



Using stories of the past to teach students about its complexity



Die wichtigsten Maße de

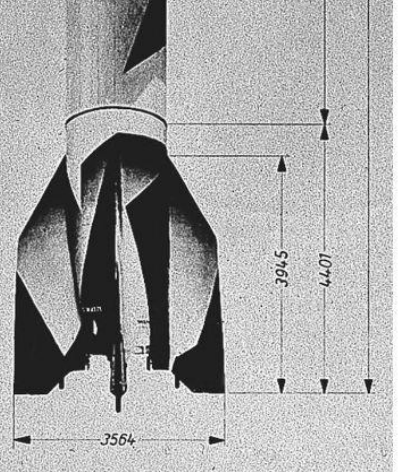


Abb. 2

Figure 2

The most important dimensions of the missile



Sharing European Histories

Self-Guided Course

Using Stories of the Past to Teach Students about its Complexity

Ana Zdravkovic

**Evens
Foundation**



Using Stories of the Past to Teach Students about its Complexity

Example Lesson Plan

By Ana Zdravkovic

This example lesson plan of the [Using Stories of the Past to Teach Students about its Complexity Teaching Strategy](#) is part of the Sharing European Histories Self-Guided Course, developed by Ana Zdravkovic. Its aim is to demonstrate how the Teaching Strategy can be adapted into the local context and classroom setting.

Introduction

This lesson plan is designed to help students to engage with the complexity and differences in everyday life of ordinary people in Europe during the Second World War 1939-1945. Although this period is not regarded as a distant past, students usually do not perceive it as a period that has a big influence on their lives and the lives of their family members. Besides, they are prone to generalisation even though not all people in Europe have lived through the War in the same way. Using life stories should help them to familiarise themselves more with that period and to better understand what has transpired.

Time needed: 90 min (2x45 min)

Approximate age: 13-16

Number of students: 24-30

Learning objectives:

- To find out how everyday life looked like during WWII;
- To reveal which where the main topics ordinary people were thinking and talking about during WWII;
- To compare everyday life of people from different groups and countries during WWII;
- To understand the meaning of terms such as the Holocaust, war crimes, ghetto, concentration camp;
- To analyse the position of the author by comparing different sources about the same phenomenon/event;
- To build a critical attitude towards historical sources and remembrance;
- To underline the difference between sources and evidence.

Materials needed:

1. A copy of one story for each student (4-5 stories for the class).
2. A map of Europe (map of Europe or blank map of Europe in WWII - [here](#)) – 6 copies.
3. An empty timeline – [here](#) or make your own – 6 copies.
4. Stickers and papers.

Preparation:

1. Study offered excerpts from life stories or prepare some new and decide which to use with your students.
2. Decide how to split your students into groups.
3. Print selected stories, maps and timeline in enough copies.
4. Prepare PPT for the summary.

First Lesson

45 min

Activity 1: Individual Reading

10 min

Each student receives a copy of one of the chosen stories and has time to read it by themselves. Their task is to focus on the following information:

- Who is the main character of the story?
- When and where did the story take place?
- What is the story about? (Summarize in 1-2 sentences)

Activity 2: Exchanging Information

15 min

Students are divided into small groups so that each group will consist of students who have read different stories. The teacher can provide copies in different paper colours and hand these out. Alternatively, they can also coloured sticky notes to the back of each story and put one phrase on each copy so that students can find other group members.

The first task of each student in the group is to shortly present the story to the other members of the group and to find where on the given map and timeline their story can be situated, using sticky notes or stickers. During the presentations they will also write key events and terms on stickers and add these on the timeline.

At the end of this activity, all group members have presented their life stories and located these on the common map and timeline. Now, students will have the time to contrast and compare their life stories and note down any similarities or differences.

Some questions students can use in comparing life stories:

- How similar or different are the people from your stories in terms of: gender, age, level of education, the place they were born in and lived?
- What are the common points in their life experiences during WWII?
- What are the main differences between their life experiences during WWII?

Activity 3: Group Presentation

5 min

In this activity, all groups will present their map, timeline and list of similarities and differences to the rest of the class in order to contrast and compare, in preparation for the discussion. If there are terms unfamiliar to the students, the teacher can explain their meaning to the class or ask for an explanation to students who know their meaning.

Discussion

15 min

The first lesson will be concluded with a class discussion, based on the findings and group work in the previous activities. Students will be encouraged to notice that perspectives on the same period or event can be different due to several factors. The discussion can be guided by the following set of questions:

- Who was affected by the event/s presented in the story? Is their importance just individual or maybe local, national, regional or global?
- How important was the place where a person lived for shaping their experience?
- How important was the age of the person for shaping their experience?
- Are there some other factors that seem important for shaping someone's experience?
- How does the time period influence the person's thoughts and actions?

Second Lesson

45 min

Activity 4: Comparing stories from the past with official perspective in the textbook

15 min

Note: This activity can be given as homework if the teacher wants to have more time for discussion and/or summarising in the second lesson.

Students will compare the stories with the information presented about the period of WWII in their textbooks and think about the differences between two descriptions. Key questions are:

- What was the intention of textbook authors and what of the storytellers?
- Who is the most relevant person to speak about WWII?
- Are there more or less important stories in the past?

Discussion 2

20 min

This discussion continues based on the previous activity and its goal is to distinguish evidence from life stories as a source and to demonstrate the limitation of stories as a source. Questions to be discussed are:

- Are the stories reliable and trustworthy? Is the text in the textbook reliable as well? Why?
- How can someone's memories fit into a wider context?
- What can we find out from the stories about the period? Some concrete examples?
- What is more relevant – facts given in the textbook or what people from the stories have said about the period?
- What else should we know in order to be able to use stories in our search for evidence about the past?

Activity 5: Short lecture about life of ordinary people in WWII

10 min

Finally, the teacher highlights and gives more explanation about the key terms and events from the stories followed by PPT with the help of the students and summarises the lesson. Through this short lecture they will speak more about war crimes, concentration camps, the Holocaust, resistance movements, civil wars and their consequences, making an introduction to the Cold war period.

Example Worksheet

World War II: Ordinary People

Group number/name: _____

	Similarity	Difference
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

A Selection of Life Stories

Alfredo Enriquez Novoa

I was born one summer night in 1920 in a small town of only 1000 inhabitants in Galicia near the Atlantic Ocean. I was a farmer, just like my father, who died when I was 12 years old. We enjoyed life in the Banda Mountains, and during the carnival dedicated to San Roque we ate, drank and played all night in the town square.

On August 24, 1938, I was drafted into the army and assigned to the 31st Ourense Infantry Regiment. On September 7, we entered Ostorgoj. Three weeks later, I was assigned to the 5th Battalion of the 2nd Regiment of the Blue Arrow Division and I stayed there until December 4, when they finally gave me the promised vacation. On December 22, I went to Catalonia because of the offensive that started on Christmas, December 24. At four in the afternoon, I crossed the Tigris River by boat and swam. I couldn't feel my feet, but I couldn't complain either because the noise would wake the enemy. However, the enemy was also ready to attack, even though he was trembling with cold and fear. With the help of machine guns, cannons and planes, we won, but with many dead. We were isolated for a few days, however, until reinforcements arrived. Then we moved on. On January 9, we entered Zaragoza, where we fought the enemy for several hours. It was one of my biggest fights. There were many losses on both sides. I was severely wounded and after several operations in various hospitals until March 22, when I had to evacuate with the others due to the great offensive on Madrid, due to which the hospitals had to remain free.

On April 1, the war ended, but my happiness did not last long. Two months later I had to go to Valle de Oliz where I was sent to Albacete and then to Barcelona to be later transferred to a camp in Morocco where I remained until December 5, 1940. After the invasion of Tangier which was a French colony, since my battalion was with the Germans, I stayed for a year in Tetuan in Morocco until we returned to Spain via Gibraltar.

Everything was uncertain, there was hunger, collapse, sadness, and I had to learn to take other people's lives because of other people's political, ideological and racial conflicts.

On October 20, 1942, I was again called up to the battalion as part of the 53rd Regiment, whose task was to help the Germans and Italians on the Spanish-French border. However, I was not able to fight, so I was transferred from the hospital in Ourense, which did not have instruments and specialist doctors, to La Coruna, where I was operated on and detained until July 7, 1944, when I was sent home with torn pants after six years of service and 40 surgeries.

© Source: Story of Alfredo written by his granddaughter Daniela Enriquez Badas in 2010 and used with her permission.

Ivan Stanchov

I was born in 1929 in Sofia. From 1943 I lived in the USA where I graduated in History and from 1971 in the UK. In 1990 I returned to Bulgaria and in the following years I was appointed several times as ambassador and from 1994 to 1995 as minister of foreign affairs.

My family spent three interesting and active months fighting bugs and trying to survive on mushrooms, blueberries, young nettles and beetroot soup. The coupon system was relentless; not only was it impossible to find meat, but no one was allowed to kill an animal. You can imagine the happiness when the priest's calf broke his leg and he had to be killed. My parents managed to buy a steak and we ate as little as we could, so that it would last longer. Even though, for some inexplicable reason, in Sofia, as well as in the villages, it completely disappeared from the market, they managed to keep the meat edible for a whole week: they put it on a cement floor and covered it with a damp cloth whose ends were immersed in a sink cold water. Thus, in the hot July days, they were able to achieve continuous evaporation.

At dawn, an unexpected visitor awakened me: a burly landing-troops German officer. He saluted and said that Herr Major had sent him to me with the following order: "You must leave Sofia immediately. The Brown ones – (that was what the people of the Gestapo were called because of their brown uniforms) are on their way to arrest you." I asked him why his Major, whom I knew was the resident of the military intelligence in Bulgaria, was so worried about me. "Weil Sie doch ein Offizier und ein Herr sind!" (Because you are an officer and a gentleman!), answered the man, who then saluted sprightly and disappeared. I caught the first train to Varna, and while travelling, I thought about how lucky we were that there was such hostility between the Wehrmacht and the Nazis... Later, the doorman told me that an hour after I had left, a group of Germans came looking for me.

© Adapted from: Станчов, И. (2019). *Дипломат и градинар: Мемоари*. Хеликс прес: Софија

Zagorka Kočić

I was born in 1910 in the village of Donja Jajina, district of Leskovac, in a poor peasant family. Until the age of 12, when I went to school, I kept my parents' cattle. I finished two grades, and I couldn't continue because we were poor, and my parents needed manpower. I was engaged in agriculture, and I used to work as a day laborer.

In 1928, I married Dragoljub Kočić from the village of Veliko Vojlovce, Jablanica district, to a middle-class peasant family. I have three children. In the former Yugoslavia, I did not belong to any party, but my father and my spouse always voted for the Democratic Party.

After the capitulation of Yugoslavia in 1941, during the summer, when the occupier and our traitors began to capture people, they began to flee the town. They hid in the forest and came to my father in Donja Jajina where they would get food. I saw them at my father's house and they told me that they would fight against the occupiers and that the occupier would lose the war because they attacked Russia, which is a great power.

When the partisan detachments were formed in Kukavica, I sent them food aid, and in 1943 I gave aid in money. As my whole family was a sympathizer of the NLM, and my brother and two sisters had been in partisan detachments since 1941, and my spouse was part of an illegal village committee and was chased by the occupier and their servants, I lived in constant fear that they would kill all of us.

On August 9, 1944, a village guard from Lebane captured my spouse and took him with the intention of killing him, but he managed to escape. The guards came to my house to look for him, and since they could not find him, they drove me and my children to Lebane and kept me in prison for half a day. I was not questioned because I was ill, so they released me soon after. After a few days, they came looking for my spouse again. They didn't do anything to me this time. A few days when Nedić's people came again to search for him. They wanted to get me into the house with the children and set it on fire, but thankfully they changed their minds.

When Lebane was liberated, they came again and threatened to execute us all. The NLA attacked them and they did not succeed. In September 1944, our region was finally liberated.

On October 26, 1944, I joined the Communist Party. I was happy and proud to have become a member of the party that runs the country and creates a happy future and life for working and honest people and humanity.

© Source: Kočić, Zagorka. Statement given in Lebane. 2 December 1946. Private collection. Permission to use given by her daughter, Ljiljana Kočić.