Marginalized Histories: Persecution and Discrimination of Roma and Sinti | ***Activities for students***

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1. A mind map: stereotypes and reality

The exercise aims to show the differences between stereotypes and reality. It enables the students to master the principles of critical thinking and verification of information while analysing historical sources. Focus on getting the students to understand how stereotypes shape social perceptions of marginalised groups, and how they can be overcome.

Introduction | Start the class with a short discussion on stereotypes. Ask the students to list examples of stereotypes that may apply to different groups of people, and then introduce the topic of the Roma as a group whose stereotyping is particularly strong. Point out that stereotypes have their origins in the media, literature and oral messages, are often untrue or incomplete, and that their perpetuation affects the lives of real people.

Step 1: Work in groups on a mind map

Divide the students into groups and assign each group a large sheet of paper or allow them to create a digital mind map (e.g. using tools such as Canva, Lucid, etc.). Ask the groups to divide the sheet into two sections: **Stereotypes** and **Reality**.

- **Stereotypes**: In this part, the students are asked to collect stereotypes about the Roma. Encourage them to draw on a variety of sources such as media, stories, films or social messages. These can be both positive and negative perceptions, but particularly focus on negative stereotypes, which often lead to discrimination.

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- **Reality**: In this section, the students should look for real information about Roma life, especially in a historical context, such as inter-war Europe. They can use materials provided by the teacher, articles or documentaries. It is important that they confront stereotypes with facts, e.g. by comparing stereotypes of the 'nomadic lifestyle' with the actual living conditions of the Roma during the period in question.

Teacher tip: Pay attention to the diversity within the Roma community. Not all stereotypes apply to every group, and the Roma were not a homogeneous one. Emphasise that stereotypes simplify reality and are hurtful.

Step 2: Analysis of the mind maps and discussion

After completing the mind maps, each group presents their findings to the entire class. Encourage the students to discuss how the different groups approached the task, what was surprising or new to them. It is useful for the teacher to ask guiding questions such as:

- What stereotypes appear most often and why?
- How do the media and popular culture perpetuate these stereotypes?
- What facts are particularly different from stereotypical perceptions?

Discussion on overcoming stereotypes

Finally, lead a discussion in which the students consider how stereotypes related to the Roma and other minorities can be counteracted. Here are some questions to stimulate reflection:

- What steps can we take in our daily lives to combat discrimination?
- How can education and knowledge of history contribute to changing social perceptions?
- How can the media play a positive role in shaping public opinion?

Additional guidance:

- Ensure that the discussion is constructive and non-judgmental.
- You could extend the discussion to other groups in society and compare stereotypes that apply to different minorities.

2. Now and 100 years ago

This exercise aims to develop the ability to critically analyse source texts and compare how representations of the Roma have evolved over the last hundred years. This will enable the students to understand how perspectives and narratives about this minority have changed.

Introduction

Begin the class with a short discussion on the role of media and art in shaping public perceptions of minority groups. Ask what stereotypes or images of the Roma appear in contemporary media, including social media and culture. Introduce the historical context - how these perceptions were shaped in the interwar period.

Step 1: Work with the source text

Divide the students into groups and provide them with newspaper articles or text excerpts about the Roma from the interwar period. You can prepare a variety of materials: newspaper articles, extracts from literature or images in art that referred to this group. Some of the texts may portray the Roma in a positive light, others may contain prejudices.

If possible, the task could be to find contemporary articles on the Roma yourself. You could ask the students to bring material to class or allow them to work with internet access to find contemporary articles.

- **Comparison**: Have the students compare how Roma were portrayed 100 years ago with current media portrayals. It is worth noting the language, the tone of

the articles, the context in which the Roma are placed and the general way they are portrayed.

Teacher tip:
Remember that students may find it difficult to interpret older texts, so it is worth introducing a brief discussion of the historical context.

Step 2: Critical analysis

After reading and analysing the sources, each group should answer some key questions that will help them understand how the media have influenced and continue to influence perceptions of the Roma:

- What were the main differences in the portrayal of Roma then and today?
- Can you see any similarities in stereotypes or prejudices?
- How has the language used to describe the Roma changed?
- What aspects of Roma life were highlighted 100 years ago and what aspects are highlighted today?

Encourage the students to think about how different media and art can influence the way we view social groups - both in the past and today.

Teacher tip:
Note the development of media discourse on the Roma, including the influence of different ideologies (e.g. nationalism between the wars and today's human rights movements).

Step 3: Class discussion

After completing the analysis, ask the groups to present their conclusions. This can be done in the form of a presentation or a debate where each group presents its findings. It is worth noting the differences in representations of the Roma in different historical periods, as well as the changing role of the media in creating social perceptions.

Ask questions to help the students understand the deeper mechanisms behind the changes in media narratives:

- What historical factors may have influenced the changing portrayal of the Roma in the media?
- How have contemporary human rights movements changed the way minorities such as the Roma are written about?
- What actions can help further break down stereotypes and prejudices in the media and culture?

Additional guidance:

- Provide support for the students to analyse source texts - especially older ones that may contain difficult vocabulary.
- Ensure that the discussion is balanced and includes different perspectives.
- You could ask the students to write a short reflection on how the media they use on a daily basis portrays minority groups, including the Roma.

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3. Simulation: Esztergom City Council - Decision on the location of a Roma settlement

This activity corresponds with a case study from Hungary "Forced relocation of Roma settlements to animal burial sites"

The simulation aims to develop teamwork, critical thinking and decision-making skills in the context of social challenges. Playing different roles, the students will have to discuss and make a decision on the location of a Roma settlement, while taking into account the different perspectives and interests of the residents.

Introduction

At the beginning of the activity, discuss with the students the issue of how settlement location decisions can affect different social groups. Introduce the historical and contemporary context concerning the Roma community in Hungary, in particular the challenges of integration and social exclusion. Emphasise that the topic of building or relocating Roma settlements is often controversial and that decisions about such projects are socially, economically and politically complex matters.

Step 1: Preparation of roles and simulations

Divide the students into groups, each with specific roles in the simulation that involve specific interests and priorities:

- **Mayor**: He/she has to keep the peace in the city, look after the interests of all social groups and find a compromise.
- **Health officer**: Focuses on public health and the living conditions that prevail in the planned locations.
- **Resident opposing the Roma settlement**: Is concerned about the negative impact of the settlement on the local community and property value.

- **Neutral resident**: May have a balanced perspective, trying to understand the arguments of both sides.
- **Roma community representative**: Represents the interests of the Roma, trying to provide their perspective on integration, needs and challenges.
- **Economy officer**: Deals with the impact of the settlement on the local economy, such as employment or infrastructure.
- **Social activist**: Represents human rights, including equality and justice, drawing attention to the need to tackle discrimination.

Each student or group is given a brief description of their role and a set of priorities and arguments that they can use during the simulation.

Teacher tip:
Ensure that each role is clearly described and that the students have a good understanding of their objectives in the simulation. You can provide the students with a brief overview of the city of Esztergom to build a realistic context for the situation.

Step 2: Simulate a city council meeting

Start the simulation by acting out a Esztergom city council meeting. The students discuss where the Roma settlement should be relocated, taking into account various social, health, economic and political aspects. It is important that the students play their roles and try to understand and argue from their characters' perspective.

Examples of issues that can be raised during the simulation:

- What locations are being considered? What are their advantages and disadvantages?
- Are the proposed sites suitable in terms of infrastructure and public health?
- What concerns do residents raise? How can their needs be met and at the same time provide space for Roma?
- What are the interests of the Roma community? What are their needs and challenges as regards integration in the new location?

- What might be the long-term consequences of this decision for the city and its inhabitants?

Teacher tip:
Remember that there is no 'right' decision - the purpose of the simulation is to show the complexity of social problems and how difficult it is to find a solution that satisfies all parties. It is important that the students focus on arguing and listening to other perspectives.

Step 3: Discuss the results of the simulation

After the simulation, conduct a discussion in which the students reflect together on the decision-making process and its consequences. Here are some questions that may be helpful in making a summary:

- What factors had the greatest influence on the decisions made?
- What were the most difficult aspects of the discussion?
- Were any of the parties particularly difficult to understand or represent? Why?
- What might be the long-term consequences of the decision made?
- Was it possible to reach a compromise? If so, how?
- What actions can be taken to promote dialogue between different social groups?

Additional guidance:

- Ensure that the discussion is constructive - encourage the students to reflect on their decisions and the discussion process, rather than judging individual choices.
- It is useful for students to relate their experiences from the simulation to the real-life challenges faced by contemporary Roma communities, both in Hungary and in other parts of Europe.

- You can conclude the activity by asking the students what lessons can be drawn from this simulation for the future, e.g. in the context of creating more inclusive communities.

4. A letter from the past

This activity aims to develop students' empathy as well as understanding of the historical context and creativity. By playing the role of a young Roma living in the 1920s or 1930s, students have the opportunity to better understand the challenges faced by this community. The exercise depends on personal engagement and reflection, which can bring a deeper understanding of history and its impact on the daily lives of individuals.

Introduction

At the beginning of the lesson, discuss with the students the social and political situation of the Roma in the 1920s and 1930s. Introduce the historical context, including forced resettlement, restrictions on trade, and the stereotypes that Roma had to face at that time. You may also introduce examples of anti-Roma policies in different European countries and their effects on everyday life.

Teacher tip:
Ensure that the students have access to historical materials to support their letter writing. These could be extracts from articles, memoirs or historical reports which will give an insight into the realities of Roma life at the time.

Step 1: Introduction to the task

Explain to the students that their task will be to write a letter from the perspective of a young Roma living in the 1920s or 1930s. The letter will be addressed to a friend or family member, and in the body of the letter the students are to describe daily life, as

well as their concerns and dreams, making reference to the plight of the Roma at that time.

When writing the letter, they can refer to:

- **Everyday difficulties**, such as instability in working life, social exclusion, or difficulties in accessing education and health
- **Fears related to the future**, including fear of forced displacement, uncertainty about where to live, lack of understanding and acceptance from society
- **Hopes and dreams** - what might a young Roma in the 1920s and 1930s have wanted in the context of their life and social situation? It could be a dream of a better future, equality, peace or freedom.

Teacher tip:
Conduct a short discussion about the possible contents of the letter before the students begin to write. Ask them what hopes and fears Roma youth might have had at that time, what their daily lives were like and what events might have influenced their perception of reality.

Step 2: Writing the letter

The students begin to write their letters, trying to put themselves in the shoes of a young Roma. It is important that the letters are personal, emotional and based on historical facts that the students have already learned. Encourage them to be creative - they can use language that conveys the realities of that period and refer to actual historical events that took place in inter-war Europe.

Examples of questions students can ask themselves when writing a letter:

- What events affected my situation and my family?
- What dreams for and fears about the future do I have?
- What is my everyday life like? What do I do, what do I do for a living?

- What relationships do I have with people outside my community? How do they treat me?
- What hopes do I have for the future? Do I see the possibility of change?

Teacher tip:
Students may find it difficult to relate to the realities of 100 years ago. Encourage them to ask questions and to use their imagination based on the historical context.

Step 3: Presentation of letters

Once the students have finished writing, they can present their letters to the class. You can ask them to read out the parts of the letters that best convey their feelings and thoughts. During the presentation, ensure that there is an atmosphere of understanding and respect so that the students feel comfortable sharing their work.

During the presentation, the students can share their reflections on what they found most difficult about writing the letter and what they consider to be the most important aspect of Roma life at that time.

Teacher tip:
Emphasise the importance of empathy and understanding in approaching history. Encourage the students to reflect on the importance of looking at history through the experiences of individuals and not just political events.

Step 4: Discussion and reflection

After the presentation of the letters, organise a discussion in which the students have a chance to reflect on their thoughts. You could ask questions like:

- What were the most common dreams and fears that appeared in the letters?
- How is the situation of the Roma in the 1920s and 1930s different from today?
- Did the letters help the students to better understand what life was like for Roma at that time?
- What feelings did the students have when playing the role of a young Roma?

Teacher tip:

Keep the discussion open and reflective. Allow the students to express their emotions and thoughts, encouraging further reflection on the history of ethnic minorities in Europe.

5. Simulating a session of the International Court of Human Rights: Justice for the Sinti and Roma

This activity challenges students to understand complex human rights issues, historical injustices and the process of restoring justice. The simulation of a session of the International Court of Human Rights on the issue of reparations for the Sinti and Roma provides the students with an opportunity to develop skills in argumentation, teamwork and analysis of the perspectives of different parties to the conflict.

Introduction

Before starting the simulation, introduce the students to the injustices inflicted on the Sinti and Roma during the Second World War. Discuss the repression to which these communities were subjected, including persecution, forced displacement and the genocidal crimes committed against the Roma and Sinti during the Holocaust. It is important that the students understand the historical context and contemporary discussions on the recognition of injustices and reparations. Read the article: **The Genocide of the Sinti and Roma: Why Should We Remember It Today?**

Teacher tip:

Provide the students with access to materials on the history of the Sinti and Roma, including reports from reparations trials, interviews with descendants of survivors, and documents from the International Court of Human Rights. It is also worth introducing the students to the basic principles of international tribunals.

Step 1: Division of roles and introduction to the simulation

Divide the students into groups to represent the different parties in the simulation of the court session:

- **Human rights defenders** - their task is to present arguments for the award of reparations and recognition of the injustices done to the Sinti and Roma. They can use examples from other reparation processes and argue on the basis of human rights and international law.
- **Historians** - will be responsible for presenting the historical background of the persecution of the Sinti and Roma, providing evidence and documents of their suffering.
- **Descendants of the Sinti and Roma** - will take on the role of those who lost their loved ones during the Second World War. Their arguments should be based on personal stories, demanding recognition of suffering and justice.
- **Lawyers representing Germany** - their task is to present the position of the German state, which may include legal, financial and political aspects related to reparations.

Teacher tip:
Before starting the simulation, explain how the International Court of Human Rights works. Discuss the importance of historical evidence, principles of international law and human rights norms that the students will need to consider in their arguments.

Step 2: Simulation of the court session

The simulation begins with a session of the Court. Each group has the opportunity to present their arguments. All participants should use available historical and legal information and additional sources to support their position. It is important that each group is well prepared and able to defend its point of view.

Human rights defenders can focus on international treaties that emphasise the need to right historical wrongs, as well as moral and ethical arguments about justice for persecuted communities.

Historians should provide evidence of the persecution of the Sinti and Roma by citing historical facts, wartime documents and research on the impact of the events.

Descendants of the Sinti and Roma can focus on presenting individual family stories, allowing the students to become emotionally involved in the case and better understand how the trauma of the Holocaust affected the lives of future generations.

Lawyers representing Germany should consider the financial, political and legal arguments involved in the reparation process. They can also refer to what steps have already been taken by the German government as regards reparations.

Teacher tip:
During the simulation, it is useful to play the role of a judge, moderating the discussion and ensuring that each side has an equal opportunity to present its arguments. You can also encourage the students to ask each other questions and enter into dialogue.

Step 3: Deciding together

After the presentation of the arguments, each group has time to discuss the case within their role. Then the whole class, as a simulated tribunal, collectively decides whether reparations should be awarded, and what kind of reparations would be appropriate in this situation. It is important that the decision is justified on the basis of the arguments presented.

Teacher tip:
You can divide the decision-making process into stages, e.g. considering the historical arguments first, then the ethical arguments, and finally the legal and financial arguments. Allow the students to discuss what criteria were most important to them in making the decision.

Step 4: Reflection and discussion

After the simulation, organise a discussion in which the students have the opportunity to reflect on the process and outcomes of the simulation. You can ask the following questions:

- Which arguments were the most convincing?
- Are there other ways of redressing wrongs that might be more appropriate than financial compensation?
- What challenges does today's society face in recognising historical injustices against the Sinti and Roma?
- Can the decisions taken by the International Court of Human Rights have a real impact on today's approach to justice?

Teacher tip:
Reflecting on the simulation should make the students think critically about justice and human rights. You can encourage them to share their feelings about the difficulties they encountered in representing their roles and what reflections they took home from the whole experience.

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