

Mapping Auschwitz-Birkenau

Many students understand and internalize information more efficiently when they are able to visualize the history they are studying. The Nazis used very precise methods for processing people through or into their death camps. This exercise utilizes primary sources and maps to orient students to the process of arrival and selection at Auschwitz-Birkenau, adding location, direction and movement to the written testimony.

Lesson Plan:

Run copies of each of the following:

- Map of Auschwitz II-Birkenau (<http://www.remember.org/camps/birkenau/>)
- Photographs from the Auschwitz Album – the documented arrival of a Hungarian transport in Auschwitz-Birkenau in May 1944 (available at www.ushmm.org) - could be projected
- Excerpt of survivor memoir detailing arrival at Birkenau (Note: Hungarian Jews provide the visual descriptions that accompany the photographic evidence. Consider Olga Lengyel and Elie Wiesel.)

Instructions for Classroom Exercise:

1. Analyze map against Auschwitz Album selections one photograph at a time, focusing on location and movement. What is the flow of this process? How do people move through the camp? This can be done individually, in small groups or as a class. Have students point out the landmarks.
 - Arrival and Selection
 - Notice where trains come in
 - Notice Krema II and III
 - Notice people selected for gassing moving to Krema II
 - To Left, To Right
 - Notice entrance gate to Birkenau
 - Right from Jewish perspective = work
 - Left from Jewish perspective = gas
 - To Gassing
 - Birchwood outside of Krema V
 - Krema V in background
 - Locate on map – how do they get there?
 - Kanada
 - Locate on map - how do they get there?
2. Analyze map against memoir of arrival at Auschwitz paying particular attention to the movement of the people through the camp. Where are they going and how are they getting there?

Special Notes for Teachers:

1. This exercise is designed to meet state standards for using primary source documents, understanding and reading maps, and an ability to utilize and evaluate a variety of sources.
2. A variation of this exercise could include an analysis of the movement of people through Operation Reinhard Camps (Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka) with maps available at www.deathcamps.org. Used in conjunction with this Birkenau exercise a comparison of the Reinhard camps would reinforce the difference in the operating systems in the death camps.
3. To bring this exercise into the present day visit <http://www.remember.org/auschwitz/> to take a virtual tour of what Birkenau looks like today.