

# LESSON: Challenges of Escape, 1938–1941

**GRADE LEVEL:** Adaptable for grades 7–12

**SUBJECT:** Multidisciplinary

**TIME REQUIRED:** Approximately 90 minutes (can be broken up over multiple class periods)

**This is a *thematic* lesson that builds on fundamental knowledge and provides in-depth exploration of a topic.**

## RATIONALE

Students will understand the complex factors that led German Jews to seek to emigrate from Nazi Germany and the complex factors that impeded their immigration to the United States in the 1930s and 1940s.

## OVERVIEW

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What “push” factors—events and pressures that motivate people to leave their countries—sparked Jewish emigration from Germany in the 1930s?
- Why was it difficult for many Jews to immigrate to the United States?
- How did government policies, public opinion, and global events in the 1920s and 1930s affect the ability of Jews to flee from Germany to the United States?

### EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Analyze primary sources
- Analyze and evaluate multiple and complex causes and effects of past events
- Use secondary sources to inform their interpretation of primary sources

### TEACHER PREPARATION

- Read the following recommended *Holocaust Encyclopedia* articles:
  - [“Anti-Jewish Legislation in Prewar Germany”](#)
  - [“German Jewish Refugees, 1933–39”](#)
  - [“Immigration to the United States, 1933–1941”](#)
- Read the following optional *Holocaust Encyclopedia* articles:
  - [“The United States and the Refugee Crisis, 1938–1941”](#)
  - [“United States Immigration and Refugee Law, 1921–1980”](#)
- Examine the following optional resource:
  - [What Did Refugees Need to Obtain a US Visa in the 1930s?](#)

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## MATERIALS

- [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#) article: "Immigration to the United States, 1933–1941"
- [The Path to Nazi Genocide](#) video
- [American Newsreels](#) video
- [Why Didn't They Just Leave](#) classroom video (12:50)
- [Steps to Immigrate to the United States](#)
- [Student Worksheet](#) and [Answer Key](#)
- [Excerpts from Klaus Langer's diary](#)

## LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

**The lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications to achieve the educational outcomes.** Technology and teaching strategies are suggested in the instructional sequence; please use other options if they support the learning needs of your students. Consider utilizing graphic organizers, note-taking strategies, reading choices, and online engagement tools.

Educators may choose to use learner variability modifications specific to this lesson:

- Provide students with choices as to how they access information throughout lessons, i.e. read print alone, read print with a partner, read along while the teacher reads aloud, etc.
- Define terms that would clarify understanding for students. Display definitions if needed.
- Incorporate strategies such as think-pair-share and jigsaw to enhance student engagement.
- *Holocaust Encyclopedia* articles are available in various languages; refer to the word "Language" and select the Globe icon available on the lefthand side of the article.
- *The Path to Nazi Genocide* is subtitled in 12 languages. Scroll below the video to see the options.

This lesson is available as an [online, asynchronous experience for students](#), which can be accessed through a web browser or LMS files. The online lessons are accessible for all students for in-person and virtual learning, and they provide specific support for students using screen readers.

## INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE

### WARM UP

1. Define **push factors**, **emigration**, and **immigration**:

**Push factors:** internal and external pressures that prompt individuals to move voluntarily

**Emigration:** leaving one country to permanently live in another

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**Immigration:** arriving in a new country to live there permanently

## ASK THE STUDENTS

- What push factors might lead people to have to emigrate? (Unwelcome by community, unemployment, laws, no access to resources such as education)
- What do people potentially give up if they immigrate to another country? (Belongings, jobs, family, friends, communities, house, pets)

**Note:** This prompt may lead students to share their own immigration stories or those of their families. Teachers can encourage students to think about the personal push and pull factors their families faced, and add these factors to the class list.

## PART ONE

2. Hand out the [Student Worksheet](#) and prepare the class to watch two film clips. You can find the answer key [here](#).
  - a. Review the first question on the worksheet: What push factors did Jews in Germany experience between 1933 and 1939? What led many to seek refuge in other countries?
  - b. View [Citizens to Outcasts](#) (Chapter three of *The Path to Nazi Genocide*) to examine how the Nazis persecuted Jews. Instruct students to watch for and then list examples of push factors on the worksheet.
    - i. Potential Push Factors: (Jews in greater Germany were persecuted, lost their jobs, Jewish-owned shops were boycotted; public displays of antisemitic propaganda; Kristallnacht attacks, synagogues burned; Jews sent to concentration camps, passports and financial resources seized)
3. Review the second question on the worksheet: What was happening in the United States in the 1930s that might have made it difficult for European Jews to immigrate to the United States? Select either option below.

Option 1:

  - a. View [Newsreel film](#) (4:58). Instruct students to watch for and list examples from the film that show what may have made it difficult for European Jews to immigrate to the United States.
    - i. (anti-immigrant attitudes, unemployment, xenophobia, isolationism, antisemitism)
  - b. Read the *Holocaust Encyclopedia* article "[Immigration to the United States, 1933–41](#)." Consider discussing the article as a class or in groups and ask the following question: How did US government laws and policies affect the ability of German Jews to immigrate to the United States?

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Option 2:

- a. Watch the [Challenges of Escape classroom video](#) (12:50). Consider discussing the film as a class or in groups and ask the following question: What was happening in the United States in the 1930s that might have made it difficult for European Jews to immigrate to the United States?.
4. Have a class discussion about the newsreel film and the encyclopedia article. Write the orange topics below on the board or in some shared digital space. Ask students to share examples from the film and article to answer each question.

How did American **racism and antisemitism** influence immigration in the 1930s?

How did the **Great Depression and economic concerns** influence immigration in the 1930s?

How did **national security concerns** influence immigration in the 1930s?

How did **the 1924 immigration law** influence immigration in the 1930s?

How did **World War II** make immigration even more difficult?

## PART TWO

5. Divide the class into small groups and provide each group with the [Steps to Immigrate to the United States](#). Ask students to discuss and draw conclusions about why they think each document or step was required for emigration and/or immigration to the United States and fill out page 2 their [worksheets](#). Students should draw on the categories/topics identified above (racism/antisemitism, Great Depression/economic concerns, national security concerns, the 1924 immigration law, and World War II) for their answers. Students also should use the lists they made while watching the films and information from the Holocaust Encyclopedia article to inform their answers. You can find the Answer Key [here](#).
6. Instruct students in their groups to read the [Excerpts from Klaus Langer's Diary](#) and take complete page 3 and page 4 of the [worksheet](#) as noted below:

### ASK STUDENTS TO USE THEIR WORKSHEETS AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS:

- What does each entry reveal about the different challenges facing Klaus's family as they attempted to leave Germany?
- What can we learn about the emigration and immigration experience from his diary, and does it differ from what we learned from the historical documents we just examined?

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## CONCLUSION

### WRAP UP

7. Hold a class discussion to conclude the lesson.

#### ASK THE STUDENTS

- What did you learn about emigration/immigration during the 1930s?
- What was surprising about the documents, including the diary, that you analyzed? How did the documents you analyzed change your prior assumptions about this topic?
- What does Klaus’s diary show us about how refugees experienced the immigration process?
- What made the immigration process difficult?
- How did government policies, public opinion, and global events affect the ability of Jews to flee from the German Reich to the United States in the 1930s and 1940s?

### ASSESSMENT OPTION

The prompt below may be assigned to facilitate a discussion at the end of the lesson. Consider assigning other projects (student essays, or individual or group visual presentations) to assess learning.

#### Student Prompt:

Based on Klaus Langer’s diary, your notes from both of the films, and historical documents in the PDFs, evaluate the challenges faced by Jews attempting to flee the German Reich and immigrate to the United States. Providing evidence from primary sources (government documents and Klaus Langer’s diary) and secondary sources (encyclopedia articles, film clips), answer the following questions:

- How did anti-Jewish policies, laws, and actions influence Jewish emigration from the German Reich?
- How did American domestic concerns influence the ability of Jews to immigrate to the United States?

Consider the impact of government policies, public opinion, and global events in the 1920s and 1930s when formulating your response.