

2019

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**Category:** Year 9 – 10

**Topic:** The impact of the Holocaust was felt globally. Explain how Holocaust survivors adapted to life after liberation and describe the contributions they have made to the post-Holocaust world.

As the Allied forces began bearing down on Nazi Germany in the summer of 1944 they discovered the horrifying evidence of Hitler's final solution; the ultimate and crippling amalgamation of the Nazi ideology, thousands of concentration camps made specifically to kill, imprison, force to labour, experiment on and commit atrocities to Jews, Soviets, Serbs, Poles, political prisoners, homosexuals, intellectuals and all those that were not the 'pure' Aryan race. Although the devastating effects of the Holocaust will never truly be dealt justice in 738 words we can still explore the lives of those that survived it.

The Jews were treated like a 'subhuman' race. Living in these camps meant lives no better than those of battery hens, with forced labour, austere living conditions and rampant disease being commonplace in these camps, not to mention the mass gassing, burning and death marches that killed some 15-20 million people. Those that were liberated would never be the same, as described by Italian Jew, Primo Levi "We lay in a world of death and phantoms. The last trace of civilization had vanished around and inside us." Many died from emaciation within hours of liberation. The ones that survived returned home to nothing, they lost their families as Tomas Radil-a holocaust survivor-said "What really is home? It's not a city, it is a family, but I knew the family would not be complete." In this aspect many Jews found it very hard to return home.

For many Jews return home was impossible, the Nazis had stripped them of their citizenship and passports so when the war ended they were no one, from nowhere, with no name and no home. Many immigrated to Britain, America, Israel (Palestine), Australia, New Zealand and many other countries. But here too they faced struggles, in Britain the policy towards Jewish refugees and immigrants was harsh and the government did not allow mass migration, only

those with family in Britain were allowed in. The same went for British-controlled Palestine, where ships carrying primarily Jews were detained in detention camps and denied entry into Palestine, from 1945-48 70,000 were stopped from entering. But these problems were also overcome as protests by Jewish youths and pressure from Harry Truman (US President) caused the British government to allow 100,000 refugees in. The state of Israel was founded in 1948 to give the Jews a home as spoken by David Ben-Gurion (Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Palestine) “The Nazi Holocaust, which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe, proved anew the urgency of the re-establishment of the Jewish State,”

Tomi Reichental, another survivor said “We completely stopped talking about the holocaust, it was indescribable. We just shut it out of our mind.” This made me think that survivors of such a traumatic event, tried to forget about it and rebuild their lives to a time before the holocaust, as if it never happened. That meant finding what remained of their families. For most it was a struggle, organisations like the International Red Cross aided in the search but millions of people had been displaced across Europe. Oftentimes people resorted to looking on their own by tracing lost family members’ footsteps, scouring newspapers and survivor registries. For parents the ordeal was similar, some were able to contact the original rescuer of the child, but for many all they found was that the child had been killed or missing. These searches lasted for months and years, sometimes the family would be reunited but usually someone wasn’t there.

Today many survivors are just now speaking up and educating the next generation about their experiences during the holocaust, people like Eva Mozes Kor, Madeline Deutsch and Tomi Reichental all recently have spoken about their experiences during and after the Holocaust. Some other noteworthy holocaust survivors are as I’ve talked about Primo Levi, a chemist and writer; Irena Sendler, a Polish nurse that helped 2,500 Jewish children and Otto Frank, a businessman who lost his entire family due to the holocaust but still published his daughter’s journal, *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

In the broken world of post-war Europe these survivors of the Holocaust never gave up, not in the search for a new home, not when family disappeared and not when Europe was steadily closing their gates to them. These survivors bit by bit, rebuilt their lives from rubble and who’s stories will be told so that they will be forever carved into our collective history.