

# Overcoming Adversity

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What do the terms adversity and resilience mean?
- What skills and traits do people develop when overcoming adversity?
- How can people work together to support each other during difficult times?

## Overview

This activity engages students with a discussion of the meaning of the terms “adversity” and “resilience,” especially when discussing refugees. Students will reflect on *Lisa of Willesden Lane* to cite examples of adversity faced by Lisa Jura, the book’s central figure, who was a Jewish refugee on the Kindertransport. Students will connect the ability to overcome adversity with character traits such as resilience and determination, apply this understanding to a video testimony from a Kindertransport survivor, reflect on individuals they are familiar with who exemplify these traits, and create award certificates to recognize someone they know for overcoming adversity.

## Target Audience

Grade 3-5

## Activity Duration

Two 45-60 minute class periods

## Enduring Understandings

- It is important to discuss both the adversity refugee’s face, as well as their resilience in response to challenging circumstances.
- SEL skills like Self-Awareness prioritize students’ personal and social identities and build individual agency in overcoming adversity.
- Refugees, such as children involved in the Kindertransport, exhibit skills and traits that serve as a model for people dealing with many types of adversity.

## Materials

- Copies of *Lisa of Willesden Lane*
- Key Vocabulary: *Lisa of Willesden Lane* handout (display only)
- “Adversity” and “Resilience” term and definition (one per student)
- Images that represent adversity (display only)
- Kindertransport routes and historical timeline (display only)
- What adversity did Lisa face handout (one per student)?
- Character traits “glossary” handout, reflection prompt, and table (one per student)
- Certificate instructions handout (one per student)

## Historical Background for Educator Kindertransport and Refugees

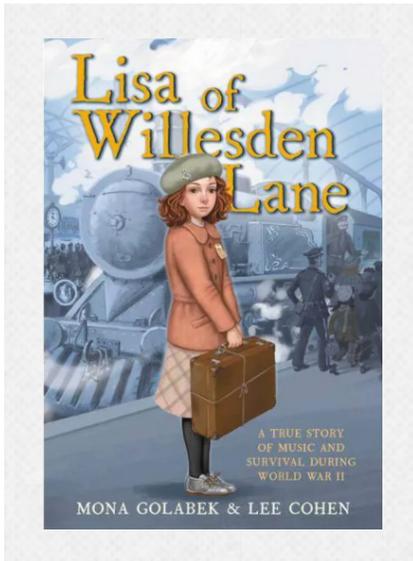
Kindertransport, a German term meaning children’s transport, was the informal name of a series of rescue efforts that brought thousands of refugee Jewish Children to Great Britain from Nazi-held lands between 1938 and 1940. After Kristallnacht, an organized massacre of German Jews, the British government eased immigration restrictions to allow children under the age of 17 to enter Great Britain from Germany and German-annexed territories (Austria and Czechoslovakia). Private citizens or organizations had to guarantee payment for each child’s care, education, and eventual emigration from Britain. In return, the British government agreed to allow unaccompanied refugee children to enter the country on temporary travel visas. It was understood that parents or guardians could not accompany the children, but once the war ended, the children would return to their families.

The last transport from Germany left on September 1, 1939, just as World War II began. The last transport from the Netherlands left for Britain on May 14, 1940, the same day that the Dutch army surrendered to German forces. In all, the rescue operation brought about 9,000–10,000 children from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland to Great Britain. Some 7,500 of these children were Jewish. Many children from the Kindertransport program became citizens of Great Britain, or emigrated to Israel, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Most of them would never again see their parents, who had been murdered during the Holocaust.

Similar to the experience of Jews living in Nazi-controlled areas before World War II, 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.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR\\_Translations/eng.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf)
- <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>

## Social-Emotional Learning

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning is the leading organization advancing the promotion of integrated academic, social, and emotional learning for children in Pre-K through Grade 12. This organization has developed the following five interrelated core competencies for effective social and emotional learning:

- **Self-Awareness** concentrates on understanding your emotions and thoughts and how they influence your behavior. Skills include self-perception, self-confidence, and self-efficacy.
- **Self-Management** emphasizes your ability to regulate your emotions and behaviors in different situations, as well as how to set and work toward goals. Skills include impulse control, executive function, stress-management, and self-discipline.
- **Responsible Decision-Making** highlights your ability to make positive choices and take responsibility for positive and negative outcomes. Skills include identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, and reflection.
- **Social Awareness** focuses on your ability to empathize with others. Skills include empathy, appreciating differences, and respect.
- **Relationship Skills** revolve around your ability to relate well to others. Skills include communicating clearly, listening, cooperation, resisting negative pressure, resolving conflicts, and supporting one another.

These competencies, viewed through the lens of human rights education, can play an important part in engaging students in understanding how their social, emotional, and academic learning connect with the social and historical contexts in their communities and larger society. This lens of SEL, sometimes labeled “transformative” SEL, positions students as co-creators



in their own learning and encourages students to use their constructed knowledge to address issues of equity, power, injustice, and privilege.

## Procedure

### Ask

- 1 To begin class, display the word “adversity” on the board, and ask students to share some ideas about its meaning. After receiving a few responses and ideas, display the definition: *a state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune*. To help students connect to the term, it may help to show them images related to the definition and ask them to identify the example of adversity represented in each image.
- 2 Next, repeat the same process with “resilience” using the following definition: *the capacity to recover quickly from difficult circumstances*.
- 3 To help deepen understanding and connect to students' lives, ask students to think to themselves about times in which they have faced adversity and have been resilient.
- 4 After reviewing the terms and definitions, distribute vocabulary graphic organizers to each student. After recording the definition of “adversity” and “resilience” on the organizers, students in pairs can brainstorm ideas for identifying characteristics, examples, non-examples, and visual representations of the terms. In full-class discussion, students can share responses. Provide clarification as needed until all students have completed the entire chart. You may also choose to complete each section together as a class for added support.
- 5 Next, share with the class that they will be using the two terms to better understand important themes from *Lisa of Willesden Lane* and apply the themes to their own life. It may be helpful to briefly review the cover of the text and the setting for the beginning of *Lisa of Willesden Lane*. To do so:
  - a. Share the map of Kindertransport routes and the historical timeline of the Holocaust from the book. (This map and timeline are also located as handouts for display at the end of the activity.)
  - b. Remind students that the story begins in Vienna, Austria during the late 1930s.

- c. Be sure students are aware that *Lisa of Willesden Lane* is a true story co-written by Lisa Jura's daughter Mona Golabek.
- d. As needed, you can also review with students the background of the story and a selection of key vocabulary terms from the book that help build understanding using the *Lisa of Willesden Lane* vocabulary handout.

## Analyze

- 6 Display the questions:
  - a. "What are examples of adversity Lisa faced in *Lisa of Willesden Lane*?"
  - b. "What did she do to overcome each example?"
- 7 Distribute the "What adversity did Lisa face?" handout and direct students to collect details from the *Lisa of Willesden Lane* handout that provide information for answering these questions. As needed, direct students to specific excerpts:
  - Chapter 1, which describes Lisa's family's experiences with antisemitism in German-occupied Vienna.
  - Chapter 2, which describes Lisa's departure from her family and home on the Kindertransport.
  - Chapter 3 pages 33–37, which describe Lisa's concern for her family.
  - Chapter 7 pages 73–78, which describe Lisa's experiences during German air raids on London.
  - Chapter 12, which describes Lisa learning about the Holocaust and likely loss of her family members.
- 8 When students finish reading, facilitate a full-class discussion centered around a timeline sketch of things Lisa did to overcome adversity. After listing examples from the students' notes sheets, ask students, "What character traits do you think Lisa displayed?"
- 9 Next, distribute or display a "glossary" of character traits that people might rely on to overcome adversity, including resilience and determination. Based on these definitions, students will use the following template to complete the sentence: "Lisa displayed the character trait of \_\_\_\_\_ to overcome the adversity of \_\_\_\_\_." Then students can write brief explanations of their sentence-completion choices.

## Apply

- 10 Explain that the class will watch the testimony of Alice Boddy recalling her own experience relocating to England on the Kindertransport. Share with students that this testimony is a firsthand experience from someone who went through the Kindertransport and to pay close attention to her words, tone, and body language. Ask students to consider what character traits does Alice Boddy (1:21) demonstrate in her testimony.

- 11** After viewing the testimony, use the “Examples of Adversity and Resilience” handout to have students think of examples of adversity and resilience faced by four different people:
- Alice Boddy
  - A famous person from either history or today (including sports and/or entertainment)
  - A person they know
  - Themselves
- 12** Share with students that they will identify character traits the individuals displayed. If desired, the full class could complete the first row on Alice Boddy together and then students can complete the remainder of the chart individually or in pairs..

## Act

- 13** Direct students to consider one of the people they described in the table. Students will use a template to craft and decorate certificates recognizing that person’s ability to overcome adversity and their character traits utilized when doing so. Students can then present certificates to the person they selected if they wish. \*Note: If you believe this may make some students uncomfortable, you may instead ask students choose to create a certificate for a family member to take home and share.

## Connections

Connect to Student Lives	Connection to Contemporary Events	Connection to the Future
Students will brainstorm examples of adversity they or people they know have confronted.	Students will connect character traits for overcoming adversity displayed by Jewish refugees in the World War II era to traits they can develop today.	Students will recognize the importance of skills and character traits for overcoming adversity they might face in the future.

## Clips of Testimony

- **Alice Boddy**, Jewish survivor, describes how she had the strength to travel and register herself for the Kindertransport and face changes in her life by always believing in herself no matter what.

## National Standards and Frameworks

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

D2.Civ.7.3-5 Apply civic virtues and democratic principles in school settings.

D4.2.3-5 Construct explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples, and details with relevant information and data.

### Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

RI.5.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 4–5 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.5.2 Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

W.5.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### 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:

- Experiences 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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**Key Vocabulary:**  
*Lisa of Willesden Lane*



Word and Definition	Sentence
<b>Nazis</b>	
<b>Anti-Semitism</b>	
<b>Kristallnacht</b>	
<b>Kindertransport</b>	

## Key Vocabulary: *Lisa of Willesden Lane*



Word and Definition	Sentence
<p><b>Nazis</b></p> <p>Members of the anti-Semitic German Socialist Workers Party and followers of Adolf Hitler.</p>	<p>Nazis who took control of Austria passed strict laws against the country's Jewish population.</p>
<p><b>Anti-Semitism</b></p> <p>Prejudice against, and hatred of, Jewish people.</p>	<p>Many Jews who lived in Austria in the late 1930s left the country because of growing anti-Semitism.</p>
<p><b>Kristallnacht</b></p> <p>Translated as "the night of broken glass," refers to a wave of violence against Jews that took place in Nazi Germany and German-held territory on the night of November 9-10, 1938.</p>	<p>Many German Jews responded to Kristallnacht by attempting to move out of Germany to safety.</p>
<p><b>Kindertransport</b></p> <p>An organized effort to evacuate Jewish children from German-controlled areas to the United Kingdom between 1938 and 1940.</p>	<p>Many British families provided money and assistance to help Jewish children relocate to England on the Kindertransport.</p>





## Images of Adversity and Resilience



STUDENT HANDOUT





**FPO**

# What Adversity did Lisa Face in *Lisa of Willesden Lane*?



Chapter and Page Number	Details of the Adversity Lisa Faced	What did Lisa do to Overcome This Adversity?
<p><b>Chapter 1:</b> This chapter describes Lisa's family's experiences with Anti-Semitism in German-occupied Vienna.</p>		
<p><b>Chapter 2:</b> This chapter describes Lisa's departure from her family and home on the Kindertransport.</p>		
<p><b>Chapter 2:</b> This chapter describes Lisa's departure from her family and home on the Kindertransport.</p>		
<p><b>Chapter 7 pages 73-78:</b> This selection describes Lisa's experiences during German air raids on London.</p>		
<p><b>Chapter 12:</b> This chapter describes Lisa learning about the Holocaust and likely loss of her family members.</p>		

# Character Traits for Overcoming Adversity



STUDENT HANDOUT

**Resilience**

the ability to adapt to and overcome difficult situations

**Confidence**

the feeling or belief that one can rely on someone or something; firm trust

**Courage**

strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger

**Perseverance**

continued efforts to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition

**Determination**

a firm or fixed desire to achieve a desired end

Lisa displayed the character trait of \_\_\_\_\_

when she overcame the adversity of \_\_\_\_\_.

**Explanation:**



Person	Describe the adversity the person faced.	What character trait(s) did the person display?
Alice Boddy		
A famous person		
A person you know		
You		



I hereby recognize

\_\_\_\_\_

[FULL NAME]

for overcoming the adversity of

\_\_\_\_\_

[BRIEFLY DESCRIBE HERE]

In overcoming this challenge,

\_\_\_\_\_

[FIRST NAME]

displayed the character traits of,

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

[IDENTIFY UP TO THREE CHARACTER TRAITS]

Teaching with  
*Testimony*

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## Survivor Biography for Educator Background

**Alice Grunwald Boddy** was born in 1923 in Vienna, Austria. Her father, Ignaz Gruenwald, was born in Vienna and died in 1934. Ms. Boddy's mother, Bertha Eisner Gruenwald was born in Rakovice, Czechoslovakia. Ms. Boddy had one brother, six years older than she, who left Vienna and immigrated to Chicago in 1938. Ms. Boddy was sent to London on the Kindertransport in August 1939. She was 'adopted' in London by a Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, and remained there until February 1940 when arrangements were made for her to join a children's transport to the United States. Upon her arrival in the United States, Ms. Boddy traveled to Chicago to join her brother. After her mother arrived in the United States, Ms. Boddy lived with her mother and brother in Chicago and worked as a pre-school teacher in an orphanage.