



Teacher material

Perpetrators or victims? Interned men and women of the Soviet Special Camp Nr. 2 (1945 - 1950) in Buchenwald

Activity Plan

How to

Divide into groups: each group is given a source about one person to analyse - Who is the person? Why was the person interned? Is the person a victim? A perpetrator? Then the group will explain to the class what they found and in what kind of category they would put "their" person on the basis of their source. In a second round, they will get another source to compare with their initial findings. After the groups have presented their findings, the class will draw conclusions about perpetrators and victims in the wider context of Nazi and Stalinist camps and their remembrance.

Aim and access

Judgements on the Soviet Special Camp No 2 at Buchenwald are often based on already existing images of "the Communists", or "the Stalinist regime". Here, persons are presented, which played different roles in Nazi society and were interned for a variety of reasons. To understand better the issue's complexity, students will start with biographies and later receive general information about the context, why these three persons were interned at Buchenwald.

Material

4 Biographical sources of 2 inmates of the Speziallager 2:
2 sources each about Elli Marschall and Otto Koch.

E. Marschall:	1. Document of accusation	2. Statement by shop owner
O. Koch:	1. Memorial plate inscription	2. Personal letter from Koch

Steps

- Each group gets one source related to one person interned in the camp (several groups can work on the same person).
Guiding questions:
 - What is said about the person?
 - Why was she or he interned?
 - Based on this information, do you find it justified, understandable, fair that the person was interned?
 - Collect arguments to describe her or him as a victim or a perpetrator.
- The groups meet in the plenary session to present their results and discuss the following questions:
 - Which information was new or surprising for you?
 - Do you think everyone deserved to be interned? Which arguments would you support?
 - Were they all perpetrators or all victims? If so, in which sense?
 - Can a person only be either a perpetrator or a victim?)



- 3 The groups meet again and receive a second source related to "their" person.
Guiding questions:
- What is said about the person?
 - With this additional information given, do you find it justified, understandable, fair that the person was interned? Which arguments are fundamental for your judgement now?
- 4 The groups meet again in the plenary, present their results and discuss the following questions:
- With this additional information, collect arguments to describe the persons as victim or perpetrator.
 - Which arguments are fundamental for your judgement now?
 - In general: What for do we need the categories "perpetrator" and "victim"?
 - What is needed to use them in a helpful way?
 - After all: What is essential to characterize the Special Camp No 2 and the interned persons?

Historical background

The so-called Special Camp 2 Buchenwald was one of the altogether ten camps and three prisons located in the Soviet-occupied zone and used by the occupying power for the internment of Germans. The Soviet Security Service took charge of the still-existing structural facilities of Buchenwald Concentration Camp beginning from August 1945 and initially committed persons from the region. Primarily local functionaries of the NSDAP, but also adolescents and victims of denunciation were interned. All contact to the outside was prohibited, and no trials of an even remotely legal nature took place. More than 7,000 of the 28,000 inmates died, many of them in the winter of 1946-47 as a result of hunger-related diseases. The camp was dissolved by the Soviets in February 1950, shortly after the founding of the GDR.

Till 1989 "Buchenwald" was only connected with the former Nazi concentration camp and the GDR National Memorial erected in 1958 - the existence of the Soviet Camp was neglected. The complexity of the camp's history and the diverse biographies of the interned Germans give good reasons to be specific and concrete and avoid general assumptions or judgements. The resources offer at least some information on two persons and confront us with the necessity to be precise: Whether we describe a person as "perpetrator" or "victim" depends on our ethical standards, the social situation which is discussed, the social roles of the involved persons, including their choices to deal with the other, and their responsibility, extracted from the mentioned ability to act.

Aim and method

Students shall start with documents, speak about social roles and individual responsibility, and reflect their own judgement. Especially the existence of two camps at one site in different political situations underline the question what for and how to compare and contrast historical situations. Instead of a lecture, the described steps shall help the students to come to terms with historical analysis, individually and as a group. This learning process may be deepened on site, where the cemetery with individual texts on memorial stones and the exhibit offer much more background information.

**Sources:**

All images and texts are selected from the collection of the Buchenwald Memorial.

Further information:

1. Information on the history of the Special Camp No 2 Buchenwald (1945 - 1950): <http://www.buchenwald.de/en/73/>
2. General information on the history of Soviet Special Camps in Germany after 1945:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NKVD_special_camps_in_Germany_1945%E2%80%931949