



Ordinary things?

How can the things owned by people in the past give us a different way of seeing their lives and times?

Key Question: How can the things owned by people in the past give us a different way of seeing their lives and times?

Teaching Aims & Learning Objectives

- To create an educational space for an 'authentic encounter' with the past
- To empower students to search for their own meaning in the past
- To explore and develop students' working historical knowledge and understanding

Rationale

To speak about the Holocaust is to relate a narrative of destruction: the destruction of men, women and children, but also the deliberate destruction of evidence of the crime. To the casual eye, many of the objects which survived this destruction may appear banal, since they are often 'ordinary', everyday things. This lesson shows how our interaction with authentic artefacts can actually create unique and profound learning opportunities.

By its nature the lesson lends itself to the beginning of a series of lessons on the Holocaust. As it is grounded in an evidential, historical approach to teaching and learning it is especially suitable for use in history classrooms. This does not preclude it being used in other subjects however. Moreover, its pedagogical principles and its aim of an authentic learning experience where students arrive at their own questions about the past, appreciate its complexity and struggle to make sense and meaning of what they have learnt, has broad application.

Key Information

- The lesson is intended for Year 9 students and above. It is devised for history classes, but elements can be adapted for other subject specialisms.
- Timings are suggested on the basis of a one hour lesson, and may need modifying accordingly.
- Prior knowledge is not needed. However, do not underestimate the knowledge and preconceptions your students may already have. Where appropriate, ensure this is explored, valued where it enriches the discussion, and – in the case of misconceptions, confusions and inaccuracies – addressed as required.
- For this lesson you will need the accompanying PowerPoint. Printed copies of Slide Two – the first image of the shoe – should be available to students for them to note their ideas and questions.
- The following lesson plan should be read and used in conjunction with guidance on the accompanying PowerPoint slides. Extensive support on guided questioning is also available in the additional information following the lesson plan.

Lesson Plan

Reading objects for meaning (10 minutes)

This starter activity does not require you to use the PowerPoint. Ask students to remove a shoe and pass it to a neighbour. Images of shoes or shoes from a drama department might be used as an alternative. Explain students need to imagine they have just discovered this shoe. Looking at it closely, what can they reasonably say about the shoe's owner?

You may need to guide them to reflect on issues relating to size or styling, but stress these deductions can only be tentative. The aim here is partly to increase students' familiarity with interrogating and interpreting an object. It is also to direct attention towards an object from their own lives; one which might help create a connection with the person they will encounter in the lesson.

What can be said about the owner of this shoe? (15 minutes)

It is important that students are not told yet that this shoe is connected with the Holocaust – the aim is to see how much can be deduced just by looking at the object itself.

Students discuss what can be said about the owner of the shoe by approaching it from multiple viewpoints. This will require you to proceed sequentially through the PowerPoint, and to employ guided questioning to help reveal information about the child who wore this shoe. Detailed, step-by-step guidance is available in the Additional Information section.

The enquiry should begin by asking students to say something about the owner of the shoe and give reasons for their deductions. This will create a space for you to say something about what it is to 'do history' – using sources as evidence of the past; asking questions of it, making inferences and deductions, but only as far as the evidence will bear; that these ideas will be tentative and will need corroboration from other sources; the importance of contextualising the source by relating it to what else we know about the time and place from which it came.

The key points to be drawn out of questioning at this stage is that of the shoe's age, how we know this, and what the object can tell us about the owner and the time in which he lived.

Confirming that the shoe is around 70 years old use the PowerPoint to direct students to consider how they know the shoe is old. Ideas should come from the students, but take the opportunity to give life and colour to the story of the shoe's owner. Moving onwards, use the close-up images of the shoe's sole to encourage students to consider how it was made. They should also reflect on the materials that have been used, thinking about how these features compare to the shoes they examined in the lesson's starter activity.

Discussion of how the shoe has been made and what it has been made of should allow students to develop a fuller picture of its owner. It is also an opportunity for them to think about similarities and differences in society then and now. The repair-work undertaken on the shoe is a good point to begin exploring this train of thought. Again, ensure students are not speculating wildly but rather are basing their deductions and drawing their conclusions on account of the evidence they have.

Contextual narratives (15 minutes)

Ask students what is now known and unknown about the shoe's owner, and collect ideas on what can be done to find out more. Explain the shoe comes from Auschwitz-Birkenau: this will enable you to discover their existing knowledge and understanding of the camp, correcting accordingly. Ensure students understand the differences between the various camps in the Nazi system.

Relay to students the historical facts about Auschwitz-Birkenau and what would, in all likelihood, have happened to the owner of the shoe. This could be done by you narrating the typical experience of children arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Reflection, questions, meaning (10 minutes)

Allow sufficient time and space for students to process the narrative they have just heard. To help students' move from an affective experience into the cognitive domain ask them to consider the process they have moved through. They

- Started with a shoe they knew nothing about, but were able to infer and deduce a surprising amount from it
- Learnt more by thinking about the historical context and narrative relating to the shoe
- Can now reflect on what the shoe and its history means to them; the issues, questions, and themes it raises – what it means

To do this, ask them to discuss in pairs or groups what they see as the significance of the shoe and the questions it raises for them. Encourage them to record these thoughts and ideas around the image of the shoe on the print out of Slide Two that you have given them.

Plenary (10 minutes)

Collect feedback from students. You may wish to record these responses visually in a prominent place for future reference. Open up a class discussion on what students see as the significance and 'meaning' of the shoe. You can then display the questions raised by other groups on the same activity (Slide 11) as a means of summarising the conversations which have occurred. Conclude by asking students to identify the questions they are particularly interested in. These can then be revisited throughout your Scheme of Work.

Engaging all learners

Effective questioning is central to this lesson. You may need to employ strategies to make sure questions are understood and accessible to some students. This might require some questions to be broken down into two or more parts; similarly, it might be useful to not only ask questions audibly but to reinforce these through written means as well.

Having key questions on cards may help to support students. This approach will potentially raise literacy issues, but by the same token could develop competencies in this area. Providing students with written versions of questions you want to ask could also enable you to stretch higher-ability students in mixed-ability settings.

A card-strategy also offers an opportunity for students to record their own thoughts in writing. Alternatively this objective could be achieved by using Post-It notes which students write on and then affix to printed copies of the image of the shoe. These notes might later be transferred into a recording grid which provides students with a framework to support their learning.

Further information

Further classroom resources that specifically address the issues students typically raise about the Holocaust can be accessed through our free CPD programme. For further information on these, please see our website <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/holocaust> where you can also find other open-access resources.

Additional Information

Pedagogical guidance

A key objective of the lesson is to create an authentic learning experience. By this is meant an approach to teaching which engages students' interest and captures their imagination, but does not seek to use their emotional involvement to manipulate them, to instruct them in 'moral lessons', or to impose a pre-defined meaning on the past. Authenticity comes from students arriving at their own questions about the past, becoming aware of its complexity, and then struggling to make sense of what they have learned in a continuing 'search for meaning'.

For authenticity of this kind to be achieved a desire for truth and a respect for evidence is essential. Insisting on students' right to draw their own conclusions does not imply all meanings are possible, nor all equally valid. Conclusions need to be grounded in an accurate picture of the past, one rooted in and constrained by available historical evidence.

In the case of *Ordinary things?* the primary source is the object: the shoe. The teacher therefore has an important role to play in helping students to explore and 'read' this source so they can begin to use it as evidence. Empowering students to approach sources in this way requires us to inculcate and develop skills and competencies such as observation, inference and deduction. But skills cannot be divorced completely from knowledge, as the specific historical context is essential if we are to go beyond pure imagination and discern real meaning in the past.

Since the shoe is an object, it cannot speak for itself. This makes the teachers' interventions all the more crucial, for it falls on you to provide them with a historical narrative – the knowledge and context – so they know and understand what happened to the child. Importantly, however, this does not equate to you offering what you regard as the meaning, 'lesson' or interpretation of the shoe: the 'authentic learning experience', as conceived here, rather requires that you allow meanings to emerge from the students themselves.

The shoe is particularly well suited to this task as it both engages them and disrupts their sense of order. An affective and cognitive dissonance is created when feelings of familiarity with an ordinary object – in this case, a child's shoe – are unsettled by placing that object in events far beyond our lived experience. Accordingly, students raise issues and questions they find troubling in the world revealed to them by the history of the Holocaust. By taking these questions as starting points for enquiry into the Holocaust we have the opportunity to respond directly to our students' concerns, create within them a sense of ownership over learning, and facilitate deeper levels of understanding.

Historical Context

The following information is intended to help you provide students with required historical context at different stages of the lesson.

Auschwitz

It is likely your students may have misconceptions about Auschwitz. It is important that students understand it was part of a vast camp system in Nazi-occupied Europe. Similarly, they need to appreciate there were many types of camps, some of which served several functions. They included:

- Concentration camps
- Death camps
- Forced labour camps
- Prisoner of war camps
- Transit camps

Located in German-occupied Poland, Auschwitz was the largest complex in this camp system and comprised three main sites:

- Auschwitz I Main Camp
- Auschwitz II – Birkenau
- Auschwitz III Buna-Monowitz

In addition there were some 40 sub camps.

The three main camps had similarities but also significant differences. Auschwitz I was a concentration camp, where victims of different categories were subjected to brutal treatment, summary executions, punishing work, malnourishment and terrible living conditions. People were murdered by phenol injections to the heart; thousands of others were shot, hanged, gassed or subjected to medical experiments. Buna-Monowitz meanwhile was a factory system which used slave labour to produce synthetic oil and rubber for the German war effort. Conditions were also brutal with a very high death rate. Finally, Auschwitz II – Birkenau served as a concentration camp and as a death camp.

The death camps of Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau were constructed to murder as many human beings as quickly as possible, within hours of their arrival. None of the other camps had this explicit purpose.

Approximately one million people (over 90%) of those murdered at Auschwitz were Jews. It is possible the child who wore this shoe was Roma or Sinti (a 'Gypsy' child). Some 23,000 Roma and Sinti were deported to Birkenau where 21,000 – many of them children – were murdered.

Since the shoe was found at Birkenau and had not been shipped elsewhere for reuse, we can infer the child would probably have arrived at the camp at some time in the last months of its operation. It was during 1944 that the rate of killing at Birkenau reached a new level of ferocity, bringing with it 'logistical issues' such as overflowing warehouses.

The child – in all likelihood – arrived at Birkenau having been deported on a cattle wagon. Trains from all over German-occupied Europe were used to deport Jewish people to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Typically 80-100 people were crammed into one wagon, perhaps 20-30 wagons per transport. There was no room to sit down, only one bucket of water to drink and another bucket for their toilet needs. Journeys often lasted for some three days and nights; on occasion even longer.

Arrival and murder

On arrival at Birkenau the wagon doors were unlocked, unbolted and opened. Somewhere between 2,000-3,000 people were ordered onto the ramp. They were then divided into two large groups: men and older boys on one side; women and young children on the other.

Each group formed five lines, each line walked towards a medical doctor who decided whether they would be sent left or right. A few – perhaps 5 or 10%, no more than 20% - would be chosen for hard manual labour in the concentration camp. The number would depend on how many people were needed for work at that time.

The child wearing this shoe was not chosen for work. He would have walked along the train line inside the camp for about a kilometre, perhaps with his mother or grandparent, until they reached a large building. There they were ushered into an underground changing room. They were ordered to undress for a shower; to ensure that their shoes were tied together and to hang up their clothes on a peg so that they could retrieve them later.

The naked child and the rest of his family, their friends and community were then pushed into an adjacent room. This looked like a shower room, with shower nozzles fixed to pipes on the ceiling and water pipes running around the walls. But, of course, this was not a shower room. It was a gas chamber.

The door was shut, locked, and sealed behind them. Zyklon B gas pellets were emptied into a ventilation shaft, and around 20 minutes later everyone inside the gas chamber was dead. The room was ventilated and the bodies then dragged out. The child's body was transported to the crematoria ovens elsewhere in the building where they were burned. His ashes were dumped into a nearby pond, or spread on a surrounding field as fertilizer. In winter, the ashes of the dead were used to grit nearby roads.

PowerPoint Walkthrough

The following walkthrough takes you through the lesson slide-by-slide. You may find it especially useful for developing guided questioning.

Slide 2



Drawing on the skills developed in the starter activity, ask students to say something about the owner of the shoe and to give reasons for their deductions. Anticipate the following responses:

- A small child
- Gender – we cannot be sure, but most will guess it is a boy's shoe
- 'He' lived a long time ago

You may decide to remark on how this exercise reflects some of the core practices of 'doing history': how we have to be guided by the evidence available to us. The important point to focus on is the issue of the age of the object, for students will unpack this over subsequent slides.

Slide 3:



Confirm the shoe is indeed old – perhaps sixty or seventy years old – but pose the question:

how do we know this shoe is 'old'? Encourage students to closely scrutinise the image. If students are working in small groups they could discuss their ideas before feeding back to the class. As you collect responses you may find it useful to direct students towards considering the following:

- Colour and condition: the shoe is faded, worn, crumpled – it looks aged
- Style: many would describe it as 'old-fashioned' – it does not have the appearance that children's shoes do today; its style and design looks like a miniature of an adult's shoe.
- Materials: it is fastened by laces, not Velcro as is often the case in the present day. Be aware the issue of materials will be expanded upon in subsequent slides.

Slide 4:



Direct students to consider how the shoe was made: how, for example, has the sole been fitted? On close examination it is possible to see small nails or tacks have been used to pin the sole to the upper of the shoe. Allow the group to notice this. If they need help, the next slide shows closer detail.

Slide 5:



Point out to students how from this angle part of the heel has come away, and the small nails pinning parts of the shoe together are clearly visible. Note may be made of the condition of

these nails: how do they help confirm that this is an old shoe?

Slide 6:



Encourage students to think more about the materials used to make the shoe. What, for example, are the benefits of using leather rather than plastic for making a shoe? How many pieces of leather has the shoe been made from? Ask students to recall the shoes they looked at earlier: how are shoes today constructed differently to this shoe?

Reference can be made to how soles are usually made from a single piece of material – they are mass-produced, moulded, made of synthetic material or rubber and stuck to the upper with glue. By contrast, this old shoe is made of different layers of leather pieces, cobbled together with nails, and in all likelihood made by hand.

You could encourage students here to think about the various processes which went into the construction of the shoe.

- The child will have probably visited the shoemaker, who would have drawn an outline of his foot to get the exact size of the shoe
- Pieces of leather will then have been cut out and made to measure these dimensions
- The leather parts will have been sewn together with a machine
- The shoe was held on a wooden last as the nails in the sole and heel were tapped in, one at a time.

Explain how this suggests the shoe was made with care by a skilled craftsman. It would have been quite an expensive item. This is an opportunity to direct students to think more broadly about what the differences between this old shoe and their shoes tells us about the societies of the past and the present. Draw attention to how shoes today are generally not built to last, are often thrown away rather than repaired – partly because new shoes are relatively cheap, partly because of a desire to keep up with fashion and buy new things.

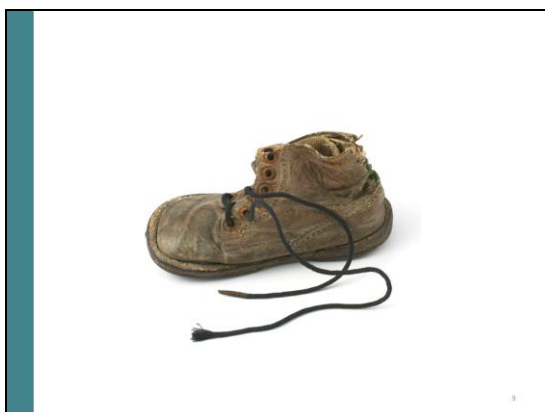
Slides 7 & 8:



Remind students of the need to substantiate our ideas and conclusions. Using these two slides, what evidence is there that the owner of this shoe did not live in a throw-away society? Guide students towards looking at the back of the shoe. What do they notice? Slide 8 provides a closer view of the stitching made to repair the shoe. Ask students what this repair suggests: perhaps it was handed down from sibling to sibling; maybe the family did not have the money to simply go and buy new shoes.

Move students towards thinking about who undertook this repair, and why they did this. Again, going on the evidence available it is evident the stitching is uneven and the wrong colour: clearly this was not undertaken by a professional, but probably by a mother or a father. But how much time and effort seems to have been spent on making this repair? Stitching leather together is no easy task. It seems reasonable to conclude the parent took the time and effort as they cared about their son.

Slide 9:



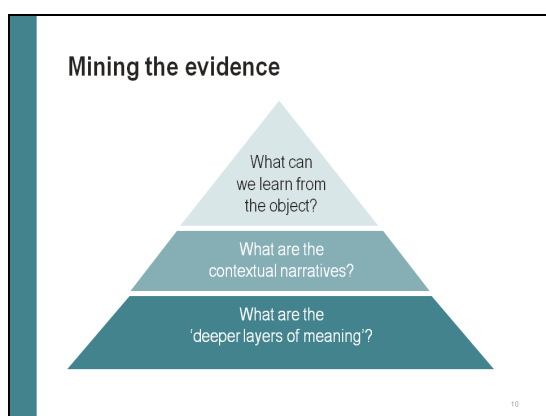
This is a good moment for students to summarise what they know about the owner of the shoe and his family. Students may recap by way of a spider-diagram or by annotating their own copy of the shoe image. After completing this task ask students to compile a list of what they

don't know about the child. Collect these ideas. They are likely to include not knowing his name, age, or appearance; where he came from, who his family were, and so forth. Challenge students to propose how they might find out more about the owner. If the suggestion is not forthcoming, explain how more may be revealed by looking at where the shoe comes from.

Explain to students that the shoe comes from Auschwitz, using this as an opportunity to explore and correct knowledge and understanding. Ask students if they know any other background information which may help build up a picture of the child. They may suggest he was Jewish, or say something about how he came to be at Auschwitz. Use the historical context provided in the Additional Information of these notes to discuss these ideas.

Students now need to be provided with a narrative of what happened to the child when they arrived at Auschwitz. For this purpose you might use the historical context provided in these notes.

Slide 10:



Allow sufficient time and space for students to process the narrative they have just heard. To help students' move from an affective experience into the cognitive realm ask them to consider the process they have moved through. They

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Slide 10 helps students to conceptualise these stages. Ask students in pairs or groups to discuss what they see as the significance of this object and the questions and issues it provokes. As these conversations take place circulate around the students, formatively assessing their understanding and making interventions as necessary.

Slide 11:

What are the 'deeper layers of meaning'?

Why did they keep the shoe and kill the child?
Why didn't his parents protect him?
The innocence of the victims
What does this tell us about other mass killings?
Why the Jews?

What would he have done with his life had he...
Why didn't somebody save him?



Why did they kill a three year old child?
Why didn't more people fight back?
How was this possible in the modern world?
Did people know what was happening?
Can one person stand for millions of victims?

It is imperative students understand that it is possible to drawing many meanings from the shoe. Reassure them the particular meanings they each draw from their encounter with the shoe and its past are reflected in the questions, themes and issues they deem important. With this understanding move to collect feedback from students on the previous discussions they have had, opening up into a class conversation. Reveal the questions, themes and issues on Slide 11 as a means of summarising the emerging lines of enquiry and/or capturing common concerns. Conclude by asking students to identify the questions they are particularly interested in, which will then inform their enquiry questions in the ensuing Scheme of Work.

Acknowledgements

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Artwork by Cheryl Lowe

University College London, Gower Street, London, WC1H 0AL

Tel: +44(0)20 7612 6437 **fax:** +44(0)20 7612 6126 **email:** holocaust@ucl.ac.uk **web:** ucl.ac.uk/holocaust-education

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