

Activity D:

Mordechai Vanunu

Teacher's Briefing

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Materials for Students

The Hero and Whistleblower

The Traitor

Hero or Traitor? Sheet 3 continued

The story of Mordechai

Fact or opinion? – KS3 extension activity

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Activity D:

Mordechai Vanunu: activity overview

Concepts to examine

Nuclear weapons proliferation, morality of nuclear weapons, patriotism, human rights, crime and punishment, language use and persuasive language.

Materials and space needed

Tables for small group work, sugar paper and thick markers. Sheets 1, 2 and 3 for the Key Stage 4 activity and Sheets 3, 4 and 5 for Key Stage 3 activity.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the lesson:

All students should be able to explain what Vanunu did and why he went to prison.

Most students will be able to identify how the use of language can influence what we think.

Some students will be able to have an opinion on Vanunu's actions and decide whether they would have done the same.

Overview

- Through small group work and co-operative learning, students piece together the story of Mordechai Vanunu, the whistleblower on Israel's nuclear weapon programme. Students will also understand how language can be used to sway opinions.

Instructions

Key Stage 3

- Split the students into small groups.
- Provide them with the cards from Sheet 4, and ask them to put them in the order they think the events occurred.
- Ask the students to report back to the class. Discuss the story to make sure everyone understands.
- Ask the students to answer the questions in small groups, then go through the answers as a class.

Extension activity

- Ask the students to sort the cards from Sheet 5 into 'fact' and 'opinion'. They must then decide with which statements they agree. In discussion, also encourage them to make opinions on the 'facts' in the activity. This is a good opportunity to explore how the media and advertising often present opinions as though they are facts, and the importance of questioning these.

Key Stage 4

- Split students into four equal sized groups (so 6 to 8 students in each group). Best to have the groups seated around tables, so they can work together more easily.
- There are two sets of material: one describes a version of events that portrays Vanunu as a whistleblower and hero, the other portrays him as a traitor to his country. Give copies of one set to two groups and the other to the two other groups.
- Give each group member a piece (or two) of information from their set of material. They must keep this to themselves and can only articulate it through word of mouth, i.e. they cannot just pass about the papers bearing the information but have to listen to one another. They are allowed a piece of sugar paper, but only one person can make notes. Each student is responsible for their piece of information, and need to make sure it is known by the group. No-one can leave their seat.
- Set a time limit and make students aware of the above rules. When the time is up students should have an understanding of the events leading up to, and after, Vanunu's arrest.
- Put groups with different information together, give them the list of questions and have them fill in the sheet.

Plenary

- Bring the class together in a circle. Discuss the story. Pose the question 'Would you do the same as Vanunu in a similar situation?' Take a vote.
- Discuss: how did the language make Vanunu sound different in the two versions/ on the fact/opinion sheet?

Activity D:

Mordechai Vanunu: further information

Who is Mordechai Vanunu?

Mordechai Vanunu is a whistleblower, telling the world about the Israeli nuclear weapons programme. He was born in Morocco in 1954 and moved to Israel with his family as a child. He was working at the Negev Nuclear Research Centre in Dimona as a nuclear technician (between 1975 and 1985) when he discovered that nuclear weapons were being produced. He took a number of photographs and wrote notes on the developments he was observing.

At the time he was working at the plant, he was also studying philosophy at the Ben Gurion University and became increasingly uncomfortable with many of Israel's policies. He was also becoming regarded as a radical for his involvement with a peace group that brought together Jewish and Arabic students. He was becoming progressively more concerned about the nuclear developments.

When he was made redundant from the research centre, Vanunu went travelling with his redundancy money. When in Australia, he converted to Christianity and it was at a church meeting about peace and disarmament that he told of what he had found out in Dimona. He then went on to tell a journalist that was working at the church and they agreed that it would be best for him to tell his story to the British press in London.

Before the story was published in 1986, Vanunu was lured to Italy and then kidnapped by Mossad secret agents. He was arrested for espionage and treason and sentenced to 18 years in prison, 11 of these in solitary confinement. When he was released in April 2004, it was under a number of strict conditions. Vanunu was not to speak to foreigners, journalists or to leave Israel. He was also ordered to inform the Israeli authorities if he moved

between cities. His defence lawyers say these conditions are unfair as Vanunu has no more information about Dimona left to give. He has subsequently been arrested several times for breaking these conditions. He was arrested in 2007 for talking to foreigners and handed a 6-month suspended sentence. This was changed to a six month community service order in 2008. He was arrested again in 2010 and jailed for three months. In 2015 he requested to be allowed to leave Israel. This request was denied. He then spoke to foreign journalists about the matter and broke the conditions of his release. He was placed under house arrest.

Vanunu still maintains that it was crucial to tell the world about these developments. He denies being a spy and says he was acting for peace.

Vanunu:

Sheet One: The hero and whistleblower

Vanunu was a radical at university. Working with Arab students despite the tension between the two groups in Israel/Palestine.

Vanunu was born to a Jewish family in Morocco and grew up in Israel and later became a Christian.

Israel refuses to tell the world whether it has nuclear weapons or not.

Whilst Vanunu worked as a technician at a nuclear research centre he became aware they were producing nuclear weapons.

Vanunu believed that nuclear weapons are immoral as they can kill so many innocent people.

In 1970 most countries signed up to an agreement to try and get rid of nuclear weapons. India, Israel and Pakistan did not sign this agreement and have since made nuclear weapons.

After losing his job Vanunu travelled to the UK to tell the British press about Israel's nuclear weapons.

Vanunu wanted to tell the world of the immoral nuclear developments in Israel.

Vanunu was worried Israel having nuclear weapons would threaten world peace and cause more countries to get nuclear weapons. He thought Israelis and the world deserved to know what he'd seen.

Vanunu knew speaking out would get him in serious trouble but felt it was worth the risk.

Vanunu was kidnapped by Israeli intelligence agents, drugged and taken back to Israel. His trial was in secret. When he was taken to prison he wrote the details of his kidnap on his hand and held it up to the window of the van he was in as he was not allowed to talk to any journalists.

Vanunu was in prison for 18 years, 11 of them in solitary confinement (seen as a form of torture, he was not allowed to see anyone except prison guards). Even after his release, he is not allowed to move around freely and he does not have freedom of speech. He says he has no new information he could tell.

Amnesty International and other human rights organisations say that Vanunu is a prisoner of conscience (because he was in prison because of his politics and beliefs) and his treatment has been unfair. They argue he should be allowed to leave Israel and talk to whoever he wants.

Vanunu is seen as a hero in the peace movement for standing up for what he believes in and not allowing countries to develop these destructive weapons unchecked.

"I have sacrificed my freedom and risked my life in order to expose the danger of nuclear weapons which threatens this whole region. I acted on behalf of all citizens and all of humanity." – Mordechai Vanunu.

Vanunu:

Sheet Two: The traitor

Vanunu was a radical at university. He set up a group with Arab students and the Israeli government was very disapproving due to hostile relations between the countries.

Vanunu was born to a Jewish family in Morocco and grew up in Israel and later rejected Judaism.

Israel does not want to tell the world whether it has nuclear weapons or not.

Vanunu took photos of top secret material at the nuclear plant at which he worked. This was obviously a forbidden activity.

Vanunu was fired from his job at the nuclear research centre.

Vanunu flew to London to sell state secrets to a British national newspaper.

He was highly critical of the Israeli government as he felt they were mistreating the Palestinians.

Vanunu broke a secret agreement he had signed with the Israeli government.

Vanunu had to be drugged to get him to return to Israel.

Vanunu was convicted of treason (betraying one's country or state) and espionage (being a spy) and put in prison for 18 years.

Vanunu is still considered too dangerous to leave Israel, talk to journalists or foreigners or move within the country as he might reveal more secrets.

Israel might want nuclear weapons in case countries nearby get such weapons. It believes it is surrounded by hostile countries that want to attack it.

Israel argued that Vanunu put them in danger as other countries would know about their weapons and their security.

When he was released from prison, he was booed by people outside.

One of Israel's politicians (Yosef Lapid) described Vanunu as "one of the most severe traitors and spies in the history of the Jewish nation... the world is transforming this scum known as Vanunu into its hero. I recommend to Israel's citizens to treat Vanunu with the utter hatred that he deserves" .

Vanunu:

Sheet Three: Hero or traitor?

- First, make sure you have understood the story.
- Based on your knowledge of the story, write three statements in each of the boxes below. The statements must be about Mordechai Vanunu, but they can be **FACT** or **OPINION**.
- Put an '**F**' or '**O**' in the right-hand column to prove you know which is which.

In this box write statements supporting the point of view that Mordechai Vanunu was a **HERO**

1.	
2.	
3.	

In this box write statements supporting the view that Mordechai Vanunu was a **TRAITOR**

1.	
2.	
3.	

Vanunu:

Sheet Three: Hero or traitor? – continued

Now discuss these questions, and note down your ideas to report back to the class.

1. Most countries in the world have agreed not to make any nuclear weapons in a special international agreement. It is called the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. To “PROLIFERATE” means to spread or reproduce. Why do you think they have done this?
2. Was the Government of Israel right or wrong to make nuclear weapons in secret? Do they have a right to build them or should they work with other countries to reduce the number of these weapons?
3. What should a person do if they discover that the government that they work for is doing something that they believe is wrong, and keeping it a secret?
4. A ‘PATRIOT’ is a person who feels strong loyalty to their own country – some patriots think that their own country is better than all other countries. Some patriots believe that they should always support the actions of their government, whatever they do. What do you think about this kind of strong ‘PATRIOTISM’?
5. If you were a friend of Mordechai Vanunu, at the time of this story, what advice would you have given him? Would you help him to escape, and put your own freedom in danger? Or would you tell the police?
6. What do the words ‘Freedom of Speech’ mean? Do you have freedom of speech at home and at school / college? How important is freedom of speech as a human right? Can you think of situations when freedom of speech should be limited?

Vanunu:

Sheet Four: The story of Mordechai

Put Vanunu's story into the order that it happened.

Vanunu was born in Morocco in 1954 and moved with his family to Israel when he was nine.

Vanunu got a job as a nuclear technician at the Negev Nuclear Research Centre in Israel in 1976.

Vanunu became worried that the Research Centre was actually making nuclear weapons. He thought they were immoral as they can kill so many people instantly. He made notes about what he saw and took pictures.

Vanunu lost his job in 1985 and went travelling with the redundancy money he got from work. He converted to Christianity in Australia.

Vanunu met a journalist when travelling and told him about what was going on in the Research Centre. He agreed to travel to London in 1986 to tell his story to the British press. He wanted the world to know about Israel's nuclear weapons. He planned to give some of the money from the story to the Australian Anglican Church.

The Israeli government found out about Vanunu and sent Mossad (the security service) agents to London to capture him. They tricked him into going to Rome then arrested and drugged him and took him back to Israel. They wanted to keep their nuclear weapons secret (and make no comment on them even today).

Vanunu was put on trial (in secret) in Israel and convicted of espionage (being a spy) and treason (betraying your country or state). He wrote details of his kidnap on his hand and held it to the window so journalists could see.

In 1988 Vanunu was sentenced to a further 16 years in prison (on top of the two he had already served). 11 of these were in solitary confinement. This meant that he didn't get to mix with any other people and is seen as a form of torture.

When he was in prison, people had very different opinions about Vanunu. The peace movement thought he was a hero for risking his personal freedom to tell the world about the weapons. In Israel he was seen as a traitor, revealing state secrets.

When Vanunu was let out in April 2004 he didn't have freedom of speech and wasn't allowed to leave Israel. Campaigners say this is against his human rights. The Israeli government say he may still have secret information to tell, although he says he has told everything he knows.

Vanunu:

Sheet Five: Fact or opinion (KS3 extension)

1. Divide the statements below into two piles: 'fact' and 'opinion'.
2. Second, decide whether you think the opinions are 'right' or 'wrong'.
3. You should end up with 3 piles.

Vanunu was very brave to stand up for what he believed in.

Vanunu was foolhardy by taking silly risks.

Vanunu was a traitor to his country for telling their secrets.

Vanunu was a nuclear technician at the Negev Nuclear Research centre in Israel.

Vanunu was arrested by secret agents in Rome after being lured there by another agent.

Vanunu was put in prison for 18 years, 11 of them in solitary confinement (locked up on his own).

Vanunu's prison sentence was too long and too harsh for his actions.

Vanunu should have been given the death penalty to stop him revealing any more secrets.

Israel does not want the world to know about its nuclear weapons.

People of the world had the right to know about the weapons, selling the story to the paper was right.

People of the world had the right to know about the weapons but he could have done it a different way.

When Vanunu realised that the Research Centre was making nuclear weapons, he began to take pictures and make notes.

Vanunu does not have full rights now, even though he has been released from prison. He is not allowed to leave Israel, talk to foreigners or journalists or move around Israel without first saying where he is going.