

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

Building Families in a New Land: Home Life for Refugees

Guidance Notes and Lesson Plan

Lesson Objectives:

- To foster empathy for those who are integrating into new societies and cultures
- To enable students to share their knowledge and preconceptions about refugees' and migrants' challenges when acculturating to a new country
- To encourage students to analyse and synthesise a range of information and grapple with the complexity of a global war and its impact on individuals, thereby bringing the grander narrative in history into confrontation with the subjective experiences of war and resettlement
- To challenge simplistic judgements and narratives

Introduction

After the Second World War, hundreds of thousands of people were displaced and stateless, having lost their homes and often their families due to the experiences of violence and genocide across Europe. For many who survived, it was important to overcome those traumatic losses by starting fresh in a new place, preferably in a country that would not be discriminatory or prejudicial to minorities.

This lesson explores the practical challenges that refugees and migrants faced when integrating to life in post-war Britain. Evidenced by personal testimonies, this lesson includes language barriers, starting new hobbies and interests, building families and relationship breakdowns, and antisemitism. This is not meant to be comprehensive, but to highlight some of the complex problems that newcomers overcame. This lesson also emphasises the nuanced nature of personal experiences by offering comparatively different reactions to the same challenges (e.g., language barriers easily overcome whereas others felt learning English was very isolating). This enables students to grapple with how individuals' reactions and experiences are subjective (and influenced by age, ability, gender, class, race), even if the challenge is objectively the same.

This, in turn, encourages students to challenge simplistic judgements and narratives about others, enhancing their awareness of the wide spectrum of human experiences, and the empathy we must have for people integrating into our communities.

Key Information

This lesson is designed for students aged 12 and above. It is devised for History classes.

Timings are suggested on the basis of a one-hour lesson, and may need adapting based on circumstances.

Prior knowledge is not needed. However, the notion that students may arrive with knowledge, ideas and preconceptions is embraced and should be utilised to explore, challenge and resolve misconceptions.

Resources:

- Guidance Notes and Lesson Plan
- Lesson PowerPoint
- Print out PowerPoint

Lesson Plan

Slide 1 – Lesson Title: Building Families in a New Land: Home Life for Refugees

Challenges for Refugees in Britain (5 mins)

Give students two minutes to consider the question ‘what challenges would there be for refugees moving to a new country?’ and add them in the columns whether they think them to be short-term challenges or long-term challenges, they will need to explain why they have put them in either category.

After students have brainstormed independently, the teacher can introduce these prompts and students can add to the columns accordingly. Some prompts for the teacher could be:

- Language barriers
- Financial burdens

- Having children
- Relationships
- Antisemitism/racism
- Missing home
- Participating in local communities
- Sports
- Religion

Keep the discussion brief, as there is plenty more to come, but this activity should help get the students focused and help to clarify the different challenges that refugees faced, which are discussed in further detail below.

This activity can either be done as a class or in pairs. Slide 2 is also on the Print Out slide if you wish to do it in pairs.

This activity is designed to get students to think about things that could be challenging for refugees and migrants moving to a new country.

Note: In preparation for slides 3 to 11 there is a note-taking sheet on the Print Out PowerPoint (slide 3).

Language Barriers (5 mins)

One of the key challenges faced by people moving to another country is language differences. Invite students to consider the two quotes on slide 3. Ask the students to discuss the following questions:

- Do you think it would be easier to learn a new language when you were younger or older?
- Do you think being on your own or with family would make it easier to learn a new language?
- Why do you think it is important to learn the language of a new 'home' country quickly?

Hobbies and Interests (5 mins)

Introduce Rudi Leavor (slide 4) and then listen to 4 minutes of his testimony (1:48:12 to 1:52:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1m2V5v8_8AE, also embedded via link on the slide or in the PowerPoint's notes section). Ask students to consider how Rudi's love of music has affected his life and whether it helped him create a new life in Britain.

Now introduce Iby Knill (slide 5). Ask students to read through Iby's quote, in which she discusses her hobbies. Ask students to think about why hobbies are important to us and how they might help people to integrate and feel a sense of belonging within new communities.

Building Families & Relationship Breakdowns (7 mins)

On slide 6, introduce Ellen Kerry Davis and listen to 5 minutes of her testimony (1:05:17 to 1:10:03, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cQ4uAzYp7k&t=3917s, also embedded via link on the slide or in the PowerPoint's notes section). Ask students to consider the questions on the slide reflecting on how Ellen describes her family life and when she was happy. Do they think her experiences as a refugee have affected her attitudes towards family?

On slide 7, introduce Freida Laird and listen to 90 seconds her audio testimony (01:17 to 2:58, <https://gatheringthevoices.com/frieda-laird-reflection-on-life/>, also embedded via link on the slide or in the PowerPoint's notes section; the transcript is also available on slide 8). Ask students to characterise Freida's attitude towards her life and family. For example, she says she considers herself lucky, but then, has her life been easy?

Antisemitism (5-10 minutes)

**Please note that antisemitism should be spelt without a hyphen (e.g. anti-Semitism is incorrect)*

Introduce the definition of antisemitism and contextual information, both on slide 9. You may wish to discuss with students here about their understanding of antisemitism, both in the past and present.

On slide 10, introduce Wolfgang and watch 60 seconds of his testimony (49:49 to 50:32, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn515712>, also embedded via link on the slide

or in the PowerPoint's notes section). Ask students to consider the questions on the slide and then discuss as a class. The questions are:

- What worried Wolfgang as a teenager?
- How does Wolfgang describe his experience of antisemitism in England?

On slide 11 introduce Ruth Rogoff and ask students to read through the quote from Ruth about her experiences of antisemitism when living in Leeds. Ask them the following questions:

- Does it surprise you that Ruth found the teachers to be more antisemitic than the students? Why/why not?
- Ruth says that the experience made her stronger – why do you think that is?

Ask the students to consider if Wolfgang and Ruth's experiences of antisemitism would have made it harder for them to make new friends? Would they have been scared to talk to new people because of their experiences?

Activity: How do challenges connect? (10 mins)

Invite students to consider how each of these challenges that you have just explored would impact one another and complete the worksheet (Slide 12. Worksheet on slide 4 of the Print Outs).

The connections students find may be positive connections or negative connections. For example, a negative connection could be that if you don't know English it may be hard to make new friends, whereas a positive connection could be by joining a sports team you learn the language faster.

Students need to think of one positive and one negative connection for each.

Summary: What were the challenges that refugees and migrants faced when building their new lives in the UK? (5 minutes)

Give students 2-3 minutes to discuss the following questions in pairs (Slide 13):

- What were the challenges that refugees and migrants faced when building their lives in Britain?
- How did the refugees and migrants in this lesson overcome their challenges?

- How has living in Britain shaped refugees and migrants' lives? And how have migrants shaped Britain?

Give students time to discuss their thoughts, then collect feedback from the group on these questions. This discussion provides opportunities to draw connections between newcomers varied experiences and their varied reactions, when integrating to a new life in Britain.

This is also an opportunity for students to reflect upon the dynamic relationship between refugees and Britain. This includes how immigrants in Britain have contributed to their communities, and how those communities and experiences have shaped refugees' and migrants' lives. The goal here is not to measure their contributions as 'good' or 'a lot', but to emphasise the relationship between the place/communities in which live, and their impact on your life, attitudes, interests, family and aspirations. For example, Ellen Kerry Davis describes herself as finally being happy living with her son, just shortly after separating from her husband. For Ellen, leaving her unhappy marriage was a relief, and a positive change, whereas for others, a separation may be perceived negatively, akin to a failure. In this sense, someone's happiness (or sadness) is really subjective and nuanced, and can be easily misunderstood.

This lesson therefore encourages students to reflect upon their own preconceptions about others' lives to better foster understanding and empathy, particularly for those who are new to British society. This is an opportunity to also ask students whether they've ever felt misunderstood by their own communities, or whether they've ever noticed others feeling excluded when joining a new group, gym, club, activity, sport, etc. By doing so, this helps to elevate students' awareness about the diverse experiences and values of others, and how kindness and compassion for everyone in our community is important for a healthy society.

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