

## Internment of ‘enemy aliens’

### Teachers’ Notes

After the outbreak of war in September 1939, all Germans and Austrians in Britain became ‘enemy aliens’ and had to register with the police. Although most remained at liberty, in the summer of 1940, restrictions tightened and tens of thousands were interned. This lesson explores some of the effects that internment had on people’s lives. For more information see: <https://wp-research.aber.ac.uk/nsrefugeeswales/history/internment/>.

### Curriculum links

#### Key Stage 4

History, Literacy skills

## Lesson Plan

### LEARNING AIMS

- To understand the term *internment* and how it impacted people's lives
- To explore different perspectives on *internment*.

### EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

- Copies of student worksheet (one per student).
- Transcript of the audio clip.<sup>1</sup>

### STARTER

Have this definition of **internment** on display:

'Internment is the imprisonment of people, commonly in large groups, without charges or intent to file charges. The term is especially used for the confinement of enemy citizens in wartime or of terrorism suspects.'<sup>2</sup>

Ask the group:

What is your response to the practice of internment?

### DEVELOPMENT

[Listen to Dorothy Fleming's description of the day her father, Erich Oppenheimer, was arrested and interned](#)

Distribute and read the student handout.

Ask the group to consider the following questions:

- How might it have felt for people to escape and find refuge in Britain, to then be interned?
- What impact would leaving your job and your family have the second time round?

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<sup>1</sup> We added the video clip's transcript, which you may choose to share with your students if you think it would be helpful. The transcript is in English and Welsh whilst the clip is in English only.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia, *Internment* (2022) <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internment>> [accessed 16 March 2022]

## MAIN

Students are to complete the task of writing a letter to a newspaper from the point of view of a campaigner in 1940 who is opposed to the internment of Jewish refugees. These can then be shared with the whole class for discussion and feedback.

You can also explore with your students the fact that there were many people who did not oppose the internment of the 'enemy aliens' and some of the challenges of the situation (why did the government feel the need to intern Jewish refugees?). The government did, however, begin releasing people from internment and by October 1940, 5,000 had been released.

## PLENARY

Ask the group:

1. How has your view of internment changed?
2. What can we learn from this event?

## Transcript

### Dorothy Fleming on internment

He had found work in Hatton Garden. And you know how it was with the internment, if they found the people in, they took them. If not, they often didn't come again. That's why a lot of the refugees who had their work would spend their day in the park.

Now, my father was working in Hatton Garden and my mother said he came home one day at lunchtime and she said she went quite pale, and said, 'What are you doing here?' And he said, 'I've just come for some tools.' And that minute the bell rang and they came and said 'Mr Oppenheimer, I'm afraid you have to come with us'.

And he was taken to the Isle of Man.

And just now when my mother died, I discovered all his letters from the Isle of Man. I didn't know they existed. He must have written more or less every other day, in German.

And he doesn't complain but he must have suffered terribly because to have escaped from the Nazis and then to be locked up and away from my mother and she in the Blitz, it must have been absolutely dreadful. I know they made some sort of a life for themselves and they played music and they had lectures and all sorts of things. But it must have been dreadful for him.