

Course:

Unit: The Shoah

Day:

Lesson Topic: The women's experiences in the camps - brothels

Question: How did serving in the brothels differ from other labor assignments?

Estimated Time: 45 - 60 minutes in class

Grade Level: 11 and 12

Objectives:

1. Students will explore and become familiar with various labor assignments in the camp system, especially the puffkommando (brothels).
2. Students will learn to extract meaning, emotion, and historical significance from literature by deciphering relevant and accurate information and comparing it to historical knowledge.

Prior Knowledge:

This lesson follows weeks of exploring the events that led to the Shoah and the establishment of the murder camps such as Auschwitz. Most of the readings and histories have most likely been taught through a male perspective. Potentially, a day or two prior to this was spent exploring other relevant issues regarding the detention and murder of female prisoners.

Activity:

For homework the previous night, have the students read "Scheiss Egal" in Liana Millu's Smoke Over Birkenau. Students should be expected to identify major characters, the main idea, terms and depictions of the how women were treated.

In class:

1. When students enter the class, they should break up into groups and briefly make sure that they are all on the same page regarding the reading. This is the time for the group to clarify any basic questions a member might have. When the students are ready, they should discuss the following questions. (Be sure to assign roles to various group members)
 - o Besides serving in the brothel, what other jobs are different women expected to complete? Be sure to describe the rigor of the activity and identify whether it is a stereotypical "woman's job." (Why does this matter?)
 - o How did the two sisters respond differently to the camp life, expectations, and psychological toll? How do they justify their decisions?
 - o How did Gustine's response to the items Lotti sent differ from that of the other women in the infirmary? Why do you suppose the responses differ?
 - o What supposedly made then men's treatment in Auschwitz better than the women's? You may also want to refer to Primo Levi's foreword.
 - o Describe the conditions inside the brothel. What was your initial reaction to the conditions? Is there any irony in the appearance of the brothel and the service that is expected?
 - o Why is it significant that Millu ends the story with the entrance of the soldier?
2. When the students have completed this task they should create a list of questions that were left unanswered in the book?
3. Show the students the segment entitled "The Brothel" for PBS's Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State. It begins on disc two at 41:19 minutes and runs for approximately 6:16 minutes. Students should watch the film and then answer the following questions
 - o What was Himmler's purpose in establishing a brothel at Auschwitz?
 - o According to Jozef Paczynski, what was the initial response of those inmates living in Block 24 when they were told to move out because the building would be used as a brothel? Why do you suppose they responded in this manner?
 - o Who was able to receive a voucher? Who was not able to?

- What was Ryszard Dacko's views on the type of work expected of the women? Treatment of the women?
 - What is known about the brothels? Why might we lack knowledge about the history of the brothels?
 - Why might it be least the least acknowledged component of the camp system?
4. When the students have completed this task, they should create a list of questions that were generated by the film and left unanswered.
 5. At this point, a brief lecture filling in some of the details should be made. Any questions the students have can be answered here.

Assessment Method(s):

The student responses to the questions may be collected and an essay may be assigned. An essay comparing the service expected in the brothels versus that expected in other labor units may be given. Students could be expected to not only describe the expectations, psychological impact, advantages and disadvantages of the various labor assignments, but also the complex rationale by which prisoners (male and female) viewed particular jobs. Another essay may ask students to compare the male prisoner's experience to that of the female.