

The Jewish Refugee Crisis of the 1930s

Essential Questions

- What challenges confront refugees attempting to relocate to safe places? How does the experience of European Jews before World War II illustrate these challenges?
- How do groups who are victimized by crimes against humanity respond to these injustices?
- How do refugees demonstrate perseverance and resilience in response to displacement and human rights abuses?
- What international policies and programs are in place today to protect refugees?

Overview

This activity engages students in an analysis of accounts of Jewish refugees who attempted to flee Nazi Germany and German-occupied countries between 1933 and the beginning of World War II. Students then examine secondary sources to trace the escalation of the Nazis' persecution of European Jews and explain how the worldwide depression, nativism, and isolationism in potential destination countries presented challenges to refugees. After brainstorming policies and programs that could have minimized these challenges, students will analyze international agreements written after World War II to protect refugees, document character traits that help refugees survive adversity, and draft action plans to learn more about international relief efforts to help refugees.

Target Audience

Middle School Social Studies

Activity Duration

Two 45–60 minute class periods

Enduring Understandings

- Mass migration is a common response of groups threatened by crimes against humanity.
- Between 1933 and 1939, as Nazi Germany's discrimination policies escalated, millions of European Jews attempted to relocate to safety.
- The challenges confronted by Jewish refugees before and during World War II shaped international refugee protections that were written after the war.

Materials

- Whiteboard/blackboard and markers or chalk
- Copies of *The Children of Willesden Lane*
- Access to USC Shoah Foundation testimonies
- “How did life change when the Nazis took control?” Handout
- Sequencing table: “Jews in Prewar Germany”
- “The Evian Conference” organizer on barriers to safe passage
- The Jewish Refugee Crisis: Testimony Notetaking Guide
- Excerpts from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights handout
- Excerpts from “Convention and Protocol Regarding the Status of Refugees” from the UN Refugee Agency
- Document Analysis Form for UN refugee rights documents
- Modern-Day Refugee Crises: Testimony Notetaking Guide
- Writing an Action Plan for Learning about Refugee Relief Efforts handout
- Action Planner: Conducting Research on a Local, National, or International Refugee Relief Program

Background Information/Links

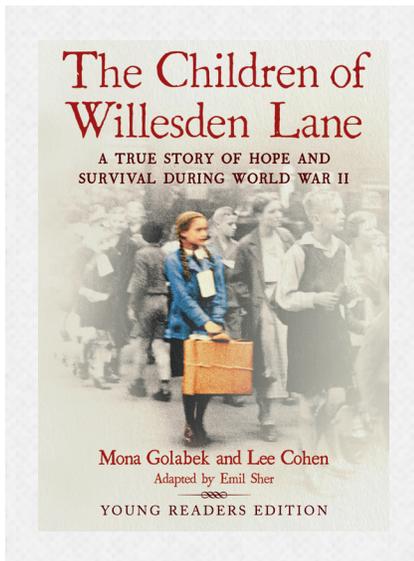
In 1932, Adolf Hitler was the leader of the nationalistic, antisemitic, and racist National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party). He was elected to the German Reichstag (Parliament), and in January 1933, he was appointed Chancellor by President von Hindenburg. After the Nazis staged a fire at the Reichstag, Hitler passed the Enabling Act, which allowed him to pass laws without the approval of the Reichstag or the President. This was the beginning of the end of the Weimar Republic. The Nazis established a single-party dictatorship referred to as the Third Reich. From 1933 until 1945 the Nazi government enacted hundreds of increasingly restrictive and discriminatory laws and decrees that banned Jews from all aspects of German public life.

In 1933, more than a half-million Jews lived in Germany (less than 1%), primarily in urban areas and especially in Berlin. When the Nazis initially took control over Germany, between 37,000 and 38,000 German Jews migrated to Germany's neighbors. These countries included Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Years later, during World War II, many of these refugees were captured and murdered in the Holocaust after Germany conquered many countries in western Europe in 1940.

Between 1933 and 1938, Nazi Germany's persecution of its Jewish citizens intensified. The government barred Jews from serving in the civil service, and the Nazis supported boycotts of Jewish-owned businesses. In 1935, the Nuremberg Race Laws denied German Jews their basic citizenship rights.

Despite these measures, Jewish migration from Germany stabilized during the mid-1930s as both European countries and the United States were reluctant to accept refugees. In the United States, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1924 had placed ceilings, or quotas, on the number of immigrants who would be permitted from specific countries each year. Once the Great Depression began in 1929, many unemployed Americans feared competition from immigrants for jobs. Antisemitism was also common in the United States and other countries.

Events in 1938 created a refugee crisis in Europe. Violence against Jews throughout Germany increased throughout the year and culminated with *Kristallnacht* on November 9 and 10. During this “Night of Broken Glass,” planned violent attacks, or pogroms, against Jews broke out throughout Germany in its occupied territories in Austria and Czechoslovakia. After *Kristallnacht*, Germany's government passed laws to remove Jews from



all areas of the country's public life, including public schools, employment, and even property ownership.

Jews living in Germany and other German-occupied territories responded to the events of 1938 with a dramatic increase in attempts to leave the country. Roughly 36,000 Jews left Germany and Austria in 1938, and 77,000 more fled in 1939. It was during this time that the United Kingdom admitted 10,000 Jewish children, without parents or siblings, in the Kindertransport program. *The Children of Willesden Lane* documents the experience of Lisa Jura, an Austrian girl whose parents arranged for her to flee on the Kindertransport after the German occupation of their country. Many more Jews attempted to leave but were denied by immigration quotas in destination countries. For example, between the beginning of 1938 and June of 1939, more than 300,000 German, Austrian, and Czech Jews applied to move to the United States, where immigration quotas capped the number of places available at just 27,000.

When World War II began in September of 1939, nearly 400,000 Jews left Germany and German-occupied Austria for safety in places such as the United States, British Mandate Palestine, Great Britain, South America, and Shanghai. About 163,000 remained in Germany in October of 1941 when the German government officially banned all Jewish emigration. The Nazis murdered most of those who remained during the Holocaust.

As illustrated by the experience of Jews living in German-controlled areas before World War II, refugees have no choice but to flee their homes because they are threatened by conflict and persecution. They often encounter immense challenges, including exposure to extreme weather conditions; lack of access to proper food, shelter, education, or job opportunities; and a future that is often dependent on conditions improving in the areas they needed to flee. Because of this, and in response to the experience of refugees seeking safety from the Holocaust, refugees are protected by international laws, including the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Convention. Refugees cannot be sent back to their home countries if doing so places them at risk. International law also guarantees the rights of refugees to enter and remain in other countries.

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.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf
- <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>



Procedure

Ask

- 1 If necessary, the class will review the setting and historical context of *The Children of Willesden Lane* with the teacher ensuring that the students know that the story begins in Vienna, Austria, after Nazi Germany has annexed, or taken control of, Austria.
- 2 The teacher will distribute or display on the screen the graphic organizer for completing the Ask engagement activity. The teacher will direct pairs of students to revisit text

from the first three chapters of *The Children of Willesden Lane* and respond to the question, “How did life change when the Nazis took control?” In full class discussion, the class will list changes on the board. (Examples: changed street names, Lisa no longer able to take piano lessons, her father no longer able to do business with Gentiles, public violence against Jews)

- 3 The teacher will tell students that USC Shoah Foundation has compiled videotaped testimonies of Jews describing their experiences living in Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied territory. The teacher will pose the following questions: Why are eyewitness accounts from Jewish survivors valuable sources of information for learning about life in Nazi Germany? What can we learn from them that we cannot learn from textbook accounts? What might be the limitations of testimonies as sources of information? Pairs of students will discuss responses to these questions, and the teacher will facilitate a brief full group discussion of the responses, listing on the blackboard or whiteboard the strengths and possible limitations of testimonies as sources of information.
- 4 The teacher will tell the class they are about to see the testimony of two Jewish survivors of the Holocaust describing their experiences with antisemitism during the 1930s—Herman Cohn and Kurt Klein. As the pairs watch the testimony segments, they will repeat the previous exercise by using their organizer to compile a list of ways in which life changed for Cohn and Klein after the Nazis gained control of Germany. Once this is completed, the teacher can also ask, “What questions do you still have about Herman Cohn’s and Kurt Klein’s experiences?”
- 5 The teacher will ask, “What do you think are some ways in which Jews living in Nazi Germany responded to the discrimination and human rights abuses that Lisa, Herman, and Kurt experienced?” The teacher will call on volunteers to share ideas and then announce that in this lesson, the class will focus on one common response to discrimination: migration.
- 6 The teacher will ask the students to consider the question, “Based on the experiences of Lisa, Herman, and Kurt, what challenges do you think people who attempted to flee Nazi Germany faced on their journeys to safety?”

Analyze

- 7 The teacher will ask students what they know about the Nazis’ persecution of European Jews before and during World War II, ensuring that students are aware of the meaning of key terms such as “Holocaust,” “discrimination,” and “persecution.” The teacher will announce

that students will examine secondary sources to learn more about how the Nazis' anti-Jewish policies escalated between 1933 and the beginning of World War II in 1939.

- 8 Pairs will read and explore years 1933–1937 in the [Echoes & Reflections Timeline of the Holocaust](#). As students read, they will complete a sequence chart documenting key events in the escalation of anti-Jewish policies in Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied territories, including the nationwide boycott of Jewish business, the Nuremberg Laws, and Kristallnacht.
- 9 After checking sequence charts for accuracy, the teacher will ask, “How did changing conditions affect choices made by Lisa’s family in *The Children of Willesden Lane*?”
- 10 The teacher will announce that next, the class will examine how conditions and attitudes in possible destination countries affected German Jews’ attempts to migrate. Pairs will examine materials from the entry titled article “The Evian Conference” (July 6, 1938) on the [Echoes & Reflections Timeline of the Holocaust](#). As students read, they will complete an organizer identifying and explaining various factors that created barriers to Jews migrating to safety, including the Great Depression existing immigration policies, and antisemitism.
- 11 Students will view the following testimonies and document challenges encountered by Jewish refugees, completing notetaking organizers for each, along with Lisa Jura in *The Children of Willesden Lane*:

Kurt Klein (1:56)

<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Watch.aspx?testimonyID=9610&segmentNumber=0&returnIndex=0&contentView=1&pg=2>

Herman Cohn (1:56)

<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Watch.aspx?testimonyID=25551&segmentNumber=0&returnIndex=0&contentView=1&pg=2>

Vera Gissing (5:59)

<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Watch.aspx?testimonyID=22915&segmentNumber=0&returnIndex=0&contentView=1&pg=2>

Elena Nightingale (3:35)

<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Watch.aspx?testimonyID=31809&segmentNumber=0&returnIndex=0&contentView=1&pg=2>

Note: If possible, arrange for students to view the testimonies in the order in which they appear here, as they reflect the increasing challenges faced by refugees as the 1930s progressed and World War II began.

- 12 In think pair, share, the teacher will ask, “What character traits were displayed by refugees on their journeys to safety? What character traits were displayed by the people who helped them?”

Apply

- 13 In a full-class discussion, the teacher will ask students to reflect on *The Children of Willesden Lane*, the Holocaust Timeline materials, and the Shoah Foundation testimonies to make a list of barriers and challenges that limited the safe passage of Jewish refugees before World War II (Examples: families were separated, visas were difficult to obtain, countries implemented

quotas and other immigration restrictions, antisemitism in destination countries). The teacher will ensure that students realize many Jews who were unable to locate as a result of these challenges lost their lives when the Nazis implemented the Final Solution during World War II.

- 14 The teacher will ask pairs of students to brainstorm policies and/or programs in destination countries that could have saved lives and briefly ask students to share ideas.
- 15 The teacher will distribute or display text from international legal documents regarding human rights for refugees:
 - Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights
 - Excerpts from the UN Refugee Agency’s “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” which includes the text of the “1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.”
- 16 Using the supporting materials, students will closely read the excerpts, summarize the purpose of each document, identify key words and phrases from each, and identify protections that would have made a difference for Jewish refugees during World War II. As needed, the teacher will ask groups to share ideas and clarify the meaning of each excerpt in full class discussion.

Act

- 17 The teacher will ask students if they can identify some places with large numbers of refugees in today’s world (anticipated responses: Syria, Central America) and briefly describe the Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar (Burma) and Bangladesh. The teacher will introduce and play for the class the USC Shoah Foundation testimony of Jamela Khatun. Students will record notes about the testimony on an organizer.
- 18 The teacher will facilitate a full-class discussion around the following questions: “What experiences and character traits connect Jamela’s experience with Jewish refugees from the 1930s, including Lisa in *The Children of Willesden Lane*?”
- 19 The teacher will notify students that, as with the Kindertransport in the late 1930s, there are many organizations and relief efforts in today’s world to support refugees. The teacher will announce that students will create action plans for researching to learn more about these efforts.

Connections

Connection to Student Lives	Connection to Contemporary Events	Connection to the Future
Students will create action plans for researching to learn more about efforts to help refugees.	Students will connect the experiences of Jewish refugees during the 1930s with the experiences of refugees today.	Students will gather information about the experiences of refugees to correct misconceptions and learn more about relief efforts.

Clips of Testimony

■ Kurt Klein

Kurt Klein recalls how his relationships with his non-Jewish friends and acquaintances changed as discrimination against Jews intensified. In the second segment, he describes his experience moving to the United States.

■ Herman Cohn

Herman Cohn describes how the Nuremberg Laws changed his life as a child growing up in Nazi Germany and contrasts his childhood perspective on discrimination with that of his parents. In the second segment, Cohn explains how he was able to leave Germany and move to the United States despite the American quota system.

■ Vera Gissing

Vera Gissing recalls her parents' decision to send her and her sister on the Kindertransport from Czechoslovakia to England in 1939. She describes saying goodbye to her parents at the train station in Prague and the journey to England on the Kindertransport.

■ Elena Nightingale

Elena Nightingale describes her extended family's extraordinary efforts to escape the Nazis in Italy during World War II.

■ Jamela Khatun

Jamela Khatun describes how her life changed during the government of Myanmar's crackdown on Rohingya Muslims, including her journey to a refugee camp in Bangladesh.

National Standards

College, Career and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards

D2.Civ.7.6.8 Apply civic virtues and democratic principles in school and community settings.

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.

D4.4.6-8 Draw on multiple disciplinary lenses to analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at local, regional, and global levels over time, identifying its characteristics and causes, and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem.

D4.7.6-8 Assess their individual and collective capabilities to take action to address local, regional, and global problems, taking into account a range of possible levers of power, strategies, and potential outcomes.

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 State Standards for English Language Arts

RI.8.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

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.

W.8.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

The Willesden Project brings the power of music, technology, and story to reshape the ways in which students learn about the history of the Holocaust and resonant themes. Learn more at: <https://iwitness.usc.edu/willesdenproject>.

How did life change when the Nazis took control?



How did life change when the Nazis took control? Make a list of life changes for each individual and their families.

Lisa from *The Children of Willesden Lane*
(consult the first three chapters)

Kurt Klein (USC Shoah Foundation testimony)

Herman Cohn
(USC Shoah Foundation testimony)



STUDENT HANDOUT

As you examine the Echoes & Reflections Timeline of the Holocaust, use the sequencing table to list actions the Nazis took against Germany's Jewish population. Record these events in chronological order.

Action	When did this begin/take place?	Summary



STUDENT HANDOUT

As you read timeline entry “The Evian Conference” (July 6, 1938), use the organizer below to explain how each factor created barriers for Jews attempting to flee the escalating persecution in Nazi-controlled areas.

Factor	How did this factor create a barrier for Jews attempting to leave Nazi-controlled areas?
The Great Depression	
Immigration Policies in the United States and other countries	
Antisemitism	

The Jewish Refugee Crisis: Testimony Notetaking Guide



STUDENT HANDOUT

<p>1. Identify the speaker Name, Age/DOB, Experience Group. What are the speaker's credentials to speak about the Jewish refugee crisis of the 1930s?</p>	
<p>2. Topic What aspect of the crisis is the witness speaking about in the selected segment? Summarize the content of the testimony.</p>	
<p>3. Tone What is the speaker's attitude towards the subject? What diction/word choices provide clues about the speaker's point of view?</p>	
<p>Why is this segment of testimony an important source of information for documenting challenges Jews faced attempting to flee to safety?</p>	
<p>What questions does the testimony raise?</p>	

Excerpts from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights



STUDENT HANDOUT

1. Preamble

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law...

...Now, therefore, The General Assembly [of the United Nations],

Proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

2. Article 14

1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Excerpts from “Convention and Protocol Regarding the Status of Refugees,” from the United Nations Refugee Agency



Excerpt 1

IV. The Conference adopted unanimously the following recommendations:

B

(Principle of unity of the family)

THE CONFERENCE,

CONSIDERING that the unity of the family, the natural and fundamental group unit of society, is an essential right of the refugee, and that such unity is constantly threatened, and

NOTING with satisfaction that...the rights granted to a refugee are extended to members of his family, recommends Governments to take the necessary measures for the protection of the refugee's family especially with a view to:

- (1) Ensuring that the unity of the refugee's family is maintained particularly in cases where the head of the family has fulfilled the necessary conditions for admission to a particular country,
- (2) The protection of refugees who are minors, in particular unaccompanied children and girls, with special reference to guardianship and adoption.

C

(Welfare services)

THE CONFERENCE,

CONSIDERING that, in the moral, legal and material spheres, refugees need the help of suitable welfare services, especially that of appropriate nongovernmental organizations [such as the International Red Cross/Red Crescent]

RECOMMENDS Governments and inter-governmental bodies to facilitate, encourage and sustain the efforts of properly qualified organizations.



Excerpt 2

Article 3

NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Contracting States shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin.

Article 16

ACCESS TO COURTS

1. A refugee shall have free access to the courts of law on the territory of all Contracting States...

Article 17

WAGE-EARNING EMPLOYMENT

1. The Contracting State shall accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory the most favourable treatment accorded to nationals of a foreign country in the same circumstances, as regards the right to engage in wageearning employment...

Article 22

PUBLIC EDUCATION

1. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education...

Article 26

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

1. Each Contracting State shall accord to refugees lawfully in its territory the right to choose their place of residence to move freely within its territory, subject to any regulations applicable to aliens generally in the same circumstances...

Article 27

IDENTITY PAPERS

1. The Contracting States shall issue identity papers to any refugee in their territory who does not possess a valid travel document...

Article 32

EXPULSION

1. The Contracting States shall not expel a refugee lawfully in their territory save on grounds of national security or public order...

IN FAITH WHEREOF the undersigned, duly authorized, have signed this Convention on behalf of their respective Governments,

DONE at Geneva, this twenty-eighth day of July, one thousand nine hundred and fifty-one, in a single copy, of which the English and French texts are equally authentic and which shall remain deposited in the archives of the United Nations, and certified true copies of which shall be delivered to all Members of the United Nations and to the non-member States referred to in article 39.

Document Analysis Form



STUDENT HANDOUT

Excerpt 1: Preamble and Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In your own words, summarize the purpose of the excerpted document.

What are the most important key words and phrases in the excerpt?

In what way or ways does the document address challenges that Jewish refugees faced during the 1930s?

What are the limitations on this documents' effectiveness in protecting the human rights of people who move to flee violence and/or persecution?

Document Analysis Form



STUDENT HANDOUT

Excerpt 2: “Convention and Protocol Regarding the Status of Refugees”

<p>In your own words, summarize the purpose of the excerpted document.</p>
<p>What are the most important key words and phrases in the excerpt?</p>
<p>In what way or ways does the document address specific challenges that Jewish refugees faced during the 1930s?</p>
<p>What are the limitations on this documents' effectiveness in protecting the human rights of people who move to flee violence and/or persecution?</p>

Modern-Day Refugee Crises: Testimony Notetaking Guide



STUDENT HANDOUT

<p>3. Identify the speaker Name, Age/DOB, Experience Group. What are Jamela's credentials to speak about refugee crises in today's world?</p>	<p>Name: JAMELA KHATUN</p>
<p>4. Topic What aspect of the refugee experience is Jamela speaking about in the selected segment? Summarize the content of the testimony.</p>	
<p>5. Tone What is Jamela's attitude toward the subject? What diction/word choices provide clues about her point of view?</p>	
<p>Why is Jamela's testimony an important source of information for understanding the common experiences of refugees in today's world?</p>	
<p>What questions does the testimony raise?</p>	

Writing an Action Plan for Learning about Refugee Relief Efforts



STUDENT HANDOUT

An action plan describes how an individual or group will meet a chosen set of objectives. It provides detailed action steps and describes how these steps will be taken. In this project, you will draft an action plan for learning more about a local, national, or international relief effort to help refugees confront the challenges you learned about in this lesson.

An excellent action plan meets three criteria:

- It is *complete*. It includes all the steps your group will take to research a relief effort for refugees.
- It is *clear*. To meet group objectives, it is clear who will do what and when.
- It is *current*. It reflects the most current work of refugee relief organizations and anticipates opportunities and/or barriers your group might confront while completing its research.

The next page includes a template your group can use for its action plan.

Action Planner: Conducting Research on a Local, National, or International Refugee Relief Program



Describe your group's goal. What do you hope to achieve by conducting this research?					
Action Step	Responsible Person(s) Who will take the lead on this step? Who else will be involved?	Deadline When will this step need to be completed so the group can move on to the next step on time?	Resources Needed What will we need to complete the step? How much time might it take?	Possible Challenges What challenges might keep us from completing the step effectively on time? How will we address these?	Result Was the step completed? When?
Step 1: Identifying an Organization to Research					

Action Planner: Conducting Research on a Local, National, or International Refugee Relief Program



Action Step	Responsible Person(s) Who will take the lead on this step? Who else will be involved?	Deadline When will this step need to be completed so the group can move on to the next step on time?	Resources Needed What will we need to complete the step? How much time might it take?	Possible Challenges What challenges might keep us from completing the step effectively on time? How will we address these?	Result Was the step completed? When?

Survivor and Witness Biographies



STUDENT HANDOUT

Kurt Klein, a Holocaust liberator and survivor, was born in 1920 in Walldorf, Baden, Germany, and died in 2002. He was forced to drop out of school around the time of his bar mitzvah as persecution of Jews intensified in Nazi Germany. At the age of 16, he moved to the United States in 1937, a year after his sister, who arranged for him to receive a support affidavit. He worked multiple jobs to secure funds to also move his parents to the United States. At one point, Klein's parents made it to France, but indifference on the part of American officials and the beginning of the war prevented their safe passage. Both of Klein's parents died at Auschwitz. Klein was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1942, and during World War II, he served in the Fifth Infantry Division in France, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. When patrolling the town of Volary, Czechoslovakia, he helped to liberate 120 young Jewish women from a factory that had been abandoned by SS guards. One of the women, Gerda Weissman, became his wife. Gerda and Kurt Klein started a foundation and devoted their lives to human rights advocacy after World War II.

Herman Cohn, a Holocaust liberator and survivor, was born in Essen, Prussia, Germany, in 1921 and died in 2016. Cohn was the son of a successful Prussian linen manufacturer, but his family fled to the Netherlands in 1937 as the Nazis' persecution of Jews intensified. They moved to the United States in 1939. Cohn enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942 and served in Germany during World War II, where he visited the liberated Dachau concentration camp, guarded high-level SS prisoners, and helped seize the homes of high-level Nazi leaders for American soldiers' lodging. After World War II, Cohn opened a well-known clothing store in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago and shared his experiences of the Holocaust with school children. In 2015, he returned to Germany to participate in a documentary about the liberators of Dachau.

Vera Gissing, a Jewish survivor, was born in 1928 in Prague, Czechoslovakia. In her early life, she lived with her parents and sister in a town outside of Prague. After Germany invaded and occupied even more of Czechoslovakia in 1939, Gissing's family was forced to house a German commandant who treated them with cruelty. During that time, Gissing's mother searched for a way to send her two daughters to safety. Through Nicholas Winton, she was able to arrange to have them move to England on the Kindertransport. Winton paid families 50 pounds each to care for children until they reached the age of 17. Once in England, Vera and her sister lived with separate foster families, with Vera settling in Liverpool and eventually attending a school for Czech refugees in Wales. Both of Gissing's parents died in the Holocaust. After the war, Gissing briefly moved back to Prague but resettled in England. She used her diaries from her World War II experiences to write the book *Pearls of Childhood*. She worked as a translator, interpreter, and editor for several publishers. She was in contact with Winton until his death in 2015 and collaborated on his biography.

Elena Nightingale, a Jewish survivor, was born in 1932 in Livorno, Tuscany, Italy. Nightingale spent her early childhood in Livorno until age 7. In Italy, she had a close-knit, middle-class family and was one of four daughters with many Jewish and Christian friends. Italy's antisemitic laws prohibited Nightingale from attending public school, and her father lost both his job and his position in the military reserve. In 1939, her family decided to leave for the United States, and they settled in a small apartment in New York City. Nightingale graduated summa cum laude from Barnard College and earned a Doctor of Medicine from New York University. She worked as a pediatric geneticist and medical scholar and served on the board of Amnesty International.

Jamela Khatun, Rohingya survivor, was born in Kyuang Taung, Rakhine, Myanmar, (Burma) in 1976. In her early life, she lived with her parents and three siblings in a farming community and attended a local madrasa. On several occasions, Khatun and her family fled to different places in Myanmar to escape persecution against the Rohingya by her region's Rakhine majority. In August of 2017, after Rakhines began committing acts of genocide, Khatun and other Rohingyas escaped on foot to Bangladesh where they reside in a large refugee camp.