
Save one person, save the world: Nicholas Winton and the Czech Kindertransport

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Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport

By *Caren Stelson*

Illustrated by Selina Alko

Carolrhoda Books

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Book recommended for 2nd grade to 6th grade.

Lesson recommended for 5th grade through 8th grade.

Three 50-min lessons.

Book summary

Set in 1938, *Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport*, a picture book, tells the true story of Jewish children being separated from their loving families following Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia. Using Kindertransport and traveling by train and boat, children were sent to England for safety. Foster families cared for the children, but they deeply missed their families and culture. When they were older, after the war, some of the children returned home to search for their parents and realized no one had saved them. Fifty years later, they met the man who had organized the Czech Kindertransport, thereby saving their lives, Sir Nicholas Winton. Winton saved 669 children through Kindertransport. The book includes a timeline for reference on Kindertransport movement.

NCSS themes

- (1) Individual Development and Identity.
- (2) Individuals, Groups and Institutions.
- (3) Power, Authority and Governance.
- (4) Civic Ideals and Practices.

This lesson addresses the NCSS themes of Individual Development and Identity (4); Individuals, Groups and Institutions (5), and Power, Authority and Governance (6). As Hitler and the Nazis expanded their authority and power, individuals and groups responded to protect Prague's children. The actions of Czechoslovakian citizens and parents, along with those of English organizers, demonstrate the importance of civic ideals and practices (10).

C3 framework standards

- (1) D2.Civ.10.6–8. Explain the relevance of personal interests and perspectives, civic virtues and democratic principles when people address issues and problems in government and civil society.



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- (2) D2.His.3.6–8. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.
- (3) D2.His.14.6–8. Explain multiple causes and effects of events and developments in the past.

Materials

- (1) *Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport*. (2023) By Caren Stelson, Illustrated by Selina Alko.
- (2) Chart paper and markers
- (3) Cause and effect chart ([Appendix A](#))
- (4) Interactive whiteboard
- (5) Computers or tablets for student use
- (6) Head, Heart and Conscience teaching strategy from Facing History and Ourselves (see <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/head-heart-conscience>)
- (7) Text-to-text, Text-to-self and Text-to-world Strategy from Facing History and Ourselves (see <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/text-text-text-self-text-world-0>).

Notes to the teacher before beginning the lesson

This lesson is best taught after covering the early events of Second World War. Students should have background knowledge on the rise of Hitler, the policy of appeasement, Kristallnacht (The Night of Broken Glass), the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Holocaust to fully grasp the historical context of *Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport*.

The northwestern end of Czechoslovakia was known as the Sudetenland, an area with a large population of individuals of German heritage. Hitler's goal was to annex areas with large German populations, and Sudetenland became one of his targets. Attacks driven by prejudice against Jewish people occurred here just as they did in Germany. Following the Kristallnacht attacks of November 1938 that destroyed Jewish businesses and synagogues in Germany, Austria, East Prussia and the Sudetenland (see map of destroyed synagogues at <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/BodyImage%233MapofKristallnacht.gif>), Jewish refugees fled to Prague, among other cities.

This lesson investigates the evacuations of Jewish children known as Kindertransports. Through the work of volunteers, over 10,000 Jewish children were transported to Britain between 1938 and 1940. This lesson concerns the work of Nicholas Winton in Prague. Winton and those helping him saved 669 children just before Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia. While this is a 3-day lesson about Czech children who participated in Kindertransport and its impact, their stories are relevant to people across Europe during Second World War and at other times. In addition, increasing levels of antisemitism in the United States ([Anti-Defamation League, 2025](#)) make teaching about the Holocaust essential to equipping students for civic engagement ([Bowen and Kisida, 2019](#)). For more information, see <https://www.nicholaswinton.com/>.

References to "children" in the lesson plan refer to the children on Kindertransport. "Students" refers to the students in the classroom.

Big ideas

- (1) An individual's actions can have an immense impact.
- (2) Extraordinary times call for extraordinary actions.
- (3) Sometimes survival comes at great sacrifice.
- (4) Communities shape history through their actions or inactions.
- (5) Remembering our past guides our future.

Compelling question

Does saving one life save the world?

The compelling question will be presented within the context of the Holocaust, and more specifically, within the actions of Sir Nicholas Winton. "Save one life, save the world," words taken from the Jewish Talmud, are inscribed within a golden ring on the end pages of the picture book, *Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport*. This golden ring was given to Winton, a hero in *Stars of the Night*, by some of the children he saved ([Sir Nicholas Winton Memorial Trust, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c](#)).

Prior to Lesson One, display the compelling question for students and read it aloud. Inform students that the phrase "save one life, save the world" comes from the Jewish religious text, the Talmud. Ask students to reflect on what this line might mean. Use the Think-Pair-Share active learning technique ([Read Write Think, n.d.](#)) so students can think individually about the prompt, then discuss their ideas with a partner and lastly share some of their thinking with the larger class.

To reinforce the compelling question throughout the multi-lesson unit, we recommend briefly revisiting the question at the end of each lesson. Ask students to consider whether or how their thinking about this line has shifted. At the conclusion of this unit, students will be asked to reflect more deeply on the line and the compelling question and write a reasoned argument in response.

Objectives

- (1) *Exploration/introduction*: Students will be able to explain what Kindertransport was and why it was needed for Jewish children in Czechoslovakia by creating an annotated timeline connecting the picture book to historical events and primary sources.
- (2) *Development*: Students will be able to compare and contrast the experiences various individuals and groups had with Kindertransport by class discussions of children's and families' personal accounts.
- (3) *Expansion*: Students will be able to evaluate the impacts of participating in Kindertransport by completing a cause-and-effect flow chart.

Procedure

Lesson One: exploration/introduction

Supporting question: What happened in Prague, Czechoslovakia just before Second World War began and why?

Estimated time to complete: 50–60 min.

Objective: Students will be able to explain what Kindertransport was and why it was necessary by creating an annotated timeline connecting the book to historical events and primary sources

Assessment method: Using chart paper and markers, create an annotated timeline that connects the book to historic events and primary sources.

- (1) Review the historical context of this time period by displaying these resources on a classroom screen or having students view them on their individual devices. Students may also work in groups and present their findings to the class:
 - Maps and descriptions of the spread of Nazi control of Europe from <https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/life-in-nazi-occupied-europe/foreign-policy-and-the-road-to-war/anschluss/>, particularly beginning with Anschluss. Video from the Nuremberg Trials on the invasion of Czechoslovakia (see <https://youtu.be/0XuBqYApfIE?si=FVQxoMwESc2nXLiZ>)
 - Photo of Hitler entering Prague (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupation_of_Czechoslovakia_\(1938%E2%80%931945\)#/media/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-2004-1202-505,_Prag,_Burg,_Besuch_Adolf_Hitler.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupation_of_Czechoslovakia_(1938%E2%80%931945)#/media/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-2004-1202-505,_Prag,_Burg,_Besuch_Adolf_Hitler.jpg))
- (2) Read the picture book, *Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport*.
 - While reading, use the following questions to guide conversations about the historical events and experiences of various groups of people in the story (children, families, foster families and Sir Nicholas Winton and his team):
 - What was life like for children living in Prague before Second World War? Why do you think that?
 - What historic events can you identify from the book? What references confuse you?
 - How did these events explain Kindertransport?
 - What emotions do you think various characters in the book were feeling? (children, parents, foster families, Sir Nicholas Winton, volunteers who helped with Kindertransport)
- (3) After reading the picture book, work with students to co-construct an annotated timeline of the events highlighted in the story. The timeline can include photographs or illustrations from the picture book, or simply provide a text-based overview of the key events.
- (4) Open to page 9 in the picture book and reread the double-page spread that focuses on the “cold day in March” when an “army of German soldiers marched into our city of Prague.” Using a map of Europe during Second World War (see <https://www.worldhistory.org/uploads/images/18715.png?v=1748085666-1743243041>), show students a video of Hitler’s movement and his forces (see <https://youtu.be/ieOTtY9SXJ8?si=J8H42sD7KAuwlDeX>), as well as footage of Jewish refugees fleeing the discrimination.
- (5) Lastly, group students and have them examine the exhibition resource that focuses on how Kindertransport came to be in Prague on their 1:1 devices (see <https://www.nicholaswinton.com/exhibition/kindertransport>). As they discuss the exhibition, ask groups to record 3–5 key bits of information that they would want to add to the class timeline constructed earlier in the lesson. As students share their information, discuss and add to the timeline. Have students describe Kindertransport and tell why it was important. Help the students begin to build the understanding that one person can make a difference.

Lesson two: development

Supporting question: What was Kindertransport like for the children and families?

Estimated time to complete: 50–60 min.

Objective: Students will be able to compare and contrast the experiences various individuals and groups had with Kindertransport by class discussion of children's and families' personal accounts.

Assessment method: Use the Head, Heart and Conscience teaching strategy to help individual students or pairs reflect on the experiences of children and families.

- (1) Introduce the supporting question and focus of the lesson to students: What was Kindertransport like for the children and families?
- (2) Explain to students the details of the first flight of Kindertransport out of Prague. The teacher may state: *The first flight to evacuate 18 Jewish children from Prague was on January 9, 1939, and was organized by the Barbican Mission to Jewish People, a Christian organization and Nicholas Winton's committee. Journalists and photographers came to document the departure and landing of the flight. The flight landed in South London. Most of the children were placed in homes in this area.* Show the video of the flight (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hansi_Neumann_flight). Ask students to consider the following questions:
 - How do the children and adults in the video seem to feel? Why do you think they might be feeling that way?
 - How do the emotions portrayed in the video compare to those in *Stars of the Night*?
 - Why might Barbican Mission, a Christian organization, help to evacuate Jewish children?
- (3) Introduce the head, heart, conscience prompts to help students or pairs of students examine this emotional topic from the children's and families' perspectives using the resources provided below in steps 3 and 4 (see <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/head-heart-conscience>):
 - *Head* – What information do you know about this event? What additional information would you like to have to help you understand the event better?
 - *Heart* – What emotions does this event raise for you? Are there particular moments, images or stories that stand out to you? If so, why?
 - *Conscience* – What questions about fairness, equity or justice does this event raise for you? What choices did key figures make, and what values may have guided those choices? How were people impacted by this event? Are there people who should be held accountable? If so, how?
 - Invite students to share their reflections.
- (4) Examine the children's perspectives of Kindertransport experience using the following audio and text interviews from children on Kindertransport:
 - Hana Bandler (audio interview; minutes 12:00–18:00; see <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80016727>)
 - Vera Schaufeld (written article; see https://www.hmd.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/vera_schaufeld_life_story.pdf)
 - Additional audio interviews can be retrieved from (see: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/search/global?query=kindertransport+interviews>).

- (5) Examine the families' perspectives of Kindertransport experience using the following audio and text sources:
 - Letter from parents of Kindertransport children (see <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/05/19/478371863/britains-schindler-is-remembered-by-those-he-saved-from-the-nazis>)
 - Karoline Luise Fischl (audio interview; minutes 13:45–16:05; see <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80008952>).
- (6) Refer back to the supporting question (What was Kindertransport like for the children and families?) and invite students to share their responses to the head, heart, conscience prompts.

Lesson three: expansion

Supporting question: What were the short and long-term impacts of Kindertransport?

Estimated time to complete: 50–60 min.

Objective: Students will be able to evaluate the impacts of participating in Kindertransport by completing a cause-and-effect flow chart.

Assessment method: Students will complete a cause-and-effect flow chart outlining the impacts of the invasion and Kindertransport.

- (1) Introduce the supporting question and focus of the lesson to students: What were the short and long-term impacts of Kindertransport?
- (2) Introduce the cause-and-effect flow chart (see [Appendix A](#)). As a whole class, help students review the causes of Kindertransport (e.g. Kristallnacht, prejudice against Jews, rise of Hitler, Nazi aggression, annexation of German-dominated lands (Anschluss), emotions such as fear and uncertainty) and add them to the cause column of the flow chart.
- (3) Instruct students to add short- and long-term effects of Kindertransport to the effect column of their flow charts as they examine the following sources in pairs or trios:
 - Stories of survivors (see <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/07/13/world/europe/nicholas-winton-children-saved.html>),
 - Winton's interview (see questions "I had just asked Mr. Winton if he would like to say anything else about his relationship with members of the Jewish community in Britain and what their response was to this work you were doing?" and "Did you actually meet any of the families that were to take these children?" in (see https://collections.ushmm.org/oh_findingaids/RG-50.030.0422_trs_en.pdf) and reflect on primary sources from previous lessons.
 - Cause – Kindertransport
 - Effect(s) – survival, loss of identity and culture, family separation, etc.
- (4) Debrief using the text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world strategy (see <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/text-text-text-self-text-world-0>).
 - Text-to-self – Can you make connections to your own life, ideas and experiences?
 - Text-to-text – Can you make connections that relate to another text (e.g. books, movies, comic books, art, TV, etc.)?
 - Text-to-world – Can you make connections to events in the larger world: the past, present and future? (Students could consider prior knowledge about history or current events.)

- (5) Show video of Winton meeting the children he saved through Kindertransport from “That’s Life” (1988) (see <https://www.bbc.com/videos/cz9987129980>). Help the students make connections back to the impact of Kindertransport.

Summative assessment. Winton used Kindertransport to help save a total of 669 children, resulting in approximately 6,000 family members surviving today.

Open the book to the dedication page. Point out the dedication and the picture of a gold ring. The survivors gave Winton a gold ring with “save one life, save the world” engraved inside it. Using at least 3 primary or secondary sources from the three lessons, students create an evidence-based response to the question, “Does saving one life save the world?” Instruct the students to use the Claim, Evidence, Reasoning (CER) model to organize their responses. Possible argument stems to help students begin their responses might be:

- (1) I think it’s important that Nicholas Winton saved each child because . . .
- (2) Even though Nicholas Winton saved many children, I think it wasn’t enough because . . .

An image of the actual ring is at <https://www.nicholaswinton.com/exhibition/recognition-1988>. The caption beside the ring explains the origin of the engraving:

Gold ring engraved with the words “Save one life, save the world”, given to Nicky by some of the children he rescued during the “Remembering for the Future” conference in June 1988 (a conference on the Holocaust, organised by Dr Elizabeth Maxwell). He wore the ring for the rest of his life. The words are taken from the Jewish Talmud teaching: “Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire.”

Suggested extension activities.

- (1) Make connections to present-day immigration and current events.
- (2) Use *We Had to Be Brave: Escaping the Nazis on the Kindertransport* (Hopkins, 2022) as a companion book.
- (3) Visit the Kindertransport Association website, which features a collection of memory quilts created by survivors of the Kindertransport (see <https://kindertransport.org/history/memory-quilts/>). Each square includes a 1–2 min audio description of the reasoning behind each design. Students could investigate individual squares and then participate in a discussion about the commonalities and differences between them.

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(The Appendix follows overleaf)

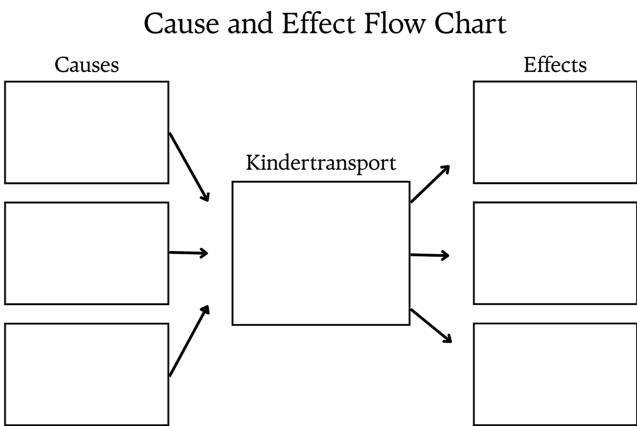


Figure A1. Cause and Effect Flow Chart for Kindertransport. **Source:** Authors’ own work

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