

The last bar mitzvah

Kristallnacht lesson 2 of 2

Teachers' Notes

On 9 and 10 November 1938, the Nazi regime conducted a series of attacks called 'pogroms' against the Jewish population in Germany and other Nazi-occupied territories. This event became known as *Kristallnacht* or 'Night of Broken Glass' because of the shattered glass that filled the streets after the vandalism and destruction of synagogues, Jewish-owned businesses and homes. In this collection of resources, we explore former Welsh resident, Julius Weil's recollections of this devastating event. Julius Weil died in Cardiff in 2021.

Following on from *Kristallnacht* 1, this second lesson explores Julius Weil's account of his bar mitzvah, the last to take place in the Glockengasse Synagogue before it was destroyed during *Kristallnacht*. Students will explore the impact of this event in a creative way, creating their own small installations.

This is session 2 of 2 on the topic of *Kristallnacht* and it is recommended that teachers use both resources. It assumes a basic understanding of the Holocaust. You may wish to cover the Holocaust Educational Trust's worksheet '[Defining the Holocaust](#)' before embarking on this set of two sessions.

Curriculum links

Key Stage 4

Art and design, History, Literacy skills

Lesson Plan

LEARNING AIMS

- To understand what a young person's bar mitzvah is and its importance.
- To explore how art and symbolism can be used to represent the devastating events of *Kristallnacht*.
- To be able to respond with empathy, understanding and creativity to a historical event.

RESOURCES/EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

Copies of group worksheet.

Transcript of the video extract.¹

Although not absolutely necessary, this lesson would benefit from students having access to a **Drama Studio** with a lighting rig. If you do not have access to a black box Drama studio, you can have areas in the classroom laid out for each group with some black fabric, card, or paper to create the 'black box' in which the students can create their installations. Lamps or torches can be used to emulate a lighting rig.

You will also need to collect a range of simple objects and/or art materials for the students to use. Example props and materials might include different coloured paper, mock 'broken glass pieces' (safe to use and available as an art supply), paints, items of clothing (e.g., a party outfit).

STARTER

Display the image [One Spring \(1941\) by Karl Bodek and Kurt Conrad Löw](#).

Pose the following questions to the group:

- What can you see in this picture? What might this image represent? What might the barbed wire, the butterfly and the colour yellow **symbolise**?

Discuss in small groups/pairs then feedback to the whole class.

Make clear the importance that art depicting the Holocaust need not be graphic or harrowing to look at; symbolism can be used to portray these devastating events.

DEVELOPMENT

Re-cap learning from *Kristallnacht* 1. **What** was *Kristallnacht*? **When** did it happen? **Who** did it affect and **how**?

Introduce the Jewish bar mitzvah ceremony by sharing the following definition and watching the video clip <https://jewishmuseum.org.uk/schools/asset/life-cycle-bar-bat-mitzvah/>.

¹ We added the video clip's transcript, which you may choose to share with your students if you think it would be helpful. The transcript is in English and Welsh whilst the clip is in English only.

“A Bar or Bat Mitzvah is a coming-of-age ceremony for Jewish boys and girls when they reach the age of 12 or 13. This ceremony marks the time when a boy or girl becomes a Jewish adult. This means that they are now responsible for their own actions and can decide for themselves how they would like to practice Judaism.”²

If you have Jewish students in your class perhaps they would like to share their own experiences. You can also discuss the importance of similar ceremonies in other faiths, e.g., confirmation or other important ceremonies and events that students or their families have been part of, e.g., baptism, wedding, graduation, funeral, Hajj. Why are they important?

Next, watch the [video clip of Julius Weil \(whose oral history we heard in the first *Kristallnacht* lesson\) discussing his bar mitzvah](#).

Pose the following questions to the class, which they can discuss in pairs:

- How might Julius have felt about his bar mitzvah being the last in the synagogue before it was destroyed during *Kristallnacht*?
- What about the young Jewish people in Cologne and across Europe who were never able to have their ceremony? How might they feel?

MAIN

Divide the class into small groups of three or four and distribute the accompanying task sheet.

Students can be given around 20 minutes or so to complete the exercise. You also have the option to extend the task, if timing allows, to create bigger and more detailed installations. For example, students could plan their installation in the first lesson and their homework task could be to prepare items for sharing in the next lesson. This might allow for greater choice and ownership.

Save enough time to view and evaluate all the installations. You may wish to photograph them for display. We would love to see what the students come up with! Share your photographs on social media tagging JHASW/CHIDC and CMOP in your posts or send the images to us and we will post them on our website.

PLENARY

Students are to make some reflective notes on the following questions:

- Which installation had the biggest impact on you and why?
- What did you enjoy about responding in a creative way? What were the challenges?
- What role can art and symbolism have when exploring devastating events such as *Kristallnacht*?

² Jewish Museum London, *Life Cycle: Coming of Age* <<https://jewishmuseum.org.uk/schools/asset/life-cycle-bar-bat-mitzvah/>> [accessed 26 January 2022].

Transcript

Video extract: Julius Weil – bar mitzvah

My bar mitzvah preparation took place when I was twelve and at thirteen, I did have my bar mitzvah in the synagogue called the Glockengasse in Cologne [Köln in German]. The synagogue which was an old one. It was probably I would say at that time, in 1938, it would have probably been a hundred years old. But on *Kristallnacht*, of course, it was burnt and destroyed together with lots of other synagogues, and this was just over two weeks after my bar mitzvah. And, therefore, mine was the last to take place in this particular synagogue.