

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.

Materials Needed:

Provide links to or make copies of the following resources:

1. Map of Auschwitz II-Birkenau <http://www.remember.org/camps/birkenau/>
This is an interactive map. When students click on specific locations noted on the map, they will be able to see photos of those places.
2. Auschwitz Album Photographs for Students
<https://mchekc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/AuschwitzAlbumStudents.pdf>
The Auschwitz Album is a photo collection documenting the arrival of a Hungarian transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau in May 1944.
The source of the photos chosen for students in the pdf above is...
https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/index.asp
3. Auschwitz Album Photographs – Notes for Teachers
<https://mchekc.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=775&action=edit>
PDF <https://mchekc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/AuschwitzAlbumTeachers.pdf>
4. Extension: Incorporate an excerpt from a Hungarian Holocaust survivor's memoir detailing arrival at Birkenau. Consider Elie Wiesel's *Night* or Olga Lengyel's *Five Chimneys*. (Excerpt not provided.)

Instructions for Classroom Exercise:

Analyze the Auschwitz-Birkenau map against the Auschwitz Album selections - one photograph at a time, focusing on location and movement.

Consider: What is the flow of this process? How many times, and in what ways, are people sorted? What does it mean to go right or left? How do people move through the camp? What are their ultimate destinations within the camp?

This step can be done individually, in small groups, or as a class. Scaffold as needed. Consider having students mark the landmarks on a printed copy of the map.

- 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 people and materials get there?
- The Sauna: Two places noted on the map.
 - Locate these on the map and look at the photos. Who went here? Why?

Extension: Analyze the map against the memoir excerpt, paying particular attention to the movement of people through the camp – particularly the movement of the main character. Where are they going? Why? How are they moving?

Notes for Teachers:

1. If background information is needed before starting this activity, see the short (2:14 minute) USHMM video titled “Auschwitz” linked below.
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/gallery/auschwitz-maps>
2. This exercise is designed to meet state standards for using primary source documents, understanding and reading maps, and synthesizing information from a variety of sources.
3. If you wish to take a virtual tour of what Auschwitz-Birkenau looks like today, see
<https://panorama.auschwitz.org/> and <https://remember.org/auschwitz>