

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

Time: 60-90 minutes

Audience: 6-12th Grade

Learning Targets

By the end of this lesson, students will...

- Gain a greater understanding of Holocaust history as it pertains to Jewish children in hiding
- Develop a greater appreciation for non-traditional Holocaust narratives
- Reflect on their own identities and the identities of others by examining the forced identity changes of hidden children
- Begin to think critically about their own world and contemporary injustice

Aligned Standards

Common Core: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.6-12.1-2

This curriculum is a project of the California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education, established by the JFCS Holocaust Center, with support from the California Department of Education, Marin County Office of Education, and the State of California.

Context

The lesson should be placed inside of a World War II unit and after students already have context on the Holocaust. For a list of common terms used in the lesson, go to the glossary at the end of the lesson.

In this lesson, students will learn about the experience of hidden children, a term used to describe Jewish children who survived the Holocaust by hiding, either physically or by changing their identities, during the Holocaust through group discussions and analysis of oral history film clips. The lesson will include the story of AnneMarie, a Bay Area woman who survived the Holocaust in hiding as a child. By integrating AnneMarie's story into the larger history of the Holocaust, students will gain an understanding of the experiences of hidden children during this violent period.

Materials Needed

- [Google Slides](#)
- Handouts 1-3 (attached at the end of the lesson)
- Computer, projector, speakers
- Pens/pencils

Lesson/Activity

This lesson has been designed for in-person learning, but can be modified for virtual learning. Please note, due to the challenging themes of hatred and discrimination that this lesson focuses on, it is recommended that students receive a trigger warning about the challenging nature of the subject, frame the lesson as a continuing conversation, and remind students of their options if they feel they need to

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

take a break.

1. Before beginning this lesson, you will need to prepare copies of Handouts 1-3 - attached at the end of the lesson - for all students in your class.
2. **Slide 1.** Open the Google Slides and introduce the topic to your students: Rescue & Resistance - Hidden Children during the Holocaust.
3. **Slide 2.** Then, provide framing for the lesson with the following information included in the slide:

Prior to the start of World War II, there were approximately 9.5 million Jews living in Europe, including nearly 1.6 million Jewish children. During the Holocaust, the Nazi regime and its collaborators killed six million Jews, nearly two-thirds of Europe's entire Jewish population.

Children were especially vulnerable. While the Nazis used adults as slave laborers, they felt that they had no need for children who were not able to work. As a result, by the end of the war, more than 90% of Jewish children in the area occupied by Nazi Germany and its allies had been killed.

4. **Slide 3.** Display the images on Slide 3 (and on Handout 1: Contemplating Childhood) of the Hidden Children slideshow and discuss the following question, either in small groups or as a class:
 - What do you see in the photographs? Describe the setting, activities, etc.
 - What comes to mind when you think about the concept of childhood?
 - What do you think children need to feel comfortable and safe?
 - To what extent do the photos shown look like "normal" photographs of childhood?
5. **Slide 4.** Utilize the discussion of the photos and questions above to explain that many Holocaust survivors who experienced the Holocaust as children often had very difficult childhoods.

To highlight this, read the words of Bay Area Holocaust survivor Ed L.aloud: *"I was lucky. I survived it without any physical scars but I am scarred nevertheless. You see I was robbed: The Germans robbed me of my youth, they robbed me of having parents, and they robbed me of having friends. Even now, 65 years later, I cannot forgive them.*

After reading Ed's quote aloud, discuss the following two (2) questions as a group:

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

- What does Ed mean when he says he was robbed?
 - How might the experiences of Jewish children like Ed who grew up in the Nazi era differ from those of kids with “normal” childhoods?
6. **Slide 5.** After discussing the questions above, reveal the caption for each of the pictures, explaining to your students that the people in these photos were actually children who were hidden from the Nazis. Their childhoods were profoundly affected by the Nazis’ extreme hatred for the Jewish people.

Then, ask the students the following question: *Does knowing that these children were separated from their parents and hidden with strangers change the way we view the photos? Why?*

7. **Slide 6.** In January 1933, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Soon after, he and the Nazi government enacted a series of antisemitic measures aimed at excluding Jews from German society, including the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. These laws first deprived German Jews of their citizenship and all pertinent, related rights, effectively removing Jews from all spheres of German political, social, and economic life. The laws also established definitions of Jewishness based on bloodlines.
8. **Slide 7.** As a child during the 1930s, AnneMarie Feller lived with her parents, Frida and Herman, in Chemnitz, Germany. The Feller family witnessed increasing antisemitism in German society, including *Kristallnacht* on November 9-10, 1938. On this night, otherwise known as “The Night of Broken Glass,” the Nazis unleashed a violent pogrom against Jews, destroying hundreds of Jewish businesses, synagogues, and private homes. Tens of thousands of Jews were arrested, including Herman Feller, who was sent to Buchenwald concentration camp in east-central Germany.

Like many other Jews, the Feller family decided that their only option was to leave Germany. They soon packed their belongings and fled over the border to neighboring Belgium with the help of the Resistance. Unlike the Fellers, however, the majority of European Jews did not flee their home countries as the Nazi threat increased.

9. **Slide 8.** Hear from AnneMarie directly in Video Excerpt 1 as she describes illegally crossing the border into Belgium. Then, discuss the following questions (on **Slide 9**) with your students:
- Why do you think the Fellers chose to leave Germany?

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

- What are some reasons that they might have chosen to stay?
- What types of things would a person need to leave the country?
- AnneMarie mentions that Franklin D. Roosevelt sent Jews who were trying to flee back to Europe. Why might countries not have accepted Jewish immigrants?

When the German army invaded Belgium in May 1940, however, AnneMarie and her family were once again in danger. Left with few options, AnneMarie's parents made one of the most difficult decisions of their lives: to send AnneMarie into hiding.

10. **Slide 10.** There were two main types of hiding for children – physical hiding and hiding in the open.

- **Physical hiding** required that the person hiding was totally concealed from the outside world. Anne Frank and her family, for example, managed to physically hide by living in a small apartment that could only be accessed through a secret door behind a bookshelf.

The voice of Anne Frank has become a symbol of the Holocaust. Her famous diary illustrates a life in hiding and it is taught in classrooms throughout the world. Although the most famous, Anne was only one of thousands of children who were hidden during the Holocaust, and each has a unique story.

- **Hiding in the open** means that the person did not have to hide their existence, but instead had to assume a different identity. To do this, children had to assume new names, dates, family histories, and often had to learn the practices of Christianity. Children hiding in the open were either taken in and protected by non-Jewish families or were given refuge in convents or orphanages.

AnneMarie Feller, mentioned previously, survived the Holocaust by living in a Catholic girls' school near Brussels, Belgium. She was given false identification documents and survived the war by pretending to be Catholic. Very few people at the convent knew that she was Jewish. Like hiding physically, hiding in the open was extremely difficult, and the fear of being detected was something that hidden children and their rescuers had to face every day.

With these types of hiding in mind, prompt the students to investigate these questions further with the following discussion questions:

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

- What might a person need, in order to hide – either physically or in the open?
- What do you think would be the most difficult thing for a person in hiding to get used to?

In many cases, parents were not able to go into hiding with their children. It was much less complicated to make arrangements to hide one person, and a young child aroused fewer suspicions than adults. For these reasons, most children who survived in hiding were separated from their parents.

11. **Slide 11.** Hear from AnneMarie in Video Excerpt 2 as she shares her memories about leaving her father to go into hiding. Then, discuss the following questions (on **Slide 12**) with your students:

- How do you think AnneMarie felt when she left her father?
- What do you think parents worry about most when sending their child into hiding?

12. **Slide 13.** Unfamiliar environments, new traditions, and the absence of family members made life in hiding very difficult, and the fear of discovery was ever-present. Rescuers and members of the Resistance, including foster families and members of the clergy, had to create elaborate backstories for each child. Some were said to be distant relatives and others war orphans, for example.

Adapting to their new identities could be quite difficult for children hiding in the open; even the smallest mistake in saying a Catholic prayer or mispronouncing a word could expose a hidden child's secret. As a result, most children quickly learned how to portray their false identities. In many cases, this included: learning a new language or dialect, masking an accent, remembering to respond to a false name, remaining fully dressed in the company of friends (for boys, as circumcision was a clear indicator of one's Jewish heritage), or adopting the rites and customs of a new religion.

13. **Slide 14.** Hear from AnneMarie in Video Excerpt 3 as she describes some of the difficulties of blending in once she and her family were in Belgium.
14. **Slide 15.** Because of her multifaceted identity as a Hidden Child, AnneMarie's overall identity has many different parts.

With all aspects of AnneMarie's identity labeled on the slide, ask students to cite evidence from the lesson today that speaks to each. Then, discuss the following questions as a group:

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

- How do the items or qualities listed act as part of AnneMarie's identity?
- How hard was it for AnneMarie to hide those parts of herself from the outside world?
- According to her, what was the most difficult aspect of hiding her identity?

Teaching Tip! Have extra time? Have each student complete an identity chart, writing their name in the center and different parts of their personal identity on each branch, responding to the same questions posed in the discussion of AnneMarie's identity.

15. **Slide 16.** For the most part, non-Jews were either indifferent or outright hostile towards Jewish people during the Holocaust, and those who helped Jews hide could face severe punishments, including death. While some people were willing to hide Jews, a majority of non-Jews were not willing to risk their lives to save their Jewish neighbors.

Rescuers had different motivations for saving Jewish children. While some did so because they could gain financially (as Jews often had to pay hefty fees to rescuers), others helped because they believed it was the right thing to do. These rescuers were upstanders — they understood that what was happening was wrong, and they worked hard to help make it right.

Many rescuers have since been bestowed with the title of Righteous Among the Nations, an award given to non-Jews who put themselves at great personal risk to save Jews during the Holocaust. The honor is given by Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. At least one of AnneMarie's rescuers, a young woman named Andrea Gulen, was given the Righteous Among the Nations award. She joined the Underground while studying at the University of Brussels, and worked with several convents in Belgium to help organize the hiding of at least 600 Jewish children.

16. **Slide 17.** To end the lesson, read the following quote from psychologist Ervin Staub: *"Goodness, like evil, often begins in small steps. Heroes evolve; they aren't born. Very often the rescuers made only a small commitment at the start—to hide someone for a day or two. But once they had taken that step, they began to see themselves differently, as someone who helps. What starts as mere willingness becomes intense involvement."*

Then, discuss the following questions as a group:

- What do you think might have motivated non-Jewish people to hide Jewish children?

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

- What are some qualities that upstanders have?
- Think about a time when you have witnessed someone being bullied or discriminated against. How did you react? If you could go back in time, would you react differently?
- Do you agree with Staub's assertion that heroes begin their journey taking small steps? What actions can we take today when we witness someone being bullied or discriminated against?

Next Steps? History comes alive through primary sources like those seen in this lesson. To learn about incorporating archival materials into your curriculum or bringing a survivor of genocide to your classroom through our [Speaker's Bureau Program](#), contact the JFCS Holocaust Center (holocaustcenter@jfcs.org).

Supplemental Resources

*NOTE: All resources listed below are available to you at the JFCS Holocaust Center's Tauber Library & Archives. ** Marks items that are part of the Teacher Resource Center and may be checked out by local students and educators.*

- (1990). *We Were Children Just Like You*. Center for Holocaust Studies, Documentation and Research.
- Bay Area Hidden Children (2001). *Our Stories: As Told During the Meetings Between Our Founding and Our Tenth Anniversary*. Bay Area Hidden Children.
- Brachfeld, S. (2007). *A Gift of Life: The Deportation and the Rescue of the Jews in Occupied Belgium (1940-1944)*. Institute for the Research on Belgian Judaism.
- Elbaum, G. J. (2010). *Neither Yesterdays nor Tomorrows: Vignettes of a Holocaust Childhood*. G. Elbaum.
- **Fogelman, E. (1994). *Conscience & Courage: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust*. Anchor Books.
- **Greenfeld, H. (1993). *The Hidden Children*. Ticknor & Fields.
- Heberer, P (2011). *Children during the Holocaust*. AltaMira Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
- Kustanowitz, E. (1999). *The Hidden Children of the Holocaust: Teens Who Hid from the Nazis*. Rosen Pub. Group.
- Marks, Jane. *The Hidden Children: The Secret Survivors of the Holocaust*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.
- **Neumark, Z. (2006). *Hiding in the Open: A Young Fugitive in Nazi-Occupied Poland*. Vallentine Mitchell.
- **Nicholas, L.H. (2005). *Cruel World: The Children of Europe in the Nazi Web*. A.A. Knopf.

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

- Secret Lives: Hidden Children and Their Rescuers During WWII. New York, NY: Wellspring, [2004]. DVD.
- Vromen, S. (2008). *Hidden Children of the Holocaust: Belgian Nuns and Their Daring Rescue of Young Jews from the Nazis*. Oxford University Press.
- Wolf, D.L (2007). *Beyond Anne Frank: Hidden Children and Postwar Families in Holland*. University of California Press.

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

Glossary

Antisemitism: Prejudice or discrimination against Jews. Antisemitism can be based on hatred against Jews because of their religious beliefs or their group membership (ethnicity), but also on the erroneous belief that Jews are a race. Nazi antisemitism was racial in nature; Jews were viewed as ethnically inferior to Aryans and destructive of the world order.

Aryan: "Aryan" was originally applied to people who spoke any Indo-European language. The Nazis, however, primarily applied the term to people of northern European racial background.

Buchenwald: Nazi concentration camp in east-central Germany, near Weimar. Buchenwald opened in 1937 and was one of the largest concentration camps within the old German borders.

Concentration camp: Camps established by the Nazi regime, which eventually became a major instrument of terror, control, punishment, and killing performed through deliberate means as well as attrition by hunger and/or disease.

Deportation: Forced relocation. During World War II groups of Jews were deported from their homes, first to ghettos and later from ghettos to concentration, slave labor, and extermination camps.

Hidden Children: Jewish children who were hidden during the Holocaust in an attempt to save them from the Nazis.

Hiding in the open: Hiding by changing one's identity (e.g. pretending to be Catholic)

Judenrat: Council of Jewish "elders" appointed and held responsible for carrying out "the exact and prompt implementation of directives" as issued by the Nazis. Some members believed that resistance should only be used as a last resort, while others were active members of the local underground and resistance movements. Members often faced impossible moral and ethical decisions which affected their communities.

Kristallnacht (Crystal Night, or The Night of Broken Glass): On November 9-10, 1938, the Nazis unleashed a wave of violence against German Jews, destroying hundreds of Jewish businesses, synagogues, and private homes. Tens of thousands of Jews were arrested.

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

Nazi: Short for National Socialist, or a member of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP), the political party that emerged in Munich after World War I. The party was taken over by Adolf Hitler in the early 1920s. Antisemitism was at the core of the Nazi Party's platform.

Nuremberg Laws: The laws that first deprived German Jews of their citizenship and all pertinent, related rights. These laws effectively removed Jews from all spheres of German political, social, and economic life and established definitions of Jewishness based on bloodlines.

Physical hiding: Hiding by concealing one's existence from the outside world (e.g. in a cupboard, basement, attic, etc.)

Pogrom: A Russian word meaning destruction; specifically, destruction of Jewish life and property.

Resistance: Organized group acting in secrecy to oppose the government or, during war, to resist occupying enemy forces. Also known as the Underground.

Righteous Among the Nations: An honor bestowed by Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. The award is given to those non-Jews who, at the risk of their own lives, saved Jews from their Nazi persecutors. Formerly known as *Righteous Gentiles*.

Synagogue: A meeting place for worship and religious study in the Jewish faith.

Upstander: Someone who sees something wrong, and takes action to make it right; someone who stands up for what they believe is right.

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

References

Suzanne Vromen, *Hidden Children of the Holocaust: Belgian Nuns and Their Daring Rescue of Young Jews from the Nazis* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

Credits & Copyright

“Deciding to Act” in Holocaust and Human Behavior, Facing History & Ourselves,
<https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-9/deciding-act>

Identity Chart adapted from Facing History & Ourselves. Visit
<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/identity-charts> for more information.

Images on Slide 3 from Yaffa Eliach, ed., *We Were Children Just Like You* (Brooklyn, NY: Center for Holocaust Studies Documentation and Research), 93-95.

.

Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

Handout 1: Contemplating Childhood



Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

Handout 2: Understanding Identity Activity



Rescue & Resistance

Hidden Children During the Holocaust

Handout 3: Timeline of the Holocaust in Belgium

At the beginning of World War II, there were approximately 60,000 Jews living in Belgium. An estimated 94% of these were foreign Jews who, like the Fellers, had fled from German-occupied territory after the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party (Vromen, 2008).

May 10, 1940	Germany invades Belgium.
May 28, 1940	Belgian forces surrender to Nazi Germany.
October 23, 1940	German Military Authorities implement anti-Jewish laws, including: Jewish government employees dismissed (including teachers and lawyers); Nuremberg Laws of 1935 instituted; registration of all Jewish businesses; all Jews were forced to register with Belgian authorities.
April 14, 1941	Belgian paramilitary groups begin pogrom in Antwerp, destroying two synagogues.
May 1941	Germans impose further anti-Jewish measures, including: Jews banned from owning radio sets; Jewish people barred from managerial positions in businesses; all Jewish property must be registered with German authorities.
August 1941	Curfew imposed. Jews were not allowed to be outside from 8pm to 7am.
November 1941	Judenrat, or Jewish Council, created—Association of Jews in Belgium (AJB); Jewish children are no longer allowed to attend public school.
May 27, 1942	Jews forced to wear the Star of David outside of clothing in public.
July 1942	German authorities force AJB to distribute notices for 5,000 Jews to report for deportation.
August 15, 1942	Deportation of Jews began from Belgium, continuing through July 1944. Approximately 25,000 Jews were deported to Eastern Europe in this period. Fewer than 2,000 survived.
April 14, 1943	Three members of a Belgian armed resistance group attacks a railway convoy carrying 1,600 Jews. 217 are able to escape. All three members of the Resistance are eventually arrested.
September 2, 1944	Allied forces liberate Belgium.