

THE TREATMENT OF MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN NAZI GERMANY

Pathway Guide by Mark Robinson

This Pathway Guide considers the overall theme of Nazi treatment of people from minority communities, and is based on two Reteach lists: *Homosexuality in Nazi Germany* and *Disability in Nazi Germany*.

Please note that all timings are suggestions only so feel free to adapt or change them according to the needs of your students and your timetable. (Times in brackets refer to classroom time.)

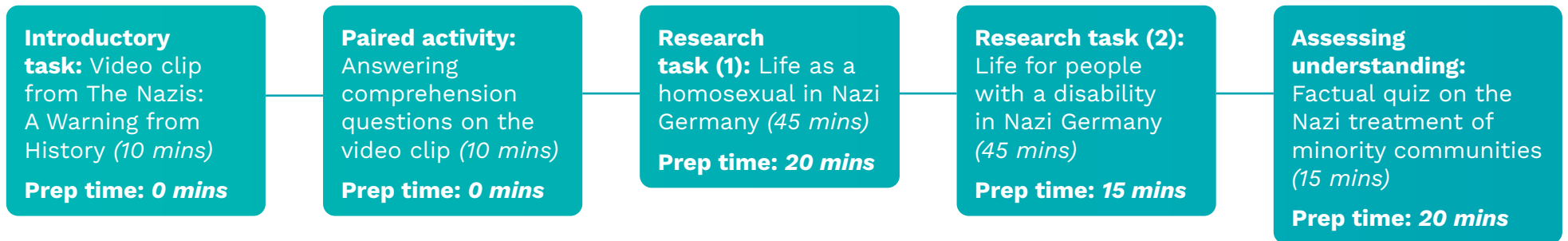
Enquiry questions

1. Why did the Nazis persecute people in minority communities in Germany?
2. How far did the Nazi treatment of homosexuals differ from their treatment of people with disabilities? If there are differences, why might that be?
3. To what extent did the German people participate in/concur with the persecution of minority groups?
4. Why is it important to recover individual stories of those who were persecuted by Nazism?
5. Why is it important to commemorate the events of the Holocaust each year?

Curriculum and specification mapping

- **KS3 curriculum:** The Holocaust
- **OCR History A:** Germany 1925–1955: The People and the State
- **OCR History B:** World Depth Study: Living under Nazi Rule, 1933–1945
- **Edexcel:** Modern depth study: Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1918–1939
- **AQA:** Germany, 1890–1945: Democracy and dictatorship (Part three: The experiences of Germans under the Nazis).

Not much planning time available



- **Introductory task:** Watch *The Nazis: A Warning from History – The Gestapo* clip about Ilsa Totzke (from the *Homosexuality in Nazi Germany* Reteach list: <https://reteach.org.uk/subject/history/homosexuality-in-nazi-germany>) and the clip on Manfred Bernhardt (from the *Disability in Nazi Germany* Reteach list <https://reteach.org.uk/subject/history/disability-in-nazi-germany>).
- **Paired activity:** Help students to understand the nature of the context by completing the question sheet from the *Disability in Nazi Germany* on the Reteach website. (A teacher answer sheet is also available.)
- **Research task (1):** Use extracts from *Branded by the Pink Triangle* by Ken Setterington to help in researching what life was like as a homosexual in Nazi Germany. Students should learn about Paragraph 175 of the German penal code, and create a graph plotting the number of convictions for homosexuality between 1918 and 1945. What was life like for homosexuals in Germany between the First and Second World Wars? Why did life become so much worse after the Nazis took power? (The Reteach article *The Enemy Within: Homosexuality in the Third Reich, 1933–1945* provides useful material as an extension to this topic for students who finish quickly.) How did the Nazis act against homosexuals?
- **Research task (2):** Students should research the Aktion T4 policy as a way of researching what life was like for people with a disability in Nazi Germany. How were these people treated before 1939? Why did the Nazis wait until after the outbreak of war to introduce Aktion T4? How far did the treatment of people with a disability overlap with the treatment of homosexuals?
- **Assessing understanding:** Create a factual quiz on Nazi discrimination against minority communities. Possible formats could include:
 1. Ordering exercise: Place key laws and actions introduced by the Nazis in chronological order
 2. Matching Nazi laws to their definitions
 3. ‘Quiz Quiz Trade’: Students review information with their peers by asking and answering questions
 4. Basic factual knowledge test
 5. Make a plan of how this quizzing technique could be used over a three-week period to prepare for a history test.

Some planning time available

Introductory task (1):
Ilsa Totzke and Würzburg
(40 mins)
Prep time: 40 mins

Investigation (1):
Ilsa Totzke's life
(60 mins)
Prep time: 25 mins

Introductory task (2):
Opposing the Nazi
Aktion T4 programme
(45 mins)
Prep time: 10 mins

Investigation (2):
Nazi policies
towards people with
disabilities (45 mins)
Prep time: 20 mins

Taking it further:
Totalitarianism
in Nazi Germany
(60 mins)
Prep time: 15 mins

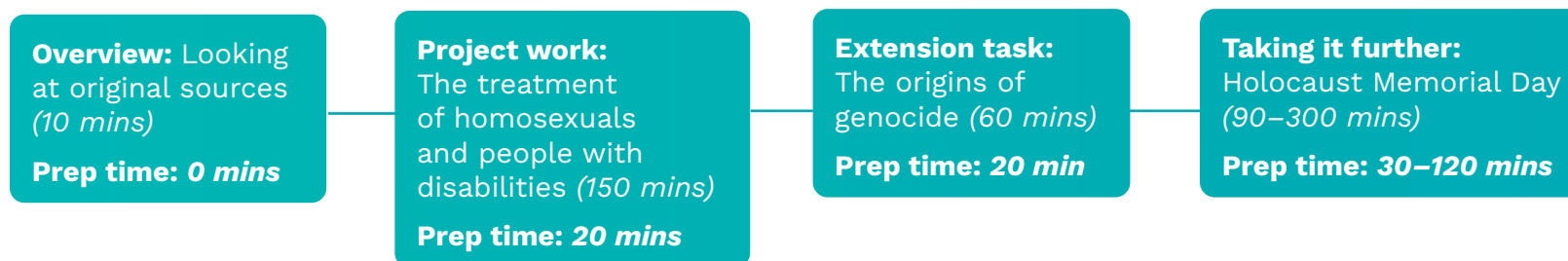
- **Introductory task (1):** Give students an introduction about Ilsa Totzke and the city of Würzburg. Build a picture of Würzburg in the 1930s: population, geographical position, voting patterns in the Weimar elections, and the nature of life under Nazi rule. What are the implications of such a small Gestapo force for such a large region? What did the Gestapo spend their time doing? What was the role of the citizenry?
- **Investigation (1):** Create a more detailed picture of Ilsa Totzke's life using the video clip and the article on the Reteach list: *Lesbianism, Transvestitism, and the Nazi State: A Microhistory of a Gestapo Investigation, 1939–1943* (<https://reteach.org.uk/subject/history/homosexuality-in-nazi-germany>). Divide the article and ask different groups to investigate the different stages of Ilsa Totzke's life. Make a timeline as a group on a poster roll.

What are the accusations against her? How does she fall outside the 'norms' of Nazi Germany? Why did she become 'Righteous Among the Nations'?
- **Introductory task (2):** In this task, students should create positive messages to oppose the Nazi 'fake news' of the Aktion T4 programme. Use *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* by Susan Bachrach to explore how the Nazis used eugenic theory to justify their policy. Students can create rebuttals to the different pieces of Nazi propaganda that are shown in the book. These could be in the form of 'mirror' images saying the opposite of Nazi propaganda, news posters/leaflets with positive messages about people with disabilities, or evidence-gathering sheets.
- **Investigation (2):** Read Chapter 2 of *The Nazis: A Warning from History* which looks at the personal impact of Nazi policies on people with disabilities. Different groups should take responsibility for researching the different elements of Nazi policy towards disabled minorities:
 1. Nazi Lebensborn philosophy
 2. The SS (Schutzstaffel) breeding programme
 3. Forced sterilisation of 'undesirables'
 4. The extent of opposition to Nazi policies (for example, the Catholic Church)
Each group presents their findings.

- **Taking it further:** Read the chapter from *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* by Piers Brendon called: ‘The Nazis in Power’. This offers a good overview of the imposition of totalitarian rule. Consider the following questions:

1. How did the Nazis ensure complete control of Germany?
2. Why did the Nazis persecute people from minority communities?
3. To what extent was Nazi treatment of homosexuals similar/different to the treatment of people with disabilities?

Longer planning time available



- **Overview:** Use the diagram from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/persecution-of-homosexuals/pdf/H_Pauly.pdf together with Hitler’s order for the T4 extermination programme ([Aktion T4 from Wikipedia](#)) to give students some more background to the topic. The link to Hitler’s order contains the translation: ‘*Reich Leader Bouhler and Dr. Brandt are entrusted with the responsibility of extending the authority of physicians, to be designated by name, so that patients who, after a most critical diagnosis, on the basis of human judgement [menschlichem Ermessen], are considered incurable, can be granted mercy death [Gnadentod].*’ – A. Hitler

Discuss what these two documents tell us about how the Nazis viewed people from minority communities, what they planned to do to them, and how they justified this to the German people.

- **Project work:** Divide students into pairs or small groups for project work.
 1. Use *The Pink Triangle* by Richard Plant, together with the Arolsen Archive: https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/search/topic/1-1-34-1_8141401?s=homosexual which highlight the difficulties of living under the Nazi regime as a homosexual.
 2. Use Chapter 6 of *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* by Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wipperman, and the link from the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust website <https://www.hmd.org.uk/learn-about-the-holocaust-and-genocides/nazi-persecution/disabled-people/> to bring students’ attention to the lives of people with disabilities under the Nazis.

- It should be possible for each pair/group of students to research a specific individual and find their photograph, details about their lives and personal letters. These should then be summarised in a visual way that can be displayed in the classroom/corridor.

Possible formats could include:

1. Making paper cubes for a hanging display with, for example, an image on Side 1, a snippet of biographical detail on Side 2, an extract from a letter on Side 3, the individuals' professional context on Side 4.
 2. Creating posters covering similar information.
 3. Creating a set of digital profiles of individuals.
- **Extension task:** Use the Further Materials on the *Disability in Nazi Germany* Reteach list <https://reteach.org.uk/subject/history/disability-in-nazi-germany>, especially Chapter 1 of *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* by Henry Friedlander to examine the background to the Nazis' extermination programme. Friedlander starts his book with the statement: 'Nazi genocide did not take place in a vacuum.' Explore the origins of the concepts of human inequality that underpinned Nazi ideology. Students should create a tree diagram or a fishbone diagram (or other visual scaffold) to summarise the different strands that fed into Nazi thinking.
 - **Taking it further:** Using the official website: <https://www.hmd.org.uk/> plan an activity for Holocaust Memorial Day (this occurs annually on 27 January) to shape a whole-school commemoration. Though the Jewish genocide is commonly covered, Holocaust Memorial Day seeks to commemorate all victims of genocide. Use the resources to help plan your commemoration to include minority communities discussed in this Pathway Guide, and beyond. The resources created from the 'Project work' section of this guide will be useful here.