

Who was Alan Turing and why should we care?

Being gay in Britain in the 1950s

Guidance Notes and Lesson Plan

Lesson Objectives

- To recap and consolidate previous learning
- To learn more about the post-war treatment of Alan Turing and the context in which that took place
- To understand the legal context in which Turing's arrest and conviction took place
- To learn about Turing's death and point forward to later lessons looking at variation in public, political and legal responses over time

Introduction

In the previous lesson, students learnt about Alan Turing and the importance of his work to Britain and the wider world. They were made aware that his contributions to a variety of fields have had important and far-reaching implications, not least in computing and AI. They learnt about his conviction for gross indecency, the consequences of that and the later apology and pardon, all of which was placed within the context of the initial question "what makes a hero?".

Lesson 2 builds upon this work by looking more closely at the post-war treatment of Turing and the social, cultural and legal context of the time. Therefore, it is important that teachers reinforce the need for students to not make judgments about this treatment with hindsight – they must take the context of the post-war period into account, providing support for their views. That said, they should feel free to be critical of the treatment, as many were at the time and since.

The lesson enables students to understand Turing through the words of those who knew him. That many of those did not judge him for his homosexuality will help students understand that within any socio-cultural and legal context there are always differing views; what is of interest to us at this point in the study of Turing is why one view outweighs another.

Key Information

This lesson is designed for students aged 13 and above. It is devised for History classes.

The timings suggested are based on a one-hour lesson and may need adapting based on circumstances. Some adaptations have been suggested where appropriate.

The lesson is designed to follow lesson one of the scheme of work: *Who was Alan Turing and why is he important to Britain?* Prior knowledge is not needed. However, the notion that students may arrive with knowledge, ideas and preconceptions is embraced and should be utilised to explore and resolve misconceptions.

As far as possible, students should remain in the same small group throughout this course of lessons.

Resources

- Lesson plan
- Lesson PowerPoint
 - Including three slides with embedded film clips
- ‘How much do you remember about Alan Turing?’ worksheet
 - To be printed one per student
- The legal context for gay men information cards
 - To be printed one set of cards for each small group. Note, two of the information cards are double-sided.
- The legal context for gay men worksheet
 - To be printed one per student

Lesson Plan

Starter (5 minutes)

Before the lesson begins, put a ‘How much do you remember about Alan Turing?’ worksheet where each student will sit. The purpose of this quick activity is to remind the class of what they learnt in the previous lesson. It allows the teacher to correct any misunderstandings or gaps in anyone’s knowledge – particularly helpful for anyone who missed the previous lesson.

Introduce the lesson and then allow 3 minutes to complete the worksheet. Allow a minute for the class to check they have completed their worksheets correctly against the completed version on the Lesson 2 PowerPoint (Slide 1).

Activity: What was Turing really like? (15-20 minutes)

The class will now be shown a series of short film clips; these are embedded in Slides 3, 5 and 7. The first two both have an interview with Olive Bailey, the third with Joan Clarke. Each film clip is followed by accompanying discussion questions, which are designed to help students focus their attention on the real Alan Turing and his sexuality, as remembered by two significant people who knew him: Olive Bailey and Joan Clarke. The discussion will help check the level and depth of understanding.

The first two clips are taken from a CBC News report broadcast 14th January 2015. Teachers can choose to show either or both, choose which of the discussion questions to use, depending on their class, and show the first two clips together then use the discussion questions, or have a brief discussion after each clip. Teachers can decide how many of the discussion questions it is suitable for them to pose and introduce supplementary ones of their own if appropriate to the discussion.

[Nazi code-breaker on Imitation Game hero Alan Turing \(4m12s\)](#)

Discussion Questions

- What was Alan Turing's role at Bletchley Park, and why was his work so important during the Second World War?
- Olive Bailey describes Turing as having a "lovely sense of humour" but also being misunderstood. Why do you think some people found him difficult to understand?
- The film *The Imitation Game* portrays Turing as eccentric. Do you think films sometimes exaggerate real people's personalities? Why might they do this?
- Turing chained his coffee mug to a radiator to avoid losing it. What does this tell us about his personality and the way he worked?

[Real "Imitation Game" code-breaker Olive Bailey describes Alan Turing - YouTube \(2m30s\)](#)

Discussion Questions

- What does Olive Bailey say about Turing's intelligence and personality?
- Bailey describes Turing's sense of humour. Why do you think humour might have been important for people working in high-pressure environments like Bletchley Park?
- Bailey mentions Turing's personal struggles, including the fact that being gay was illegal at the time. How do you think this affected his life and career?
- Bailey reflects on how Turing's legacy has been misunderstood. Why do you think it took so long for his contributions to be fully recognised?

[My Engagement to Alan Turing by Joan Clarke \(later Joan Murray\)](#) (2m51s)

Discussion Questions

- Joan Clarke describes Alan Turing's proposal as unexpected. Why do you think Turing wanted to marry her, despite knowing he was gay?
- Clarke describes their relationship as "sweet" and says she wasn't upset when the engagement ended. What does this tell us about their friendship?
- At the time, being gay was illegal in Britain. How might this have influenced Turing's decision to propose marriage?
- Joan Clarke was one of the few women working as a codebreaker at Bletchley Park. What challenges do you think she might have faced in a male-dominated field?

Activity: Being gay in Britain in the 1950s (25-30 minutes)

This activity is designed to allow the class to explore the legal context for gay men in the UK in the 1950s. With the class in their small groups, give each group a set of the 'legal context for gay men in Britain in the 1950s' information cards and every student a 'legal context for gay men in Britain in the 1950s' worksheet.

The class are to read and discuss the information cards in their groups. As they do so, they must each answer the questions on their own worksheet. Allow up to 20 minutes for this, then bring the class back together and take feedback, using the questions on the 'legal context...' worksheet, which can be shown on slides 10 and 11.

The questions are in two sections:

- those that focus on giving the students deeper knowledge of Turing, his "crime", punishment and the consequences; they will learn what those who knew him thought about him and his homosexuality,
- and the second set which are designed to promote and stretch their understanding of their knowledge and the social and moral context of 1950s Britain.

These questions are included below.

Section 1: Recording Key Information

- 1) What were the three main laws used to criminalise LGBTQ+ people in Britain in the 1950s, and how did they work?
- 2) How did entrapment (police pretending to be interested in a same-sex relationship to trick someone into breaking the law) contribute to arrests and prosecutions?
- 3) Why was Alan Turing arrested in 1952? How did the law at the time justify his prosecution?
- 4) What punishment was Turing given by the court? How did it affect his health and career?
- 5) What was the Wolfenden Report (1957)? What recommendations did it make about homosexuality?
- 6) Give two ways that Turing's legacy has been recognised in Britain in recent years.

Section 2: Demonstrating Understanding

- 7) Why do you think the UK government criminalised homosexuality in the 1950s?
- 8) How might entrapment have made life more difficult for LGBTQ+ people at the time?
- 9) How do you think Cold War fears affected how the government treated LGBTQ+ individuals?
- 10) Why was the Wolfenden Report important, even though it didn't immediately change the law?
- 11) What do you think was the purpose of Turing's Law, and why was it introduced decades later?
- 12) In what ways do you think Turing's legacy has helped people understand LGBTQ+ history?

Summary (5 minutes)

Following the discussion in the previous activity, ask students to write an answer to the question shown on the final slide of the PowerPoint (and below). They should write this in the space provided on their 'legal context...' worksheet.

- Given what you have learned about the legal system, social attitudes, and government fears in the 1950s, why do you think Turing was prosecuted?
- Do you think his treatment was purely about enforcing the law, or do you think there were deeper reasons behind his conviction?

As a concluding comment, pointing towards the next two lessons, the teacher should ensure that the answers given to these summary questions include references to the social and legal context of the 1950s.