



CASE STUDY

Sandford Award Criteria 1

The education programmes are delivered in a way that engages, informs and inspires visitors

At The National Archives, KS3 students work with original documents, high quality facsimiles and resources to analyse, reflect and debate the challenging subject of The Holocaust.

The National Archives



The National Archives (TNA) is the official archive of the UK Government and for England and Wales. TNA is the guardian of the nation's most iconic documents, dating back over 1,000 years. It aims to make these records as accessible and available as possible. This includes opening them up to young people and schools. TNA gives expert advice on information and records management and is a cultural, academic and heritage site. TNA fulfils a leadership role for the archive sector and works to secure the future of physical and digital records.

Session Description: ‘What can British government documents tell us about what happened in the Holocaust?’ – Key Stage 3

Students investigate the Holocaust using a range of original documents, from a Foreign Office telegram about Kristallnacht to a map of Auschwitz drawn by a survivor. Pupils have to consider what documents we hold in the British Government Archive and why. This workshop develops students’ skills at assessing the usefulness and limitations of historical documents, while addressing misconceptions and provoking discussion.

What impressed the Sandford Award Judge?

‘Students examined a range of documents and resources relating to the Holocaust, both facsimiles and originals. Difficult original materials were explained, for example unfamiliar language relating to the Holocaust, such as ghetto and clarity was given on the definition of the Holocaust. Students began with looking at black and white drawings in a diary and were asked to deduce any information. Through skilful looking techniques, they discovered that the artist was a French nurse and was a camp prisoner. The educator stimulated their curiosity by giving further detailed information to set the context – that she was an illustrator and resistance member during WWII. She recorded the shocking treatment and murder of female prisoners at Ravensbruck concentration camp and this was used as evidence in a 1946 Nazi war crimes trial.’

Stimulating curiosity, analysis, reflection and debate through enquiry based discussion

‘The educator effectively helped scaffold their learning about the Holocaust through high level enquiry based group discussions and feedback from each table. Students analysed, reflected, debated and asked further questions, showing sustained interest and curiosity. Educators addressed complex and challenging questions. One student asked: “Why did Britain not bomb Auschwitz?” Another described how focusing on one moment of the Holocaust related to one person made it easier to understand the human experience, rather than a focus on numbers murdered.’

The teacher was very satisfied and the session met their expectations. He commented that the success of visits is due to the expertise of the educators, the excellent quality of the learning experience and the opportunity to encounter authentic documents. He said the students had little prior knowledge of the Holocaust and the workshop enabled them to consolidate their knowledge and understanding.’

An encounter with ‘the real thing’

‘Students [also] learned about the historical context of the documents, as well as insight into how TNA looks after them. Students worked hands-on with original documents, literally touching pages of history... it was clear to see that an encounter with the real thing they had been researching inspired visible awe and wonder.’

Object handling and high quality reproductions

‘At the start of each session, a true story is shared about a rat, now an archive mascot, which had eaten through parchment documents of an eminent 19th century lawyer. This story sets the tone as to why an archive is necessary and educators explain that it has also been built to be bomb proof. The sessions end with a look at the 3D replica of the original document [and] the rat ...

In each session, educators introduce students to handling items. They touch paper, leather and parchment to aid understanding of their properties and the way people recorded material in the past. By the end of the sessions, students were visibly excited, enthused and demonstrated a passion for History. Students are introduced to conservation techniques, for example understanding how special weights hold documents flat... All sessions highlight the treasures (documents) they have in the collection and ensure differentiation, for example providing simplified transcripts in sessions.’

In conclusion...

‘The educators embed the clearly stated learning philosophy into their teaching, applying seven descriptors of what TNA learning means. These descriptors underpin the methodology for each session, enabling educators to achieve intended outcomes including make students curious and have a clear enquiry question that students answer by the end of the workshop.’