

Auschwitz – A lesson in history

Today, let's talk about Auschwitz. It's a lesson in history we should never forget. Why discuss it now? Simple – I was recently invited to go to Poland for a long weekend to Cracow. One of the trips we made was to Auschwitz. I can tell you – it makes you think twice on many things once you have visited the place. Whilst it is not in my top 10 places to visit I believe it is a place you should visit once in your life. Indeed, many tourists do – during mid-June to mid-September mostly. It is as creepy and shocking today as you can imagine. When you walk around the site you can only imagine how ghastly it was and what it might have been like to live there. I will add – for those non-believers who say the Jews weren't murdered by the Nazis – I say this – visit this place and you will rapidly think again.

During our visit I discovered Auschwitz is actually on two sites – *Auschwitz I* and *Auschwitz II*. *Auschwitz I* - was the original concentration camp. It served as an administration centre and as a slave labour camp, as well as having a gas chamber. This is where you see the photo of the workers marching through the gate with the orchestra playing. Barbed wire still surrounds this camp. Inside the dormitories are examples of life here. Every room is different. Prepared to be shocked. Visitors will see rooms showing thousands of suitcases, shaving brushes, and glasses. The worst room shows human hair, cut from the prisoners to be made into cloth or used for bedding - truly awful. The firing range and where people were hung and the punishment cells are truly shocking.

Auschwitz II Birkenau - served as a concentration camp. It was an extermination camp. On arrival passengers, who had arrived in cattle trucks through the famous arch, were on the railway platform instantly split into two. Guards would assess everyone. If you went to the left you lived, to the right you were sent to the gas chamber. Women with children went to the right to avoid any separation panic. Most prisoners died within four months. The place is huge. With the Russians advancing the Nazis blew up the gas chambers. The remains are still there today. Many people have asked me, "Did you cry when looking around?" No, but it hit hard me after I returned home. Something inside felt the pain of others... Overall, I think it is important to discuss this topic.

Category: History / WWII / Auschwitz

Level: Intermediate / Upper Intermediate

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EXERCISES

1. **Auschwitz:** Think of three things you know about Auschwitz? Go round the room swapping details with others.

2. **Dictation:** The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

3. **Reading:** The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

4. **Vocabulary:** Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

5. **The article:** Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?

6. **Geography: Poland:** Where is Poland? Where is Cracow? Where is Auschwitz? Draw a map on the board then **look on Google maps** to help you locate Auschwitz.

7. **Auschwitz:** In pairs think of five things about Auschwitz from the article. Then add five other things you know about it. Write them below. Discuss together. What are your conclusions?

From the article	Your thoughts
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

8. **Let's roleplay 1: Discussion FM:** In pairs/groups. One of you is the interviewer. The others are one of the following people. You are in the *Discussion FM* radio studio. Today's interview is about: *Auschwitz*.

1	A tourist who has been to Auschwitz	3	A historian
2	A Jewish person	4	A German

The teacher will choose some pairs to roleplay their interview in front of the class.

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9. Let's think! In pairs. On the board write as many words as you can to do with **Auschwitz**. *One-two minutes*. Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

10. Let's roleplay 2: In pairs. You are in a bar in Cracow. Start a conversation about Poland. *5-minutes*.

11. Let's do 'The Article Quiz': Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

Student A

- 1) Name the country.
- 2) Name the city.
- 3) When do many tourists visit Auschwitz?
- 4) What does the author say to non-believers?
- 5) Where is the barbed wire?

Student B

- 1) What was Auschwitz II?
- 2) What did the guards do when the passengers at Auschwitz arrived?
- 3) Overall, the author thought what?
- 4) What can you see in some of the rooms in Auschwitz I?
- 5) What is the worst room to see?

12. Prisoner of war camps: Think of three other prisoner of war camps. They can be from the past or from today's world. Write them below. Compare each and discuss together with your partner.

1	_____
2	_____
3	_____

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

13. Presentation: In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a two minute presentation on: **Auschwitz**. Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation to the class. The class can vote on the best presentation. Class – After the presentations go through the good and weak points on each presentation. Learn from the results.

14. A day in the life... In pairs, discuss how daily life might have been like in a concentration camp. Talk about the hardships, the deaths, the punishments and the lack of food... **The teacher** will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

15. Let's write an e-mail: Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: **Auschwitz**. Your e-mail can be read out in class.

16. Sentence starters: Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) Auschwitz _____
- b) The Nazis _____
- c) Concentration camps _____

DISCUSSION

Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- 2) How would you feel if you visited Auschwitz?
- 3) Do you think people should visit Auschwitz?
- 4) What do you think German people think of Auschwitz?
- 5) Should we forget about Auschwitz – after all, it is more than 60 years ago...?
- 6) Do you think people's attitudes have changed about the Nazis and the Final Solution?
- 7) Do you think history could repeat itself?
- 8) What World War II memorials have you visited recently?
- 9) Were any of your relatives killed during a war? Explain.
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

Student B questions

- 1) What do you think about what you read?
- 2) Would you like to visit Auschwitz? Explain.
- 3) Why is it important to keep Auschwitz as it is?
- 4) Why is man today still killing his own kind?
- 5) What is the worst thing to shock you?
- 6) Have you ever been to Poland? If yes, explain where you have been.
- 7) Can you imagine YOU being sent to Auschwitz during WWII? Explain your thoughts.
- 8) Do you think 'non-believers of the Final Solution' should be sent to Auschwitz?
- 9) What do your friends think of Auschwitz and what happened there?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

SPEAKING

Let's discuss! Auschwitz

Allow 10-15 minutes – As a class / small groups / pairs / 1 to 1

20 things about Auschwitz – discuss together
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The teacher can moderate the session.

GAP FILL: READING:

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

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creepy

ghastly

trips

tourists

weekend

Nazis

imagine

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orchestra

shocked

truly

suitcases

slave

cells

hung

GAP FILL: LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

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Auschwitz II Birkenau - served as a concentration camp. It was an extermination camp. On arrival passengers, who had arrived in cattle trucks _____, were on the railway platform instantly split into two. Guards would assess everyone. If you went to the left you lived, to the right you were sent to the gas chamber. Women with children went to the right to avoid _____. Most prisoners died within four months. The place is huge. With the Russians advancing the Nazis blew up the gas chambers. The remains are still there today. Many people have asked me, "Did you cry when looking around?" No, but it hit hard me after I returned home. Something inside _____... Overall, I think it is important _____.

GRAMMAR

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

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only

many

should

those

when

this

might

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or

of

to

on

an

as

I



SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings:

Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20

1	creepy	11	guards
2	imagine	12	panic
3	simple	13	punishment cells
4	extermination camp	14	awful
5	through	15	actually
6	instantly	16	barbed wire
7	slave labour camp	17	dormitories
8	concentration camp	18	orchestra
9	administration centre	19	railway platform
10	gas chamber	20	still

LINKS

<http://www.auschwitz.org/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auschwitz_concentration_camp

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v16vnJQ7vmo>

<http://history1900s.about.com/od/holocaust/a/auschwitz.htm>

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