



ABOUT THIS LESSON

RATIONALE

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn about the double-edged sword of liberation from the point of view of Holocaust survivors.

As part of the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand’s mission, this lesson inspires and empowers action against antisemitism, discrimination, and apathy by remembering, educating, and bearing witness to the Holocaust. Students examine primary and secondary materials to understand the impact of liberation.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

1. Level 6.2 Social Studies: Understand how cultures adapt and change and that this has consequences for society.
2. Level 6.1 History: Understand how the causes and consequences of past events that are of significance to New Zealanders shape the lives of people and society.
3. Level 7.2 History: Understand how people’s interpretations of events that are of significance to New Zealanders differ.
4. Level 8.1 Social Studies: Understand how policy changes are influenced by and impact on the rights, roles, and responsibilities of individuals and communities.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand the nuance of the concept of “liberation”.
- Students will analyse effects and perspectives of liberation on survivors and liberators.
- Students will explore the influence of governmental policy on immigration to New Zealand.
- Students will recognise the contribution of survivors on New Zealand society

Key Words

Refuge/Refugee
Perspective
Testimony
Liberation/Liberator
Antisemitism
Immigration/Emigration
Displaced Persons

Policy
Racism
Xenophobia
Economic depression
Alien
Bergen-Belsen
Homogenous



Day 1 Activity: Liberation

This activity is to introduce the duality of liberation from two perspectives: liberator and victim. At the end of this activity, students should understand why those in the cities and armies fighting World War II would have felt such joy compared to the victims who would have been numb to what was going on.

Use the following definition, pictures, and video testimony with your students to have a discussion on how liberation was a double-edged sword.

Have your students, either in pairs or individually, analyse the provided materials using APPARTS. This is a tool to analyse pictures and videos that helps students connect what they are seeing with what they are learning. Students do not have to do ALL the acronym to analyse the sources. This is just a tool to help them as they go along.

Before using these resources, discuss with your students the graphic nature of what soldiers would have seen upon entering the camps, as the video shows some of the same views they saw.

Author: If known, what does the student know about the author that affects their understanding of the document?

Place & Time: Where is the source (ie: photograph, video, image) taking place? When is the event happening?

Prior Knowledge: What events happened prior to the one being depicted? How does this affect the events being depicted?

Audience: Who is supposed to consume (read/watch/look at) the source? Why was this audience chosen specifically?

Reason: This is also known as purpose. Why produce this source? What does it serve to do?

The Main Idea: This looks at the entire message of the source. Students should describe this in their own words, not using any kind of quotes from the document, to show understanding.

Significance: How or why is this source relevant to the topic? How does it support an idea that the student is trying to express in their work/reports/writing?



Differentiation: You can choose one part of this for students to use or have them work together as a class to analyse one specific item. We recommend printing out what APPARTS means and giving to each student so they can have a copy with them when they work.

Question ideas for class discussion:

- How do you think the prisoners reacted when the soldiers liberated the camps?
- How does the reaction of the prisoners compare to the reaction of those in the major cities (ie: Paris, London, etc)?
- How do you think the sights of the camps affected the soldiers? How did the sights of the soldiers affect the prisoners?
- Why would the liberators take such graphic videos/pictures of what they saw in the camps?
- Many of the prisoners would have lived in Displaced Persons (DP) Camps for months to years after being liberated, so does this make them truly “free”? Why or why not?

You can come up with other questions for discussion, to guide your students to understand the disparity between the joy felt by those who had been fighting in the war (soldiers/civilians/cities) vs the numbness or lack of response from prisoners when they were liberated.

Do not put the students in the shoes of the prisoners and ask questions like “What would you have felt?” or “How would you have reacted?” The discussion should centre around the idea that liberation was good overall, but that the prisoners would have faced difficulties at the end of the war.

You can click [here](#) to see the HCNZ pedagogical approach to teaching the Holocaust for more information on why not to do this with students.

Liberation, *n.* /ˌlɪbəˈreɪʃn/

1. a. **The action of liberating (esp. from confinement or servitude); the condition of being liberated; release.**

2. a. **The action of freeing a region or its people from an oppressor or enemy force; the result of this.**



VE-Day Celebrations in Christchurch



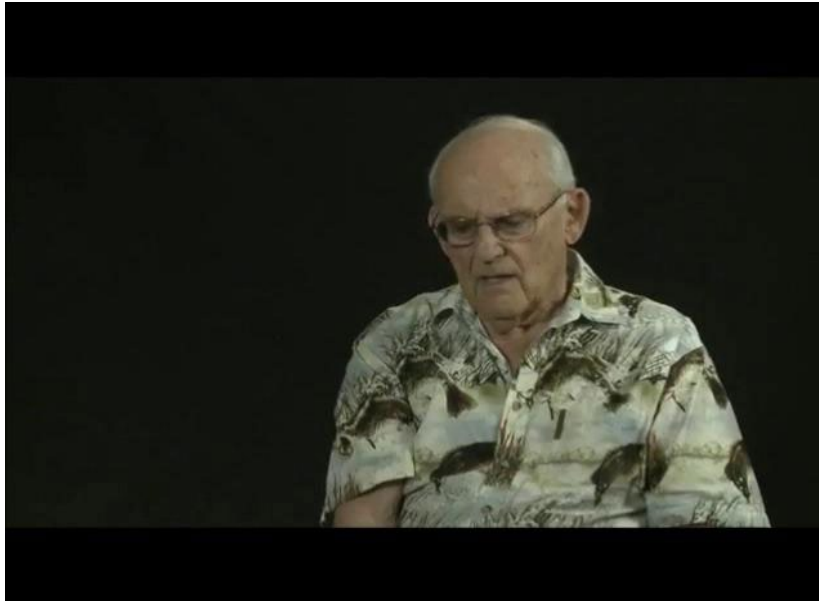
VE-Day headline, Nelson Mail



VE-Day Celebration outside Parliament, Wellington



This soldier's testimony contains graphic descriptions of what he experienced and saw when he was liberating a concentration camp. Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem, Israel, uses the pedagogical theory of "safely in, safely out." This belief is that students should not be traumatised by the content they are learning about the Holocaust. Before viewing this video, please make sure you as the teacher have viewed it first and discuss with your students some of the things they will hear the soldier describe.



An American soldier's first-hand account of liberating a concentration camp



Day 2: Survivors' Responses to Liberation

Liberated but not free....

Where do we go?

What do we do?

The initial joy of liberation led to the discovery that the war had created the worst humanitarian and refugee crisis in history. One of the main ways in which the Nazis were able to commit their crimes against humanity was by stripping the prisoners of their citizenship, making them stateless. Some of the prisoners would be able to return home to where they were from, but what they found was not always a warm welcome.

Starter Activity

Write the word 'refuge' on the board. Ask the class to brainstorm other words around it to show what it means.

As a class, discuss those words to create a definition of 'refuge'. Afterwards, split the class into pairs and ask them to discuss what the word 'refugee' means. Explain how it is linked to the meaning of the word 'refuge'.

Using the documents below, have students analyse how survivors responded to liberation after the initial joy had subsided and they needed to start their lives over.

Eva Braun, born 1927 in Slovakia, liberated by the US army in 1945,

"We woke up in the morning and there was absolute silence everywhere. The watchtower was empty. The SS men had disappeared. Suddenly we heard a noise from the direction of the road. [...] And then someone shouted that they were Americans. The Americans came in and liberated us. [...] All through the war we had prayed for liberation, and here it was suddenly. You are free! But after I had digested the idea of freedom I realized that actually the whole time I had been hoping to see my father, and I even dared to hope that I might possibly see my mother, in spite of everything. I knew in my heart that this was almost completely unrealistic, but I was sure I would see my father. But still, there were doubts, and I began to understand that it might not happen. When I heard about freedom, I was also very frightened. What would we find?"



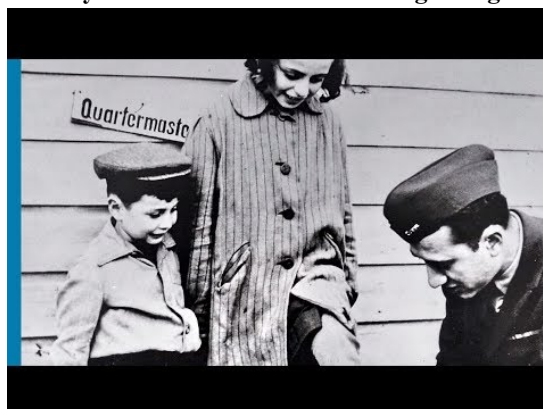
Shoshana Stark, liberated from Bergen-Belsen by the British in 1945

“I went home. I didn’t have anywhere I could stay... The gatekeeper was living in the house and wouldn’t let me go in... I also had aunts and family. I went to see all their apartments. There were goyim [gentiles] living in every one. They wouldn’t let me in. In one place, one of them said, ‘What did you come back for? They took you away to kill you, so why did you have to come back?’ I decided: I’m not staying here, I’m going.”

Jewish Survivors Boarding Trucks of the Bericha Movement, on their way to Israel (Yad Vashem Archives, 6950/3)



Play video from 5:56 “A New Beginning”





Day 3: Immigration to New Zealand Activity

Using the clips of New Zealand Holocaust survivors on our website and the infographic below, have your students analyse why survivors decided to make a new life in Aotearoa New Zealand.

It is important before the students begin analysing documents that you have a class discussion around the concepts of racism, xenophobia, and economic depression. For students to understand the obstacles to immigration to New Zealand, they should recognise the ideas around New Zealand policy of maintaining a homogenous, “British”, society and how that prevented Jewish refugees before and after the war.

Discussion questions could be:

- How does immigration affect the demographics (population) of a country?
- How does racism affect the ability of those who wish to immigrate to a new country?
- How does religion factor into allowing new immigrants into New Zealand during the years 1933 - 1945?
- Even after accounts by NZ soldiers, such as Major Wilson, why would New Zealand still limit refugees from settling in New Zealand?

With this activity, the goal is for students to see why Holocaust survivors would have wanted to leave Europe after the war (push factors), and what in New Zealand would make them choose this country (pull factors). Students should be able to synthesise the difficulties in making a new life in a new country and the issues they face with emigrating and immigrating, be it political, social, religious, or cultural.

Starter Activity – Take a poll of your students:

- **Have you or anyone in your family immigrated to New Zealand in the last 50 years?**
- **Where did they emigrate from? Why did they decide to leave their home country for New Zealand?**
- **What difficulties did they face when they moved to New Zealand?**

MIGRATION: NEW LIFE IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

1945 TO TODAY

At the end of the Second World War, European Jewry found itself scattered across the continent, flung far from their homes, with millions dead. Many Jews felt that after the events of the Holocaust, the only thing they could do to protect themselves and what remained, was to get away from Europe as far as humanly possible. The push and pull factors that led to Jewish migration to New Zealand were varied but can be summarised by the categories below.

PUSH FACTORS

- Antisemitism in Central and Eastern Europe
- No work for refugees
- Many refugees had no homes to return to
- Jews had been stripped of citizenship in their home countries



PULL FACTORS

- New Zealand was the furthest point from Europe
- New Zealand needed skilled labour
- Some Jews were able to escape to New Zealand prior to Holocaust
- An established Jewish community in New Zealand

The joy of liberation also brought with it the harsh reality that a "return to life" would never be the same. For many Jews, leaving Europe was an arduous task that took years to accomplish as the lack of papers, money, and no support networks meant they would languish in Displaced Persons camps for years. When they would emigrate, they would be starting over, often alone.



Jews immigrating to New Zealand would often find a lukewarm reception upon arrival. Prior to the end of the war, those Jews who had immigrated to New Zealand had been labeled "enemy aliens," and that mentality would be a stumbling block to full integration into Kiwi society. Eventually, Jews would be received as welcome immigrants who were productive members of Kiwi society.



Using testimony clips on the HCNZ website, as well as the excerpts below, analyse the push and pull factors on Jewish immigration to New Zealand. Answer the following questions at the end and be prepared to discuss:

- How did New Zealand immigration law affect Jewish refugees immigrating to New Zealand?
- Why did New Zealand feel the need to limit the number of Jewish refugees coming to New Zealand?
- How did this decision impact the survivors' individual experiences? (*If not specifically stated, how do you think it impacted their experiences?*)

PUSH FACTORS	PULL FACTORS



Sources of immigration policy

1931 Immigration Restriction Amendment Act

- Gives Minister of Customs and officials discretion to decide who was suitable to enter New Zealand
- Prevented aliens* from Europe entering New Zealand unless:
 - they had guaranteed employment
 - considerable amount of capital
 - 'possessed knowledge and skills which would enable them to rehabilitate readily, but without detriment to any resident of New Zealand.'

Source: *At the time of passage, the word alien referred to all persons who were not of British descent or British dominions.

Ann Beaglehole, 'Immigration regulation - 1914-1945: restrictions on non-British immigration', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/immigration-regulation/page-3>

1946 report from the Director of Employment to the Acting Permanent Head of the Prime Minister's Department:

It is considered that New Zealanders and British immigrants should obtain preference in filling the more attractive jobs in the community. If we are obliged to accept a number of refugees, these people would be more easily assimilated if the selection is largely restricted to the unskilled types who are prepared to accept employment in heavy industries. It is felt that professionals and highly skilled technical personnel are more likely to prove difficult to assimilate in that before long they would desire to embark on their own account as employers of labour.

Source: ANZ, LI 22/1/27, Part 1, Director of Employment to Acting Permanent Head, Prime Minister's Department, 25 October 1946



But the main impediment to the reunion of families, which the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees had expected New Zealand to facilitate, was 'the question of policy'. A statement by the New Zealand Delegation to the United Nations Special Committee on Refugees and Displaced Persons on 10 May 1946 opened with the obligatory expressions of sympathy about the plight of refugees, but went on to state that the 'New Zealand Government does not favour mass or group immigration of refugees' and that immigration of aliens would continue to be restricted under the Immigration Act.

Source: The Response of the New Zealand Government to Jewish Refugees and Holocaust Survivors, 1933-1945. Ann Beaglehole, [SECONDGEN ARTICLE](#)

Dear Mother,

As I told you in my other letter I am going to describe briefly some of what I saw when I flew across German with Mr Jordan and party to see a typical German concentration camp....

This camp is the notorious BELSEN camp - of many concentration camps used for "political prisoners" of all nationalities, of both sexes, young & old, who had in any way opposed the German Order. (I fail to see how children of 12 - 14 years can be classed as "political offenders")

The numbers who have passed through this camp will probably never be known, for the records had been removed, but at the time of its liberation, its population of living was approx 40,000 & its dead, lying naked where they had collapsed in the roadways, gutters or hutments', numbers 22,000. Naked, became the living, having ceased to be human & having lost all sense of shame or sex, stripped them to gain the warmth of extra garments. Where the prisoners died in the hub & their companions, lying beside them on the filthy wooden floors were too weak to remove the bodies, the limp & the dead shared the same quarters. Sometimes floorboards were lifted, & the bodies pushed underneath. As most of the inmates had dysentery & did not have the strength to move even themselves outside you will realise that the air was so foul that it was almost impossible to enter the hutments. There were no sanitary arrangements whatever in the camp, so the air outside was not much better.

As we moved about the camp, a baby's body was seen lying out in the open. We came across many huge plots of ground - taped off. Even one plot was a notice - "Grave. 2000 approx. 27 April 1945". German soldiers are being forced to remove & bury the dead....

It is the same in Buchenwald, Dachau, & many others. This is the result of a scientific starvation - this is German culture!



Most Germans now protest that they were ignorant of these happenings & that the SS were solely to blame. I do not believe them.

Men are not taught to do the things that Germans did to these people. It is something brutal in the make-up of every German which allows him to perpetrate or condone these acts of horror. No punishment we can impose will be too severe for the German people.

Source: Written by Major Stuart J. Wilson, NZ Army, 13 May 1945. This letter has been redacted for the purposes of this activity. The full letter is in the archives at the National Army Museum Te Mata Toa in Waiouru, New Zealand.



Day 4: Jewish Contribution to New Zealand

The Jewish people have been an integral part of New Zealand society since the earliest days of colonisation. Whether they were active in the trading industry or helping to establish towns, Jews were well known throughout New Zealand before the Holocaust. Those survivors that came to New Zealand after the war, or came before the war as refugees, made their mark on New Zealand society as well.

Starter Activity – Discuss with your students the following questions:

How do immigrants contribute to the societies that they join?

- Economics (jobs)
- Socially (arts/volunteering/etc)
- Demographics (birth rate/low populated areas)

Have your students pick from the list below of Jews who had an impact in the New Zealand. Students will research the life and work of that person to present to the class to learn how survivors of the Holocaust or those who came before the Holocaust worked to integrate and affect New Zealand.

Entrepreneurs

- Harry Seresin
- Hans Klisser

Fashion

- Hallensteins

Architects

- Ernst Plishke
- Robert Fantl

Photography

- Marti Friedlander
- Woolf Photography (Inge & Ronald Woolf)

Politicians

- John Key

Musicians

- Clare Winter