

# Music as Resistance

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What role does music play in my life?
- How can music be a tool for resistance to oppression and injustice?
- What role did music play in helping Holocaust survivors resist and persevere?
- How have individuals and groups used music in the past and the present to resist oppression?

## Overview

In this activity, students will investigate the importance of music as a tool for resistance to oppression and injustice. Using examples from both the past and present, students analyze different ways that music has been used and consider what it means to resist in the face of extreme adversity and injustice. Students will take action by then creating or personalizing a piece of music that represents a response to an issue important to them and demonstrates the power of music as a tool for resistance.

## Target Audience

Grades 9-12

## Activity Duration

Two 45-60 minute sessions

## Enduring Understandings

- Stories, such as those from refugees and genocide survivors, can help students connect to important skills and themes of self-awareness such as resilience, persistence, courage, and hope.
- When faced with overwhelming adversity, individuals find ways to exhibit agency for themselves and empower others.
- Music, though often used as a form of comfort, has also been an important tool for speaking up against oppression and injustice.

## Historical Background for Educator

In 1932, Adolf Hitler, leader of the nationalistic, antisemitic and racist National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party), was elected to the German Reichstag (Parliament). In January 1933,

### Materials

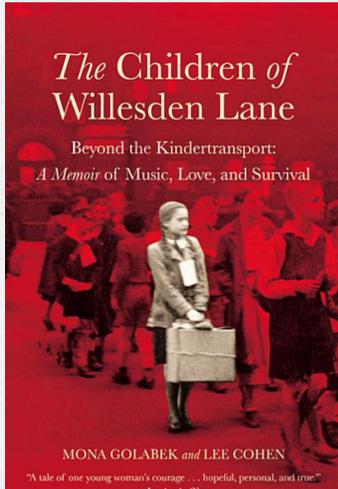
- Copies of *The Children of Willesden Lane* (9-12 Edition)
- Think-Pair-Share Handout (One per student)
- Excerpts from *The Children of Willesden Lane*
- Testimony as a Primary Source Analysis Chart Handout (Three per student)
- SCIM-C Chart Handout (One per student)
- Music as Resistance Personal Reflection Handout (One per student)

he was appointed Chancellor by President von Hindenburg. From 1933 until 1939, the Nazi government enacted hundreds of increasingly restrictive and discriminatory laws and decrees that banned Jews from all aspects of German public life. During World War II, the Nazis systematically targeted Jews in Nazi-occupied territories. Jews were forced to wear identifying symbols, relocate to heavily crowded ghettos, and participate in forced labor. Millions of Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. The Nazis also targeted racial, political, or ideological groups deemed “inferior” or “undesirable”—“Roma (Gypsies), homosexuals, Slavic peoples, the mentally and physically disabled, Socialists, Communists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

On November 9–10th, 1938, Jewish homes, shops, and houses of worship were destroyed during Kristallnacht (The Night of Broken Glass). This Nazi-sponsored violence occurred throughout Germany and in the German-annexed territories of Austria and the Sudetenland (in Czechoslovakia). Following Kristallnacht, and after a debate in the British House of Commons, Great Britain agreed to help an unspecified number of orphans and child refugees.

Kindertransport, a German term meaning children’s transport, was the informal name of a series of rescue efforts that brought thousands of refugee Jewish Children to Great Britain from Nazi-held lands between 1938 and 1940. The first Kindertransport left Berlin, Germany on December 1st, 1938, and arrived in Harwich, Great Britain on December 2nd, 1938. Transports continued to leave from major cities such as Berlin, Vienna, and Prague, until September 1st, 1939, the day World War II began. The last transport left from the Netherlands on May 14th, 1940—four days after the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands. Once the children arrived in Great Britain, they were sent to live with foster families. If no family had been found for them, the children were sent to hostels, boarding schools or farms. Between 9,000 and 10,000 children were saved, including 7,500 Jewish children.

*The Children of Willesden Lane* is the inspirational story of Lisa Jura, who was born on April 21st, 1924 in Vienna, Austria. She grew up in a Jewish family with her parents, Abraham and Malka, and her sisters, Rosie and Sonia. From an early age, Lisa was a piano prodigy who dreamt of becoming a concert pianist. She spent hours practicing and taking piano lessons until it was forbidden by the Nazis, who entered Vienna in 1938. When the Nazis took over Austria, the anti-Jewish laws made life restricting and dangerous for all Jews, including Lisa’s family. Her parents were desperate to try to save the lives of their daughters. Abraham



managed to procure one ticket on a Kindertransport (“Children’s Transport”), a rescue operation that evacuated children from Nazi-occupied Europe. Most, but not all, of the children rescued were Jewish. Abraham and Malka made the difficult decision to send Lisa; they felt her music would give her strength to survive an uncertain future.

Refugees today have no choice but to flee their homes when they are threatened by conflict and persecution. They often encounter immense challenges and adversity in their journeys, including exposure to extreme weather conditions, lack of access to proper food, shelter, education, and job opportunities.

Because they are forced to confront difficult circumstances and trauma, studying the stories of refugees and genocide survivors can offer students valuable case studies on skills and character traits they can develop for overcoming adversity in their own lives. For example, Lisa Jura’s dedication to musical performance gave her a sense of purpose and helped her maintain the resilience needed to overcome adversity as a Holocaust survivor and refugee.

### Sources

- <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-jewish-refugees-1933-1939>
- <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/teaching-about-refugees.html>
- <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>
- [https://assets.ctfassets.net/r2fjqekz37jz/5Fq4hMCkvHCxiSS0OdFwYm/817f5df21f5a7c9d6b444c1a62d43aea/Brief\\_Histories\\_-\\_Kindertransport.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/r2fjqekz37jz/5Fq4hMCkvHCxiSS0OdFwYm/817f5df21f5a7c9d6b444c1a62d43aea/Brief_Histories_-_Kindertransport.pdf)



## Procedure

### Ask

- 1** Begin the activity by placing the word “Resistance” where all students can see it. Share with students that the Cambridge English Dictionary defines resistance as “the act of fighting against something that is attacking you, or refusing to accept something.” Invite students to add to that definition using their own words, or share how they would define the word. As students share, explain that resistance usually means refusing to comply or accept something. Next, based on their working definition, ask students to share examples of resistance that they can think of. Students might share ideas like protesting, refusing to do something, arguing...etc.
  
- 2** Share with students that resistance can take many forms, and today they will take a closer look at how music and artistic expression can serve as important forms of resistance to oppression or injustice. As the lesson begins, ask students to reflect on the following prompt as they begin thinking to themselves about specific songs, artists, or genres that might highlight the theme of resistance, they will use these at the end of the activity.
  - What role does music play in my life?
  - How can music be a tool for resistance to oppression and injustice?
  
- 3** Next, play the first 1 minute and 30 seconds of *Get Up Stand Up* by Bob Marley and the Wailers. Students will use the Think-Pair-Share Handout to structure student analysis of the elements of resistance to oppression or injustice featured in the sample music.
  - First, students will think about how the song represents the concept of resistance to oppression or injustice, and record those items on their Think-Pair-Share handout.
  - Next, students will pair with a partner in the classroom to compare notes.
  
- 4** Now, lead a brief discussion in which students share their thoughts about music as resistance with the whole class. Through this discussion, highlight explanations of why *Get Up Stand Up* might highlight themes, words, or feelings connected with resistance. Examples include the theme of human dignity through the lyrics “get up, stand up,” and the theme of perseverance through the lyrics “don’t give up the fight.” The following questions can support this class discussion:
  - What are some common themes that you and your partner identified in the *Get Up Stand Up* song excerpt?
  - How does this song inspire or encourage others to resist, and how does that resistance relate to strength and human dignity? Are there specific words, phrases, beats, or tones that showcase this?
  - Why do you think music has the potential to sustain people through hard times?

### Analyze

- 5 To strengthen the connections made in the “ask” phase, students will revisit the story of Lisa Jura from *The Children of Willesden Lane*. Using the excerpts from *The Children of Willesden Lane* handout, students will analyze parts of Lisa’s story and learn more about how music was a valuable tool for perseverance and a way to defy and resist the circumstances forced upon her.
- 6 You might choose to have students work in small groups to read through the excerpts or have students work independently. As students read and complete the handout, invite students to discuss the different examples from the book and how they showcase the different ways music was a form of resistance for Lisa.
- 7 Next, share that Lisa’s story may have opened student’s thinking towards other examples of how music played an important role in the face of oppression and genocide. Ask the class to consider what else they think they could learn from hearing firsthand accounts from those who used music as a form of resistance? After hearing a few responses, distribute the Using the Testimony as a Primary Source Analysis Handout, explain that students will have a chance to learn from others by analyzing three testimonies that call attention to the power of music as a form of resistance during the Holocaust and World War II.
- 8 Before viewing testimony, help students understand the importance of:
  - paying attention to the speaker’s tone of voice and body language;
  - considering the context and perspectives of the witness;
  - focusing on the personal story of the testimony as opposed to facts and figures.
- 9 When viewing testimony, help strengthen the experience by
  - providing students with the biographies of the survivors providing testimony;
  - pausing clips to allow time for students to reflect, record thoughts, questions, and ideas;
  - engaging students in investigations using active inquiry; and
  - promoting interdisciplinary thinking and learning through common, recurring themes and;
  - creating connections to their own lives and personal experiences.
- 10 Testimonies for Analysis
  - [Halina Nelken](#) (3:17)  
Halina Nelkin, a Jewish survivor, describes how musical concerts were organized in the ghetto, describing it as “living by culture.”
  - [Kurt Messerschmidt](#) (3:17)  
Kurt Messerschmidt, a Jewish survivor, explains his own story of resistance through music.
  - [Rose Schwartz](#) (2:19)  
Rose Schwartz, a Jewish survivor, shares her experience as a child and how music helped her survive through difficult circumstances during the Holocaust.

- 11 When they have finished, students will discuss the reflective prompts from the Testimony as a Primary Source Analysis Handout and share important facts, emotions, and quotes from the testimonies that resonated with them. Students will also consider how different types of music, and even the act of creating music, were considered resistance.

### Apply

- 12 Students will apply what they have learned about music as a form of resistance by selecting a song to analyze. A few choices are included below and have been previewed for appropriate lyrics. Be sure to preview additional songs that you might add to the list.

- *Freedom* by Beyonce Featuring Kendrick Lamar (2016)
- *A Change is Gonna Come* by Sam Cooke (1964)
- *For What It's Worth* by Buffalo Springfield (1966)
- *What's Goin On* by Marvin Gaye (1971)
- *Fortunate Son* by Creedence Clearwater Revival (1969)
- Any other songs with themes of resistance to oppression and injustice, selected at the teacher's discretion.

**Note:** *be sure and listen to all lyrics to the song to ensure it is appropriate for the classroom.*

- 13 Using the SCIM-C Chart Handout, students will analyze their selected song and its representation of the theme of resistance to oppression or injustice through music by:
- summarizing key details about the song and artist(s);
  - contextualizing the production and performance of the song;
  - inferring the point of view(s) shared in the song;
  - monitoring what additional historical evidence may be needed to effectively understand the song as a historical source; and
  - {Optional, if time permits} corroborating the themes of this song with additional songs of the time period.
- 14 As students are working on their analysis, provide support for students by encouraging questions about context and interpretation. Students may not know the context from which the song was written or performed, research beyond the information provided through this plan may be needed to fully complete the SCIM-C Chart. Upon conclusion of their individual song analysis, students will complete a reflection prompt through which they will interpret the meaning of their selected song and how it provides an example of music as a form of resistance.

### Act

- 15 Students will begin by identifying a current issue of oppression or injustice that they have heard about, witnessed, or experienced in their lives.
- 16 Then, using the Music as Resistance Personal Reflection Handout, students will create their own piece of music that represents a response to the current issue they have identified.
- 17 In order to create multiple entry points for students in this activity, they could also arrange a piece of music, write original lyrics, or repurpose an existing song as a response to their identified issue of oppression or injustice today.
- 18 Through this exercise, students will explore issues that affect them, their community and others around the world. This exercise draws upon student interest while meeting them where their skills/interests intersect, and it also provides an opportunity for students to share their work with other people than their peers in class and take action on contemporary issues using music as a form of resistance.

### Connections

Connection to Student Lives	Connection to Contemporary Events	Connection to the Future
Students will develop their knowledge of the concept of music as a form of resistance to oppression and injustice and identify the relationship between resistance, strength and human dignity.	Students will analyze examples of how music has been used as a tool for resistance in the past in order to discover for themselves how they can use music as a tool to resist current day oppression or injustice.	Students can use their knowledge of music as a form of resistance and the relationship between resistance, strength, and human dignity to inform future student advocacy to support resistance efforts.

### Clips of Testimony

- Halina Nelkin, a Jewish survivor, describes how musical concerts were organized in the ghetto, describing it as “living by culture.”
- Kurt Messerschmidt, a Jewish survivor, explains his own story of resistance through music.
- Rose Schwartz, a Jewish survivor, shares her experience as a child and how music helped her survive through difficult circumstances during the Holocaust.

### National Standards and Frameworks

#### C3

D2.His.4.6-8. Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

D3.1.6-8. Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

D4.2.6-8. Construct explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples, and details with relevant information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations.

D4.8.6-8. Apply a range of deliberative and democratic procedures to make decisions and take action in their classrooms and schools, and in out-of-school civic contexts.

#### Common Core ELA

SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.8.2 Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

SL.8.4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

#### CASEL's SEL Framework

**SELF-AWARENESS:** The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. This includes capacities to recognize one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose. Such as:

- Experiencing self-efficacy
- Having a growth mindset
- Developing interests and a sense of purpose

**The Willesden Project** is a global initiative that expands the reach of Lisa Jura's story of survival, resilience, and triumph as she struggles to come of age separated from her family during World War II, as originally shared by her daughter, author and concert pianist Mona Golabek, in *The Children of Willesden Lane* books and musical performances. [Learn more at The Willesden Project.](#)

#### Lisa of Willesden Lane:

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# Survivor and Witness Biographies



STUDENT HANDOUT

## Halina Nelkin

Halina Nelken, daughter of Edmund and Regina, was born in Kraków, Poland on September 20th, 1925. She and her younger brother, Feliks, played piano. Halina's family was Jewish, but they were not observant. The family attended synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and they observed Passover. After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, the Nelken family escaped to Eastern Poland. They returned to Nazi-occupied Kraków in November 1939. Life began to change for the Jews of Kraków in November 1939; Halina was not allowed to attend school. Later, Jews were forced to wear a white armband with a blue Star of David. Halina and her family were forced to move into the Kraków ghetto. While in the ghetto, Halina attended clandestine school, took care of children, and worked in a store. Throughout her time in the ghetto, Halina wrote a diary. Halina was deported from the ghetto in 1942. Between 1942 and 1945, Halina was imprisoned in Plaszow, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ravensbrück, and Malchow. Halina was liberated by Soviet Armed Forces at the Leipzig-Mansfield concentration camp. After the war, Halina was reunited with her mother and brother. Halina attended the University of Krakow. Halina married and had one child, Leszek. Halina and her husband divorced, and Halina moved to the United States. Halina has one grandchild, Jason. This interview was conducted on November 25th, 1945 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

## Kurt Messerschmidt

Kurt Messerschmidt was born on January 2nd, 1915, in Werneuchen, Germany, and was raised by his mother, Else. Kurt moved with his mother to Berlin in 1918, where Else was a seamstress and designer. Kurt had a younger half-brother, Henry Oertelt. In 1921, Kurt entered public school and also attended classes in Jewish education. Kurt excelled as a linguistics scholar, musician, and athlete. He represented his Gymnasium (high school) in an annual gymnastics competition in Berlin in 1932. In 1942, after the dissolution of his school, Kurt worked for a German furniture-moving firm whose owner, Mr. Schäffler, employed former Jewish educators to help them avoid deportation. Kurt's family remained in Berlin until 1943, when they were deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto. Kurt and his wife, Sonja, were married in Theresienstadt. Kurt was in many concentration camps, including Auschwitz-Birkenau, and he survived a death march. After the war, he was reunited with his wife and with his brother. Kurt's mother did not survive the Holocaust. Kurt and Sonja settled in Maine and had two children and two grandchildren. This interview took place on June 27th, 1997, in Portland, Maine.

## Rose Schwartz

Rose Schwartz (born Rose Halpert), daughter of Martin and Etel Perl, was born in Krivé, Czechoslovakia (now Krivé, Slovakia) on November 27th, 1926. The family was Orthodox. Rose had six siblings—four sisters and two brothers—and the family lived on a farm. Rose and her siblings attended public school, and their classmates were Jewish and non-Jewish children. On March 15th, 1939, Czechoslovakia was occupied by German armed forces. As a safety precaution, Rose was sent to live with her aunt, and her siblings were also sent away. During the war, Rose was forced to work in a brick factory. There, she was taught songs in Hungarian. Rose believes that the music she learned to sing helped her survive. After the war, Rose married Joseph Schwartz. They immigrated to the United States, where they raised their sons, Mark and Eddie. At the time of her interview, Rose had four grandchildren. This interview was conducted on December 15, 1995 in Margate, Florida.

# Think-Pair-Share



STUDENT HANDOUT

**Directions:** Use the Think-Pair-Share chart below to reflect on ways in which the concept of resistance is present in the excerpt of *Get Up Stand Up* by Bob Marley and the Wailers.

<b>Task</b>	<b>Your Thoughts</b> Record your thoughts in the space below
<p><b>Think</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What lyrics from the song represent the theme of resistance? Provide quotes or key words from those lyrics in your response.</li><li>2. How do the lyrics you selected above represent resistance?</li><li>3. How does this song inspire or encourage resistance?</li><li>4. Why do you think music has the potential to sustain people through hard times?</li></ol>	
<p><b>Pair</b></p> <p>Select a partner and compare your responses to the prompts above. Were your ideas similar? Were your ideas different?</p>	
<p><b>Share</b></p> <p>After having a discussion with your partner, participate in a whole class debrief. Were your ideas similar to others in the whole class? Were your ideas different from others in the whole class?</p>	

## Excerpts from *The Children of Willesden Lane*



### STUDENT HANDOUT

Excerpt from <i>The Children of Willesden Lane</i> .	How does the excerpt convey the concept of resistance through the use of music?
<p><b>Pages:</b> 7–9</p> <p><b>Begin with:</b> “The Cold November Wind...”</p> <p><b>End with:</b> “Outside an old woman...”</p> <p><b>Context:</b> The narrator describes Lisa’s life in Vienna and the importance of her love of music.</p>	
<p><b>Pages:</b> 26–29</p> <p><b>Begin with:</b> “The Westbahnhof station...”</p> <p><b>End with:</b> “Turning slowly above...”</p> <p><b>Context:</b> Lisa prepares to leave her family as she boards the train on her way to London.</p>	
<p><b>Pages:</b> 84–88</p> <p><b>Begin with:</b> “The station at Whitechapel...”</p> <p><b>End with:</b> “The room grew hushed...”</p> <p><b>Context:</b> At Willesden Lane, Lisa works up the courage to play the piano for the first time.</p>	
<p><b>Pages:</b> 141–145</p> <p><b>Begin with:</b> “No one got much sleep...”</p> <p><b>End with:</b> “They were officially homeless, once again...”</p> <p><b>Context:</b> Lisa dangerously plays the piano as bombs fall around her.</p>	

# Testimony as Primary Source Analysis Chart



STUDENT HANDOUT

Interviewee Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Experience Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Date and Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Relevant Info: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** As you watch the clip of testimony, write facts that are presented in the left column. Use the right column to note emotions the interviewee demonstrates.

<b>Facts: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How</b> List the topic, dates, event details, location (city, region, country), and names/groups.	<b>Emotions: What emotions did you notice?</b> Notice facial and body expressions, tone of voice, pauses, and word choice.
<b>Reflection Prompts</b> (After viewing the testimony clip)	
What event is this person recalling? How do they feel about the event?	
What role does resistance play in the event this person is describing? Who/what did they resist?	
How does the resistance described in this clip relate to strength and human dignity? How does participating in this act of resistance make this person feel?	



**Directions:** Use the chart below to analyze your selected song that demonstrates music as a form of resistance to oppression or injustice.

Title of Song: \_\_\_\_\_ Writer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Written: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Summarize</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What information, details, and perspectives does this song provide?</li> <li>■ What is the song about?</li> <li>■ Who was the author/artist?</li> </ul>	<b>Contextualize</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ When and where was this song produced?</li> <li>■ Why was the song produced?</li> <li>■ What was happening in the immediate and broader context at the time this song was produced?</li> </ul>	<b>Infer</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What does the song suggest?</li> <li>■ What perspectives or points of view are shared in this song?</li> <li>■ What interpretations may be drawn from this song?</li> </ul>	<b>Monitor</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What additional evidence beyond this song is needed to help you understand how this song represents resistance to oppression or injustice?</li> </ul>	<b>{Optional} Corroborate</b> Search for at least one more song related to the topic/event in your song: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What similarities and differences between the songs exist?</li> <li>■ What factors might account for these differences?</li> </ul>
<b>Interpret</b> How does your song provide an example of music as a form of resistance to oppression or injustice? How is the topic/event in your song similar to or different from events you have either witnessed or experienced in your life today?				

## Music as Resistance Personal Reflection



STUDENT HANDOUT

**Directions:** Now that you have analyzed multiple examples of music as resistance through testimony and other sources, take a moment to independently reflect on what this concept means to you. Then, consider at least one present day resistance movement to oppression or injustice that you are passionate about, and complete the prompt below.

In the space below, identify the present-day resistance movement you selected. Define the issues that the movement seeks to address, and explain how those issues relate to you, your community, and others around the world. Then, create your own piece of music that represents a response and encourages resistance to this issue. You may create your own piece of music, write your own original lyrics, or personalize the lyrics of a popular resistance song.