



GET TO KNOW WW2

Look Closer

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

FirstNews WORLD WAR 2

5 September 1945

THIS week, American troops have shown German people the horrors inside Hitler's concentration camps.

Hitler started to set up concentration camps in 1933 but, at the time, people had no idea he planned to turn them into death camps.

In all, the Nazis set up around 100 camps and they had two uses. Some were concentration camps for prisoners to be used as slave labour in nearby factories. That was bad enough but, during the war, the Nazis used them as death camps for the killing of "undesirables" – mainly Jews.

As the allied armies raced towards final victory, the troops liberated the camps one-by-one, revealing the horrors of the Nazi idea of creating a "pure" society.



5 April 1945: British, American and Allied prisoners of war cheer as their liberators, the 9th Army, move them out of the Nazi camp at Altengrabow, Germany

The first camp to be liberated

The first camp to be liberated was in July 1944 when Soviet troops entered Majdanek, a death camp located in Poland two miles from the city of Lublin.

Majdanek was set up by the Nazis in 1941. Hitler's plan for it was the speedy extermination, by gassing, of new arrivals (mostly Jews) brought in from countries including Czechoslovakia, France, Austria, and the Netherlands.



Jewish women and children getting off the train coaches on arrival in Auschwitz

The BBC's Alexander Werth was one of a group of reporters who went inside Majdanek a week after it was liberated.

"My first reaction to Majdanek was a feeling of surprise," he said.

"It looked harmless from outside. The place was large; like a whole town of barracks painted a pleasant soft green. We stopped outside a large barrack marked Bad und Desinfektion II. 'This,' somebody said, 'is where large numbers of those arriving at the camp were brought in.'"

"Did any of them suspect, while washing themselves after a long journey, what would happen a few minutes later? They were asked to go into the next room. The 'next room' was a series of large square concrete structures. The naked were forced from the bath-house into these dark concrete boxes and then, with 200 or 250 people packed into each box, the process of gassing began. In anything from two to ten minutes everybody was dead..."



Children made to wear striped clothing stand behind a barbed wire fence at the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz



Auschwitz

– *the most famous camp of all*

On 27 April 1940, Heinrich Himmler ordered a new camp to be built near Oswiecim, Poland.

The Auschwitz concentration camp (Auschwitz is the German spelling of Oswiecim) quickly became the largest Nazi concentration and death camp. It was made up of three large camps and 45 sub-camps.

Auschwitz II (or Birkenau) was completed in early 1942. Birkenau was built around 1.9 miles away from Auschwitz I and we've found out now that this was the real killing centre of the Auschwitz death camp.

Jews, gypsies, and other people the Nazis thought were "undesirable" were captured and sent to Auschwitz. When the trains stopped at Birkenau, the people were told to leave all their belongings on board and were forced to gather on the railway platform, known as "the ramp".

Families were quickly and brutally split up as an



Everyone at Auschwitz was tattooed with a prisoner number to identify them

SS officer, usually a Nazi doctor, ordered each individual into one of two lines. Most women, children, older men and those that looked unfit or unhealthy, were sent to the left. Most young men and others that looked strong enough to do hard

Nazi officers supervise Jews leaving railway trucks during the deportation to the camps in 1941



work were sent to the right. They didn't know it at the time, but the right line meant that they would become a prisoner of the camp. The left line meant immediate death at the gas chambers.

The entire mass murder system depended on keeping this secret from its victims. If the victims had known they were headed to their death, they would most definitely have fought back.

Those that had been sent to the right had their heads shaved and were thrown into the cruel, unfair, horrific world of camp life.

The limited amount of food and extremely hard labour meant many prisoners starved to death.



Auschwitz

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Medical experiments

Also on the ramp, Nazi doctors would search among the new arrivals for anyone they might want to experiment upon. One of their favourite choices was twins.

At Auschwitz, there was a team of Nazi doctors. One of the most well-known was Dr Josef Mengele. He experimented on identical twins, hoping to find a secret to cloning what Nazis considered the perfect person.



Freedom

When the Nazis realised that the Russians were pushing their way toward Germany in late 1944, they started destroying evidence of their appalling activities at Auschwitz.

In the middle of January 1945, the Nazis removed the last 58,000 prisoners from Auschwitz and sent them on death marches. The Nazis planned on marching these exhausted prisoners to different camps.

On 27 January 1945, the Russians reached Auschwitz.

When they entered the camp, they found 7,650 prisoners who had been left behind. The camp was liberated and these prisoners were now free.

Prisoners' barracks at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp



Auschwitz facts

- Auschwitz was the largest of the Nazi camps.
- It was set up in May 1940 and was liberated by the allies on 27 January 1945.
- In all, 1.1 million people died during the four and a half years of Auschwitz's existence. One million of them were Jewish men, women and children.
- More people died in Auschwitz than the British and American losses of World War Two combined.
- Some Jewish prisoners secretly wrote eyewitness accounts of the atrocities of the gas chambers and hid them in bottles buried in the ground. A number of these accounts have since been discovered.



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Carefully read the Behind The Headlines section of the newspaper about the Nazi concentration camps, then answer the following questions:

Q1) True or false (AF2)

- At first, Nazi concentration camps used prisoners as slave labour for nearby factories.
- Auschwitz became the only death camp.
- Maidanek's 'Bad und Desinfektion' (bathroom and disinfection) building was really a gas chamber to kill the Jews.
- On arrival at Auschwitz, most women, children, unfit, unhealthy, or older men were gassed and the young or strong men became prisoners.
- More than 1 million died at Auschwitz alone.

Q2) Look at the headline 'Death camps'. Why do you think the journalist has chosen this particular headline? Why do you think it works? (AF6)

Q3) The opening sentence, or lead, of a newspaper report should answer the 5 Ws (Who? What? Where? When? Why?). Can you work out the key facts from the lead of the 'Death camps' article: 'THIS week, American troops have made German residents view the horrors inside Hitler's concentration camps.?'

Q4) The BBC journalist Alexander Werth went to Maidanek camp a week after it was liberated. How do his first impressions of the camp change during the visit? Which words explain this to the reader? (AF5)

Q5) The Behind The Headlines is a special section all about the Nazi concentration camps. How does the feature's structure of articles, subheadings and fact box tell us the story of the Nazi camps? (AF4)

Q6) What do the original source photographs (taken during the Second World War) in 'Behind The Headlines' tell us about the concentration camps? In what ways is the information you learn from these original photographs similar or different to the text in the accompanying First News reports? (AF7)





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Who?

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What?

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Where?

When?

Why?



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(AF7)

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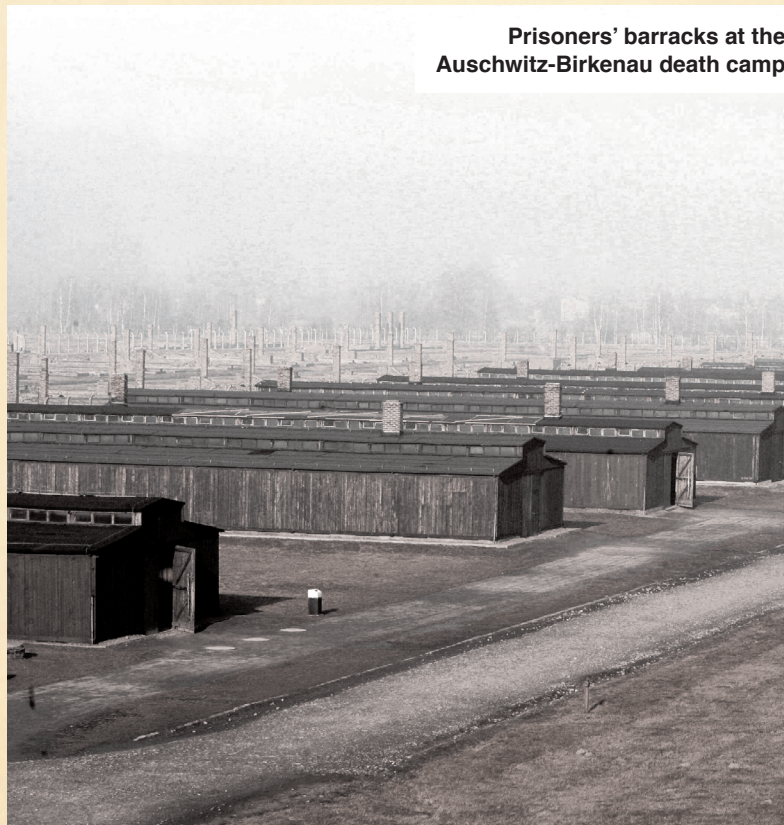
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Prisoners' barracks at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp



Children made to wear striped clothing stand behind a barbed wire fence at the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz



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TEACHER ANSWERS

The teacher answers are intended to be a guide as to the AF strand of the question and possible responses from pupils working at different levels.

Q1) True or false? (AF2)

AF2 – understand, describe, select, retrieve information, events or ideas from texts and use quotations and reference to the text

Possible answers:

L3 – identifying obvious points

L4 – identifying relevant points

- **At first, Nazi concentration camps used prisoners as slave labour for nearby factories.** T
- **Auschwitz became the only death camp.** F – The Nazis had over a hundred camps and many were death camps, including Maidanek
- **Maidanek's 'Bad und Desinfektion' (bathroom and disinfection) building was really a gas chamber to kill the Jews.** T
- **On arrival at Auschwitz, most women, children, unfit, unhealthy, or older men were gassed and the young or strong men became prisoners.** T
- **More than 1 million died at Auschwitz alone.** T

Q2) Look at the headline 'Death camps'. Why do you think the journalist has chosen this particular headline? Why do you think it works? (AF6)

AF6 – identify and comment on the writer's purpose and viewpoint, and the overall effect on the reader

Possible answers:

L4 – main purpose identified, simple comments show some awareness of the writer's viewpoint

L5 – main purpose identified, viewpoint clearly identified but limited

L6 – The writer's viewpoint clearly identified, with evidence precisely located, and the effect upon the reader explained

- These two words also sum up the Behind The Headlines section because all the stories are about the Nazi camps and many were death camps too.
- The journalist has chosen to sum up the events in a simple and direct way – just two words, perhaps to help the reader start to understand a very big WW2 story – the inhumane way in which the Nazis dealt with, not least, over a million Jews and other 'undesirables' who died in Auschwitz.
- The articles, and subheadings, are going to give the details of the Nazi camps, so the headline does not need to be lengthy – it needs to attract our attention to the special feature.
- The word 'Death' is emotive because it suggests killing, especially contrasted/juxtaposed as it is with the word 'camps', as we think of summer holidays and tents when we see this word - not the end of life.
- The headline is in front of a photo of the happy liberated Allied prisoners of war. This contrast makes us even more curious to see why the headline should be about death. This soon becomes apparent however with the rest of the photos and the text.



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Q3) The opening sentence, or lead, of a newspaper report should answer the 5 Ws (Who? What? Where? When? Why?). Can you work out the key facts from the lead of the 'Death camps' article: 'THIS week, American troops have made German residents view the horrors inside Hitler's concentration camps.'

AF3 – deduce information from the text

L3 – a few examples correct, showing simple deduction

L4 – most deductions correct

L5 – correct deductions

Who? American troops

What? They are helping the Germans to find out more

Where? Hitler's concentration camps

When? This week (5th September 1945)

Why? To see the 'horrors' of the camps

Q4) The BBC journalist Alexander Werth went to Maidanek camp a week after it was liberated. How do his first impressions of the camp change during the visit? Which words explain this to the reader? (AF5)

AF5 – explain and comment on the writer's use of language...

Possible answers:

L4/5 - some explanation and comment

L6 – detailed explanation and comment

● There are two journalists here – the one who is writing the First News article in 2014 about what happened at Maidanek - and Alexander Werth who reported back on his 1944 visit to the death camp. This First News story is the second of its special feature on the Nazi death camps, so it introduces us to the details and real horror of the death camps, just like Alexander Werth was doing to his audience in WW2. At the time, most people did not know about the death camps, just as children, nowadays, will not know the facts. So, the First News journalist chooses to use Werth's eyewitness account, to give us a better understanding of what the camp was really like from a journalist who saw it for themselves.

● Many of the Jews did not know what was going to happen to them in places like Maidanek and Auschwitz. Werth presents us with the ordinary, seemingly everyday details of the camp the Jews would have seen. He describes the barrack buildings as being painted a 'pleasant soft green'. We think of green as a fertile and life-giving colour of nature. This is in contrast to the real purpose of the buildings – to incarcerate (imprison) people and even kill them.

● Alexander Werth must have heard terrible stories about what was happening inside the camps, perhaps that is why he is shocked and expresses 'surprise' at how normal and harmless the camp looks.

● Werth takes the reader on the journey the Jews and other 'undesirables' would have taken to the gas chambers, so we not only understand something of what these poor people went through but we then sympathise with them.

● He mentions the 'Bad und Desinfektion' building. It seems such an everyday place – the bathroom. Disinfection room sounds odd because why do people need to be disinfected but it doesn't tell the true, horrible story of the building.

● Someone describes to Werth 'the large numbers' of people who were brought to this building. It's as if there were so many, the person can't even come up with a figure. This is a terrible thought for the reader because the dead are not individual human beings, with families, but an unknown mass.

● Werth asks the question: 'Did any of them suspect...?' This is a haunting question and the reader feels compelled to ask themselves this question too.

● We soon find out, just like the prisoners, because 'minutes later' the prisoners are dead.





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- The adjectives used in the description of the gas chamber, 'large' and 'dark', are foreboding. The verb of 'forced' and 'packed' shows how brutal the Nazis were to the prisoners.
- The prisoners are now reduced to the noun 'naked'. They have no identity – and are no longer even human beings.
- The contrast/juxtaposition between the 'pleasant' camp and the 'naked' truth of the gas chambers is shocking to the reader. We are even more stunned because of the contrast the journalist has given us. The normal treatment expected for prisoners was twisted by the Nazis, just like they turned an ordinary-looking camp into a place of death.
- The journalist ends with an ellipsis 'In anything from two to ten minutes, everybody was dead ...'. It is as if there are no more words to describe the nightmare scene. Also, the prisoners are dead now, so the writing stops to reflect how their lives have been cut off.

Q5) The Behind The Headlines is a special section all about the Nazi concentration camps. How does the feature's structure of articles, subheadings and fact box tell us the story of the Nazi camps? (AF4)

AF4 - identify and comment upon on the structure and organisation of the text...

Possible answers:

L4 – simple comment on the features of the articles, subheadings and fact box

- There are different stories about what went on in the camps and photos to show the Allied prisoners and the Jews.

L5 – various features clearly identified with some explanation

- The three stories tell us different parts of the story about the Nazi camps. For example, we find out that people did not know that the camps had become death camps until the Allies liberated them. 'The first camp to be liberated' tells us that people were gassed to death in the camps and has an eyewitness account to prove this.

L6 – some detailed exploration and comment

- 'Death camps' is a special Behind The Headlines section in the WW2 newspaper. The editor wants to show readers that the mass execution of the Jews and other people considered 'undesirable' by the Nazis is the most shocking event of WW2 and needs to be written about in more detail, and several articles, so that people understand what really went on in the Nazi camps.

- There are three different articles to tell the story and there is a journey for the reader: from the liberation of the prisoner of war camps to the horrifying revelation of the death camps, such as Auschwitz. We hear about the liberation of the Allied prisoners in 'Death camps', then we find out about Maidanek camp in 'The first camp to be liberated' with quotes from Alexander Werth, who actually visited the camp when it was liberated. So, we get a firsthand account of the camp. Then we discover the background to Auschwitz, how people were organised when they arrived at the death camp, the fact that prisoners were part of Nazi medical experiments and the liberation of Auschwitz.

- The subheadings, for example, 'Medical experiments' and 'Freedom' in the 'Auschwitz – the most famous camp of all' article help to sum up and tell different aspects of the story of Auschwitz. They also help the reader to locate details, such as the Nazi doctors, quickly.

- The special section is dominated by original/primary source photos to emphasise the reality of the death camps.

- There is an Auschwitz fact box to sum up some of the horrifying number facts about the death camp and help the reader understand why there is a special section devoted to the Nazi death camps. For example, 'More people died in Auschwitz than the British and American losses of World War Two combined'.





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Q6) What do the original source photographs in the Behind The Headlines tell us about the concentration camps? Are the photos different or similar to the information in the First News articles? (AF7)

AF7 - relate texts to their social, cultural and historical traditions

Possible answers:

L5 – Similarities and differences identified, with some explanation, including context

L6 – Some detailed comment and discussion, exploring similarities and differences between the two texts, and how the contexts in which they were written and read affect meaning i.e. how the historical context influences the text, how a topic is treated differently in texts from different times

● The photos are a visual way to tell the horrific story of the camps and Auschwitz. There is a positive start with the happy-to-be-liberated Allied prisoners of war. However, they are in contrast to the majority of upsetting photos of Auschwitz. There is the Dossel camp photo of the thin Polish prisoner of war, which is proof that soldiers were poorly treated. The Auschwitz image of the malnourished and upset children, in their ill-fitting prisoner clothing, behind the forbidding barbed wire is harrowing. So is a photo of a prisoner's arm with a number tattoo. It brings to mind the kind of identification that is branded on farm animals rather than human beings.

● Even though the First News articles are written 70 years after the liberation of the camps, they try
● use source vocabulary to bring the reader closer to the events described. For example, the German vocabulary of 'Bad und Desinfektion' is used, so you see the exact words the camp prisoners would have seen on their way to their deaths. First News also uses the translation 'undesirables' of the Nazi term for all the human beings they rejected, including Jews and gypsies. It may have chosen to include this original and highly emotive Nazi term to emphasise the inhumane way that the Nazis dealt with others.

● First News also includes primary source quotes from Alexander Werth, who visited Maidanek camp when it was liberated. This supports the First News journalist's description of the terrible truth about the death camps.

● In some ways, the secondary source First News text is more graphic and upsetting, than the primary source photos. This is understandable because the newspaper is intended for pupils, so really distressing photos would be unsuitable for a younger audience. For example, the article describes how 'The limited amount of food and extremely hard labour meant many prisoners starved to death' but there are no photos of the dead.

