



WORKSHEET: BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO THE KINDERTRANSPORT RESCUE OPERATION

Every group receives a short introduction to the situation of Jews creating the need for this rescue operation, as well as a list of aspects that might help you in the discussion. Afterwards please read the following testimonies in small groups.

Brief account on the Kindertransport rescue efforts



Kindertransport. Arrival of Jewish children from Berlin and Hamburg in London, 2nd February 1939.

ÖNB/Wien, S 52/11

On the eve of Nazi rise to power, about half a million Jews lived in Germany. They enjoyed equal rights and perceived themselves as part of the German society.

Following the accession to power of the Nazi party and the anti-Jewish measures taken in the 1930s, there was a radical change in the situation of German Jews. Jewish children were also affected: the number of Jewish pupils in the schools was limited to 1,5% of all pupils, they were separated from non-Jewish pupils in the classrooms, they were forbidden to participate in sports events, and were exposed to psychological harm from their classmates and teachers.

In 1938, Nazi Germany annexed Austria and took over Czechoslovakia, subjecting the Jewish citizens of those countries to Nazi oppression.

The high point of physical harm to Jews in that time was during the November Pogrom (the so called “Kristallnacht”) of November 1938. In attacks on German and Austrian Jews, synagogues and Jewish businesses were set on fire, dozens of Jews were murdered and tens of thousands were arrested.



Following the November Pogrom, desperate Jews increased their efforts to at least get their children out of Germany. The gates of many countries were in fact closed to Jewish refugees, but after news of the pogrom reached the world press, British government agreed to take in several thousand Jewish child-refugees.

Refugee aid organisations took care of all organisational and financial aspects of the travel arrangements, the transfer of the children to Great Britain and their absorption in British institutions and homes. All children had to be „guaranteed“, meaning that someone had to guarantee that the financial support for the child will not fall on the British government.

The children arrived from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Most of them took a train to the Netherlands and from there took the ferry to England. Some of the children were sent directly to (Jewish and non-Jewish) foster families, others were sent to a reception camp until suitable arrangements were found for them. Some of them were later sent to boarding schools.

During the rescue efforts, from December 1938 and until the outbreak of war in September 1939, about 10,000 refugee children arrived in Britain, about 80% of them Jewish. The vast majority of their family members remaining in Germany perished in the Holocaust.

Keywords for Source Work

The following keywords might help you discuss the testimonies. What is similar about them? What is different?

- farewell on the platform
- language / culture
- absorbing society
- positive experience
- negative experience
- feelings / outlook on the world
- disappointment / gratitude
- the journey
- reflection on identity



- reference to life before the Kindertransport
- life after the war / fate of parents
- hopes and dreams for the future
- survivor's guilt