



LESSON PLAN: Bystanders to History: The World's Response to the Holocaust

1 Provide students with background on the *MS St. Louis* using the information provided in the corresponding **Note**.

2 Introduce students to **Sol Messinger (bio)** and **Liesl Loeb (bio)** and show their clips of testimony. Conduct a whole-group discussion using the following questions:

- What did you learn about the ill-fated journey of the *MS St. Louis* by watching Sol Messinger's testimony?
- How far is Cuba from the United States? How do you think passengers felt being so close to the United States and freedom, but not being allowed to come ashore?
- What was the significance of "mañana"—the first Spanish word that Sol learned? What did "mañana" mean to the passengers on the *MS St. Louis*?
- How does Liesl Loeb describe the emigration process for Jews living in Germany?
- The quota number Liesl's parents had was in the 14,000s. She says that by the time her mother's sister was able to get to the consulate and get a number, they were in the 70,000s. What do these figures tell you about the desire of the Jewish population to leave Germany at the time?
- How does what these two individuals have shared compare/contrast to treatment of immigrants and/or refugees coming to the United States today?

3 As an introduction to the topic of the responsibility that other countries had in intervening in what was taking place in Europe, have students read the statements below (which should be prepared in advance on the board or chart paper) and decide with which position they identify most.

- a. Nations should be responsible for the safety of other nations and ethnic groups who are in danger at any cost.
- b. Nations should be responsible for the safety of other nations and ethnic groups who are in danger if it suits their interests.
- c. Nations should be responsible for the safety of other nations and ethnic groups who are in danger only if it doesn't cost too much tax money.
- d. Nations should be responsible for the safety of other nations and ethnic groups who are in danger if it doesn't involve risking human lives.

- e. Nations should not be responsible for the safety of other nations and ethnic groups who are in danger.

4 Divide students into small groups and have them discuss their responses. Emphasize that the goal is not to persuade classmates to change their minds about which statement they chose, but rather to share ideas and thinking on the topic.

5 Explain to students that they will examine the issue of ways that the free world reacted to the fate of Jews by studying what came to be referred to as “the Jewish refugee problem.”

6 Distribute and read the **Evian Conference** and **Bermuda Conference** handouts. Follow with a discussion using the questions below.

- Compare the two conferences; what were their official goals?
- What was the outcome of these conferences?
- Do you believe that antisemitism was a factor in the outcome of these conferences? On what have you based your response?
- What role, if any, should the United States play in helping to provide a safe haven to refugees from countries where gross human rights violations, genocide, or potential genocide is taking place?

7 Introduce students to Felix Nussbaum using information in the corresponding **Note** and then show *The Refugee*. Have students study the painting and then share their interpretations of it by discussing the following questions:

- What do you believe the artist was attempting to say to the world through this work?
- What do you think the globe in the painting represents?
- What might the bundle next to the man represent?
- How does the man in the picture perceive the world?
- Comment on Nussbaum’s choice of color, line, and shape. What is the overall effect of his choices?
- Do you think this piece of art accurately reflects how Jewish refugees felt during the late 1930s? Identify specific examples from one or more of the texts or visual history testimonies to support your response.
- Do you think this painting could have meaning for present-day refugees? Explain your thinking.

8 Next, show students *Portrait of an Unidentified Man*. Have students study the painting and then share their interpretations of it by discussing the following questions:

- What do you think the title of this painting means?
- How does Nussbaum portray gloom and despair in this painting?
- Compare this painting to *The Refugee*. What similarities do you see in the artist's choice of light and color?
- Does viewing the two paintings together tell a story? If so, what is the story?
- Do you think that earlier works by Nussbaum (pre-1939) were similar in style to these paintings? Why or why not?

9 To help students consider whether Nussbaum's style was different in his earlier works, show them *Shore at Rapallo*, and have them discuss the difference in the artist's style between 1934 and 1939. Explain that Nussbaum painted this picture of Rapallo in 1934, while visiting Italy with his companion and future wife, Felka Platek. Nussbaum spent time at the seaside resort with his parents, who were thinking of settling in Switzerland. This was the last summer that Nussbaum would spend with his parents, who returned to Germany and were eventually deported to Auschwitz and murdered.

10 Introduce students to Samuel Bak using information in the corresponding **Note**, and show the painting *Thou Shalt Not Kill*. Have students study the painting and then share their interpretations of it by discussing the following questions:

- What do you believe Samuel Bak was attempting to say to the world through this work?
- Why do you think he chose this symbol to express his idea?
- Who do you think the artist addresses in this painting?
- Comment on Bak's choice of color, line, and shape. What is the overall effect of his choices?

11 Provide students with background information on the debate regarding the role of the United States and other Allies with respect to the Holocaust available in the corresponding **Note**.

12 In small groups or as a whole class, read each of the excerpts listed on the **Primary Source Readings** handout. After determining the central idea of each excerpt, have students develop a list of essential questions based on the documents to stimulate additional thought and inquiry on the topic of how United States' officials responded to events as they were unfolding in Europe from 1933 to 1944.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 90-120 MINUTES