
Fighting racism, standing up against hate:

#Leon110

# As we approach the 110th anniversary of Leon Greenman’s birth, we are delighted to announce a UCL Centre for Holocaust Education Beacon Schools, alumni, partners and friends’ initiative for young people.

*Dear Beacon School Lead Teachers and alumni, partners and friends - we are living in unprecedented times and schools, teachers, young people, parents and families are all responding to fast-changing circumstances, shifting priorities at home and at school/work owing to COVID-19. But these are also challenging and difficult times: socially and politically we see division. ‘Them and us’ thinking threatens our communities, our cohesion and our values, instances of antisemitism, and rising hate crime worry many[[1]](#footnote-1) – and our school communities are often at the forefront in the fight to respond, whether through the curriculum, by promoting British values and SMSC, safeguarding and citizenship schools strive to ensure our young people have safe spaces to discuss complex issues and empowering them to safeguard their futures. We know that young people care about these issues. In recent times we have seen a range of protest movements, advocacy and campaigning for causes that students have been inspired and empowered by, finding their voices and innovative avenues to address injustice and inequality to fight for causes that matter … we hope this initiative speaks to those contemporary and very real and relevant concerns, by returning to the past and to a British Jewish man’s experience and considering its legacy and relevance today.*

***Leon Greenman*** *– as you know - was born 18 December 1910 and thus this year marks the 110th anniversary of his birth. He was closely associated with the IOE and his story is interwoven in many of the Centre’s resources and materials. Through an ‘Authentic encounter’ with an ordinary object – a handmade toy – we introduced Leon’s family, Else and Barney to you and thereby your students, providing young people a way into exploring the Holocaust. In ‘Surviving survival’ we shared Leon’s post-war life to enable teachers and young people to reflect upon the Holocaust’s lasting impact and the relationship of that difficult history to contemporary issues. What the legacy suite of materials, focusing upon Leon, reveal is something more of his experience and life, raising uncomfortable, challenging and difficult questions for us today about just what surviving survival means – but in Leon we also see a man facing down racism, standing up against antisemitism and hate long after the Holocaust. In this context Leon was a trailblazer in terms of speaking out about his experiences and standing with and up for the voiceless, the vulnerable, those facing hate, discrimination or marginalisation and injustice – through this anniversary project, we hope to remember and honour Leon and your Beacon School work – a project that will look to the past (Leon and his life) to help us consider our present and possible futures for our communities and beyond.*

*So, this pack provides all the information, links and details you will need. We very much hope our Beacon Schools, Quality Mark schools, partners and friends will join us and lead the way, as we both educate about and commemorate this moment in time.*

Nicola Wetherall and Ruth Anne Lenga

This pack provides:

1. What is **‘Fighting racism, standing up against hate #Leon110’**? An introduction to the anniversary initiative and the competition.
2. **Resources**: A note to students – and invitation to reflect on the poem (RAL)

Student template for competition entries.

Note to teachers – discussion points to consider with students when reading Leon’s poem.

PowerPoint (based upon the ‘Note to students’ and with additional notes)

Narrative summary for teachers / #HMD2021 ‘Be a light in the darkness’ variant that could be a case study.

1. What other ways could #Leon110 be marked? **How else to get involved?**
2. Additional materials or links: [Authentic Encounters](https://www.holocausteducation.org.uk/courses-events/online-cpd/authentic-encounters-holocaust-starting-point-teachers/)

[Legacy suite: ‘Surviving Survival’, ‘Liberation’ and ‘Home’, ‘A note from Leon’ and ‘The First Year’.](https://www.holocausteducation.org.uk/lessons/core/surviving-survival/)

[*The Story of An Englishman in Auschwitz*](https://theconversation.com/the-story-of-an-englishman-in-auschwitz-71601)

[Leon’s interview with the USC Shoah Foundation](https://vhaonline.usc.edu/login)

# At its heart, our anniversary initiative takes the form of a **competition** for Year 8 and 9 students. Our aim is that through engaging with this initiative students encounter/revisit Leon’s story in the first instance, and, in light of that, pause to consider his life, legacy and contemporary relevance.

**What is the competition? How do I get started and who can take part?**

All Beacon Schools (alumni and present) students in England – students in Years 8 and 9 – can participate in this competition.

Simply share the Note to students – the letter or with accompanying PowerPoint (in tutor time or within a subject lesson, where you have some time to explore this), and then explain the task: using the student template provided, students are to reflect on the words of Leon’s poem (this may be familiar to you from the Legacy materials) and, by applying what they have learned about Leon, what they understand from the poem, consider Leon’s legacy today and the contemporary relevance of his story in a short reflective creative writing response.

Students need to:

1. Give Leon’s poem a title.
2. Complete the poem. Write a final stanza in response to Leon – by considering his legacy and the relevance of his story, students are to address his concerns, fears, uncertainties and consider his questions, or new emerging questions given our context today.
3. Explain their choice of a title for the poem and offer a short explanation (no more than 300 words) of why they reacted/responded to Leon in that final verse the way they did. This element could potentially be completed/recorded as a video clip/file by mobile phone or ipad/other electronic devise and sent to Centre along with the template. Any such recording should be no more than 3mins in length and permission for filming and use must be secure and in line with school policies before being shared with the Centre.

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|  |  | Competition/assignment task and criteria |
| Year 8 and 9 students | Competition response to Leon’s poem  | The response stanza **can** take whatever form the student decides – acrostic, haiku, free verse, sonnets – but **should not** be more 14 lines (using the Centre’s double sided A4 template provided) |

**Am I allowed to help my students?**

Yes, by reviewing, giving advice but not marking. This is not designed to be demanding of teachers/tutors at this time, rather to be encouraging and supportive throughout the process.

**How will you decide on your school’s key stage winning/entries to national competition? What is the process? How does it work? Who does what?**

The poem responses, once completed, should be submitted by students to their usual teachers/form tutors.

Teachers will have an opportunity to look at students’ work and offer some feedback (in line with schools remote learning feedback expectations at this time, but this should be light-touch and minimal, not lead to telling students what to write etc). Teachers will then select (up to 5) poem responses from their participating Year 8 and 9 student entries of their school and submit them to the Beacon Schools competition.

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| Students | Students write their poem responses and complete the Centre entry template |  |
| Teachers | Students’ usual teacher/tutor/HOY will decide which are the best entries to submit (up to five entries per Beacon School) and email them to the Centre (n.wetherall@ucl.ac.uk).  |  |
| Long List Panel | The Centre’s #Leon110 team will review entries B |  |
| Short List Panel | The Centre’s leadership team will decide on a key stage shortlist of 10 entries. |  |
| Showcasing the Short List | The shortlisted poem responses will feature on the Centre’s website as part of our marking Leon’s anniversary. |  |
| Awardee  | The Year 8/9 awardee/s will be decided by the Centre’s Leadership Group  |  |

**How do I submit my students’ best poem responses?**

For each entry use student and a tutor or class group only, remove other identifiers. (Keep full note/details for your internal use/records) and then attach your poem responses templates (up to five from your school) to an email. In the subject line, note name of school and #Leon110

Send your schools entries to holocaust@ioe.ac.uk

**What’s the deadline?**

The deadline for you to submit student poem responses is **Wednesday 13th January 2021** 16:00 GMT. Any submission that has an email time-stamp after this deadline will not be considered.

**When will the awardee/s be announced?**

Lead Teachers/schools will be notified of their awardee’s success on **Wednesday 20th January 2021** – ahead of public announcement **Wednesday 27th January 2021.**

The awardee student/s, Lead Teacher and SLT link/representative will be invited to join the Centre’s #HMD2021 online gathering.

**Narrative summary for teachers: Overview of Leon Greenman Story – by Ruth-Anne Lenga**

Leon Greenman was born in London’s East End on the 18th of December 1910. His grandparents were of both Dutch and Eastern European heritage. When Leon was young his family decided to live in Holland. Later he became an apprentice hairdresser, joined a boxing club and became an amateur singer of romantic ballads. During a musical evening held at a club for young Jewish people Leon met his future wife Esther (Else) van Dam – a Dutch girl living in London. He moved back to London, the town of his birth, to be nearer to her and the romance blossomed.

Leon and Else were married in London in the Stepney Green Synagogue in June of 1935. They honeymooned in Brighton. Shortly afterwards they went on a visit to Rotterdam in Holland to see Else’s grandmother. While there, she persuaded the young couple to settle in Holland to look after her. They agreed.

On the 17th of March 1940 Else gave birth to a boy named Barney. The happiness was short lived. Germany invaded Holland just two months late. Leon, entrusted his British passports and money to non-Jewish Dutch friends for safe keeping. He was worried that these important documents and all the money he had may be confiscated. If this happened Leon and the family would be in danger of the same fate as the Dutch Jews who were now under German rule. But when Leon came to reclaim his documents he discovered that his friends had burned the passports for fear of being caught helping Jews.  Leon’s money had also ‘disappeared’.

Late one night in October 1942 Leon, his wife, Barney and Else’s elderly grandmother were forcibly taken from their home by Dutch police working for the Germans occupation forces. They were taken to Westerbork, a transit camp for Dutch Jews. Whilst there Leon tried many times to explain his British citizenship and the family’s right to be interned under international law, but it was all to no avail. They were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on the 18th of January 1943. On arrival Leon was separated from Else and Barney. What followed for Leon was a horrifying two years of slave labour, experimentation, beatings, starvation in numerous concentration camps. He was eventually liberated by the Americans at Buchenwald on the 11th of April 1945.

During his incarceration he had made a ‘covenant’ with God:  if he and his family survived he would dedicate his life to bearing witness to the Holocaust so that the despicable acts might never happen again.  Yet Leon was to eventually learn that his wife and son had been murdered in gas chambers soon after they had arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

He nonetheless began a life-time mission to tell the world about what happened. While most survivors at this early stage were too traumatised to speak out, Leon began touring schools, universities, and various faith groups to tell his story to anyone who would listen.

Leon built his life in London where he remained for the rest of his life. In the years the followed Leon worked as a London market trader.  He never remarried.

On retiring he was able to pursue his lecturing with greater voracity. He also became a human rights activist and campaigner with the Anti-Nazi League, standing up against far right groups in spite of being in his 80s.  It was at a cost. In the early 1990s he became a target for attack by such movements.  He was sent death threats and the windows of his home were smashed.   Leon remained undeterred and continued his fight.

In his final years, he built up a horde of material relating to the Holocaust which surrounded him in his terraced house in Ilford. Hardly an inch of space remained free of items that would remind him of his heavy past. This included many of his own paintings which recorded the regular nightmares he endured.  He enjoyed watching TV and fixing himself a favourite meal - never throwing out food or wasting anything. He loved to sing and could bust unto song given half a chance at any function. He died at the age of 97 on March 7th 2008.

Aside the competition there are other ways you can get involved in this anniversary initiative:

* **An assembly** to mark #Leon110 during weeks of 7-18 December. Having produced a PowerPoint to support and launch the competition with young people, slides x-y, could be used as an assembly tool by a head of Year, House or senior leader. This could be delivered virtually in these COVID times. Such an approach would ensure whole school participation in marking the anniversary – and a chance to ensure your school community are aware of your Beacon School status. If time does not allow for a full Leon110 anniversary assembly, then perhaps he can still be mentioned and woven in to nod to the anniversary? Perhaps a link to your schools’ values, a theme and so on, all in an effort to raise awareness during this period.
* **A display** in school to mark the #Leon110 anniversary – a chance to use art, articles, images and maps to raise awareness of Leon’s story and his legacy today. This is a chance for schools to be **creative** in how they reveal the significance and relevance of Leon’s life – it could feature students work, it might raise questions about the links between Leon’s life to the contemporary world, it may draw on a local connection. This display might be designed/created by older students (perhaps Yr9+) who have previously studied Leon’s story – or a distinct contribution make by the Art/DT departments? It could feature some of the student’s poetic responses or include extracts from Leon’s book or quotes from his testimony. If you mark the anniversary in this way, then do include your UCL Beacon School logo, and send us a photo of the display via **@UCL\_Holocaust.**

Our aim here is to introduce and highlight Leon’s story through social media and in doing so raise awareness of its contemporary significance and the importance of your UCL Beacon School status.

The display/s we think is most creative, thought-provoking, engaging will receive a copy of Leon’s Book for the school library and a student and staff representative invited to the Centre’s online #HMD2021 commemorations in January.

* As a Beacon School Lead Teacher – please send us **5 words** to describe Leon: the man and his significance in advance of December 18th’ anniversary, via n.wetherall@ucl.ac.uk as we hope to create a **word cloud** to mark the day and it would be great to have your contributions. Please mark the email ‘#Leon110 5 words’ and we will collate and publish on the day via our social media.
* You may want to draw upon this #Leon110 project to feed into your schools **#HMD2021** planned events/activities. Exploring Leon’s legacy within the framework of his being a ‘light in the darkness’ (how despite all his experiences, he would still shine a light on others persecution, challenge hatred, speak out for and stand with those facing identity-based violence) could be a meaningful and compelling case study/personal story to inform tutor discussions or assembly reflections. It could be you draw on Leon’s story in your HMD2021 assemblies, tutor time activities or other planned events – if you haven’t been able to in December, or as a reminder.



1. <https://www.statista.com/chart/11521/hate-crime-is-surging-in-the-uk/> and <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2020/feb/06/antisemitic-incidents-hit-new-high-in-2019-according-to-study> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)