

CARL VON OSSIETZKY

What's this lesson about?

Through the example of Carl Von Ossietzky, students will learn how freedom of speech is used in the fight against war.

Learning Goals:

- Students will know who Carl Von Ossietzky was and why his story won him a Nobel Peace Prize.
- Students will understand what freedom of speech is and why it is important.
- Students will understand the complexity of the right to free speech and expression.

Materials

- Lesson Slides
- Student Worksheet

Slides

Slide 1: Title Slide

Slide 2: Warm-Up Questions

Slide 3: Life of Ossietzky - Picture of Ossietzky

Slide 4: Timeline of life

Slide 5: Take a Stand Scenario

Slide 6: Question #1

Slide 7: Question #2

Slide 8: Create your own scenario

Slide 9: Wrap Up

Key Facts:

- The Allies were considered the winners of WW1, a constellation of countries in opposition to the central powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey). After 4 years of war and combat the Treaty of Versailles is the peace treaty that ended the war. After the war, Germany was blamed and had to sign the treaty.
- The National Socialist Party, or the Nazis as we often refer to them, was a German fascist political party, which rose to power in Germany after WW1. When they had the power they occupied Poland, which started WW2.
- In the game, we are in Europe between WW1 and WW2. Germany lost World War I. They are sentenced to take the blame for the war, disarm their military and pay huge war damages. Germany ends up in a deep economic crisis. At the same time, the country wants revenge and that is when Ossietzky reveals that Germany is building up their military - in direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles.
- Ossietzky was a journalist and editor in Germany in the early 1900s

Background story:

Carl von Ossietzky was born in Hamburg, Germany. He grew up there with his mother and stepfather. Not so good at school, he failed exams, and did not start University. But he was interested in what was going on within society, was good at writing and, eventually, got a job as a journalist. In his early career he wrote about everything from feminism to the development of the motor car.

In 1914, Ossietzky was 25 years old, and World War I began. Ossietzky was completely against war, as he was a pacifist. He certainly did not want to use weapons and take part in the war but was forced to in 1916 and dug trenches.

After the war, a large meeting was held in Versailles, France. Those who won the war decided that Germany was to blame for World War I and that Germany, as punishment, was not allowed to have many weapons and soldiers.

In 1927, Ossietzky began working for a magazine called Die Weltbühne, which covered what was happening in German and European society. In early articles for the magazine, Ossietzky wrote about the death penalty and oppressed groups in society. In 1929, the magazine printed a very special story by Ossietzky. The story revealed how Germany built up its air force, weapons depots and was increasing the number of soldiers - all in violation of the agreements they had signed after the First World War (Treaty of Versailles).

For this, Ossietzky was convicted of treason and imprisoned for seven months. When he was released, he continued to write articles that criticized German leadership.

In 1933, Hitler gained more power. During this time, Ossietzky was arrested at his home by German secret police and was put in a concentration camp because of his anti-Nazi views. He was mistreated by guards and deprived of food.

Ossietzky's friends and supporters tried to get him released from the concentration camps and promote his work warning about the potential for war. In 1936 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but the German government refused to release him to collect the award. He died shortly after in 1938 of tuberculosis (a disease of the lungs) still under guard by the secret police.

His brave acts as a journalist continue to inspire others to stand up for freedom of speech and to challenge governments and authorities.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Journalist:** Someone who works to gather the information that is passed on in newspapers, online newspapers, TV, or radio. The cases often deal with news or current events.
- **Fascist:** a follower of a political philosophy characterized by authoritarian views and a strong central government — and no tolerance for opposing opinions. Under fascist rule, the emphasis is on the group — the nation — with few individual rights.
- **Treaty:** a formal agreement between two or more states in reference to peace, alliance, commerce, or other international relations. the formal document embodying such an international agreement.
- **Freedom of Speech:** the right to express any opinions without censorship or restraint.

LESSON

Time: 35-40 minutes

Steps

- **Warm-Up (5 min):**
 - Tap into students' prior knowledge by warming up the class with a few of the following questions. Record student answers and thoughts on the board or on chart paper:
 - What is a journalist and what does a journalist do?
 - Why is a journalist's job important?
 - What is the right to freedom of speech and expression?
 - Why is the right to freedom of speech and expression important?
 - Who is Carl Von Ossietzky? Raise your hand if you have heard of him?
- **Introduction (10 min):**
 - Use the slides to introduce Carl Von Ossietzky to the students.
 - Create a "Life of Ossietzky" timeline:
 - After students are introduced to Ossietzky, ask them to recall the key moments of his life. As students share key moments, start to plot them on the timeline. Allow students the opportunity to review the timeline. Key moments include:
 - 1889: Ossietzky is born in Hamburg, Germany.
 - 1916: Ossietzky takes part in WW1 building trenches
 - The 1920s: Ossietzky works as a journalist and newspaper editor.
 - 1927: Ossietzky was the editor of "Die Weltbühne" when they published revelations that Germany had broken the agreements they signed after World War I and that Germany was equipping the military for a new war.
 - Ossietzky is arrested for treason and jailed for 7 months
 - 1933: Hitler comes into power and Ossietzky is arrested and put in a concentration camp
 - 1936: Ossietzky is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize
 - 1938: Ossietzky dies in a hospital in Berlin
- **Take a Stand (10 min):**
 - Set the Stage:
 - Lead a short discussion on the importance of Ossietzky, his work and the right to free speech and expression. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:
 - What is freedom of speech and expression and why is it important?
 - Should there be limits to what one can say?
 - How did Ossietzky use freedom of speech and expression to promote peace?
 - What do you think of how the German authorities reacted when Ossietzky printed the case? Was it right of him to speak out? This was something his own country wanted to keep secret.

- Do you know places in the world where you can be punished for saying what you mean or think today?
 - What opportunities do we have to express ourselves freely today?
 - What responsibilities do you think we have to protect freedom of speech and expression?
 - What are ways we can protect these rights?
- Take a Stand:
 - Ask students to get up from their desks. Explain to them that they are journalists and are faced with a dilemma. They find out the country they have lived in their whole life is gearing up, against international agreements, to attack a country with which there are competing interests.
 - Tell students they should move to one side of the room if their answer to the following question is YES and the other side of the room if the answer to the following question is NO.
 - Ask students: As journalists will you write and publish about the impending attack? Send students to the side of the room that stands for their decision. Give them 2 min to turn and talk to someone next to them about their choice. Bring students back to their desks.
 - Ask students: As journalists, is it acceptable to publish the country's military secrets? Send students to the side of the room that stands for their decision. Give them 2 min to turn and talk to someone next to them about their choice. Bring students back to their desks.
 - Debrief the experience. Did anything come up in the discussions that surprised them or made them think differently?
- **Build Your Own Scenario (10 min):**
 - Tell students that they will now spend a little time thinking about scenarios where freedom of expression and speech is important in their lives. Ask them to work with a partner to write one scenario that can be used in the "Take a Stand" activity. If students need help, use the following example:
 - You have noticed that your friend has started to be bullied by a group of older students in front of the school. They have also made some TikTok videos about your friend. Your friend has asked you not to tell anyone because he is embarrassed and thinks it will just get worse if they get in trouble. There is also the chance they find out who told them and start bothering you. What do you do? Do you tell an adult or respect your friend's wishes and leave it alone?
 - After the pairs have written their own scenarios, play "Take a Stand" with the student-created scenarios.
- **Reflection/Wrap Up (5 min):**
 - Have students reflect on the lesson with a short discussion. Ask them if their opinion on Ossietzky's actions changed at all after the lesson? Did anything surprise them? What lessons can be learned from Ossietzky that changes our everyday lives?
 - What was Carl Von Ossietzky's cause?

- Why was Carl Von Ossietzky imprisoned?
- Why do you think freedom of expression is important?
- What do you think is the importance of having journalists?
- What are the consequences of not having freedom of speech?
- Do you think it is easy to speak freely everywhere in the world?