

The Exhibition Builder: An outline for teachers

The Exhibition Builder allows pupils to be the historian / curator by searching through and interrogating an online archive of source material.

Having become acquainted with both an outline of the events of the Holocaust and the Blechner story, pupils might wish to formulate questions that their research in the archive will answer. Once this is established they are free to search through the sources, using the search engine to find relevant documents. Once these are located pupils can read documents, look at photos etc and decide whether they are appropriate for their exhibition. Pupils are able to comment on the sources that they choose; place them in the order that they want them to appear in and, finally, 'publish' their exhibition.

Step By Step Instructions

- Go to <http://www.exhibition-builder.com/>
- Select 'Students'
- Log in using personal log-in that has been provided by the teacher
- Under 'actions' 'select sources'
- Either manually search through sources or enter simple search terms (e.g. 'Mina', 'camp', '1939') to find sources
- To view a source double click on it
- To return to sources click on 'Back to Sources'
- To select source to go into exhibition click on 'Add to my Exhibition'
- If 'Add to my Exhibition' is selected then the pupil will automatically go to the 'Build Your Exhibition' page
- Here, by pressing the 'Add' button, pupils can add a suitable title and commentary to the source.
- A numbered position can also be added to select the place that that source will occupy in the exhibition
- Once this is done 'Add to my Exhibition' will confirm the choice
- Pupils can then either 'Preview exhibition' or go back and 'Add another source'
- Once the exhibition is completed pupils can create an overall title for their exhibition and press 'Submit my exhibition'. **Once submitted you will not be able to make any changes to your exhibition.**

Differentiation

Higher ability pupils: Once pupils of a higher ability have an idea of the Blechner story and how the process of building an exhibition works they should be able to work independently in formulating a question that they would like to answer, searching through the archive and so on.

Lower ability pupils: It is suggested that lower ability pupils focus on telling the story of one member of the Blechner family. They can find all the relevant sources by simply searching on the first name of the appropriate family member. Pupils may wish to analyse the less textually demanding sources and focus on photographic / documentary evidence.

Any questions / comments? Please get in touch via email: a.lawrence@hamptonschool.org.uk



The Blechner Exhibition:

The Story of a Jewish family in Munich

(background information taken from www.blechner.com/)

Jewish life in Munich between the World Wars

Mordechai/Markus Blechner comes to Munich in 1910. His wife, Mina follows him in 1914 with their sons Jakob and Oskar, who were born in Galicia. Salo and Leon are born in Munich. The family live in the Isarvorstadt district of Munich, a popular quarter for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Despite increased immigration since the end of the 19th century, by 1910 Jews represent just 1.9% of Munich's population. Of these 11,083 people approximately 20% originated from Eastern Europe. Within the Munich Jewish community, they represent an independent and long disadvantaged group. After the First World War and as a result of the substantial increase in anti-Semitism the gulf is slowly narrowed between the assimilated liberal majority of the community and the immigrant orthodox minority. The Eastern European Jews open their own synagogue in Reichenbachstraße in 1931, which the Blechners join.

Like many Jews in the Isarvorstadt, Mordechai earns his living as a businessman. He builds up a successful trade in shoe accessories. His two sons, Jakob and Oskar work with him in the business. Jakob is a sales agent for his father and drives to the Traunstein area and as far as Neuötting in Upper Bavaria.

Immigrants? Foreigners? Munich citizens?

Like the majority of the Eastern European Jews, the Blechners are no different from the other residents of Isarvorstadt. Mordechai and Mina speak not only German, but also Yiddish and understand Polish. German is the mother tongue for their sons. All the family hold Polish citizenship after the founding of the Polish state in 1918.

With the rise of anti-Semitism and xenophobia in the years prior to 1933 in Germany, all Jews in Munich and especially those who are not German are increasingly discriminated against and marginalised. The persecution reaches a new provisional climax at the end of October 1938 with the deportation of Polish Jews, including the Blechners to the German-Polish border. Jakob, Frieda and the parents are able to return to Munich at the beginning of November. However Salo is interned in no-man's land between Germany and Poland.

Mina, Markus and Salo Blechner try to leave via Switzerland. On the 27th August 1939 they arrive at the Swiss border town, St. Margarethen. The Swiss border guards take away their passports telling them to wait until the following day. Despite valid travel documents they are denied entry and forced to go back to Munich.

Only a few days after their return to their empty apartment in Munich the arrest of Polish Jews for their "own protection" is decreed. The Gestapo detain Markus Blechner on the 9th September 1939 in Munich and take him later to Buchenwald. Salo Blechner is able to avoid arrest and flees a few days later to Berlin, where he is arrested shortly after arrival.

Emigration

Due to the life-threatening situation for Jews, the family decides to leave Germany. Leon, Jakob and Frieda and also Oskar emigrate.

Leon, the youngest brother escapes to the United States. Near to Boston he waits for his wife Gina. Her arrival is delayed. Heavily pregnant in autumn 1938, she is arrested and detained overnight at Stadelheim during the campaign against Polish Jews. Just a few days later their son Gerson/Jerry is born in Munich. Gina and Jerry reach New York a year later.

Jakob flees with his wife Frieda to Switzerland in August 1939. From there they intend to travel via France to Britain to Oskar and then long-term to go to the USA. The outbreak of war however prevents their plans from being realised.

Oskar, the second eldest of the four brothers, tries to emigrate to America on board the Hapag Lloyd liner St. Louis sailing to Cuba. The ship leaves Hamburg 13th May 1939. After an odyssey the ship has to return to Hamburg. Due to the untiring efforts of Jewish aid organisations and increasing public pressure Belgium, Holland, France and Great Britain decide to accept the threatened refugees. Oskar is fortunate to be granted entry to Britain.

Voyage of the SS St. Louis

Oskar Blechner, the second eldest of the four brothers tries to emigrate to the USA via Cuba on board the Hapag-Lloyd steamer St. Louis. The ship leaves Hamburg on 13th May 1939. The fate of the 937 almost entirely Jewish passengers is uncertain from the outset. The majority of passengers possess only tourist visas and no valid entry documents for Cuba. The visas were issued by the Immigration Director on his own initiative. The Cuban Government refuses to acknowledge them and declares them invalid.

The United States, the next nearest immigration destination, also refuses entry to the St. Louis passengers. The ship has to return to Hamburg. Thanks to the untiring efforts of the Jewish aid organisations and growing public pressure, Belgium, Holland, France and Great Britain decide to accept the threatened refugees. Oskar was lucky. He was allowed to come to England. Only few of the those who were taken in by the other countries would survive their later occupation by the Nazis.

Camp Odyssey

Salo, the second youngest son of the family flees to Berlin after the arrest of his father in September 1939. But the arrest of Polish citizens is taking place throughout the Reich. On the 13th September, shortly after his arrival in Berlin, Salo is arrested and taken to Sachsenhausen and not long after to Neuengamme. He has to help build the camp.

On the 23rd October 1942 he is transferred to Auschwitz-Monowitz. In January 1945, as the Soviet army advances, Auschwitz is evacuated and the prisoners are taken on a "death march" to other camps. Salo survives and arrives at Dora-Mittelbau on 4th February 1945, where he works underground in the tunnels as a slave-labourer. Once again, Salo is moved in March/April 1945 to Belsen. British soldiers liberate the camp on the 15th April 1945.

After six years in concentration camp and forced labour Salo returns to Munich. He looks for his family and tries to emigrate to the USA.

Post War

"Even after all those years, I still cannot forget what happened to us in Munich and the fate of our extended family in the Holocaust " is how Alex Blumenberg commented about his relationship today towards Germany. Alex, a nephew of Markus Blechner, has only returned to Munich once since he fled Germany, when he came to visit the grave of his grandmother who died in 1942. Other members of the family describe their attitude towards Munich and Germany in similar vein. None of the family lives today in Munich or Germany. Germany is no longer their home but only the place from where the family came.

Many of the younger members of the family from the second and third generation have never been to Munich. However they do expect the city to take responsibility for its history, because it is only in this way that a repetition of the racism and violence, the terror and murder as in the Nazi period can be prevented.