

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Tuesday 27th January 2026

The Holocaust Educational Trust defines the Holocaust as "the murder of approximately six million Jewish men, women and children by Nazi Germany during the Second World War"

Holocaust Memorial Day commemorates those murdered during the Holocaust and the other victim groups under the Nazi rule by marking the anniversary of the liberation of **Auschwitz II – Birkenau**, located in **Poland**.

Antisemitism is still a prominent issue across the world.

It is therefore important to mark HMD and spread awareness of the atrocities of the Holocaust. When we hear about the Holocaust, we often hear the phrase 'never again'. To ensure this is truly the case, and that we don't ever see the same state-ensured, mass eradication of communities and culture, we must understand the weight of Holocaust, as well as its role in modern contexts.

This school year, we took part in a visit to Auschwitz through the Lessons from Auschwitz Project (run by the Holocaust Educational Trust). We've compiled this document talking about our experience to mark Holocaust Memorial day, and also to help students who will be visiting the former camp with what to expect.



Auschwitz II- Birkenau

Lessons from Auschwitz Project (**Holocaust** Educational Trust)

"Visiting the memorialised sites of the Holocaust in Oswiecim was an incredibly hard-hitting experience, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to bear witness to the testimonies of those who suffered. There is so much weight in walking the paths of what once was used to facilitate such unimaginable horrors. But experiences like these are so vital, so we can understand the extent of the loss, and the scale of the impact, and share it to our own small corners of the world. I am truly honoured to be able to share my experience and raise awareness about the holocaust through the LFA project"

- Ellen B

"Going to Auschwitz with the LFA project was very impactful, as both the visit and follow-up project/ seminars helped me to understand the scale of the atrocities committed and the robbing of individuality of the victims- the experience truly enlightened me to the impact of the Holocaust on community and culture. I was nervous beforehand, and being there was naturally a difficult experience, but I believe that it is so important to spread awareness of the impact of the Holocaust and the issue of Holocaust denial through mine and Ellen's upcoming role as ambassadors for HET "

- Ellen S

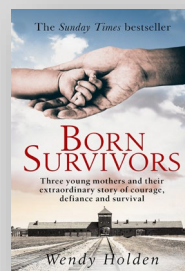
4th November-
introductory
seminar. We
heard the
testimony of
Eva Clarke
BEM. (1)

In Poland, we
entered a
Jewish
cemetery in
Oswiecim (3)

Auschwitz II-
Birkenau (5)

We flew from
Exeter to
Krakow on
the 12th
November
2025 (2)

Auschwitz I
(4)



- 1) The seminar was so important in providing us with ground knowledge about Jewish lives before the Holocaust- to understand the extent of what was lost you need to know what was there before. With the help of our group mentors, we explored the geographical scale of events as well as how things had changed after the Holocaust. We were also given a copy of the book 'Born Survivors'. Eva Clarke BEM gave her testimony. She was born at Mauthausen Concentration Camp just before its liberation. The book includes Clarke's story.
- 2) On the journey we were given more information about the sites we were going to visit.
- 3) In the Oswiecim Jewish cemetery, we saw the graves and memorials, which notably had been moved and changed because of Nazi destruction. It was explained that whilst the graves belonged to different people than who was buried below, it serves as a reminder of reconstruction post-Holocaust, and a demonstration of how the Nazis intended to erase Jewish identity.
- 4) At Auschwitz I, we walked under the 'Arbeit Macht Frei' sign, marking the threshold to the camp. This sentence was completely false- the suffering and toil of those in the camp did not lead to freedom. The 'B' is deliberately reversed as a sign of the workers' refusal to conform.
- 5) Auschwitz II- Birkenau. We finished off our time in Poland with a ceremony led by a Jewish Rabbi, who sang a Hebrew song. Poems were read out in memorial.

Some of you are visiting Auschwitz; here are some of our thoughts to help you, as visiting the site of such suffering can be very difficult:

- When you arrive, you are not 'supposed' to feel a certain way. Often your visit can be fast-paced and bleak; you might not really register your own emotions whilst you are there. Talk through how you are feeling with a friend or teacher or reflect on your own; whatever you feel is best.
- You may want to write down how you feel after you leave, so you can look back and reflect in the future, and share your experience with others if you feel comfortable.

As part of our follow-up project with Lessons from Auschwitz, we are reflecting on and looking at 3 topics:

The impersonality of statistics

When learning about the Holocaust, or 'Shoah' (meaning *catastrophe* in Hebrew) in a history textbook, it can be easy to focus on numbers, dates, facts and events as part of revision for exams. It is important to remember that each victim of the Holocaust had their own name and life. The Book of names at Auschwitz both helps you to visualise the immense scale of the mass murder but also grants individuality to each person killed by the Nazis at the concentration camp.

The role of the bystander

One might typically categorise those involved in the Holocaust into 2 distinct opposites: the perpetrators (the Nazis) and the victims. However, the role of the 'bystander' is one explored less frequently. It is important to recognise that apart from a very small few, the majority of people did not resist the Nazis or speak out against the inhumanity under their rule because they feared that they too would be killed for opposing the regime. The arrest and consequent murder of political opponents such as Marian Serejski 'set an example' to the population (although not necessarily intentionally, as the Nazis labelled what they were doing as 're-education' for fear of public uproar- yet an atmosphere of terror remained) and deter any resistance. It is therefore notable that inaction and inertia was primarily not due to indifference, but rather due to a fear of punishment and the unknown.

Other victim groups

Whilst the official definition of the holocaust exclusively refers to genocide of Jewish people by the Nazi regime, it is vital to recognise the persecution of other victim groups. The murder and erasure of the Jewish population & its culture was a part of a much larger systematic eradication of opposition to the Nazi ideology. By only focusing on specific aspects of the mass repression and loss, we risk oversimplifying the colossal impact it posed on a variety of different communities. To truly ensure we 'never again' face the same horrors of a totalitarian rule, we need to be able to recognise the manifestation of oppression in all corners of society. One clear causation of historic erasure is denial; however, silence and lack of awareness is just as detrimental. This is especially enforced by the diminishment of other victim groups.

Other victim groups included Poles & other Slavs, Roma, Jehovah's witnesses, people with disabilities (both mental and physical), LGBTQ individuals, Afro-Germans and political & religious dissidents.