Exercise 2: Defeat or liberation? Position line

Christine Riesenhuber

Introduction

This exercise aims to show the different perspectives on the end of the war. Whether the end of the war was more of a liberation or a defeat depends largely on the personal situation of the individual people and how they experienced the end of the war. Historical sources such as photos and eyewitness accounts enable pupils to adopt and reflect on these different perspectives. This multi-perspectivity also highlights the problem of dealing with the end of the war until today.

Preparation for the exercise

A line is drawn on the floor with tape or a non-permanent marker. Two sheets of paper lie/ hang at each end, one labelled 'Liberation', the second labelled 'Defeat'. Alternatively, such a line and the inscriptions can also be attached to a pin board or a free wall - depending on the spatial conditions or possibilities of the classroom.

The Attachement 1 (photos and quotes about the end of the war) is printed out, laminated if necessary and placed face down on a table.
This exercise could also be carried out online, but by positioning themselves in the room, the pupils experience it more closely and have to become much more active themselves.

This exercise could also be carried out online, but by positioning themselves in the room, the pupils experience it more closely and have to become much more active themselves.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Poland

Co-funded by
the European Union

Introduction: ‚Zero hour' - raising awareness of a controversial term

In West German historiography, the term ‚Stunde Null' (Zero hour) is often used to describe the end of the war. This term should be discussed in class:

Key questions:

- What does the term ‚Zero hour' mean?
- Can the end of the war really be described as ‚Zero hour'? What are the arguments in favour and against?
- What is your own opinion of the term ‚Zero hour'?
- Are there any parallels between the term ‚Zero hour' and the juxtaposition of 'liberation' and 'defeat'?

Step 1: Positioning the students

Each pupil draws one of the face-down cards (Attachment 1). They show it to their classmates or read the text aloud. They then have to decide where they position themselves on the line between the extremes of 'defeat' and 'liberation'.

The decisive question is:

How did/do the person in the photo or the author of the text experience the end of the war? Did they perceive the end of the war as a defeat or a liberation?

Step 2: Explaining your own decision

When all students have positioned themselves, the teacher goes round and interviews the student:

- Why did you position yourself at this point?
- Why do you think the author of the text/the people in the photo might have interpreted the end of the war the way you think?

Step 3: Class discussion

The other pupils evaluate the positioning. Do they agree with the positioning or can it be seen differently?

At the end: The teacher makes it clear that there is not one single interpretation of the end of the war, but that everyone experienced the end of the war differently.