

# The Battle of Cable Street: Antisemitism & Extremism in the UK

## History and Contemporary Parallels

### Scheme of Work Overview

**“The Battle of Cable Street: Antisemitism & Fascism in the UK. History and Contemporary Parallels”** explores the dramatic and significant moment in British history, when communities in London’s East End came together in support of the local Jewish minority in October 1936 to confront the threat of fascism. Estimated numbers of those involved vary wildly: 2,000 to 5,000 Fascists, 6,000 – 10,000 police, 100,000 – 500,000 counter-protestors. The chaos and violence of the day led directly to the passing of the Public Order Act, 1936. And, whilst this event is often remembered as a powerful act of resistance, it took place within a much wider context of growing political extremism, economic hardship and widespread antisemitism—both in Britain and across Europe.

The six-lesson scheme of work is designed to help students understand the Battle of Cable Street within its historical context and develop their understanding of the changing nature of antisemitism and the rise of various forms of extremism. The first two lessons explore the causes and context of Cable Street, including asking why there was support for fascism in Britain in the 1930s. The following two lessons together form the centrepiece of the Unit and focus on the events of the day. We then explore the consequences – first the immediate aftermath, then ongoing antisemitism and fascism in the UK and how it has changed and been challenged. The final lesson draws on the history of Cable Street and broader antisemitism and extremism in the UK to look at how students can respond to similar hatred today, however expressed. The programme is designed for the History curriculum but also covers important citizenship education themes. Given the challenging themes covered, there is a strong emphasis on creating a safe learning environment for students.

At the heart of the Unit are two lessons in which students will reconstruct the events of the October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1936. Students will examine the complexity of the Battle of Cable Street, working with a range of primary sources, including eyewitness accounts from local residents, police officers and members of the BUF, to explain how different groups experienced the day differently. Through this, they will develop their ability to analyse evidence, consider differing perspectives and understand how historical narratives are shaped.

Students will explore the consequences of the battle, both immediate and long-term, and consider developments such as the continued short-term growth of the BUF, the introduction of the Public Order Act, and the persistence of antisemitism in Britain after the Second World War. They will also examine how Cable Street has been remembered and represented over time, including how it has been mythologised in political and cultural contexts.

In the final stages of the course, students will draw connections between the past and the present. They will reflect on how antisemitism and extremism continue to exist today—often in different forms—and consider why it is important to challenge prejudice wherever it appears. By the end of the scheme, students will be equipped to suggest informed responses to antisemitism and to understand the connections between the events of Cable Street and countering the rise of extremism in all its forms.

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This scheme of work is designed for students aged 13 and upwards, fits within a broader History curriculum set in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and makes links to elements of the advised Secondary National Curriculum for England topics related to ‘challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day’ including:

- the Second World War
- social, cultural and technological change in post-war British society
- Britain’s place in the world since 1945
- a local history study (for schools in the area of Cable Street, for example)

There are also links to elements of Key stage 3 Citizenship, specifically:

- the precious liberties enjoyed by citizens of the United Kingdom
- the nature of rules and laws and the justice system

Whilst not intended to be formally assessed, it is important that teachers (and Learn About Britain) are able to measure the development of student’s understanding of both their learning and the themes of the scheme of work. To that end, students will share their knowledge of Cable Street and reflections on themes linked to British history and culture, and elements of the last lesson will speak directly to the initial questioning of the first, allowing teachers to gauge understanding of the relevance of Cable Street to the UK today. The scheme of work contains opportunities for both formal and informal assessment, as well as homework.

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## **Scheme of work and lesson content summary**

### **Lesson 1: Who were the BUF and why did they have support?**

- Introduction and context
- Frontloading concepts and classroom etiquette for discussing tough subjects
- Students will investigate the conditions in Britain during the 1930s, including the impact of economic difficulties and the rise of fascist movements at home and abroad, with an emphasis on the extent of support for the British Union of Fascists (BUF).

### **Lesson 2: Who marched, and why Cable Street?**

- The events leading up to the march and counter-protest and the shifting attitudes and responses of the Home Office, Jewish organisations such as the Board of Deputies, trade unions, nascent anti-fascist groups and the press.
- Important questions in this lesson will focus on why the BUF wanted to march in the East End and why the responses were so varied.

### **Lessons 3 and 4: What happened at Cable Street? Using eyewitness accounts and historical sources to reconstruct events.**

- An exploration of the events of the day using a range of primary sources, eyewitness accounts and video content filmed especially for this resource.
- This lesson highlights the complex range of participants, the changing responses from the Home Office on the day and the role of the police.
- Contemporary social attitudes are to the fore.
- These lessons are, in essence, a double lesson, therefore a certain amount of flexibility is built in regarding where the break between lessons should occur.

### **Lesson 5: The aftermath of the Battle: Fascism (un)defeated?**

- Exploring the immediate consequences and the wider impact.
- Continued antisemitism and the growth of fascism after the events of Cable Street.
- Students will explore their expectations of the consequences of Cable Street, compare this with what in fact happened and examine different interpretations of its significance.

### **Lesson 6: From Cable Street to today: Antisemitism and responding to prejudice.**

- Using historical knowledge to explore antisemitism in the UK from the 1947 riots to recent examples of antisemitic attacks in London and Manchester.
- Developing an understanding of trends in antisemitic and in racist attacks, and a recognition of when there are likely to be spikes in attacks.
- Exploring how communities can come together in the face of prejudice and intolerance.
- By reflecting on the “spirit of Cable Street”, students will consider how they can respond to intolerance in the present day.

## Shorter Scheme of Work

We recognise that schools have many constraints on their time and that, while wanting to commemorate the Battle of Cable Street, some may not be able to devote six lessons to this topic. Therefore, we have created a shorter route through the scheme of work. As with the full scheme of work, teachers should feel free to use and adapt the lessons and activities as they judge best for their students. That said, there are certain elements of the scheme of work which must be included in order for the learning to be meaningful. Outlined below is one possible route through the scheme of work, using only three lessons.

**Lesson 1:** Students should explore why people joined the British Union of Fascists, why Cable Street was chosen as the site of the planned march and what the various responses to the planned march were.

The following aspects of the full scheme of work are recommended.

- Show the film from the presentation (from the full scheme of work, Lesson 1), provide students with the sources sheet and have them complete Tasks 3 and 4 from the Lesson 1 student worksheet.
- Teacher-led content using slides 9 and 10 from the Lesson 1 presentation.
- Show the film from the presentation (from the full scheme of work, Lesson 2), followed by teacher-led content using slides 6-8 from the Lesson 2 presentation.
- Distribute the sources sheet and have students complete Task 3 from the Lesson 2 student worksheet.

**Lesson 2:** Here, there should be a focus on the Battle of Cable Street itself and the immediate aftermath. The following aspects of the full scheme of work are recommended.

- Divide the class into three groups and provide the testimonies sheet and Sir Phillip Game's report. One group should complete Task 3 from the Lesson 3&4 student worksheet; one group complete Task 4 and the other group tackles Task 5. The corresponding slides in the Lesson 3&4 presentation are slides 7-11.
- Then show the Pathé newsreel from slide 12 of the Lesson 3&4 presentation. Have students complete Task 6 of their worksheet.
- The same approach can be taken to cover the BUF, police/Home Office, and newspaper viewpoints, using the corresponding tasks in the student worksheet.
- All students should complete Task 10 of their worksheet, which could be set as homework.

**Lesson 3:** Students should cover continuing antisemitism, consider their personal responses to prejudice and the historical significance of the Battle of Cable Street. The following aspects of the full scheme of work are recommended.

- Begin with slides 3-5 from the Lesson 5 presentation as a starter activity, then show the film from slide 6.
- Either, distribute the sources C-F worksheet or add them to a slide to show from the presentation and ask students to complete Tasks 2 and 3 from the Lesson 5 student worksheet.
- Pair students, give them each a copy of the Interpretations Information Sheet, have one choose Interpretation A, the other Interpretation B, and complete Task 4 in the Lesson 5 worksheet.
- Next, show the film from slide 3 of the Lesson 6 presentation and check understanding using the questions on slide 4.
- The Lesson 6 workstations activity can instead be completed by placing students into groups of three, giving each group the workstation information sheets and have each student in the trio choose one “workstation” and complete the relevant task in the Lesson 6 worksheet. If time allows they can share their information between them, or it can be covered via brief whole class feedback.
- The End of Unit Project can be introduced, begun or omitted as time allows. If omitted from the lesson, it can be set as homework.

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### Showcasing learning

Learn About Britain is keen to see the results of students’ learning and pay tribute to the time and effort they and their teachers will put into this commemorative exploration of the Battle of Cable Street, in this 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. To that end, built into the final lesson of the scheme of work, is an opportunity for students to identify an injustice they feel strongly about and consider their responses to it. An end of unit activity, designed by students, will showcase learning (allowing for informal teacher assessment) and let students respond to what they have learned and understood about the need to prevent hate in their communities. From this, they will be encouraged to consider their own responses to prejudice and hatred in the UK, past and present, and to consider what they can do to counter hate in their communities.

Learn About Britain welcomes submission of students’ work, all of which will be acknowledged and presented with a certificate of recognition. Students who produce the best work – as judged by our Board and the Learn About Britain education team – will be invited to a Learning Day in East London (including a visit to Cable Street itself) and an awards ceremony in Parliament. There will be a £50 voucher for the winner and £25 vouchers for the runners up.

We envisage a closing date after the February 2027 half-term, with the Learning Day and awards ceremony taking place after Easter 2027. More information on this, and the competition, is available in our competition briefing document which is available alongside this Scheme of Work overview and on [the Learn About Britain website](#).