



LESSON PLAN: Groups that Rescued

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students consider groups of people that engaged in rescue efforts during the Holocaust. Through textual sources and excerpts from a podcast, students investigate the conditions in Denmark that allowed for the rescue of over 7,000 Jews in that nation. Students then analyze visual history testimonies and primary source documents to learn why the Kindertransport program in Great Britain was an exceptional example of rescue.

PART 1: WHAT FACTORS MADE THE RESCUE OF DENMARK'S JEWS POSSIBLE?

Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.

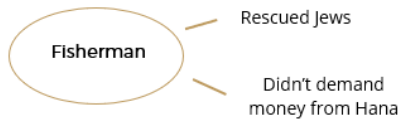
- 1 In pairs, students discuss the prompt below. The class then gathers and focuses on the examples of groups who helped others. They consider what conditions or influences might have enabled these groups to overcome the bystander effect.

In psychology, the “bystander effect” says the more people there are who witness someone in distress, the less responsible each individual feels to help. The likelihood that a person will receive help decreases as the number of witnesses increases. Discuss one instance in which a group of people neglected to help or acted to help someone in need. Why do you think the group behaved as it did in that instance?

- 2 Students learn that, during this lesson, they will explore groups who helped Jewish victims of the Holocaust despite the many pressures to remain uninvolved. They begin by listening to excerpts from the podcast, ***We Share the Same Sky***. Chapter V of the podcast recounts the rescue operation carried out by large numbers of Danish people that saved 7,200 Jewish lives in October 1943¹.

- 3 Students prepare a character map to be completed while listening to the podcast. Before listening, students are introduced to the story’s three central characters and note information about them in the center of their map. While listening, students add other characters from the story to their maps. For each character, they list their role, how they helped, and/or why they helped. (The handout, ***We Share the Same Sky Excerpts***, includes a transcript of the passages for students who would benefit from a text version.

¹ We Share the Same Sky is a seven-episode narrative podcast, presented by USC Shoah Foundation, that tells the story of Rachael Cerrotti's decade-long journey to retrace her grandmother's war story. Hana Dubova was born in Kolín, Czechoslovakia, in 1925. After Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia in 1939, Hana was part of a group of teens taken in by Denmark, and lived on a series of foster farms there. In 1943, Hana was part of the famous rescue of over 7,000 Jews organized by the Danish resistance, and escaped across the Baltic Sea to Sweden. After the war, Hana returned to Czechoslovakia and learned that her parents and brother had been murdered after being deported to Sobibór, an extermination camp in occupied-Poland. Hana lived in Denmark and Sweden for the next few years until the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 was passed and she received permission to emigrate to the U.S.



HANA DUBOVA
 - Jewish refugee from Czechoslovakia
 - Lived on foster farm in Denmark
 - Escaped from Denmark in 1943 at age 18

RACHAEL CERROTTI
 - Hana's granddaughter
 - Narrator of podcast
 - Retraced Hana's journey

BENT MELCHIOR
 - Was Chief Rabbi of Denmark
 - Age 90 at time of interview
 - Escaped on same boat as Hana at age 14



4 Students further reflect on the rescue operation through an analysis of quotes by people who were part of Danish society at the time. Each student receives a quote, cut apart from the handout **Quotes: Danish Rescue and Resistance**. (As there are only 12 quotes, more than one student may receive the same quote.) Students move around the room and find a partner. The partners read aloud and discuss their quotes. They add new “characters” to their maps, noting the motivations of rescuers. Students find a new partner and repeat this process until they have considered at least three quotes².

5 Individually or in pairs, students read the **Rescue in Denmark** handout for additional context on the rescue operation. They annotate the handout by highlighting the roles and motivations of people who helped Jews, focusing particularly on “The Elsinore Sewing Club.” Students continue to add information to their character maps.

6 Students share their character maps in small groups and identify common behaviors and motivations across the various members of Danish society. The class gathers and discusses some of the following questions:

- How was the situation for Danish Jews different from that of Jews in other German-occupied countries? How did things change beginning in 1943?
- How and why did members of “The Elsinore Sewing Club” get involved in rescue efforts? What consequences did they suffer for their actions?
- In general, what commonalities did you observe regarding the motivations of Danish people who supported the rescue efforts? What were their stated reasons for helping?
- Why do you think so many Christian Danes were willing to aid Jewish people when antisemitism throughout Europe was so widespread?
- What types of cultural and political systems in a nation allow for moral action such as the rescue in Denmark?

² These quotes focus on individuals who were part of the Danish resistance and opposed Nazi efforts. It should be noted that there were also a significant number of Nazi sympathizers in Denmark, making the efforts of rescuers especially risky. The National Socialist Workers' Party of Denmark arose in 1930, several years before the election of Adolf Hitler. The party in Denmark mirrored the Nazi Party in Germany in many ways, adopting its swastika and Hitler salute and espousing antisemitic beliefs, though not as virulently as in Germany.

PART 2: WHY IS THE KINDERTRANSPORT PROGRAM AN EXCEPTIONAL EXAMPLE OF RESCUE?

Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.

7 The handout, **Background: Kindertransport**, is projected or distributed. Individually or as a class, students read this brief overview and note any questions that arise for them about the Kindertransport program. These questions are posted so that the class can revisit them as they learn more.

8 Students watch testimony clips of Jewish survivors who were part of the Kindertransport: **Eric Richmond, Lynne Orne, and Vera Gissing**. As they watch the clips, students take notes on the **Testimony Reflections** handout.

9 After viewing the testimony clips, students journal or participate in a whole group discussion in response to some of the following questions:

- When Eric Richmond shares, “I didn’t want to go,” what feelings do you imagine this 15-year-old boy experienced on the day of his transport? What emotions might his parents have been going through as they convinced him to go?
- When the grown-ups told the children that they would follow in several weeks, do you think they believed this themselves? Explain.
- What awareness did these survivors have, as children, about why they were being sent away? What impact might this have had on such young people?
- Why does Lynne Orne say that her “one overwhelming feeling was gratitude to my parents”?
- What acts of kindness did Vera Gissing’s foster family exhibit? What did this mean to Vera?

10 Students analyze primary documents that deepen their understanding of public sentiment regarding the Jewish refugee crisis in the late 1930s. In pairs, students are assigned one of the handouts below to examine. After reading the document, they discuss and/or write responses to the “Think it Through” questions on the handout. Then two pairs who have read different documents join together. Each pair presents a summary of their document and, as a group, they compare British and American viewpoints as represented in the source material. Through this exercise, the class considers how exceptional it was for Great Britain to accept Jewish refugees in a climate in which most other nations had closed their doors³.

- **Lord Byron’s Appeal, Great Britain, 1938**
- **Letter to the Editor, Arizona Republic, 1939**

³ While the Kindertransport program was an exceptional humanitarian effort that saved thousands of lives, it is also important to understand its limitations. Due to fears of competition for jobs and infiltration by dangerous adults, immigration was limited to children only. This forced already victimized parents to make painful decisions about whether to separate their families, leading to lifelong trauma for many. Once in the UK, siblings were often separated and some children ended up in homes where they were treated as servants or outsiders. Children who learned of their parents’ demise while far away suffered further trauma, and some of those who were ultimately reunited found that cultural and emotional bonds were difficult to rekindle. An examination of the Kindertransport program must acknowledge both the positive and negative experiences of the children who were a part of it.

11 Students review letters written by the parents of Kindertransport children in order to consider their experiences and what they sacrificed to rescue their own children. In small groups, students are assigned one or both of the documents below. After reading the background and letters, they select three of the “Reflect and Respond” questions to explore through writing or discussion.

- *Postcards from a Father*
- *Letters from a Mother*

12 As a summative task, students respond to the words below from Rabbi Bent Melchior in *We Share the Same Sky*. Students fold a sheet of paper in half. On one side, they list at least three ways in which Holocaust rescuers embody the idea in the quote, citing evidence from lesson sources. On the other side of the sheet of paper, they list at least three ways in which they can apply this idea to their own lives.

“You cannot help the whole world; but those that are within your reach, you can treat and respect as human beings.”

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 120 MINUTES