

Who was Alan Turing and why should we care?

Scheme of Work Overview

Alan Turing was, for most of his life and the decades following his death, little known beyond a small circle of computer scientists, mathematicians and cryptographers, and yet, he is arguably one of the most significant figures in British history of the 20th century. His contributions across a range of scientific and mathematical fields are inestimable and it is arguably fair to say that the world would be a different place without his work. But his legacy went unnoticed and uncelebrated until the early 2000s because of his persecution and prosecution by the British legal system for being gay at a time when, under British law, homosexuality was a crime. This scheme of work offers an opportunity for students to learn in depth about aspects of Turing's life, work, persecution and rehabilitation of his reputation, which is itself grounded in a breadth study of changing social and legal attitudes across the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries. By pursuing this study, students will be able to analyse how and why attitudes and laws change over time, as well as evaluating how the themes and events of the past have shaped the United Kingdom – and in the case of Turing, the wider world – in the present.

This scheme of work is designed for students aged 13 and upwards, fits within a broader curriculum set in the 20th 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 Manchester or Milton Keynes, 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

The first lesson gives students an introduction to Alan Turing: his work and legacy, his persecution and prosecution by the British legal system and the rehabilitation of his memory from the early 2000s. This takes place within a context of the concept of ‘the hero’, allowing students to make judgements about an individual and social attitudes in historical periods. From this platform, the unit moves on to place Turing and the treatment of him by the British state within a wider context covering social, cultural and legal attitudes and beliefs, before drawing to a close by developing an understanding of how and why Turing’s legacy was resurrected and what the implications are for other injustices in Britain and the wider world. Hence, these lessons are not simply History focussed – although that is where they sit best – but allow for student exploration within Citizenship.

Below is a summary of the planned scheme of work and lesson content.

SOW lesson order:

1. Who was Alan Turing and why is he important to Britain?

Intro and context (*Learn About Britain Strand 1: A safe space for all*)

- Frontloading concepts and classroom etiquette
- What makes a hero?
- Who was Alan Turing and what were his contributions to Britain?

2. Being gay in Britain in the 1950s

What was Turing really like? (*Learn About Britain Strand 2: Authentic Historical Enquiry*)

- Turing’s role and work at Bletchley Park
- What was Turing like, by those who knew him
- Being gay in Britain in the 1950s

3. Legal and social changes in Britain that affected LGBTQ+ people

Social change deep dive (*Learn About Britain Strand 2: Authentic Historical Enquiry*)

- Changes in the law around same-sex relationships
- Examples of changing social attitudes

4. **Changing views about Alan Turing**

Siting Turing within the social and legal context of post-war Britain (*Learn About Britain Strand 2: Authentic Historical Enquiry*)

- Understanding the influence of social context on historical and contemporary events
- Reaching conclusions via historical sources

5. **Pause – Reflect – Discuss**

Consolidating learning (*Learn About Britain Strand 2: Authentic Historical Enquiry*)

- Using historical knowledge for a purpose
- Selecting historical sources for a purpose

6. **Government and National Apologies**

Reflecting and responding to learning (*Learn About Britain Strand 3: Putting learning into action*)

- Considering other injustices in the light of learning
- Exploring responses to knowledge
- What does the story of Turing mean for us today?

Lesson Summaries

1. Who was Alan Turing and why is he important to Britain?

This lesson is an introduction to Alan Turing: his life, work, conviction for gross indecency and the consequences of that, and the subsequent rehabilitation of his memory in the early 21st century. Students are encouraged to explore the concept of “the hero” and recognise the importance and far-reaching effects of Turing’s work. A biographical timeline will be created that will serve to contextualise later learning about social and legal changes affecting LGBTQ+ people.

2. Being gay in Britain in the 1950s

This lesson builds upon the learning from the previous lesson through an in-depth exploration of the post-war treatment of Turing. Through interrogating examples of social events, movements and individuals, students will be able to place the treatment of Turing within a period of changing social, cultural and legal contexts. Students will be encouraged to use these contexts to support their own views and opinions.

3. Legal and social changes in Britain that affected LGBTQ+ people

This and the next lesson form a two-part exploration of the treatment of Turing and his rehabilitation, alongside, and as an illustrative example of, the injustices faced by LGBTQ+ people. Students will gain knowledge of the legal changes regarding same-sex relationships, an understanding of the reasons behind these and be able to site Alan Turing within this context.

4. Changing views about Alan Turing

Building on the previous lesson, students will now work at applying the social, legal and cultural changes to the treatment of Alan Turing. Students will place the changing views and treatment of Turing, in person and in memory, within the changing social environment from the 1950s to the present day. In so doing, they will gain understanding of how and why attitudes and behaviours – whether of individuals or governments and countries – are influenced by cultural and social movements, not just “great men” and “big events”.

5. Pause – Reflect – Discuss

Having covered a considerable amount of ground: the social, legal and cultural contexts of post-War Britain, the work, treatment and rehabilitation of Alan Turing’ reputation; questions about government responses to maltreatment; we now pause and reflect on the learning which has taken place. In this lesson, students will be asked to take what they have learnt, use further historical sources and apply their understanding of all this to a specific purpose, namely, to present a plan for a museum exhibition about Alan Turing.

6. Government and National Apologies

The end of this unit of study presents an opportunity for students to apply what they have learnt to other cases of injustice, both in concrete and abstract terms. Students will explore examples of injustices, consider the question of apologies and discuss a range of socially and politically important questions: what and who are these for? Should they even happen at all? How do activists achieve an official apology? Finally, we revisit the Enquiry Question, with students now excellently placed to support a judgment as to why we *should* care about Alan Turing.