

Sassy Holmes
BA Drama

Educational Visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau

*Written in the style of a short solo performance, and the beginning and end of the piece dictates how I would like the piece to look, sound, and feel.

An empty stage. There is chatter, beeping, muffled tannoy; sounds of the airport. As a rush of noise builds, suggesting take off, the performer, with a backpack full of their own personal belongings, will walk onto the stage and sit. The loud sounds increase to an incredible volume. Silence.

Throughout this performance, the performer will lip sync to a track of their own speech. The audio should not match up with the performer's lips. They should be purposefully out of sync, but the performer should lip sync the words with precision. They should begin lip syncing 10 seconds before their speech begins.

As the piece progresses, the performer will begin to unpack their bag and place the items on the floor around them.

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Travelling to Poland was one of the most important things I have ever done. I have always loved history, and I value highly remembering the past as I believe that can inextricably affect the future.

When I reached Krakow, I could feel the age and beauty of the city instantly. It was pouring with rain, and with the train service down I had to navigate my way to the city centre. It was disorientating and I felt like I had been plunged into a strange and lonely world.

On my first full day in Poland, I took a guided tour to Auschwitz- Birkenau. In the mini bus on the way there, the tour guide played a film, called 'The Salvation of Auschwitz'. He reminded us that 'salvation' may be the wrong word, as not everyone was saved. The video contained footage of some of the survivors talking about their experiences, but the sound wasn't synced. The videos felt surreal; these people captured in both sound and image but not joined through the audio visual. There was something incredibly sad about the disjointed medium put before me, and this uneasy feeling filled the pit of my stomach as we reached our destination.

When we arrived, I was incredibly taken aback by the amount of people there. It was really really busy, and the noise and bustle of it all really jolted against my expectations of what Auschwitz would be like.

Slowly, we were taken on a guided tour. Each person in the tour group was given a set of headphones, in which our tour guide would be able to be heard at a normal volume, allowing him to talk very quietly. This set the tone for the group, as walking around was a very solemn and lonely experience.

I don't think it really hit me that the things being talked about happened where my feet were walking. I kept looking down at the ground to picture the hundreds of thousands of feet that had also stepped here, the atrocities they had to endure, but it only really became clear how real everything was when we were inside, looking at the collections of personal items that had been salvaged. At first I thought I was staring at a wall of barbed wire, but I looked closer and realised they were entwined glasses. A pit of crockery extended deeper and further than I could ever hope to imagine. A mountain of shoes; heels, sandals, boots. Because of the volume of people, there was no real time to stop and look at these for an extended period of time. There were routes, and we had to follow the line of people quickly. The pace of the environment meant there was so much to take in in such a small amount of time. On leaving the museum I felt so overwhelmed.

Just before our tour guide took us to the barracks in Auschwitz Birkenau, he stopped in his tracks and picked up a worm from the trodden path. "Every person deserves to live" he said as he placed it onto the grass. This was a moment that really marked the trip for me, as it was followed by a moment to wander around by ourselves, and I got time to take in every inch of what was around me. The pouring rain, the cold, the huge spaces and the small spaces, all of the ridiculously large statistics of the dead; I was struck by the reality of it all.

Over the years of studying history throughout my education, and the countless stories about the horror of the concentration camps, I think it's easy for that part of history to become so well known and recounted for that we forget how real these things were. Travelling to Poland and visiting Auschwitz was an incredibly important experience that I believe if given the chance everyone should do. As a human being, we must feel to understand, and the feelings I have experienced on this trip have allowed me a fraction of understanding into this part of history.

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The sound of rain begins.

At the end of the piece the performer will place each of their belongings back in their backpack. They will stand, and the sound of thunder and rain will become louder, as they walk off stage. The rain will get louder, and then slowly pitter out.

End.