

## A Historical Enquiry for History Students (Secondary)

### The fate of the St Louis passengers

Notes for Teachers: This enquiry is based on the St Louis case study.

<http://education.hmd.org.uk/case-studies/the-ss-st-louis/read> You will find additional ways to explore and unpack the narrative in other lesson plans

<http://education.hmd.org.uk/case-studies/the-ss-st-louis> in a presentation

<http://education.hmd.org.uk/resources/hmd-2011-primary-assembly-presentation> and in an assembly. <http://education.hmd.org.uk/resources/an-assembly-of-untold-stories> You will need at least one double period to work through the activities but older, more experienced students may benefit from a longer period to conduct a more detailed enquiry.

**Share** the **Untold Stories** from the St Louis case study with the students. **Tell** everyone you are going to show them some photographs taken on the ship and that as they look at the photographs they should make observations about two or three of the passengers eg how old they are, how they might be related to other people in the picture, or if their clothes tell us anything about their background/their social standing?

**Show** the presentation of passenger photographs.

<http://education.hmd.org.uk/resources/hmd-2011-primary-assembly-presentation> You could play the song *Somewhere (there's a place for us)* in the background. There are many recordings of this song but Hayley Westenra's version works well with this presentation.

After the presentation, **encourage** several students to describe the passengers on whom they focused. You should aim to **highlight** descriptions of at least six different people. **Ask** students to think about the case study and suggest what these individuals had in common with each other? Answers might include they were all Jewish; they were all escaping from Germany; they all wanted to build a new life and they had all been victims of discrimination but students may observe other connections.

**Direct** students to work in small groups. **Give** each group two question cards from the set found at the end of this lesson plan. **Allow** at least ten minutes for the groups to suggest answers to their questions and then **ask** them to feedback to the rest of the class, giving reasons and providing evidence for their answers.

When everyone has made their suggestions **explain** that some of the answers might help them with the next task. **Challenge** the students to work through this enquiry in their groups.

**Four countries offered asylum to the St Louis refugees. Which country offered refugees the greatest chance of survival?**

**Suggest** that groups consider the following questions in relation to each of the four countries to assist them in their enquiry. Where possible **allow** access to class reference books or the school library or the internet.

- were any of the countries occupied by the Nazis between 1939 and 1945? If so when and for how long?
- were Jewish people arrested or ordered to report to officials in this country at any time between 1939 and 1945? If so when and why?
- if yes, who sought them out, the Nazis or Officials from the country?
- did this country have camps where Jewish people were detained?
- if yes, where were the camps and who was in charge of them?
- what happened to the people detained in the camps – were they eventually released or were they sent somewhere else?

Once the students have started their research task you may further **assist** them by giving them access to the ship's passenger lists. You will find these lists on the links below. You may either print them or **instruct** students to find them on the internet. The lists show whether a passenger was offered asylum in

England: <http://bit.ly/by6dv2>

France: <http://bit.ly/bWHI1V>

The Netherlands: <http://bit.ly/ajkAX8>

Belgium <http://bit.ly/9yodgH>

The lists also provide extra information about individual passengers and in most cases offer evidence about their eventual fate. **Encourage** students to link the evidence from the lists with the evidence they have discovered in their research. This should help them reach a conclusion on which country provided the safest haven for the refugee passengers.

At the end of the research task **bring** the whole class together and **discuss** the conclusions. **Ask** the researchers to give reasons for their answers and provide some evidence for their suggestions. Does everyone agree? How has studying this **Untold Story** and considering the various responses and actions of different countries enhanced our understanding of the effects of Nazis policies in Europe? On Holocaust Memorial Day how can we use our skills as historians to make people more aware of the **Untold Stories** from the SS St Louis? Why is it important to remember the fate of individual people as well as major historical events when we study the history of Nazi Germany?

## Question Cards

What are the key decisions made in this story and who makes them?	How did Captain Schroeder defy the Nazis?	How did the Ministry of Propaganda make use of the voyage?	What role did the media play in the fate of the passengers?	Why did the Nazis arrange for some of their members to be employed as ship's staff?	What evidence is there in the case study to show that it was vital for the passengers to avoid returning to Germany?
How does each decision affect a) the refugees b) the Captain?	Why did the shipping company want the St Louis to return to Germany?	What evidence is there that decision makers in each of the ports of call were affected by their perception of public opinion?	How can the testimony of surviving passengers assist historians to understand why the passengers could not return to Germany?	What do you think persuaded France, the UK, The Netherlands and Belgium to offer asylum to the refugees?	What made the Captain plan to set fire to the ship and why did he select UK waters as the setting for this action?