

Life stories

An introduction for educators With tips and extra information

Text in italics are taken from the online learning tool

What do the personal stories of individuals tell us about history? Let's explore the history of discrimination by looking at different stories.

Get to know the stories of ten people who have been affected by discrimination.

Aims

In this learning path learners:

- Get to know the stories of several people affected by antigypsyism, antisemitism, racism and discrimination against LGBT+.
- Reflect on positive achievements in addressing discrimination and the things that haven't changed.
- Gain skills to work with historical sources.
- Work in small groups to exchange ideas about the effect of discrimination on people.
- Prepare a presentation for the larger group and get acquainted with a variety of stories from different periods in history.

Structure

This learning path consists of one track (lesson) with a number of steps.

- The learners are introduced to 10 personal stories.
- They first pick one for themselves and learn briefly about that person, then go on to work in small groups, sharing stories. The stories all deal with different forms of discrimination, such as antisemitism, racism, and discrimination against Roma and LGBT+.
- Each group then looks at photos and quotes and chooses one person's story to look into more deeply. A timeline of that person's life gives an overview. As a group, learners prepare a presentation for the class.

The historical biographies were chosen to contribute to intercultural historical learning. The focus is not on a particular period, though the Nazi era plays an important role in many of the lives presented here. The contextual information given is limited. The aim is to reflect on how personal lives are affected by discriminatory measures. Care has been taken to present people not only as victims but also as people with their own lives and identities.



Flow of work: Icons

Learners will often work in pairs, small groups or discuss a topic with the whole class. The flow for each step is easily recognised with the help of the following icons:



Answering questions individually allows time to formulate a personal response.



Discussing topics in pairs gives everyone the chance to voice an opinion and discuss in a simple format, with one person.



Discussing in small groups allows for more opinions to be shared and also creates a comfortable space to voice ideas. Not all learners are keen to express themselves in a larger group.



Class discussions give the opportunity to bring the group together to review the work being done and also give you as the educator a moment to summarise some main outcomes.



Step 1 Keywords

Write down three words about how discrimination affects people's lives'.

Learners will return to their answers during the reflection step at the end of the learning path.



Step 2 Select a person

Choose someone you think looks interesting.

On the basis of a snap judgement, learners choose a person they think looks interesting. In the following steps they will learn more about this person.



Step 3 Your choice

Why did you choose this person?

Learners may choose a particular story for many different reasons. Having to articulate whether they chose because of a face or the tag line, for example, helps them realise that there are many different ways to make a first connection with a person.



Step 4 See – Think – Wonder

Look carefully at the picture and write down a few words for each of the three questions.

What do you see?

I think that ...

What questions do you have?

This exercise helps learners explore a source using the 'visible thinking' approach, distinguishing between what they see, what they think based on this, and what they would like to know. Learners explore a picture related to the story they picked. They are encouraged to look closely and think of questions. The technique makes use of their natural curiosity.

For more information go to [Visible Thinking](#) on the website.



Step 5 Life story

Read the life story.

Select three events you think were important and explain why.

Learners are given a short text with basic information about the person they chose. All the texts are available in the file 'Life stories'.

Before starting

• Make sure learners know that their answers will be shared within the group. Exchange and discussion is central to the learning process. Each time your students login they will see the following pop-up:

Please be aware: the answers you give during assignments will be shared with your teacher and classmates in group work.

• As the topics discussed are personal, consider whether the atmosphere in the class feels safe and whether you can be sure that the learners will treat each other respectfully. Discuss this point with the class if you think this might be necessary.

• Often learners will only be able to continue if they have submitted one or more answers. At some points when working online learners will only be able to continue if the rest of the class has also submitted answers. They need to be aware of this.

• Learners will need guidance on how much time to spend on each step. Taking the level of your learners into account, and the amount of time available it will be useful to indicate the available time. Tracks start with brief questions that serve as a 'warming up'. Keep the time spent on the first steps brief, so that there is more time for discussion later on.

• Consider giving some assignments as homework (as indicated). Research and preparing presentations can be done individually or in small groups as home work.

Blended learning

Blended learning mixes online and offline work, allowing students to benefit from both learning environments in the most effective way. The learning process is centred on individual assignments and intense exchanges, and should be carefully monitored.

Learners should not run ahead of the group. It can be useful to read some of the texts collectively, with one learner reading out loud and to watch some of the video clips collectively. Take time for the group work and class discussion.



Step 6 Form a group

You will share 'your' life story in a group. Tell the group in two minutes about 'your' person and why you picked him or her.

The groups should consist of three to five learners who have all chosen different people. Each learner gets two minutes to tell their group about 'their' person and why they picked him or her. Groups will subsequently choose one life story to work on together, but learners should only be told this after they have all made their presentations.



Step 7 Choose a life story

Your group must now adopt one life story to present to the rest of the class. When you have agreed, write down the reasons why you agreed to pick that one. Why did you agree to pick this character? Look at all the sources carefully. As a group, choose a few you want to work with. Put together a presentation. Be creative. What elements of this person's life are particularly interesting? What is the significance of this life story today?

The group prepares a presentation for the rest of the class. Groups can choose their own format, perhaps a poster, a power point, an interview, or an acted scene. Alternatively, the groups might each make an exhibition panel or poster to be presented during a gallery walk.

Be clear what you want from the presentations and the time allotted to each group, and be sure to plan enough time. For example, allow five minutes per presentation and three more minutes for a few questions or responses and your feedback per group. In a class of 25 learners, and groups of five – at least 40 minutes will be needed. It is not advisable to plan more than five or six presentations in one lesson.



Step 8 All voices matter

Before the presentations, let's discuss briefly who wasn't chosen and why all stories count.

All ten people are again shown on screen. Ask if anyone chose one story but then worked with another story in the small group. Take time to acknowledge all the stories that were chosen but discarded and those that no-one chose. You can also ask learners how the group discussion went and why groups decided to work with a particular story. Finally, emphasise that every life story is a unique and valuable voice teaching us about society.

Navigation

Most learning paths have several tracks. You as the educator will choose which path and track learners work with. Each track consists of several steps. Most steps include several screen pages – usually with a question, some information, and an assignment to work on in pairs or as a group. Learners can only go back a page if it is part of the same step, perhaps to look again at the question or to reread a text. The back arrow will not take learners back to previous steps. If this is necessary, the dropdown menu in the top left hand corner opens navigation through the whole track.

Tag clouds

There are two types of tag clouds that collect the individual answers submitted by learners. The 'word cloud' collects words submitted by the learners. All answers are treated equally. However, the 'cloud' shows a random collection of answers. This means that not everyone sees the same answers. Usually there will be more words than fit on one screen. A useful way to discuss the tag cloud is to ask if anyone is surprised or interested in a particular word. As the moderator you might also group words that belong together.

Sometimes the tag cloud collects the opinions of learners statistically and displays them in a graph or with numbers. This illustrates the differences of opinion in the class. Suggestions for discussion are given.

Learners who are the first to submit answers will find the tag cloud relatively empty. Let all learners refresh their screen if the last learners have submitted their answers.

Glossary

Word highlighted in the text are explained in the glossary. It will depend on the level and interest of the learners, and the time available if they use the glossary extensively or not. In some cases the learners will be required to use the glossary. Consider which words you want to discuss with the whole class to make sure they have been understood.



Step 9 Showtime

Ready? Then it's time for your presentation!

Learners present 'their' life story to the class. Consider asking someone to take photos or to film the presentations. This should be discussed beforehand, including agreeing whether or not the presentations can be shared outside the class.



Step 10 Reflection

Look at the words you wrote in answer to the first question. Add a new thought and give an explanation.

Write down three new words about how discrimination affects people's lives.

To round off the learning path, take time to discuss some of the new words that learners have added.

Information and instruction

Extra information and instructions are sometimes provided in the top right hand corner of the screen. Make sure that learners are aware of this. They will sometimes need this information to complete an assignment.

Subtitles

Make sure to turn on the subtitles (click on the icon at the bottom right corner of the video screen to select the language) before learners start watching the film clip.

