

Lesson  
Duration:  
One 50-minute class period

## Read and Reflect: Escape in Peter Feigl's Diary

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### Learning Objectives

In this lesson, students will do a close reading of the diary entry documenting Peter's escape from France to Switzerland. Then they will compare it to the experiences of Klaus Langer who legally emigrated from Germany to Palestine. By examining their experiences side by side, students will gain a deeper understanding of refugee experiences, their various forms, and the risks inherent in each. Educators and students are encouraged to read the introduction to Peter Feigl's diary in *Salvaged Pages*, pages 63–68. It provides valuable information about the writer's life and historical context for a reading of the diary.

### Overview

This lesson was originally drafted by Holocaust educator, Colleen Tambuscio.

Core diary entries from *Salvaged Pages* used in this lesson: [Peter Feigl, Monday, May 22, 1944 from Geneva](#)

As the German occupation spread across Europe and the so-called Final Solution became official Nazi policy, some Jews found that their only hope for survival was to escape. This course of action was never simple, always dangerous, usually expensive, and almost always dependent upon luck and circumstances.

Peter Feigl crossed from France into neutral Switzerland in May 1944 by running across the border with a group of children trying to escape the Nazis. In his diary entry recounting that event, Peter describes the chaotic and confused journey and what they experienced at this critical juncture.

### Focus Questions:

Undocumented emigration and escape are often a decision of last resort for individuals and families seeking safe refuge from oppression and war.

- How does migration with legal documentation differ from fleeing or escaping from your home as a refugee without legal documentation?
- What are the different considerations for people choosing to escape violence rather than seeking better opportunities?
- What are stakes for individuals and families who are migrating? Are they different for refugees as compared to those seeking better opportunities with legal documentation?

## Activities

### Opener: Read a Diary Entry from Peter Feigl

Begin by having students read the following excerpts leading up to Peter's escape.

Thursday, May 11, 1944

*This morning the Germans came through riding on tanks et cetera . . . .An inspector was here. . . .In town and in the surrounding area things are hopping and are really getting hot. Rumors are running wild. [. . .] I hope I will be able to leave soon because I have had it. We heard machine-gun fire this evening in study hall.*

Friday, May 12, 1944

*The town is flooded with Krauts. The Maquis is fighting.<sup>1</sup> There are Krauts and armored vehicles everywhere. All the males between the age of sixteen and fifty-four must report to the gendarmerie....The Germans came searching, et cetera. We played [Peter's code word for hiding].*

Sunday, May 14, 1944

*Mass. It was learned they [Germans] are in Montauban. I was able to go out. The [drawing of a swastika in the original, meaning Germans] finally left. Denise [a rescue worker] did not come.*

Tuesday, May 16, 1944

*Denise finally came yesterday evening. She tells me that I leave tomorrow morning at eight. I had my baggage checked in.*

Wednesday, May 17, 1944

*At eight o'clock, at the very moment I was to leave, Wham! I won't leave until tomorrow. There is no train. [. . .]*

### Main Activity: Close Reading—Comparing Escape to Emigration

Doing a close reading is one way to help students of all abilities engage with diary entries. This helps students understand the complexity of the content and its emotional weight. As the term is used in many state standards, close reading allows students to purposefully and slowly reread text to deepen their comprehension. They can focus their attention on the meaning of individual words and sentences. They also can pay attention to the overall development of events and ideas.

Close reading usually includes text-dependent questions that call on students to analyze the text to draw meaningful inferences and find real evidence for their conclusions. This sort of careful attention to the text allows students to synthesize their learning. They also gain important content knowledge. Then they can communicate their understanding to their peers or an outside audience.

The [Close Reading Protocol](#) teaching strategy can be used and adapted to facilitate a close reading:

*Read Peter Feigl:* Begin with a **first read** of [Peter Feigl's diary entry on his escape to Switzerland, Monday, May 22, 1944 \[Geneva\]](#). At the time of his escape, Peter also created a rough sketch of his border crossing. View this sketch alongside the entry and ask the students if the sketch adds anything new to their understanding of his escape.

To gain a sense of the contemporary geography of Peter's escape, show a map of the route of Peter's escape ([we've made a Google map for you here](#)) noting his passage by train in France from Figeac to Clermont-Ferrand to Lyons to Viry, then on foot from Viry to Geneva, Switzerland.

Have students complete their **individual read** of the May 22 entry, underlining important words or phrases. Have them find selections that are confusing or which elicit questions. Discuss these with the class.

Read Klaus Langer: Turn to the entry dated September 8, 1939, from Klaus Langer (Salvaged Pages, page 33). Complete a **first read** of Klaus Langer with the class. Then have students do their **individual read**.

#### Discuss Text-Dependent Questions:

- How is Peter Feigl's experience of escape different than Klaus Langer's experience of emigration? What evidence from the text supports your claim?
- Are there any noticeable similarities between these two boys' experiences from their diary entries? What evidence in the diary entries illustrates these similarities?
- What considerations do you know, or which can you infer from the text, were part of each individual boy's choices?

#### Citations

1 The Maquis were the French Resistance during the German occupation.

#### Assessment

##### Across-Diary Comparison—Emigration, Escape, and the Refugee Experience

Other diarists, such as Klaus Langer, Elisabeth Kaufmann, and Moshe Flinker, left their homes as the German occupation spread and the persecution of Jews continued. Ask students to compare and contrast in a short essay the experiences of Peter Feigl with at least one other diarist. What was similar? What was different? Did these details affect their life during the Holocaust? How?