

Using Testimony in the (Online/Home) Classroom

Briefing Note: COVID-19 Update

This **Briefing Note** provides a concise summary of the key ideas contained in the two **Research Briefings** in the full [Using Testimony in the Classroom](#) pack. The Briefing Note is designed to provide educators with an overview of the key considerations in the use of testimony. It should be used in conjunction with the full pack and, in particular, with the **Lesson Sketches** contained in it. In May 2020, the Briefing Note was updated to focus on key issues relevant to the use of testimony in the delivery of Holocaust Education online and through home learning.

The full resource pack explains the Research Briefings in more detail and, through a series of **Lesson Sketches**, shows how these ideas might be applied to different media (video testimony, diaries, poetry, literature, documentary film, theatre, and digital media). The pack is available open access here: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/cultureastestimony>

Testimony is an account of an individual's personal experiences by that individual. But the form that account takes could be anything from theatre, documentary film, autobiographical writing and literature to video recordings, or digital technologies.

First-person accounts can be incredibly powerful tools in the teaching of traumatic and violent histories. The use of first-person testimony allows students to connect what they are learning to an individual life and to begin to understand the human impact of the catastrophe. Engagement with perpetrator testimony can promote better understanding of the conditions in which “ordinary” people come to commit horrific acts of violence. Testimony can also be used in the values education that is attached to Holocaust education, as witnesses often draw connections to the present day and highlight the ongoing legacy of the Holocaust.

Nonetheless, it is extremely important that first person accounts are used in a way that is sensitive to the complexity of this kind of source. *In the classroom or online, students need to be prepared in two key ways:*

- 1. Embed testimony within a broader curriculum:** testimony should not be an ‘add on’ to teaching about the Holocaust, nor should it be the only source of information for students. Rather it should be firmly embedded within a broader framework that brings together a range of materials. Students should be equipped with a firm understanding of the historical events to which the testimony relates before they engage with it and have the opportunity to respond to and discuss what they have seen, read and heard. This is essential to avoid misunderstandings. Students should not be left to deal alone with the complex emotions that testimony can provoke.
- 2. Understand the nature of testimony as a source:** Students need to be prepared with an understanding of what we can learn from testimony. Testimony can help us understand the human impact of historical events. However, because it is an individual perspective and subject to the complexities of remembering past events (especially traumatic ones), it

should not be used on its own to teach about that history. Students should be prepared to ask the appropriate kinds of questions of the testimony: e.g., What was it like for the individual? What were their motivations? What was their life like before the genocide, and afterwards?

Finally, it is essential that educators in the classroom and at home are confident that the testimony is genuine (in the sense that it is produced by a

real witness) and that it is age-appropriate. For this reason, we would recommend as a starting point resources and activities provided by trusted institutions. In the updated **Resources List** below, we list those made available by the Holocaust Educational Trust, Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and National Holocaust Centre and Museum, highlighting new materials produced in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

Updated Summary of Research Briefings I & 2

I: CHALLENGES OF TESTIMONY

The **challenges** in using testimony centre on both ethics and methods, with the two aspects being closely interwoven around some core issues: *medium/genre, authenticity, empathy, perpetrators, secondary witnesses*.

Medium/Genre Is the testimony in written form, is it a video testimony, or part of a documentary film? The medium that is used to produce the testimony has an effect on the way in which the story is told. Students should be encouraged to engage with the issues around medium, not in order to detract from the importance of the message imparted by the survivor, but to help them recognise the nature of testimony and what it can teach us.

Authenticity What does authenticity mean in relation to testimony? A testimony is authentic because it is produced by an individual who had the experiences that they recount. "Authentic" testimony does not have to be 100% accurate. Instead, it is important that there was an intention to tell the truth about a personal experience. If we

agree that a text is "authentic", then we are recognising the person giving testimony as trustworthy.

Empathy is in many cases a desirable response to hearing testimony. However, in order to be productive, empathy needs to be of the right kind. In particular, we should avoid using learning activities that encourage students to feel as if they were themselves the victim or perpetrator of violent events (e.g., through role-playing). Students cannot (and should not) experience the same emotions as the victims of Nazi persecution and it is dubious ethically and pedagogically if they feel they have done so.

Following the reflections of philosopher Amy Coplan, we adopt a model of empathy in which the student recognises the emotion experienced by the survivor (fear, sadness, despair). However, they recognise it from the perspective of the survivor, and are continuously aware of the difference between themselves and the witness. We describe this as "other-oriented". This doesn't mean that emotional responses should be avoided; however, those emotions should come

from a recognition of what the witness experienced, rather than what the student is experiencing.

Perpetrator testimonies can be used alongside those of victims, survivors and other witnesses in order to promote better understanding of the causes of genocide. However, this needs to be done in a framework that encourages students to identify the challenges posed by these sources. It is especially important when approaching these texts that empathy is “other oriented” (as described above) and that students are prepared with prior knowledge of facts and figures. Using perpetrator testimony needs to be thought through particularly carefully if students are working outside of the classroom without the immediate support of a teacher.

Secondary Witnesses The term “secondary witness” describes individuals who give an account of a past event from a personal perspective, but who didn’t experience that event themselves (e.g., children and grandchildren of survivors, or creative artists who work with first-person testimonies). However, this term can be confusing as it uses a term (“witness”) that has a very specific meaning in this context, to in fact mean something else. We do not therefore use the term “secondary witness” and instead refer to “second and subsequent generations”, when we are describing the children and grandchildren of survivors.

II: TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST THROUGH FAMILY FRAMES

“Family Frames” describes how individual stories are interwoven with those of the people closest to them. For those who arrived in the UK on the Kindertransport,

memories of family members from whom they were separated are key to the trauma that motivates the account. This is similar to (and, in important ways, different from) the testimonies of the second and third generation who recount the stories of their parents and grandparents and the impact of growing up as the child or grandchild of a Holocaust survivor. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, that might include members of the student’s own household or other family members/friends with whom they are in contact virtually. A focus on “Family Frames” can allow us to consider not only the history of the Holocaust, but also its legacy and ongoing impact. It can help us to think about how Holocaust education might make use of testimony after the survivors. There are a number of considerations when working with family frames in this context.

Teaching of the **Kindertransport** using testimony should:

- make clear the place of the Kindertransport within the history of the Holocaust
- encourage consideration of the “child perspective”
- avoid using the Kindertransport as a way of unequivocally celebrating Britain

Working with the **testimonies of the second generation** should:

- Avoid confusing the testimony of the second generation with the testimony of survivors.
- Be used as a complement to survivor testimony (also testimony produced in different media), rather than a substitute for it.

- Ensure the second generation speaker understands that: (i) they should tell the story of their parents *as* the story of their parents; (ii) that their own story is also of interest and importance.
- Prepare students by: (i) providing necessary historical context for the particular experiences of the parents of the second generation witness; (ii) engaging with the biography of the second generation witness, alongside that of their parents.
- Encourage a mixture of follow-up questions about the experience of the parent and questions relating to the ongoing impact of the Holocaust.

Resources List

The resources list gives an overview of further materials provided by the national organisations with whom we have collaborated. In May 2020, this was updated to include material created by the organisations to support Holocaust Education further during the COVID-19 crisis, school closures and social distancing.

Holocaust Educational Trust

The Trust works in schools, universities and in the community to raise awareness and understanding of the Holocaust and its contemporary relevance, providing an outreach programme for schools, free, downloadable teaching resources, teacher training, and its flagship Lessons from Auschwitz programme.

- **Outreach Programme**

The Trust arranges for Holocaust survivors to go into schools and other community spaces to talk about their experiences during the Holocaust and can arrange for trained educators to lead interactive workshops suitable for students from Year 6 (age 10). Free of charge.

Whilst they are currently unable to deliver educator led workshops, in the coming weeks and whilst restrictions for the elderly continue, the testimony element of the programme will be delivered for schools virtually, via online platforms such as Zoom and Google Meets. Working with each teacher on a case by case basis to ensure the online platforms used are the most suitable for each school, and of course taking into account safeguarding best practice, teachers will be able to sign their classes up to hear online testimony live. To accompany this the Trust will provide pre and post lesson plans (adapted for those students home learning) free of charge. More information on how to access this

opportunity will be available shortly on the HET website.

In cases where live survivor video calls are not an option, the Trust can recommend one of six pre-existing testimony recordings which students and teachers can use at home. Each one accompanied by its own specially created information and resource pack.

- **Teaching Resources**

The Trust provides free, fully resourced lesson plans and additional materials to introduce age-appropriate Holocaust-related topics across the curriculum. These include: Resources for Primary and early KS3, Exploring the Holocaust (for KS3/S2), Resources for KS4 and Scottish Nationals and Resources for post-16. The Trust's flagship teaching resource is *Exploring the Holocaust*. This is a cross-curricula scheme of work providing resources for teaching about the Holocaust through History, RE / Philosophy and PSHE / Citizenship. This is for use at KS3 and is built around 15 core lessons. The Trust provides guidance on the ways in which Holocaust education can be incorporated into other subjects such as English, Drama and Art. It suggests some suitable literature texts and plots for study and/or performance in schools.

Available at:

<https://www.het.org.uk/exploring-the-holocaust-menu>.

To support teachers and students further in the era of COVID-19, social distancing and school closures the Trust has produced two additional resources to support home learning: A 'Family Learning Pack' for children aged 10-11 and a 'Home Learning Pack' for KS3/S2 students. This is available at:

<https://www.het.org.uk/education/teaching-resources/exploring-the-holocaust-home-learning-pack-menu>

The Trust are also running a bi-weekly Holocaust Film Club on Facebook, weekly Holocaust Survivor Q&A on Twitter and a new Holocaust Book Club. Follow their social media or visit the website for more details.

Additionally, the 70 Voices digital platform created by the Trust contains 70 powerful sources on the Holocaust, including testimonies, letters, diaries and others.

- **Teacher Training**

The Trust offers free teacher training workshops for trainees and practising teachers, and free residential courses throughout the year, including an *Exploring the Holocaust* UK residential course, international teacher study visits and an Annual Teacher Training Course at Yad Vashem.

In the coming months Teacher Training will be delivered online, via platforms such as Zoom, Google Meets and Google Classrooms.

- **Lessons from Auschwitz**

A four part course centred around a one-day visit to the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. Seminars take place

before and after the visit, which enable students to be prepared for and to reflect on the visit. Students are expected to devise a 'Next Steps' project in response to their experience, spreading their understanding of the Holocaust and its continuing relevance within their schools, colleges and local communities.

In light of the Covid 19 crisis, LFA will be taking a new form Online, until visits can resume.

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

HMDT supports people across the UK to mark Holocaust Memorial Day each year, and deliver Holocaust and genocide education in a range of ways. Free resources are available for use in schools, communities, and for a range of sectors including local authorities, libraries, universities, youth groups, museums and galleries, prisons and many more.

- **Teacher Resources**

These are available for primary, secondary and SEN schools, and include guidelines for teachers, scripts and presentations for assemblies, lesson plans, tutor time sessions and creative activities. You can browse the collection at www.hmd.org.uk/schools.

- **Other resources:**

Films – HMDT have produced a range of educational films, documentaries, and testimonies and interviews with Holocaust and genocide survivors. www.hmd.org.uk/film

Life stories – these resources provide information about those affected by the Holocaust, Nazi Persecution and more recent genocides. They will give

an overview of the person's life before the genocide, what happened to them during, and if they survived what has happened since. Some life stories are also available in an 'easy-to-read' format for younger audiences, those with English as a second or other language, or to be used if you have less time: www.hmd.org.uk/lifestories

For home schooling, HMDT have produced a number of creative activities which are based around the life stories', including a number of structured activities students could complete at home.: https://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/?genocide=any&resource_type=48&age=any

HMDT's resources hub also includes images, poems, faith resources, posters and booklets, and many other resources to help people to mark HMD and deliver Holocaust and genocide education – www.hmd.org.uk/resources

In spring 2020, HMDT released their new theme for HMD 2021 "Be the light in the darkness". The accompanying theme vision can be found here: <https://www.hmd.org.uk/what-is-holocaust-memorial-day/this-years-theme/>. The vision is centred around testimony in each section.

National Holocaust Centre and Museum (NHCM)

Based in Laxton, Nottinghamshire, The National Holocaust Centre and Museum was established in 1995 by the Smith family as a Centre for learning and as a permanent memorial for the victims of

the Holocaust. Survivors and their testimony are at the core of their work to promote an understanding of the roots of discrimination and why this matters to us today. In particular reflecting on how we can be upstanders in our lives and communities.

Today the Centre has a purpose-built primary exhibition called *The Journey* which focuses on the Kindertransport as well as a main Holocaust exhibition that details the key stages of the Holocaust. Both exhibitions include a wide range of artefacts and testimony from Holocaust survivors. It is also a place of memorial having over a thousand white roses that are dedicated to those who were murdered during the Holocaust. They host survivor speakers on a regular basis who are often keen to speak with educational groups.

The Centre offers a range of learning programmes hosted at the Centre including primary, secondary, A-level, university, PGCE and community groups such as U3A and the WI. They provide specialist conferences focusing on Hate Crime as well as tailored programmes for subject specific groups. They offer outreach programmes for primary and secondary in London and Leeds. Here is an overview of some of the key programmes:

- **Secondary programme**
 - Choices Suitable for Y7-Y11, a cross curricular day that focuses on the choices that were made during the Holocaust and what this means to us today. An educator-led day where students explore the key theme in the Centre's memorial gardens, main exhibition and workshop. Students are

invited to listen to survivor testimony and ask questions relating to their experiences. Pre and post visit resources focus on the importance of testimony.

- **Primary programme**

The Journey: Suitable for Y5/6, an educator led programme that focuses on the Kindertransport. Students are guided through a series of tactile and interactive rooms that follows the story of Leo over a six week period in 1938. Students are invited to listen to survivor testimony and ask questions relating to their experiences. Pre- and post-visit resources focus on the importance of testimony. The Journey exhibition can be explored online using The Journey trail.

The Centre's online resources include:

The Journey trail:

<https://journey.holocaust.org.uk/the-journey-exhibition-trail/>

Edek: <https://www.edek.film/>)

Secondary pre- and post-visit resources: <https://www.holocaust.org.uk/72663832610>)

- **Stand Up, Stand Together**

Two video exercises for students of secondary school age

Due to the Covid-19 lockdown leading to school closures, the Centre offers two online video exercises - with tutorials - exploring what it means to be a bystander, or an upstander. After viewing the videos and completion of the tutorials, students are invited to send via email their creative responses to the Centre, and a selection of students' work will be published on the NHCM website

and social channels.

<https://www.holocaust.org.uk/standup>

- **'Ask the Survivor'**

Live video Q&A sessions between secondary school students and Holocaust survivors

Live webinars with Holocaust survivors to help secondary pupils with home education during the Covid-19 pandemic. The webinars allow Holocaust survivors to share their testimony and answer questions with groups of students and their teacher, with our educators present to facilitate. Teachers are requested to contact the Centre at upstanders@holocaust.org.uk for more information and to book a session.

- **Special Times, Special Stories**

Three video exercises for children of primary school age

With children currently learning from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Centre has created video exercises for primary aged pupils. **Special Times, Special Stories** shares 3 age-appropriate stories from Holocaust survivors involving key themes. The 3 exercises are designed to encourage positivity and sharing of stories, keeping in touch and learning from each other. Pupils are invited to send in work they've created which will be shared with Holocaust survivors and some of the work published on our website and social channels.

<https://www.holocaust.org.uk/special-stories>

- **The Journey App**

This digital version of NHCM's award-winning primary exhibition shares the story of Leo, a German-Jewish boy who

leaves Berlin on the Kindertransport, in a rich and engaging way. Appropriate for Key Stage Two pupils (Years 5 and 6). With comprehensive teacher guidance, students are encouraged to reflect critically on acceptance; sources of truth and identity – supporting learning in Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development; History and Religious Education. The app will be available in early June, and it is possible to pre-register here:

<https://www.holocaust.org.uk/forms/preregister-for-the-journey-app>