

Teacher discussion worksheet to be used with
Student worksheet: Familiar words
Topic 3: Q2: Familiar Words

- This exercise demonstrates how simple, everyday words have very different meanings for people, depending on their personal experiences; using everyday language to describe extraordinary events can be very difficult. Think about the situations described in which the survivors use familiar words such as 'pyjamas' in their testimonies and think about the word's meaning during the time of the Holocaust. See how 'pyjamas' takes on a very different meaning in the context of the Holocaust.
- This exercise also examines semantic traits of familiar words. When they are used in testimonies such as these, they highlight the difficulties survivors may have in expressing the enormity of what happened and the problems which may evolve in trying to understand events beyond our experiences.
- Consider whether we use the language of the Holocaust in a way that makes it easier to confront for ourselves. For example by using the word, 'survivor' rather than 'victim' may make the subject of the Holocaust seem a safer and less traumatic experience to come to terms with.
- We should think about what this exercise tells us about the power of language to mean different things to different people: the camp inmates and guards each had their own words to describe the camp system and camp life. Survivors have talked about the camps being a different moral universe and the language used in the camps perhaps supports this fact. Conduct some research to see if you can find some examples of these.

Information taken from Reflections Pack – Imperial War Museum