

Imagine...

remember reflect react

The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2008 is "**IMAGINE... remember, reflect, react**". This challenges us all to imagine the unimaginable. It asks us to focus on the lives and experience of victims and survivors of the Holocaust; of Nazi persecution and of other genocides. It invites us to find new and creative ways to express this experience through art and media. It marvels at the resilience of enterprise, culture and of life itself in the face of destruction. Ultimately it is a call to action for us all to:

- **Remember** the past
- **Reflect** on the present
- **React** to create a better future

Introduction

The Holocaust was a unique event, the first time that a scientific, methodical process was utilised in an attempt to systematically exterminate a people. 2008 marks the 60th Anniversary of the UN Convention on Genocide, and the 65th Anniversary of the definition of genocide by Jewish-Polish Lawyer, Raphael Lemkin. After witnessing the horrors of the Holocaust, and the death of all his family except his brother, Lemkin successfully campaigned to have genocide recognized as a crime under international law.

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) is founded on the understanding that we need to learn the lessons of the Holocaust and more recent genocides in order to create a society that acknowledges and respects our differences and our shared humanity. HMD remembers the past; reflects on the present; and encourages us all to react now to build a better future. Central to the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2008 is finding ways to express human experience through creativity: literature, art, drama, music and dance.

It is impossible to imagine the realities for people living under the threat of genocide, if one has not undergone the same experience. The reality for Jews living under the Nazis was an extreme; as is the reality for Darfuris today. There is no language to describe the suffering and trauma experienced by those affected by the Holocaust but we believe it is vital to remember and reflect on the consequences of genocide for ordinary people, and to act on their experiences.

The theme provides opportunities to focus on these experiences in a more personal way. As we consider our own experiences and the realities of our own lives we can take that first step of understanding more about the victims and survivors, rescuers and bystanders, of the Holocaust and more recent genocides. The aim is to begin a potentially transformative process that will enable us to make changes to the way that

we act towards other people, thus creating a more inclusive society. Small individual actions taken together can make a big difference. Just imagine what we can achieve by working together.

Remember the past

- Imagine... life as a persecuted minority in Europe between 1933-39 as laws are introduced restricting your employment, movement, and right to property and assembly.
- Imagine... life as a Jew¹ in Europe once the Final Solution is introduced in 1942. Even your right to live is taken away.
- Imagine... life as a persecuted minority under the Nazis as a Roma; gay man or lesbian; black person; disabled person; or a political opponent of the Nazis.
- Imagine ... how to remember the lives and experiences of those groups targeted by Nazi racial policies for whom there are no survivors who can speak today.
- Imagine... risking everything to save the life of someone whether you knew them or not.
- Imagine... the experience of the victims of recent genocides in Rwanda, the Balkans or other genocides.
- Imagine... trying to survive alone but trying to keep the memory of your family, friends and community alive.
- Imagine... you are the only person left alive from your family or your community and how it might feel to try and reconstruct your culture, religion and way of life in a hostile environment.

Historic overview

During World War II, Nazi Germany and its collaborators murdered six million Jews. Beginning with racially discriminatory laws in Germany, the Nazi campaign expanded to the mass murder of European Jews. During the era of the Holocaust, the Nazis Racist State targeted several sections of society because of their perceived "racial inferiority or impurity": Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), disabled people, gay and lesbian people, black people and some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted on political and behavioural grounds, among them Communists, Socialists and Jehovah's Witnesses.

In 1933, the Jewish population of Europe was eleven million. Most European Jews lived in countries that Nazi Germany (the Third Reich) would occupy or influence during World War II. The Nazis established concentration camps to imprison Jews, and other people who were targeted on ethnic or "racial" grounds, as well as political opponents. Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, beginning World War II. Over the next two years, German forces conquered most of Europe.

¹ As defined by the Reich Citizenship (Nuremberg) Law of 1935, a Jew was defined as anyone born to at least one Jewish grandparent.

During the war years, the Nazis and their collaborators established new ghettos (a sealed part of a city where Jews were required to live in order to exclude and isolate them) and thousands of new camps for the imprisonment and forced labour of targeted groups and forced labour. Following the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing units) carried out mass-murder operations against Jews, Roma, and Soviet state and Communist party officials. More than a million Jews were murdered by these units, usually in mass shootings. Between 1942 and 1944, Nazi Germany deported millions more Jews from occupied territories to death camps, where they murdered them in specially developed killing facilities using poisonous gas. At the largest killing center, Auschwitz-Birkenau, transports of Jews arrived almost daily from across Europe.

In the final months of the war, SS guards forced camp inmates to march hundreds of miles without shelter in an attempt to prevent the Allied liberation of large numbers of prisoners. As Allied forces moved across Europe in a series of offensives, they began to encounter and liberate concentration camp prisoners. World War II ended in Europe with the unconditional surrender of German armed forces in the west on May 7 and in the east on May 9, 1945.

By war's end, close to two out of every three Jews in Europe had been murdered by Nazi Germany and its collaborators in the tragedy we now call the Holocaust.

Victims of the Racist State

Although Jews were the primary focus for Nazi persecution, others targeted included hundreds of thousands of Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) and mentally or physically disabled people. Over 80,000 gay men were imprisoned, tortured and placed in slave labour, many others forced into marriage or hiding, thousands of political dissidents (including communists, socialists, and trade unionists) and religious dissidents (such as Jehovah's Witnesses) were also targeted. Many of these individuals died as a result of incarceration and maltreatment.

As Nazi tyranny spread across Europe, the Germans persecuted and murdered millions of other people. More than three million Soviet prisoners of war were murdered or died of starvation, disease, or maltreatment. The Germans killed tens of thousands of non-Jewish Polish intellectual and religious leaders, and deported millions of Polish and Soviet citizens for forced labour.

Holocaust Memorial Day

The Holocaust must be the beginning of learning from the past, not its end point.

Holocaust Memorial Day is recognised internationally (www.un.org/holocaustremembrance) as the day to commemorate all those who were victims of the Holocaust and Nazi persecution, as well as the victims of later genocides — such as Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo — and to explore wider issues of prejudice, hatred, discrimination and community cohesion in Britain today.

The Holocaust was a unique event: the first occasion on which the whole apparatus of a State was used to perfect the mass-murder of civilians guilty only of being different. It provides a common starting point from which to remember and learn from the lessons of the past. It is also a way into discussing difficult and interlinked issues such as racism, anti-semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, discrimination and bigotry against the few by the many — across different faiths and diverse communities.

It is important to use the day to reflect on recent genocides and contemporary issues in Britain.

The challenge of the theme is how we may remember and reflect on the victims of the Holocaust, and more recent genocides, and the extent of the persecution that victims and survivors faced. Such persecution is an attempt to obliterate completely not only individual people, but also their culture, religion and language. Often property and homes are destroyed too. Many survivors returned to face what, for us, may seem an insurmountable challenge of starting their lives over again often without family or social support.

Why is remembering the Holocaust and more recent genocides important?

It acts as a clear warning of where racism and other forms of prejudice and discrimination can lead, when combined with other factors. It allows us as individuals to reflect on our own responsibility to tackle these issues personally and in our society at large. That is why the theme demands us to remember the past.

Reflect on the present

- Imagine... a future without Holocaust survivors to tell and teach us of their experiences first hand.
- Imagine... the lives of those currently targeted for genocide, such as in Darfur.
- Imagine... the lives of those in Britain who face prejudice, hatred and discrimination.
- Imagine... the fears of the asylum seekers looking for safety from terror.
- Imagine... what potential was lost from the death of the millions in the Holocaust and other genocides.

Genocide is never simply an attempt to wipe out a certain group of people. It is almost always accompanied by an assault on the cultural identity of the 'target group'. A genocide is usually followed by efforts to erase the memory of the murdered, wiping out all cultural traces of their existence. For this reason, cultural creativity can be a form of resistance to genocide and art often provides a vehicle for the survivors to enshrine the memory of the lost and to reconstruct their shattered communities. The loss of creative talent and scientific prowess makes genocide not just a tragedy for one community, but a loss to all humanity.

There are survivors who continue to create, in order to deal with, and relate, their experiences. There are incredible works of literature, music and art that enable people to reflect on the victims and survivors of the Holocaust and more recent genocides today. Anne Frank's diary is one of the most noted personal responses, now known around the world. There are many other resources, such as Alexander Zapruder's "Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust" that chronicle as well the experiences of young people during the Holocaust. Across Europe during the Holocaust artists like Charlotte Salomon painted their experiences onto canvas. Musicians such as Gideon Klein scored the maelstrom of dark emotions, and children in Terezin drew pictures in crayons prior to their untimely deaths.

There are also biographies and autobiographies, dramas, musical compositions, poems, paintings, drawings and photography drawn from disabled, gay, and gypsy experiences before, during and after the War. Richard Grune's desire to bring attention to the terror of the concentration camps led to the 1947 publication of a limited-edition portfolio of his lithographs based on his experiences as a gay man in Sachsenhausen and Flossenbürg, one of the most important visual recordings of the daily nightmare of the Nazi concentration camps. Survivors in the UK today, like Roman Halter and Anita Lasker-Wallfisch continue to draw on their experiences in painting and musicianship.

More recently, in Sarajevo, Zlata Filipovic produced a diary about the loss of her childhood and friends during the Bosnian war. Rwandan Jean Paul Samputu lost almost his entire family in the genocide, and his recording *Testimony from Rwanda* is one of the great African music albums of modern times.

There are survivors who continue to speak out about their experiences, to provoke action, to help and support those under threat of genocide or hate crime today.

There are thousands of asylum-seekers in the UK who escape persecution in their own country and seek sanctuary here. Many are compelled to leave their country against their wishes, to escape the dangers that they and their families face due to their race, religion or even political views. Reflect on the experiences that they have, trying to make a life in a country where they may not speak the same language or understand the culture. Thousands more are unable to leave their homes, jobs and families and thus must continue to endure ongoing discrimination and prejudice.

Is there anything that you can imagine that you can do to help alleviate the problems that asylum-seekers and victims of prejudice face today?

React to create a better future

- Imagine... what you can do to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive.
- Imagine... how it feels to be a Holocaust survivor and listening to the Holocaust being denied and reading about, seeing or experiencing anti-Semitism today.
- Imagine... how you can make a positive difference in your school and community.

- Imagine... the role that you can play in building a society without prejudice discrimination, hate and exclusion.
- Imagine... a better future ... ours to share ... ours to create.

One of the stated purposes of Holocaust Memorial Day is to 'ensure that the horrendous crimes, racism and victimisation committed during the Holocaust are neither forgotten nor repeated, whether in Europe or elsewhere in the world'. Another purpose of the day is to 'restate the continuing need for vigilance in light of the troubling repetition of human tragedies in the world today'. Since the Holocaust, some lessons have been learned. Yet tragedies involving genocide and racism continue to occur.

By commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day, we stand united together in calling on the world to prevent such crimes happening again. At no time is this more important, with the events of Darfur ongoing and the lack of an official Western response. Whether we call it genocide, or ethnic cleansing, people are being killed simply because they are different – and if Holocaust Memorial Day teaches us one thing, it is to listen to the voices of the past, the voices of the survivors, and react to ensure that never again truly does mean never again.

And just as important, by commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day we stand united in our efforts to tackle prejudice, hatred and discrimination at home, wherever it occurs – at school, at work, and even amongst relatives and friends.

Just as remaining as bystanders is shocking, so is the call to silence - the only voice that the victims have left. How many genocides will it take before we learn that differences between people should not be a threat but celebrated and respected? In the increasingly diverse country in which we live, it is more important than ever before to use opportunities like Holocaust Memorial Day to reach more people with these messages.

Imagine... all the different activities that you could organise to raise awareness of Holocaust Memorial Day and its messages. Imagine... all the ways that you can act to make a difference to improve your community. Imagine... that action as a living legacy of the survivors, and victims, of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides.

Action

Remembering the victims of the Holocaust and more recent genocides is an important means of personally identifying with others' experiences, and keeping their memory alive.

Reflecting on new ways to express and explore issues relevant to Holocaust Memorial Day, in order to engage different audiences – from young people through to the elderly – across faith communities is a challenge but an opportunity as well presented by the theme, Reflect on...

Reacting in order to change the way that you and others around you behave to prevent and combat hatred, discrimination and prejudice - all of which can contribute to genocide if left unchecked.

Involving more people in your commemoration, by conceiving a more inclusive and far-reaching event, can ensure that the messages of Holocaust Memorial Day reach even more people. Reflect on... different ways of taking the commemoration to your audience.

Listening to the experiences of survivors and bringing their voices into homes, schools and communities. There are many books, plays and films as well as music and art that tell the story of victims and survivors and can be utilised to inform, educate and connect people to the theme of Holocaust Memorial Day. Either these can be performed, or survivors themselves can be invited to give their testimony in person. There are organizations that can help source survivors not only of the Holocaust, but more recent genocides such as Bosnia, Kosovo and Rwanda. Reflect on how best to get people to listen to these experiences.

Including the experiences of those sections of society targeted by the Nazi Racist State, like disabled, gay or gypsy for whom there are now few survivors who can speak. This can be done by inviting specialist speakers, by use of drama or art, through readings and biographic material and with a number of programmes or films that some agencies have available on loan.

Examining reports on Darfur today and historical documents and testimonies relating to the Holocaust and recent genocides. This can provide an inspiration to creativity, and give participants an opportunity to reflect on past and current events, and imagine a better future, and express their perspectives through all forms of media: poetry, writing, performing and visual arts.

Learning how people acted during the Holocaust and subsequent genocides can ensure that we act on the lessons of their experiences. For example, the action of Raphael Lemkin and his role in securing the UN Convention on Genocide (of which 2008 is the 60th Anniversary) will enable one to identify what constitutes a genocide and imagining what legal steps are needed to prevent future atrocities.

Thinking about an event in which you felt disorientated, not sure how to respond, can be the first step to empathy. For example, your first day at work, or the day you first became a parent or arriving in a foreign country unable to communicate. What feelings did the situation evoke? This gives some sense, if only a glimmer, of the disorientation of finding one's own world turned upside down.

Discussing issues raised by the Holocaust which could be set against tangible contemporary experiences. Questions may revolve around the progress that has been made since the Holocaust and more recent genocides and what action we can take to make a difference within our society and to help prevent genocide elsewhere. Also,

discussing what steps can be taken to help raise awareness of the steps that lead to genocide.

Asking questions about ourselves – what choices, roles and responsibilities did individuals have in the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide as perpetrators, resisters, bystanders, rescuers and liberators? What choices, roles and responsibilities do we have in our society today? Reflect on what you can do to make a difference to contribute to a better society.

Volunteering to assist survivors today, to remember the victims, and to contribute to building understanding between communities.