



Teacher material

Life in Europe 1945-49

Activity Plan

TEACHER NOTE 1:

You may want to use all of the life stories. You may just want to use a selection and have the students work in pairs or small groups. These life stories are not intended to be in any way representative of the experience of people in whole countries or regions. They are just what they say, individual life experiences of the period 1945-9. They represent a few experiences from millions. The major focus of this activity is to enable students to explore how far any single story can possibly be typical. The exercise should not encourage your students to definite answers, but to realize the varied and valid perspectives there are in Europe in the period 1945-9 and to start to see how certain factors e.g. age, location, gender, may lead to some similarities between experiences.

TEACHER NOTE 2

Depending on the nature of the class, you may want groups to complete the worksheet in detail, or to just make rough notes as an aide memoire to be used during discussion.

How to teach the activity 'What was it like to be European 1945-49?'

This activity is designed to get students to really engage with the complexity, chaos and trauma of the years 1945-49 in Europe. The statistics and other factual details from this period have a compelling nature, but they are overwhelming, and it can be difficult for students to see narratives and to understand that millions of diverse, personal experiences made up the whole. It is quite easy to generalise about his period, but life was not the same across the continent; people, places and circumstances varied. Engaging with some of the complexity of the period is vital if students are to understand the drive and determination behind the European project since 1945. Some people emerged from this period determined to change political, economic and social structures. Compromises were made with former enemies, informed by a desire never again to see Europe and Europeans sink to such depths of need and despair. In today's complicated, but still relatively more prosperous and ordered Europe, the generations who have no personal memory of these days need to learn about these times in order to understand the Europe they have inherited. They also need to be able to assess to what extent all Europeans were caught up in big change. Some lives were led quietly in this period. Some people had no chance to actively engage until much later in great ideas for a European future.

In order for this activity to be successful you need to do the following preparation:

- Study the life stories summary grid and decide which life stories to use with your students.

TEACHER NOTE 1

- Print off the life stories you have selected. Every life story is in 5 sections from 1945-49 plus a 'moving on' section.

Note: students like the step-by-step revealing the story nature of giving them the life stories section by section. It can help them to focus on how the life experiences build. A step-by-step approach also feels as if there is less reading. However, it is possible to give students the complete life stories and ask them to read the whole thing at once.

You can do this by printing off the complete story, or adapting the Word files for your own use. You may want to leave the 'moving on' sections until the end of the activity. If you have time and students who do not read so well, the stories could be podcast for use as audio files. Each life-story has a thumbnail picture. Where possible this is of the person or something close to them. It has not always been possible to obtain images.

- Print a set of character profile worksheets for every life story.

TEACHER NOTE 2





- Print off a set of the pages of the PPT ‘Textbook pages about postwar Europe’ to put up around your classroom. Decide if you also want to use the ‘Table of characters and countries’.

You will need blu-tack /drawing pins to put them up. Students will also need post-it notes for this part of the lesson. You may decide that your students need the extra support given by the ‘Table of characters and countries’. It tells them what happened to each country during and after World War Two. There is also a document called ‘Useful Maps’ that might help them if they are unsure about where countries are.

- Download, or save to a student workspace, the evidence files for students to refer to as they put together their presentations if you decide to do the longer version of activity part 3.

TEACHER NOTE 3

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Students can work online or on paper, Depending on the class circumstances.

In class:

Activity part 1 – learning about a character from the period

- Give students the character profile sheets (they can work individually, or in pairs, or in small groups).
- Give students section 1 of their character’s life story. When they have read this, follow it with parts 2, 3, 4 and then 5. Ask them to think about and complete the character profile after reading each section.
- In a plenary session ask students to give words and phrases to explain what Europe seems to have been like in the years 1945-9 and what its people needed to have a good life in the future. Write these down to return to them later.

Optional activity: If you have time, you can ask students to go into small groups, summarize to each other the life story they have discovered and discuss similarities and differences between the experiences. This does promote deeper thinking about the period. Follow this with a plenary discussion. The sorts of ideas that might emerge are on the role of different ideologies, ideas about how war changes people, thoughts about how the experience of Europeans 1945-9 have some similarities to war-torn regions today, and ideas about how influential family life is in times of great upheaval. Students may like to speculate about what sort of attitudes these people might have had to ideas about the future of Europe. What do you imagine was the key message about Europe that they would want to pass on to their grandchildren?

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:**

You could ask your students you useful they think the life stories are as source material to use as evidence to support the textbook entries. What other source material would be helpful? (They might decide that maps, statistics, or pictures would enable them to get a deeper and broader understanding of the period. Or they might want life stories form a wider variety of places).

TEACHER NOTE 4

The students and/or teacher can define the style and depth of this presentation. Students could use a tool such as Explain Everything online, they could present to primary school age children, they could present a wall display... there are many options. You might want your students to consider explicitly which sources are most useful for answering this sort of question as part of their presentation. Students should also be encouraged to use tentative language, such as 'the source material suggests to us...' and 'it seems that many Europeans...

Activity part 2 – using the experiences of your character as evidence

- Blu-tack/pin the 'textbook pages' around the classroom room (from the PPT mentioned above in the preparation section) and give students post-it notes. You may want to give your students the table of characters and countries.
- Students go around the room and read each 'textbook' entry. They then think about if and how their character's story can be used as evidence to support the 'textbook' entry they have read. If they decide it can, then they write the name and nationality of their character on a post-it, they also write what it is from their character's story that is relevant, and they stick the post-it on the wall by the textbook entry. This continues until students have worked their way around the room.
- In a plenary session, ask for student observations and questions as a result of this task. Once again, ask students to give words and phrases to explain what Europe seems to have been like in the years 1945-9 and what its people needed to have a good life in the future. Write these down new words and phrases that emerge to the lists already started.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY**Activity part 3 – drawing ideas together and assessing understanding****Shorter version**

- It may be that you only have time for a short plenary discussion about the question: What was it like to be European 1945-49? If so, try to engage the students with the following questions to draw their learning together:
 - What was it like to be living in war-torn Europe? Are any experiences common to all Europeans at this time? What seem to be the most important factors that shape people's lives at this time? What factors were likely to make the experiences different? (These are likely to include: the wartime experience of the person and their nation, personal factors and the geography of the Cold War.) What sort of language do we have to use to make sure people to not think that one life can represent the lives of millions?
 - What were the concerns of people emerging from the era of World War Two? What did people need in order to find stability, peace and a future in which they could flourish? How popular were ideas of European unity likely to be?

Longer version

- Using the words and phrases agreed so far, and the evidence files, students work in small groups to put together a short presentation (spoken, or on paper, or online) about Europe 1945-49. This presentation should present the range and diversity of Europeans' experience of these years. It should also address the questions: What were the concerns of people emerging from the era of World War Two? What did European people need in order to find stability, peace and a future in which they could flourish? How did Europe need to change to meet these needs? As part of this, ask your students to suggest what ingredients their specific character might have suggested for a better Europe.

TEACHER NOTE 4



- Your students may also be keen to learn what happened to their characters. If so, you can give them the 'moving on' section. On their character profile they had a section called 'what we have read makes us want to know'. Discuss what questions remain and how they may seek to find the answers to them.

Follow up ideas

- Ask your students to research and share a life story from the period, possibly from their own family, or from your region. As an alternative to this, students could discuss the big concerns of their generation and then seek to interview an older family member (preferably alive in the 1940s/50s period) to ask them what the concerns were of their generation in those years. The findings could then be presented and shared in some way.
- If you are using the life stories as part of a study of Europe in the second half of the 20th century, you may want to return to the characters once you have completed the study. Students could be asked to suggest what might have surprised, pleased or disappointed their character about Europe in the year 2000. This could result in some sort of action, such as writing a letter to their MEP explaining how studying this topic about Europe has made them think and feel about the European Union today, or writing up the key messages for today's Europeans that they think the 1945 generation would want to pass on, or writing a plan for a TV documentary titled: 'Europe today – the history' – what would you include and how would you present it?

An alternative approach that just uses the evidence files:

Challenge your students to put together their own source collection of ten pieces of sources material that says something important about Europe 1945-49. These could be selected from the evidence files, or source material they have researched for themselves.

Their source collection should:

- Enable a person who looks at them to learn something about what it was like to live in Europe 1945-49.
- Have an introductory piece of writing and annotations for each of the sources that put them in context and say how they help us to understand the period.
- Be given a clear title.
- Reflect something of the range and diversity of experience of Europeans in these years.
- Include a comment on how useful and reliable the sources are for understanding the period.
- Include an explanation of the student's (group's) rationale for choosing to present these sources in this way.