

TOUCHSTONE

REMEMBRANCE EDUCATION

*A manual for the quality of
remembrance education projects*



KEY TO SYMBOLS



Hint or good practice



Knowledge and insight



Empathy and involvement



Reflection and action



COLOFON

Concept | © Bijzonder Comité voor Herinneringseducatie (2015, revised edition)

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Some references to websites may no longer work when you read this booklet. Most websites are in full development and such things are bound to happen. However, we are more than happy to help you in your search for educational materials. Send us an email on herinneringseducatie@telenet.be.



Introduction

The Special Committee for Remembrance Education (BCH)

In 2008, the then Minister for Education took the first step towards the creation of a Special Committee for Remembrance Education (BCH – Bijzonder Comité voor Herinneringseducatie). This committee consists of educationalists working for several major actors in remembrance education (In Flanders Fields Museum, War and Peace in Flanders Fields, Kazerne Dossin, the Fortress of Breendonk, the Auschwitz Foundation, the Institute for Veterans IV-NIOOO, RCN Justice & Démocratie, Tumult), the educational guidance services of the different educational networks and the Ministry of Education and Training. Their common task is to support teaching teams by contributing to transparency and quality of what is on offer in the field of remembrance education. In this way, the BCH aims to close the gap between ‘providers’ and ‘clients’. The touchstone is the tool which the BCH has developed specifically to support the quality of remembrance education.

The BCH definition of remembrance education

There are dozens of views on what remembrance education is or should be. In 2008, the BCH members chose a working definition. This definition is the starting point of this brochure. More information is available at www.herinneringseducatie.be.



“Remembrance education aims at developing an attitude of **active respect** in **today’s society**, based on the **collective memory** of **human suffering** that was caused by **human activities** such as **war, intolerance, or exploitation** and that must **never be forgotten**.”

Who is this touchstone for?

This touchstone contains suggestions for all those working with collective memories. They can be teachers, but also youth and heritage workers, educational workers, authors, socio-cultural associations etc.

Attainment targets as a framework

When tackling remembrance education in a school context, you pay attention to different attainment targets. For Flemish pupils in nursery and primary education, the attainment targets for the ‘environmental studies’ subject area and the cross-curricular attainment targets for social skills are obvious. In secondary education, starting points can most easily be found in cross-curricular attainment targets (VOET) and in subject-related attainment targets for history. There are other subject matters which provide opportunities for remembrance education: languages, philosophical subjects, General Studies (PAV) and natural sciences are just a few examples.

A multitude of educational spearheads

It is obvious that remembrance education is only one of the many ‘educational’ spearheads which you can tackle both in and outside school. However, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the objectives and contents of these educational spearheads. Think of the huge amount of objectives that remembrance education and peace education, human rights education, heritage education, citizenship education have in common... They all aim at reflecting, together with young people, upon our own responsibility in a democratic society in which the fundamental rights and freedoms are respected.



Looking for inspiration?

Discover a lot of educational material on www.klascement.net/herinneringseducatie (website only available in Dutch, but you will find several items in English as well).



You will find more information about our activities or other interesting projects on our website www.herinneringseducatie.be (website only available in Dutch).



Do you want to stay up to date? Subscribe to our newsletter! www.herinneringseducatie.be (Only available in Dutch.)



Like us on www.facebook.com/herinneringseducatie.

“What do you want to learn from the past?”



The three pillars of remembrance education

Remembrance education is based upon three key elements: (1) knowledge and insight, (2) empathy and involvement and (3) reflection and action. You can consider those three pillars as the primary objectives of remembrance education. Although each objective develops other competences, in practice, they are never strictly separated. For achieving quality remembrance education, the BCH advises to focus equally strongly on each pillar. However, the order may differ according to the target group.

From the past to the present

In the areas of education in which history is part of the curriculum and attainment targets explicitly emphasize the relevance of historical knowledge, you can use linear phasing. In this context, knowledge and insight offer an impetus towards tackling the next two pillars effectively. Without knowledge and insight, empathy and solidarity as well as reflection and action lack substance and remain an empty shell. Without the possibility to apply the lessons learnt to reflection and action, knowledge and empathy remain superficial and moralising.



From the present to the past (and back again)

In education forms where history is not explicitly included in the curriculum, it may be useful to work with a circular model. Reflection on modern society leads to knowledge and insight into a historical context. Also historical empathy is made possible from there. It is important to conclude by linking up with modern society again, for example by having a moment of reflection. This approach may be equally interesting for an educational form with history as a subject matter. Your approach will also depend on the prior knowledge, the interests and sensitivities of the target group.

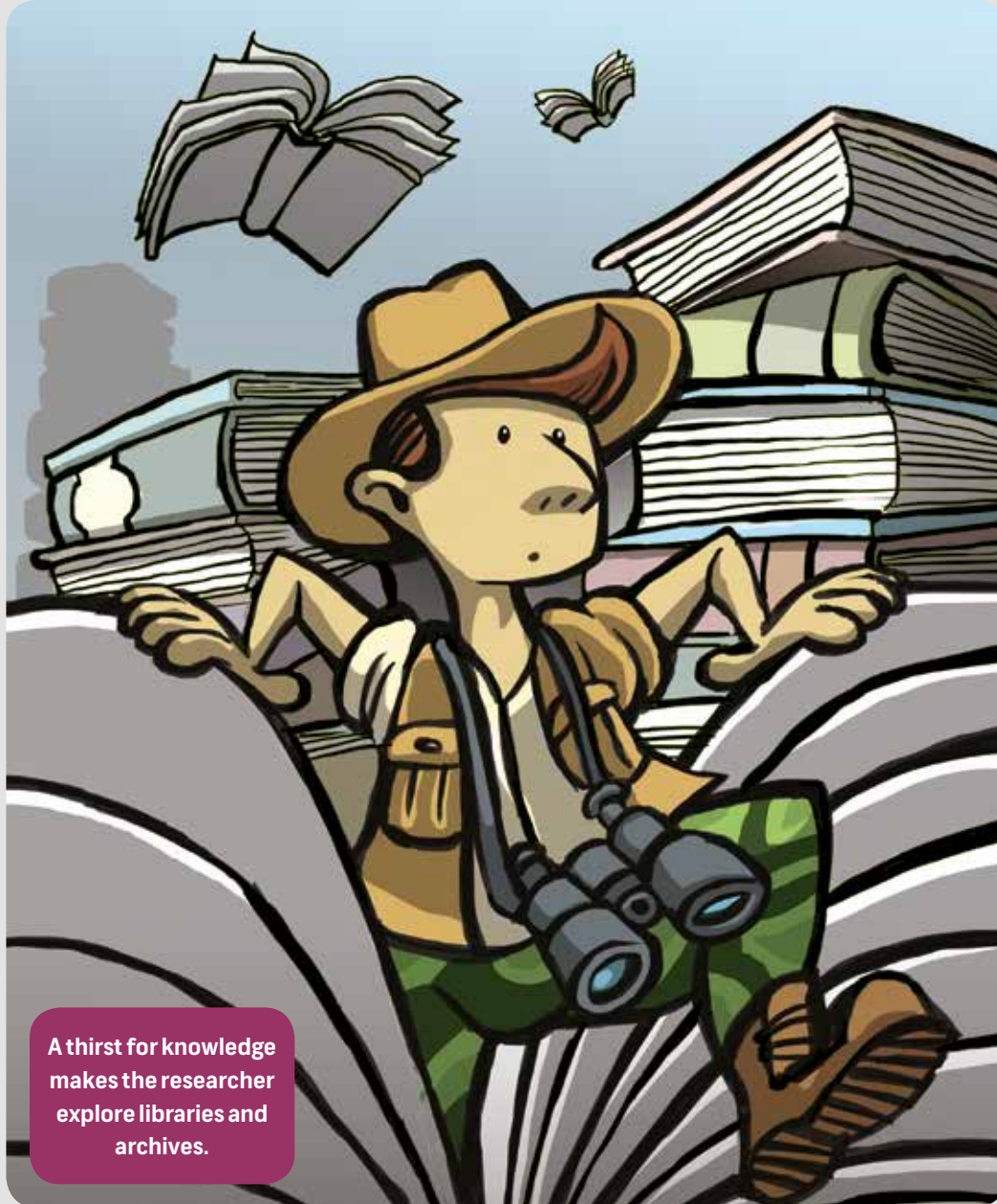


Be aware that some historians will have doubts about this method. They emphasize that history is being used in this approach as a mere accessory tool to meet a specific objective. Moreover, you run the risk of judging (or even condemning) the past by present-day standards. This is called presentism. Much depends on the questions you use for digging into the past. Some questions may be very helpful when exploring history, for example: “What are the roots of this contemporary phenomenon?” This is a very suitable approach to update the past: it will lead to a better understanding of the present by investigating (history) how things have turned out the way they did.

Below, the BCH each time gives a short comment on what can be understood by (1) knowledge and insight, (2) empathy and involvement and (3) reflection and action.



Knowledge and insight



A thirst for knowledge makes the researcher explore libraries and archives.

Insight into a historical context

Each and every historical context is brought about by the interaction between all areas of economic, political, social and cultural life. This makes each period of time different and unique. To get a good understanding of the different contexts, it is useful to start investigating the sources. Researching and reading source material together with the target group is of key importance. To understand the lives of historical figures and their historic 'reality', it is of paramount importance to compare as many different sources as possible. However, bear this in mind: sources are no mirror of the past. Sound historical research should be at the basis of your knowledge of the past.



How do I know my sources are reliable?

This is a very difficult question and probably you will never know the answer for sure. A great deal of source materials were lost some time in the past. Thus, history does not give an accurate picture of the past. But history is a construction of the past, based on a set of source materials selected and interpreted by historians. Despite the subjective nature, remembrance education projects always gain from the use and analysis of source materials. Bring your target group into physical contact with sources. Turn to local heritage societies or visit an archives institution. The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam even organizes a workshop on this. Watch the video for inspiration at www.annefrank.org (video and workshop only available in Dutch).



Accessibility to the source

Be aware that it is not obvious at all to read historical sources. Often they are written in a foreign language or in an obsolete form of Dutch/English/... People with limited language skills preferably use photographic or video materials. You can also 'translate' source material into today's standard languages. However, a critical approach to historical information (systematically questioning each source) should become a matter of course.



Processes and mechanisms

In the historical context, there are processes and mechanisms which are not one-off events but which also recur in other situations. Think for instance of the abuse of power, prejudices, propaganda, xenophobia, dehumanisation, exclusion, extremism, ... They do not take place in a historical vacuum, but are partly determined by the context in which they appear. Throughout history, they have taken different forms and shapes. Understanding those mechanisms can help you to explain other forms of collective violence. Current processes may seem similar to mechanisms from the past, but it is inevitable that they will also differ from them as the context has changed. The past will never repeat itself in exactly the same way. So, the target group must be given the opportunity to not only acquire an in-depth understanding of the historical context, but also to see the similarities and differences and identify possible connections.



The 'Jood/Juif' stamp (Jew) on Belgian identity cards was one of the first steps towards exclusion and finally towards the mass persecution of Jews during the Second World War. © Simon Schepers



Resemblances and differences

Comparing processes and mechanisms from different historical periods of time is at the heart of remembrance education. In order to reveal them, the target group may search for similarities, but also for differences between conflicts. Sometimes, a schematic approach may prove useful. A precondition for this is that the target group is confronted with sufficiently rich and diverse source material to offer them a nuanced picture. First, make them find the differences and show them the similarities. In the end, each event remains unique.



Kazerne Dossin

The permanent exhibition of Kazerne Dossin. Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on Holocaust and Human Rights highlights the various processes and mechanisms that gave rise to the Holocaust. Based on this analysis, the museum also reflects on other historical forms of mass violence: the genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda, Apartheid in South Africa, segregation in the United States, etc. In this way, you get an interesting image of the human rights theme, both in the past and the present. www.kazernedossin.eu



Top: Theme wall on 'Extinction' (Kazerne Dossin) © Simon Schepers
Left: Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen © Simon Schepers

History and collective memory

History and remembrance have a complex relationship: sometimes tense but they often inform each other. Ideally, history should be based on a neutral analysis and interpretation of sources and facts. Collective memory, by contrast, is influenced by different factors: politics, ideology, religion, gender, norms and values. This is often a top-down process: official authorities determine which events are embedded in collective memory (for instance festive events, commemoration ceremonies, names of streets, statues etc.). In this perspective, it is interesting to examine how a certain subject is remembered today and what are the reasons for this. In remembrance education, this process of raising awareness plays an important part.



Who writes history?

It is said that “history is written by the victors”. Therefore it may be an innovative thinking exercise to look at this historical event from a less obvious perspective. For instance, what happened in Japan during World War II and how are these events remembered there today? What is the German perspective on the introduction of mustard gas as a weapon during the First World War? Which socio-economic layer of the population writes history? Knowledge about the past is never absolute. This also applies to our view of history. Despite the facts, different people sometimes interpret historical events in very different ways.



Training programmes in historical thinking

The ‘Junior College Geschiedenis’ (lectures offered by the KULeuven University) trains pupils in secondary education in different forms of historical thinking. Young people gain sharper insights into the construction of the past and the present and into the distinction between history and collective memory. ‘Junior College Geschiedenis’ also offers a digital learning platform with additional documentation where teachers, pupils and lecturers can meet. For further information, please visit www.kuleuven.be/onderwijs/juniorcollege/geschiedenis (only available in Dutch).



Empathy and involvement



Getting an insight into the emotional world of historical figures but still keeping sufficient distance.

An antidote to indifference

Processes like dehumanization and exclusion are only made possible through aloofness and indifference. That is why remembrance education aims at the opposite, that is by focussing on developing historical empathy. Using primary sources, thereby giving the floor to individuals is essential. Historical figures are portrayed as much as possible as human beings rather than statistics. An insight into the dreams, ideas, feelings and plans of others tries to be an effective antidote to aloofness and indifference. It increases the involvement of the target group in the past and allows for developing historical empathy.

What is meant by historical empathy?

Historical empathy is an important concept in (history) education. It helps raise people's awareness of history and of themselves but also prepares them for active participation in society. Taking an historical perspective implies:

- recognising that values, opinions, religious beliefs and intentions of historical figures may differ from those of the researcher;
- recognising that individuals and groups had and have different values, opinions and religious beliefs (depending on the historical context);
- the willingness to interpret actions and events in terms of the values, opinions and religious beliefs of historical figures.

What is not meant by historical empathy?

Most researchers think adding the adjective 'historical' to the concept of empathy is useful because it is then distinguished from psychological or emotional empathy, which focus principally on identifying oneself and being compassionate with other people. Historical empathy does not mean that you identify yourself with historical persons. It is not about imagination either, but it is about a thorough investigation of the evidence available. That is why empathy should not be confused with sympathy. The word 'historical empathy' invariably asks for caution: the long distance in time makes it almost impossible to identify completely with historical persons, even if you would want to.



Do you want to learn more?

This chapter was based on an interesting article by Albert van der Kaap in relation to historical empathy and frames of reference. You will find this valuable text (in Dutch) on the digital learning platform Histoforum, a website for history didactics. www.histoforum.net/2011/standplaatsgebondenheid.html (Last consulted on the 25th of September 2015.)



From individuals to groups

Historical empathy is a difficult but important part of remembrance education. It helps young people to become more aware of their environment and themselves. It is an important step towards developing an attitude of active respect. The ability to build historical empathy grows with age. That is why among others The International School for Holocaust Studies (www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education) suggests the following model:

1. The individual (nursery and primary education)

With young children you should tackle the story of one individual, preferably of the same age. In this way, children are better capable of relating the story to themselves and getting a better understanding of it.

2. Family (stage 1 of secondary education)

If the children are a few years older, they can be confronted with the stories of a family. This is a social setting with which they are well acquainted. Moreover, focussing on a family allows them to explore different perspectives and they can devote their attention to relationships between individuals.

3. Groups (starting from stages 2 and 3 of secondary education)

Thirdly, there are the adolescents who are very busy developing their personal and social identity and their system of values. That is why they can be confronted with the perspectives of a wider social circle: a class, a group of friends, a village, a community, ...



Fortress of Breendonk

Due to its authentic character, the Fortress of Breendonk, a former prisoner camp for opponents of the Nazi regime during the German occupation, is a place where history is very visible. No one can remain unaffected by the prisoners’ rooms, the torture room and the place of execution. During a visit to Breendonk, the personal stories of the prisoners get a central place. www.breendonk.be

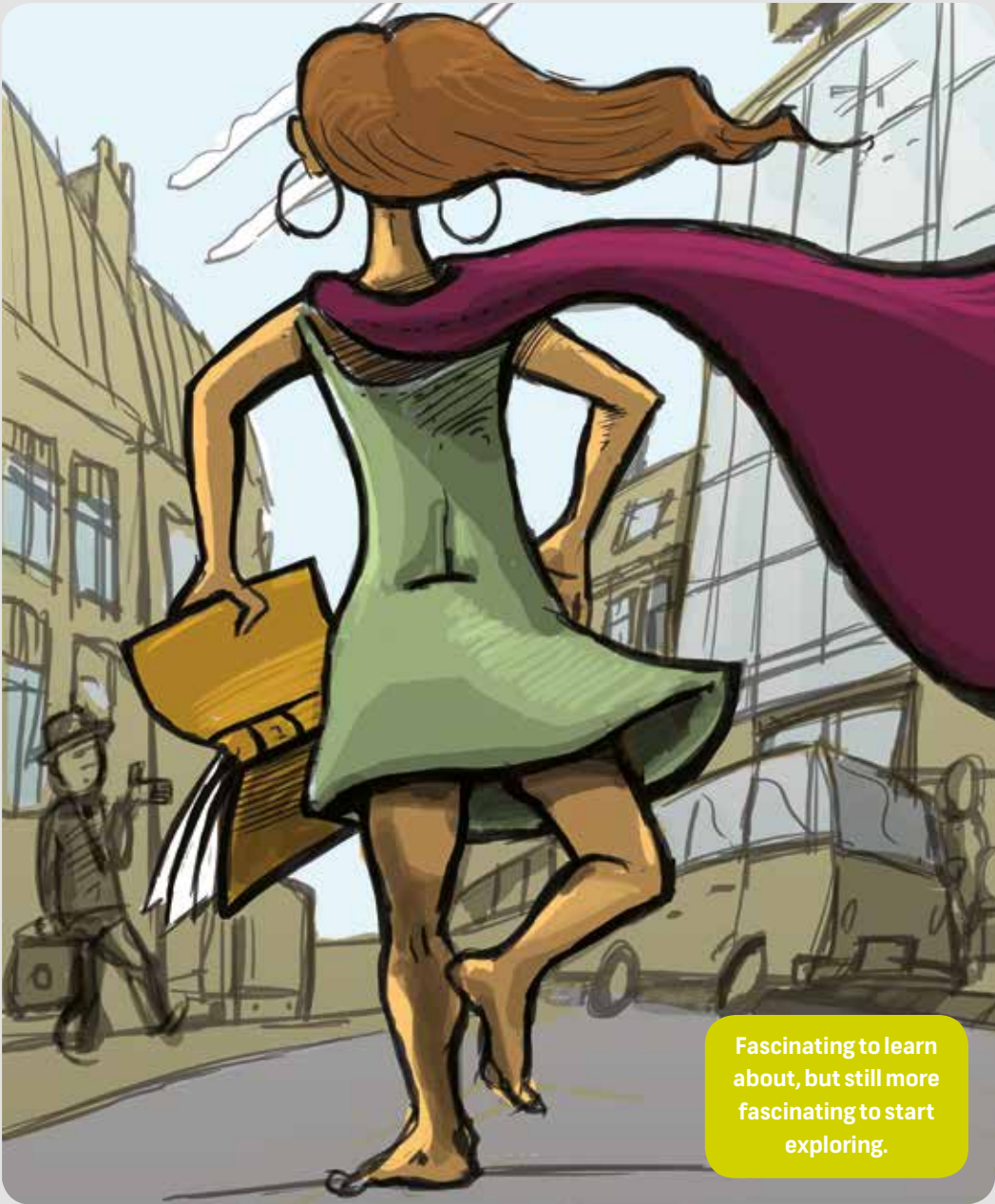


The wall with the names of 3,600 prisoners of the SS-Auf-fanglager-Breendonk © Fortress of Breendonk (Van Reeth)

Fortress of Breendonk © Simon Schepers



Reflection and action



Fascinating to learn about, but still more fascinating to start exploring.

Human rights

Teaching about historical facts is one thing. Developing historical empathy and dealing with painful emotions is a different matter. However, stimulating reflection and action is quite a challenge. Indeed, reflection aims at transcending the studied historical context and at investigating the exposed mechanisms. Key questions are then: “Can those mechanisms be found in other historical contexts or in current events?”, “What could those mechanisms lead to today?” and “How can I put my insights to good practical use?” Indeed, ideally, remembrance education leads to ‘action’ and to ‘involvement’ in individual or collective actions in case of injustice or disrespect. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is the benchmark here. The Amnesty International website contains information on human rights: www.amnesty.org.



Universal rights?

Be aware that human rights are less universal than we often think. Some non-western countries do not agree with the claims to the universality of human rights. As to that, we can distinguish three large groups: the Asian, African and Islamic discourses. Their objections cannot be simply neglected: indeed, they incite people to examine human rights from a perspective that differs from the western perspective.



Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
© UN Photo - John Isaac



Does my opinion count too?

Apart from civil rights, political, economic, social and cultural rights, human rights also encompass the so-called collective rights. The concept of collective rights emerged in the period of decolonisation and the pursuit of self-determination. Collective rights pertain to groups (populations) and not to individuals. Adherents to the philosophy of individualism criticize those rights because they do not take account of people who belong to a group but who have other beliefs and convictions (with regard to religion, culture, gender, sexuality). When, for example, a newly independent state prohibits a religion or sexual orientation, this will conflict with the individual's freedoms.



Children's rights

For young children, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a legal and rather distant notion. Therefore start with children's rights. The right to play, education, food or protection are recognisable frameworks that appeal to them. More info?

www.kinderrechten.be (Only partially available in English.)

www.kinderrechtenschool.be (Available in Dutch and French.)



'De bende van :P' (nursery and primary education) and "t Zitemzo" (secondary education)
© Children's Rights Commissioner's Office



Vormen vzw

Vormen vzw is the centre of expertise for human rights and children's rights in Flanders. You will find a lot of educational material on their website. So, to find out more, check out www.vormen.org (website partially available in English).

Now is the time to put ideas into action

Remembrance education strives for 'active respect'. The social goal of remembrance education can indeed be described as the preparation of young people to active citizenship in society. Ideally, remembrance education aims to develop critical and committed citizens; citizens who are willing to promote tolerance and solidarity, to take individual or collective action, for example, when they themselves or others are confronted with injustice and disrespect.



Be modest

Unfortunately, remembrance education is not a magic word. Thinking about the past and acting in the present are two different things. One thing does not logically follow the other. Therefore, do not expect that the lessons about the past will spontaneously generate attitudes in the present. Start from the idea that if you are able to recognise mechanisms in historic events, this will provide fertile soil for the development of critical thinking about choices and attitudes towards the society in which we live.



yEUth

YEuth is a non-profit organisation which wants to inspire young people from all over Europe to become more politically active. This is done through intercultural dialogue, debate and conflict-resolution workshops. Young people learn to turn the positive value of peace and European citizenship into concrete actions. Mutual understanding and exchange of ideas between peers occupy a central place in this. For more information, please visit www.yeuth.eu (website available in English).



Young people entering into dialogue about conflict and citizenship. © yEUth



'Andrew's Dreammuseum' © In Flanders Fields Museum (Tijl Capoen)



Ten hints for successful remembrance education

HINT 1: SUSTAINABLE LEARNING

Currently, there are numerous opportunities to embark on remembrance education: exhibitions, guided walks, stage plays, (graphic) novels, television series, musicals, ... As an educator, you will have no difficulty in finding something suitable for the target group. Choosing a topic does not so much present a problem, but providing good support to the activity does. A film or exhibition can undeniably be considered a plus, especially when it is embedded in a long-term process which largely focuses on preparation and on coming to terms with what the group experiences. For it is an illusion that a one-time visit to a site of remembrance works as a remedy for indifference. Excursions and classes in the context of a designed programme increase the chance of sustainably developing values and attitudes.



Whole school commitment

Evidently, remembrance education does not have to be limited to a classroom setting. What is more, clearly stating objectives in an unambiguous school policy will create high added value. In this way, active respect is broadly embedded into the school's operation. Labels such as 'School Zonder Racisme' (School Without Racism) or 'KiVa School' can give an impetus. You can provide even greater resonance to your commitment during project weeks, in school rules, in the activities of the pupil parliament, parent contacts, etc. The possibilities are legion! Take a look at www.schoolzonderracisme.be (only available in Dutch and French) or www.kivaschool.org (website available in English).



'Brede School'

In order to make people aware of the broad community in which they live and grow up, the notion of the 'Brede School' (Extended School) has been introduced. In this way, children and young people are also brought into contact with the theme outside school hours and the active respect objective is reinforced. Find out more on www.bredeschool.org (website only available in Dutch).

HINT 2: CROSS-CURRICULAR APPROACH

Remembrance education lends itself perfectly for a cross-curricular approach. Why speak about the Great War when teaching environmental studies, history or General Studies (PAV) and not when teaching art, physical education, social skills, aesthetics, biology, ...? It is obvious that in history and PAV classes, you acquire the required knowledge about the historical context (a prerequisite of remembrance education), but developing 'active respect' does closely pertain to attainment targets of many other subject areas. So, think creatively and use cross-curricular inputs: write poetry together, teach about the poppy or about animals in wartime, use an atlas, read a book together, go for a bicycle ride or listen to music. Moreover, this cross-curricular approach provides the opportunity for adopting different perspectives to a theme. This may be very enriching and cause new insights. As a teacher it is, for example, interesting to listen to the opinions of peers. Is there a common ground and is collaboration an option? If different colleagues exchange information and materials and the burden is not placed on a single individual, the project's chances of success and continuity are much greater.



"I am a chemistry teacher. What does this have to do with the war?"

Both in the past and in the present, scientists, architectural engineers and physicians were involved in the development of new (chemical) weapons. Think about the use of mustard gas during the First World War or the devastating power of the atom bomb. Teachers of natural sciences can use historical examples to demonstrate the power of science and where ethical dilemmas arise.



Flanders Peace Field

Flanders Peace Field vzw (FPF) from Mesen sets up (inter-) national projects to commemorate the Christmas truces during the First World War. Here, key focus is on peace education and conflict management. You can choose from educational, sports, cultural and recreational activities. www.peacevillage.be



'In no man's land' – an educational GPS game of Flanders Peace Field © Peace Village

HINT 3 : CREATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS DIVERSITY

Matching the contents to the target group is extremely important. Existing material is often intended for the so-called 'straight white male': the gender-stereotyped perception of a middle-class sixteen-year-old, with a strong interest in history. However, generally, reality is totally different. Almost one in four Belgian pupils attends vocational education and their curriculum does not include a history course. Another frequently asked question is how you deliver remembrance education to people with a recent migration background. In Flanders, almost ten percent of pupils grow up in a non-Flemish ethnic/cultural background. In a multicultural group, not all members have the same frame of reference and diverse and conflicting sensitivities often emerge. That is why speaking about the Holocaust or the Armenian genocide sometimes becomes more complicated than expected. Sometimes, simply teaching about war contexts is too confronting for young people who have traumatic experiences with war or persecution themselves. Creativity and flexibility are indispensable in this context. For those who want to go off the beaten track, there is of course the domain of world history: the study of the evolution of different civilisations and the effects of their interaction, for example: the exchange of goods and techniques via the Arab world in the 8th century, the great Chinese discoverer Zheng He, the involvement of colonial troops in the First World War, ...



Know the target group

You should not only identify the cognitive skills of your target group (for example, what is their prior knowledge about a particular topic?) but also try to understand their emotional context. What experiences do they have? Do they feel the world wars as 'their' history? What do they know about them and what do they want to know? Seek entries that fit in with their environment: the names on the monument next to the school or the African soldiers during our world wars.



Commemoration of the Congolese soldiers, 1914-1918
© IV-NI000 (Jérusalem Piérard)



Multicultural war

The graves of colonial soldiers are dispersed across the First World War cemeteries. Not only people from different nationalities, but also people from different religions fought during the Great War. Lijssenthoek is a good example of such a multicultural cemetery. 10,784 soldiers are buried there. British soldiers are buried alongside war victims from France, Canada, China, South Africa, New Zealand, Germany and Australia. www.lijsenthoek.be



The graves of Chinese, Indian, French and German soldiers in the Lijssenthoek military cemetery (Poperinge) © Henk Van Rensbergen



Do not be afraid to shift the focus

Maybe, it is not a good idea to take history as a starting point for a particular class. In their view, seventy years ago seems like eternity. Start from the pupil's social environment. An ordinary everyday situation, like a remark made by one of the pupils, can also trigger off a discussion about history. Maybe this discussion leads to a lesson plan.



A circular model can be interesting
for certain target groups.



Bottom-up

Remembrance education works best in a bottom-up direction: if the pupils feel responsible for the learning process, they are more motivated to learn. It helps to have an advance discussion with them about what your common objectives are and how you are going to reach them. For which tasks do you want to take responsibility and which tasks are left for them? Many teachers already successfully applied this method. The pupils themselves take responsibility for the presentations of lesson components or for the organisation of excursions, guest lectures or exhibitions.



Young people give a presentation to classmates during a workshop in Kazerne Dossin. © Kazerne Dossin



Learning from one another through dialogue

Some themes are sensitive and not everyone always shares the same opinion. A well organised debate can prove to be a solution. In such a debate, pupils engage in reasoned and well balanced conversations with each other. Their ultimate goal is not to be proved right but to learn from one another, to widen their view, to learn the opinions of others and possibly to reconsider and adjust their opinion on this basis. Pupils learn a lot more from a debate than from a discussion.

The six phases of an interesting debate in class are:

1. Delimitation

Clearly define the theme. It goes without saying that the topic of debate must be in line with the interests and the competences of the class group.

2. Objective

What is the purpose? To exchange arguments or to generate a problem-solving debate?

3. Preparation of the pupils

Pupils must get the opportunity to search for and process information.

4. Define the rules of the game

What will be the duration of the debate? How many rounds will be organised? How much speaking time is given to everybody? How do you request to speak? ...

5. Debate

The teacher supervises the debate, keeps an eye on time, takes notes, and asks more in-depth questions, ...

6. Debriefing

What did the pupils think of the working methods? Have they changed their views of the theme after the debate?

HINT 4 : FRAMES OF REFERENCE THEN AND NOW

Remembrance education allows pupils to gain an insight into aspects such as documents of time, image creation, interpretation, subjectivity, the role of the media and propaganda, ... Indeed, human behaviour is conditioned by the knowledge and visions people have at that point in time, in other words: their frame of reference. It is important here to take into account the pupils' environment and be aware of the fact that they are not familiar with certain historical concepts or notions.



"How stupid they were in the past!"

Young people usually make use of their own frame of reference to respond to actions and choices in the past. "How stupid to be prepared to fight in the trenches." or "It was not very clever to register as a Jew." This indicates the difficulties young people have in putting themselves in the shoes of people from the past. Developing historical empathy requires the willingness of the target group to explain such examples by starting from the then values, opinions and religious beliefs.



Conceptual framework

Be aware that many words have an historical undertone. A wrong term may unintentionally engender negative ideas. When talking about gypsies, people tend to think of unhygienic caravan dwellers and travelling master thieves. But reality is very different. Moreover, there are different groups of 'gypsies', Roma and Sinti being the largest communities. The term 'Negro' also has a negative connotation. For black people, this word refers to the era of slavery. Today, people may be insufficiently aware of the sensitivities that are related to it. In other words, the use of a lexicon is advisable. Remember to use the correct terms at all times. Auschwitz-Birkenau, for instance, consisted of two parts: Auschwitz was the concentration camp and Birkenau the extermination camp. The two camps are often mixed up.



Strange objects

For young people (as well as for adults), it is not evident to capture the spirit of those times. A lot of concepts are unfamiliar to them. Just think about food coupons, shells, trenches, telegrams, ... Objects play an important role in historical awareness. Local museums and heritage societies can help you show these objects in the classroom.



Talbot House (Poperinge), where time stood still. Rooms filled with authentic objects show life behind the front line during the Great War. © Simon Schepers

HINT 5 : HOPEFUL STORIES

Remembrance education may generate considerable added value if attention is also given to hopeful stories. Throughout history, man has made war but also has made peace. Solidarity between people, dignity and friendship are values that even a war cannot wipe out. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, established on the 10th of December 1948 (after the misery of the two world wars), is a milestone in history. It remains a crucial frame of reference for evaluating and condemning present-day crimes against humanity.



Hope between reality and Hollywood

Although, it generally boils down to this in practice, remembrance education must not always tackle negative stories. For young children in particular, it is advisable to choose stories with an optimistic undertone. It goes without saying that hopeful historical facts (the right to vote, abolition of slavery, the liberation...) must not be presented in an over-simplified way. They never have Hollywood happy endings.



Red Star Line Museum

The Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp tells the story of the many emigrants who left for America at the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th century. Personal stories occupy a central position. What were the dreams and ambitions but also the uncertainty and fear of those who chose the United States as their home? And although many adventures were very successful, others turned out to be total failures. Contemporary stories of migrants show how relevant this history still is. www.redstarline.be



Stories of migrants give a face to the history of migration.
© Red Star Line Museum (Noortje Palmers)

HINT 6 : ON VICTIMS, PERPETRATORS, SAVIOURS AND BYSTANDERS

In the past, history was examined from the perspective of the victims. Recently, the focus is increasingly placed on the perspective of perpetrators, saviours and bystanders. Remembrance educators are convinced that revealing the motives of perpetrators, saviours and bystanders is significant for the social relevance of remembrance education.

However, it is far from easy to unravel these perspectives. Indeed, ready-made teaching materials about perpetrators, saviours and bystanders are not so easy to find. Kazerne Dossin and the Fortress of Breendonk have developed educational materials in which these perspectives are explicitly tackled. These learning materials can be found at www.kazernedossin.eu or www.breendonk.be (they offer these materials in Dutch and French).



From the children's book 'Simon, het jongetje dat wist te ontsnappen' (Simon, the little escapee) © publication 2005 Uitgeverij Van Halewyck; © author Simon Gronowski, text editing by Réjane Peigny, illustrations by Cécile Bertrand



The age defines the perspective

The International School for Holocaust Studies (www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education) recommends extending the perspectives studied, depending on the age of the target group. According to them, for young children (nursery and primary education) the focus should be on the stories of victims. Slightly older children (first stage of secondary education) are more likely to be receptive to the perspective of the saviours. Adolescents in the second and third stages are better capable of placing themselves in the position of perpetrators and bystanders.



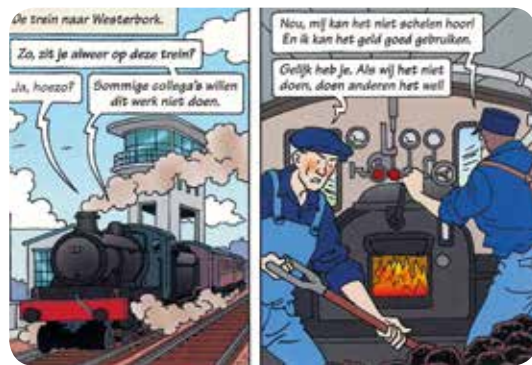
How can I tackle choices and dilemmas?

When analysing the behaviour of victims or perpetrators, pupils are at risk of getting stuck in feeling sorry for victims or in condemning perpetrators. That is why it is good to give the target group a clear insight into the choices and dilemmas with which historical figures were confronted. As a police man or soldier, did you have the choice of not getting involved in the deportations? Which elements played a role in the decision of boys to fight in the trenches during the Great War? As a Hutu, could you refuse to kill Tutsis in 1994?



Graphic novels of the Anne Frank House

The Anne Frank House has developed several graphic novels (with additional educational material) designed to make young people reflect on choices and dilemmas in wartime and today! More information on www.annefrank.org (some of these graphic novels are available in English).



From the graphic novel 'The Search' © text 2007 Anne Frank House, Amsterdam; © drawings 2007 by Eric Heuvel, Redhill Illustrations

HINT 7 : THE POWER OF EXPERIENCE

Helping people to understand the past asks for historical empathy. It is essential to use sources in which individuals tell their story. Diaries, testimonials, stories, works of art, ... help understand the dreams, feelings and ideas of historical figures. Thus, they are no longer statistics but become human beings again. In this situation, historical empathy is an antidote to indifference. Make sure that your discourse does not get too moralising and tell the story from different angles. Below, we want to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of some methods:

- Eyewitnesses
- Literature and poetry
- Art
- Historical movies
- Visit to a site of remembrance ('lieu de mémoire')
- Re-enactment
- Serious games

Eyewitnesses

A conversation with an eyewitness offers an educational context of exceptional value. Firstly, a witness succeeds in giving a face to abstract statistics (in practice mostly to victims). Secondly, a testimony makes the past more tangible. In addition, witnesses ensure that learners are morally involved: they often call on the listener's personal sense of responsibility. Despite these unmistakable advantages, learners should be warned against Primo Levi's statement: "A witness is neither a historian nor a philosopher." One thing is clear: witnesses deliver personal and subjective stories. Moreover, personal memories are always shaped in the present but also by the present: they often tell more about our present convictions than about past convictions. If Congolese people today say: "We are looking back nostalgically to the days of the Belgians", this does not mean at all that they want to go back to the colonial era when they were third-class citizens. They are simply saying that they want peace and absence of war, something they do not have today.



Where to find witnesses?

In the witnesses database of the Antwerp Peace Centre you find the names of people who will come into the classroom to tell about historical or more recent conflicts. As time goes by, it obviously becomes more difficult to find witnesses of a historical conflict. That is why a lot of museums and archives institutions focus on providing students and teachers with access to interviews. The video archives of the Institute for Veterans, Kazerne Dossin, Auschwitz Foundation and RCN Justice & Démocratie have a large collection of recorded testimonies. Through the 'getuigen' (witnesses) platform, you find written testimonies about the Second World War. www.getuigenbank.be / www.warveteranstv.be / www.kazernedossin.eu / www.auschwitz.be / www.rcn-ong.be / www.getuigen.be



An eyewitness speaks about the Nazi regime. © IV-NIOOO



A witness tells the story of his experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia.
© RCN Justice & Démocratie



Preparation

As a teacher, have a talk with the witness in advance. In this way, mutual expectations can be discussed. Ask the witness to dwell on his personal experiences. It is not the task of the witness to teach history. Prepare the pupils in advance in the best way possible. Make them aware of the unique and special character of such a meeting. Allow them to prepare some questions. Interaction is an absolute added value of a 'live' testimony.



Compare multiple views!

Make sure that the target group has sufficient knowledge of the historical reality the witness will talk about. Given the subjective character of a testimony, it can never be the only source for teaching remembrance education. A testimony must always be embedded in an objective framework of other primary or secondary sources. Moreover, inform the target group that a testimony is not about giving historical information but about giving a personal account of events.



Ordinary people in unusual situations

It is advisable that the witness, in addition to describing the event he or she witnessed (war, escape, genocide, ...), also refers to the period before or after the event. In this way, the target group will see the witness as an 'ordinary' person in an unusual situation rather than as a victim, perpetrator or bystander.

Literature and poetry

Much has been written about war. Apart from academic historiography and press coverage, there is a huge provision of war stories (autobiographies, (graphic) novels, poems) which carry you away with a first-hand account of human misery, both of significant and small players in history. Sometimes, these stories are written by people who have actually been there. Each in their own way, they give an original and intriguing glance into their emotions. Often, their stories are far from cheerful but at the same time most contain a spark of hope; the hope that we will draw lessons of peace from the past.



Before reading

Before reading a text, it is interesting to enquire into the prior knowledge of the target group. What do they already know about the theme? At the same time, it is a phase in which you can draw on the participants' fantasy. What picture do they have in mind when they hear words such as 'trenches', 'war', ...? Imagining themselves in a situation or association exercises can prove to be a useful initial step towards in-depth study of a text.



During reading

While reading a text extract, stick to content analysis. Use possible questions such as: "Which figures participate in the story?", "What do they do?", "Where does the story take place?", ... You can also do this by using propositions and additional questions: "How does the writer build tension?", "Describe the major characters", ... Or reconstruct the story together with the target group.



After reading

When reading a text fragment, you are introduced to one of the many stories about a specific theme. In remembrance education, it is important to be receptive to different perspectives. For instance, compare an extract from a French soldier's Great War diary with a German soldier's diary. Do they tell different stories? Do you see similarities and/or differences? In addition, you can write a poem yourself, make a sequel to a story, interview your grandparents and ask about their experiences, ... in a creative follow-up activity.



Kom vanavond met verhalen

Kom vanavond met verhalen (Bakermat Uitgevers, only available in Dutch, translation of the title: Come tonight with stories) is a collection of extracts from European literature: paragraphs from novels, poems, pages from picture books and graphic novels. These all relate to the war. This time, however, adults are not playing the leading part, but children and young people are. Sometimes they are victims, sometimes they are heroes. No matter what their role may be, there is no doubt that these people are survivors. This book consists of two parts: a collection of stories (1999) and a guide for teachers (2000).

Art

Some historical figures chose to tell their story in a different way. They did not choose written testimonies but expressed their emotions in art. They tell their story through music, in the form of a statue, ... There are numerous examples of these forms of art. In some cultures, it is customary that people do not express themselves in tangible forms. You will not easily find written eyewitness reports about Porajmos (the persecution of Roma and Sinti during the Second World War). This is partly due to the taboo about death. Stories are transmitted via oral tradition by singing songs.



Koenraad Tinel

As a descendant of a family of collaborators, Koenraad Tinel tries to come to terms with his past. He does so by capturing these complex memories in ink drawings and steel constructions.



Drawn memories of a war © Scheisseimer (Koenraad Tinel), 2009

Historical movies

Film is often used as a medium for education. An increasing number of teachers consider film as a major source of knowledge, insight and awareness-raising. Nevertheless, with this trend comes an ever louder call for developing 'historical film literacy' in young people. This should enable them to adopt a conscious and critical attitude towards the medium and the relationship between fact and fiction.



'Film en/als Geletterdheid'

In 2009, UGent started a research project called 'Film en/als Geletterdheid' (Film and/as Literacy). Three questions were the starting point of the study:

1. What can we learn from film?
2. How can we implement films through specific learning environments?
3. What knowledge and meaning constructions are created?

This project resulted in the following websites: www.film-en-geschiedenis.ugent.be (for the history course) and www.schoolfilm.be (for the Dutch course). Here, you will find courses helping you to embark on teaching through films, discussions of film, ... These site are definitely worth a visit (only available in Dutch)!

Visit to a site of remembrance ('lieu de mémoire')

A visit to a site of remembrance such as in Flanders Fields (also known as the Westhoek), the military cemeteries (e.g. under the management of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission), Breendonk, Kazerne Dossin, Auschwitz-Birkenau, ... becomes still more valuable if you keep the following hints in mind!



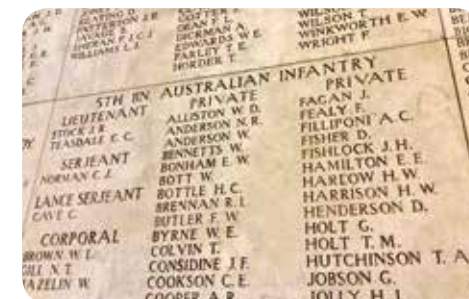
Preparation

1. It is important for you to know what you can expect: pay a preliminary visit to the site yourself and look at it through the target group's eyes.
2. Define in advance what you want to achieve by visiting this place.
3. Ensure that the target group is well prepared. The visit must be only one aspect of a holistic approach to remembrance education.
4. Get information about the site. Before the visit, make a critical analysis of the political, social, ... function of a site of remembrance throughout the years.
5. Keep the three objectives of remembrance education in mind.
6. Carefully select the right form: visit with a guide, individual visit, bicycle ride, ...



Be realistic

Do not expect too much. Sometimes, young people expect to go through an intense catharsis during such a visit and are 'disappointed' about reality. Limit the number of pupils. Mass visits will always have much less impact.



The Menin Gate in Ypres (WWI). The names of approximately 54,900 British soldiers are inscribed in the walls here, the names of soldiers who were never found or identified. © Simon Schepers



One place, many stories

During the visit, focus on knowledge, insight and historical empathy. The visit is not the time to teach important moral lessons but to better understand historical facts. Give the update afterwards. In a safe environment, the target group will be more receptive. Moreover, a site of remembrance has more than one story to tell. Numerous memories come together in such a place. For example, Auschwitz-Birkenau tells a completely different story for a Roma or a Sinti than for a Jew or a Polish political prisoner. Make sure that you know what you are talking about.



Numerous victims, numerous stories... Zentralsauna in Birkenau © Auschwitz Foundation
(Georges Boschloos)



Study trips organised by the Auschwitz Foundation

Each year, the Auschwitz Foundation organises a study trip to Auschwitz and Birkenau. Pedagogical support is given to all the activities. These activities are suitable for teachers (not for pupils). In 2015, the Auschwitz Foundation launched a new study trip to several extermination camps: Chelmno Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek. More information can be found at www.auschwitz.be.

Re-enactment

In the light of achieving historical empathy, the call for experience-based education is loud. According to many teachers, 'reliving' historical situations offers added value. Fighting in trenches, going into hiding, ... How did it feel? The target group is encouraged to identify with historical figures. This is called 'living history' or re-enactment. Of course, re-enactment can arouse people's curiosity and inspire them to seek more information about a particular historical event, but in an educational context some warnings must be given.

1. It is an illusion that you can really imagine yourself in a situation in the past. This almost inevitably leads to simplification and stereotyping.
2. Re-enactment inspires a taste for strong emotional involvement, without much analytical thinking. 'Imagining oneself in a situation' can get under the skin and trigger defence mechanisms.
3. Which message does 'identifying with' deliver? That living in the trenches, fleeing the war or going into hiding was a terrifying experience? And is that the essence of the whole experience? Wasn't this already clear beforehand?

If we want experience-based education, maybe it is a better idea to project ourselves into the contemporary role of researcher. Make the target group use authentic sources and writings that are very well contextualised, so that they cannot be misunderstood or misinterpreted. In this way, they learn to take a close look at the stories and at the same time a respectful and safe distance is kept.



Re-enactors embody the soldiers of the Second World War. © vzw Patton Drivers (Ann Wijgaerts)

Serious games

In the digital era, they are everywhere: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, smart phones, tablets, applications, games etc. Young people are confronted each day with this evolution. In recent years, the educational world has become increasingly interested in integrating these modern techniques in teaching. Remembrance education follows in this wake. It is interesting to note that games can entice young people to engage in history. But often remembrance education deals with sensitive issues. That is why you should not translate human misery into a game. In other words, carefully reflect on the objectives you want to meet and be the judge yourself of the tactfulness (restrained character) of a game.



'Fair Play – your decisions matter'

'Fair Play – your decisions matter' deals with discrimination and football. Young people aged 15 to 25 are relatively often confronted with discrimination, a study revealed. It happens at school, in nightlife and the playing field. With 'Fair Play', a serious game, the Anne Frank House wants to confront young people in a contemporary way with prejudices and discrimination and to raise these topical issues for discussion. Do the test yourself! www.playfairplay.nl (Only available in Dutch.)



'Fair Play – your decisions matter' © Anne Frank House (Cris Toala Olivares)



Motivation

Many applications use a system of points. While earning 'experience' points, you broaden your knowledge about historical events as well. In such a case, extrinsic motivation in particular is stimulated. The goal is only met when intrinsic motivation becomes more important and the game is played to collect more information. Sometimes, the idea is to give an additional stimulus to the target group by organising a competition. But beware: in such a case their desire for success (with some rivalry between participants) may inhibit their desire to learn.

HINT 8 : YOU NEED NOT LOOK BEYOND THE OBVIOUS

Vague concepts such as dehumanization, intolerance or xenophobia are often not recognised by young people in current events and even less so in their own environment. It is still a lot more difficult for them to identify themselves with historical events or with conflicts taking place at the other end of the world. Often they assume that it is not or was not that bad. Therefore, you should make it clear to young people that aforementioned mechanisms start very small-scale but can reach destructive proportions afterwards. Clearly, the target group may reflect on world problems but their own social environment may also generate sufficient matter for discussion.



Local monuments

Local war monuments offer opportunities for teaching remembrance and heritage education. They make people aware of their own region's history. It is easier for them to gain insight into the historical context in an environment that is familiar to them. Just because the environment is well known, they will more easily find links with their frame of reference. Moreover, local monuments give people the chance to discover a personal and unique story.



Als stenen konden spreken...

A war monument is like a book full of stories, but you must learn how to read them. That is why the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces developed *Als stenen konden spreken...* (only available in Dutch, translation of the title: If stones could speak...) an educational tool designed to analyse different aspects of such a monument. What do you see (figures, decorations, symbols, titles)? Where does the monument stand (next to a church, in the marketplace)? Is this place of importance? ... www.klm-mra.be



War monument at Reningelst
© Research Centre In Flanders Fields Museum



WWI exhibition by local heritage society 't Sireentje
in Waasmunster © Simon Schepers



Local heritage societies

Local heritage societies bring local history to life. Be sure to contact a heritage society in your neighbourhood. Maybe they can help you find original source material tailored to your target group. You can find all local heritage societies in Flanders and in the Brussels Capital Region through the website of Heemkunde Vlaanderen: www.heemkunde-vlaanderen.be (website only available in Dutch).



From micro- to macro-history

"During my history classes in the fourth year of secondary arts, technical and vocational education, the pupils research their own family history. For this, they have to try and go back in time a hundred years. Once all information has been gathered, they must make a presentation about their family. In this way, they gain an overview of a micro-history in the context of the events in macro-history: for example, a grandmother who smuggled butter under the eyes of the Germans during the Second World War." (Anonymous testimony, SLO - UA research 2013-2014)



Start in a simple way

"I tackle the issue of anti-Semitism in religion (or non-religious ethics) classes. I start in a simple way from stereotypes and prejudices and then I switch over to the mechanisms behind the Holocaust itself. Simultaneously, I show pictures of my visit to Auschwitz." (Anonymous testimony, SLO - UA research 2013-2014)



Conflicts after the Second World War

You do not need to go far back in time to find a topic. RCN Justice & Démocratie, for example, has an interesting educational provision dealing with genocide in Rwanda, mass violence in Burundi, DR Congo, Cambodia and Bosnia. For multicultural groups and due to the presence of refugees from these countries in our society, today's conflicts are sometimes much closer to the participants' own reality. www.rcn-ong.be (Offer available in French - sometimes in Dutch.)

HINT 9 : EMOTIONS AND COMING TO TERMS WITH THEM

Remembrance education evokes many emotions. Emotions can entail lasting impressions, but also carry some elements of risk. Often people react in an inappropriate manner because they do not know how to deal with fear, anger or sadness. If certain subjects get under the skin of the target group, their reaction may be one of total aversion. That is why you should discuss expectations in advance with the target group. Create a safe environment that allows them to express their emotions. Emotions must be given a place, but at the same time the challenge of remembrance education is in teaching pupils how to manage emotions and how to trigger a process of reflection and of raising awareness.



Speak about it!

Specific target groups (such as children and young people) who are confronted with war stories can be very upset by them. So coming to terms is indeed required, for instance after an excursion to a site of remembrance or a meeting with an eyewitness. People whose questions remain unanswered or who cannot air their emotions may in future cut themselves off from issues of remembrance education. Ask what made a deep impression on the target group. Ask open questions. Avoid questions like "What would you have done?" It is impossible to answer this question correctly.



Artistic projects

Destruction by war is opposed to artistic creativity. Artistic projects offer people the opportunity to turn the lessons learned into words, images, music or movement. Ensure that the target group is at liberty in this process. The book *Trop jeunes... Te jong...* (IV-NIOOO) is a good example of this (available in Dutch/French). The Media Wisdom Platform will no doubt inspire you to create such a project yourself. Take a look at www.ingebeeld.be (website only available in Dutch).



Trop jeunes... Te jong... © IV-NIOOO

HINT 10 : NO MORALISING BUT, SPARKING ACTION

It goes without saying that a one-off visit to a historical place or the viewing of a film or documentary film is not an antidote to extremist thinking or to a disrespectful attitude. What is more, if pupils have the feeling that conclusions are forced upon them, there is a risk that they will abandon. It is therefore of the utmost importance that developing a certain attitude is seen against a background of in-depth historical knowledge. More importantly, pupils may refuse to swallow well-intended 'lessons' and actively search for what can be learned.



Fact or opinion?

From nursery school onwards, children develop prejudices as a result of what they hear in the classroom, at home, in the sports club etc. As a parent, teacher or educator, you play an important part in this education. That is why you should react to such statements by asking children questions. The 'fact or opinion?' game stimulates the target group to think about propositions such as "It is always raining in Belgium" and "Boys are cleverer than girls." This method is used in the interactive exhibition called 'De Democratiefabriek' (official translation: Hope Factory), organised by Stichting Vredeseducatie. To find out more, please visit the website: www.vredeseducatie.nl (available in Dutch, French and English).



'En... Actie!'

"We cannot help it..." or "What can I do on my own?" Do these words sound familiar if you speak about complex (world) issues in or outside the classroom? Studio Globo set up a workshop 'En... Actie!' (only available in Dutch, translation of the title: And... Action!) in which the target group dwells on the sense and nonsense of actions for change. Why turn off the light for one hour in the struggle against climate change? Or do we smash cream pies into a politician's face to achieve something? While drawing on a broad range of examples and using interactive methods, considerable thought is given to what impact actions have and what real change exactly is. The role of young people is also discussed because after all the talking, it is time for action! www.studioglobo.be



Young people visit the memorial to commemorate deported Jews, Roma and Sinti. © Kazerne Dossin



Remembrance education for children

**Can remembrance education
be taught as early as primary
school? What are the pitfalls?
And how can they be avoided?**

Lia Caen is nine when she is called names in Duffel by the other children because she is a refugee from Roesselare. Achiel Vlamynck is twelve when he is put into prison for a fortnight because of mischief. Gabriël Versavel is thirteen and sees horrible things during the bombardments of Ypres. In 1915, Jim Martin is fourteen when he dies, far from home, of typhoid contracted in the trenches. (Source: Klein in de Groote Oorlog)

We can hardly imagine what it means to be a child in a war. If you read the diary extracts written by these children, you get a glimpse of their fear and misery. At the same time you recognise the trouble-free playfulness of a child who does not fully grasp the seriousness of the situation. You will be amazed by their resilience and adaptability. But whichever way you look at it, all their stories reflect a terrifying and baffling reality.

If you want to teach remembrance education, these are the stories you can take as a basis for classroom teaching. These stories are never nice to hear. The same question is asked over and over again: do we have to burden children who are growing up in today's society, away from war and violence, with these painful stories from a distant past?

Why?

The answer is 'yes' and there are different reasons for this. You can consider it your duty to remember. If we want these stories to become an intrinsic part of collective memory, it is of importance to pass them on as intact as possible to future generations. As children are happily open-minded to what lies in store for them, they are a vital link in this.

In addition, it offers them an excellent opportunity to learn. Telling historical human stories to young children often makes such an impression that the stories linger in their mind and are stepping stones towards developing strong historical insights. You may prefer to call this social responsibility. Children and young people who personally experienced war are hardly an exception any more in our diverse classrooms. These children raise questions about conflict within the group and count on us to answer them.

Often, historical stories about war and peace offer a more 'comfortable' learning environment stirring less resistance than present-day conflicts. This does not mean that you cannot tackle these present-day conflicts; but the historical story may broaden their view of things because of the distance. You can also consider it a social duty. Learning to know historical forms of we/them thinking helps us to understand how stereotypical thinking can lead to war and violence, to hatred and misery. Coming generations must learn to live together without hate. By working together, living together, recognising multiculturalism and by learning from one another. That is what remembrance education must do.

Yes, but...

Easier said than done? Indeed, remembrance education is rarely simple. The target group of nursery and primary education presents us with specific challenges.

First, there is the horror of the reality of war. The Internet is riddled with shocking images and stories from those war years. Although people sometimes indicate that they need this shock effect to achieve this awareness, we do not advise confronting young children, who still have to grow up emotionally, with such images or stories outside their home environment. Experience teaches us that there are two ways in which young children react to this indigestible information. They get either traumatized or very excited and balance on the verge of sensationalism. In both cases, as an educator you fail badly in your duty to teach remembrance education.

Secondly, remembrance education often requires a well-developed abstract brainpower. If, for instance, it is about understanding processes and mechanisms such as dehumanization or xenophobia which play a role in different historical contexts, it seems very difficult to us to embark on this with children under sixteen.

Thirdly, one of the biggest challenges of remembrance education is stimulating 'empathy and involvement' in the target group. For this, shedding a light on a multitude of opinions is important: the different perspectives of various parties or of those whom we traditionally call 'perpetrator' and 'victims' should be broadly highlighted. However, this approach requires the complex ability to adopt different historical perspectives, which is extremely difficult for older pupils, let alone for young children.

Despite all these challenges, it is not difficult to find examples of good practice which prove that you can successfully teach remembrance education to young children, provided that the instruments are tailor-made.

How?

The most crucial question is not whether, but how we have to teach remembrance education to young children. It is evident that there is no such thing as a recipe for success. The suggestions below help you to embark on remembrance education in a positive manner, both with children and young people.



'Andrew's Dreammuseum' © In Flanders Fields Museum (Tijl Capoen)

TOO YOUNG?

It is an unwritten rule that most remembrance education organisations consider nine years as the minimum age. However young they may be, it is not very helpful to disguise reality or tell lies to children learning about the horror of war. The fact that millions of people were killed in international conflicts is something you cannot keep quiet about. However, there is a difference between giving them correct information about historical facts and giving them an extensive and detailed report about the horror of war. They are probably too young for extremely shocking images.



Klein in de Groote Oorlog

The province of Flemish Brabant created the brochure *Klein in de Groote Oorlog* (only available in Dutch, translation of the title: Little during the Great War), an inspirational guide for pupils in the 4th, 5th and 6th forms of primary school. The package contains ideas for teaching themes such as trenches, uniforms, daily life, ... The historical information about the war years is mentioned succinctly and supported by different methods such as hands-on assignments, web quests and interviews, ... This brochure is available free of charge through the website www.vlaamsbrabant.be.



'Klein in de Groote Oorlog' © Province of Flemish Brabant, cover photo collection Jean and Isabelle Rigaux (photographer Louis Rigaux)

OWNERSHIP

Children in nursery and primary education also deserve ownership of their project. Start with a conversation in class or a Q&A session. What do the children want to know? What do they consider less interesting? What do they want to achieve after the course? No doubt they will have suggestions for exciting activities. Do involve them in the implementation of your project. Maybe, they can send a note to invite a witness to the classroom? In this way, you create support for the project and avoid the pitfall of moralising. Indeed, in remembrance education, you cannot tell pupils what they have to think but you can tell them that they have to think.

LIFE STORIES

Historical empathy is a difficult but important part of remembrance education. It helps raise children's awareness of their environment and themselves. It is an important step towards the development of an attitude of active respect. The ability to build historical empathy grows with age. With young children you should tackle the story of one individual, preferably of the same age. In this way, children will be more capable to relate the story to themselves and to get a better understanding of it. Only later in life they are capable of feeling empathy for larger groups of people.



'Nooit Meer Oorlog'

The province of West Flanders developed the 'Nooit Meer Oorlog' (No More War) website. Through a story in pictures, pre-schoolers get acquainted with Emma and Emiel. The conflict theme is at the centre of the story. Primary school pupils immerse themselves in the diary written by Jerome Seynhaeve. To find out more, check out the following website: www.nooitmeeroorlog.be (only available in Dutch).



Witnesses project 'Nooit Meer Oorlog' © 'Nooit Meer Oorlog', Province of West Flanders

TRY TO FIND A STARTING POINT

Inspiring children to develop an interest in a war of, for example, a hundred years ago is not evident. Searching concrete starting points that appeal to them is therefore essential. The lives of children in those days, the means of communication or animals in wartime can draw children's attention to the past.



'Kleine Sam'

'Kleine Sam, vertel ons over de Grote Oorlog' (translation of the title: Little Sam, tell us about the Great War) is a teaching kit which tells the First World War from the original point of view of a young dog. The conflicts are frighteningly getting closer and the dog Sam sees the war through the eyes of a child: he does not understand everything but he feels miserable about the tragic events that unfold around him. This kit is designed for pupils in the second stage of primary education. Borrow this kit - free of charge - from www.west-vlaanderen.be/genieten/cultuur/ontlenen/uitleendienst/educatieve-koffers/Paginas/educatieve-koffers.aspx (this kit is only available in Dutch).



Books available from Tumult

Tumult's online web shop has an interesting provision of children's books (only Dutch titles). Various starting points tailored to young people make the theme of the war debatable. www.tumult.be

VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

In recent years, an evolution in remembrance education has become apparent. Today, in addition to telling the victims' stories, the perspective of perpetrators and bystanders has been increasingly highlighted. Understanding why people become perpetrators makes remembrance education particularly relevant to social life. Evidently, this asks for a strongly developed historical frame of reference, which young children do not yet have. Therefore, with young children, it is preferable to examine the victim's perspective. This does not mean that the stories of perpetrators and bystanders cannot be briefly touched upon. It goes without saying that taking a nuanced approach to this dark reality is very important.



De vijand

The poetical picture book *De vijand* (The enemy) provides an interesting case for the study of the First World War. At the start of the war, a soldier receives a handbook in which is written down everything he needs to know about the enemy who is cruel and has no mercy. He must use the rifle to kill the enemy before the enemy has the opportunity to kill him. Until the soldier and the enemy end up alone, each in his own trench, under the same stars, their stomachs equally aching with hunger. Maybe they are not that different after all? (Cali Davide, Serge Bloch and Wim Opbrouck, *De vijand*, Davidsfonds, 2007, 58 pages. Also available in English!)

De vijand



De vijand © Davidsfonds

MULTITUDE OF VIEWPOINTS

Even at this young age, it is important to look beyond our own western interpretation of history. Maybe, you teach children from a migration background and their grandparents are willing to tell about how the war is commemorated in their culture? Who knows, maybe other conflicts are high on their agenda?

BEFORE AND AFTER THE WAR

When telling a life story, it is important to see the war experience as a part of the human life cycle. Who were those individuals before the war? What were their dreams, ideas or concerns? And if they survived, what did they do afterwards? By incorporating their lives before and after the war into the story, children recognise the people behind the victims and they get the opportunity to put historical empathy into practice.



Testimonies

In nursery and primary education, it is a good idea to invite eyewitnesses to the classroom. Witnesses give a face to abstract statistics. However, it is important that you make clear agreements in advance with the guest speaker and the group. Testimonies are subjective and must be put into a context. That is why they must be adequately prepared and pupils must get the opportunity to come to terms with them afterwards.

LINKING THE PAST WITH THE PRESENT

Young children often make the connection with their own environment in a very spontaneous manner. If they have learned about the scapegoat phenomenon, they recognise this because of their own experiences. On the one hand, as a teacher, you must be very careful here. Bullying in the classroom can never be put on a par with war or genocide. It is very important to strongly emphasise the obvious differences between both contexts. On the other hand, you must seize this opportunity to answer these questions linking the past with the present because, in the end, the goal of remembrance education is to develop an attitude of respect towards the 'other', however different the other person might be.

CIRCLE TIME DISCUSSIONS

By delivering remembrance education to children, you risk to stir up many emotions. As a remembrance educator, you should keep an eye on this. Make sure that you are open to their questions. For instance, you can finish a project by holding a circle discussion. The following hints may help you to effectively manage it:

- Place the children in a circle so that they can see each other very well.
- Make clear agreements in advance: children must raise a finger, listen to one another, ...
- Manage the conversation by asking questions. Try to refrain from giving the answers yourself, but ask them the following question: "What do you think?" or "Why do you think that?"
- Involve everyone: "Do you think that too?", "Do you want to say something about this?", ...
- Also try to ask some macro-questions: "What does bullying mean according to you?", "Why do people bully each other?"
- End by summing up.

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

(Robert Laurence Binyon, For the Fallen)



Guide

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Special Committee for Remembrance Education (BCH)



The In Flanders Fields Museum explores the First World War from many different angles. A visit to the museum is a memorable experience for the pupils. The museum's educational service offers different educational packages to pupils and teachers. www.inlandersfiel



War and Peace in Flanders Fields is an initiative of the province of West Flanders which has been active since 2002 as a moderator and umbrella body for all initiatives relating to the First World War theme that are being developed in Flanders Fields (also known as the Westhoek). Apart from research, tourism promotion, public outreach activities and awareness-raising, the educational component of the war and peace story is of great importance as well. www.wo1.be



In 1942, the Nazis set up their SS Sammellager at the Dossin barracks in Mechelen. For many thousands of Jews and gypsies, this assembly camp was the departure point for deportation with no prospect of return. Today, Kazerne Dossin (the former Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance) is a memorial as well as a museum and a documentation centre on Holocaust and human rights. www.kazernedossin.eu



The non-profit organization Auschwitz Foundation - Auschwitz in Remembrance wants to keep the memory of Nazi crimes and genocides alive and to raise collective awareness among young people of today and tomorrow. Concretely, the Auschwitz Foundation develops a number of activities in the field of pedagogics, didactics and in-service training, based on documentation, archives and research. www.auschwitz.be



The Fortress of Breendonk is one of the best preserved camps in Europe. The National Memorial of the Fortress of Breendonk is the symbol of suffering, torture and death of so many victims. In addition, the Fortress plays an important educational role with a provision for schools. www.breendonk.be



The Institute for Veterans (IV-NIOOO) is a public body controlled by the Defence Minister. Since 1998, the Remembrance service has been organising projects for schools in remembrance education. Keywords of their activities are remembrance, citizenship, war and peace, democracy and liberty. These projects are organised in Dutch and French and are accessible to all pupils in nursery, primary and secondary education. www.warveterans.be



The Belgian NGO RCN Justice & Démocratie raises the awareness of a broad European audience around acts of contemporary mass violence through the "If it's there, it's here"-radio series. RCN J&D also provides workshops in secondary schools, colleges, universities and in various associations. The actions of RCN J&D are aimed to remember international crimes of large scale bloodshed in Rwanda, Burundi, DR Congo, Bosnia or Cambodia and to prevent new violence in the future. www.rcn-ong.be



Tumult would like *all* children and young people in Flanders and Brussels to discover, design and disseminate an active culture of peace and non-violence. Tumult stimulates the young to take up a critical attitude towards society and teaches them to deal with conflict based on strong solidarity. Tumult works in an inclusive way and tries to make children and young people rely on their own strength and ensures a playful, interactive and participative approach. www.tumult.be



Do you want support for a project?



dynamo3

Do you want to adopt a project approach to remembrance education? Do you want to involve an external cultural partner? Use dynamoOPWEG for a free bus ride with De Lijn to a cultural destination in the neighbourhood and ask for a grant of 1,500 EUR through the dynamoPROJECT. Dynamo3 is an initiative of CANON Cultuurcel. www.cultuurkuur.be/dynamo (Only available in Dutch and aimed at Flemish schools.)



Prince Philip Fund

The Prince Philip Fund wants to encourage schools in primary and secondary education to organise exchanges with schools from the other Communities of Belgium. The intention is to develop language skills and to broaden culture by discovering each other's background, with respect for each other's individuality. www.prins-filipfonds.org (Available in Dutch, French, German and English.)



eTwinning: Working together with schools in Europe

During the period of commemoration of the Great War Centenary, eTwinning will provide online events, project kits and a special prize for projects. By working together with peers in other European countries, this matter becomes livelier. ETwinning offers teachers and pupils a safe online environment – the Twinspace – with different tools to work together and to communicate. www.etwinning.be (Available in Dutch, French and German.)



Projectloket

Projectloket is a digital platform where the broadest possible provision of grants is opened up in support of school projects. The forms of support can be both of a logistic and a financial nature. Apart from an extensive list of project grants, materials free of charge or almost free of charge or services, several interesting hints are given. www.projectloket.be (Only available in Dutch and aimed at Flemish schools.)



Kleur Bekenner

Reflection and action can be done through project activities. Kleur Bekennen can support you in this. Their educational workers are happy to provide guidance to you for the set-up of a project on remembrance education with a link to the south and the world. www.kleurbekennen.be (Available in Dutch and French.)

Notes

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