

How did refugees shape modern Britain?

Scheme of Work Overview

From Holocaust survivors to refugee athletes and artists, the experiences of those who sought sanctuary in Britain have played an important part in shaping the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the country. This scheme of work invites students to explore how Britain responded to refugees during and after the Second World War, and how migrants and refugees have, in turn, influenced Britain. Through oral histories, historical sources, and creative responses, students are encouraged to think critically, challenge simplistic narratives, and reflect on identity, belonging and legacy.

This Scheme of Work is designed for students aged 12 and up and fits within the wider curriculum on twentieth-century British history. It aligns with key themes from the Secondary National Curriculum for England, especially relating to 'Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day' and may be particularly pertinent as a study after lessons on the Holocaust. This scheme provides opportunities to study:

- The impact of war and genocide
- Migration and multiculturalism
- Refugee experiences and state responses
- Economic and social contributions of migrants
- Identity, integration and legacy

The opening lessons establish key historical context and explore Britain's response to refugees and Holocaust survivors. Students then investigate the complex journeys and integration experiences of wartime refugees. The later lessons examine identity, belonging and contemporary legacies, culminating in student-led research projects that connect past and present. Below is a summary of the planned scheme of work and lesson content.

SOW Lesson order:

- 1. How did the British government react to refugees and Holocaust survivors in the 1930s and 1940s?**
- 2. How did refugees and migrants come to Britain during the Second World War?**
- 3. How did refugees and migrants support themselves and their families in post-war Britain?**

4. **What were the challenges that refugees and migrants faced when building their new lives in the UK?**
5. **How did coming to Britain change refugees' identities?**
6. **What is the legacy of refugees in Britain today?**

Lesson Summaries

1. **How did the British government react to refugees and Holocaust survivors in the 1930s and 1940s?**

This introductory lesson explores the mixed and often reluctant response of the British government to Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution. Through primary sources and discussion, students examine British policy, public opinion and media coverage, as well as the reasons why the government admitted some groups while excluding others. The lesson also provides historical context on antisemitism and immigration in Britain.

2. **How did refugees and migrants come to Britain during the Second World War?**

Using the personal stories of John Chillag and Marion Camrass, this lesson explores the complex and often perilous journeys taken by refugees and displaced people. Students compare their assumptions about migration routes with real-life experiences, track movements on maps, and consider how labels like 'refugee', 'migrant' and 'stateless person' are applied. The lesson encourages understanding through the study of personal stories and critical thinking about identity and survival.

3. **How did refugees and migrants support themselves and their families in post-war Britain?**

Focusing on the post-war period, this lesson examines the economic contributions and labour experiences of Holocaust survivors and other refugees. Through four case studies, students learn about challenges, adaptation and agency. They reflect on the tension between survival and ambition, and explore how personal and national recovery intersect. The lesson also links historical refugee experiences to contemporary questions about work and identity.

4. **What were the challenges that refugees and migrants faced when building their new lives in the UK?**

This lesson explores the social and emotional dimensions of integration, including family life, language learning, antisemitism and community building. Students analyse testimonies and consider how refugees responded differently to similar challenges. Activities encourage students

to make connections between themes and develop nuanced understandings of adjustment, identity and support systems in a new country.

5. How did coming to Britain change refugees' identities?

Students explore the concept of identity and how it is shaped by external perception, migration and personal change. Using testimonies and reflective activities, the lesson introduces physical, religious and community identity as key themes. Through discussion and analysis, students grapple with the complexities of self-perception and social labels, and consider how identity is both fluid and shaped by context.

6. What is the legacy of refugees in Britain today?

In this culminating lesson, students investigate the long-term impact of refugees and migrants in Britain. A research project on contemporary figures who were once refugees or migrants helps students connect past and present. The lesson also explores continuities and changes in refugee experiences, challenging assumptions and encouraging students to reflect on action, empathy and historical responsibility in today's multicultural Britain.

This scheme of work was produced by Hannah Randall and Dr Chelsea Sambells on behalf of Learn About Britain.