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## What was Dachau?

How did the Dachau concentration camp change, 1933-45?

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## Key Question: What was Dachau?

### Teaching Aims & Learning Objectives

- To develop an understanding of the dynamic, fluid nature of Dachau
- To be able to use the Nazi Concentration Camp website to assess and evaluate ideas about Dachau

### Rationale

This is the third of three lessons about the Nazi Concentration Camps. Whilst it could be taught as a stand-alone lesson in part of a unit of work studying the Holocaust, it links directly to the previous two lessons; particularly lesson 'What was a concentration camp?' (available at <http://www.camps.bbk.ac.uk/teaching-and-resources/teaching-resources/lesson-plans.html>), which works to unpack initial student conceptions of concentration camps.

'What was Dachau?' specifically aims to use the concentration camp Dachau as a case study to help students develop a more complex understanding of the dynamic, changing nature of the Nazi camp system. Recent research has revealed myths and misconceptions students hold about the Holocaust. This lesson focuses on two of these in particular: many students have little knowledge of camps other than Auschwitz-Birkenau; and many students lack a temporal framework for this period. Dachau is primarily chosen because:

- It is the only camp that spans the entire breadth of Nazi rule (1933-45), and so helps develop students' chronological understanding of the camps in the context of evolving Nazi rule in Germany.
- It is an example of a camp other than Auschwitz-Birkenau, and so helps students develop a broader conception of the camps system

### Key Information

- Students need to be able to access the 'Nazi Concentration Camps' website ([www.camps.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.camps.bbk.ac.uk)).
- This lesson is intended to be taught as a one hour session, preferably as part of a broader Scheme of Work incorporating the other two lessons on the website.
- PowerPoint slides are available to accompany this lesson. Students will also need photocopied Document and Context Cards.

## Lesson Plan: What was Dachau?

### Provoking Curiosity (15 minutes)

This lesson takes the form of an investigation to answer the question ‘what was Dachau?’ If students have previously completed Lesson 1, they will go back to their collective concept map about Nazi concentration camps and consider how their original notion of Dachau has changed after looking at the sources. If they haven’t completed Lesson 1, they can go straight into this activity.

Before asking students to explore the ‘Nazi concentration camps’ website themselves, give all students, whether they have completed any of the previous lessons or not, a puzzle to problematize initial thinking about Dachau.

With students arranged into small groups, show the class Slides 2-4 of the PowerPoint linked to this lesson, each of which contains a quotation. Ensure students have hard-copies of these slides.

Ask students to comment on these quotations. If needed to facilitate discussion, ask students to consider:

- What is each quote describing? Are they all describing the same thing, or are they describing different things?
- What comparison might you make between them?
- How might you account for the similarities and differences between them?

Some students may suggest that these quotations actually describe the same place; if they do not, then move towards revealing that the 3 quotes are all describing Dachau.

Each quotation relates to a different point in time: 22 March 1933 (Slide 2); 31 August 1939 (Slide 3); 29 April 1945 (Slide 4). Ask students to reflect on what this information tells them about Dachau, and what questions or issues this raises. Explain that they will be exploring these in greater detail in the next activity.

### What do the sources suggest about Dachau? (35 minutes)

Outline to students how they will be conducting an investigation into the nature of Dachau. Working in small groups, they are to build a picture of the camp and its history during 1933-1945 from the sources made available to them. Indicate that this exercise also aims to develop a better understanding of Dachau’s place within the history of Third Reich and some key events of the Second World War.

Direct students to the ‘Themes and Documents’ section of the Nazi Concentration Camps website, explaining this is where they will be undertaking most of their investigation. Remind them there are other sections that may also support them in their enquiry.

### Document Cards

Give each group one of the 10 A4 source Document Cards. Each card is differentiated (see 'Engaging all Learners' for further explanation). Students need to find the source on the 'Nazi Concentration Camps' website and as a group complete the key information on it. Each card is based on one particular source from the website and is intended as a 'snapshot' of an aspect of Dachau at a particular moment. Each card should take about 10 minutes to complete, depending on the group.

When students have completed their card, they place it on the classroom wall in chronological order (you might add some dates along the wall to help them to do this). Invite students to have a brief look along the wall to read some of the other nine document cards. This can be done as other groups are putting their cards up, rather than waiting for everyone to finish.

Whilst students are putting up their cards, the teacher also adds the 3 quote cards (Slides 5, 6 and 7) to the wall.

Students stand back from the wall to see the 'whole,' and the teacher facilitates a discussion of what they have produced. Firstly, some groups can be asked to feedback what they've found out. From this, they can be asked whether any cards mark particularly significant 'turning points,' and to what extent this confirms or refutes earlier notions of what they imagined Nazi concentration camps in general, and Dachau in particular, to be. In discussion, it is important to draw out the point that Dachau meant different things to different people at different points in time. The sources they have looked at come from a range of perpetrator and victim testimony, and so reflect different perspectives on what Dachau stood for.

### Layering Context Cards

Each group is given a Context Card from the Resources (Slide 38 – this card is the same for all students to record on).

The aim is to explore the website to provide a relevant piece of context, preferably with a date, to help explain and understand what Dachau was at different points in time. Each small group needs to complete at least one Context Card (though some should complete more if time permits).

Areas to direct them towards include the following topics (in the 'Themes' section of the website); Early Camps; Camp System; Perpetrators; Slave Labour; Prisoner Groups; Executions; Holocaust; Liberation. They could also look at the Timeline or Maps sections.

Having the teacher modelling this activity can help, by showing students how to navigate through the website and record their findings.

Once this is completed, students can add their Context Card to the Document Cards on the wall and step back to look once more at what is evolving. Encourage them to look for anything that the Context Cards describe that may explain what is happening in Dachau.

At this point the teacher can invite small groups to explain their Context Cards and how they help develop an understanding about what Dachau was.

### Reflection (10 minutes)

Remind students of the initial investigation question; 'What was Dachau?'

*If students have completed the first lesson in this series;*

Tell them to look at their concentration camp concept maps from the first lesson, and ask them to consider how what they've found out about Dachau relates to their maps. They are to add new ideas onto their original concept maps, using a different colour pen to indicate that they are adding new ideas from this specific lesson.

*If students haven't completed the first lesson in this series, then;*

Tell students in their small groups to use the information gathered this lesson to answer the question 'What was Dachau?', either in the form of a brainstorm chart, or in no more than 3 sentences (more challenging). Students then feedback ideas to the rest of the class.

See the Pedagogical Guidance section for ideas about what elements might be included in developed students descriptions.

## Engaging all learners

The idea of modelling a document with students is a way of framing the task for those requiring some initial support. The key to modelling is to make the implicit explicit – to make visible the thinking processes in identifying the key vocabulary in the source, identifying the message and the context around it, analysing the extent to which it answers the investigation question, and considering any further questions or issues it might throw up.

The Document Cards are differentiated for students. Some are blank, for more able students, whilst some have question prompts in selected boxes, for students requiring more support. Having such prompts may be less intimidating for some students, and their reading for purpose in the documents more achievable. The fact that they are only completing one of these, as their part in the class construction, should also make the task seem less daunting.

The use of IT – the Nazi Concentration Camp website – is intended to help students develop a critical use of websites; the ability to navigate around them and use them for specific purposes is seen as a motivating factor in terms of developing broader skills.

This lesson also aims to help bridge between academic research and schools by bringing contemporary research into the classroom. The Nazi Concentration Camps website is based on Nikolaus Wachsmann's 2015 landmark book *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, based on his study of the camps on a huge array of widely scattered sources.

Some students may need vocabulary support, depending on the class. On Slide 5, for example, words such as 'dilapidated,' 'munitions,' and 'amiable' may need explanation.

Further, the ideas behind encouraging students to construct their own knowledge and understandings from the evidence will hopefully provide a sense of ownership over the outcomes of the lesson.

## Additional Information

### Pedagogical guidance

This session follows a number of key pedagogical strands, as outlined in Lesson Plan 1.

The 2016 'What do students know and understand about the Holocaust? – Evidence from English Secondary Schools' report identifies some students' misconceptions concerning the concentration camps. For instance, the conflation a large number of students make between camps and prisons is mistaken. The camps, which Stone describes as 'initially used for the purpose of crafting the racial community and eliminating political opponents' (Stone, 2015: p.10), were 'also outside the due process of law and people could be sent there without formal legal charge or trial' (UCL CfHE, 2016: p.196). The report also reveals that no students below Years 12 and 13 were able to name another camp other than Auschwitz in interview. Another relevant finding in the report was that the distinction between concentration camp and death camp is not understood, with students unable to differentiate between camps established for work, imprisonment, punishment or 're-education,' and the death camps created for the purpose of extermination only.

This lesson, the third in a series of three, specifically links to the first lesson, which aims to open up student conceptions of 'concentration camps' and start to interrogate them. In the 'Reflection' part at the end of this lesson, you should ask students to relate what they've found out about Dachau back to their original Nazi concentration camp concept maps, and consider to what extent their new knowledge reinforces or challenges their new findings.

The start of this lesson is intended to problematize their thinking about camps such as Dachau. It is important when using the three quotes not to mention Dachau or the aims of the lesson. For this reason you should start with Slide 2, rather than the introductory Slide 1. The intent of this is to reveal a moment of 'surprise' for students when they are told that the three different descriptions are all of the same place. The challenge then is for students to explain this apparent paradox, which is developed in the main section of the lesson where students study original source material from the 'Nazi Concentration Camp' website.

In the Reflections section at the end of the lesson, stress that whilst good descriptions should include elements of the following, the key concept that needs to be communicated is one of fluidity, of a camp in constant change as it reflected and responded to external contingencies;

- Dachau was a 'concentration camp,' not a 'death camp,' although many prisoners died horrific deaths there
- Dachau changed many times over a short period of time (1933-45)
- This change was a response to an array of external factors, from the Nazi consolidation of power to events of the Second World War
- Dachau held different numbers of inmates at different times, with the prisoner population growing sharply during the war
- The types of inmates at Dachau changed – from mainly political prisoners in its

early years, to a more diverse population by the start of the war, including “asocial”, homosexual, and Jewish prisoners, and then mostly foreign prisoners by the latter stages of the war

- At times, Dachau was used as a collection point for the sick and infirm in other camps
- Dachau developed into a site for brutal slave labour
- Living conditions changed dramatically, as did the number of dead: prisoners were far more likely to perish during the war than before
- From 1942 Dachau was a place of horrific ‘scientific’ experiments on inmates

Encourage students to reflect on further questions they may want to ask to reach a better understanding of Dachau, especially in thinking about what knowledge gaps may still exist. Students can consider where they might go to find further evidence, be it on the ‘Nazi Concentration Camp’ website or other sources, such as books. You could use extracts from *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* and credible websites, such as from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (<https://www.ushmm.org>).

## Historical Context

The Nazi Concentration Camp website is replete with historical information and context. Aspects of this investigation can be contextualised by exploring other themes within the website.

Students also need to be aware that ‘camps’ took many forms and functions, and that these were often liable to change as the war progressed. Students need to appreciate a notion of camps not as enclosed spaces, which barbed wire, walls and searchlights may give the impression of, but as having a dynamic relationship with the surrounding community in which they were situated.

## Documents on ‘Nazi Concentration Camps’ website, related to Dachau

This is a list indicating the documents used in this lesson relating to Dachau. It is intended as a reference point to help direct teachers and students in their search for relevant sources for this enquiry.

Document 3: Himmler sets up Dachau in 1933 (as a camp for political prisoners)

Document 21: Dachau as the main prewar training centre for Camp SS guards (1933-34)

Document 95: A Nazi magazine reports on Dachau, 1936 (on the influx of German “criminals” and “asocials”)

Document 51: report on the different Dachau prisoner groups in 1937 (good overview of all the

different groups at this stage, still overwhelmingly German prisoners)

Document 37: Dachau as destination, during wartime, of transports of “invalid” prisoners from other camps (1942)

Document 54: The Soviet slave labourer Victor C. on youths and children in Dachau in wartime (probably 1943)

Document 74/75: use of Dachau during wartime as centre for human experiments, in this case (75) on Soviet prisoners (probably 1942)

Document 46: The Jewish survivor Ladislaus Ervin-Deutsch on night shifts in Kaufering (Kaufering was a satellite camp of Dachau, so the source points to the spread of satellite camps for forced labour, and the use of Jewish slave labourers deep inside Germany in 1944)

Document 112: prisoner diary on day of liberation in Dachau, 29 April 1945 (gives some sense of the size of the camp, which could be compared to Dachau in 1933)

## Bibliography

Foster, S. et al (2016) *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust? – Evidence from English Secondary Schools* London: UCL Centre for Holocaust Education

Stone, D. (2015) *The Liberation of the Camps: The end of the Holocaust and its aftermath* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Wachsmann, N. (2016) *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* London: Abacus.

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