

FOLLOW-UP LESSON AFTER VISITING THE DACHAU MEMORIAL SITE

RECOMMENDED LESSON STRUCTURE

TIME REQUIRED

45 minutes

90 minutes when using the optional source and exercise sheet

LEARNING GOALS

Further study and discussion of Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's life after his liberation from the Dachau concentration camp

DESCRIPTION

The follow-up module is designed for 45 minutes and takes a biographical approach. If the optional source and exercise sheet is included, it is recommended to plan for 90 minutes.

The students are introduced to the theme of the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp through a diary entry by Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, an aspect they have already encountered during their visit to the Memorial Site.

In the follow-up they study Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's life after 1945. They work with additional sources like excerpts from letters and poems by Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz.

In small groups they discuss how Kupfer-Koberwitz attempted to find a way back into life after his imprisonment in the concentration camp, how he dealt with his traumas and how these traumas influenced his everyday life.

POSSIBLE MATERIAL FOR PREPARING THE LESSON

- Information on the history of the Dachau concentration camp after 1945:
<https://www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de/en/historical-site/dachau-concentration-camp-memorial-site-1945-today/>
- Biographical information on Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz for teachers:
<https://www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de/en/history-online/the-graphic-novel-a-lifelong-survival/>

NECESSARY MATERIAL FOR THE LESSON

- Source sheet: Diary Entry by Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, April 29, 1945
- Source and exercise sheet: Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's life after 1945
- Optional source and exercise sheet: Edgar Kupfer Koberwitz's life after 1945 – "Chain of the Days"

TIME STRUCTURE (45 MINUTES)

TIME	CONTENTS	LEARNING GOALS	TEACHING TECHNIQUE	NECESSARY MATERIAL / MEDIA
10 min	<p>Introduction to the theme of the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp</p> <p>Refer back to the visit to the Memorial Site: What can you recall about the liberation of the concentration camp?</p> <p>Present the source sheet: Diary Entry by Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, April 29, 1945: How did Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz experience liberation? What happened to the prisoners after liberation?</p>	<p>Activate prior knowledge</p> <p>Create a connection to the visit to the Dachau Memorial Site</p> <p>Introduction to the topic of "life after 1945"</p>	Conversation in class, teacher talk	<p>For preparation: biographical material</p> <p>For giving the lesson: Copies of the source sheet: Diary Entry by Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, April 29, 1945</p> <p>Beamer or docucam</p>
20 min	<p>Work on the source and exercise sheet: Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's life after 1945</p> <p>If enough time is still available, use the optional source and exercise sheet: Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's life after 1945 – "Chain of the Days"</p>	<p>Become familiar with different important themes with respect to Kupfer-Koberwitz's life after his liberation from the concentration camp</p> <p>Create an emotional connection to the topic</p>	Work in small groups	<p>Copies of the source and exercise sheet: Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's life after 1945</p> <p>Optional source and exercise sheet: Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's life after 1945 – "Chain of the Days"</p>
10 min	Bring together the different results from the work done, check them with one another and discuss	Consolidate in the group what has been worked on and learnt	Student presentations, class conversation	<p>Source and exercise sheet</p> <p>Beamer or docucam</p>
5 min	Closing reflection	<p>Sensitizing students to the fractured biographies of victims</p> <p>Sensitizing students for the era after 1945 and how the Nazi past was approached and dealt with, and how this past continues to have an effect today</p>	Teacher talk	

SOURCE SHEET

**DIARY ENTRY BY EDGAR KUPFER-KOBERWITZ,
APRIL 29, 1945**

- ¹ [...] shots, shots and salvos, – machinegun fire. – Bursts of fire rattle on uninterrupted. – There must be fighting in the camp area. – The only doubt I have is what it is. – Is there a split in the SS and they're shooting at one another? – Have Allied troops arrived and there's fighting? – Or perhaps the guards are shooting from the pillboxes at prisoners who are outside the blocks? – [...] Suddenly outside yelling, ⁵ running around, rushing: "The Americans have arrived, the Americans are in the camp, yes, yes, they're there on the roll call area!"

[...] Everyone runs to the roll call area. – From far away to right here you can hear the yelling and cheering. – They're shouts of joy.

- [...] We can hardly believe it, but we can hear the jubilation outside. – Comrades come, they come ¹⁰ back, breathless they tell us: "The Americans are on the roll call area! [...] The camp has been captured, we're free, free!" Even the seriously ill leave their beds, stagger to the windows. –

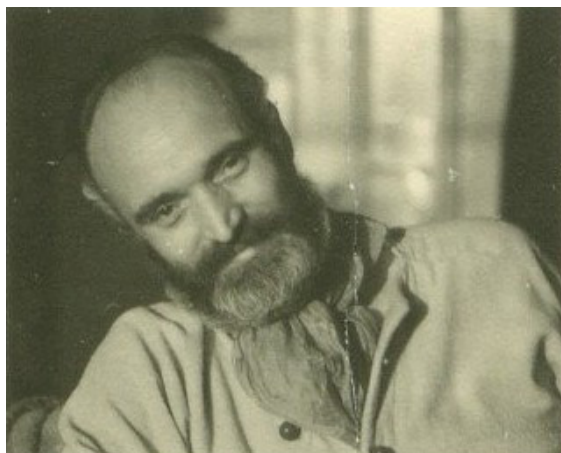
Comrades come to my bed, Frenchmen, Russians, Jews, Italians. –

We kiss each other like brothers, we congratulate one another. – Some have tears in their eyes. –

We shake hands: "Free, free!"

- ¹⁵ Then another uproar: "A soldier is in the quarters¹, an American, – he'll be here in a moment!" – And right after, there he is, – a giant in a steel helmet, smiling, very calm, and chewing gum. – "Hallo boys!" – he says. – They mob him, – each one of them shakes his hand, – anyone who can speak a few words of English says them to him.

- [...] The day is over, this April 29, – I will celebrate it as my second birthday for the rest of my life, ²⁰ as the day that life was gifted to me again.



Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz after the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp, 1945

Archive of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, DaA F6427_0030

Excerpt from Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Dachauer Tagebücher. Die Aufzeichnungen des Häftlings 24814* (Dachau Diaries. The Notes of Prisoner 24814), Munich 1997, pp. 444-449.

¹ The "quarters" refers to the sickbay for the prisoners in the concentration camp.

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SOURCE AND EXERCISE SHEET

EDGAR KUPFER-KOBERWITZ'S LIFE AFTER 1945



EXERCISES

- 1) Read through the source and the texts to the photos.
- 2) Mark the places where Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz lived on the accompanying map.
- 3) Summarize what Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz reported about his physical and psychological state, and what consequences they had for his life.
- 4) Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz was more than just a survivor of the Dachau concentration camp. Referring to the texts and photographs, discuss your impressions about what kind of person he was.

SOURCE:

In summer 1945 Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz left Dachau to continue typing out his notes in *Schloss Haus*, owned by the Thurn and Taxis family, near Regensburg.

He emigrated to Switzerland probably in the fall of 1947. In a letter to his friend, Konrad H., from 1960, Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz described the next stage of his journey through life.

- 1 My esteemed, dear Mr. H.,
[...]
First of all, please accept my thanks for your help with the cheque. [...] Your gift will enable me to pay the rent and then there will still be something left, and that will help me and I can use to good effect.
- 5 [...]
How did I end up in America? Yes, it was strange, it came to me and so I followed. [...] At Christmas 1945 an American captain had orders to take my Dachau manuscript to Washington [...].
He visited me a couple of times before leaving. Later he wrote to me from America. [...]
While I was living in Switzerland he told me that he was now a professor at the university in Chicago
- 10 and if I wished, he could provide the personal guarantee necessary for me to come over because he knew how much I disliked living in Germany. I agreed, because I always think that things which come to us are saying something.
All the documents were ready, but six months, a year, and then even more time passed, and I had more or less forgotten. I went instead to Ischia and wanted to settle in to work there again and stay for
- 15 the winter season. I had a 1,000 francs. On the day they arrived I fell very ill, an infection. I had to go to the international hospital in Naples and then to a specialist in Rome. By the time I got back to Ischia all my money was used up. I had to now decide if I should somehow borrow money in Ischia [...].
I gave myself three days to think it over. On the third day a letter arrived [...]. It was an official letter from the American consulate in Munich, my application was approved (after almost two years),
- 20 all I had to do was undergo a physical examination. For me, this was the answer to my question, a finger pointed towards America, pointed in that direction precisely on the final day I had set aside for my decision.
[...]

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I arrived on a Saturday evening. Early on Monday I was told that the house was too small [i.e. the
25 house of a friend where Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz was supposed to stay], I had to find an apartment and
foremost a job. I went to the labor exchange, became a shoe salesman, but knew nothing about selling
shoes. On Tuesday a friend picked me up and then dropped me off at a YMCA hotel. I had 5 dollars.
He drove off, I could give him a call if something's wrong. Yes, there was something wrong, there were
only rooms for 8 dollars a day [...]. I deposited my suitcase and went to visit a friend, a whisky
30 manufacturer, who I knew from Switzerland. He invited me to stay the night in his home (35 rooms).
The next day he drove me back to Chicago and asked what I intended to do now. I said to him,
anything will do, I just need to find a job. (I'd been fired after just half a day at the shoe department
because I knew nothing about the measurements or what things were called.) He named a hotel,
I went there and was taken on as a houseman.

35 [...]

And meanwhile I've been here six years. Now you know how it came about. Now and then I had some
bad luck as well and couldn't save a penny, quite the opposite, for about four years I sent 50 dollars a
month to poor old people in Europe who couldn't get by on their own.

[...]

40 And then I worked as Santa Claus and had to lift up onto my lap around 300 children a day.
Let's say a child weighs just on 30 pounds [...] then you'll be astonished how many tons that is.
But it made me ill, I had a heart attack. I borrowed a 100 dollars and in my very old car (long sold)
drove to Los Angeles, and to a better climate. [...] Still wearing a long beard (Santa) I'd hoped to slip
into a film, to work as an extra or something like that for a while. But that proved impossible. And so,
45 I became a doorman.

[...]

Yes, I've now gotten to know people here. I even know someone who is very wealthy, but it's no help to
me, because it's precisely wealthy people who one always needs to comfort and who always fear that
they're going to starve to death.

50 [...]

No, I've got no personal means, but when a fee or something like that is paid out, it's very little, but
every time it plugs one of hundreds of holes. I've also received compensation, as long as I was still in
Germany, 5 DM per day for each day in a concentration camp.

[...]

55 My general health has improved, except for the nerves in my back which make their presence felt
in a painful clenching. Horrible. And there are quite horrific bouts of depression as well, but I
don't really know if they rise up out of my unconscious or they have their source in a physical cause.
I'm quite simply unable to answer letters, for example, or sometimes I can't even tidy up.
Thumping, overwhelming depression! The only thing I want to do is lie down and read. For the most
60 part, sleeping is also impossible, or only if I take some pills. But I try to get by with as few pills as
possible. I'm writing this letter, admittedly, with the help of [...] pep pills, otherwise your letter would
never get answered or only after a long time had passed. [...] Earlier in life, I could be glad about
everything, today it's as if the joy is covered in ashes [...]. Is all this the symptom of a sick soul or a
sick body?

65 [...]

I haven't been able to write since 1945 and this is probably what I suffer from the most, by which
I mean, this is the symptom of my great suffering, as if a bird would no longer sing. If I were a
millionaire or a beggar, I would always write, because it's something that I have to do. But as it is
now, everything in me has fallen silent and in a way it is to be the living dead. Perhaps though I've
70 only been buried alive and one day my tomb will be opened. [...]

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Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz left the USA in 1960/61. After a year on Ischia, he moved to Sardinia, where he lived until 1986. In 1987 he returned to Germany and lived in a nursing home near Stuttgart, where he died on July 7, 1991, at the age of 85.

**PHOTOGRAPH 1****Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz shortly before his trip to the USA, 1953**

Archive of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site

Traveling was part of Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's life once he turned 18. Besides his native tongue – he spoke standard German despite his Swabian origins – he had a command of English, French, and Italian.

He lived for more than seven years in the USA. He often had very little money. He did buy a Cadillac, however. Unfortunately, it is not known what happened to the car after he returned to Europe.

Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz discovered his passion for writing early. He wrote travel guides, most notably about the island of Ischia, as well as shorter articles, poems, and not least the notes and diaries during his imprisonment in the Dachau concentration camp. He saw himself as a writer but could never earn enough from his work to live on.

**PHOTOGRAPH 2****Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, probably taken in Switzerland between 1966-1976**

Archive of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, DaA F6427_0051

Having just turned 18, Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz decided to stop eating meat. "I don't eat animals because I do not want to live from the suffering and death of other creatures," he wrote in his book "Die Tierbrüder. Ich tue meinen Mund auf für die Stummen" (Brother Animals. Speaking up for those who can't). The catalyst for this decision was a meeting with a vegetarian painter on Capri, who invited him to dinner in 1925. During his imprisonment in Dachau, which lasted almost five years, he gave the meat in his meals to his fellow prisoners. Throughout his life Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz lovingly took care of stray cats and dogs.

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Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz in front of his cabin on Sardinia, probably between 1966-1976

Archive of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site

Even though Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz led a rather secluded life, he was by no means a withdrawn hermit. He always had close friends and confidants in his life as well as good relationships with the locals in the countries where he lived.

One of his closest confidants was Hilda G., whom he had met in the 1920s. They remained in contact until her death in 1989, even during his imprisonment in the Dachau concentration camp. Until his own death, Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz was always in touch with his sister Irma.

Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz had a number of relationships with men, all of which came to an end after a while. He appears to have not lived out his homosexuality openly.

**PHOTOGRAPH 4**

Wreath for Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, laid at his funeral by his former fellow prisoners, 1991.

Inscription on the ribbons of the wreath:

"Dear Rau Rau, we your comrades from the Präfix work detail thank you. W. Eichler"

Archive of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site

For the rest of his life Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz stayed connected with his former fellow prisoners from the Dachau concentration camp. This was particularly the case for his comrades who were forced to work in the "Präfix" screw factory.

His fellow prisoners saw him as a kind of "joker" who lived in his own world. This view of him was in part influenced by how he mewed and purred like a cat when entering a room. He took great delight in bringing a smile to the face of his comrades – in addition, playing the role of the "joker" was a survival strategy. He was given the nickname "Rau Rau," which stuck, and his former fellow inmates continued to call him this after liberation.

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EDGAR KUPFER-KOBERWITZ’S LIFE AFTER 1945



OPTIONAL SOURCE AND EXERCISE SHEET

**EDGAR KUPFER KOBERWITZ'S LIFE AFTER 1945 –
"CHAIN OF THE DAYS"****EXERCISES**

- 1) Read the excerpt from the poem "Chain of the Days."
- 2) In the final two stanzas Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz makes a few assumptions about life after concentration camp imprisonment. Discuss in your small group what he fears and whether the worries he expressed during his imprisonment became a reality.

SOURCE:

In 1946 Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz published a volume of poems. One of them was the following poem, "Chain of the Days," which he had written while imprisoned in the Dachau concentration camp.

[...]

- 1 Each day makes us blunter and dull,
Feelings wither in the heart –
All one feels is if the stomach's full,
If today there's still the strength to endure,
5 And the barbarity is all a joke. –

[...]

- And when these days have trickled away,
Then who has survived them,
Will be lonely and stick out still, a tree in the wind,
10 Alien to the world, an orphan,
Shyly passed by –

- There, outside, no one will understand us,
No one realize why we look
So completely differently at the world
15 Why we take such different steps:
Our souls twisted lame and buckled.

[...]