

The Holocaust and Wales: The Welsh language

Teachers' Notes

In this lesson, the students will look at the story of Kate Bosse-Griffiths, a German-Jewish refugee, who fled to Wales and became a leading figure in the Welsh-language movement.

Curriculum links

Key Stage 3

Art and design, History, Literacy skills, Welsh language.

Lesson Plan

LEARNING AIMS

- To examine how and why the experience of oppression may affect people's responses to new cultures and circumstances.
- To explore the experience of being a refugee straddling two or more cultures.
- To gain knowledge of an important Welsh-language literary figure in twentieth-century Wales.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

- Copies of student worksheet.
- Transcripts of the audio clips.¹

STARTER

Ask how many students speak or understand another language, in addition to Welsh or English?
Write the different languages they speak or understand on the board.

Ask the students to consider and discuss the following questions:

- Where does this knowledge come from – their own experiences as younger children or those of their families?
- If you have moved to another country, does learning the language of that country make it easier to integrate and be accepted?
- How important to you is the Welsh language?

DEVELOPMENT

Kate Bosse-Griffiths – Biography.

Käthe (Kate) Bosse-Griffiths was born in Wittenberg, Germany in 1910. Her father, Paul Bosse, was chief surgeon at the local hospital while her mother, also Käthe, came from a Jewish family. Although Käthe's parents had been Jewish, she (like her daughter Kate) was raised as a Christian. After the Nuremberg Laws were passed in 1935, however, she and her children were classified as Jewish.

Kate received a doctorate in Egyptian sculpture from Munich University and obtained a post at the Egyptological Museum in Berlin. She was dismissed at the end of 1936 when a colleague reported her Jewish ancestry. She fled Germany and chose Britain as her destination, arriving in January 1937. She obtained a job at Oxford University in 1939, where she met her future husband John Gwyn Griffiths. The pair married quickly in September 1939, in part because of fears that Kate would be

¹ We added the audio clips' transcripts, which you may choose to share with your students if you think it would be helpful. The clips and transcripts are in Welsh; the English translations are available.

classified as an enemy alien and interned. Kate's mother was eventually killed in Ravensbrück concentration camp, although some other family members survived the war.

Kate and Gwyn moved to Wales, where Kate embraced the Welsh language, writing poetry and short stories and submitting them (successfully) in competitions. Initially, Gwyn helped her with translating into Welsh, but she soon became fluent. The Welsh landscape reminded her of the black forests of her native Germany, the "real aimless nature, the thing I had missed so much in the tidiness of the lovely English countryside".²

Kate and Gwyn were leading members of the Cylch Cadwgan (Circle of Cadwgan), a Welsh-language literary group named after a local mountain. She published her first novel, *Anesmwyth Hoen* (*Uneasy Joy*), in 1941, and in 1942 won a short story competition in the National Eisteddfod held at Cardigan for *Y Bennod Olaf* (*The Last Chapter*). Many of her works had an autobiographical element, incorporating German and European themes.

The family moved to Swansea after the end of the war, where Kate became curator of the university's Egypt collection. She continued to write for the Welsh-language press, supporting the creation of the Cymdeithas yr Iaith (Welsh Language Society) in 1962. She was even fined for refusing to pay a parking ticket that was written in English. She died in 1998. Her sons continue her passion for the Welsh language. Her eldest son, Robat, runs the publishing press Y Lolfa, while her younger son, Heini, is an author who has written numerous books on learning Welsh.

Ask the students to first read Kate Bosse-Griffiths's biography and then listen to [a clip of Heini Gruffudd discussing his mother's attitude to the Welsh language](#). Then, working in pairs or individually, students should answer the following questions on their worksheet (**TASK 1**):

1. Why did Kate become involved in the Welsh-language movement?
2. Kate chose to express her feelings through poetry. How can literature and poetry capture the experience of being a refugee?

MAIN

A poem by Kate Bosse-Griffiths.

Hedyn (1971)

(I ateb y cwestiwn, sut y gallwn fod berchen gwreiddiau mewn dwy wlad.)

Hedyn wyf o wlad bell
Wedi ei lyncu gan aderyn treigl
Wedi ei gludo dros y mor gan wennol;
Dsgynnodd ar dir newydd ei aredig
A thafu gwreiddiau

Glaswelltyn wyf ar borfa las
Wedi fy mhlygu gan garn defaid

² Heini Gruffudd, *A Haven from Hitler* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2014), p. 144.

Wedi fy nghnoi gan ddant bustach
Tyflais yn gnawd byw
Tyfais yn rhan o Gymru

A seed

(To answer the question of how one can have roots in two countries.)

I am a seed from a distant land
Swallowed by a migratory bird,
And carried across the sea by a swallow.
I fell in freshly ploughed land,
I took root.

I am a blade of grass in a green field,
I have been bent by the hoof of a sheep,
I have been chewed by the teeth of a cow.
I became living flesh.
I became part of Wales.

Ask the students to listen to [a clip of Heini Gruffudd reading one his mother's poems in Welsh](#). Then, working in pairs or individually, students should answer the following questions on their worksheet **(TASK 2)**:

1. How does Kate represent her life journey in this poem?
2. Why does Kate describe herself as a seed?
3. What does the green field represent in the poem? What about the sheep? The cow?

PLENARY

Ask students to compose a short poem on the theme of change and integration. They should think about the poem's structure, what experiences they want to capture or the metaphors they want to use.

Encourage the students to read their poem aloud to the class and discuss what themes they have included in their poem and why.

Sources

Centre for the Movement of People, *Refugees from National Socialism in Wales: Kate Bosse-Griffiths* <<https://wp-research.aber.ac.uk/nsrefugeeswales/history/background-of-refugees/refugee-profiles/kate-bosse-griffiths/>> [accessed 30 August 2022]

Gruffudd, Heini, *A Haven from Hitler* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2014)

Transcripts

[Heini Gruffudd discussing Kate Bosse-Griffiths's attitude to the Welsh language](#)

Roedd mam yn amlwg oherwydd y profiadau yn yr Almaen wedi mynd i deimlo yn erbyn awdurdodau gormesol. Roedd hwnna'n bwysig iawn iddi. Ac yng Nghymru roedd hi'n gweld bod yr iaith Gymraeg o dan ormes, heb hawliau, felly roedd hi'n frwd iawn dros y Gymraeg, i berthyn i Gymru, brwd dros y Gymraeg a wedyn cymryd rhan mewn ymgyrchoedd pan ddechreuodd Cymdeithas yr Iaith. Fe wrthododd hi dalu dirwy parcio achos bod e'n Saesneg, mynd i'r Llys. Cwbl gefnogol i Plaid Cymru hefyd, gweld bod y Plaid yn cynnig ffordd ymlaen i Gymru oedd yn ffordd oedd yn amddiffyn gwareiddiad, ac iddi hi roedd hi'n sicr yn gweld y Gymraeg a Chymru a phosibiliadau i roi ateb i fyd heddychol newydd.

[My mother had, because of the experiences in Germany, clearly come to rail against oppressive authorities. That was very important to her. And in Wales she saw that the Welsh language was under oppression, without rights, so she was very enthusiastic about the Welsh language, to belong to Wales, and then took part in campaigns when Cymdeithas yr Iaith began. She refused to pay a parking fine because it was in English, and went to court. Completely supportive of Plaid Cymru as well, seeing that the party offered a way forward for Wales that protected civilization, and for her she certainly saw the Welsh language and Wales as possibilities to provide a solution to a new peaceful world.]

[Heini Gruffudd reading *Hedyn*, a poem written by Kate Bosse-Griffiths](#)

Cerdd fach yw hon ysgrifennodd mam yn 1971, flynyddoedd ar ôl dod i Gymru wrth gwrs, pum mlynedd ar hugain ar ôl dod yma, ac mae'n dal i deimlo bod hi'n perthyn i ddwy wlad, roedd gyda hi wreiddiau yn yr Almaen a hefyd erbyn hynny yng Nghymru, a dyma ysgrifennodd hi, 'Hedyn' yw'r teitl.

Hedyn wyf o wlad bell
Wedi ei lynu gan aderyn treigl
Wedi ei gludo dros y mor gan wennol;
Dsgynnodd ar dir newydd ei aredig
A thaflu gwreiddiau

Glaswelltyn wyf ar borfa las
Wedi fy mhlygu gan garn defaid
Wedi fy nghnoi gan ddant bustach

Tyflais yn gnawd byw
Tyfais yn rhan o Gymru

Fanna mae'n mynegi yr anhawster mawr o ddod i berthyn i wlad newydd, ei bod hi wedi cael ei chwalu mewn ffordd, wedi cael ei sathru, wedi cael ei chnoi ac eto trwy'r cyfan wedi dod wedyn yn rhan o Gymru.

[This is a small poem my mother wrote in 1971, years after coming to Wales of course, twenty-five years after coming here, and she still feels that she belongs to two countries, she had roots in Germany and also by that time in Wales, and this is what she wrote, 'Hedyn' ('Seed') is the title.

I am a seed from a distant land
Swallowed by a migratory bird,
And carried across the sea by a swallow.
I fell in freshly ploughed land,
I took root.

I am a blade of grass in a green field,
I have been bent by the hoof of a sheep,
I have been chewed by the teeth of a cow.
I became living flesh.
I became part of Wales.

Here she expresses the great difficulty of coming to belong to a new country, that she has been shattered in a way, has been trampled on, has been chewed up and yet through it all has then become part of Wales.]