
British responses to the Holocaust

What were the British responses to the unfolding genocide in Europe during the Second World War?

Key Question:

What were the British responses to the unfolding genocide in Europe during the Second World War?

Teaching Aims & Learning Objectives

- To develop a more complex and nuanced understanding of British responses to the Holocaust, based on the historical record.
- To be able to draw meaning from, and ask questions of, archival historical sources.
- To consider questions the historical record of British responses to the Holocaust might provoke about Britain's past, present and future.

Rationale

- Respond to the myths and misconceptions students hold concerning British responses to the Holocaust, highlighted in the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education national research into student knowledge and understanding (2016).
- Encourage students to construct an understanding of British responses based on the historical record, using primary source documents from a variety of archives.
- Enable students to develop a differentiated understanding of what British responses there were, how they changed over time, interacted with one another and were contingent both on wider developments in the course of the Second World War and knowledge and understanding about the dimensions of the unfolding genocide.
- Expose the complexity of the past and its presentation, and to allow students to consider what this means, both for their view of Britain's historic role in the Holocaust and for how this country should respond to future genocides and refugee crises.

Key Information

- This investigation is intended to be taught over two one-hour lessons to Year 8 History students and older.
 - You will need the following accompanying resources:
 - PowerPoint slides
 - Ability to play two short film clips from YouTube ('That's Life' and 'British Pathé')
- For each group (of approx. 4-5 students)
- A set of A3 evidence envelopes containing sources A-L, with guidance questions
 - An accompanying set of A4 context cards for sources A-L
 - An A5 envelope containing a set of 17 'event cards,' with accompanying date cards including historical context for the years 1939-45
 - A supporting vocabulary sheet
- Material to support teacher knowledge is included at the end of this lesson plan.

Lesson sequence

Below is a very simplified outline of the key activities in the lesson, with approximate timings. Each part is elaborated and explained in the following lesson plan.

Lesson 1 (one hour)

- Taking a survey: 'what happened when the British government knew about the mass murder of Jews?' (15 mins.)
- Where do our stories of rescue come from? (15 mins.)
- What do historical sources say about British responses? (30 mins.)

Lesson 2 (one hour)

- What do historical sources say about British responses? Plenary (15 mins.)
- What stories can we tell of British responses to the Holocaust? (35 mins.)
- Reflections (10 mins.)

Lesson Plan: Lesson 1 (of two)

Introduction (5 minutes)

Start by showing slide 2 of the accompanying PowerPoint, an outline map of Europe, and ask the class what they have learnt about studying the Holocaust so far. It is assumed they will have already studied the Holocaust for at least a few lessons before coming to the topic of British responses to the Holocaust. The purpose of spending a couple of minutes on this is to connect with their prior learning and set the scene for what is to come.

Emphasise with the students that genocide had implications for the whole of continental Europe. This raises questions about what the rest of the world was doing as genocide unfolded and, in particular, how Britain responded.

Taking a survey – ‘What happened when the British government knew about the mass murder of Jews?’ (15 minutes)

Show students the survey question from the Centre’s national research study (Slide 4). Then show them the seven possible answers and read them out. Ask them, without talking, to select the one they think is the ‘best fit’ answer, and to keep it fixed in their heads.

They will now vote on these answers to create a collective class response to the survey question. They each have a single vote but no one except the teacher will know how each individual voted. Ask them to close their eyes and read out the question again with each of the seven options. When they get to the option they think is best they raise their hand to vote.

Emphasise that this is not a ‘test’ as such, they are not expected to ‘know’ the answer: it is just to be able to initially gauge where the class are at the start – what are their *expectations* about how Britain responded, rather than their knowledge about what happened.

Count the hands and reveal the answers at the end when the class open their eyes. Closing eyes obviously circumvents peer pressure, but also adds a sense of drama in anticipation of the results that are revealed.

Explain to them that the survey question they’ve just answered is one of a vast student survey of schools in England. More than 7,000 students responded to this question. Show them what other students thought on Slide 5. Slide 6 is the same graph, but adds responses as a percentage for KS3 only in yellow boxes, which can be contrasted to responses of an aggregate of KS3, 4 and 5 students.

Ask the class questions such as:

- What can you see in the graph?
- What do you first notice?
- What patterns can you see?
- How does this compare with your class response?

Before feeding back, get them to discuss some of these in small groups first.

Encourage them to reflect on where the answer to this survey question, and their knowledge of the Holocaust, comes from. In a broader sense, depending on the class, you may encourage them to reflect on where their knowledge of the past comes from, and what about the past they can be certain about.

Where do our stories of rescue come from? (15 mins.)

This part of the lesson shares two moments in time with students, 1939 and 1945, which frame the start and the end of the Second World War. The purpose is to directly address and problematise some of the responses in the student survey, that Britain ‘developed rescue plans to save the Jews’ (response B), and that Britain ‘knew nothing until the end of the war’ (response G).

1939

Show slides 9 and 10 and ask, in the context of Nicholas Winton’s story, ‘What stories do we tell ourselves about British responses to the Holocaust?’ There is some further background information about Nicholas Winton in the Historical Context section, below. The film clip is from the BBC’s *That’s Life* programme, aired in 1988. The PowerPoint has a hyperlink to the clip, which can also be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_nFuJAF5F0. Ask students what kind of story this is telling about British responses to the Holocaust.

Show students slide 11. This refers back to the original survey question, ‘What happened when the British government knew about the mass murder of Jews?’ It presents information that could suggest response B, that the government ‘developed rescue plans to save Jews’ as a ‘case closed.’ Suggest to students that it might seem from stories such as Nicholas Winton’s, and the broader policy that accepted some 70,000 Jewish refugees before the Second World War, that this was what was done, and so there’s no need to investigate further: ‘case closed.’ Give students an opportunity to respond to this.

Now show students slide 12. At this point, as indicated in the Additional Information section at the end of this lesson plan, highlight the numbers of Jewish refugees who were denied admittance to the United Kingdom; and who was doing the responding in the *Kindertransport*: although the Government allowed up to 10,000 Jewish children to enter the United Kingdom, this was on the condition that the costs of supporting them did not fall upon the state – that individuals and non-governmental agencies organised the transports, housed and cared for the children, and that their residency in the United Kingdom would be temporary. Their parents were not permitted to enter the United Kingdom with them. Children were more acceptable immigrants as they posed no threat to British jobs, would be repatriated at the end of the war, and had to be financially sponsored by individuals or organisations within Britain before being allowed into the country. It is of note, too, that the stories of the rescued children are often remembered in how we choose to represent Britain’s role, but less so those of their parents who were left behind.

Clearly, the stories of the rescue of Jewish children before the outbreak of war do not, after all,

support option B, and more investigation is needed into what plans – if any – the British Government drew up to try to rescue Jews from the Holocaust, once the period of systematic murder really began under the cover of the Second World War. This is not to negate, of course, the roles that individuals such as Nicholas Winton played, nor the compassion and generosity of the families who welcomed the children into their homes.

1945

Now show students Slide 14. Ask them what they notice and think about the photograph. Some aspects that can be drawn out through teacher questioning include:

- Noticing the language employed on the sign.
 - What isn't mentioned? Jews, mainly because it was only later that different victims groups, notably the Jews, were differentiated. There's a politics around the language of not naming specific groups here – the emphasis is clearly on the generalised barbarity of Nazi crimes, and there is a lack of recognition of the scope and scale of the genocide of the Jews.
 - The use of the word '*Kultur*.' Blame is being placed on a German notion of *Kultur* – a distancing from broader western culture and tradition of which the Allies themselves were a part.
 - 'Concentration camp' – at this point, the idea of a 'concentration camp' isn't an alien idea to the British. Through the 1930s, for instance, Dachau was widely reported in the British media.
- Asking why this sign has been erected where it is. What is it marking? The camp isn't there anymore, having been burnt down to eradicate an outbreak of typhus.
- Asking who the sign is addressed to. The sign is designed by the victors rather than the victims.

At this point you may give them a little context to the photo. Some of the points you could mention are included in the Historical Context section, below.

Now show Slide 15 and play the clip from the British Pathé newsreel of British soldier, Gunner Illingworth, speaking following the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. Start playing the clip from 03:47 through to 04:26. A transcript of his short statement can be found in the Additional Information section. As well as describing the perpetrators as inhuman, he goes on to say 'We actually know now what has been going on in these camps. I know, personally, what I'm fighting for.'

Show slide 16, which suggests from this that it may seem as though the British government 'knew nothing until the end of the war' (option G), when the camps were liberated by the Allies: 'case closed.' It may also seem that this can go some way towards showing that (incorrectly) Britain 'went to war because of the Holocaust' (option A), as the soldiers are genuinely appalled by the evidence of the Nazi atrocities that they have encountered. Again, give students the opportunity to respond to this.

Finally, ask students what Nicholas Winton's story and the story of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen have in common. Bring out here that they can be interpreted as benign views of British

responses to the Holocaust, both of the role of individuals and that of the British Army and government. They can be used to tell a story of Britain as 'liberator', one that presents only a positive view of Britain's role. Tell students that they will now be looking at a range of archival sources to test how well this conception holds up to the historical record.

What do historical sources reveal about British responses to the Holocaust? (30 minutes)

Preparation;

- Students sit as small groups (4-5 per table).
- Give out two envelopes 'Envelope A' and 'Envelope B' for each group table. Tell students not to open the envelopes until instructed.

Before opening Envelope A, ask them; 'Between 1939-1945 when do you think most information about the mass murder of European Jews might start to reach people in Britain, and why? Who might be the first to hear?'

The aim here is to get them to start reflecting on and drawing on their own conceptual and chronological understanding of the Second World War. Applying their knowledge and understanding, some may be able to suggest that it is not really until the late summer and autumn of 1941, when systematic mass murder of Jews begins on a vast scale, that information could have started to become available, most notably following Operation *Barbarossa*, the invasion of the Soviet Union, and that news of these killings may then take some time to reach the Allies.

The interactive timeline activity that is at the heart of the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education's *What was the Holocaust* lesson would help students with this chronology, and students may also consider what factors could have impeded information about the Holocaust from reaching Britain.

To start, encourage the class to break down the investigation question into a series of sub-questions. These will inform the main question, and should look something like:

- *What knowledge was available in Britain about the Holocaust?*
- *When did this knowledge become known?*
- *Who had access to this knowledge?*
- *What actions were available?*
- *What actions were taken, and why?*

Now tell students what the two envelopes on their desk contain:

Envelope A is A3 sized containing 12 sources on A3 card that reflect some of the key moments around British reactions to the unfolding genocide in Europe. Underneath each source there are prompt questions for students to consider. These are intended to help focus students on specific features of each source as a starting point to construct a hypothesis about what the source reveals, rather than as a definitive checklist of questions to answer.

Once students have constructed a hypothesis about each source they can then look in the A4 envelope that contains 12 A4 context cards, one for each source. These provide background information and context that will help students to refine their hypothesis about what the source reveals. Pilot research in a number of schools shows that students enjoy the autonomy of being left to decide when the A4 envelope is opened, rather than this being directed by their teacher.

SOURCE A

The Wiener Library



AT FIRST SIGHT...

Take a couple of minutes to look at the photograph. What can you see?

You might want to think about:

1. Where was the photograph taken? Which country?
2. Who are the people in the photograph? What is their relationship to each other?
3. When do you think this photograph was taken?
4. What is happening in the photograph?

Try to back-up your ideas with some evidence from the photograph. Think about how you might answer 'how can you tell?' every time you make a statement from the image.

Example of an
A3 source card

SOURCE A: Source Context

Title: Refugees from German-occupied Czechoslovakia being marched away by police at Croydon airport
Date: 31st March, 1939
Archive: Wiener Library, London

The Wiener Library

Source Context

This photograph shows a Polish-Jewish man being deported. He is shown at Croydon airport being escorted by police officers as he is about to be sent on a plane back to Czechoslovakia. He had been living in Czechoslovakia and had just arrived in Britain. The Nazis had only just taken over Czechoslovakia on the 15th March, 1939, and some Czechs had decided to flee. Refugees at the time had no automatic right of entry to Britain, unless they could show they had enough money to support themselves, or had someone to look after them.

There was some opposition to immigration on the grounds that it threatened British jobs, and some feared that 'floodgates' would be opened if Britain offered sanctuary to all who wanted it. There is much we don't know about this photograph, and there are a number of stones that surround it. One is that the man in the photograph made such a fuss about being deported (put back on the plane to Czechoslovakia) that the pilot refused to take off, so the man stayed. Another is that the man had actually informed the press beforehand so they could come and record the event, hoping this might help his case to stay in Britain.

Key questions:

What does this source tell you about...



Example of an A4 context card

Teachers should note that there is an unevenness in the distribution of sources, with the years 1939-1941 containing fewer sources, because whilst the process of genocide was unfolding in the initial war years, the mass killing of the Holocaust was yet to be enacted. Following the advent of Operation *Barbarossa*, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the context of the Second World War changed as Nazi policy towards the many Jews in newly occupied territories changed. Again, students may be able to make links here with the UCL Centre's *What was the Holocaust? An Interactive Timeline* lesson, and may remember some of the unfolding events and context from it, especially in terms of identifying different stages of the developing genocide.

You may wish, at certain points during the activity, to draw students' attention to particular aspects of the sources. Each source has an accompanying historical background description later in this lesson plan to help highlight what aspects of each source students should be aware of in particular.

Also note to students that the sources represent a variety of voices, including the Prime Minister, the Foreign Office, Parliament, the Jewish refugee community, and the ordinary British public. Included in this is the voice of women at the time, exemplified by Source J which focuses on social reformer Eleanor Rathbone's *Rescue the Perishing* pamphlet. Ask students if there are any others in this selection. Is it important that there should be?

Lesson 2 (of two)

What do historical sources reveal about British responses? (15 minutes plenary)

Invite students to reflect on which historical evidence supports or contradicts the positions that they considered at the start of the previous lesson, and whether there are any student survey responses that can now be confirmed or refuted. Show slide 30 to help with this. In particular, bring to their attention to:

Source B: Neville Chamberlain's 'Declaration of War,' September 1939

This makes it clear for students that when the British government found out about the mass murder of Jews, they didn't 'declare war on Germany' (**option A**). In Chamberlain's 'Declaration of War' there is no mention of Jews: rather, he makes it clear Britain was going to war to aid Poland, which had just been invaded, in response to their treaty 'obligations' to that country. Further, in 1939 the mass murder of the Holocaust was yet to happen – so Britain could not have gone to war to save the Jews.

Source G and Source H: Churchill's speech notes and Anthony Eden's 'Allied Declaration', 1942

Both of these sources show that the correct response in the student survey is **option C**: 'punish killers after the war.' Churchill states in the House of Commons that 'when the hour of liberation strikes in Europe, as strike it will, it will also be the hour of retribution.' Eden's 'Allied Declaration' also makes clear that 'those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution.' This position was consistently made by the British government during the course of the war.

Source K: Air Ministry & RAF Reconnaissance Photographs, July 1944

This source refers to **option D**, the plan to 'bomb Auschwitz.' As the context card with this source makes clear, whilst Churchill was personally supportive of this plan in 1944, due to bureaucratic inertia in the Ministry of Defence it was never enacted.

Groups can also feedback on some of the following:

- Their findings from the new ideas they have gained from the evidence. Are there any particular issues that arise?
- Any further questions they might want to ask? Any gaps in the evidence?
- The issues around Britain's record from the evidence in light of 'British values.' To what extent, for example, does the historical record reveal a compassion towards the plight of Jewish refugees and a willingness to help them? (Students may decide that the answer to this is rather complicated, nuanced and mixed.)

In addition you can be guided here by the students themselves, to talk about whichever sources

they find particularly interesting and revealing.

What stories should we tell of British responses to the Holocaust? (35 minutes)

Continuing to work as small groups, students now use this initial encounter and discussion of the sources as a starting point to construct an understanding of British responses to the unfolding genocide in Europe.

Give each group a set of cards to arrange in any way they wish to effectively tell the story, or at least part of the story, of British responses to the Holocaust. Each A5 card contains a key event with a date, a summary, and a visual prompt (see example below). Many of these cards will be familiar to students from the previous source analysis task, as well as from Nicholas Winton and Ludwig Neumann's stories. A few, however, introduce new events and information.

Reigner Telegram
 August, 1942



Gerhardt Reigner (of the World Jewish Congress) sent a telegram to the British government, which was met with disbelief;

'received alarming report stating that, in the Fuehrer's Headquarters, a plan has been discussed, and is under consideration, according to which all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany numbering 3½ to 4 millions should, after deportation and concentration in the East, be at one blow exterminated...'

Example of an A5 arranging card

Show some ways in which they might be prompted to start thinking about arranging and linking the cards. They should be able to do at least one of these, and some may integrate more than one into their arrangement:

- Chronologically, to show how events unfolded over time. They can use the date cards (for the years 1939-45) to help with this and supply some historical context. Show slide 33 for an example of this.
- Thematically, for instance focusing on those cards referring to the Jewish refugee crisis.
- Positionally, for instance which cards concern the policy of the British government, of the Prime Minister, of Jewish groups, of the general public, and how do they relate to each other?
- Causally, for instance the Vrba-Wetzler report recommends the bombing of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the Karski report (amongst others) prompts Eden's Allied Declaration.
- Significance. If students had to choose any 4-5 cards to 'tell the story' of British responses, which would they be, and why?

Make sure you allow time for students to feedback their ideas to the rest of the class. Following peer feedback they may then revise their arrangement. They can photograph their final arrangement as a visual record of their thinking, as well as for the possibility of an extended piece of summative writing that could form an assessment at the end of this lesson.

Reflections (10 minutes)

‘What happened when the British government knew about the mass murder of Jews?’

Remind students of the 2016 UCL student survey question and graph from last lesson. Show Slide 52 as a prompt for this. Invite them to reflect on what their responses to the survey question would be now: has it changed or stayed the same? Why?

‘What are the stories we like to tell ourselves?’

Show students Slide 53. The contrast between the policeman in the two images is striking: ask students what they notice about it. Invite comments from students about what stories we like to tell ourselves, why, and the implications such stories may have.

‘What does it mean to be British? What kind of values do we want to nurture?’

Show students Slide 54. These two letters are connected to the story of Ludwig Neumann that students will have encountered in Source C.

Ask students to reflect on the two contrasting letters sent around this time. The first is from a member of the British public written to the British Consul, offering to host Frau Neumann and her daughter in Britain, whom they are inviting as their guests, an action that will give the author and her husband ‘great pleasure.’ The second letter is an anonymous note to Ludwig Neumann after his release from an internment camp on the Isle of Man, from a member of the public describing refugees who had sought safe haven in Britain. The National Archives contains many notes and letters like this, written to the Home Office, describing British attitudes towards non-British citizens and immigrants, that use words such as ‘scum’ and ‘aliens’.

Ask students to contrast these two letters, and reflect on what they suggest about what it means to be ‘British,’ and what values we want ‘British’ people to cherish and nurture in the present and future – what kind of society do we want to become?

Show slide 55, which is one of many other letters written to the Home Office that are similar to that in slide 54. Of interest here is the ‘sign off’ at the bottom of the letter that uses the term ‘Britisher.’ Ask students what they think this means as it is used here.

Engaging all learners

The selection of sources includes a differentiation of media types for students to work with, both to try to engage with students in different ways, and to represent the variety of ways in which knowledge was accumulated and expressed. This resource can also be differentiated in terms of the quantity of sources, though be aware that by removing some sources means students may be left with an incomplete understanding or narrow view of this period of history.

The use of the student survey is intended to bring some relevance and an empirical starting

point for their investigation, in which they are actively involved. Also, the use of powerful individual narratives, such as that of Nicholas Winton, are intended to engage students early in the enquiry.

Teacher questioning is a key element of responding to different student needs. By being alert to where student thinking is at, and asking questions to probe student understanding, teachers are able to challenge and reframe thinking where necessary, responding to student misconceptions in a dynamic way.

There is a key word bank if needed to help students with more difficult vocabulary, reflecting the language used in the source material.

Additional Information

British responses to the Holocaust aims to open the complexity of the past and the dynamic relationship between past and present, through the use of empirical research into student knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust and historical sources from British archives.

Pedagogical guidance

This session follows a number of key pedagogical strands:

An emphasis on student-centred, socially constructed knowledge and understanding, and a central role for the teacher within this. Students are encouraged to formulate and refine their opinions from historical sources while interacting with others in a group. This follows an approach based on the premise that ‘all knowledge is constructed... it is not the result of passive reception’ (Noddings, 2012: 126). However, as theorists such as Biesta argue, this shouldn’t marginalise the key role of the teacher in shaping, challenging and broadening student thinking.

An emphasis on a more nuanced, differentiated emphasis on a range of British responses, rather than a unified ‘British response.’ The idea behind the title of this resource, *British responses to the Holocaust*, is that the archives articulate different voices and realms of knowledge that existed in Britain at the time, be it the Foreign Office (The National Archives), PM Winston Churchill (The Churchill Archives), British Jewish communities (The Wiener Library), the wider British public (Mass Observation). Students, as a result, should move from a notion of a homogenised, unified conception of Britain’s reaction, towards a more differentiated understanding of what British responses there were; how they changed and interacted over time; and to make sense for themselves what meaning to place on this.

A focus on the use of primary historical documents. Students are encouraged to form hypotheses and make tentative judgments by referring to a base of primary documents revealed during the lesson. This lesson mirrors the belief of Kaiser & Salmons (2016: 100-1) that

‘ultimately, the aim of student interrogation of the sources is to reveal how different narratives are constructed; deepen student understanding of the Holocaust; add nuance and complexity to their understanding, and to allow students’ own meanings to emerge out of that encounter with the past, rather than using the past to teach predetermined lessons.’ In this lesson, student knowledge and understanding, under expert teacher guidance, is intended to emerge from the sources.

An approach that addresses and takes into account prior student knowledge, and aims to challenge common myths and misconceptions that may be held. The context and nature of student prior knowledge is at least partially unpacked by the teacher at the start of the lesson. By considering a small element of the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education national research study (2016), students reveal prior knowledge and conceptions of British responses to the Holocaust, which is then revisited at the end of the lesson.

Learning that is based on contemporary classroom research into current states of student knowledge of British responses to the Holocaust. This comes principally from the 2016 UCL research report, *‘What do students know and understand about the Holocaust? – Evidence from English Secondary Schools.’* This study revealed a number of key student misconceptions that these lessons attempt to redress. One of these, for instance, is that most students (34.4%), when given a choice, believed Britain went to war because of the Holocaust. By the end of the lesson it is intended that such student misunderstandings will have been dispelled.

Nurturing the ability of students to think critically. Students should be supported in formulating arguments that exhibit ‘deductive soundness’ (Shand, 2000: 3). This is where their conclusions and arguments follow from the premises as part of a clear logical thread. It also seeks to expose assumptions students may have, to avoid unsupported assertions, and adopt an openness to refine and re-evaluate their positions in the light of new evidence. This also relates to adopting a critical approach towards how values that are today promoted as ‘British values’ are not given, innate and taken-for-granted but need to be ‘fought’ for.

Historical context

Historical context about Bergen-Belsen

- At the time the camp was liberated, on the 15th April 1945, the Second World War was almost over.
- Bergen-Belsen was a camp near Hanover in northern Germany.
- It was the first camp to be liberated by the British. (You might ask students to consider why this was so – to think about the geography of the camps and liberation).
- Belsen was complex. Its function changed a lot during the war and its population constantly fluctuated (it functioned at various times as a training barracks for the Wehrmacht, a POW camp, a ‘holding camp’ for the exchange of POWs, and as a

'recovery camp' for those unfit for labour). Belsen was not an extermination camp, and there were no gas chambers.

- When the British arrived, out of the 60,000 inmates, 30,000 had just arrived the week before on death marches from the East. The camp was initially meant to hold just 5-10,000.
- On liberation the British soldiers were shocked. There were 10,000 corpses with 17,000 left barely covered in open pits. Most, but not all, of them were Jewish. The death rate was so high because of disease (typhus) and starvation.

Concentration camp atrocities: Interviews at Bergen-Belsen (1945) | British Pathe transcript

'Today is the 24th April, 1945. My name is Gunner Illingworth and I live in Cheshire. I am at present in Belsen camp, doing guard duty over the SS men. The things in this camp are beyond describing. When you actually see them for yourself you know what you are fighting for here. A picture in the paper can't describe it at all. The things they have committed, well, nobody would think they were human at all. We actually know now what has been going on in these camps. I know, personally, what I'm fighting for.'

Historical context about Sir Nicholas Winton

- Nicholas Winton worked tirelessly to rescue Jewish children from German occupied Czechoslovakia.
- On the eve of war, he took applications from Jewish parents at his hotel in Prague.
- He organised fund-raising to pay for transport to Britain and to guarantee that children younger than 17 would not remain in the UK. A warranty of £50 had to be paid to ensure this happened at the end of the war.
- He found foster homes in Britain willing to take the children.
- He rescued 669 children, most of them Jewish. This action became known as the 'Czech *Kindertransport*.'

Background to historical archive sources

Much of the background text for these key documents is adapted from Gilbert's (1981) *Auschwitz and the Allies*, with some additional information from a variety of other sources (Sharf, 1964; Wassertein, 1979; London, 2000). Gilbert's book is highly recommended as a good starting point for any teachers wishing to expand their knowledge of this aspect of the Holocaust.

Whilst background information is contained in each of the context cards, below is a very brief rationale for the choice of each of the 12 sources and its function in the overall investigation.

Source A: Refugees at Croydon airport (Wiener Library)

This shows an aspect of British ambivalence around Jewish immigration into the UK in early 1939. Whilst it has been argued that Britain's pre-war record towards Jewish refugees in comparison with other countries was 'relatively generous' (Wasserstein, 1979: 9), as perhaps 70,000 entered between 1933 and 1939, there was a definite undercurrent of antagonism, and many more were denied entry. The 1939 White paper limited numbers allowed in to Britain. Some in Britain argued the influx of Jewish refugees aggravated unemployment, threatened to open the 'floodgates' to other refugees, and that a mass influx might lead to outbreaks of antisemitism.

Source B: Neville Chamberlain's declaration of war (The National Archives)

In declaring war on Germany on the 3rd September 1939, Chamberlain explained his reasoning: that 'going to the aid of Poland' was a way of Britain and France fulfilling their treaty 'obligations' to defend her when Germany invaded. This source is included to counter the most common response in the 2016 student survey: that Britain declared war on Germany when the government learned about the mass murder of Jews. In Chamberlain's statement there is no mention of Jews or mass murder (which, indeed, had not yet begun as a systematic programme of genocide).

Source C: Ludwig Neumann on the Isle of Man, 1941 (Wiener Library)

This source shows how German nationals, including Jewish refugees, were treated as 'enemy aliens' in Britain at the start of the war and the hostile, visceral reaction of some members of the public towards them. At the start of the war there were an estimated 80,000 potential 'enemy aliens' living in Britain, including Germans, Austrians and later Italians. The government divided them into three categories – 'A' were 'high risk' (600); 'B' were 'doubtful cases' (6,500); and 'C' were 'no security risk' (64,000) which included mostly refugees fleeing Nazi persecution. At first, only 'A' category were sent to special 'internment camps' – eventually, almost all were. Many were sent to camps in racecourses, such as Ascot and York, or incomplete housing estates, such as Huyton near Liverpool. Most, though, were sent to the Isle of Man.

Ludwig Neumann was a German-Jewish businessman who owned an industrial clothing factory in Essen. After he was forced to sell it to the Nazis he was sent to Dachau concentration camp, and from there left Germany for Great Britain, where he was briefly interned in the Isle of Man as an enemy alien. He then went on to serve as an anti-aircraft gunner for the British. The National Archives contains many notes and letters, written to the Home Office, describing British

attitudes towards non-British citizens and immigrants such as Neumann.

Source D: The Daily Telegraph, 5th June 1942 (Imperial War Museum)

This is an example of how events were being reported by the British media, bringing increasing knowledge of aspects of the unfolding genocide into the public realm. On 25 June 1942, the *Daily Telegraph* published information that 700,000 Polish Jews had been murdered. It mentioned Chelmno, in Poland, which was the first of the Nazi death camps. Mobile gas vans were used to murder Jewish men, women and children. The newspaper was informed about this by Szmul Zygielbojm, a representative on the Polish National Council in London, who had received a report from the Bund in occupied Poland, transmitted to London via the Polish underground. The Bund was a Jewish socialist party in Poland which promoted the political, cultural and social rights of Jewish workers and sought to fight antisemitism. On June 26th 1942, in a further effort to publicise the details of the Nazi policy against his fellow Jews, Zygielbojm broadcast the main facts of the Bund Report on BBC radio.

Source E: The Riegner Telegram (The National Archives)

Gerhart Riegner's telegram was significant because it included intelligence about both Hitler's own constant reiteration that the war would end with the annihilation of the Jews, as well as the pattern of recent deportations. For the first time the seemingly diverse deportations made sense as part of a pattern and a plan. The information reached Riegner from a German industrialist who hated Nazism.

On August 8th, convinced that the message was as accurate as it was terrible, Riegner handed an identical telegram to the British Consul to send to Sydney Silverman in London, a Labour MP, and Chairman of the British Section of the WJC. Silverman was finally given Riegner's message on August 17th, and promptly asked for an interview at the Foreign Office. At the interview, Colonel Ponsonby said, 'he should consider whether any action taken by the Jewish Associations might not annoy the Germans and make any action they were proposing to take even more unpleasant than it might otherwise have been.' It was clear that the impact of Riegner's telegram had been lost.

Source F: Churchill's speaking notes from the House of Commons (The Churchill Archives)

In Parliament, Churchill condemned the 'utter degradation of the Nazi nature' and the atrocities they had committed across Europe, with particular reference to the Jews. This is an example of senior governmental knowledge of atrocities. Although Jews are mentioned, the language is more rhetorical than specific. The final sentence alludes to British strategic wartime policy of dealing with the atrocities being committed: 'When the hour of liberation strikes in Europe, as strike it will, it will also be the hour of retribution.'

Source G: Churchill's letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury (The Churchill Archives)

This letter of support from Churchill, written to the Archbishop of Canterbury, condemns Nazi atrocities against the Jewish people. It shows the viewpoint of the Prime Minister as well as the inference that the fact that the public meeting in the Albert Hall was being held to express outrage at the atrocities must indicate a significant degree of (unspecified) public awareness of

what was happening. William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time, supported social and economic reforms in Britain and worked to combat antisemitism and other forms of prejudice.

Source H: Allied Declaration (The National Archives)

The Allied Declaration came as evidence emerged, particularly from the Jewish underground, that made knowledge of the unfolding genocide increasing apparent, and as consequent calls for the Government to act grew. This source is included as Anthony Eden makes clear the British Government's intent that 'those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution.' As with source F, students should therefore be clear that the correct answer in the student survey should be C: that Britain would 'punish the killers after the war.'

Source I: The Suicide letter of Szmul Zygielbojm (The National Archives)

Szmul Zygielbojm, the Bundist deputy to the Polish National Council, made frantic efforts to persuade the Polish government-in-exile in London, the British Government and its Allies to do more to help save the Jews of continental Europe, but they came to nothing. On 11th May, 1943, he told a Polish Jewish reporter that he was contemplating a hunger strike to draw attention to the slaughter. However, on 12th May Szmul Zygielbojm committed suicide in London. His note said, 'the responsibility for this crime... falls indirectly on the whole human race.' Although Zygielbojm's death was widely reported in the press, the motive behind it received little notice.

Source J: *Rescue the Perishing* by Eleanor Rathbone (Wiener Library)

This source helps give voice to women who were active in urging the Government to do more to help Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. The response she received in Parliament in particular indicates the kinds of barriers that such advocates of action faced.

Eleanor Rathbone was a social reformer and independent MP. In her pamphlet she was updating information on Nazi extermination, and argued that the British Government showed little sign of urgency in dealing with the refugee problem. At her own expense, 10,000 copies were printed and distributed widely. However, some saw it as being overly 'aggressive'. It is interesting how her plea reveals the thinking of MPs opposed to the relaxing of immigration restrictions. Conservative MP Colonel Ward, who spoke after her, responded by saying that 'to admit a large number of refugees of the Jewish religion might easily fan the smouldering flames of antisemitism which exist here into a flame' (Gilbert: 139). He also feared they would gravitate to the East End of London, where, after the Blitz, there was a severe housing shortage. He suggested refugees should be settled in Libya and Tunisia, in North Africa, instead.

Source K: Air Ministry & RAF reconnaissance photographs, July 1944 (The National Archives)

The possibility of an Allied bombing of Auschwitz was mooted in the summer of 1944. According to Martin Gilbert, Churchill was supportive of bombing raids on Auschwitz, but the War Department were resistant for the 'technical difficulties involved' (Gilbert: 306). There was also some resistance from the World Jewish Congress, concerned that the first victims of any bombing would be the Jews themselves, but they did call for bombing railway lines. It also reveals that the Allied priority was in the strategic bombing of places such as Auschwitz III

(Monowitz), a synthetic oil and rubber plant, in an attempt to destabilise German war industry, rather than the death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. On August 20th, for instance, Monowitz, five miles from the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau, was bombed and several buildings 'severely damaged.' According to Gilbert, 'although Allied bombers on various missions continued to fly over Birkenau, the pilots, navigators, and bombing officers were totally unaware of what lay below them' (Gilbert: 311).

Source L: Atrocity film directive (Mass Observation)

This shows a member of the public's response to seeing the footage of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen in a cinema in Hampstead. It is interesting in that it reveals misconceptions held at that time, as well as a sense of disbelief, describing the camps as a 'gross misrepresentation', as part of an 'unfair trick' the government has played on the public.

Bergen-Belsen, near Hanover in northern Germany, was the most significant of the camps to be liberated by the British, on April 15th, 1945. Conditions were horrific when the British arrived. Half the 60,000 inmates had arrived just a week before on death marches from the East. Disease, especially typhus, was rife, as was starvation, with many of the inmates being described in witness accounts as 'living skeletons' and 'walking dead'.

A chronology for teachers of some key events

This timeline is intended to provide some historical context and a sense of the chronological unfolding of events, to support teachers in teaching *British Responses to the Holocaust*.

Date	Title	Event
1917		
November	Balfour Declaration	The British Government issued the Balfour Declaration in which it undertook to facilitate the establishment in Palestine of 'a national home for the Jewish people.'
1922		
December	Palestine Mandate	The League of Nations confirmed the terms of the mandate to govern Palestine accorded to Britain. 1918-1939 the Jewish population of Palestine grew from 56,000 to 475,000 (from under 10% to 31% of the population).
1933		
September	Jewish emigration from Germany	From 1933 onwards, emigration was a central element in the German Government's Jewish policy. A special arrangement with the Jewish Agency for Palestine: the <i>ha'avara</i> (Hebrew: 'transfer') agreement enabled Jewish emigrants to Palestine to retain part of their assets, but by 1938 this became almost impossible.
1938		
July	Evian Conference	An international conference meeting on the initiative of President Roosevelt to seek an international solution to the refugee problem. It established a Committee to negotiate with the Germans and other

		countries, but by the outbreak of war had little to show for its efforts.
August	Jewish emigration from Austria	A Central Office for Jewish Emigration was established in Vienna under Gestapo auspices. This was then replicated in Germany.
1939		
Nov 1938-Aug 1939	Kinder-transport	The UK took in 10,000 mainly Jewish children after <i>Kristallnacht</i> . Nicholas Winton found 669 homes for Czech Jews, who needed a financial sponsor to enter the country.
May 1939	White Paper	In response to the 1939 Arab Revolt, Britain limited Jewish immigration to Palestine to 75,000 for five years, and said that further immigration would be determined by the Arab majority.
June	Buchenwald	The British government was aware of the mistreatment of Jews, even prior to the war, as the death of 110 Jewish prisoners at Buchenwald concentration camp was reported.
1939-1941		
	Shanghai	Following the outbreak of the Second World War, in desperation many Jews fled Nazi-occupied Europe to the International Settlement in Shanghai, the only city in the world where refugees could enter without visas – by 1941 there were 20,000 Jewish refugees in Shanghai.
May 1941	Polish Government-in-Exile	The Polish Government-in-Exile sent a formal note to the Governments of all the Allied and neutral powers, describing how ‘tens of thousands’ of Polish citizens had been ‘incarcerated in concentration or internment camps,’ and it went on to refer specifically to four such camps, ‘Oswiecim (Auschwitz), Oranienburg, Mauthausen and Dachau’.
Autumn 1941	Operation Barbarossa	German coded messages intercepted by British intelligence begins to reveal mass slaughter by SS killing squads of Jews and others in the Soviet Union on an unprecedented scale.
1942		
February	Sinking of the MV Struma	This ship, containing Jewish refugees from Romania, was denied entry to Palestine by the British and was then torpedoed and sunk on being sent back.
May	Bund Report	A report from German-occupied Poland reaches Britain, providing details of the mass murder of Jews and including in mobile gas chambers, a reference to the death camp of Chelmno. Details are published in the <i>Daily Telegraph</i> and broadcast on the BBC.
May	Biltmore Programme	The Biltmore programme came from a conference of American Zionists in New York who called for ‘the fulfilment of the Balfour Declaration’ through the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in an independent Palestine. The British were not interested in such a plan.
August	Riegner Telegram	A message about the Nazis’ extermination plan reached Gerhart Riegner in Switzerland. He passed it on to Britain and the USA. A representative of the British Foreign Office said they’d had no confirmation about it from other sources, and warned not to ‘annoy the Germans’ further in case this provoke worse measures against the

		Jews.
September	Churchill on French deportations	Churchill gave a speech in the House of Commons, calling French deportations ' <i>brutal persecutions</i> ' and declaring ' <i>When the hour of liberation strikes in Europe, as strike it will, it will also be the hour of retribution.</i> '
November	Karski Report	An eye-witness report given to the Foreign Office describing liquidation of Warsaw ghetto, deportations, and gassings at Belzec. Led to Allied Declaration in December.
December	Allied Declaration	The Karski report led to Allied Declaration (Britain, the USA and USSR) in December saying that if extermination was carried out, those responsible would receive their 'due punishment'.
1943		
January	Casablanca Conference	The Allies proclaimed that they would accept nothing less from the Germans than 'unconditional surrender' and that they intended to 'impose punishment and retribution in full' on the 'guilty, barbaric leaders' of the countries currently opposing them.
April	Churchill's pledge to world Jewry	Churchill told the War Cabinet he believed the Balfour Declaration should be honoured, and Jews should be allowed to emigrate to Palestine.
April	Bermuda Conference	This was an Anglo-American Conference on Refugees. Both Jews and many non-Jews had advocated an 'open door' policy on immigration, but to their disappointment this was rejected. Little concrete was agreed.
1944		
April	Vrba-Wetzler report	Two Slovak Jews who escaped Auschwitz wrote a report on it. It was the earliest attempt to estimate numbers and gas chamber descriptions.
May	Eichmann's exchange proposal	Eichmann initiated an approach to exchange Hungarian Jews on a pro-rata basis with the Allies, especially for trucks. Britain and the United States were suspicious of the sincerity of this offer, believing it to be a ploy to split them from their alliance with the Soviet Union, and it was rejected by the Allies.
1945		
April	Liberation of Bergen-Belsen	Liberated by the British on the 15 th April, it became emblematic of Nazi crimes in general, both in the immediate post-war period and after.

Sources for timeline taken from Black (2016), Gilbert (1981), and Wasserstein (1979) (see Bibliography);

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