

HMD lesson plan – What happened to the *Kindertransport* children?

Secondary lesson plan for HMD



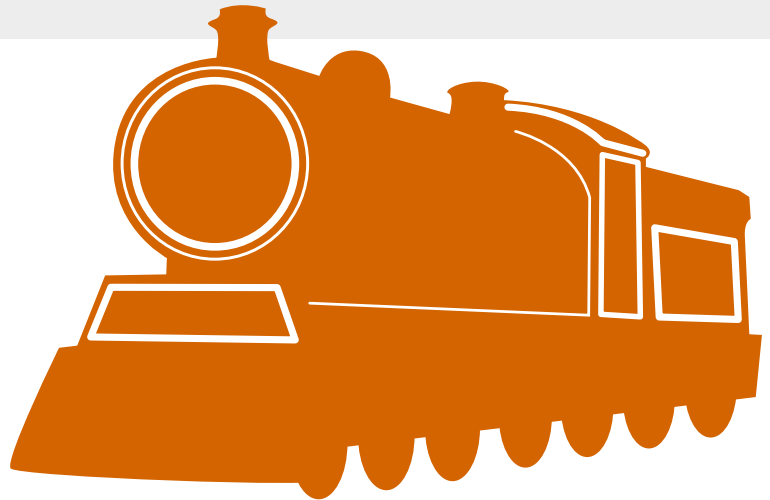
HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
DAY TRUST

Learning from genocide -
for a better future

This lesson is suitable for 11-14 year old students. Through testimony, artefacts and memorials it introduces the history of the *Kindertransport* – a programme that rescued 10,000 children from the Nazis. It is suitable for use in a range of subjects – such History, Art and Design, English, RE, PSHE, Citizenship.

Learning objectives:

- Students will learn what the *Kindertransport* programme was, and hear about the children rescued through it.
- Students will discuss the way the programme worked and what the children experienced.
- Some students will analyse details such as how it was organised and how the children were welcomed, and draw conclusions about what we can learn from it.



Background knowledge:

This activity is suitable for students with little or no background knowledge of the Holocaust, though you may want to ensure they have some contextual understanding of what the Holocaust was in advance. For example by delivering a **HMD assembly**.

You will need:

- The accompanying PowerPoint displayed so students can see the slides.
- The Martha Blend hand out – one per student or small group. You will be prompted when to give this out.
- A transcript is provided of a historical audio clip that students will listen to, which you might like to hand out to help students decipher what the children are saying, or for accessibility.
- The text in purple boxes with an orange triangle (see left) throughout the lesson plan is there for you to read to students to give them more information as you go.
- Discussion questions are accompanied by example answers to help you get the conversation going if students are unsure.

Lesson plan

This lesson plan is produced in partnership with The Harwich Kindertransport Memorial and Learning Trust - kindertransport-memorial.org

THE HARWICH
KINDERTRANSPORT
MEMORIAL
& LEARNING TRUST

Introduction to Holocaust Memorial Day (display slide 1)

Each year on 27 January we mark Holocaust Memorial Day to remember:

- the six million Jewish people who were systematically persecuted and murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators during the Holocaust.
- the Nazis' other victims, including Roma and Sinti people, disabled people, gay people, political opponents and many others who faced persecution and death at the hands of the Nazis.
- the millions of men, women and children, who have been murdered in the genocides which followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

Martha Blend and her autograph book

Display the pictures on slide 2 of the book and discuss:

- How old do students think it is?
- What do they think the writing is?
- What language is it in?
- What do they think the story is behind the book?



Today we are learning about a programme known as the *Kindertransport*, which translates as 'Children's transport'. It was a humanitarian programme which ran between November 1938 and September 1939. Approximately 10,000 children, most of them Jewish, were sent from their homes and families in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia to Great Britain to escape persecution from the Nazis.

Distribute the Martha Blend hand out for students to read, either together, in small groups, or individually.

See discussion questions below. You can go through these as a whole group, or give them to small groups and feedback:

| Questions | Example answers |
|---|--|
| Why did Martha have to go on the <i>Kindertransport</i>? | When the Nazis invaded Austria there was increased violence, discrimination and danger for Jewish people. Her parents wanted to get her somewhere safer. |
| Why couldn't her parents come with her? | The <i>Kindertransport</i> programme was only for children up to the age of 17. The British government didn't want lots of adults coming because there was already an unemployment problem in England. |
| How did she feel about coming to England? | Discuss the quote in particular. Martha and the other children had a range of emotional responses – fear, sadness, numbness, relief, hope, anger... |
| Was it a good thing for her to come to England? | Ultimately yes it was a good thing – Martha was well looked after by a kind foster family and survived the Holocaust. However, the rest of her family did not and she had to live the rest of her life without them. |

When Martha's boat docked in the UK she was in a town in Essex called Harwich. This is where most *Kindertransportees* arrived to. Martha's family had managed to arrange a foster family for her in advance, so she went straight from Harwich to London to meet them. Lots of children didn't have a foster family ready when they arrived. What happened to them?

Arriving in Harwich

Go through the pictures on slides 3-7, reading the captions as you go. Further information to read out:

All of the children who arrived at Harwich had name tags attached to their clothes and were registered on arrival. Those who had a foster family to go to, like Martha, were then taken onwards. Those who didn't, and there were many of them, were taken to local holiday camps along the coast, which were empty as it was winter. The largest of these camps was called Dovercourt Bay.

The first arrival of 200 children from Berlin and Hamburg docked at Harwich on 2 December 1938. The camp remained open until the end of March 1939. In that time almost 2,000 of the refugee children had been housed at the camp, some for a week or so, but others, those most difficult to place with foster parents such as older boys, stayed for months.

The holiday camp was not designed for the winter and the chalets had no heating. In the third week of December 1938, the coldest winter of the century moved in to the East of England and many people who stayed there as children remember Dovercourt for its freezing temperatures and icy water bottles in the beds at night.

In their own words

In 1939 the BBC sent a team to record a radio documentary about the children living at the camp. It was called *Children in Flight*. The children interviewed each other so you won't hear many adult voices. This was quite a radical format for the time. We will listen to a bit of the programme now, and hear what life was like for the children in their own words.

| Questions | Example answers |
|---|--|
| What makes the children happy? | Letters from their parents, presents. |
| What makes the children sad? | Missing their parents and not knowing when they will see them again. The cold weather. |
| How do they spend their time? | Going to the beach, playing football, learning English, singing, going to the cinema. |
| How have the local community welcomed them? | Free cinema tickets, gifts, visits from the mayor and mayoress. |
| What do the children hope for? | A foster family, and for their parents to join them soon. |

The role of the British government

Please note – this activity is a little more advanced and can be skipped if you are short of time.

Look at the table on slide 9 and discuss the things done, and not done, by the British government, and what was achieved by the various charities working on the programme.

Discussion questions:

- What did the British government do that was good?
- Do you disagree with any of their decisions? Why/why not?
- What do you think they could have done better?
- From what you can see on the table, why do you think 10,000 children were able to come? It may sound like a lot but this is the total rescued from across three countries. What stopped that number being higher?

Teacher Note

The government didn't cap the number, but also didn't give any money or support to the programme, so the refugee aid charities were only able to bring over as many children as they could make arrangements and raise money for.

Kindertransport memorial

A charity called The Harwich Kindertransport Memorial and Learning Trust is currently raising money for a memorial to the *Kindertransport* to be placed on the dock at Harwich where the boats arrived.

In small groups, discuss: if you were designing a memorial what would it look like? How do you memorialise a story like this?

Slide 10: look at the design for the memorial being built

- Why do you think the artist has designed the memorial like this?
- What is the significance of the different poses of the children in the memorial? (For example – the two eldest children are respectively looking forward and back. The younger children show a range of nervousness, curiosity, and childish oblivion.)
- Do you think it is important to have a memorial in Harwich? Why/why not?

Slide 11: watch the video clip of Ian Wolter – the sculpture's designer

This may simply answer some of the questions your students had about the design, or it may raise more questions to discuss. If you have time you could:

- Ask students what they think of Ian's idea that people can interact with the sculpture: some people think this is a good thing as it shows how anyone could be a refugee, some people think this could turn the sculpture into entertainment and trivialise the *Kindertransport*. What do you think? Why?
- Discuss the quote he shares from Rabbi John Rayner
- Look at how he has worked with historic photographs of real children arriving on the *Kindertransport*

Child refugees today

Look at slides 12 and 13. There are still child refugees around the world.

Take a look at the photographs on slide 13. What can we tell about these children? For example:

- Luckily, we know that they are now in a safer place as they have reached a refugee camp. They have shelter, food and water.
- However, it looks overcrowded. Although the refugee camp is safer than the country they left, it is not the same as having their own home. The people in these camps want to move on with their lives and make a new home, go to school and get jobs.
- Some of these children have a parent in the photograph and some don't. Some show older children looking after younger children. Some children in refugee camps are there with their families. Some of them might have got separated from their families.

This camp is funded by aid money from the European Union specifically to support Rohingya refugees. Ordinary people like you and I can also donate clothes, shoes, sanitary products and blankets to refugee camps to help. Now that you have learnt about Martha, the *Kindertransport*, and child refugees today, discuss as a class what you can do next. Here are some suggestions:

- It is important that we learn about people like Martha and what happened to them, so that history doesn't repeat itself. As a class you could find a way to tell more people about the *Kindertransport* – by having an **assembly**, **making a display**, or telling your families.
- You can make a commitment to always do something on Holocaust Memorial Day – light a candle, have a special **school lesson** like today, and learn about more people affected by genocide.
- You can raise awareness about child refugees today by learning more to create a display or assembly.
- You could organise a fundraising activity or a donation drive in your community for unwanted clothing and blankets to send to a refugee camp. (Visit helprefugees.org for information on how to donate money or items)
- We should always remember to be empathetic and kind to other people, including people who are different from ourselves.



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Important note for teachers - after the lesson:

Please let us know that you and your class have done this lesson, and we would love to hear about any follow up activities. Please contact the Education Officer on education@hmd.org.uk. This helps us to know how resources are used in schools, and your school may be featured as a case study when we talk about the range of activities taking place across the UK for HMD.

Take the learning further:

Find more secondary school assemblies and lesson plans at hmd.org.uk/schools.

Find more resources such as other life stories, films and activities in our [resources hub](http://hmd.org.uk/resources).



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Learning from genocide - for a better future

Martha Blend



This book was given to an Austrian girl called Martha in 1938.

The book is a collection of messages.

In 1939, Martha moved to the UK.

She never saw the people who had written in the book again.

In January 1938 Martha Blend celebrated her eighth birthday. Her cousin gave her an autograph book as a birthday present.

Martha was delighted, and asked the people she knew and cared about to write personal messages in the book. Her school friends and relatives picked up their pens and pencils and filled its pages with their thoughts. The entries were varied - some wrote witty comments and others wrote more earnest messages about the importance of good behaviour. Martha's father wrote a piece of special advice about education. His message to his daughter was 'He/She who puts the effort into their studies will achieve their life goals.'

Martha was very pleased with all the messages. They were a record of a happy time.

A few months later in March, the Nazis entered Austria and life changed forever. Martha remembers the streets being full of uniformed men in brown or black shirts with swastika armbands. The law changed to say that Jewish children had to be taught separately, and Martha was taken away from her friends and the teacher that she loved, and put in a new class made up of a small group of scared Jewish children.

In November 1938 there was a night of organised extreme violence against Jewish people. Martha remembers:

'In every town in Germany and Austria synagogues were burned, shops owned by Jews smashed up and looted, homes broken into. Worst of all, thousands of Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps like Buchenwald and Dachau. My father was one of those arrested and I can never forget the sound of the Nazi jackboots stomping up our stairs and battering on the door. My mother's pleas were ignored as he was taken away, an unarmed man with no power to resist the heavily-armed SS guards.'

It was very clear now that Jews were in real danger under Nazi rule.



After lobbying from refugee aid groups, the British government agreed that Jewish children could travel to Britain without a visa, as long as certain requirements were met. This programme was known as the *Kindertransport*. Martha's parents had been desperately trying and failing to find a way to emigrate as a family, so signed her up to come to England alone, hoping they could join her later. Martha was allowed to take one small suitcase, and in it she carried the autograph book.

'When my parents broke this news to me, I was devastated: an only child who had never been away from home, to travel to a strange country and to strange people with a different language! It seemed more than my nine-year-old self could be expected to cope with. But gradually, as the harassment by the Nazis grew worse, I realised that I had no choice but to go.'

The *Kindertransport* saved the children's lives but separated them from those they loved most, their parents. By the end of the war many were orphans, because their parents had been murdered in the Holocaust. Martha says:

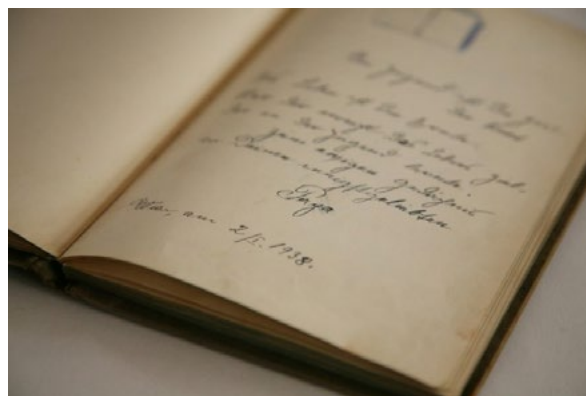
'I came to England as a nine-year-old child, but when the war ended, I was fifteen. I had had no word from my parents for five years and was dreading the discovery of what had happened to them. Rumours about the fate of the Jews in Europe did not make me feel optimistic. Soon I learned the sad fact that my parents, along with grandmothers, aunts, uncles and cousins, all had shared the fate of the millions of Jews who were murdered in Hitler's concentration camps and gas chambers.'

'There was nothing to go back to Austria for, so I made my home in this country and have lived in England ever since as a naturalised British citizen. After I had gone to school and university, I spent 25 years as a teacher of English, my second language. Since my retirement I have written a book about my experiences, called 'A Child Alone'. I have also told my story to the pupils of many schools: not for its own sake, but to show how hate propaganda can lead to terrible consequences of murder and mayhem. That is a lesson we dare not forget today.'

Martha never knew what happened to many of the school friends whose words of wisdom, joy and hope filled the pages of her book. As she held it in her hand it linked her to the world she had to leave behind.

Martha used her autograph book to share her story with young people. She hoped that as she read their messages to people, they would understand more about what was lost when the Nazis were in power. The messages, written by the relatives and friends of one eight-year-old girl, represent the world destroyed by Nazi policies of hatred.

Martha died in 2013. Martha's story is told in full in her book - *A Child Alone*.



The autograph book took on new significance as it now contains the only surviving sample of her father's handwriting.

Children in Flight transcript

Children in Flight, 1939, BBC

Kate: I am Kate. I am 16 and I come from Hamburg. I came in December with 200 children, mostly younger than myself. And now I am staying in a camp near Harwich with 600 who have had to leave Germany. We are all waiting to come to homes in England where we can stay till our parents will leave Germany.

Luther: A bell rings at eight o'clock, and we have to get up. Some boys get up earlier to make a run to the sea, which is near the camp. 8:30 we have good English breakfast which we enjoy. First we did not eat porridge, but now we like it. When we finish the breakfast, we get the letters or cards from our parents, and then we are all very happy. After that we clean and tidy our rooms. Then we have two hours lessons in English. After tea we can go to the sea, which is wonderful. Or we play English games or football. In the evening, we learn a lot of English songs till we go to bed.

Interviewer: What was your journey like?

Brigitte: Oh we had a very good journey, but we must make it quite alone. No one was allowed to come with us and I must carry my luggage always and it was very heavy. My mother was very sad that she must not come on the platform and say goodbye to me. It is nice to be in camp with all the other children. I feel not so alone.

Kate: We are so happy to be in England, aren't we Marian?

Marian: Yes, but it's terribly cold here in camp, especially at night.

Kate: I think Marian, you are as happy as I am to be in England, but my greatest sorrow is how to get my parents over.

Marian: Yes, that's it. There is no possibility for our parents to emigrate, and we don't know when we will see them again.

Kate: Every day, we get a lot of presents, for instance, boxes of apples and oranges, or toys for the little ones. We are grateful to the English and thank them all very much.

Marian: I hope I will soon come to an English family, where I can live and begin to learn, till my parents will emigrate and I can go to them.

Luther: Sometimes we go to a picture house in Dovercourt we have seen the good film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. We were all delighted.

Irene: The Mayoress of Dovercourt, the Mayor of Harwich paid a visit to the holiday camp. About that, we were very proud. A number of our friends have already left the camp. Very nice English families have taken them.

Adult: Sprechst du English? Ja? (Do you speak English? Yes?)

Child: Six

Adult: Six, yes, that's quite right, you're six.

(Child speaks German)

Adult: Can you can you count in English? Yes, you count 1...

Child: Yes. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8...