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# Life in Plauen

What can we learn from the history of one city?

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## Key Question: What can we learn from the history of one city?

### Teaching Aims & Learning Objectives

- Develop knowledge and understanding of Jewish life in Europe before the war
- Analyse the experiences of Jews and non-Jews in a single city
- To reflect on what Plauen reveals about Germany before and after 1933

### Rationale

In the space of just four years the Nazi regime and its collaborators destroyed Jewish life and communities that had been present in some European countries for over 2000 years. Reflecting on this long history helps students to grasp the voids created by the genocide. However, research by the Centre for Holocaust Education indicates Jewish life before the Second World War is rarely taught in English secondary schools.

This lesson seeks to expand knowledge and understanding of Jewish life in Europe before the war through exploration of the city of Plauen. A city where the Jewish community enjoyed a long and rich history, the fortunes of Plauen's Jews from the late nineteenth century through the first decades of the twentieth provides a fascinating case study into Jewish and non-Jewish relations during this period and the complexities that arise from communities living alongside one another.

### Key Information

- The lesson is intended for Year 9 students and above. It is specifically devised for History classes, but elements can be adapted for RE and other subject specialisms.
- Timings are suggested on the basis of a one hour lesson, and may need adapting accordingly.
- Prior knowledge is not needed. However, do not underestimate the knowledge students may bring from other subject areas.
- You will need the accompanying PowerPoint, the Task cards, the Photo cards, and the Creating a complete picture card. You may also wish to provide students with sugar paper to construct their timeline.
- Pedagogical guidance to support teacher knowledge is included at the end of this lesson plan.
- The following lesson plans should be read and used in conjunction with information on the accompanying PowerPoint slides.

## Lesson Plan

### Introduction (5 minutes)

Begin by establishing what, if anything, students already know about pre-war Jewish life in Europe. From here, outline the lesson objectives and explain they will be focusing in this lesson on the experiences of one particular city by building up a historical picture of it in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Show students Slide 2 of the PowerPoint map, asking if they know the size and characteristics of the Jewish population in Germany prior to the Second World War. If necessary, ensure they know this was a very small percentage (less than 0.75% of the population were Jewish) and the Jews of Germany were much assimilated. End by identifying the location of Plauen and ensure students are aware of how national boundaries can change over time, effecting in some cases how communities see themselves.

### Finding out about the city and its people (15 mins)

Students could work individually or in small groups. Distribute Task Card 1: Creating a Timeline and Photo Cards 1-3. The task is to construct a chronology of events from 1870-1933 using the available information. Once complete students should evaluate and raise questions about the timeline. The purpose here is to position Plauen within its historical context and to reflect on a small reform Jewish community who are going about their everyday lives and planning for the future. As you collect students' thoughts you might ask:

- What historical events do they feel are missing? Why are they relevant?
- Can they draw any conclusions about how the First World War relates to the decline of the Jewish and non-Jewish population?
- How important is the changing political and economic situation for life in Plauen?
- What events on the timeline do they find peculiar? If not forthcoming, you should draw attention to the construction of the synagogue.

### Investigating the synagogue (10 mins)

Students should move to focus on the construction of the synagogue and why it was built. Hand out Task Card 2: The synagogue. Ask students to read through the card and have these questions in mind as you show them the PowerPoint of the synagogue. Be aware that the synagogue slides will play without needing you to click through them.

After playing the PowerPoint students could respond to the questions on the Task Card in small groups before opening up a whole class discussion. As you direct this conversation, remind students that although built by local Jewish people, this building was also used by

non-Jewish people in Plauen. It was paid for by selling a previous building in the centre of Plauen and by fundraising by Jews and non-Jews over a number of years. Encourage them to think about this Reform Jewish community as being made up of German citizens, and the fact that the synagogue was built on the edge of the town.

Ask students for their thoughts on the style of the building; the reactions might be extreme, ranging from either loving it or hating the architecture. Be sure discussion centres on the historical nature of the building and why it was built, rather than the religious aspects of the building (though these themes might be of interest too). To conclude, question why the Jewish community may have chosen such modern architecture, which stands out from the surrounding buildings.

### **Creating a full picture (10 mins)**

Explain to students the need to add further detail to their understanding of Plauen. Distribute Creating a Complete Picture – Further Information, and Task Card 3: Re-evaluating the evidence. Ask students to add this new contextual information to their timeline, and then summarise how this has developed their understanding of events Plauen. As you direct feedback, be sure students don't make the mistake of concluding the non-Jews of Plauen somehow "became" Nazis. Note the split of the electoral vote, and remind students that people did not necessarily vote for the NSDAP in 1933 simply because of the Party's antisemitism: this was the case with some, but for others it was more complex.

Suggest the synagogue was built by the community to show a commitment to Germany and that the Jewish community were loyal German citizens who played a role in the town. It was also meant to be a communal building. Remind students they have looked at a whole community, but ask them to identify what they feel they have missed so far. They have not of course learnt about any individuals.

### **The Klipstein and Dingfelder Families (15 mins)**

The final part of the lesson focuses on two families, the Klipsteins and the Dingfelders. Distribute Photo cards 4 and 5. Begin by asking students to consider how these images may differ to other Holocaust-related images they may be familiar with. Some information is given about the families on these cards, together with a web address where more details can be found. If students have internet access encourage them to use this link to explore the families further. Alternatively, use your interactive whiteboard to do so as a class and find out what happened to these people. You may find this activity also works as a homework exercise.

## Plenary (5mins)

To conclude, share Photo card 6. Suggest students return to their timeline and reflect on what they have learnt about the town of Plauen and its Jewish and non-Jewish population.

## Engaging all learners

If your students are especially responsive to individual stories you may decide to rearrange some of this lesson's activities. After completing the timeline you could ask students to focus on the individual lives of the Klipstein and Dingfelder families, before considering the building of the synagogue. Alternatively teachers may wish to start with the synagogue and then move backwards into the history of the town. Some of the cards have a substantial amount of text; accordingly, students with literacy difficulties might be paired with more confident readers, have the cards read to them, or reduced into shorter sections to be shared amongst the class. For extension work ask students to complete Task Card 4: Retelling what you have learnt. This could also be completed by all students as a homework exercise.

## Further information

This lesson introduces the important theme of pre-war Jewish life to students. Further material and more detailed support on teaching this theme is available on the Centre's CPD programme, particularly the lesson **Jewish life in Europe**. Teachers may also wish to make use of the lesson **The Gumprich & Voos families: German Jews and the Holocaust**.

## Additional Information

### Pedagogical guidance

The lesson's focus on one city allows students to more fully engage with a complex past. The city is not well known and was chosen for that very reason; for students to be able to reflect on the situation for small communities in large cities. But Plauen was also selected for the questions raised by the opening of its new community building and synagogue in 1930. If the economic conditions of the time mean some might consider such expenditure foolish, there is also the matter of growing support for the Nazi party in the area. The lesson aims to throw up some of the complexities of being an historian, that on the face of it things were going well for this community, but underneath the synagogue was built in part to show a commitment to Germany by its citizens in the face of political change and during a period of uncertainty.

In keeping with good pedagogical practice the lesson also looks at the stories of two families – the Klipsteins and the Dingfelders, both of whom lived in Plauen. Introducing these families to students gives them the opportunity to develop their research skills and find out what happened to them. Since the internet is a valuable tool but also a source of much pernicious material, student's usage is mediated by way of using reliable Holocaust related websites: namely, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem.

### Additional Plauen material:

The websites below provide useful additional resources to support the Plauen materials.

- [http://www.cad.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/synagogen/inter/start\\_de.html](http://www.cad.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/synagogen/inter/start_de.html)  
The website of Darmstadt University, showing eleven CAD recreated synagogues from across Germany.
- [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)  
The home page of Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority. From the home page is possible to search the 'Pages of Testimony' for individuals who perished in the Holocaust.
- [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)  
The home page of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The website contains much information about Jewish life in Germany before the war, as well as related photographs. There is also an online exhibition relating to the voyage of the ship the St Louis.

As indicated, further details on the Klipstein and Dingfelder families can be obtained by searching the USHMM website. For reference, here are further details about the respective families:

The Klipstein family managed to escape to Belgium, leaving behind Irma's parents. The family spent two and a half years working in the underground economy in Belgium before going into hiding in 1942. The family were denounced in 1943, but Ursula was not taken by the Gestapo as she was believed to be the child of a Dutch non-Jewish neighbour. Ursula spent the rest of the war in a convent, where half of the twenty five children were Jewish children in hiding. She was given the name Janine Hambenne. Her parents were taken to Malines Camp, but were not deported to a death camp as during a cultural evening at the camp Irma Klipstein read out a poem, her accent was recognised by the camp commandant as being from the same area of Germany he was from, and as a result did not deport Irma or her husband Leo.

The Dingfelder family also left Plauen. Martin the eldest son of Leopold emigrated to the USA in the 1930s. Leopold, wife Johanna and 15 year old Rudi boarded the ship the St Louis bound for Cuba. The ship was not allowed to dock and returned to Europe and ultimately the Dingfelders settled in Gouda, Netherlands. In 1942 Leopold and Johanna were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau where they were both murdered. Rudi was sent to various concentration camps, and was sent on a death march, where he and four others tried to escape. Of the five escapees three were shot, one died two days later and only Rudi survived. Rudi was found by Allied troops and returned to Gouda, he emigrated to the USA in 1946.

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The PowerPoint slide show images of Plauen synagogue are used with the kind permission of Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany.

Photograph of Dingfelder family butcher shop circa 1925 - USHMM collections #31765

[www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)

Photograph of Dingfelder family butcher shop circa 1925 - USHMM collections #46053

[www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)

Photograph of Ursula Klipstein 1937 - USHMM collections #99697 [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)

Page of testimony for Therese Wertheimer - Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust Remembrance Center: The Central Database of Shoah Victims' names <https://yvng.yadvashem.org/>

Photograph of the destruction of Plauen synagogue. Permission from The Vogtland Publishing House pending.

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