

Confronting Refugee Challenges

Essential Questions

- What challenges confront refugees attempting to relocate to safe places?
- 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?
- In what ways do individuals and organizations help refugees confront the challenges they face?

Overview

In this activity, students will reflect on USC Shoah Foundation testimony and excerpts from *The Children of Willesden Lane* to explain why some people are forced to flee from their homes to seek safety from persecution and genocide. They will then analyze a variety of sources to document challenges confronted by refugees and participate in a jigsaw activity to gather information about efforts to provide Jewish refugees with assistance before and during World War II. Finally, students will analyze source materials profiling refugee assistance efforts in the modern world and develop a rating system for evaluating these international relief efforts.

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.
- Refugees confront significant challenges when traveling and upon arrival at their destinations.
- Individuals and organized relief efforts help refugees confront challenges.
- Individuals who help refugees often make personal sacrifices and take significant risks to do so.

Materials

- Whiteboard/blackboard and markers or chalk
- Access to USC Shoah Foundation testimonies
- Notetaking Guide: Accounts of Kristallnacht
- Notetaking Guide: The Decision to Leave
- Quick Write: Lisa's Challenges
- Notetaking Guide: Refugees and Internally Displaced People
- Jewish Refugee Rescue Efforts: Study Group
- Jewish Refugee Rescue Efforts: Home Group
- Refugee Relief Organizations Profile
- Quick Write: Comparing Relief Efforts
- Notetaking Guide: Evaluating Charities and Refugee Relief Organizations
- Developing Your Rating System

Background Information/Links

Refugees and internally displaced people 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.

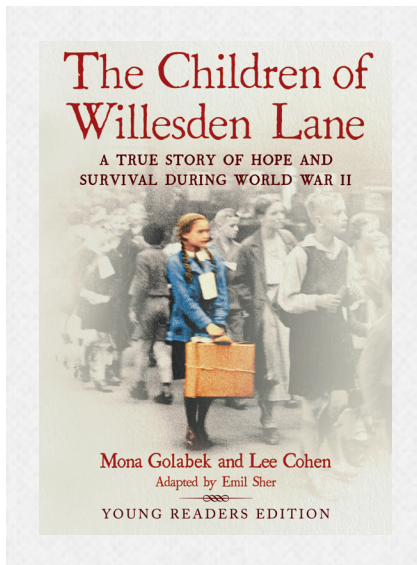
Like refugees, internally displaced people flee their homes to escape violence and persecution. However, internally displaced people remain in their home countries because they hope conditions will improve, they are physically or financially unable to travel to a different country, or they are blocked from seeking safety elsewhere.

The experiences of Jews living in Germany and German-occupied territory before and during World War II and the Holocaust illustrates the challenges confronted by refugees and internally displaced people.

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.

Events in 1938 created a refugee crisis in Europe. Violence against Jews throughout Nazi occupied Europe 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 property ownership.

Jews living in Germany and other German-occupied territories responded to the events of 1938 with a dramatic increase in attempts to migrate to relative safety. 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.

Jews living in Germany and German-occupied territory during World War II faced immense challenges. The Nazis murdered most of those who remained in an act of genocide they called the Final Solution. They sent many more to forced labor concentration camps. Those who were not captured were forced to live in hiding and often moved from place to place to avoid capture.

Individuals who recognized the humanity of European Jews engaged in courageous efforts to help them address the challenges they faced as refugees and internally displaced people. British businessman Nicholas Winton played a prominent role in the Kindertransport program. He personally arranged for the resettlement of some 669 Jewish children from German-occupied territory to his home country after Kristallnacht. Aristides de Sousa Mendes was a Portuguese consul. After Germany conquered France in 1940, Sousa Mendes risked his career by violating his country's immigration restrictions to help French Jews migrate through Portugal to safe passage. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Virginia attorney Jacob Morewitz intervened to permit Jewish refugees aboard the *SS Quanza* to disembark in the United States rather than be returned to Europe. In the face of stiff opposition, Roosevelt publicly lobbied the U.S. State Department to permit the refugees to remain in the country. Morewitz filed a lawsuit to delay the *Quanza's* departure from the port of Norfolk, Virginia, so its passengers could have time to be granted permission to stay.



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>
- <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/mendes.html>
- <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-refugees-aboard-the-ss-quanza>

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 and begun to implement anti-Jewish laws and policies.
- 2 The class will together read pages 15-17 of *The Children of Willesden Lane*, which describes Lisa Jura's family's experience on Kristallnacht and view Abraham Grossman's USC Shoah Foundation testimony about the event. As they read the excerpt and view the testimony, students will complete a graphic organizer recording things Lisa and Abraham SAW and HEARD as the event transpired. The teacher will ask students to share responses to the question, "Based on these accounts, in what ways was Kristallnacht a turning point for many European Jews?"
- 3 The teacher will ask, "What do you think are some ways in which Jews living in areas controlled by Nazi Germany responded to Kristallnacht and its aftermath? 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.
- 4 The teacher will read with students pages 21-24 of *The Children of Willesden Lane*, describing Lisa's parents' discussions about sending their daughters away from Vienna to live in England. They also will view a segment of Vera Gissing's USC Shoah Foundation testimony. As students read, they will categorize on a notetaking organizer factors the families saw as for and against relocation. As needed, the teacher can discuss and list these factors in a full-class discussion.
- 5 The class will complete a Quick Write responding to this prompt: "What challenges do you think Lisa encountered after she arrived in London? What character traits did she need to overcome these challenges?"

Analyze

- 6 The teacher will announce that in this lesson, the class will take a closer look at the topic of forced displacement, both during World War II and in today's world. In pairs, students will view the video segment providing basic information about refugees and internally displaced people:

- IWitness video "Refugees" (available from the IWitness Dashboard):
<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/Account/>

As students view the videos, they will complete notetaking organizers in which they will document basic information about refugees and internally displaced people and list challenges faced by each. As needed, the teacher can clarify with the full class basic information about refugees and internally displaced people. The teacher will also ask and discuss: "Based on the experiences you learned about with Lisa and Vera, how did Kristallnacht contribute to the emergence of both refugees and internally displaced people in Europe?"

- 7 In pairs, students will analyze source materials describing the experiences of one refugee and one internally displaced person during the era of World War II:

- Chapter 5 of *The Children of Willesden Lane*, which describes Lisa Jura's arrival and early hours as a refugee in London
- USC Shoah Foundation testimony of Elena Nightingale, describing the journeys and fates of her internally displaced family members:

As the students analyze the sources, they will highlight or check the challenges experienced by Lisa and Elena's families that were listed on the organizer from the previous step. They will also list examples of organizations and individuals that assisted displaced people before and during World War II.

- 8 The teacher will organize the class into "home" and "study" groups for a jigsaw activity. Each "home" group will have six students, for a total of three pairs of "study" groups. Each "study" pairing will read and view materials and complete a graphic organizer about an individual who rescued displaced people before or during World War II. Individuals for study include:

- Sir Nicholas Winton, contributor to the Kindertransport program.
- Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Portuguese consul who violated national policies when issuing visas for Jews to migrate through Portugal: Bio and video on [Yad Vashem website](#); USC Shoah Foundation testimony of Isaac Bitton
- Jacob Morewitz, American attorney; and the U.S. First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, who advocated for refugees on board the SS *Quanza* in 1940. [Trailer for the documentary film "Nobody Wants Us," U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum article on the SS Quanza.](#)

- 9 The teacher will direct students to return to their "home" groups. Each pair will share information about their assigned individual, and students will record information on an organizer as they listen. In think-pair-share, the class will discuss this question: "What challenges faced by displaced persons were these individuals able to address? What were they not able to address?"

Apply

- 10 The teacher will raise the question, “What are some ways in which individuals and organizations assist refugees in today’s world? What are the strengths and limitations of these efforts?”
- 11 Students will examine web pages of three varying refugee relief efforts and use a notetaking organizer to compile information to critically evaluate the impact of each:
 - Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/>
 - The International Rescue Committee’s partnership with Sesame Workshop: <https://www.rescue.org/sesame>
 - The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/healthprotection/fieldupdates/spring-2019/rohingya-refugee-crisis.htm>
- 12 The teacher will distribute or display a Quick Write activity in which students will reflect on the similarities and differences between the programs they read about, focusing on the varying missions and purposes of each.

Act

- 13 The teacher will announce that the class will begin to think about which international relief efforts they would support. As needed, the teacher can engage the students in brainstorming questions they would want to ask about organizations they are evaluating. The class will be divided into groups of 2-3 and complete a brainstorming guide using the Evaluating Charities and Refugee Relief Organizations handout
- 14 Based on their completion of the brainstorming guide, students will develop a criteria list and scoring system for evaluating refugee relief organizations.
- 15 As an extension, students can utilize their rating systems to evaluate the three efforts profiled in the “Apply” portion of this lesson or to evaluate a different effort. Also, the teacher could arrange for students to describe their rating systems in a larger forum, such as a school assembly.

Connections

Connection to Student Lives	Connection to Contemporary Events	Connection to the Future
Students will develop their criteria for evaluating refugee relief efforts.	Students will analyze secondary sources to collect information about three prominent refugee relief efforts in the contemporary world.	Students will develop their criteria for evaluating refugee relief efforts. These rating systems can be used to inform future student advocacy or support efforts.

Clips of Testimony

- **Abraham Grossman**, a Jewish survivor, recalls his experience living in Berlin during Kristallnacht when Nazi officials and supporters burned synagogues, destroyed Jewish homes, and incarcerated Jewish men in concentration camps (1:19).
- **Vera Gissing**, a Jewish survivor, remembers her parents' decision to send her and her sister Eva on the Kindertransport from Czechoslovakia to England in May 1939. Gissing describes saying goodbye to her parents at the train station in Prague and the journey to England on the Kindertransport (5:59).
- **Elena Nightingale**, a Jewish survivor, describes the fates of her internally displaced family members who went into hiding or attempted to flee during the Holocaust (3:35).
- **Isaac Bitton**, a rescuer and aid provider, describes the efforts of Aristides de Sousa Mendes to provide refugees with Portuguese visas to help them flee to safety as Nazi Germany expanded its territorial control early in World War II (6:00).

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>.

Notetaking Guide: Accounts of Kristallnacht



STUDENT HANDOUT

Lisa Jura (pages 15-17 of <i>The Children of Willesden Lane</i>)	Abraham Grossman (USC Shoah Foundation Testimony)
What did she SEE?	What did he SEE?
What did she HEAR?	What did he HEAR?
Based on these accounts, in what ways was Kristallnacht a turning point for many European Jews?	

Notetaking Guide: The Decision to Leave



STUDENT HANDOUT

<p>Lisa Jura's Family (Pages 2-24 of <i>The Children of Willesden Lane</i>)</p> <p>What push factors influenced the family's decision to leave?</p>	<p>Vera Gissing's Family (USC Shoah Foundation Testimony)</p> <p>What push factors influenced the family's decision to leave?</p>
<p>What were the disadvantages of leaving?</p>	<p>What were the disadvantages of leaving?</p>

Quick Write



STUDENT HANDOUT

What challenges do you think Lisa encountered after she arrived in London? What character traits did she need to overcome these challenges?

Notetaking Guide: Refugees and Internally Displaced People



STUDENT HANDOUT

Directions: As you watch the videos, use this organizer to record notes about refugees and internally displaced people. Then, highlight or check the challenges you listed that are described in Chapter 5 of *The Children of Willesden Lane* and Elena's Nightingale's USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

Refugees	Internally Displaced People
Who are they?	Who are they?
What challenges do they face when they move?	What challenges do they face when they move?
What long-term challenges do both groups face after resettlement?	

Jewish Refugee Rescue Efforts: Study Group



STUDENT HANDOUT

As you read about the rescue effort your study group has been assigned, complete the organizer below.

Circle One

Sir Nicholas Winton/Kindertransport

Aristides de Sousa Mendes/Portuguese Consul

Eleanor Roosevelt and Jacob Morewitz/SS Quanza

Summarize the actions the individual(s) took to rescue refugees before and during World War II.

What challenges did the individual(s) need to overcome?

Jewish Refugee Rescue Efforts: Home Group



STUDENT HANDOUT

As you learn about the rescue efforts from the other members of your home group, complete the table below.

Name of Rescuer/Effort	Actions Taken	Risks and Challenges
Sir Nicolas Winton/ Kindertransport		
Aristides De Sousa Mendes/ Portuguese Consul		
Eleanor Roosevelt and Jacob Morewitz/SS Quanza		

Refugee Relief Organizations Profile



STUDENT HANDOUT

<p>Amnesty International https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/</p>	<p>The International Rescue Committee/ Sesame Workshop https://www.rescue.org/sesame</p>	<p>The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/healthprotection/fieldupdates/spring-2019/rohingya-refugee-crisis.htm</p>
<p>What actions does this group take to help refugees?</p>	<p>What actions does this group take to help refugees?</p>	<p>What actions does this group take to help refugees?</p>
<p>What challenges faced by displaced people does the group confront?</p>	<p>What challenges faced by displaced people does the group confront?</p>	<p>What challenges faced by displaced people does the group confront?</p>
<p>What refugee challenges does it NOT address?</p>	<p>What refugee challenges does it NOT address?</p>	<p>What refugee challenges does it NOT address?</p>

Quick Write



STUDENT HANDOUT

Compare the three relief efforts you learned about. Which one would you most likely support? Explain why.

Notetaking Guide: Evaluating Charities and Refugee Relief Organizations



Evaluation Theme	For this theme, what questions would you ask about the charity you are evaluating?
<p>Governance and Oversight <i>Explanation of the Theme:</i> The board that runs and provides oversight over the organization is independent, involved, and free of corruption.</p>	
<p>Measuring Effectiveness <i>Explanation of the Theme:</i> The organization measures its impact to demonstrate that it achieves its mission and goals.</p>	
<p>Finances <i>Explanation of the Theme:</i> The organization spends donated funds appropriately on achieving its mission and goals</p>	
<p>Solicitations and Informal Materials <i>Explanation of the Theme:</i> The organization provides the public with information about itself that is accurate, thorough, and respectful of the people it seeks to help</p>	

*Themes Adapted from the Better Business Bureau's "[Standards for Charity Accountability](#)"

Developing Your Rating System



Based on what you learned on the BBB page, develop a list of criteria for evaluating a refugee relief effort. For each criterion, come up with a scoring system. You may not need to use all of the rows in the table below.

Criteria Statement	Scoring System
Criteria 1	
Criteria 2	
Criteria 3	
Criteria 4	
Criteria 5	
Criteria 6	
Criteria 7	
Criteria 8	
Total Score:	

Survivor and Witness Biographies



STUDENT HANDOUT

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 cared for 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.

Abraham Grossman, a Jewish survivor, was born in 1925 in Gustrow, Germany, and died in 2020. As a child, he was bullied at school by both his teacher and fellow students because he was Jewish and often responded by fighting back. Just before the beginning of World War II, Grossman and his brother were sent to England on the Kindertransport. He returned to Germany during the war as a member of the British Army's Jewish Brigade and served in several countries, including at a German camp for Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. He learned that his mother and sister had been murdered at Auschwitz. After World War II, Grossman and his wife Genya defied immigration restrictions and moved to British Mandate Palestine before the establishment of the state of Israel. He served in the Israeli military when war broke out in response to Israel's creation in 1948 and achieved fame for shooting down an Egyptian plane. He worked as a plumber, moved to the United States after Genya's passing in 1975, and eventually returned to Israel. He died in 2020 after contracting the coronavirus.

Isaac Bitton, a Jewish rescuer and aid provider, was born in 1926 in Lisbon, Portugal, and died in 2006. He grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in Lisbon that hosted Jewish refugees before and during World War II. His family ran a soup kitchen that provided food for the refugees. During World War II Bitton served in the British Army's Jewish Brigade in Belgium. After the war, he worked for Haganah, a movement that supported the establishment of the state of Israel. Bitton served in the Israeli Defense Forces on two occasions during the late 1940s and 1950s. Bitton and his family moved to the United States in 1959. In the 1980s, Bitton established a fund to restore a Jewish cemetery in his home country of Portugal.