments now stand. Each attempt ended with a reaction of the communist authorities and the Security Service.

In the Katyń Valley in modern day Russia there are two monuments in the form of crosses, officially unveiled on 31 July 1995. These are 1) the so-called 'social monument', which was placed in the Katyń Valley twice (first in 1981 and then in 1995), and 2) the so-called 'government monument', erected in 1985, originally with a different inscription.

In May 1981, the illegal Civic Committee for the Construction of the Katyń Monument was established in Warsaw. On 31 July 1981, members of the Committee set up a 4.5-metre-high stone cross in the Katyń Valley with the date 1940, a crowned eagle, a plaque with the inscriptions Katyń and Wojsko Polskie (Polish Army), and posts with the names of the NKVD camps where Polish prisoners of war were held in captivity after the USSR's aggression against Poland in 1939. The initiators of the cross were the priest Stefan Niedzielak and Stefan Melak. The same night, the cross was disassembled and removed by the Security Service using a large crane. Two more attempts to erect a cross were made, but each time the crosses were removed. At the turn of April and March 1985, without prior announcement and without an unveiling ceremony, the authorities of the Polish People's Republic erected a white granite cross, 4 metres high, with a false inscription: "*Polish soldiers, victims of Nazi fascism resting in the Katyń region – 1941.*" The text of the inscription caused indignation among Poles and the topic was covered in newspapers as far away as Switzerland. This also caused outrage in Germany and was discussed at a Bundestag meeting. Chancellor Helmut Kohl stated that the Polish side had been informed that the German government did not understand this falsification of history and that it felt offended by this fact.

In 1989, one of the initiators of the monument and the guardian of the Katyń families, the priest Stefan Niedzielak, was murdered. At the end of March 1989, the false inscription was removed, but no new information was provided about the true date and persons responsible for the Katyń massacre. The situation changed only after the collapse of the communist government in Poland and then the USSR.

Sources: Przewoźnik, A. & Adamska, J. (2010). *Katyń. Zbrodnia, prawda, pamięć* [Katyń. Crime, truth, memory], Świat Książki: Warszawa; Wasilewski, W. (2009). 'Pamięć Katynia. Działania opozycji' [The Memory of Katyń. Opposition activities], *Biuletyn IPN*, 5(6), pp. 60-70.

# Recommended reading and further research for teachers

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→ To find out more about the Katyń massacre and subsequent lie, we recommend the following sources:

(PL/EN) 'KATYŃ – Historia wciąż żywa' [Katyń - History Still Alive], *YouTube IPNtvPL*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=417QavvOLa8>, accessed 24 January 2023.

(PL/EN) 'Historia zbrodni' [History of a crime], *Narodowe Centrum Kultury – Remembrance campaign and detailed history of events*, [http://pamietamkatyn1940.pl/en/blog/historia\\_zbrodni/](http://pamietamkatyn1940.pl/en/blog/historia_zbrodni/), accessed 24 January 2023.

(EN) 'The Katyń Massacre – Basic Facts', *Institute of National Remembrance*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/3921,Katyn-Massacre-Basic-Facts.html>, accessed 24 January 2023.

(EN) 'The Katyń lie. Its rise and duration', *Institute of National Remembrance*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/4020,The-Katyn-lie-Its-rise-and-duration.html>, accessed 24 January 2023.

(PL/EN) 'Katyń - the true story of a lie', *YouTube Muzeum Historii Polski w Warszawie*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mo0Q6FqT5c>, accessed 24 January 2023.





# Pavlov's House & Gerhard's Mill

## Reminders of the devastating consequences of war

Visit-based and/or  
Classroom-based  
Learning Activity

The idea of this lesson is to use memorials to show the destructive consequences of war. Any material losses are accompanied by even greater and more significant human losses. Using the example of Pavlov's House and Gerhard's Mill in Volgograd, Russia, which were defended for almost 2 months during the Battle of Stalingrad, students will discuss the nature of heroism. The battle, which was one of the bloodiest and most brutal battles in the history of mankind, became one of the key events of World War II (known in Russia as the Great Patriotic War). Pavlov's House and Gerhard's Mill have become symbols of the battle. During the battle, the infamous Order No. 227 "Not a step back!" was issued, the terrible consequences of which have led to contradictory assessments being made of it. Studying the same battle from the perspectives of the state, soldiers and officers is an important lesson for a multiperspective understanding of the events of World War II.

Author	Anna Cherepova, history teacher, Moscow, Russia
Age	15+
Approximate Time	90 minutes
Key question	Does the state have the right to order wide-ranging physical and human sacrifices? Who should make such decisions – the authorities or the people themselves?



# Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Learn the significance of the Battle of Stalingrad and its place within World War II.
- Study the content of Order No. 227 “Not a step back!” and its consequences.
- Compare two ways of preserving memorials.
- Develop critical thinking and empathy through reading personal historical sources.
- Reflect on human rights and the role of citizens in war and peacetime.

## Pedagogical recommendations

This lesson can be conducted both with and without a visit to the memorial sites.

If a visit is possible it is assumed that, on the ground with a guide, students will learn that Stalingrad was the key for the Germans to the strategic oil reserves of the USSR. In addition, the geography of modern Volgograd will show that the Volga River was a natural barrier that helped the Soviet army to hold the city and not let the Germans advance further east.

If a visit to the city and memorial site is not possible, the facts mentioned above can be discussed with the use of historical maps. Most history textbooks contain enough general information about the Battle of Stalingrad to cover the main purposes of studying these issues.

## Activities

To prepare for the lesson, students receive a handout that briefly describes the Battle of Stalingrad and its significance for the further events of World War II (see Appendix I).

### Stage 1

Memorial observation and comparison

20 minutes

In a brief session, the students discuss the outcomes of their preparation with a guide or the teacher. Then the lesson begins with a study of the memorials, learning about their history, and comparing the photos below.

Pavlov’s House is an ordinary four-story residential building that turned into an impregnable fortress during the Battle of Stalingrad, which a group of Soviet soldiers held for 58 days. The house was named after the senior sergeant who took command. Marshal V. Chuikov said in his memoirs: “This small group, defending one house, destroyed more enemy soldiers than the Nazis lost during the capture of Paris.”

**Ruins of Pavlov's House  
in Stalingrad, USSR, 1943**

Photo: Unknown,  
Public domain, Russian  
State Military Archive,  
Wikimedia Commons,  
File:[Pavlov's\\_House.jpg](#)



**Pavlov's House memorial,  
Volgograd, Russia, 2013**

Photo: Insider, CC BY-SA  
3.0, Wikimedia Commons,  
File:[Дом\\_Павлова\\_03.jpg](#)



**Gerhard's Mill, Volgograd,  
Russia, 2015**

Photo: Savin, A , CC BY-SA  
3.0, Wikimedia Commons,  
File:[May2015\\_Volgograd\\_img14\\_Gergardt\\_Mill.jpg](#)



Gerhard's Mill is situated directly across from Pavlov's House in central Volgograd. During the Battle of Stalingrad, Gerhard's Mill became the final frontier, with the Soviet Red Army deterring the army of German Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus on its approaches to the Volga. Fierce fighting for the mill lasted for several months: it was bombed and blown up numerous times, but the German Army failed to take it, or pass around it. The building was semi-surrounded for 58 days, during which time it sustained numerous hits from air bombs and shells. This damage can still be seen today – literally every square metre of the exterior walls was hit by shells, bullets and shrapnel, and the reinforced concrete beams on the roof were broken by direct hits from aircraft bombs.

Students study the photos and/or the memorials themselves and work in small groups to fill in the worksheet (see Appendix II).

## Stage 2

Order No. 227 and the prerequisites for its publication	25 minutes
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At this stage, students are divided into groups and read Order No. 227 "Not a step back!" (see Appendix III). After reading, the students share their assumptions with their own groups about the reasons for Joseph Stalin to issue such an order and what consequences this order might have had. After the group work, the groups discuss their assumptions with the teacher and the class. These assumptions should be written down on the board so that everyone can see them. This will be needed for the next stage, when students will read historical sources in which they can check the assumptions made in the group work.

## Stage 3

Study of historical sources	25 minutes
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Individually, students read and compare the views of Order No. 227 expressed by a writer, a Soviet officer, and a soldier (see Appendix IV). They should think about the following questions:

- 1 What conclusions and reflections did the witnesses of Order No. 227 make and why?
- 2 Are there any differences between them?
- 3 What consequences did this order have for the soldiers?
- 4 Compare your answers to questions 1 – 3 with the results of your work with Order No. 227.

## Stage 4

Final discussion & reflection	20 minutes
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Finally, the teacher initiates a reflective discussion. The class should discuss two main issues:



- What might have forced people and soldiers to sacrifice themselves so desperately to defend the city?
- Did the supreme power in the country have the moral right to issue such orders as Order No. 227? What were the grounds for issuing this order? Do you think they are convincing and sufficient?

In the discussion, it is important to take into account such factors as the totalitarian regime, wartime, the factor of desertion, the importance of the region, and the danger of its conquest by Nazi troops.

If there is time left, there can be a short discussion about the role of authorities and citizens in wartime as well as peacetime.

Finally, the teacher should sum up the lesson. The main point of the summary should be that often during a war it is ordinary people who become the victims, and victory is fashioned at their expense. It is not only the enemy who can condemn people to these sacrifices, but also the leadership of the country itself. During World War II, for example, Stalin and the Soviet leadership did not always take into account the interests of its own citizens in its actions, and instead made decisions, the consequences of which can be seen as cruel and neglectful towards human lives. Is there a moral justification for such decisions? Everyone answers this question for themselves in different ways, based on their own worldview.

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## Glossary

Barrier troops – military units that are located in the rear or on the front line (behind the main forces) to maintain military discipline, prevent the flight of servicemen from the battlefield, capture spies, saboteurs and deserters, and return troops who flee from the battlefield or lag behind their units.

Commissar / Commissioner – the position or title of a person vested with authority, or a member of a commission. Here, commissar refers either to a member of the NKVD or more broadly to an official working for the government.

Luftwaffe – the German Air Force, which was part of the German armed forces.

NKVD (Russian: *Народный комиссариат внутренних дел*) – the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs. Established in 1917, the agency was initially tasked with conducting regular police work and overseeing the country's prisons and labour camps in the USSR. It was responsible for the mass extrajudicial executions of citizens and conceived the GULAG network of camps.

Totalitarian regime – a political regime implying absolute state control over all aspects of public and private life.

# Preparatory handout for students

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Read a brief history of the Battle of Stalingrad below. While reading, please underline the sentences about:

- The strategic significance of the Stalingrad region for both sides.
- The results of the battle.
- Losses incurred during the battle.
- An evaluation of the battle compared to others throughout history.

The Battle of Stalingrad (23 August 1942 – 2 February 1943) was a major battle on the Eastern Front of World War II during which Nazi Germany and its allies unsuccessfully fought the Soviet Union for control of the city of Stalingrad (later renamed Volgograd) in Southern Russia. The battle was marked by fierce close quarters combat and direct assaults on civilians in air raids, the epitome of urban warfare. The Battle of Stalingrad was the deadliest battle to take place during World War II and is one of the bloodiest battles in the history of warfare, with an estimated two million total casualties. Today, the Battle of Stalingrad is universally regarded as the turning point in the European theatre of war, as it forced the German High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*) to withdraw considerable military forces from other areas in occupied Europe to replace German losses on the Eastern Front. The victory at Stalingrad energised the Red Army and shifted the balance of power in the favour of the Soviets.

Stalingrad was strategically important to both sides as a major industrial and transport hub on the Volga River. Whoever controlled Stalingrad would have access to the oil fields of the Caucasus, and control of the Volga itself. Germany, already operating on dwindling fuel supplies, focused its efforts on moving deeper into Soviet territory and taking the oil fields at any cost. On 4 August, the Germans launched an offensive using the 6th Army and elements of the 4th Panzer Army. The attack was supported by intense *Luftwaffe* bombing that reduced much of the city to rubble. The battle became one of house-to-house fighting as both sides poured reinforcements into the city.

On 19 November, the Red Army launched Operation Uranus. The Axis flanks were overrun, and the 6th Army was cut off and surrounded in the Stalingrad region. Adolf Hitler was determined to hold the city at all costs and forbade the 6th Army from attempting a breakout; instead, attempts were made to supply it by air and to break the encirclement from the outside. The Soviets were successful in denying the Germans

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the ability to resupply through the air, which strained the German forces to breaking point. Nevertheless, the German forces were determined to continue their advance and heavy fighting continued for another two months. On 2 February 1943, the 6th Army, having exhausted their ammunition and food, finally capitulated, making it the first of Hitler's field armies to surrender during World War II – after five months, one week, and three days of fighting.

The losses of Germany and its allies of troops of all types amounted to more than 800,000 people (killed, wounded or captured). The total losses of the Soviet Union, according to various sources, amounted to more than a million people.

Source: Adapted from  
'The Battle of Stalingrad',  
*Wikipedia*, [https://  
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/  
Battle\\_of\\_Stalingrad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Stalingrad),  
accessed 3 July 2022.

# Observation worksheet

	Pavlov's House (modern view)	Gerhard's Mill
Description (what can you see?)		
Why does the building look like this?		
What emotions and feelings do you get when looking at this building?		
Was it the right decision to preserve the exterior of the building? Try to argue your point.		



# Order No. 227 handout

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Read Order No. 227 below. The Order was issued on 28 July 1942 by Joseph Stalin, who was acting as the People's Commissar of Defence. It is known for its famous line "Not a step back!" In groups, discuss what reasons Stalin might have had to issue such an order, and what consequences this order was likely to have. Please make notes, as they will be used in a class discussion afterwards.

The enemy throws new forces to the front without regard to heavy losses and penetrates deep into the Soviet Union, seizing new regions, destroying our cities and villages, and violating, plundering, and killing the Soviet people. The German invaders penetrate towards Stalingrad, to the Volga River and want at any cost to trap Kuban and Northern Caucasus, with their oil and grain. [...] Some of the Soviet troops of the Southern front, following the panic-mongers, have left many cities without resistance and without orders from Moscow, bringing shame on their banners. The people of our country, who love and respect the Red Army, are beginning to be discouraged and are losing faith in the Red Army, and many curse the Red Army for leaving our people under the yoke of the German oppressors and itself running east.

Certain unintelligent people at the front reassure themselves by saying that we can retreat further to the east, as we have a lot of territory, a lot of ground, a lot of people, and that there will always be much bread for us. They want to justify the fear at the front. But such talk is a falsehood, helpful only to our enemies. Each commander, Red Army soldier and political commissar should understand that our means are not limitless. The territory of the Soviet state is not a desert, but consists of people – workers, peasants, our fathers, mothers, wives, brothers, children. [...] We have lost more than 70 million people, more than 800 million pounds of bread annually and more than 10 million tons of metal annually. Now we do not have predominance over the Germans in human reserves, in reserves of bread. This leads to the conclusion that it is time to finish retreating. Not one step back! Such should now be our main slogan.

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According to this Order, military councils of the fronts and front commanders should: [...]

a) Form within each Front between one and three (depending on the situation) penal battalions (800 persons) to which commanders and high commanders and appropriate commissars of all branches of the armed forces who have been guilty of a breach of discipline due to cowardice or vacillation will be sent and put on more difficult sectors of the front to give them an opportunity to redeem by blood their crimes against the Motherland. [...]

b) Form within the limits of each army 3 to 5 well-armed barrier detachments (up to 200 persons in each), and put them directly behind unstable divisions and require them in case of panic and scattered withdrawals of elements of the divisions to shoot panic-mongers and cowards where they stand, and thus help the honest soldiers of the division execute their duty to the Motherland; [...]

c) Render all help and support to the defensive squads of the army in their business of strengthening order and discipline in the units.

The People's Commissioner of Defence  
Joseph Stalin

Source: Stalin, J. (1942), 'Order No. 227', July 28, <https://www.tracesofwar.com/articles/4849/Order-No-227-July-28-1942-J-Stalin.htm>, accessed 18 January 2023.

# Historical sources on Order No. 227

## Source 1

Soviet officer

Vasilevsky, A. (1978).  
*A lifetime's work*.  
Politizdat: Moscow,  
p. 552.

“Order No. 227 is one of the strongest documents of the war years in terms of the depth of its patriotic content, the degree of emotional tension. There were many conflicting viewpoints on the Order, but it can be justified by the very harsh and alarming time during which it was issued. What attracted us most in the Order were its social and moral content.”

## Source 2

Writer & soviet soldier

Simonov, K. M. (1982).  
*Different days of the war: A writer's diary*.  
Vol. 2. 1942-1945.  
Khudozhestvennaya  
Literatura: Moscow,  
p. 688.

“We... were stunned into silence for a whole hour after we read the order. I really came to my senses only a few days later in Moscow. All that time it seemed to me that time had stopped moving. Before that, the war was wound tight up like a ball of yarn, at first a tangle of misfortunes. Then, in December of '41, this ball seemed to begin to unwind, but then it began to wind up again, like a ball of new misfortunes. And suddenly, when I read this order, everything seemed to stop. Now it seemed that in the future the course of life would be a kind of leap – either jump over or die!”

## Source 3

Soviet officer

Sokolov, B. V.  
(2013). *The Miracle of Stalingrad*.  
Algorithm: Moscow,  
p. 45.

“Stalin hoped that under the threat of executions and penal battalions, the Red Army soldiers would fight harder and cause more damage to the enemy. In fact, sometimes the opposite happened. Fearing reprisals, commanders at all levels were sometimes late in ordering a withdrawal, and this led only to additional losses.”

## Source 4

War veteran

Nikulin, N. N. (2008).  
*Memories of the war*.  
Hermitage Museum:  
St. Petersburg,  
pp. 43-47, 231.

“The troops went on the attack, driven by terror. Meeting with the Germans was terrible, with their machine guns and tanks, the fiery meat grinder of bombing and artillery shelling. No less terrifying was the inexorable threat of execution. In order to keep the amorphous mass of poorly trained soldiers in obedience, executions were carried out before the battle. They grabbed some puny do-gooders or those

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who blurted something out, or random deserters, who were always abundant enough. They lined up the whole division and summarily finished off the unfortunates. This preventive political work resulted in a fear of the NKVD and commissars – greater than a fear of the Germans. And when it came to the offensive, if you turned back, you'd get a bullet from the squad. Fear forced the soldiers to go to their deaths. This is what our wise party, the leader and organiser of our victories, counted on. They were shot, of course, after an unsuccessful battle as well. Hence the combat capability of our valiant troops. [...]

The actions of the barrier troops are understandable in conditions of general discord, panic and flight, as there was, for example, at Stalingrad, at the beginning of the battle. There, with the help of cruelty, it was possible to restore order. Even then, it is difficult to justify this cruelty. But to resort to it at the end of the war before the surrender of the enemy! What monstrous stupidity that was!"

# Rzhev War Memorial

## The 'hushing-up' of history

### Classroom-based Learning Activity

During the lesson, students will be asked to study Soviet-era historical primary sources about the Battle of Rzhev. In doing so, they will conclude that this battle is comparable in importance – i.e. the number of human and material losses – to other battles of the Great Patriotic War (World War II), e.g. Stalingrad or Kursk. At the same time, students will see that this large battle was unfairly ‘forgotten’ by the Soviet state. In the course of further discussions with the teacher, students will give possible reasons for the concealment of historical facts, as well as the consequences of these actions. As a post-lesson homework assignment, teachers may ask the students to conduct research on similar silenced facts in the history of World War II and offer ideas on how to avoid this in the future.

Author

Anna Cherepova, history teacher,  
Moscow, Russia

Age

15+

Approximate  
Time

90 minutes

Key question

How and why are historical events hushed up, who is responsible, and is it possible to avoid this in the future?



# Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Learn what distorting and concealing historical facts means or signifies.
- Train their analytical and critical thinking skills.
- Understand why it is important to remember and discuss certain historical events that may be unpleasant for a nation or country.
- Use empathy to learn who suffers from the concealment of facts.
- Discuss their opinion about the importance of opening memorial sites in the future.

## Pedagogical recommendations

Students should have experience working with historical sources and know the specifics of how to examine them. It is important to explain to students that it is necessary not only to read the text itself, but also to bear in mind the author of the source, their background and goals, and when the source was created. Students should be able critically to evaluate facts and opinions presented in the text.

## Activities

Before the lesson, students receive a handout that describes the history of the commemoration of the Battle of Rzhev. The text provides a brief overview of some historical memoirs on this battle (see Appendix I).

### Stage 1

Introduction

10 minutes

The lesson begins with a discussion of the memorial site. Students describe its appearance and symbolism, using the above image. The teacher informs them that this monument is dedicated to the Battle of Rzhev. It was installed only in 2020 at the request of veterans. The teacher facilitates a discussion on why some memorial sites were established in Soviet times by the state itself, and others only now. Students offer their own opinions. Then, the teacher announces the topic of the lesson: the concealment of facts in history.

### Stage 2

Group work with sources

20 minutes

Students are divided into 3 groups and work with historical sources. Each group studies a separate issue about the Battle of Rzhev. The first part of the work is the study of the memoirs of a Soviet officer, a participant in the Battle of Rzhev (see Appendix II). Each group receives

a different extract from the same source. After studying the sections of the document, the groups present their results to each other. Students should write down keywords on a piece of paper so that each group has the answers of other groups in front of them visually. These keywords can be placed on the board so that all groups working with other passages from this source have a general idea of the reasons for hushing up the Battle of Rzhev. After that, the students draw conclusions about the scale of the battle to further understand why the Soviet government chose to hide its results.

### Stage 3

Comparison of statistical data

15 minutes

Calculating the exact number of those killed not only in the Battle of Rzhev, but also in World War II as a whole, is a very difficult task. In pairs, students should imagine what difficulties researchers can face when calculating losses, compare the statistics of human losses in the largest battles of World War II, and conclude what place Rzhev occupies in the history of the war (see Appendix III).

### Stage 4

Study of an interview about the memorial

25 minutes

Students should read the extracts from an interview about the Rzhev War Memorial with Svetlana Gerasimova, a historian (see Appendix IV). While reading the interview, they should think about the following questions:

- 1 According to Gerasimova, what were the goals of the Rzhev operations? Compare them with those you learned about from Source 1.
- 2 Were these objectives achieved?
- 3 What reasons does Gerasimova give for the deliberate silence concerning this battle?

### Stage 5

Final discussion

20 minutes

As a class, discuss the following questions:

- 1 Why can some facts in history be evaluated in different ways?
- 2 Why are some facts distorted or concealed?
- 3 Who suffers from it?

Finally, return to the image of the memorial site. The teacher asks: why is it necessary to erect memorial sites? What function(s) do they have?

**Memorial to the Soviet  
Soldier, Rzhev, Russia,  
2020**

Photo: Korobtsov, Andrei,  
CC BY 4.0, Wikimedia  
Commons, File:Ржевский\_  
мемориал\_30.06.2020.jpg



**Optional post-lesson homework activities:**

- 1 Students can be invited to do research and look into the history of World War II for other examples of how facts were suppressed. The teacher may ask students to figure out, in the course of their research at home, who benefited from the suppression and why, as well as who suffered from it. The teacher can also invite students to discuss how to prevent the hushing up of events in the future.
- 2 More advanced students can be invited to conduct research on the historical memory of their country's wars. The task is to read a history textbook about any war, and to conclude how the information about this war is presented in the national narrative – as a tragic, shameful, or heroic event? Why does national historical memory mostly deal with the heroic side of history, rather than the uglier side?



# Assessment

As the activities in the classroom assume the active involvement of students in the performance of tasks, the teacher can evaluate the involvement of students, the accuracy of the answers given from their work with the documents, and the reliability of quotations.

The teacher can evaluate homework according to the following criteria:

- Accuracy of the facts given.
- Variety of historical documents that students use.
- Reasonableness and validity of the conclusions that students make in their research.

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## Glossary

Army Group Centre (German: *Heeresgruppe Mitte*) – one of two distinct German strategic army groups that fought on the Eastern Front in World War II.

Bridgehead – a strategically important area of ground around the end of a bridge or other place of possible crossing over a body of water.

Offensive operation – a military operation taking the form of an advance by armed troops with the aim of occupying territory, gaining an objective or achieving some larger strategic, operational, or tactical goal. Another term for an offensive often used by the media is ‘invasion’, or the more general ‘attack’.

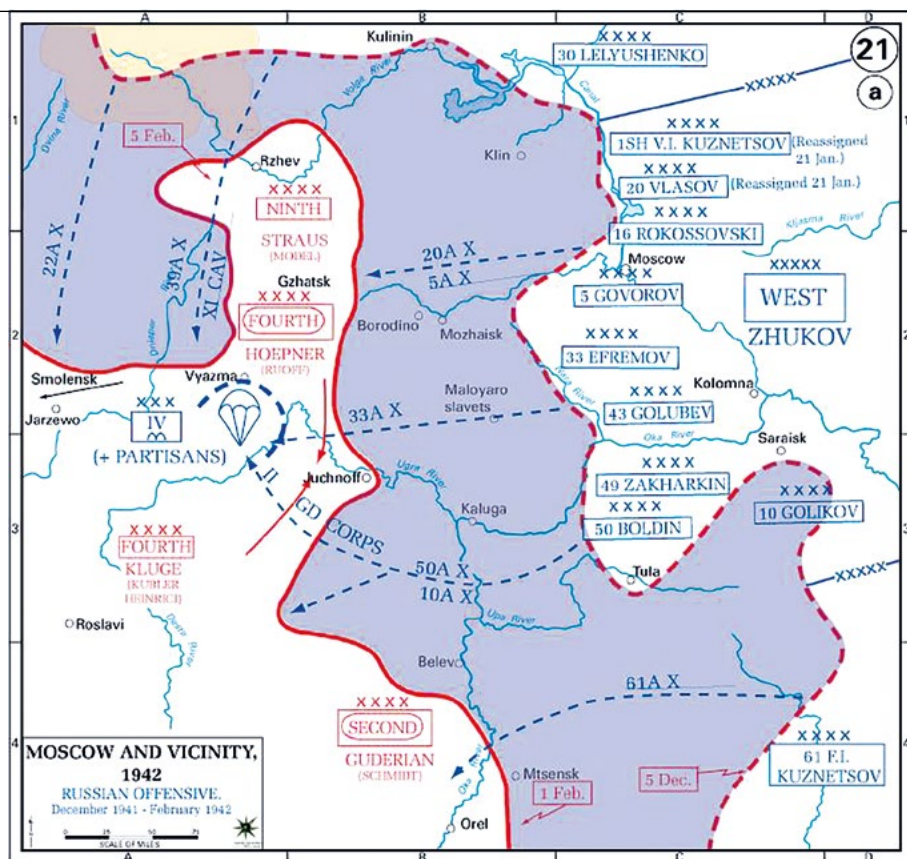
Salient – a battlefield feature that projects into enemy territory, also known as a bulge. As the salient is surrounded by the enemy on multiple sides, the occupying troops are vulnerable. See the location of Rzhev in the image below for a visual example of a salient.

Supreme Command – is the top-level operational command of the armed forces of a state (or coalition of states), usually in wartime and sometimes in peacetime. In the USSR during World War II Josef Stalin was the head of the Supreme Command.

Wehrmacht – the armed forces of Nazi Germany between 1935 and 1945.

## Map of the Battle of Rzhev, 1941-42

Photo: History Department of the United States Military Academy, Public domain, Wikimedia Commons, File:Rzhev\_salient\_1941-1942.jpg



# Preparatory handout for students

Please read the text below about the Battle of Rzhev and the collective memory about it. While reading, please think about the following questions:

- 1 How has the attitude of Russian officials and historians towards the Battle of Rzhev changed over time?
- 2 In your opinion, what consequences might hushing up the story of defeats and failures lead to?
- 3 Do you think citizens of a society are able to influence official authorities not to hush up or distort historical events?

The Battle of Rzhev was a military confrontation between Soviet and German troops during the Great Patriotic War. It took place in the area of the Rzhev-Vyazma salient from 5 January 1942 to 21 March 1943. The confrontation included four offensive operations by Soviet troops aimed at defeating the main forces of the Army Group Centre, liberating the cities of Rzhev, Sychevka, and Vyazma, and thereby clearing the Rzhev-Vyazma salient. It ended with the retreat of the Wehrmacht on 5 March 1943.

In official Soviet historiography, the events of 1942-1943 on the Rzhev-Vyazma salient were not considered as a whole, and even more so were not qualified as a battle. There was no description of the battle in the Soviet Military Encyclopaedia, in the six-volume History of the Great Patriotic War, or in other official publications of the Soviet period.

In the modern Russian period, the term 'Battle of Rzhev' was introduced into historiography by the independent Russian historian S. A. Gerasimova, and others. Over time, the validity of this conclusion (that the activity around the salient should be recognised as the 'Battle of Rzhev') was recognised at an official level, and therefore in the Great Russian Encyclopaedia the battles of Rzhev 1942-1943 are considered as a series of interrelated Soviet offensive operations. A direct appeal has already been published in the official journal *Russian Military Review*: "The restoration of historical truth requires the introduction of the concept of the Battle of Rzhev into use by scholars, putting it on a par with such fateful battles of the Great Patriotic War as the Battle for Moscow, the Battle for Leningrad, and the Battle for the Caucasus."

The events in the area of the Rzhev-Vyazma bridgehead were not glorious for the Soviet side: for a long time, a large German army group was situated near the state's capital. All attempts by the Supreme Command to eliminate it, despite heavy losses, ended in failure, and, as a result, the commander of the Western Front, I.S. Konev, was removed from office. After the war, the country's leadership tried to 'forget' about these events.

Source: Adapted from 'Battles of Rzhev', *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battles\\_of\\_Rzhev](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battles_of_Rzhev), accessed 14 November 2022.

# Memoirs of Soviet officer Pyotr Mikhin about the Battle of Rzhev

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## Group 1

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Read the following excerpt from the memoirs of Pyotr Mikhin, a Soviet officer who fought at the Battle of Rzhev. How does the author characterise this battle? Underline the keywords that support your answer.

“For three years at the front, I had to participate in many battles, but again and again my painful memories bring me back to the Battle of Rzhev. It’s scary to remember how many people died there! The Battle of Rzhev was a massacre, and Rzhev itself was the centre of this massacre. I didn’t see anything like it again during the whole war. And for me, as for many of my fellow soldiers, it was also a harsh lesson in the school of war... My story about the battles in and around Rzhev only slightly exposes the submerged part of the iceberg that is the Rzhev tragedy. This is just what I have seen and experienced myself. [...]

More than sixty years have passed since the end of the Battle of Rzhev. But despite its grandiosity, which was not inferior in scale to either the battles of Stalingrad or Kursk, few people know about it. Only a veteran who was in that meat grinder will never forget it.”

Read the following excerpt from the memoirs of Pyotr Milkhin, a Soviet officer who fought at the Battle of Rzhev and explain the importance of the battle. Support your answer with quotes and words from the text.

“The Rzhev salient along the front was 530 km long, going 160km beyond the town of Vyazma. And it was only 150km away from Moscow. Both Stalin and Hitler were aware of the importance of this bridgehead, and therefore the former sought to eliminate it at all costs, the latter to keep hold of it at any cost. The following facts speak about the constant interest that both Hitler and Stalin showed in the battles for Rzhev. When his troops left Rzhev, Hitler wanted to hear about the blowing up of the bridge over the Volga on the phone. And Stalin, who had never gone to the front, could not resist visiting Rzhev on 4 August 1943, six months after the fighting ended. It was there that he signed the order for the first salute in honour of the liberation of Oryol and Belgorod.

The battles near Rzhev were led by outstanding military leaders from our side: Marshals Stalin, Zhukov, Konev, Vasilevsky, Sokolovsky. But Rzhev was never taken.

The Germans referred to Rzhev in different ways: ‘the key to Moscow’, ‘a pistol aimed at the chest of Moscow’, ‘a springboard for jumping to Moscow’. And they fought furiously to take it.”

Read the following excerpt from the memoirs of Pyotr Mikhin, a Soviet officer who fought at the Battle of Rzhev. How does the author explain that information about the Battle of Rzhev was hushed up? Support your answer with quotes from the text.

“As a result of the clearance of the Rzhev-Vyazma salient, the threat to Moscow was finally removed. But the fact that Rzhev was not taken by us either in January, as Stalin ordered, or in August 1942, and was abandoned by the Germans only in March 1943, did not do honour to our command. That’s why the commanders who fought there were so shamefully silent about the Rzhev battles. This silence nullified the heroic efforts, inhuman sufferings, courage, and self-sacrifice of the millions of Soviet soldiers who fought at Rzhev; it was a betrayal of, and an outrage to, the memory of almost a million dead, the remains of whom, for the most part, have not yet been buried – that, it seems, is not particularly important.

The Battle for Rzhev is the most tragic, the bloodiest, and the most unsuccessful of all the battles conducted by our army. And we don’t usually write about failures. But after all, a long war cannot consist of victories alone. Isn’t the tragedy of millions more important than the dubious honour of even the most high-ranking uniform?! And patriotic education will not suffer if we point out the heroism and tragedy of soldiers who laid down their lives for the sake of victory in failed military operations.”

Source: Mikhin, P. A.  
(2006). *Артиллеристы,  
Сталин дал приказ!*  
[Gunners, Stalin gave the  
order!], Yauza: Moscow.

# Statistical data of World War II battles: losses of USSR armed forces

	Total number of troops at the beginning of the operation	Human losses in the operation			
		Irrecoverable losses	Medical losses	Total losses	Daily average
<u>Rzhev-Vyazma Strategic Offensive Operation</u> 8 January 1942 - 31 March 1943	1 059 200	272 320	504 569	776 889	7 543
<u>Stalingrad Strategic Offensive Operation</u> 19 November 1942 - 2 February 1943	1 143 500	154 885	330 892	485 777	6 392
<u>Kursk Strategic Defensive Operation</u> 5 - 23 July 1943	1 272 700	70 330	107 517	177 847	9 360
<u>Oryol Strategic Offensive Operation “Kutuzov”</u> 12 July - 18 August 1943	1 287 600	112 529	317 361	429 890	11 313

Krivosheev, G. F. (ed.) (1993). *Потери Вооруженных Сил СССР В Войнах, Боевых Действиях И Военных Конфликтах* [Losses of the armed forces of the USSR in wars, hostilities, and military conflicts], Военное Издательство: Moscow, p. 176.

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# Extract from an interview with historian Svetlana Gerasimova

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"The construction of the Rzhev Memorial to the Soviet Soldier near the village of Khoroshevo in the Tver region spurred public interest in the events which took place during the Great Patriotic War in 1942-1943 near Rzhev. The goal was to defeat the troops of Army Group Centre, which posed a real danger to the capital of the USSR, Moscow. The task of ensuring the safety of Moscow, set in January 1942, was only partially achieved by March 1943. The battle's territorial scope along the front is impressive – from 600-700 km in early 1942 to 530 km in March 1943. In other words, the Battle of Rzhev was not for one city, rather an important German bridgehead was eliminated. In Soviet times, the events in the area of the Rzhev-Vyazma salient were partially covered up. In our time, official military-historical scholarship shows the military operations on the central sector of the Soviet-German front from January 1942 to March 1943 only in fragments. This can be explained by the fact that the operations of the Soviet troops, despite all their heavy losses in manpower, did not fully achieve their goals. It was not possible to finally defeat the troops of Army Group Centre at the Rzhev-Vyazma bridgehead, so the Soviet command considered these operations unsuccessful. Yes, the Germans eventually left the area, or rather, were withdrawn by the Wehrmacht command. The hushing up of these operations might also be explained by the fact that the troops in these operations were commanded by the most famous commanders of the Great Patriotic War – Zhukov and Konev."

Source: Bushev, A. (2019). 'Историк раскрыла малоизвестные страницы Ржевской битвы' [Historian reveals the little-known pages of the Battle of Rzhev], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 19 June, <https://rg.ru/2019/06/19/reg-cfo/istorik-rasskryla-maloizvestnye-stranicy-rzhevskoj-bitvy.html>, accessed 18 January 2023.





# Instructions for visiting memorial sites

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Marcus Chavasse  
Anna Skiendziel

When visiting a memorial site with students, it is important to consider behavioural norms and specific rules that might apply to the site. Appropriate behaviour is important not only to avoid disturbing other potential visitors, but also to show correct respect for the site and the people it commemorates. It is also advisable to inform students whether there is anything specific they need to bring, e.g. sturdy shoes and sensible clothes. To avoid any kind of confrontation, the explanation should be done before arriving at the site, either in the classroom or on the way there (if travelling by bus, for example).

Naturally, different types of memorial site require different kinds of preparation. This short chapter gives a general overview of things that should be considered when preparing a visit. We leave it up to the discretion of the teacher to decide which points apply to a given visit.

## Memorial sites as places of reflection and respect: how to behave

It can be a good idea to ask students before the visit how they think they should behave there. This question is a good starting point for a discussion about behaviour and any official regulations at the site, while giving students the initiative in the discussion. The following points may not be official rules, but they are important behavioural aspects that need to be discussed.

Many sites exist to commemorate the dead, for example war memorials, concentration camps, or simple plaques dedicated to individuals, such as the Stumbling Stones. It is a general rule of thumb that the correct way to pay respect at these places is to remain silent in private reflection.

Depending on age and personality, many school-age students might find this difficult, but they should be made aware of the expectation. For the same reason, students should refrain from running and playing at such memorial sites; they should respect all parts of the monument and stick to marked paths where necessary. A memorial site is not the same as a park, even if it sometimes may look like one. A useful comparison is to use the example of a graveyard: how would the students behave there?

Students should be informed that there are times and places to ask questions, and that these moments are not always during the visit. Depending on the pedagogical recommendations, the best time to ask questions might be during the journey back from the memorial site, back in the classroom, or it may be appropriate for questions to be asked throughout the visit. The teacher should make these boundaries clear in advance.

It is likely that there will be other groups or visitors at the memorial site during the visit. Students should not only respect the site itself, but also other visitors. This includes keeping quiet and not disturbing others, sticking together or with the group, listening to and following the guide, and showing a respectful attitude. Bear in mind that people could be paying personal respects to relatives, for example.

## Official rules and regulations

Most memorial sites have their own rules and regulations, which should also be followed. It is the responsibility of the teacher to be aware of these and inform the class before the visit. See below an exercise that can be used to help students think about what kind of rules might be in place and, more importantly, why these rules exist. Such rules could concern,  
for example:

- Wearing appropriate clothing – for the weather, but also for the culture or religion
- Taking photos
- Using mobile phones
- The size of luggage allowed
- Eating or drinking
- Listening to music
- Riding a bicycle

## Things to remember: a final checklist

For the organiser of a visit, there are also a number of formalities that must be considered when planning, for example:

- Is the site inside or outside?
- Is the site public or private?
- Do you have to make an appointment to visit?
- Is the site free or do tickets need to be bought?
- How long will the visit take, including travel time?
- Is it mandatory to have a guide?
- From what age is it appropriate to visit the site?
- Is the site accessible to disabled people?
- Are there any documents that need to be brought?

Think about these requirements before planning a visit to make sure everything goes smoothly. Of course, a visit to a memorial site can be an overwhelming experience and cause unpredictable reactions amongst students. Throughout all of the preparatory stages, the organiser should remain calm and give students a sense of comfort. Planning everything well can ensure a stress-free experience for all involved.

## Understanding rules: a short exercise

The following short exercise (15-20 minutes) can be used in preparation for a visit to a place where rules and regulations are in place. It is designed for students to understand why such rules exist.

- 1 In pairs, students should come up with 5 rules that they might expect to be in place at the memorial site they will visit.
- 2 Then, each pair teams up with another pair (using the snowball method), compares answers and compiles a list of 5 rules that they all agree upon.
- 3 After each group has 5 rules, they should then look at each rule in turn and add “because...” after it, e.g. “Don’t interrupt the guide, because...”. Thinking about why a rule is in place will help them to understand the necessity of following it.
- 4 Finally, each group chooses a representative who reads the group’s set of rules to the class.

In this exercise, the word ‘respect’ is likely to appear a lot. If there is time, a short discussion about the meaning of respect could be held, i.e. who is being respected and why.

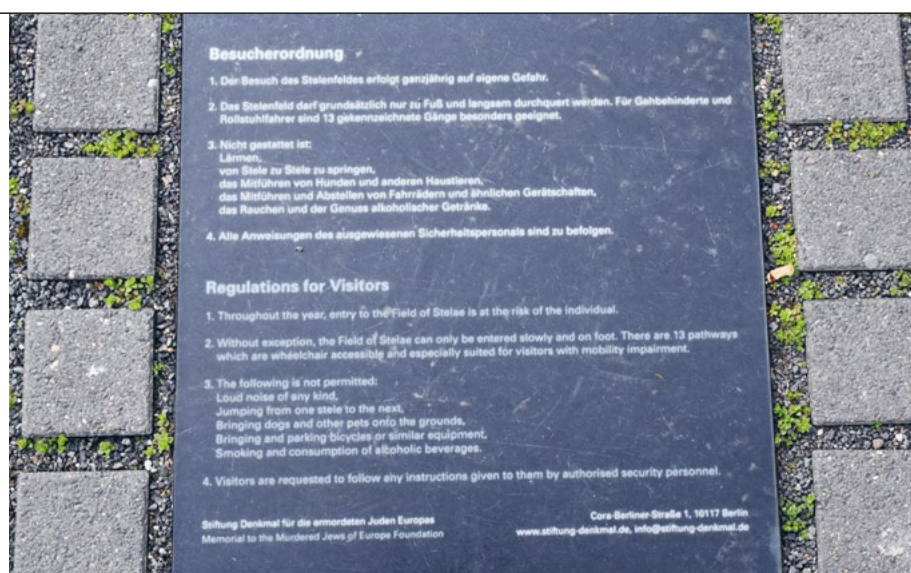
**A sign asking for silence and respect at Arlington Cemetery, Virginia, USA**

Photo © Arlington Cemetery, all rights reserved



**An example of site regulations, taken at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, Germany.**

Photo: Vasyatka1, CC CA-BY 4.0, Wikimedia Commons, [File:Memorial\\_to\\_the\\_Murdered\\_Jews\\_of\\_Europe\\_-\\_Regulations\\_for\\_Visitors.jpg](#)



**An example of site regulations at Auschwitz-Birkenau**

Białecka, A., Oleksy, K., Regard, F. & Trojański, P. (eds.) (2010). *European pack for visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum: Guidelines for teachers and educators*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, [https://auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/auschwitz/inne/european\\_pack\\_for\\_visiting\\_auschwitz.pdf](https://auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/auschwitz/inne/european_pack_for_visiting_auschwitz.pdf), accessed 13 February 2023.





# List of similar memorial sites

Marcus Chavasse

The following is an incomplete list of European World War II memorial sites that can be used together with the methodologies presented in the Learning Activities section of this guide. It is intended a) to provide concrete examples that can be used in an educational setting, and b) to serve as inspiration for educators to think of memorial sites in their respective environment that can be visited and/or studied in a classroom setting.

Alongside basic information about the memorial site, this appendix provides suggestions about how the memorial could be taught or incorporated into a lesson.

This list of memorial sites follows the categories outlined in the Learning Activities:

## Official memorials of military campaigns

See Serpeni Bridgehead Memorial, Rzhev War Memorial, Pavlov's House and Gerhard's Mill

## Official memorials of victims

See Concentration / Extermination Camps, Chişinău Ghetto, Monument to the Katyń Massacre

## Museums dedicated to historical events

See Museum Berlin-Karlshorst

## Unofficial memorials / private initiatives

See Stumbling Stones



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# Official Memorials to Military Action

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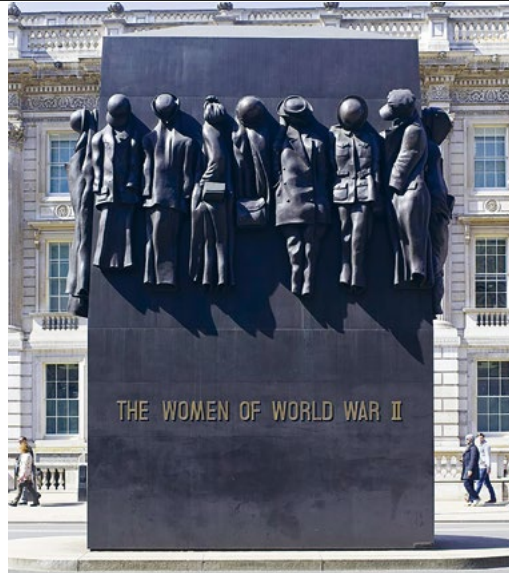
# Monument to the Women of World War II

London, UK, 2005

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**Monument to the Women of World War II, London, England, 2014**

Photo: Shiva, Andrew, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons, [File:UK-2014-London-Monument\\_to\\_the\\_Women\\_of\\_World\\_War\\_II\\_\(1\).jpg](#)



Occupying a symbolic place near Downing Street in London, this is one of the very few war memorials dedicated specifically to women in the UK and wider Europe. Different clothes symbolise the many different jobs and roles taken on by women during the war, including farming, nursing, factory work, and working in the Royal Navy.

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## Suggestion for teachers

→ The vital role of women during World War II in all countries is a topic that can be under-represented in classrooms. Accordingly,

‘herstory’ – as opposed to history – is becoming more popular in history education. This monument could be used as a starting point for a

discussion on lesser-known aspects of World War II, or on personal/local history featuring specific women known to the students.

# National Memorial to the Winter War

Helsinki, Finland, 2017

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**National Memorial to the Winter War, Helsinki, Finland, 2017**

Photo: Kastemaa, Heikki, CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia Commons, File:[Pekka\\_Kauhanen\\_Bringer\\_of\\_Light\\_2017.jpg](#)

The First Soviet-Finnish War, also known as the Winter War, began after the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939. Inside the memorial, which represents a weakened but still standing Finland, are 105 photographs which show various aspects of the 105-day war, including the importance of international aid, the contribution of women, and the effects of the conflict on daily life.

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## Suggestions for teachers

→ This memorial can be used to study the continuous importance of the memory of World War II, and the particular memory context that we are living in right now. Inaugurated in 2017, it is a very recent monument that raises interesting questions for further discussion: why was such a monument only established in 2017? How

does it differ from earlier monuments? How does this memorial commemorate different aspects of the war? What impact does our current society and/or government have on the development of such a monument?

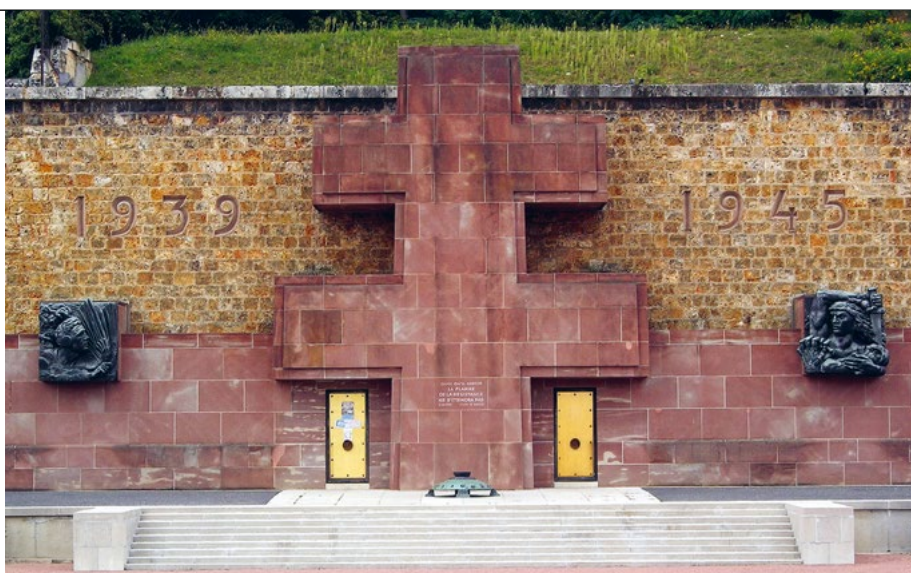
→ Each European country has one or more official memorials to World War II illustrating a specific national historical memory (at a given time). An interesting exercise could be to compare different national monuments in the same country and see what they say about the changing memory culture of a place.

# Mémorial de la France combattante

Paris, France, 2006

**Mémorial de la France combattante, Paris, France, 2006**

Photo: CaptainHaddock, CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia Commons, [File:Mont-Valerien\\_croix\\_de\\_Lorraine.jpg](#)



This is the most important memorial to French soldiers who fought in World War II. It is situated at the site of a mediaeval fort, repurposed by the Germans during World War II as an execution site. 17 people are symbolically buried at the site: fighters from France, Senegal, Morocco, Tunisia, and the French Pacific islands, as well as members of the French Resistance and POWs. There are also 16 relief sculptures symbolising different aspects and stages of the war.

## Suggestions for teachers

→ This monument evokes the global scale of World War II, which could be quite overwhelming. A targeted photo quest or monument observation sheet (see Learning Activity: Şerpeni Bridgehead Memorial) could help to focus

students' attention when visiting such a site.

→ This monument highlights the contribution of non-Europeans during World War II. On all sides, colonial soldiers were fighting: Indian

soldiers in the British Army; Central Asian soldiers in the Red Army; etc. This can help students understand the extent of the war and also its contemporary importance in other countries.

# Brest Fortress Memorial Complex

Brest, Belarus, 1971

**‘Courage’ sculpture at the Brest Fortress Memorial Complex. Brest, Belarus, 2014**

Photo: Alexxx1979, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons, [File:Brest\\_Fortress\\_Monument\\_Courage\\_9132\\_2150.jpg](#)



In 1941, German forces attacked the Brest Fortress, taking the Soviet defenders by surprise. A siege ensued, and after several days the Nazis took control of the fortress, which became an important symbol of resistance in the Soviet Union. The memorial complex features huge statues, including the ‘Courage’ sculpture (pictured), an eternal flame, a museum, and an obelisk in the shape of a bayonet.

## Suggestions for teachers

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>→ This monument complex is large and could be overwhelming. A targeted photo quest or monument observation sheet (see Learning Activity: Şerpeni Bridgehead Memorial) could help to focus students’ attention when visiting such a site.</p> <p>→ Because the Soviets were defeated here, Soviet</p> | <p>historians and academics largely ignored the topic until recently. See Learning Activities: Rzhev War Memorial and Monument to the Katyn massacre for similar stories of historical events being kept quiet.</p> <p>→ In 2014, the ‘Courage’ sculpture was awarded the title of ‘world’s ugliest mon-</p> | <p>ument’ by CNN, who subsequently apologised after outrage in Russia and Belarus. Studying contemporary attitudes to monuments can be as interesting as studying the history and the monuments themselves. See Learning Activity: Şerpeni Bridgehead Memorial for questions to use about the contemporary relevance of monuments.</p> |
|---|--|--|

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# Official Memorials to Casualties

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# Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center

Kyiv, Ukraine, 2016

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**Monument to Jewish victims of Nazi massacres at the Babyn Yar Memorial Complex, Kyiv, Ukraine, 2015**

Photo: Prymasal, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons, File:Комплекс\_пам'яток\_в\_урочищі\_Бабин\_Яр\_Київ\_Дорогожицька\_вул.,\_вул. jpg



This memorial centre is part of a wider complex situated on the site of several Nazi massacres of Jews during World War II. Primarily a Holocaust memorial, the complex also contains other memorials to the Holodomor, the Kurenivka mudslide of 1961, and more recently the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In 2022, the monument was damaged by Russian attacks.

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## Suggestions for teachers

→ This monument complex is large and could be overwhelming. A targeted photo quest or monument observation sheet (see Learning Activity: Serpeni Bridgehead Memorial) could help to focus students' attention when visiting such a site.

→ The memorial site has a long and interesting history. It could be incorporated into a lesson about 'covering up' history (see Learning Activity: Rzhev War Memorial) as the Soviet Union discouraged placing specific emphasis on the Jews murdered here.

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# Local monuments to victims of war

Pan-European

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**Memorial to fallen soldiers in World War I and World War II, Otley, England, 2017**

Photo © Mike Coyle / Imperial War Museum, all rights reserved



Often small and unassuming, consisting of a cross and a plaque with names, such monuments exist all over Europe: they are not large national monuments meant for ‘everyone’, but rather smaller monuments dedicated to the soldiers from a specific town or village who died during the World Wars. There is one in almost every village, town, and city in Europe. This fact alone points towards the enormous scale and wide-reaching consequences of World War I and II.

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## Suggestion for teachers

→ There are many advantages to studying such monuments, not least to learn more about one’s local history, and the fact that they can easily be visited. To enhance the study of local

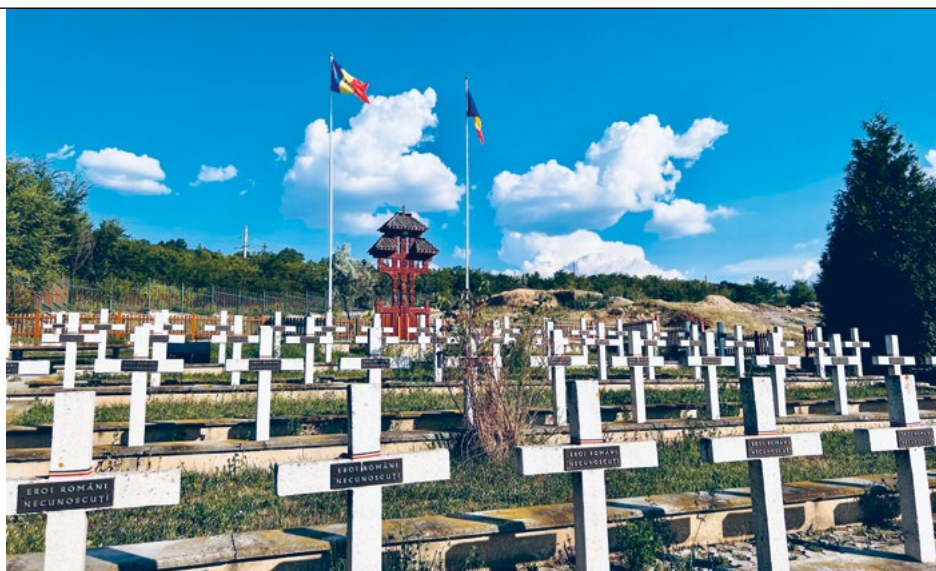
history, students could be asked to research a) the construction and/or renovation of the monument, how this was reported, and whether this changed over time, or b) the ceremonies that are held at

the monument and compare them with ceremonies held at larger, national monuments: what are the similarities and differences?



# Țiganca Cemetery to Romanian Soldiers

Țiganca, Moldova, 2010



Țiganca Cemetery to Romanian Soldiers, Moldova, 2022

Photo © Kristina Smolijaninovaite, all rights reserved

In this cemetery, Romanian soldiers are buried on the territory of modern-day Moldova. During the Jassy-Kishinev offensives of 1944 (see Learning Activity: Șerpeni Bridgehead Memorial), the Romanian Army switched sides from the Axis to the Allied powers. This led to Romanian soldiers being largely ignored in the post-war historical memory by both sides. The opening of this cemetery was an important step in coming to terms with the trauma.

## Suggestions for teachers

→ There were numerous theatres of war during World War II, and enemy soldiers fell on different territories. Across Europe, there are cemeteries for enemy soldiers. A key question is who should take care of such sites? In Russia, for example, local initiatives are key in their upkeep, whereas the

German Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge is an organisation responsible for the upkeep of German war graves in Europe and North Africa. This memorial site can start an interesting discussion about memorials today, their use and usefulness.

→ Historians have claimed that the Jassy-Kishinev offensives, particularly the first, were almost completely ignored by Soviet archival records and historiography. See Learning Activity: Rzhev War Memorial for another example of this, and methodologies on how to teach it.

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# Pinkas Synagogue

Prague, Czech Republic, 1960

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**Pinkas Synagogue**  
interior, Prague, Czech  
Republic

Photo courtesy World  
Monuments Fund



This is the second-oldest surviving synagogue in Prague. The names of around 78,000 Czech Jews who died during the Holocaust are written on the walls, and there is an exhibition of children's drawings from the Theresienstadt ghetto. Today, the synagogue is administered by the Jewish Museum in Prague. During the war, although the Nazis took over administration of the museum, many items were considered works of art and were not destroyed.

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## Suggestion for teachers

→ Allegedly, the Nazis planned to preserve this synagogue and accompanying cemetery to serve as a monument to a people that they had

destroyed completely. The synagogue could serve as a starting point for a meta-discussion about monuments and what could and should be memorialised.

# Victims of Iași Pogrom Monument

Iași, Romania, 2011

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Victims of Iași Pogrom  
Monument, Iași,  
Romania, 2017

Photo ©  
GlobetrottingViking /  
Tripadvisor, all rights  
reserved



This monument commemorates the Romanian and Bessarabian Jews killed in the summer of 1941. It was one of the worst pogroms of World War II: over a third of the Jewish population of the city was killed. A monument has existed on the site since 1976. In 2011, it was rebuilt with a new monument and plaque; the previous plaque made no specific reference to Jews, simply to “victims of the fascist pogrom”.

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## Suggestion for teachers

→ See Learning Activity:  
Monument to the Victims of  
the Chișinău Ghetto for both  
an overview of the Jewish

history of the region and  
methodologies that could be  
applied to this memorial, and  
memorials like it.



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# Projekt Riese Tunnel System

Walim, Poland,

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**View of the tunnels in  
Projekt Riese, Walim,  
Poland, 2006**

Photo: Przykuta, CC BY-SA  
3.0, Wikimedia Commons,  
[File:Riese\\_Rzeczka\\_  
korytarz\\_344.jpg](#)



Projekt Riese was a large-scale Nazi construction project in Lower Silesia from 1943-45. Using forced labourers, POWs, and inmates from the nearby Gross-Rosen concentration camp, a series of underground tunnels were built. They are unfinished, and their purpose remains unclear. A memorial site was erected to commemorate the hundreds of forced labourers who died during the construction of the tunnels.

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## Suggestion for teachers

→ Projekt Riese is another often unexplored aspect of the war. It is important to remember that not everyone who died did so during the fighting or in concentration camps, but also through forced labour across the Third Reich and occupied territories.

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# Museums

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# Central Prisoner of War Museum

Łambinowice, Poland, 1964

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**Central Prisoner of War Museum, Łambinowice, Poland, 2011**

Photo: Julo, Public domain, Wikimedia Commons, File:Łambinowice,\_Centralne\_Muzeum\_Jeńców\_WojennychDział\_Oświatowo-WystawienniczyDział\_Zbiorów\_i\_Konserwacji\_-\_-fotopolska.eu\_(219114).jpg



This museum is part of a larger memorial complex in Łambinowice, and the site of a prisoner of war camp that has been used in every war since the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. Most famously, it was home to the infamous Stalag VIII-B camp during World War II and housed over 100,000 Polish POWs; after the war it was taken over by the Red Army and held around 10,000 German POWs, many of whom died of typhus and maltreatment.

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## Suggestion for teachers

→ Such a site can be useful not only when teaching World War II history, but general European (and local) history as well. It shows well how buildings and places are repurposed by different,

often conflicting, forces, and the problems this legacy can cause in the historical memory of a town or country. This is a good way to include multiperspectivity into history lessons (see also Learning

Activity: Museum Berlin-Karlshorst for activities that can be used at such locations).

# Hadamar Memorial Museum

Hadamar, Germany, 1983

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**Hadamar Memorial Museum**

Photo © Fotosammlung  
Gedenkstätte Hadamar,  
all rights reserved



This museum, situated on the site of the Hadamar Euthanasia Centre, is a memorial to the estimated 200,000 people who were murdered by the Nazis during Aktion T-4. These were mostly “undesirable” members of German society: those with mental or physical disabilities. Medical experiments and forced sterilisations were also carried out here as well as the murder of hundreds, if not thousands, of forced labourers from Poland and other countries.

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## Suggestions for teachers

→ Importantly, this memorial highlights that ordinary Germans did not escape the brutality of the Nazi regime. It can be used as a starting point when studying the range of victims who were killed as a result of National Socialism.

→ The memorial is situated in a hospital which is still operational and can be used when discussing the question of what a memorial site can be, or indeed what a memorial site can be used for in the present.



# National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War

Kyiv, Ukraine, 1986

**National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War, Kyiv, Ukraine, 2013**

Photo: Sarapulov, CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia Commons, File:Комплекс\_Українського\_державного\_музею\_Великої\_Вітчизняної\_війни\_05.jpg



One of the largest museums in Ukraine, the national museum is part of a complex featuring memorials to the defence of the Soviet border, the terrors of the Nazi occupation, the partisan struggle, the home front, and the 1943 Battle of the Dnipro. In 2015, the name was changed to remove the term 'Great Patriotic War' as part of a ban on Nazi and communist propaganda.

## Suggestions for teachers

→ A photo quest can be a good way to get students to take in the large area of the complex (see Learning Activity: Serpeni Bridgehead Memorial).

→ See Learning Activity: Museum Berlin-Karlshorst for methodologies on how to discover layers of history within a museum. A study of past exhibitions, if possible, can be an enlightening way

to find out the history and evolution of the memory culture of a certain place.



# German Resistance Memorial Centre

Berlin, Germany, 1980

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Courtyard in the Bendlerblock building, home of the German Resistance Memorial Centre, Berlin, Germany, 2006

Photo: Carr, Adam,  
Public domain,  
Wikimedia Commons,  
[File:Bendlerblock.jpg](#)



This memorial and museum is situated in the Bendlerblock in Berlin, the place where Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg and the other members of the plot to assassinate Hitler in 1944 were executed. Though there was no united ‘German resistance’, the museum commemorates various aspects of resistance under Nazi rule, from the Social Democrats and Communists, to the Catholic Church and White Rose movement.

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## Suggestions for teachers

→ This museum and aspect of history – resistance – can easily be de-anonymised: what actions did individual people take? This kind of subject can be used to teach empathy.

→ The topic of von Stauffenberg is a complex one and could invite some high-level discussion about the nature of compliance and resistance. He was a member of the Wehrmacht, so was complicit in the Nazi regime, but also resisted from within.

Similar ‘grey zones’ and controversies, and how to approach them, can also be found in Learning Activity: Rzhev War Memorial and Learning Activity: Monument to the Katyn Massacre.

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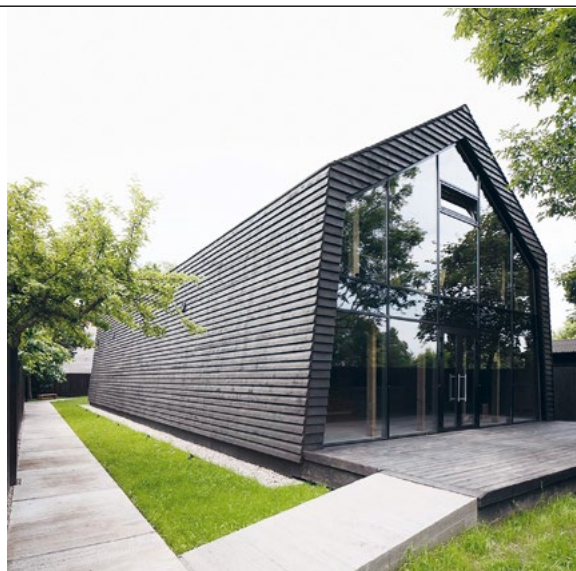
# Unofficial memorials & private initiatives

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# Žanis Lipke Memorial

Riga, Latvia, 2012

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**Žanis Lipke Memorial,  
Riga, Latvia, 2012**

Photo: Starks, Ansis, CC  
BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia  
Commons, File:Žaņa\_  
Lipkes\_memoriāls.jpg

This memorial was funded entirely by private donations and cost around €500,000. Žanis Lipke was a Latvian dock worker who rescued around 40 Latvian Jews by smuggling them out of the Riga ghetto. They were temporarily hidden in a bunker on his property, where the current memorial now stands. In 2012, the memorial was officially opened by the presidents of Latvia and Israel. Lipke has been honoured by Yad Vashem as one of the Righteous Among the Nations – non-Jews who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jewish lives.

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## Suggestion for teachers

→ This memorial began as a citizen-led project (see Learning Activity: Stumbling Stones). It could be used to highlight lesser-known	aspects of resistance to the Nazis, or personal/local history.
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# Last Address (Последний адрес)

Pan-European (mostly post-Soviet countries), from 2014

**Last Address plaque of  
Yeraterina Mikhailovna  
Zhelvatykh, Moscow,  
Russia, 2014**

Photo: Mlarisa, CC BY-SA  
4.0, Wikimedia Commons,  
[File:Zhelvatych\\_-\\_memo-  
ry\\_sign.jpg](#)



"Here lived Yeraterina Mikhailovna Zhelvatykh, typist, born in 1905, arrested 11/1/1938, executed 04/05/1938, rehabilitated in 1957"

This project, initiated by journalist Sergey Parkhomenko, is inspired by the Stumbling Stones project. Based on the motto "One name, one life, one sign", the project commemorates one person at a time based on the last place they lived before being deported or killed during repression. The first plaques were laid in Moscow in 2014. Since then, plaques have appeared in 48 cities in Russia, and similar projects have been started in the Czech Republic, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. As with the Stumbling Stones in Berlin, there is an overwhelmingly large concentration of plaques in Moscow and St Petersburg.

## Suggestion for teachers

→ Including this project, the Learning Activity: Stumbling Stones could be utilised in almost any European country. It can

be easily adapted to local circumstances, and a visit to a local plaque could be relatively easily organised. It is a good example of

de-anonymising history: taking the focus away from nameless statistics and bringing the focus back to 'normal' people.

# #everynamecounts

Arolsen Archives, online, since 2007



#everynamecounts  
promotional image

Photo © Arolsen Archives,  
all rights reserved

#everynamecounts is a project run by the Arolsen Archives, the International Centre on Nazi Persecution. The archive contains around 30 million documents relating to Nazi crimes, concentration camps, forced labour, and displaced persons. The project #everynamecounts aims to build a digital memorial to the victims of Nazi persecution so that future generations will be able to remember the victims' names and identities. It is a crowdsourcing initiative that relies on the participation of regular people to help digitise the archive.

## Suggestion for teachers

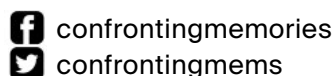
→ On the website of the Arolsen Archives, there is an introduction to the project in different languages, as well as suggestions and materials

on how to incorporate #everynamecounts into the classroom through engagement and participation.



# Your feedback

If you use our materials, we would love to hear from you! Your comments and feedback on the guide and other materials are very welcome. Contact us via: [info@confronting-memories.org](mailto:info@confronting-memories.org)



CSF e.V. / Secretariat  
Badstr. 44, 13357 Berlin, Germany  
Tel: +49 30 46 06 45 40  
[info@confronting-memories.org](mailto:info@confronting-memories.org)  
[www.confronting-memories.org](http://www.confronting-memories.org)

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Project lead  
Kristina Smolijaninovaitė

Pedagogical consultant  
Benny Christensen

Content editor  
Olivia Durand

Linguistic editor  
Richard Coombes

Technical editor  
Marcus Chavasse

Designer  
Laura Klimaitė-Lusa

Publisher  
CSF e.V.

CSF e.V. / Secretariat  
Badstr. 44, 13357 Berlin, Germany  
Tel: +49 30 46 06 45 40  
[info@confronting-memories.org](mailto:info@confronting-memories.org)  
[www.confronting-memories.org](http://www.confronting-memories.org)



# Museum Berlin-Karlshorst

Memorials in the past,  
present and future

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## Stumbling Stones

Examples of victim  
commemoration

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## Monument to the Victims of the Chişinău Ghetto

A forgotten page  
of history

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## Şerpeni Bridgehead Memorial

Perspectives on  
WWII war memorials

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## Concentration / Extermination Camps

Lessons from  
the camps,  
or learning about  
violations of basic  
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## Monument to the Katyn Massacre

Human rights,  
the distortion of  
history and the  
Katyn lie

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## Pavlov's House & Gerhard's Mill

Reminders of the  
devastating  
consequences of war

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## Rzhev War Memorial

The 'hushing-up'  
of history