The Kindertransport: introduction and background for the project In My Pocket

Germany, in 1933, had democratically voted the National Socialist party into power, with Adolf Hitler at its helm. From that historical moment, antisemitism became law. Jews were slowly squeezed out of most professions, sporting clubs and even forbidden to sit on benches in parks and attend public swimming pools. Jewish children could not go to public schools. This discrimination and persecution continued for years.

On 9th and 10th November 1938, the Nazis staged a pogrom – a violent and unprovoked attack on Jews all over Germany, burning down hundreds of synagogues and smashing the windows of thousands of Jewish businesses and many homes and beating up Jewish people. All this, while the state-controlled police and fire departments stood by. This pogrom is known as Kristallnacht: The night of broken glass. In Germany today, it is known as Pogromnacht.

The Jews realised that this signified **a point of no return** for them in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, the areas that Germany controlled in 1938.

It was at this point that **Britain eased immigration** restrictions for certain categories of refugees, having closed their doors to Jews at the Evian Conference in July of that same year which discussed the "Jewish refugee problem"

They agreed to allow an unspecified number of unaccompanied minors under the age of 17 to enter Great Britain from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, coordinated by Jewish organisations in these countries, along with British Aid groups.

This became known as the **KINDERTRANSPORT** (Kinder=children, transport=transport)

(Many of you may recall the recent **movie "One Life"** based on the true story of Sir Nicholas Winton, a British Jew who coordinated the rescue of hundreds of Czechoslovakian children.)

Private citizens or organizations had to guarantee payment of 50 pounds for each child's care, education, and eventual emigration from Britain. In return, the British government agreed to allow unaccompanied refugee children to enter the country on temporary travel visas. It was understood at the time that when the “crisis was over,” the children would return to their families in Europe. Britain would not admit the parents and families of the children as they did not want to be seen to be prioritising these Jewish adults ahead of their own citizens.

The few infants included in the program were cared for by other children on their transport.

Children chosen for the transports **travelled by train** to ports in Belgium and the Netherlands, then known as Holland. From there, they sailed to Harwich on the east coast of England. Upon arrival in Harwich, children with sponsors went to meet their foster families, mostly Jewish and some non-Jewish families, in London. This accounted for about half the Kindertransport children. Those without sponsors were housed in a summer camp in Dovercourt Bay and in other facilities until individual families agreed to care for them or until larger groups of children could be taken to hostels, farms or schools.

The very last transport left on 1st Sept 1939, on the eve of the outbreak of WW2.

In all, the rescue operation brought about 10,000 mostly Jewish children to Great Britain.

Many Kindertransport children eventually became citizens of Great Britain, or emigrated to the US, Canada, Australia and after 1948, to Israel. Most of them would never again see their parents and families, who were murdered during the Holocaust.

This humanitarian effort to save mainly Jewish lives highlights the extreme nature of the Holocaust and the tragedy of forced separation of families. It was a concerted effort to rescue Jewish lives after all possibilities had been exhausted and the doors of the world had all but closed.

FYI for teachers, but not for the students as this is part of the IMP slideshow:

((*If you recall **the Paddington Bear books**, the Brown family finds a bear from “darkest Peru” sitting on a suitcase at the train station. He has a note hanging around his neck that says “Please look after this bear”. The family takes him in. Michael Bond, author of the Paddington Bear books, said in an interview in 2017 that the inspiration for the character of Paddington was the arrival of so many Jewish refugee children in London that he remembers seeing as a child. Each of them carried a small bag of belongings and had a string around their necks with a specific number, denoting the family with whom they would be fostered.))