

## A VISIT TO THE MEMORIAL REQUIRES PREPARATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Specific preparation and follow-up help sustain the educational experience of an on-site visit. This handout includes basic recommendations and a few methodological suggestions.

### PREPARATION

Our educational work supports young people in particular in **emotionally** and **cognitively** processing a visit to a former concentration camp. Our aim is to inspire a lasting engagement with history, in order to foster the development of **critical historical awareness**.

This occurs on an individual and **voluntary** basis. For this reason, **we do not consider assignments** oriented towards testing historical knowledge **an appropriate approach**. This distracts from looking at larger, overarching contexts, which we consider important to communicate.

#### Content for Preparation

In terms of content, a good approach to prepare for the visit is focussing on the term „**Volksgemeinschaft**“ and its meaning in Germany under National Socialism.

On our **website** you will find preparatory materials with a topical text and questions.

If the preparation should to focus on camp history, we recommend our digital offers:

- Online exhibition „**Children and Teenagers in the Concentration Camps**“  
[<https://www.jugend-im-kz.de/en>]
- educational **material**  
[(Download: PDF, 320 KB)]

This educational material includes a suggestion on how to design one or several school lesson(s) of 45 minutes each.

#### Expectations: Mental Images

In addition to preparing the subject matter, it is also important to discuss students' **expectations** in terms of visiting the memorial. Many people have images of concentration camps in their minds that have been shaped by iconic figures or works in the culture of remembrance. This can lead to unrealistic expectations or misgivings.

For this part of the preparation, students can discuss the following **questions**.

- 1) Do you think memorials are important? Why / Why not?
- 2) What expectations do you have about visiting the memorial? Do you have questions, doubts, or misgivings? What are they?

#### Films and Internet Research: Powerful Images

**Films and photos researched on the Internet** often leave one with powerful images. These can generate unrealistic expectations. Given the changed appearance of the site, it is easy to have a sense of **disappointment**. If you wish to show a fictional or documentary film or if you plan to do **online** research, we suggest the following:

Ask the students to formulate **questions** or **brief statements** about the films or sources found online. What bothered or surprised them?

These questions, statements, and visual impressions can either be addressed beforehand during class, or they can be brought along to the site and discussed as part of the visit to the memorial.

## FOLLOW-UP

A visit to the memorial confronts students with information about historical events that can be emotionally challenging. Please plan at least one class period for **follow-up work**. This is necessary, in order to reflect on these experiences and assess their relevance in the present.

### Suggestions for Follow-up

If there is not much time for follow-up, a proven approach is to allow students to express their individual **thoughts** and potentially their disappointment.

A possible question for discussion is:

- Did the visit to the memorial meet your **expectations**? To what extent yes? To what extent no?

The following questions are helpful in thinking about historical **structures** and prevailing social **conditions**. The aim is to assess the importance and **relevance** of this knowledge for **one's own presence**.

At this point we recommend working in small groups and in a process involving multiple phases, to allow plenty of time for discussion.

- Which (societal, political, social, economic,) conditions do you think made the crimes committed during the Nazi era possible?
- How do you think society must be composed today, to prevent such crimes from being repeated – and how can the individual make a contribution?

In addition, on our website you can find guidelines for a three-part discussion in small groups, in which participants provide individual answers about the meaning of the saying **"Never again!"**.

### Other Options

The Buchenwald Memorial has a varied history spanning multiple decades. How, whom, and where we remember and commemorate, what themes are especially relevant – these questions are still the subject of ongoing **negotiation** within our society.

The following questions can be discussed during follow-up as a means of raising awareness for this process of negotiation and the positions represented in such discussions.

- 1) In your opinion, what significance do concentration camp memorials and an engagement with the history of National Socialism have today?
- 2) In your opinion, what significance do concentration camp memorials and an engagement with the history of National Socialism have for former concentration camp inmates and their families?