



One Life



Teacher Resource Package Prepared By:

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Synopsis

Country of Origin: United Kingdom

Release Year: 2023

Director: James Hawes

Runtime: 109 minutes

Language: English, German, French, Czech

Themes: Heroism, Refugees, Kindertransport

Two-time Oscar winner Sir Anthony Hopkins plays Sir Nicholas Winton, who rescued 669 children from the Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia in the months leading up to World War II. Director James Hawes deftly jumps between the young Nicky as a mind-mannered young stock broker (played by Johnny Flynn) in a race against time to bring the Jewish child refugees to safety in England before the borders close, and Winton fifty years later (Hopkins), who lives haunted by the fate of the children he wasn't able to save. All this leads to a cathartic climax as he finally begins to come to terms with his memories of his heroic actions. This stirring drama also stars Helen Bonham Carter as Nicky's mother Babette, who assists him in navigating the bureaucracies in England.

Related Websites

Sir Nicholas Winton

<https://www.nicholaswinton.com/exhibition>

Context: Kindertransport

Before viewing the film, teachers should familiarize students with the term Kindertransport and what that entailed. Most people think that the initiative to bring unaccompanied child refugees to the UK was a grand humanitarian initiative, but the reality was different. After hours of debate in Parliament in November 1938, the British government decided that it would not waive the stringent visa requirements that it had just made to the Aliens Act. This meant that any adult trying to flee Nazi Germany would have to go through layers of bureaucratic challenges if they were to secure safe passage to England. The only exception made was to allow an unspecified number of unaccompanied Jewish and “non-Aryan” children into the UK “provided they were sponsored by responsible bodies and responsible individuals” and that their maintenance was privately guaranteed “without any harm to our own population.” (Source: <https://thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/2018/11/21/revisiting-the-origins-of-the-kindertransport-on-its-80th-anniversary/>).

The children that Nicholas Winton saved were not part of the official Kindertransport that the British government allowed. When Nicholas Winton suggests to Doreen that they should try to save the Czech refugees through that program, she dismisses the idea, noting that “his majesty’s government refuses to believe that these people (refugees from the Sudetenland) are in danger” and that the British are only allowing children from Germany and Austria to be granted the visa waiver. The mandate of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia was to rescue political refugees at imminent risk. Winton refuses to be deterred and thus he creates the children’s section of the BCRC. As with the official Kindertransport program for German and Austrian children, strict conditions were put on the children that Winton was able to save: each child was to have an individual sponsor who would guarantee to pay for all the child’s needs until they were over 17 plus a fee of £50 for their eventual return. In this manner, Winton and his colleagues were responsible for extending the Kindertransport programme to include refugees from Czechoslovakia.

Further Reading

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

<https://www.hmd.org.uk/learn-about-the-holocaust-and-genocides/the-holocaust/kindertransport-refugees/>

BBC

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-68070539> (profiles of some Kindertransport children who still live in the U.K.)

Quakers in Britain

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/faith/our-history/kindertransport>

Context: Refugees

One Life is an ideal film to introduce younger students to one of the today’s most pressing issues. Before watching the film, teachers should prepare students by devoting at least one lesson to defining what constitutes a refugee and what kinds of situations would necessitate having to risk one’s life to find safety in another country. Explain to students that refugees are not people who choose to move to a different country but rather people who are forced to flee their home countries. Listed below are some questions you might want to ask to start a discussion:

1. What kind of dangers or threats might make someone run away from their home and country? Write down words like war, persecution, religion, race, dictatorships and ask

students what these words mean and how they might force people to do anything to stay safe.

2. Have you heard stories about refugees before? If so, where have you heard about them?
3. Do you know any countries that refugees have fled?
4. How do you think you would feel if you suddenly had to leave your country, taking only the barest essentials? What would you take with you if you could only carry one backpack?

There are several sites that provide teachers with age-appropriate sites and lesson plans relating to refugees. Listed below are a few:

Schools Welcome Refugees

<https://schoolswelcomerefugees.ca/resources/>

The UN Refugee Agency

<https://www.unhcr.org/teaching-materials-ages-6-9.html> (Specifically for younger grades)

The UN Refugee Agency

<https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/education/teaching-about-refugees/teaching-materials-ages-15-18> (Specifically for high school students)

Pulitzer Centre

<https://pulitzercenter.org/builder/lesson/migration-and-refugees-lesson-plans-20360>

Teaching Tolerance

<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/exploring-young-immigrant-stories> (for younger grades)

Amnesty International

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/education/2015/10/8-educational-resources-to-better-understand-the-refugee-crisis/>

ADL

<https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/we-were-strangers-too-learning-about-refugees-through-art>

British Council

https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/living_together_-_refugee_education_pack3.pdf

Suggested Activity:

Ask students to pretend that a Syrian refugee has joined their class and pose the following questions:

1. How did the refugee end up in Canada?
2. What do you think the refugee would want to know about you?
3. Where would you take the refugee to introduce him/her to the city?
4. What does the refugee need to know about your school?
5. Do you think the refugee will encounter any prejudice in your school? Why/why not?
6. What would you do to help the refugee adapt to a Canadian school?

Theme: Heroism

The herculean effort Winton undertook to save so many children was only recognized in the 1980s when his story became the subject of an episode of the TV series *That's Life*. Winton did not see himself as a hero. As he says to Doreen, he sees himself as “an ordinary person” and his volunteer partners were “an army of the ordinary.” In fact, rather than congratulating himself for saving so many people, Winton spends far more time being haunted by those he could not save, especially those on the ninth train that departed on the day the war started.

By any measure, Winton was a hero not just for the work that he did personally, but also for recruiting others like his mother to his cause. What compels a person to take a personal risk to help others? Winton was by no means the only hero in this story. Doreen Warriner and Trevor Chadwick also went to great lengths to ensure the safe passage of the refugee children to England. The foster parents who agreed to take care of the children and offer a £50 fee for their eventual return can also be considered heroic. Some would argue that it was the parents of the children who displayed real heroism in going to great lengths to ensure their children's safety over their own. The concept of heroism is one that teachers could explore further after watching the film, using the lesson plan from the Holocaust Education Trust listed below:

<https://www.het.org.uk/primary/what-makes-a-hero>

Extension Questions

1. Why do you think Nicholas Winton felt the need to help the refugee children? Did he stand to gain anything from his altruism?
2. Who were the other people who helped him save the children?
3. Who were the people who stood in his way?
4. Do you think that other people have learned from Winton's example? What situations in the world today require the efforts of someone like Winton?
5. What are some of the ways that “ordinary people” can make a difference?
6. Why do you think that Winton gets more of the credit for saving children than Trevor or Doreen?

Extension Activity

There were other exceptional people like Winton who, at great risk to themselves, helped to save Jews during the War. Students could research some of these stories by going to <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html> and reading about their heroism. What motivated them to take the risks they did to save others?

Theme: Responsibility to Protect

“There is a difference between passive goodness and active goodness which is, in my opinion, the giving of one’s time and energy in the alleviation of pain and suffering. It entails going out, finding and helping those in suffering and danger and not merely leading an exemplary life, in the purely passive way of doing no wrong.” (Nicholas Winton from a 1939 letter. Source:

<https://www.endthekilling.ca/2012/08/03/nicholas-winton-rejecting-passive-goodness/>)

The Holocaust was by no means the end of genocide around the world. What has started to change is the way the world responds to crimes against humanity. When the world failed to intervene in the Rwanda genocide, the former Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, raised the question about when would it be appropriate for the international community to intervene for the sake of protecting populations. The result was a 2005 UN initiative called the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Under the umbrella term of Mass Atrocity Crimes, R2P focuses on preventing and halting four crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. The Responsibility to protect has three pillars:

Pillar One

Every state has the Responsibility to Protect its populations from four mass atrocity crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

Pillar Two

The wider international community has the responsibility to encourage and assist individual states in meeting that responsibility.

Pillar Three

If a state is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action, in a timely and decisive manner and in accordance with the UN Charter. (Source: <https://www.globalr2p.org/what-is-r2p/>)

Related Activity

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect outlines several countries where populations are experiencing or are at risk of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity or ethnic cleansing. For each one, they provide some background on the situation and suggestions to protect further crimes. Students should consult the page at <https://www.globalr2p.org/> and answer the following questions:

1. How many of these atrocities was I aware of before reading this? Why are some atrocities given more press coverage than others?
2. Who are the victims and perpetrators in these crimes?
3. What can be done to raise awareness about these atrocities?

Extension Activity

The Nicholas Winton website at <https://www.nicholaswinton.com/> lists two organisations, Safe Passage (<https://www.safepassage.org.uk/>) and the International Red Cross and the International Rescue Committee

([\) that provide ways that people can become actively involved in helping refugees and others suffering from climate or](https://www.rescue.org/?_gl=1*1hmhut0*_ga*NjY1NDc5NjE1LjE3MTM3MTUxMDA.*_ga_MCH4QLVDRD*MTcxMzcyMTM4Mi4yLjEuMTcxMzcyMTcyNy40NC4wLjA.*_ga_DDZCWB8N2Y*MTcxMzcyMTM4Mi4yLjEuMTcxMzcyMTcyNy40NC4wLjA.)

humanitarian crises. Students should divide into groups and pick one country listed as needing international protection or aid. Each group should:

- Identify the difficulties faced by the people in that country, providing specific facts and examples
- Ways that governments, NGOs and other organizations can help
- Choose a method as a group (apart from just donating money) to help the cause either by raising awareness or providing some practical initiative (e.g. letter writing to local politicians) to make a personal impact.

Film Structure

One Life is not the first film to be made about Nicholas Winton – there are two other documentary films about him. Rather than taking a straightforward chronological approach to how Winton rescued so many children during the War, the director of *One Life* begins Winton's story in 1987, when Winton's bravery is discovered serendipitously when he donates his scrapbook to Betty Maxwell, the wife of newspaper publisher Robert Maxwell. The focus thus shifts from Winton's heroism as it happened, to how it was almost lost to history. The scenes that take place during the War all happen as flashbacks; the main narrative thrust occurs in the 1980s when Winton is clearing out his office and is looking for a place to donate his briefcase that contains all the information about the children he saved. Unravelling the story in this way accomplishes several purposes. Firstly, it underscores Winton's humility, reminding the audience that Winton really did see himself as an "ordinary person" even though his actions were extraordinary. Secondly, the film takes place in the context of a refugee crisis in the UK in the 1980s. Background news reports and allusions to refugees flooding into England remind the audience that what happened during the 1930s was not an isolated incident that can be safely relegated to the past. Finally, by beginning the film towards the latter part of Winton's life, the director reinforces the way that his efforts to save so many children shaped Winton's future and preoccupied him long after the War was over.

Related Activity

The role of Winton is played by two actors – Anthony Hopkins plays the older Winton and Johnny Flynn plays him as a younger man. Students should write a character sketch of Winton at both phases of his life. How is the younger Winton different from the older Winton? How is he the same? Why do you think that the director decided to deliberately begin the film years after Winton rescued the children? How do the flashback scenes shape the way we see Winton as an older man? Do you think the film would have had more impact if it had been told chronologically without revealing the outcome of his efforts until the end or is it more emotionally powerful to structure it around the discovery of his heroism years later? Provide examples from the film to support your opinion.

One Life General Questions/Activities

1. What is Nicholas Winton doing at the start of the film? How does this establish his character from the beginning?
2. How was Winton's mother instrumental in helping him save the children? What was her personal background and how might that have shaped her determination to help the refugees?
3. What is Winton's reaction when he first visits the refugee camp? Why does Doreen initially discourage him from trying to save the children?
4. When Winton goes to the rabbi seeking a list of names of vulnerable children, the rabbi has two reservations about Winton's plan to resettle the kids in foster care in England. What were those reservations? How does Winton respond to those concerns?
5. What obstacles does the British Foreign Office put in place to limit the number of refugees eligible to come to England? How do Winton and his cohorts meet this challenge?

6. Why does the editor of the Maidenhead newspaper refuse to run a story about the refugees that Winton saved? Why do you think that the director included this incident in the film?
7. When Betty Maxwell remarks that the children on the final train that never made it probably all died in concentration camps, Winton responds that she may be right but he “needs to keep [his] imagination in check.” What does he mean by this?
8. Winton’s heroism was only discovered years later after his story appeared on a popular TV show. In what way does popular culture still influence the way we learn about history and world events? Provide specific examples.
9. Divide students into groups to research Doreen Warriner and Trevor Chadwick. What role did each of them have in the Kindertransport? Why do you think Nicholas Winton ended up getting all the credit?
10. Divide students into groups and have each one research one of the children that Winton saved. Where were they placed? What was their experience like as a child refugee taken from their parents? How were they treated by their foster family? Where are they today?

References (All websites cited are from May, 2024)

Sir Nicholas Winton

<https://www.nicholaswinton.com/exhibition>

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

<https://www.hmd.org.uk/learn-about-the-holocaust-and-genocides/the-holocaust/kindertransport-refugees/>

The History of Parliament

<https://thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/2018/11/21/revisiting-the-origins-of-the-kindertransport-on-its-80th-anniversary/>

BBC

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-68070539> (profiles of some Kindertransport children who still live in the U.K.)

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Yad Vashem

<https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html>

Holocaust Education Trust

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Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform

<https://www.endthekilling.ca/2012/08/03/nicholas-winton-rejecting-passive-goodness/>

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

<https://www.globalr2p.org/>

Safe Passage

<https://www.safepassage.org.uk/>

International Rescue Committee

https://www.rescue.org/?_gl=1*_1*hmhut0*_ga*NjY1NDc5NjE1LjE3MTM3MTUxMDA.*_ga_MCH4QLVDRD*MTcxMzcyMTM4Mi4yLjEuMTcxMzcyMTcyNy40NC4wLjA.*_ga_DDZCWB8N2Y*MTcxMzcyMTM4Mi4yLjEuMTcxMzcyMTcyNy40NC4wLjA