

Friendships and Human Connection

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What role do friendships play in my life?
- How can listening and showing empathy help me connect to others?
- What role did human connection play in helping Holocaust survivors persevere?
- How can we strengthen connections and friendships at my school?

Overview

This activity engages students with the topic of friendship and the power of human connection to help us persevere during challenging times. Students will begin by using a thinking routine to explore the complexity behind friendships and why human connections mean so much to us. Next, students will reflect on excerpts from *Lisa of Willesden Lane*, along with testimonies from Holocaust survivors, that help students explore the impact of human connection on perseverance and survival. Finally, students apply concepts and collaboratively assess the role human connection and friendships play in their school. Students will take action by developing a plan for building empathy and strengthening human connections.

Target Audience

Grade 3-5

Activity Duration

Two 45-60 minute sessions

Enduring Understandings

- Refugee stories, such as children involved in the Kindertransport, can help students connect to important skills and themes of self-awareness such as resilience, persistence, courage, and hope.
- When faced with adversity, human connection and belonging can play an important role in persevering.
- Individuals have the power to strengthen their relationships with others by listening and showing empathy.

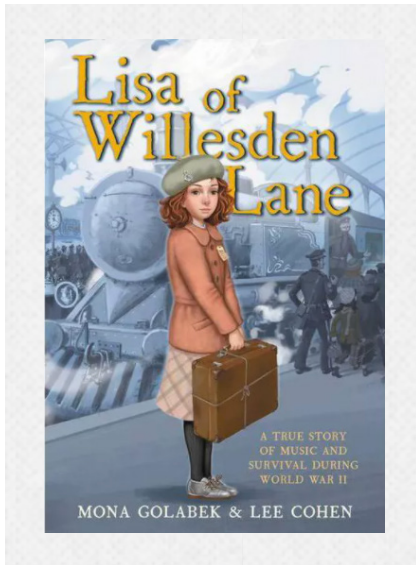
Materials

- Copies of *The Children of Willesden Lane*
- Handout 1: Kindertransport Map and Timeline
- Handout 2: Lisa of Willesden Lane Vocabulary
- Handout 3: Connections from *Lisa of Willesden Lane*
- Handout 4: Human Connection Testimony Analysis
- Handout 5: Creating Safe Spaces

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 children to Great Britain from Nazi-held lands between 1938 and 1940. After Kristallnacht (The Night of Broken Glass; Nazi-sponsored violence occurred throughout Germany and in the German annexed territories of Austria and the Sudetenland (in Czechoslovakia). The British government eased immigration restrictions to allow children under the age of 17 to enter Great Britain from Nazi-occupied Europe. Citizens or private 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. Transports continued to leave from major cities such as Berlin, Vienna, and Prague, until September 1, 1939, the day World War II began. The last transport left from the Netherlands on May 14, 1940—four days after the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands. 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 those persecuted by the Nazis before and during 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.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 the lesson, ask students to consider a memory of a close friendship, a time when they felt a strong connection to someone, or a powerful sense of belonging. This could be a friend or family member. Before students reflect on their memories, you may want to ask them to first brainstorm some of their favorite memories they have experienced with a friend, classmate, family member and then choose and identify the memory they wish to reflect upon. Some children

may need more support in identifying a specific memory before being able to discuss.

As students reflect on their memories, invite students to discuss a few of the following questions about their memories:

- How did the memory make you feel?
- Did it make your day better or help you get through a hard time?
- Did it make you think deeper about someone, an idea, or event?
- What are ways we connect with others?

- 2 As students discuss their thoughts, invite the class to write down a response to the following question “why are our connections to others so important?” As students write, explain that human connection means that you feel that you are seen, heard, and valued by someone else.
- 3 As they finish writing their responses, share with the class that today they are going to be using testimonies and excerpts from *Lisa of Willesden Lane* to investigate why friendships and other forms of human connections and belonging were so important in helping people persevere during the Holocaust. Share with students that a testimony is a personal retelling of memories by someone who witnessed the events described.
- 4 It may be helpful to briefly review the cover of the book and the setting for the beginning of *Lisa of Willesden Lane*. To do so:
 - 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.)
 - Remind students that the story begins in Vienna, Austria during the late 1930s.
 - Be sure students are aware that *Lisa of Willesden Lane* is a true story co-written by Lisa Jura’s daughter Mona Golabek.
 - 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

- 5 Next, give each student a copy of the Connections from *Lisa of Willesden Lane* handout to each student that helps capture and reflect on examples of how friendships and human connections inspired the group of young people to persevere.
- 6 Students can work in small groups using their books and handouts to revisit examples and then discuss what they noticed. Example excerpts include:
 - Chapter 3 (pages 20–22): Lisa says goodbye to her family and her mother leaves her with important words.
 - Chapter 8 (pages 57–59): Lisa enjoying her first dinner at Willesden Lane and reflects on joining her new friends who have faced similar challenges and experiences as herself.
 - Chapter 12 (pages 85–86): Lisa makes a strong connection with Hans.
 - Chapter 19 (pages 140–141): Lisa arrives at her audition.
- 7 You might choose to read the first excerpt as a class and complete the corresponding section together to model the process. Next, students may work individually and share out together or read excerpts as a group and work collaboratively to discuss their responses to questions on the handout.
- 8 Next, explain that the class will watch two testimonies of Holocaust survivors who discuss the importance of human connections, friendships, and empathy. Share with students that these testimonies are firsthand experiences from people who survived the Holocaust and endured extreme hardship and trauma. Ask students to pay close attention to their words, tone, and body language, these can be windows into the emotions the speaker is feeling.
 - Vera Gissing (1:00)
 - Marion Lazan (1:41)
- 9 Distribute copies of the Testimony and Human Connection handout among students, a copy to each student and review the directions with the class. Before playing the first testimony, check to make sure the class understands the analysis questions. After the first testimony is complete, provide a few minutes for each student to write their answers.
- 10 After both testimonies have been viewed, consider having students first provide concrete examples of how friendships and human connections helped Vera and Marion persevere during difficult times. This will position students better to respond to the two reflection questions.
- 11 Take a moment to discuss with the class the two reflection questions at the bottom of the page.
 - How can meaningful connections with others help us through challenging times?
 - How can you work to create meaningful connections in your community?

Apply

- 12 Students will apply what they have learned about human connections, friendships, and belonging to explore what their classmates think about the topic and potential gaps that exist in their school.
- 13 During this exercise, students will work towards the goal of answering the question “How can we build connections here?” To do this, students will use the Creating Safe Spaces handout. This handout is a series of short survey questions to ask their classmates and gives them a chance to share what they think about the power of friendships, human connections, and belonging. While several questions have already been created to guide the process, students can work together and add to the existing starter questions. You may also choose to create your own questions, assign students specific questions, or rewrite ones that have been provided.
- 14 This will also allow students an opportunity to gauge how their peers perceive topics related to:
 - School culture and climate
 - Strength and value of positive relationships
 - Opportunities to improve how students meet and create a sense of belonging
- 15 When complete, give time to students to ask their classmates questions. This might take place in the same class, a different class, at lunch, on the playground, or another space. Students may need support in creating questions that help gather appropriate feedback. You may encourage students to ask fellow teachers and administrators as well. When students have gathered responses, invite students to share their feedback as a class. Be sure to keep track of the feedback; it will help students create their Safe Space Plans.
- 16 When students are finished sharing, ask them to respond to the driving question, “How can we build connections here?”

Act

- 17 Students will use all of their learned information to work together and create a “Safe Space Plan.”
- 18 Students can work as a small group to brainstorm ways that the school can help students build positive relationships with their peers, teachers, and administrators. You might suggest to students that they can draw diagrams of places where opportunities exist, suggest events that encourage relationship building, consider practices that other classrooms can try, and even think about how these ideas might be promoted.
- 19 If students struggle to think of ideas, consider helping students think about where they have seen students struggle to connect or make friends. You might share ideas like ensuring that everyone is included during recess, meeting someone new in the cafeteria, or ensuring that new students feel welcomed.
- 20 When students have generated a few ideas, work as a class to share what they have created. This could be an opportunity to use many of the ideas in class to create one plan or suggested ideas. You might show this to other teachers or your school administration.

Connect to Student Lives	Connection to Contemporary Events	Connection to the Future
Students can recognize the importance and strength of meaningful human connections between their peers and adults.	Students can recognize the importance of connecting with others, not just in times of need, but as an ongoing commitment to building positive relationships.	As students continue to learn and grow, consider how they might be able to use this information to create stronger connections with others in the future.

Clips of Testimony

■ Marion Lazan

Marion Blumenthal Lazan discusses the empathy and kindness from her classmates despite their obvious language barrier.

■ Vera Gissing

Vera discusses her friendship with her childhood friend Marta and the impact that the friendship had on her.

Lisa of Willesden Lane:

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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.](#)

Survivor and Witness Biographies



STUDENT HANDOUT

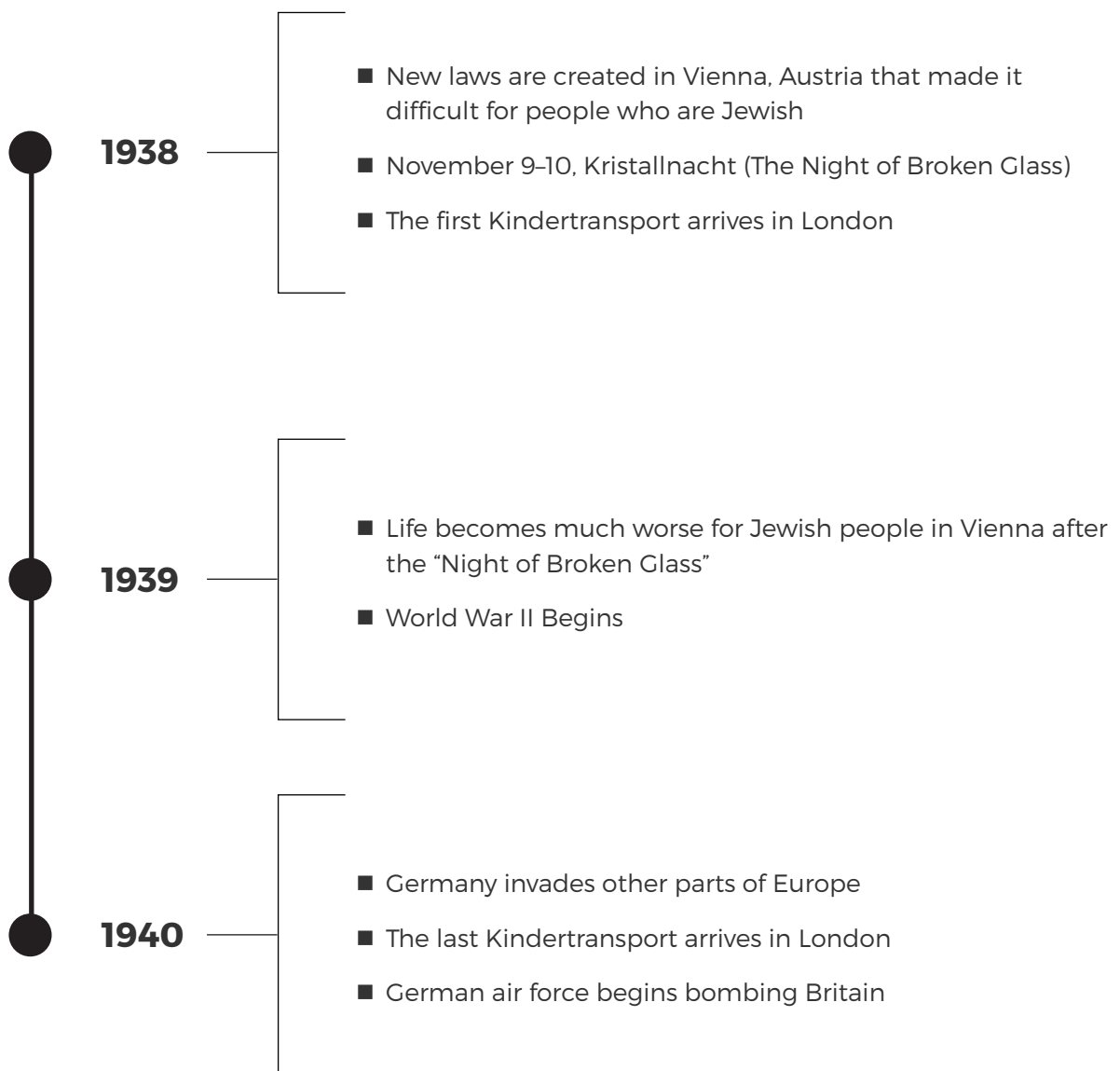
Marion Lazan

Marion Blumenthal Lazan was born on December 20, 1934 in Bremen, Germany. After Kristallnacht in November 1938, her father was taken away and sent to Buchenwald concentration camp. He was released ten days later because his immigration papers were in order. The family moved to the Netherlands with the hope of moving to the United States. Her family settled in Gouda and took care of 725 children whose parents sent them to the Netherlands from various parts of Europe. In May 1940, the Germans invaded the Netherlands and Marion's family could not leave. All of their belongings were destroyed when the Germans bombed the city and demolished the harbor in Rotterdam where their possessions had been stored. The family was sent to the Westerbok transit camp. In February of 1944, Marion was sent to Bergen-Belsen. After liberation by the Soviet Armed Forces, Marion first went to the Netherlands and then to the United States. She gave her testimony on February 6, 1995 in Hewlett, New York.

Vera Gissing

Vera Gissing (maiden name Diamant) was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia on July 4, 1928. She grew up in a Jewish family. In 1939, when Vera was 11, she and her sister Eva were sent on the Kindertransport—a rescue mission to save Jewish children. Vera and Eva would be separated at the station where Vera was met by her enthusiastic foster mother. Vera and her foster sister became great friends. Later, Vera was sent to Southport to live with another loving family. Eva eventually wrote to Vera gently explaining that their parents died during the Holocaust. After the war, Vera went back to Czechoslovakia and lived with her aunt. She graduated from college and moved to London with her family. Vera was interviewed on October 25, 1996, in Wargrave, England, United Kingdom.

Kindertransport Timeline and Historical Background



Key Vocabulary:
Lisa of Willesden Lane



Word	Definition
Nazis	
Antisemitism	
Kristallnacht	
Kindertransport	

Key Vocabulary:
Lisa of Willesden Lane



Word and Definition	Sentence
<p>Nazis</p> <p>Members of the anti-Semitic German Socialist Workers Party and followers of Adolf Hitler.</p>	<p>When the Nazis took control of Austria, they passed strict laws against the country's Jewish population.</p>
<p>Antisemitism</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 antisemitism.</p>
<p>Kristallnacht</p> <p>Translated as "the night of broken glass," it 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>Kindertransport</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>

Connections from *Lisa of Willesden Lane*



STUDENT HANDOUT

Directions: Working together, read the section using the page numbers provided. After reading, discuss the reflection question and write your answers in the box.

Chapter and Pages	Summary	Describe how friendship and human connection help Lisa get through challenging times.
Chapter 3 (Pages 20–22)	Lisa says goodbye to her family and her mother leaves her with important words.	
Chapter 8 (Pages 57–59)	Lisa enjoys her first dinner at Willesden Lane and reflects on joining her new friends who have faced similar challenges and experiences as herself.	
Chapter 12 (Pages 85–86)	Lisa finally meets Mrs. Cohen's son, Hans.	
Chapter 19 (Pages 140–141)	Lisa arrives at her audition.	

Discussion Question: Why do you think it was important for Lisa to feel like she belonged?

Human Connection Testimony Analysis



STUDENT HANDOUT

Witness	What experience was the speaker describing?	Describe the speaker's tone, body language, and emotion as they spoke.	What example of human connections or sense of belonging does the witness speak about?
Marion Lazan			
Vera Gissing			

How can meaningful connections with others help us through challenging times?

How can you work to create meaningful connections in your community?

Creating Safe Spaces



Directions: Use the questions provided to interview your classmates. As you ask the question, be sure to listen closely and write down important points or thoughts. Remember that you are gathering information to help answer the following question: “How can we build connections here?”

Question	Interview #1	Interview #2
Why are friendships important to you?		
How does your class or school help make others feel welcome?		
Are there opportunities to make new friends in class or at school?		
Can you think of any ways to help others feel supported or welcomed?		
What changes would you make to make sure your school is supportive of all students?		

Additional Questions to Consider?