

Teachers' Notes

Activity 8: Britain and the Legacy of Loss - Part 2



TOPIC

Britain's Response to Nazism and the Holocaust, Surviving the Holocaust

AGE GROUP

Years 7-11 (ages 12-16)

Progression Steps 4 and 5

LENGTH

1 hour

AREAS OF LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE

Health and Well-being

Humanities

Languages, Literacy and Communication

DESCRIPTION

WARNING: This activity includes video testimony relating to suicide.

This activity introduces students to the experience of the Holocaust survivors and the legacy of loss they endured in the aftermath of World War 2. Students will consider the value of survivor testimony and the role it plays in our understanding of the history of the Holocaust.

Students will watch video testimony of Irene Kirstein Watts, a survivor of Nazi persecution and Kindertransport refugee, and reflect on the challenges she faced and the means by which she was able to rebuild her life. Through this lens, students will be reminded that while the Holocaust ended in 1945, its devastating human impact did not.

The activity also explores some of the complexities of Britain's response to news of Jewish persecution and murder during the Holocaust. In particular, students will be introduced to Britain's policy on internment and consider the political and social context which Jewish refugees faced living in the UK.

To be best able to understand this activity, it is recommended that students first complete **Activity 5: The Legal Effect: How Laws can Persecute or Protect**.

This activity can be completed as a standalone class or as part two of a two-part course of study. The first part of the activity is set out in **Activity 7 – Britain and the Legacy of Loss – Part 1**.*

LEARNING AIMS

As a result of completing this activity, students will:

- Reflect on the concept and value of survivor testimony and what can be learnt about individual experiences, actions, and choices from such testimonies.

*A full list of activities can be found at the end of this document.



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LEARNING AIMS continued

As a result of completing this activity, students will:

- Explore some of the ambiguities in Britain's response to news of Jewish persecution and murder during the Holocaust, and the British context which shaped this response.
- Tackle the misconception that liberation or rescue was always a straightforward, positive experience for survivors.
- Understand the Holocaust as an event that affected individuals differently and reflect on the Holocaust's enduring legacy of loss, the impact this had on individual families and how survivors rebuilt their lives.
- Learn about the connection to Wales through the video testimony of a Kindertransport refugee.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Whiteboard/markers, computer to listen to testimony.

Consider

Inform students that the activity will focus on Britain's response to Nazism and the Holocaust, and the legacy of loss experienced by Holocaust survivors.

Explain to students that the activity will include video testimony provided by a Holocaust survivor - that is, a person who experienced the history and was interviewed years after the events to preserve their memories.

As a starting point, discuss the meaning of the word 'testimony' with the students.

On the board, draw a mind map and ask the class for words that automatically come to mind when thinking about 'testimony'.

You may want to consider the following definitions provided by Yad Vashem:¹

1. Legal meanings: a) all such declarations, spoken or written, offered in a legal case or deliberative hearing; and b) something that serves as evidence.
2. Meanings related to authentication that do not necessarily have a legal connection: a) an assertion that offers first-hand authentication of a fact; and b) evidence or proof in support of a fact or an assertion.

¹Yad Vashem, *Using Testimony in Holocaust Education – A Learning Environment* <<https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/activity-plans/use-of-testimony.html>> [accessed 22 May 2022].

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Consider continued

Then ask the students to answer the questions on the student worksheet (**Task 1**) and to discuss their answers in pairs/groups.

The objective of this task is for students to think about the unique value of Holocaust survivor testimonies. Answers may include:

- Survivor testimony can provide a personal story of the Holocaust that cannot be obtained or may be overlooked in documents or written records – including the individual feelings, motivations, and fears of those who experienced history.
- Survivor testimony helps emphasise the individual human impact of the Holocaust – rather than presenting events in dehumanising statistics.
- The act of listening to such testimony ‘bears witness’ – so that knowledge of the Holocaust will persist – in the hope that such knowledge will help prevent similar crimes against humanity from ever being perpetrated again.
- Listening to such testimony can also be seen as a means to honour both the memory of the survivor and the memory of those who did not survive.

Some students may query the reliability of testimony which is recorded years later after the events – and they should understand that they may critically evaluate such testimonies in the same way as other historical sources. However, they should also be encouraged to explore the intrinsic value of such testimony as evidence of the impact of the Holocaust on survivors and its lasting legacy, long after the end of the war.

Collect

Explain to the students that they will now explore the challenges faced by Holocaust survivors by looking at the experiences of Irene Kirstein Watts, a survivor of Nazi persecution and Kindertransport refugee.

Students may need to refer to the **Handout**, which provides a glossary of key terms, to help with the tasks on the worksheet.

Ask the students to read **Irene’s biography**, set out in the **student worksheet**.

Then, working in groups/pairs, ask the students to analyse the photograph of Irene’s father, [Ziegmund Kirstein](#) (provided on the student worksheet). The worksheet sets out questions to help students with their analysis (**Task 2**).

Once students have completed this task, explain to them that the photograph was taken in Swansea in the 1950s. Irene’s father was one of nine brothers and sisters, all of whom were murdered in the Holocaust.

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Collect

Next, ask the students to read the brief summary of **the British government's policy on 'internment'** during World War 2 (provided on the **Student Worksheet**). Then ask them to watch **video clip 1**, where Irene describes what happened to her father during and after the war. **[Trigger warning: Video clip 1 describes Irene's father's suicide.]**

Then, working in groups/pairs, ask the students to answer the questions on the student worksheet (**Task 2**).

Encourage students to reflect on the complexity of Britain's response to refugees during the war. From May 1940 onwards, British attitudes towards refugees became even more cautious and negative. Fear of German invasion increased feelings of antipathy towards foreigners and refugees in Britain. This contributed to the government's blanket decision and centralised policy of internment. There were also fears that refugees could be spies – which seems particularly unjust in the case of Jewish refugees who had, of course, been compelled to leave Germany due to Nazi persecution.

Irene's testimony relating to her father reflects the enduring trauma of Holocaust survivors after the end of the war, and the devastating consequences of such suffering and loss.

Next ask the students to read the extract on the student worksheet from the Yad Vashem website, which provides a very brief summary of the different experiences of Holocaust survivors following their liberation at the end of the war. [Source: <https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/activity-plans/liberation-and-survival.html>]

Then, working in pairs/groups, ask the students to answer the question on the worksheet (**Task 3**).

Encourage students to reflect on:

- The fact that the experience of Holocaust survivors was by no means uniform.
- Liberation – and the end of the war – was generally a moment when survivors came to realise the incomprehensible scale of the Holocaust, and the immensity of their personal losses.
- The rejection by local populations and ongoing antisemitism was another profound blow. Many survivors had to contend with the loss not just of their own families but of their community and homes, and any hope of anchoring to the normality of their pre-war lives.
- Liberation, therefore, was not a moment of great joy and celebration for Holocaust survivors and it required an almost superhuman effort to face what had been irretrievably lost.

Next ask the students to watch **video clip 2**, where Irene talks about her adult life after the war.

Then, working in groups/pairs, ask the students to answer the questions on the Student Worksheet (**Task 3**). Students may note Irene's decision to emigrate to Canada, her pride in her children and grandchildren and her lifelong career working with and for children as examples of how she rebuilt her life following the Holocaust. Students are also encouraged to reflect on Irene's testimony more generally and the value in learning about the Holocaust from a Holocaust survivor (building on from the discussion in **Task 1**).



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Construct

Ask the students to consider the statement “Holocaust survivors were the lucky ones” and then write their thoughts and reflections on this statement (**Task 4**). Encourage students to refer to what they’ve learned in the activity - particularly from Irene’s video testimony.

They might also want to reflect on the following question as part of their response:

- How might governments, charities, aid agencies and individuals best help families who are escaping war or persecution in another country?

Communicate

Working in pairs or groups, ask students to read another student’s written response (**Task 4**). Then ask them to discuss what they’ve read and whether their thoughts and reflections are the same as or different from each other’s.

Appendices

1. Handout 1: Glossary.
2. Handout 2: Video Transcriptions.
3. Handout 3: Student worksheet.

List of Activities

- Activity 1: Kindertransport and Child Refugees in Wales: Part 1 - Driving Forces.
- Activity 2: Kindertransport and Child Refugees in Wales: Part 2 - The Journey.
- Activity 3: Kindertransport and Child Refugees in Wales: Part 3 - Arrival in Wales.
- Activity 4: Jewish Life in Pre-War Europe – Identity, Diversity and Commonality.
- Activity 5: The Legal Effect: How Laws can Persecute or Protect.
- Activity 6: Prejudice and Propaganda.
- Activity 7: Britain and the Legacy of Loss - Part 1.
- Activity 8: Britain and the Legacy of Loss - Part 2.
- Activity 9: Re-thinking Responsibility.
- Activity 10: Resistance and Remembrance.



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Cover Image

Ziegmund Kirstein, Irene Kirstein Watt's father in Swansea, 1950s. Image from Irene Kirstein Watts's interview from the archive of the USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education, 1998. For more information: <http://sfi.usc.edu/>.



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