

## Overview for teachers

### *'What's my story?'*

a safe, authoritative guided-study online study for KS3 & 4 English that explores the use of language in autobiographical writing, focusing on *The Long Night* by Ernst Bornstein

#### Rationale:

In the current climate, with most students working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, *What's my story?* is designed for guided-study as part of a KS3 or KS4 English course. The course uses the testimony of Ernst Bornstein's *The Long Night* in particular to engage students in understanding the ways in which language can be used to describe quite extraordinary life experiences. In this, they will encounter a number of key concepts authors use, such as *point of view*, *narrative voice*, *testimony*, *imagery*, *simile*, *word connotations*, *synonyms*, *antonyms*, *tenses*, *metaphor*, and *mystery* to describe experiences they have had, as well how the writing of life stories, such as testimony, is done for particular purposes and audiences.

Following some initial research to find out what teachers and students want in the current crisis, these short lessons have been constructed from teacher feedback which showed a desire, amongst other things, to; keep lessons 'short'; keep lessons relatively clear and easy to follow and comprehend; make lessons as self-directing as possible; keep a sense of integrity and student wellbeing when confronting difficult and potentially distressing issues in an online course. We are responding to these requests but recognise that teachers know their students and are ultimately best placed to make decisions regarding what to share with their classes. Also, self-study doesn't necessarily mean that students work through the lessons in complete isolation; it is important that teachers intervene in ways they think appropriate in the context of the students they work with.

#### KS3 English National Curriculum links:

Some of the several aspects of the KS3 National Curriculum which this suite of short lessons cover include;

- **develop an appreciation and love of reading**, and read increasingly challenging material independently through reading a wide range of fiction and non-fiction... with a wide coverage of genres, historical periods, forms and authors.
- **understand increasingly challenging texts** through: learning new vocabulary, relating it explicitly to known vocabulary and understanding it with the help of context and dictionaries; making inferences and referring to evidence in the text; knowing the purpose, audience for and context of the writing and drawing on this knowledge to support comprehension
- **read critically** through: knowing how language, including figurative language, vocabulary choice, grammar, text structure and organisational features, presents meaning
- drawing on **knowledge of literary and rhetorical devices** from their reading and listening to enhance the impact of their writing
- Considering **how their writing reflects the audiences and purposes for which it was intended**

## Supporting all learners:

To help students of all abilities access the materials in this course, we have included the following;

- Key icons to help students be clear about what they are expected to do.
- A key words list towards the beginning of each lesson to help support student literacy.
- A limited amount of text on each slide so students find the lesson easier to follow.
- A mixture of text based and visual resources, including animations from The Long Night to watch.
- A personalised approach to engage all students: at the start of each lesson there is a short YouTube link to the course presenter to give students a 'friendly face' to greet and encourage them.
- In some places a variety of tasks that students can choose from.
- Some optional extension and challenge tasks where appropriate
- Some limited repetition of key words and ideas to reinforce key concepts.
- Sounds files available for some aspects (e.g. lesson 3), so students can opt to have longer pieces of text read to them.
- Modelling and giving examples at times to show more clearly students what is expected
- Providing transcripts of the animations, so students can follow along of it helps them.
- Sentence starter prompts provided in lessons 1 and 2.

## Staying safe:

During the current pandemic, it is obviously really important to keep student mental well-being at the forefront of our minds. Whilst there may always be some anxiety about engaging with the history of the Holocaust, especially in a guided-study form such as this, there are a number of key measures in place in this course to minimise this and to safeguard students' mental wellbeing, including;

- The exclusion of 'atrocious images' in this course designed to 'shock' students.
- Teachers and parents are encouraged to talk to students about what they are learning, to help reflect and contextualise this disturbing history.
- A sensitivity to the use of language in the course to reassure and encourage rather than to distress.
- Prompts in each of the course units for students to reflect and contextualise on what they are learning.
- Forewarning students when they are about to come across something they may find particularly disturbing, such as at the start of both animations. There is also a warning icon ⚠ to alert students to this

## Authors:

This course has been written by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education in collaboration with the University of the West of England, Bristol, and in particular Joan Foley, PGCE Secondary English Group Tutor, who has provided much welcome support. It also couldn't have happened without the amazing support of Noemie Lopian, daughter of Ernst Bornstein.

For these lessons, it is presumed that students may have some basic prior knowledge of the Holocaust, though this may not necessarily be in any great depth.

## Course structure:

- To engage with this series of lessons, students will need access to the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education's (CfHE) website <https://www.holocausteducation.org.uk/>
- The 4 'short lessons' are each broken down into **30-minute** sections.
- It is suggested that students work through these lessons in sequential order to get the most out of them. The first lesson, for instance, introduces the idea of autobiography, testimony and literary devices authors use to tell the stories of their lives.

- Each lesson will include at least one activity, which students can show someone at home or their class teacher. At some points there will also be a short task to check understanding of concepts covered.
- Most slides have **icons** to help students identify what it is they are expected to 'do.' These are explained for them in the introduction.