

Activity 4: Jewish Life in Pre-War Europe: Identity, Diversity & Commonality



TOPIC

Jewish Life Pre-War

AGE GROUP

Years 5 or 6 (age 9+)

Progression Step 2

LENGTH

1 hour

SUBJECTS

History, Religion, Values and Ethics, English, Health and Well-being

DESCRIPTION

In this activity, students will reflect on the concept of 'identity' and how they view their own personal identity.

Students will listen to the video testimony of Inge Hack, a Kindertransport refugee, and collect primary photographic evidence relating to her life in Germany, allowing them to understand the individuality of the Jewish lives affected by the Holocaust.

The students will also have an introduction to what Jewish identity, culture and communal life was like in Europe before World War 2 and consider how Jewish pre-war experiences differed or were similar.

The activity will allow students an opportunity to reflect on the points of commonality between their lives and those of Jews living in Europe before the war. It will also enable students to begin to appreciate the immense diversity of pre-war European Jewish culture.

The activity can be easily split into two shorter sessions where necessary – Tasks 1 and 2 can be covered in the first session and Tasks 3 and 4 can be completed in a second session.

LEARNING AIMS

As a result of completing this activity, students will:

- Reflect on the concept of 'identity'.
- Have an introduction to the richness and diversity of Jewish life and identity in Europe before World War 2.
- Learn that 'Jewishness' was just one element of a Jewish person's identity, alongside a variety of other factors such as family, school, hobbies, etc.
- Reflect on the individuality and common humanity of Jewish lives affected by or lost in the Holocaust.
- Learn about the connection to Wales through the video testimony and primary photographic evidence of a Kindertransport refugee.



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EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Whiteboard/markers, projector, computer to listen to testimony.

Consider

Inform students that they are going to consider and discuss the word 'identity'. Collins Online Dictionary defines identity as "*Your identity is who you are. [or] The identity of a person or place is the characteristics that distinguish them from others.*"¹

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

You might ask the students questions such as:

- What identities do we have?
- Who determines our identity?
- Do you think a person can have multiple identities?

You might want to encourage the students to consider things like family, hobbies, school, beliefs, religion, health, being rich or poor, nationality, country of origin, language, and home.

On the student worksheet, ask the students to write down five words that come to mind when they think about their own identity (**Task 1**).

Collect

The students will be watching a video testimony from Inge Hack, a child refugee who came to Wales during the 1930s to escape Nazi persecution.

Ask the students to read Inge Hack's biography and watch a short video, where Inge describes her experience of being a Jewish child in Nuremberg, Germany in the 1930s.

Then, working in groups/pairs, ask the students to answer the questions on the student worksheet (**Task 2**). The students will also need to look at the collection of photographs from Inge's life in the 1930s.

¹Collins Online Dictionary, *identity*, n. (2022) <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/identity>> [accessed 15 February 2022].

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The testimony and photographs describe and show Inge and other Jewish children in a variety of scenes, most of which will be familiar to students from their own lives (for example, referencing familiar scenes of family and school life), highlighting that the Jewish children generally had interests and experiences which were much like those of the students.

And, as the images and testimony used in this lesson suggest, Inge—just like all Jews and everyone else—had multiple facets to her identity, formed by her family, friends, education, interests, and many other experiences.

The video testimony highlights an incident where Inge was prohibited from playing with a friend. The friend's father was an SS officer. From the beginning of the Nazi regime, Hitler entrusted the SS with the removal and eventual murder of political and so-called racial enemies of the regime (including, ultimately, the annihilation of European Jews.) Therefore, the testimony suggests that Inge was prevented from playing with her friend on the grounds of her Jewish identity.

Ask the students to read the handout regarding Jewish Life in Europe before the Holocaust.

Then, working in groups/pairs, ask the students to write four things they have learnt about the everyday life of Jewish people in Europe before the 1930s. Encourage the students to think about the differences in the lives and experiences of Jews during this time (for example, in relation to their nationalities, languages, jobs, education and traditions) (**Task 3**).

Encourage the students to perceive that many European Jews did not necessarily define their Jewish identity solely (or, in some cases, at all) in religious terms.

Construct

Ask the students to write a short letter as Inge Hack, to introduce herself to Edith Gordon (her Kindertransport sponsor in Wales). Encourage students to refer back to their discussion about identity at the start of the lesson (**Task 1**), as well as Inge's biography, video testimony and photographs (**Task 2**).

Communicate

Ask the students to share their letters with a friend or a member of their family (**Task 4**). Ask how their letters added to their friend's or family's understanding of Jewish life in Europe before World War 2. Ask them to write down some notes or keywords that reflect their response.



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Appendices

1. Handout 1: Inge Hack - Biography (including a collection of photographs of Inge's life in the 1930s).
2. Handout 2: Jewish Life in Europe Before the Holocaust.
3. Handout 3: Inge Hack - Interview transcription.
4. Handout 4: 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.

