



Thinking Historically about Missing Persons: A Guide for Teachers

1. Introduction & Acknowledgements

Introduction

How do societies attempt to address the legacies of a violent past? Whether the conflict took place in a former era, as in the case of Spain, or has formally ended but the effects linger on, as in the case of Guatemala, or has yet to be resolved, as in Cyprus, each society exhibits approaches that are varied and that evolve over time. Because the processes that this question points to are highly complex and say as much about the future as they do about the past, they deserve to be addressed in an inclusive and sensitive manner, in consideration of different perspectives and experiences. This requires that individuals are prepared to engage in a constructive, respectful and responsible dialogue. This set of educational materials seeks to contribute to such a process within Cyprus and in other societies experiencing the legacies of conflict. It focuses on the issue of missing persons, a dimension common to conflicts worldwide, and asks teachers and students to consider the question of how societies should address missing persons.

'Missing persons' are people whose families have no news of them, and those who are reported missing as a result of an armed conflict, on the basis of reliable information. The missing are a symbol of how history continues to be lived every day by societies emerging from experiences of conflict or authoritarian regimes and of the fact that this past remains present. Because the missing continue to live in society through the space created by their absence, they, and we with them, live in both the past and in the present. Because of this, and because of the pain caused to families and societies by disappearance, the issue of missing persons can also help students engage with questions about the ways in which the past continues to be reflected in contemporary societies and about how they define their relationship to the past.

These materials ask teachers and students to consider the question of how societies should remember missing persons and address the legacy left by the missing and the conflict which caused their disappearance. They do this through a number of activities. Unit 1 looks at the experiences of countries around the world, and how they have addressed the problem of missing persons. Unit 2 looks at the missing in Cyprus. Unit 3 looks at the different responses over time to the missing in Cyprus, and why they have emerged. Unit 4 explores the connections between history and memory. Finally, Unit 5 asks students to conduct an exercise to think through how missing persons in Cyprus should be remembered.

These activities form part of three components that are critical to developing a broad and sophisticated understanding how the issue of missing persons can be taught in an accessible and engaging format: 1) a theoretical overview of history and history education; 2) a comparative focus on missing persons at the global level, with in-depth explorations of experiences in the former Yugoslavia, Spain, Morocco and Guatemala along with Cyprus; 3) a sequence of lesson plans that aim to cultivate greater understanding of the phenomenon of missing persons in Cyprus and around the world and also to develop students' thinking about historical empathy and about representations of the past. Users of the materials also have the opportunity to go further and deeper in their learning experience, by drawing upon an extensive array of additional resources that are provided at the end of each case study.

The aim is to introduce a complex and highly sensitive topic, that of the missing persons, to the classroom in a way that not only provides a firm grounding in the issue in its human, social and political dimensions, but also enables students to develop their understanding of concepts and dispositions related to historical thinking. The first section, which offers a theoretical discussion of history and history education, serves as a key resource to prepare educators to handle this and other sensitive topics in the history classroom, and forms the basis for the lessons and activities that follow. This foundation, of learning to think historically, is fundamentally necessary to cultivating a disciplined and rigorous approach to teaching and learning about the past, an approach that aims to enable learners to grapple with different accounts, to evaluate and assess diverse sources, to construct interpretations through disciplined argument and debate, and in so doing, to apply the methods of multiperspectivity in ways that can promote an enriching process of questioning, exploration and learning. As a result, students will be prepared to handle complex historical issues with greater confidence and sensitivity, and will become better able to recognise and critically respond to the abuse and misuse of history.

This set of educational materials is the outcome of a collaboration between The Elders, the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR) and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), who came together as a result of the efforts of The Elders to bring attention to the important work of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, through their documentary film *Cyprus: Digging the Past in Search of the Future*. The educational materials that have emerged from this collaboration benefit, we hope, from the unique attributes of each organisation: the leadership and vision of The Elders, the insights of ICTJ into addressing the legacies of conflict, and the expertise of AHDR in history education and fostering multiperspectivity within intercultural dialogue and education. The way the materials have been produced is a further reflection of the merging of synergies, ideas and efforts, having been produced through a process of dialogue and collaboration by a dedicated inter-communal project team of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot educators, researchers and other practitioners who worked with the guidance of international history education specialists.

The pedagogical approach of the lesson plans and activities has been carefully crafted to create a learning journey where with each step, deeper knowledge about the context within which people go missing is attained through interactive activities that allow students to compare and contrast the different ways in which various societies have responded to the issue of missing persons. The lesson sequence introduces students to different sources, aims to enable them to use these sources to understand the motivations and goals of people in the past and aims to help students prepare their own research agenda in order to draw their own conclusions about how Cyprus can address the issue of missing persons and the questions associated with the legacy of social conflict that this issue brings forward.

The materials aim to be a first step forward in contributing to a wider process of grappling with difficult and complicated aspects of the past, and represent one of many different educational approaches. Although the emotional, personal or moral issues raised by the experiences surrounding missing persons can also be taken up in extremely powerful ways within teaching strategies, these educational materials have chosen a distinctly historical approach. They aim to provide a foundation in historical thinking on the basis of which students can enhance their ability to think critically about the past, which is in many ways a prerequisite to being able to address this issue in constructive ways as an active, well-informed and engaged member of society. Developing historical thinking is clearly beyond the scope of one educational publication, however, by moving through this sequence of lessons, students will be able to reflect more critically on how societies have chosen to represent the past and develop their own ideas about alternative ways in which the past might be approached, preparing them to take on larger and more complex questions both in their learning and eventually in their own actions and decisions as citizens.

While directed mainly at educators working at secondary school level for use as supplementary materials in classrooms with students aged 12 to 15 years old, the lessons and activities have also been designed to be used in contexts outside of the classroom. Therefore, individuals and civil society organisations, such as youth groups and those working with relatives of the missing, can also easily adapt the lessons in independently organised workshops or seminars. Moreover, the pack is designed to be used in settings around the world where there is an interest in understanding how to teach and learn about sensitive historical topics, such as the missing persons, through a disciplinary approach.

We have made every effort to approach the issue with both sensitivity and respect to the profound experiences and perspectives on missing persons that exist, and to take into account the differing levels of knowledge and preparedness that people may bring to the issue. This is also an effort to tap into the reservoir of goodwill residing within societies who wish to move to a place of greater trust and understanding. This process can only be furthered through a combination of mutually supportive efforts and diverse strategies that together lead to a productive and meaningful dialogue on how to come to terms with the legacies of a violent past.

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