Conflict and genocide

A compilation of thought-provoking websites and online resources to support teaching about war, conflict and genocide across the curriculum.

Shocking, wars and genocides have killed nearly 170 million people during the twentieth century. The evidence of human cruelty during this time period is phenomenal – almost unbelievable – and suffering has been intense. This makes for a sensitive subject, and one that poses many challenges when working out how to broach the subject in the classroom. How do we make learning about genocide lively and engaging for students of all ages and abilities? How do we do this and still retain the respect such a subject deserves? And the big one – how do we make such horrific events relevant and meaningful to our students? After all, the death toll is merely that – a figure – and it can be very easy to detach ourselves from dry facts and long lists of statistics.

This issue’s compilation of useful websites will hopefully provide you with a wide range of interesting and inspirational resources to make use of when teaching about conflict and genocide. The subject has such potential for use not just in history lessons, but also across the whole curriculum, from creative responses to events and experiences through art, literature, drama and music, to philosophical and thought-provoking enquiries into blame and morality. As you browse through the websites reviewed in the following pages, you’ll find poems, mini movies, interactive war diaries, interviews with genocide survivors, interviews with genocide perpetrators, virtual reality tours of concentration camps, primary source documents, and so much more.

Some sites cover a broader topic – wars from the twentieth century, for example – while others are more tightly themed with focus on specific events – one site, for instance, is solely focused on the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. However, a key theme threading its way through each and every one of these websites is that conflict and genocide is not at all a thing of the past. It’s happening now, it’s relevant to all of us, and there are things that we, as teachers, students and ordinary human beings, can do. It’s a lovely approach to take when teaching about war and conflict, and there are plenty of practical ideas for awareness-raising activities and initiatives that students might be motivated to set up in their own schools.

Many of the websites also provide resources that would be perfect for use with this issue’s cross-curricular project. Expand your P4C enquiry into the life of Sadako Sasaki with stories of children who are suffering right now because of war from the BBC’s ‘Children of Conflict’ website, investigate the wider impact of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with a source pack from the Imperial War Museum on living under nuclear threat during the Cold War, supplement a lesson on the Home Front with multimedia resources and fun activities from BBC Primary History World War II. The possibilities are endless.
World Without Genocide – www.worldwithoutgenocide.org

Key stages 2-5

Interesting, educational and relevant, World Without Genocide strives to show that genocide is not just a historical phenomenon – it is happening right now. This approach gives it huge potential in the classroom, especially with older students.

As you browse the site, you'll find the legal UN definition of genocide, along with information on the eight stages of genocide, which shows quite clearly how simple prejudice can escalate to full blown genocide – a very interesting discussion point there. There's also extensive information on specific genocides, both past and present – Darfur, Somalia and Rwanda to name just a few – and also on countries who are currently and systematically abusing their inhabitants' human rights – North Korea, Burma and the Cote D’Ivoire are featured here. For each genocide, you will find information on the what, where, when, who and how, along with maps and photographs. Some hard hitting facts and images here.

World Without Genocide is very geared towards students and what they can do to help, now and in the future. Worth a look is the ‘Conflict-free campus initiative’ in the Advocacy section. This page provides information on where certain electronic companies get their minerals and metals, and ranks each company on their use of conflict-free minerals. In the Congo, over 5,000,000 civilians have been killed due to conflict over the mineral mines that provide the components for our electronic devices. If you want to shock your students, this might be the way to do it!

Other initiatives include The Red Hands Day, a global campaign to protest against child soldiers, and The Butterfly Project, inspired by the poem ‘The Butterfly’ by Pavel Friedmann, to remember the 1.5 million children who died in the Holocaust. Even if you choose not to participate in these projects, such initiatives could inspire a huge range of activities for the classroom, from art projects to language analysis to discussions on citizenship.

An offshoot of the BBC’s World Service, Children of Conflict is an awareness-raising initiative, and as such, aims to shock. It focuses on the stories of children who have lived and are still living through wars and conflict, and is separated into five main sections – child soldiers, lost children, wounded children, child-headed households and child workers. There's also a nice page featuring different children’s charities and initiatives, which includes links to their websites.

The information in each of the main sections is direct and simply put. A child with only moderate literacy skills would have no problem navigating the site and reading the information. You’ll also find quotes and stories from children all over the world here. Some quotes are short, some are longer and available as downloadable audio files (RAMs), but all are in the child’s own words, translated directly and shocking in their simplicity. The audio files are generally in the child’s native language, but are also available to read in English. The majority of quotes are from school-age children between the ages of ten and 17, which should make them all the more thought-provoking and relevant to our students. It might encourage them to ask, ‘What would I do in their shoes? How would I feel? How could I cope?’

Along with the stories and quotes, you’ll find a few really lovely songs and poems, written and performed by the interviewed children and their friends. These are generally more hopeful and positive than the children’s stories, and have great potential for analysis and discussion in the classroom – I’m sure they could stimulate a whole range of creative responses.

A simple site, but hugely effective and very hard hitting. Definitely deserves a visit.

Children of Conflict – www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/childrensrights/childrenofconflict

Key Stages 2-5
Full of inspiration and ideas for teaching about conflict and its aftermath, the British Red Cross website is an interesting site to explore.

In its extensive Teaching Resources section, you’ll find lesson plans, assembly kits and a whole array of multimedia resources. Some of it is less relevant to conflict and genocide, but there are some fantastic lesson plans for a range of age groups, covering subjects such as prisoners of war, war crimes trials, last year’s riots here in the UK, child soldiers, refugees and terrorism. There are some very poignant and compelling images here – great discussion starters.

Also worth a look is the Quick activities section, which features a variety of unusual lesson starters and activities, including charming your way through a hostile checkpoint in a troubled country, examining the way journalists and reporters cover terrorism and other distressing events, and an interesting discussion on acting with humanity and morality during war. Videos, photos and project ideas can be found in the Teaching packages section. This section covers some intriguing topics – the use of robots to make war more ‘humane’ might be interesting to explore with older students, as would a project on the complexities of conflict and the ‘rules of war’. Particularly exciting is Operation Amphibian, a role play project setting up a camp for refugees displaced by war/natural disaster, which could be used and adapted for all ages. (A one off payment is required for access to this project’s resources however).

This site focuses predominantly on the children of World War II – what toys they might have played with, what their bedroom might have looked like, what it might have been like to be evacuated etc. This, coupled with the site’s extensive collection of multimedia resources and bright appealing page design, should encourage younger students to consider what it might have been like to grow up in wartime Britain and will hopefully prompt some imaginative and thoughtful discussions.

Easily navigable and colourfully illustrated with eye catching cartoons, BBC Primary History World War II is perfect for use with younger students. The information provided is fairly extensive, covering topics such as evacuation, the Blitz, wartime homes and food and shopping, but is also organised into small, easy-to-read sections. Complicated concepts – the events leading to World War II, for example – are explained in simple language and definitions are given for any words a younger child might have trouble understanding. As long as your students can read fairly well, they should have no trouble using the site by themselves.

There’s also a wide range of multimedia resources to explore on this site, with a comprehensive collection of photos, videos, sound clips and written sources available in each section. This section of the site can be used with any age group and highlights include an image of a soldier kissing his little daughter goodbye before he leaves Britain, a compilation of letters from evacuated children and an eerie audio montage of air raid sirens and falling bombs. Clips from the BBC’s The Diary of Anne Frank television series are also worth taking a look at, as is the Teacher’s Resources page, which includes worksheets, lesson plans and a list of useful links.

The majority of lessons and activities on this site are very philosophically inclined – they’re aiming to develop students’ questioning and critical thinking skills. There are also some more unusual resources to discover here, and a lot of opportunity for creativity – for both students and teachers. Obviously not all of it is relevant, but a good rummage might unearth some real gems.
A straightforward and uncomplicated site, Hiroshima Remembered is the perfect resource for any project or research assignment on the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The articles are detailed but concise, and come complete with statistics, vivid descriptions and eyewitness accounts. They are also organised chronologically and tell the stories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki right from the testing of the bombs all the way through to the Japanese surrender and beyond.

There’s a substantial number of photographs, a couple of maps and a few short video clips of the explosion and its aftermath, which the site’s producers are happy for teachers and students to make use of. There’s also a selection of brief biographies of those behind the design, testing and dropping of the bombs – very useful, as the articles themselves don’t waste much time explaining who’s who.

If your students are investigating whether the bombings can be justified (Activity 7 in this issue’s cross curricular project), then the Historical Documents section is especially worth pointing them towards. In it, you’ll find a compilation of documents, including lead nuclear researcher Leo Szilard’s petition to the President arguing against using his newly developed atomic weapon on innocent civilians, the White House press release on the Hiroshima bombings, and the personal reflections of President Harry Truman on giving the order to drop the bombs. A lot of interesting and thought-provoking resources here – the highlight of the site as far as I’m concerned.

A teacher’s guide to Anne Frank and her diary, this site also provides resources and information on a wide range of related subjects including prejudice, discrimination, and civic responsibility. There’s only one picture on the whole site and the information isn’t easy to skim through – paragraphs are long and bulky – but it’s detailed, extensive and makes for a really great teacher-orientated resource.

As you might expect, there’s a lot on Anne Frank, her diary and how she fits in with historical events, but there’s also a broader focus, with articles on the history of anti-Semitism and the role of women and girls under Nazi rule, as well as an overview of other genocidal acts during the twentieth century – all complete with a huge range of review questions designed to stimulate deep and critical thinking. There’s also a fascinating article on the uniqueness of the Holocaust – definitely one for older students though, as it’s rather intense, with a lot of long words! You’ll find some great lesson plans too, which can be used with students aged from eight to 18. Grade levels are all clearly labelled (the site is American), and each lesson plan is well structured, featuring a range of external links and extension activities.

You might also like to take a look at the guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust from the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. (Find these under the heading ‘Introduction’). This section explains why it’s beneficial to teach about the Holocaust and gives some tips on how to do so and what to avoid when teaching the subject. It also provides some interesting ways to incorporate the teaching of the Holocaust and Anne Frank into the wider curriculum, for example into studies of art history, literature, contemporary world problems, culture and government.

Aesthetically lacking, but easy to navigate, Anne Frank in the World is packed full with useful information and challenging review questions – perfect for personal research and classroom activities.


Key Stages 2-5

Hiroshima Remembered – www.hiroshima-remembered.com

Key Stages 3-5
An extensive collection of multimedia resources, comprehensive information and lesson plans, A Teacher’s Guide to the Holocaust is a must visit for teachers of all key stages – and students too.

The sheer volume of information is a little overwhelming at first, but the bulk of it is organised into three main sections and navigation is fairly intuitive. Within each section, you’ll find pages and pages of facts, figures and eyewitness accounts, along with hundreds of photographs, external links and video clips. Students can take a brief quiz at the end of each section, and for teachers, the site’s creators have put together a selection of lesson plans, discussion questions, essay topics and reproducible handouts for each topic.

The whole range of lesson plans can be found in the Student Activities section, and since the site is American, are divided by grade level. There’s a phenomenal amount of activities here with links across the whole curriculum. The instructions are clear, the accompanying resources supplied, and most of the tasks are or can easily be scaffolded, which should allow for easy differentiation. The only downside is that the plans are ordered alphabetically, rather than by subject or theme, which means they aren’t easily searchable.

The Teacher Resources section, a massive compilation of photographs, video clips, music, maps, bibliographies and more, also deserves some attention. Highlights include hundreds of primary source documents related to the Holocaust, and a collection of virtual reality movies. These virtual reality movies – essentially interactive panoramas – will take you and your class on a virtual tour around concentration camps, Nazi ghettos and Holocaust war memorials. Especially poignant are the images from Majdanek camp and killing centre, which lead you through the final journey of the Nazi’s many gassing victims – beginning with the undressing room and ending in the crematorium. For many students, the Holocaust is a difficult thing to comprehend – these panoramas are an effective way to make it real, and might also stimulate some interesting responses through creative writing, drama or music.

The Imperial War Museum’s learning centre, Their Past Your Future, was created to help history teachers and students of all ages explore the course, causes and consequences of conflict from the World War One right through to present day.

From the main page linked above, you can search for free resources available on this site by key word, Key Stage or events. If you just fancy a browse, click ‘find out more’. The resources are divided into six categories. Historical notes, personal stories and teaching activities are fairly self-explanatory, but the other three are just a little more unusual. Source Enquiries are self-contained enquiries based on the format of a GCSE source enquiry paper, and come complete with original sources from the museum’s collections, while Source Packs contain a range of original sources related to one historical period, event or theme. The Itineraries section is especially interesting, as it houses a selection of tried and tested itineraries for historical visits.

Something else unusual and hugely intriguing about this site is its range of online exhibitions. These aren’t listed with the other resources and so, unfortunately, are not searchable – they appear at the bottom of your screen and switch around every time you refresh. My personal favourite is ‘One in Five’, an interactive exhibition examining how World War Two affected people and places across the UK, and still shapes lives today. In here, you’ll find war diaries, commemorative films, regional images and more. A real joy to explore, even your most reluctant historians will have a great time working their way through the interactive diaries and scrapbooks.

The great thing about this site is that all the resources available are designed specifically with teaching in mind. There are so many, and they cover such a wide range of topics within the overall theme of war, that I can’t even begin to give you the highlights! I highly recommend taking the time for a good exploration – who knows what exciting resources you’ll find?
A striking site, Rwandan Stories traces the history of the Rwandan Genocide right from its origins, all the way through to the nation’s recent and rocky recovery. There’s even an extra section with current news and progress in Rwanda – great for background information on Rwanda’s culture, economy and politics – and a shop, where teachers can purchase downloadable lesson plans and resources.

Divided into five chronological sections – origin, genocide, aftermath, recovery, today – the site is attractive and easy to navigate. The articles are clearly organised and categorised, and the information included is extensive. There are some stunning photographs here, and a large number of fantastic video clips, the majority of which are around two to three minutes long, making them perfect for a classroom setting.

Highlights include ‘My friend the killer’, the firsthand account of a young woman who became friends with one of the interahamwe militia, and ‘A good man’, in which a young Rwandan man who lost over fifty family members during the genocide, recounts his grandfather’s murder.

The site is full of stories like these, and not only from journalists, relief workers and victims of the genocide either. The most interesting and unique aspect of this site is that it includes stories from those who participated in the genocide too – the killers. Their tales of brutal murder are chilling, but reading through, you realise that they are people too. It’s a sobering thought, and has such potential for deep exploration, especially with older students.

This really is a captivating site. It’s poignant, beautifully set out, and ideal for personal research. The inclusion of stories from the Hutu killers makes for an intriguing and absorbing read, and could provide a fantastic starting point for all sorts of philosophical enquiries into morality, prejudice and dehumanisation.

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