

Challenging Histories

Guiding principles for good historical learning:

- To be conscious that we each have a unique perspective based on our own circumstances, but that nobody has more or less importance in this class.
- To let the facts inform you and lead your learning, rather than finding facts to support a prior viewpoint.
- Avoid the use terms like 'we' to refer to historical figures, peoples – as historians it is necessary to be impartial, so language is important.
 - i.e. refer to 'the British' rather than 'we'. This helps to separate ourselves from the study and avoids unintentional othering or subconscious bias.
- Accept that interpretations and feelings about what we study can and will differ. This is ok!
- Discussion should be based on the facts. Use evidence to support your points to avoid making unfair or inaccurate assertions.

A shared space for learning

To make the class respectful, fair, inclusive, kind and supportive, we will:

- Listen to one another without interrupting
- Ensure that everyone in the class has a chance to have their say
- Avoid using language which might hurt other people
- Ask questions and give our views, knowing that others won't judge

Enquiry Question:
**How did the British government react
to refugees and Holocaust survivors in
the 1930s and 1940s?**

Lesson Title:
**British Attitudes and Actions towards
Refugees and Holocaust Survivors**



German refugees from Poland in British refugee camps,
1945, IWM

What is the difference between a refugee and a migrant?

Discuss with your partner: What is the definition of a refugee? What is the definition of a migrant?

Let's compare:

Refugees are people who have fled their countries to escape conflict, violence or persecution and have sought safety in another country. (UNHCR)

A migrant is someone who moves from one place to another to find work or for a better living conditions. (Oxford Dictionaries)

*It is important to note that there is no legal definition for migrant whereas there is for refugee. This means some migrants may also be in danger, but don't fit the legal definition of refugee, for example if they are fleeing a natural disaster.

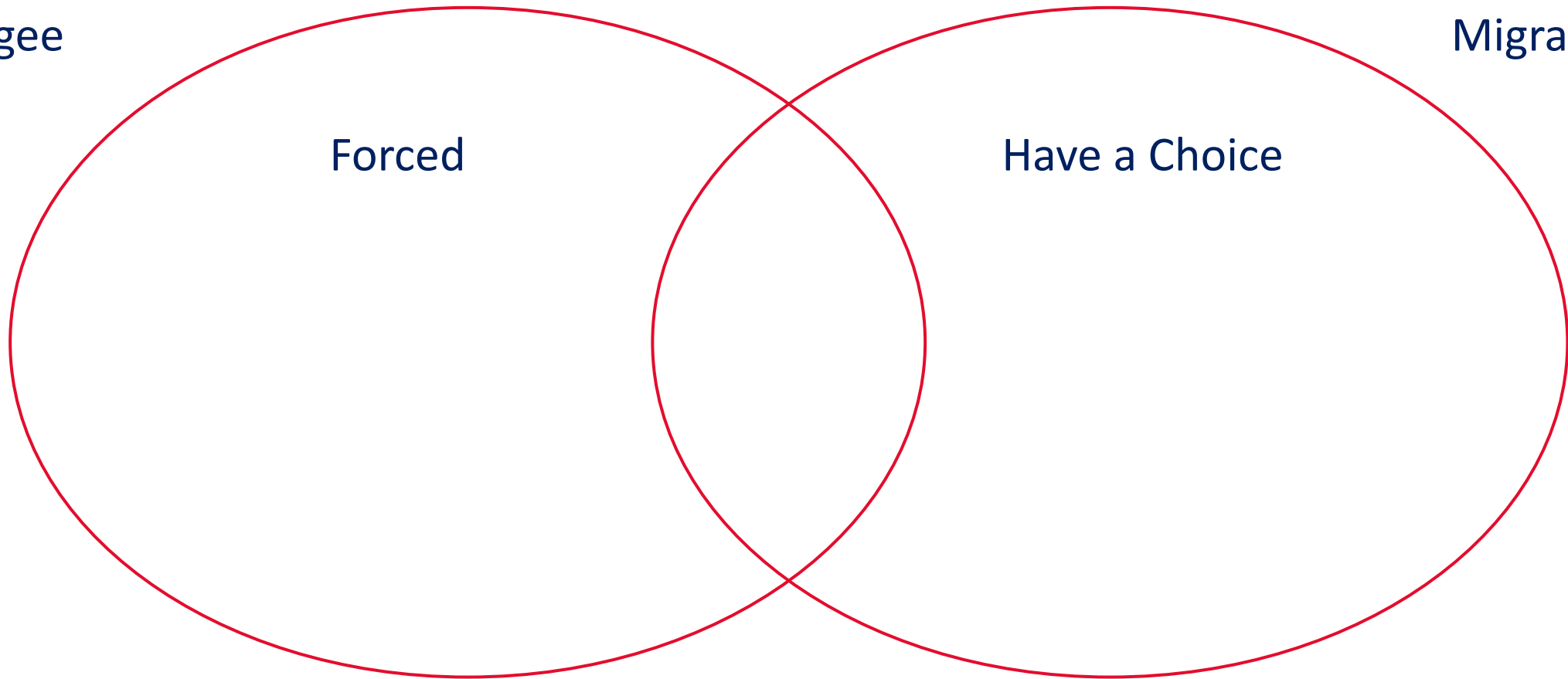
What do refugees and migrants experience?

Refugee

Migrant

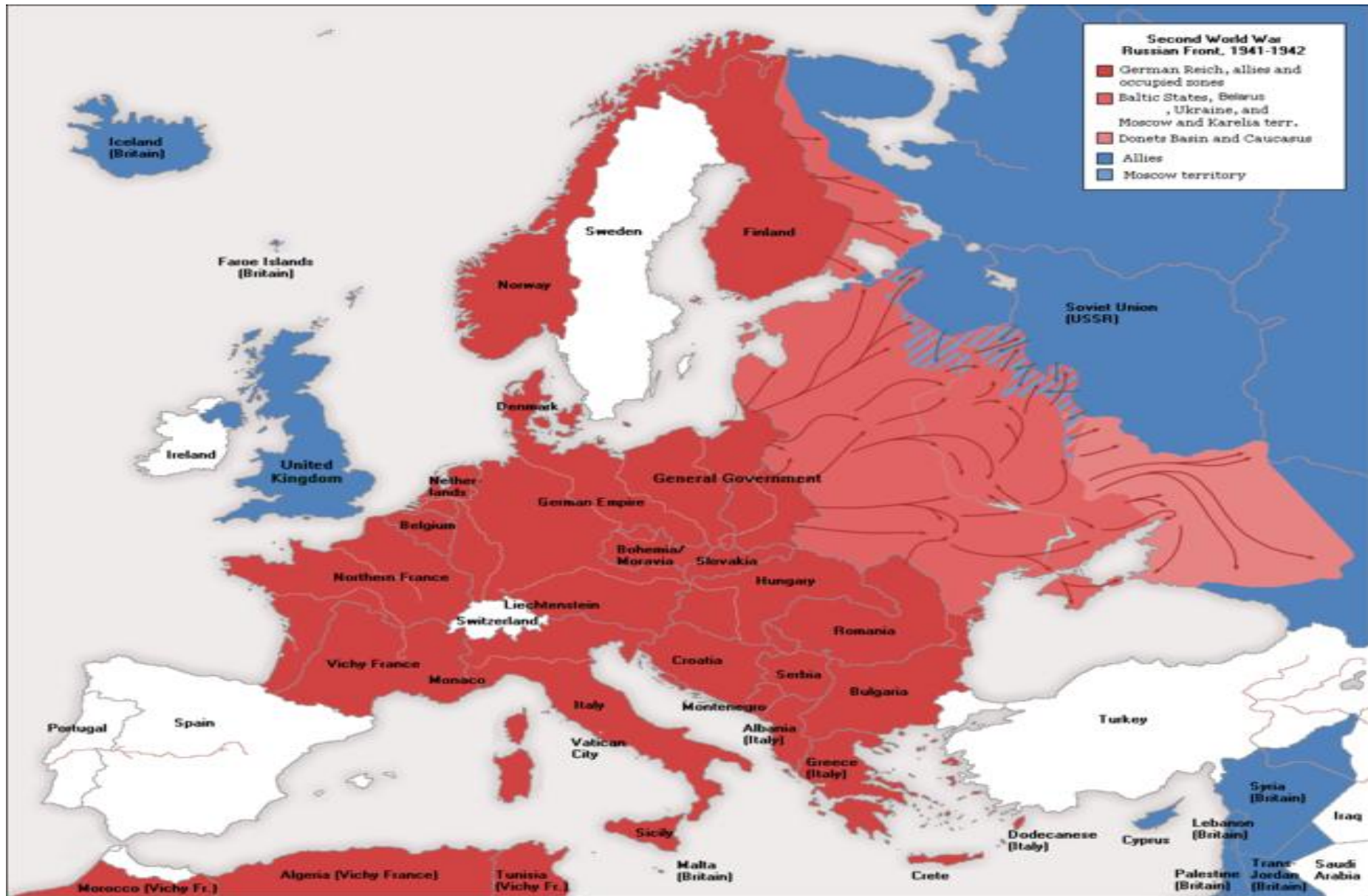
Forced

Have a Choice



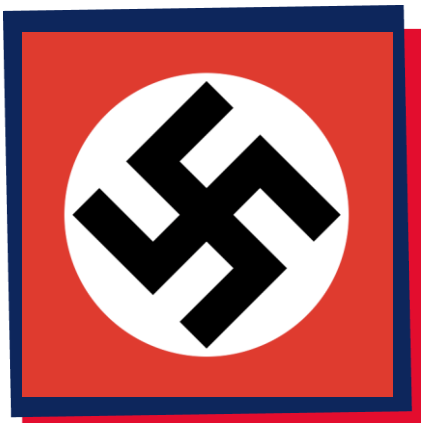
What happened during WWII?

- Global conflict that resulted in an estimated 50-85 million deaths. It was the most destructive war in human history.
- Started on 1 September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland
- As the war unfolded, Germany formed an alliance with Italy and Japan (the Axis powers) to fight against others, including Britain, France, Soviet Russia and the USA (who called themselves the Allied powers)
- Many nations, who wanted peace or to remain neutral, were pulled into conflict, meaning that many countries across the world were affected
- Major battles unfolded in Europe and the Pacific (Asia)
- War ended in Europe in May 1945, and in Asia in August 1945. The “Allies” won.



What happened to the civilians in Europe?

- Many people realized that there were tensions rising in Europe, possibly leading to war
- They knew because Germany's leader, Adolf Hitler, stated openly that he wanted his Nazis (his followers) to wage war on all of Germany's 'perceived' enemies, both at home and abroad...



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“Under the symbol of the swastika, Germany will triumph over all opposition, and the enemy we defeated at home will also be defeated if he threatens us from abroad.”

Adolf Hitler, *Gau Westfalen-Süd* (4 - 10 July 1938)

Who were Nazi Germany's enemies?

- Hitler believed that certain individuals, communities and nations should not exist in Nazi Germany. He called the Germans a superior 'race' to others. Hitler claimed that the 'subhuman' ('Untermensch') groups included:
 - Jewish people
 - Political opponents, such as communists and trade unionists
 - Gay men ('Homosexuals')
 - Roma and Sinti people (previously called Gypsies)
 - Alcoholics and others considered 'asocials'
 - People with mental or physical disabilities, such as Down's Syndrome or Autism
 - Black people and those with mixed heritage
 - Jehovah Witnesses
 - Many others, including those who helped these groups and individuals
- Hitler and his Nazis then targeted these groups through various methods: segregation, persecution, exploitation and then mass murder

The Holocaust (1933-1945)

- After the war broke out in 1939, the Nazis escalated many of their discriminatory policies; victims were often powerless
- As the German army expanded its territory, its armed forces shot and killed millions of innocent civilians in towns and villages
- The Nazis built labour (or 'concentration') camps that had terrible conditions, little food, and overcrowding. Millions died.
- The Nazi also built death camps, where millions were also intentionally murdered by inhaling toxic gas in gas chambers. Those who were sent to be gassed did not know they would be murdered.
- The term 'the Holocaust' often refers to the 6 million Jews who died during this period, although 13 million people from various religions and ethnicities died in total.

Fleeing Nazi Germany and the Holocaust

- Although Hitler repeatedly and clearly stated in his speeches he wanted Germany to wage war against its enemies, many did not believe he would kill civilians
- As the war continued, Germany conquered many nations in Europe
- As a result, some people decided to migrate to other nations

“Words can be like tiny doses of arsenic: they are swallowed unnoticed, appear to have no effect, and then after a little time the toxic reaction sets in after all.”

Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich*

What do you think
Victor Klemperer meant by
this quote?

Governments' Attitudes to Refugees

Write down as many ideas as you can to think about how governments could view refugees coming to their country, some will be positive attitudes and others will be negative.

Why might a government help refugees?

Why might a government refuse to help refugees?

How did British authorities handle refugees?

There were three key ways that the British government dealt with refugees:

1. Strict immigration controls (visas) for refugees coming to Britain
2. Detention of refugees within Britain
3. Humanitarian evacuations of refugees to Britain, such as the Kindertransport

1. British Immigration Policies, 1930s

- Many western nations limited immigration
- Britain operated a visa system. From 1938 onwards, immigrants (called 'aliens') to the UK had to have a visa to enter the country; those without one were refused entry. Visas could be obtained (for a cost) from British offices across the world
- Immigrants had to be self-supporting or privately sponsored, meaning many were wealthy or had wealthy friends
- By Sept 1939, Britain accepted approx. 80,000 refugees out of 500-600,000 who sought entry



Entry visa granted to Frederick Aschkenasi,
24 March
1939, [Holocaust Centre for Humanity](#)

British Refugee Policies, 1930s

- Whereas the UK government had policies for migrants, there was no legal concept for right to asylum, meaning that the UK did not have laws for refugees fleeing war or violence on the basis of ‘persecution’
- This meant the UK government did not have any funding allocated to help refugees (until 1939 when that changed)
- During the 1930s, many charities, some politicians, religious groups, and wealthy philanthropists wanted to help refugees

What is asylum?

The United Nations today defines it as “the protection that a country grants to a non-citizen in its territory.”

The UN states everyone has a right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution.

Surveillance and Detention of Refugees



Photograph of internees outdoors at the Hutchinson Internment Camp on the Isle of Man, Britain, 1940-1, *Tate Archive*

- Initially, only Nazi sympathisers were interned
- In 1940, anti-foreigner fears grew, nurtured by right-wing press
- Around 27,000 Jewish refugees (most from Germany and Austria) were interned as 'enemy aliens'
- Most were released in autumn 1940
- Some even sent as far as Canada

2. Surveillance and Detention of Refugees

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“In Germany we were kicked out because we were Jews, here we were interned because we were Germans.”

Heinz Skyte, German-Jewish Holocaust survivor, *Holocaust Centre North*



Photograph of Heinz Skyte whilst interned on the Isle of Man, *Holocaust Centre North*

3. Humanitarian Evacuations such as the Kindertransport

- Translates as “children’s transport” in German
- Evacuation of approximately 10,000 child refugees from Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia within 9 months (Nov 1938 to Sep 1939, when war prevented continued evacuations); nearly half came from Berlin and Vienna
- Organised by the Refugee Children’s Movement (RCM) comprised of various charities, individuals and politicians (not a government initially)
- Included Jewish and non-Jewish children, each guaranteed £50 to help refugees’ re-emigration, with the hope children would return home
- During the war, ‘Kinder’ lived with British families and attended local schools
- As war continued, British government began to offer more financial support to the Kinder and their host families
- After the war, most Kinders’ families had been killed, so they took remained and took British citizenship, building their lives permanently in the UK



Austrian Jewish refugee children arrive at a London train station. 2 February 1939, USHMM

Experiences of the Kindertransport

- The impact of forced emigration on evacuees varied greatly from child to child
- Many children had wonderful foster families with attentive parents, whereas others experienced neglect and sometimes abuse
- The children on the Kindertransport are today considered “now the most famous and commemorated group of refugees coming to Britain” (Tony Kushner, 2006)



Kinder Jack Hellman carried this teddy bear with him to England in 1939, *USHMM*

What would you take with you on such a journey?

Kindertransportee Dr Martin Kapel, BEM

- Martin Kapel (b. 1930) in Leipzig, Germany to Polish Jewish parents
- Forcibly expelled from Germany to Poland, where he stayed with family in Krakow, and later in a small village, from Oct 1938 to Aug 1939
- Joined the Kindertransport on 25 August 1939 (aged 8) and met his foster family who took him to Coventry
- Martin overcame his struggles and won a scholarship to study
- Martin gained a PhD in Chemistry and became a university lecturer in Leeds

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“For a child it was very frightening especially since I couldn’t speak English and the people around me couldn’t speak either German or Yiddish and so I found myself repeatedly in situations which were puzzling and which I couldn’t handle in any way because I couldn’t talk to anybody.”

Martin Kapel, German-Jewish Kindertransport evacuee,
Holocaust Centre North

Kindertransportee Martin Kapel, BEM

- Let's watch Martin Kapel's [BBC Teach](#) video [here](#)
- While watching it, think about Martin's experiences – did he feel safe in Britain? What dangers did he face here that he may not have had in Poland?



Photograph of Martin Kapel, *Holocaust Centre North*

Remembering the Kindertransport

- Most 'Kinder' (children) arrived in Harwich, then took a train to Liverpool Street Station in London
- Almost half of the 'Kinder' never saw their parents ever again because they were murdered in the Holocaust
- This statue commemorates the children's journey to Britain and is called 'Kindertransport – the Arrival' by Frank Meisler



Photograph of Kindertransport Memorial, Hannah Randall and Chelsea Sambells, June 2022

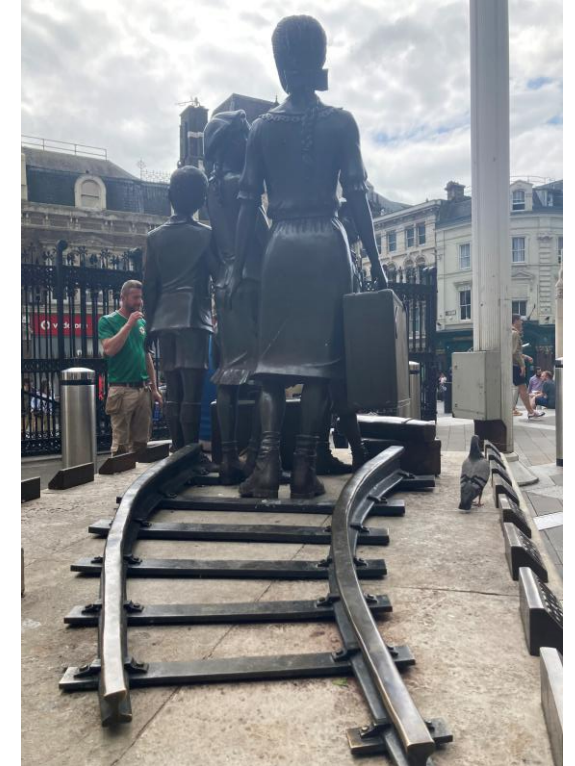
Does this memorial successfully commemorate the Kindertransport?



Photograph of Kindertransport Memorial, Hannah Randall and Chelsea Sambells, June 2022

Half the class will argue that it is “successful at remembering the Kindertransport” – the other half will argue against this. Consider:

- Does it show the emotions well?
- How does it make you feel?
- Where is it?
- Why should we have a memorial for the Kindertransport?
- Do you think people know what it is for?
- Should it be looked after? And by who?
- To what extent does this memorial reflect the experiences of the Kinder?



Photographs of
Kindertransport Memorial,
Hannah Randall and Chelsea
Sambells, June 2022

Summary: What were British Attitudes and Actions towards Refugees and Holocaust Survivors?

- Discuss the following questions with your partner and be ready to share your thoughts (use evidence to support your answers)
 - Having looked at some evidence, what were British attitudes and actions towards refugees and migrants during the 1930s and 1940s? You may want to consider:
 - The costs for a visa to enter
 - The internment of 'enemy aliens' in Britain
 - The Kindertransport
 - How has your knowledge developed during this lesson?