

AMERICA, INDIFFERENCE AND THE HOLOCAUST

TEACHER MATERIALS

Thank you for choosing a field trip and education program with the National Museum of American Jewish History. We are sure that your experience will be both enjoyable and educational for your students. Please use these pre-visit materials to help prepare your class for their field trip or outreach program, and to provide a context for the Museum lesson. In addition, there are suggested follow-up activities for you to do in the classroom after your visit. Please adapt these lessons to the appropriate grade level and ability of your class.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM

Established in 1976, and situated on Philadelphia's Independence Mall, the National Museum of American Jewish History is the only Museum in the nation dedicated to collecting, preserving and interpreting artifacts pertaining exclusively to the American Jewish experience.

The Museum serves as an important resource for information about Jewish life and culture, exposing visitors to American Jewish history through its changing exhibitions and complementary programming. It also offers a wide range of public and school programs related to exhibitions. Exhibitions are interpreted through age appropriate lessons designed for elementary through high school grades.

ABOUT THE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Your visit will be divided into three sections. A museum educator will conduct your lesson.

1. Your class will visit historic Congregation Mikveh Israel, "Synagogue of the American Revolution," which shares its location with the Museum. Students will learn about the role of the Jewish community in Philadelphia during the 18th century. They will also learn about Jewish ritual, symbol and worship. Students will examine "hands-on" objects and receive an introduction to the Hebrew language.
2. Students will watch a twenty-five minute portion of the film, "America and the Holocaust: Deceit and Indifference". This film is about America's anti-Semitic and anti-immigration attitudes and policies in the 1930s.
3. Students will learn about the story of the S.S. St. Louis by examining artifacts and using primary source materials.

Please allow two hours of time for the full program

Suggested Classroom Lessons

The following lessons are designed to prepare your students for their upcoming visit. Please adapt these lessons to the grade level and abilities of your students.

Suggested Pre-Visit Lesson

The following discussions will help your students understand more fully some of the issues that will be addressed during the visit.

1. What is in a Word?: Refugee

Objectives:

- To learn what a refugee is
- To understand different factors that cause refugees
- To relate that knowledge to current events
- To have students read the newspaper or other news periodicals

Instructions:

- Define the word refugee with the class. Discuss the difference between a refugee and someone seeking to immigrate to a country for economic reasons?
- Ask students to clip out newspaper articles pertaining to human rights abuses around the world.
- Ask students to clip out newspaper articles pertaining to people seeking refuge around the world.
- Discuss: What countries are people trying to flee? What are the reasons they are looking for refuge? Is it easier for some people to gain refugee status than it is for others? What is a quota? Why would people seek refugee status in America? Do you think that America should continue to open its doors to refugees?

2. Historic Timeline

Objectives:

- To understand the historical context for the voyage of the *St. Louis*
- To learn about measures taken against Jews in Nazi Germany
- To develop sorting, categorizing, and analytical skills

Instructions

- Copy and distribute the timeline that follows. This timeline will greatly enhance the discussion segment of the Museum lesson.
- Have students categorize the Nazi actions against the Jews as economic (affecting money, livelihood, or property), political (affecting rights of citizenship), cultural (involving art, music, literature, etc.), and other. Or, use other categories of your choosing.
- Discuss: What conclusions can the students draw based on the categorization exercise? What was the primary focus of the Nazi actions? Why? Which do they think would have affected them the most had they been Jews in Germany at that time? Why?

Timeline

The passengers of the S.S. *St. Louis* were fleeing Germany because it was a dangerous and oppressive place for Jews to live. The following is a brief timeline that shows the social and political climate that the passengers faced before deciding to leave Germany.

1933

- Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany
- The first work camp opens in Dachau, a German town near Munich.
- Boycott in Germany of Jewish-owned stores and businesses
- Jewish government workers are forced to retire
- Books written by Jews and opponents of Nazism are burned
- Jewish immigrants from Poland are stripped of their German citizenship.
- Nazis establish Reich Chamber of Culture, then exclude Jews from the arts
- Nazis prohibit Jews from owning land
- Jews are prohibited from being newspaper editors

1934

- Hitler becomes President
- Jews are banned from the German Labor Front
- Jews not allowed national health insurance
- Jews are prohibited from practicing law

1935

- Jews may no longer serve in the German army
- The Nuremberg Laws are passed. Among them are laws denying Jews citizenship in Germany. Jews are not allowed to vote. Jews are forbidden by law to marry or date Germans

1936

- Jewish doctors are no longer allowed to work in German government hospitals

1937

- “The Eternal Jew” exhibition opens. This traveling exhibition promoted Anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews and Nazi perceptions of their danger to the world
- Jews are banned from many professional occupations including teaching Germans, and from being accountants or dentists.

1938

- Law for compulsory Aryanization of all Jewish businesses
- At Evian, France, the U.S. convenes a League of Nations conference with delegates from 32 countries to consider helping Jews flee Nazi Germany, but no country will accept Jewish refugees
- Nazis order Jews over age 15 to apply for identity cards from the police, to be shown on demand to any police officer
- Jewish doctors are prohibited by law from practicing medicine
- Jews are prohibited from all legal practices
- Nazis require Jewish women to add Sarah and men to add Israel to their names on all legal documents including passports
- All Jewish property and wealth must be registered with the Nazis
- All Jews must have their passport marked with a large red "J"
- For a two-day period in November, many thousands of Jewish-owned stores and business are broken into and robbed. Synagogues and Jewish institutions were burned down. This was called "Kristallnacht" or "crystal night" because of all the broken glass left on the streets. 30,000 Jews were arrested and degraded. Many were sent to concentration camps. 91 Jews were killed. Jews were billed for the damage that occurred and any insurance money they may have been able to collect was confiscated by the government
- Jews are publicly humiliated on a regular basis
- Jewish children may no longer attend German schools

1939

- Nazis force Jews to hand over all gold and silver items
- Jews lose rights as tenants and are relocated into Jewish houses
- In May - The S.S. St. Louis, a ship crowded with 930 Jewish refugees, is turned away by Cuba, the United States and other countries and returns to Europe

Suggested Post-Visit Lessons

These lessons are developed to further enhance the students' visit to the Museum and to reinforce the information that they learned.

1. What Would America Do Today?

Objectives:

- To relate the S.S. *St. Louis* story to today.
- To have students think critically about American society

Instructions:

- Introduce the following quotation as a “Writing for Thinking” exercise. Students respond in writing to the quotation as a way of organizing their thoughts and preparing for discussion.
In the preface to the book *The Abandonment of the Jews* (Pantheon Books, 1984), David Wyman recounts the inaction of the U.S. government and much of the American public to the news of the during the Holocaust and asks, “Would the reaction be different today? Would Americans be more sensitive, less self-centered, more willing to make sacrifices, less afraid of differences now than they were then?”
- Have students share what they wrote.
- Discuss: What influences American attitudes towards immigrants and immigration? What is our attitude today? Why?

2. Internet Detectives

Objectives:

- To allow students to engage in additional research about the S.S. *St. Louis* using authentic archival and primary source materials
- To introduce students to a significant national resource in the field of Holocaust studies
- To develop skills in analysis and critical thinking

Instructions:

- Have the students visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website on the S.S. *St. Louis*:
<http://www.ushmm.org/stlouis/search/index.htm>
- Students can examine documents from the researcher's files for four passengers. They can trace what happened to that person from the He/she disembarked the S.S. *St. Louis*.
- Have students write up what they did on the website and what they learned.

3. A Survivor's Story

Objectives:

- To follow up on the *S.S. St. Louis* story by having students meet a Holocaust survivor
- To personalize the subject of the Holocaust so that it doesn't remain abstract and distant
- To allow students to engage with a person from another country and another generation

Instructions

Bring in a Holocaust survivor to speak to your class or at a school assembly. Lisel Loeb, a survivor from the *S.S. St. Louis*, may be available to speak to your class about her experience on that historic ship. Other Holocaust survivors may also be available to speak with your class. Call the Education Department at 215-923-5984 for more information.

4. Creative Writing

Objectives:

- To develop persuasive writing skills: formulate an argument and support it with evidence
- To deepen understanding for the American attitude towards immigration in the 1930s

Instructions:

Have students imagine that they are United States Congressmen in 1939. Their constituents are unemployed because of the Great Depression don't want a lot of immigration into the United States. The Congress is considering a bill to allow more immigrants into the U.S. because of the situation in Europe. The students need to decide what position they will take on the bill. They should write two short speeches explaining their position: one to be delivered in Congress and one to be delivered back to the voters. Students may deliver one of their speeches to the class.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following publications provide information about the voyage of the *S.S. St. Louis* in the larger context of American responses to the Holocaust. The material is appropriate for individuals at the adult or advanced high school reading level.

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Morse, Arthur. While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy. Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1983.

Newton, Verne. FDR and the Holocaust. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

Wyman, David. Paper Walls. America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

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VOCABULARY LIST

Anti-Semitism

Discriminating against and persecuting Jews

Ashkanazim

Jews who settled in or came from Central, Eastern and Northern Europe

Asylum

Protection granted by a government to political refugees

Holocaust

The systematic destruction of over six million European Jews by the German Nazis during World War II

Immigration

The act of people entering a new country in order to settle there

Isolationist

One who opposes the involvement of his/her country in international alliances or agreements

Judiasm

A religion based on the laws and teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Talmud

Quota

The number or proportion that is allowed or admitted, as in to a country

Refugee

A person who flees from their home or country to seek shelter and protection elsewhere, as in a time of war and periods of political or religious persecution

Sephardim

The Jews of Spain and Portugal and their descendants

Synagogue

A Jewish house of worship