



# Reinhold Hanning, Auschwitz Guard

*This enquiry uses a former Auschwitz guard as the focus to generate questions, and this is probably only suitable for Year 5 and above, and even then it's best delivered to pupils with a knowledge of the Holocaust. However, you could replace this with any example of your choosing, real or fictional.*



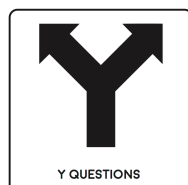
Get pupils into pairs to debate the first of the three questions below, then move to 4s and argue 2 v 2, and then into 8s as a 4 v 4.

**2s:** Should you always follow the rules - yes / no?

**4s:** Should you always forgive, or is it sometimes wrong to forgive?

**8s:** If you commit a crime a long time ago, but are only punished now - should the punishment be the same as if you did it yesterday?

Each time, the question increases in seriousness. This helps everyone break their silence and become more comfortable talking in front of others as the group size gradually gets bigger. In each instance, pupils are allocated a side - very important, as it cuts out the need to form an opinion and they get straight to the business end of making reasons.



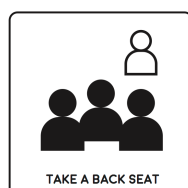
They're all now warmed up (try to resist hearing back from groups for too long - it drops the energy) and discussing the big concepts central to the rest of the session.

Next, introduce Reinhold Hanning, perhaps with a couple of pictures on the screen (sorry, we can't provide for copyright reasons). Explain that Hanning was a man who did something a long time ago and is now asking for forgiveness. He was an Auschwitz guard for 2.5 years when aged 18. He was a prominent member of the SS and oversaw the killing of over 170,000 Hungarian Jews during his time there. He was finally brought to trial last year, aged 94. He admits his guilt, saying *"I stood by and did nothing to prevent these injustices. I beg your forgiveness."*

For your own knowledge, there's more on his case here:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36560416>.

He was sentenced to 5 years in prison, but it's a good idea to keep this from pupils for now, and ask them what they think would be a suitable punishment in this instance.



Questions may form organically from the discussion of a suitable punishment. It's good to have a few questions up your sleeve, though, so you can pivot if one doesn't come to the fore.

## Responsibility:

Is Hanning just as responsible for the deaths as the senior Nazi commanders?

Can you be a criminal for doing your job?

When are you not responsible for your own actions?

## Forgiveness:

Should Hanning be forgiven?

Is it possible to 'hate the sin, but love the sinner' (Gandhi)?

Can only victims give someone forgiveness?

## Punishment:

Should age be a factor when deciding a punishment?

Should punishments be lessened for crimes committed long ago?

When should you be punished for following orders?

## NEXT STEPS

If pupils had the chance to speak to Reinhold Hanning, what would they say? Could they apply their thinking and conclusions from the enquiry in their answers? Or would they choose not to?