

Teachers' Notes

Activity 7: Britain and the Legacy of Loss - Part 1



TOPIC

Britain's Response to Pre-war Nazi Persecution, Surviving the Holocaust

AGE GROUP

Years 7-11 (ages 12-16)

Progression Steps 4 and 5

LENGTH

1 hour

AREAS OF LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE

Health and Well-being

Humanities

Languages, Literacy and Communication

DESCRIPTION

This activity introduces students to the experience of Holocaust survivors and the legacy of loss they experienced in the aftermath of Nazi persecution and World War 2. Students will watch the video testimony of Irene Kirstein Watts, a Kindertransport refugee, to reflect on the challenges she faced and to broaden their understanding of the meaning of the term 'survivor'.

The activity also explores some of the complexities of Britain's response to news of Jewish persecution and murder before the war. In particular, students will analyse extracts of the UK parliamentary debate in 1938, which led to the Kindertransport programme. This provides a picture of British society at the time and the political and social context, which Jewish refugees faced on arrival to the UK.

To be best able to understand this activity, it is recommended that students first complete **Activity 5: The Legal Effect: How Laws can Persecute or Protect**.

This activity can be completed as a standalone class or as part one of a two-part course of study. The second part of the activity is set out in **Activity 8 – Britain and the Legacy of Loss – Part Two**.*

LEARNING AIMS

As a result of completing this activity, students will:

- Reflect on the concept of a survivor.
- Explore some of the ambiguities in Britain's response to news of Jewish persecution by the Nazis and the British context, which shaped this response.
- Tackle the misconception that rescue was always a straightforward, positive experience for survivors.

*A full list of activities can be found at the end of this document.



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LEARNING AIMS continued

As a result of completing this activity, students will:

- Reflect on the Holocaust's enduring legacy of loss and the impact this had on individual families.
- Learn about the connection to Wales through the video testimony of a Kindertransport refugee.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Whiteboard/markers, computer to listen to testimony.

Consider

Inform students that they are going to consider and discuss the term 'survivor' in the context of the Holocaust.

On the board, draw a mind map and ask the class for words that automatically come to mind when thinking about a 'survivor'. You may want to ask the students questions such as:

- What does the word survivor mean (one still living, one left behind, one who has escaped, a descendant)?
- What do you think is needed for a person to survive in a foreign country, after escaping horrific persecution?

You may also want to share the following definition of a Holocaust survivor, as provided by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:

*"The Museum honours as Survivors any persons, Jewish or non-Jewish, who were displaced, persecuted, or discriminated against due to the racial, religious, ethnic, social, and political policies of the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945."*¹

On the **student worksheet**, ask the students to write down three emotions or feelings that come to mind when they think about the word 'survivor' (**Task 1**).

¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Frequently Asked Questions: 11. How is a Holocaust survivor defined?* <<https://www.ushmm.org/remember/resources-holocaust-survivors-victims/individual-research/registry-faq#11>> [accessed 21 May 2022].

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Collect

Explain to the students that they will now explore the challenges faced by Holocaust survivors by looking at the experiences of a survivor, who escaped Nazi Germany on a Kindertransport. As a starting point, students will analyse extracts from the UK parliamentary debate, which led to the Kindertransport programme. The debate indicates the range of British attitudes to refugees and the social and economic climate at the time, which helps draw a picture of the society in which the Kindertransport children arrived.

Ask the students to work in pairs to read **Handout 1**. This Handout sets out extracts from two speeches made in the UK House of Commons on 21 November 1938. They formed part of the debate on whether Britain would accept more Jewish refugees from Germany, following the violence of the November Pogrom on 9-10 November 1938 (*Kristallnacht*).

One student should read the first speech in the Handout and the other should read the second speech. Then the students should discuss in their pairs what they have learnt.

Students may also need to refer to **Handout 2**, which provides a glossary of key terms.

Then, working in pairs, ask the students to answer the questions on the **student worksheet (Task 2)**.

Encourage the students to reflect on the following:

- In his speech, Samuel Hoare argued that the British Government could not support greater numbers of Jews escaping Nazi persecution because that would “*inevitably lead to the growth*” of antisemitism in Britain.²
- The existence and support of the British Union of Fascists demonstrates that, at least in the early 1930s, a substantial minority of the British population actively supported similar ideas to the Nazis and thought that Britain would be improved by taking a similar approach as the Third Reich. It also shows the presence of more radical antisemitism in Britain, which contrasts with the attempts by other sympathetic organisations in Britain at that time to help persecuted German Jews.
- Samuel Hoare’s speech makes it clear that Jewish children could only be accommodated if their maintenance was privately guaranteed and that the Home Office would do nothing more than “*to give the necessary visas and to facilitate their entry into this country*”.³ Adult refugee visas were conditional on financial guarantees, which were increasingly difficult for Jews to provide considering the Nazi’s anti-Jewish laws (which, for example, excluded Jews from German economic life and confiscated their valuable assets and businesses).

² Hansard, *Racial, Religious and Political Minorities, HC Deb 21 November 1938 vol 341 c1468* <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1938/nov/21/racial-religious-and-political-minorities#column_1428> [accessed 21 May 2022].

³ Hansard, *Racial, Religious and Political Minorities, HC Deb 21 November 1938 vol 341 c1474* <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1938/nov/21/racial-religious-and-political-minorities#column_1428> [accessed 21 May 2022].

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Collect continued

Encourage the students to reflect on the following:

- In practice, this meant that the children, with only a few exceptions, could not be accompanied by their parents, and they had to be sponsored by welfare organisations who would pay a £50 bond as security so that the children would not be a burden on public finances.
- Critically, the Kindertransport was funded by private individuals and organised by welfare agencies. It was not a UK government initiative – and the speech by Samuel Hoare shows the limit (and potential underlying prejudice) of Britain's response.
- The Kindertransport scheme ultimately rescued nearly 10,000 children. This was, of course, only a devastatingly small fraction of the six million Jews who would be murdered in the Holocaust – and the vast majority of Kindertransport children never saw their parents again.
- The evidence in **Handout 1**, therefore, provides an opportunity for students to reflect on the complexity of the Kindertransport story – rather than seeing it as a wholly positive example of British humanitarian commitment.

Next, the students will be hearing from Irene Kirstein Watts, a child survivor who came to Wales during the 1930s to escape Nazi persecution.

Ask the students to read the **biography (student worksheet)** for Irene and watch the **video clip**, where Irene describes some of her experiences of being a survivor and a Kindertransport refugee in Britain during and after the war.

Then, working in groups/pairs, ask the students to answer the questions on the **student worksheet (Task 3)**.

Encourage students to reflect on the complexity of the survivor experience during the Holocaust. Irene's testimony relating to her childhood experiences in Britain reveals the family, language, social, religious, and cultural pressures she faced, together with explicit prejudice and other barriers to belonging to her new community. It also reveals how these experiences affected Irene throughout her life – and, for example, impacted her ability to be a parent, which demonstrates the inter-generational impact of Holocaust trauma.

The final question in **Task 3** is another opportunity for students to reflect on the complex range of factors that influenced the British government, institutions, charities, and individuals in their response to Nazism and the Holocaust – and the impact of those decisions on real lives.

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Construct

Task 4. Ask the students to write a newspaper article reporting on the UK House of Commons debate on 21 November 1938, based on the speeches set out in **Handout 1** (including the footnotes). Encourage the students to include the range of opinions expressed on how Britain should respond to Nazi persecution of Jews, the national historical context and the limits of the UK government's response.

Communicate

Ask the students to share their newspaper articles with a friend or a member of their family. How has their article added to their friend or family's understanding of Britain's response to the Nazis in the build-up to World War 2 and the Kindertransport? Write down some notes or keywords that reflect their response.

Appendices

1. Handout 1: Extracts from UK House of Commons Debate.
2. Handout 2: Glossary.
3. Handout 3: Video Transcription.
4. Handout 4: Student worksheet.

List of Activities

- Activity 1: Kindertransport and Child Refugees in Wales: Part 1 - Driving Forces.
- Activity 2: Kindertransport and Child Refugees in Wales: Part 2 - The Journey.
- Activity 3: Kindertransport and Child Refugees in Wales: Part 3 - Arrival in Wales.
- Activity 4: Jewish Life in Pre-War Europe – Identity, Diversity and Commonality.
- Activity 5: The Legal Effect: How Laws can Persecute or Protect.
- Activity 6: Prejudice and Propaganda.
- Activity 7: Britain and the Legacy of Loss - Part 1.
- Activity 8: Britain and the Legacy of Loss - Part 2.
- Activity 9: Re-thinking Responsibility.
- Activity 10: Resistance and Remembrance.



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Cover Image

Irene Kirstein Watts, with her mother (Margot Kirstein, in the centre) and her brother (Bernot Kirstein, on the right) taken in Berlin, 1935. Image from Irene Kirstein Watts's interview from the archive of the USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education, 1998. For more information: <http://sfi.usc.edu/>.



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