

## Learn the History: Rescue in Peter Feigl's Diary

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### Learning Objectives

In this lesson students will consider the great personal risks that people faced in choosing to rescue Jews. By exploring supplemental materials and reading excerpts from Peter's diary during his time in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, students will increase their knowledge of rescue operations and the complex networks that cooperated to save Jewish children's lives during the Holocaust.

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, January 5, 1943, January 15–31, 1943, February 1, 1943**

German occupation and Nazi policy forced Jews, particularly those with families, to go to great lengths to protect themselves and their children. Many tried to legally emigrate but they faced harsh restrictions and huge expenses that often made this option impossible. As Nazi persecution escalated, parents sought any opportunity to save their children's lives, including attempts to conceal their Jewish ancestry through religious conversion, placing them in hiding, or sending them off as refugees to unoccupied countries. In some cases, this meant entrusting complete strangers with the lives of their children.

Peter Feigl recorded in his diary the efforts of a great many people to shelter him and help him survive in occupied France including Daniel Trocmé, the principal of a boarding school Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. This part of his journey began in 1942, as the Germans began carrying out deportations of foreign-born Jews in France. For the next two years, he would survive thanks to the efforts of complete strangers who risked their lives to ensure his safety including Pastor André and Magda Trocmé from the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in Southern France.

### Focus Questions

Rescuing Jews during the Holocaust was a life-and-death decision both for those persecuted and for those attempting to save lives.

- Consider the risks involved in rescuing people who are in danger. If the decision to help compromises your safety or the safety of those you love, what would make you choose one course of action or the other?
- What factors play a role in an individual's decision to rescue? Consider wealth, faith, personal relationships, moral values, and other variables.
- Is there a moral absolute in such circumstances? If you believe we should always help in such situations, how do you justify potentially harming yourself or those you love? If you believe we should not have to act, how do you justify turning away from those in need?

## Activities

### Opener: Peter Feigl's Rescue Experience

Begin by having students discuss the risks and factors involved in rescuing people who are in danger. From what they already know about the Holocaust, was rescue during the Holocaust different?

Have students read the following entries from early January, 1943.

Tuesday, January 5, 1943 [Les Caillols]

Mrs. B [Brémond] (they got married) wrote a letter to Mr. Trocmé in which she asked him if he did not have an opening for me at his place.<sup>1</sup> I had asked her to allow me to go to school. She gave this letter to a young girl, Simone Fullenbaum, who lived previously in Les Caillols and now lives at Les Grillons with Mr Trocmé. I hope that I'll be able to get there. The food there is fit for kings (butter, potatoes, et cetera). Whatever is happening to you? . . . Your son is thinking of you.<sup>2</sup>

Friday, January 15, 1943

We were told that we'll have to get out in two or three days. When I returned from Marseilles at noon, Mrs. B. told me that she received a telegram from Mr Trocmé. He has a vacancy and expects me as soon as possible. Once again I am in luck. I quickly packed my suitcases so as to be able to leave early Saturday at 7:20 A.M. . .<sup>3</sup>

Ask students to reflect on these two entries. What do they reveal about the circumstances of Peter's life as a fourteen-year-old boy living on his own? What do we learn about rescue efforts during the Holocaust from his entries? What questions still remain?

If rescue during the Holocaust is a new topic, it may be helpful to provide the following [overview on rescue](#) from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

### Main Activity: Understanding Rescue in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon

Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, the place where Peter was hidden from January 1943 through December 1943, has become one of the most highly regarded rescue operations in the history of the Holocaust. Mr. Trocmé, as Peter refers to him in his diary, was Daniel Trocmé, the

cousin of Pastor Andre Trocmé, a Protestant pastor in the village of Haute-Loire, who along with his wife Magda, hid thousands of Jewish refugees, especially children.

Such courageous efforts to save lives at the risk of your own, were not commonplace. They required individuals and communities to take tremendous personal risks.

1. Begin by discussing their general understanding of rescue during the Holocaust. One helpful tool could be to create a [K/W/L teaching strategy](#) on rescue and complete the first two columns “What do you know about rescue during the Holocaust?” “What do you wonder about rescue during the Holocaust?”
2. Ask students to read [Peter Feigl’s diary entries from his time in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon](#). Have students add new information to the third column of their K/W/L, “What did you learn about rescue?” from these entries.
3. View the photograph below of Peter while living in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and watch Peter Feigl’s video testimony from Yad Vashem about the ten months he lived in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. What new information do you gain about Peter’s daily life in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon from these supplemental materials? What can you add to your chart?
4. Read the following summary from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on the [village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon](#) and their rescue efforts. For more insight into the actions taken by the residents of Le Chambon, read the following excerpt from an interview with Magda Trocmé, the wife of Andre Trocmé, the anti-Nazi pastor in Le Chambon.
5. Have students continue to add information to their K/W/L charts.

## Citations

<sup>1</sup> This is a reference to Daniel Trocmé, director of the children’s home Les Grillons [The Crickets] at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, Haute-Loire, where Peter was sent later, on January 16, 1943. Daniel Trocmé was the cousin of Pastor André Trocmé, the spiritual leader of the Protestant community of Le Chambon sur Lignon.

<sup>2</sup> Alexandra Zapruder, ed., *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers’ Diaries of the Holocaust*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015 ) 77.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Assessment

### Assessment: Writing Prompt

Choose one of the Focus Questions from this lesson to answer in an essay form. Your essay must incorporate at least one diary entry from Peter Feigl as a point of reference for your response. It can include any of the supplemental materials included in the lesson.

- Consider the risks involved in rescuing people who are in danger. If the decision to help compromises your safety or the safety of those you love, what would make you choose one course of action or the other?

- What factors play a role? Consider wealth, faith, personal relationships, moral values, and other variables.
- Is there a moral absolute in such circumstances? If you believe we should always help in such situations, how do you justify potentially harming yourself or those you love? If you believe we should not have to act, how do you justify turning away from those in need?

## **Extensions**

### **Deeper Exploration: Righteous Among the Nations**

Yad Vashem, a world center for Holocaust research, recognized Pastor Andre and Magda Trocmé as Righteous Among the Nations, which is a highly noble honor awarded to rescuers. Students can learn about this honor from Yad Vashem's summary page. Have students research the guidelines for certification of rescuers by Yad Vashem and discuss the following:

- What are the guidelines for certification of rescuers by Yad Vashem?
- Examine the chart of the names and numbers of Righteous Among the Nations.; What do you notice about this information? What inferences can you make from these statistics and rescues?
- Finally, watch the [animated map](#) on rescue efforts during the Holocaust. What further information can you add to your K/W/L chart?

### **Historical Topics Across Diaries: Rescue**

Other diarists wrote about aspects of rescue on behalf of Jews in their diaries. To investigate this topic further see the diary of Otto Wolf and of Alice Ehrmann.