

Lesson  
Duration:  
Two 50-minute class periods

## Read and Reflect: Emigration in Klaus Langer's Diary

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### Learning Objectives

In this lesson students will explore the external and internal obstacles to emigration that German Jews faced in the 1930s. By engaging in close reading of diary selections from Klaus Langer, students will learn how individuals and families attempted to legally emigrate to save their lives.

We encourage educators and students to read the introduction to Klaus Langer's diary, *Salvaged Pages*, pages 13–17, before beginning the lesson. It provides valuable information about the writer's life and historical context for a reading of the diary.

### Overview

This lesson was initially drafted by Holocaust educator Bonnie Sussman.

Students studying the persecution of Jews in Germany during the Nazi rise to power frequently ask, "Why didn't they just leave?" This question implies that there was a simple solution to the problems Jews in Germany faced. In reality, German Jewish families had to navigate many shifting elements at the same time, including German emigration policies, the different immigration policies of nations and how these impacted European Jews, and their own financial, legal, logistical, and emotional circumstances. Perhaps most of all, German Jews had been integral, legitimate members of German society since the mid-nineteenth century. In a short span of time, they had to understand their loss of citizenship, status, and basic rights and grasp the necessity of leaving in order to survive.

In his diary, Klaus Langer traces his own family's efforts to emigrate and the logistical, emotional, and psychological obstacles they faced. His diary reveals the complexity of the process on every level and suggests a more nuanced, complex answer to the question of why Jews didn't "just" leave Germany.

### Focus Questions

- What motivates people to legally emigrate to another country? What challenges do they face? What might cause a person to choose to stay even if life is hard?
- How does a person's sense of self (social standing, history of residence, cultural or national identity) affect the decision and the experience of leaving?
- What are the challenges that faced emigrants who have a long history of being treated like outsiders as compared to those with a long history of being an integral part of society?

## Activities

### Opener: Read Klaus Langer's Diary

Begin by having students read Klaus Langer's diary entry from December 19, 1938, in which he reports of the many obstacles facing his family as they attempt to emigrate.

Regarding the emigration of my parents I have the following to report. First came two refusals from Argentina for lack of letters of credit. The rich uncle in America is unable to assume such a financial responsibility. We don't have an affidavit for the U.S. India requires firm employment there, or a contract. Father is now trying to make connections in India to obtain a contract. He also wrote to Peru and he was told to go to the Uruguayan consulate. Allegedly the Dominican Republic would take ten thousand Jews and provide them with visas. However, nothing further is known about that. It probably makes no sense to turn to them. However, with a Dominican Republic visa it is possible to get a half-year visa for Palestine. Shanghai also accepts Jews, even without a visa, but it is questionable how one can live there. The mail also brought no news from Palestine. We had submitted a request for a "commercial certification."<sup>1</sup>

Ask students to take a moment and reflect on what Klaus is describing. What words or phrases grab their attention? What questions do they have about emigration from this entry? What opportunities or obstacles does Klaus discuss? What does the range of places suggest about the options for the Langer family?

Additional historical background can be found in articles on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website on [German Jewish emigration before the Holocaust](#) and the [range of obstacles to immigration](#) that existed.

### Main Activity: Understanding German Jewish Emigration

One key historical thinking concept is contextualization, or the process of understanding events in the place, environment, and time in which they occurred. In this instance, the context includes both external, (domestic and international policies, regulations, where to go, restrictions, opportunities abroad) and internal (whether to leave, the emotional impact of leaving home and community, doubts if leaving is the right decision, uncertainty about the future). In the case of Klaus Langer, it is critical for students to understand the climate of Germany in late 1938 in order to contextualize his diary entries concerning emigration and understand the choices and dilemmas the family faced.

1. As a class, or independently, have students read two other entries from *Salvaged Pages* in which Klaus writes about his family's emigration options.
  - November 28, 1938 (pages 22-23)
  - January 12, 1939 (pages 26)

2. Create and complete a chart listing each location and the obstacles and concerns the family faced. Refer to a map after students read the entry in order for them to be familiar with the range of locations the Langer family was considering. For example:

Country / Location	Requirements for Emigration or Obstacles / Concerns of Family
United States	Must have financial support affidavit from US citizen Rich uncle unable to provide
Palestine (British mandate)	Can family live on income? Will Mr. Langer's pension be sent by Germany? Need a business license
Dominican Republic	Will accept 10,000 Jews and provide visas
Shanghai, China	Accepts Jews without visas How can family live there?

### Deeper Exploration: Obstacles of German Jewish Emigration

Kristallnacht was a catalyst for German Jewish emigration particularly for the Langer family. As violence and persecution against Jews continued to escalate, the options and opportunities to emigrate continued to diminish. In order to further contextualize Klaus's diary entries, you may choose to integrate the following supplemental materials that are either highly relevant or directly mentioned in the December 19, 1938, entry.

#### Evian Conference

Following the annexation of Austria in March 1938, Jews living under Nazi occupation were increasingly desperate to leave, but could not settle in another country without having the sponsoring or host country's permission. In response to the growing number of Jews wanting to emigrate, US president Franklin Roosevelt convened delegates from 38 countries in Evian, France, from July 6–15, 1938, to discuss the growing refugee situation of German and Austrian Jews. As an outgrowth to Evian, the participants created an Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees (IGCR).

1. [A summary of the Evian Conference](#) can be found on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website.
2. Have students read [Statements from Representatives at the Evian Conference, July 1938](#). Discuss their general reactions to the comments as well as the rationale given by the representatives?
3. Direct students to [Nazi Summary of the Evian Conference](#) and read aloud. Discuss the German response to the Evian Conference. Have students choose one line in the SD report that summarizes the German understanding of the conference.
4. After discussing the Evian Conference, show students [Evian Conference cartoon, 1938](#), an editorial cartoon printed on July 3, 1938, in the New York Times. Have students analyze the image and discuss any connections that surface. Discuss how this cartoon connects to Klaus's diary entries.

### **German Visa Requirement**

1. Have students review [Requirements for German Jews Applying for US Visas, 1930–1940](#).
2. Ask students to discuss the [Identity Card Issued to a German Jew](#). What do they observe? How does this ID card illustrate obstacles for German Jews?
3. As a class, discuss how Klaus Langer describes these particular obstacles in his entries of December 19, 1938.

### **The Dominican Republic as Haven for Jewish Refugees**

Klaus Langer refers to his family going to the Dominican Republic as one option. At the Evian Conference it was proposed that the Dominican Republic would admit 100,000 Jewish refugees. At the first Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR) meeting, Generalissimo Trujillo offered to admit up to 100,000 refugees from Europe. In October 1939, Generalissimo Trujillo announced that 500 refugee families would be admitted immediately under the auspices of the IGCR in the wake of discussions conducted with the President's Advisory Committee and the Joint Distribution Committee. After this initial settlement, the original aim of 100,000 refugees fell short with only 645 being admitted between 1938–1945.<sup>2</sup>

If students are unfamiliar with emigration policy to Latin America, it may be helpful to read this reference from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum "[Refuge in Latin America](#)." Alternatively, read this [article on the Dominican Republic as a haven for Jewish refugees](#).

1. Have students review the cablegram sent to the Dominican Republic on January 18, 1940, regarding the proposal to admit 100,000 European refugees into the country.

Despite the importance to the Dominican people of the question of admitting 100,000 refugees to their country, and despite the considerable publicity this question had had in the world press since the Evian Conference of July 6-15, 1938, where it was first proposed, the Dominican people have not even been informed of, much less consulted on, the project, and the question has not been discussed in the Dominican Press or Congress.

This is not a political question. It does not concern one man or group of men in the Dominican Republic. It vitally affects the destiny of the Dominican people. In a sense it is also of world interest to the people of the Western Hemisphere. If the contract legalizing the proposed project is signed without the Dominican people's understanding and consent, obtained in a direct and unmistakable manner, serious trouble lies ahead in the Dominican Republic. As a Dominican I deem it my imperative duty to inform and to warn the world before the contract is signed. Our country has been since February 23, 1930 under a dictatorial regime. This the whole world knows. It is the most dictatorial regime in all history. Is it not be expected that when this regime is ended whatever it has done without both the knowledge and the consent of the people, will be undone?

If this statement is not right, let the Dominican Government refute it through the Dominican and American Press.

Persio C. Franco  
Former Charge d'Affairs of the Dominican Republic in Washington  
Washington, D.C.,  
January 18, 1940<sup>3</sup>

2. Compare Klaus's optimism with the assessment of the situation described by the Chargé d'affaires of refugees coming to the Dominican Republic. What contributing factors does he outline that directly connect to Klaus's writings?

## **Shanghai**

Klaus Langer also mentions Shanghai as a possibility but states "it is questionable how one can live there." Immigration to China for German and Austrian Jewish refugees was a viable option as visas to the city were not required up until August 1939.<sup>4</sup> A small population fled in the early 1930s. This increased considerably following Kristallnacht. Between 1933–1941 an estimated 20,000–25,000 Jewish refugees were living in the city.

Have students read the article about [German and Austrian Jewish refugees in Shanghai](#) to build background knowledge. Students may also want to view the [photo gallery of Jewish refugees living in Shanghai](#) from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. After reading and viewing, discuss why Shanghai would have been "questionable" for the Langer family.

## **The Voyage of the *St. Louis***

The voyage of the *St. Louis* to Cuba and then toward the United States is often cited as an example of the overwhelming barriers and deep antisemitism that existed at the time. While Klaus Langer does not specifically write of the *St. Louis*, his diary does document the many obstacles his family confronted.

1. Have students read an [article from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum about the voyage of the St. Louis to learn more.](#)
2. Ask students to choose one of the three entries studied in this activity (November 28 and December 19, 1938, January 12, 1939) and cite how Klaus's record deepens their understanding of the barriers people faced in trying to emigrate.
3. After 70 years, the voyage of the *St. Louis* still evokes a cause for reflection. Recently artist Art Spiegelman commemorated the *St. Louis* with a cartoon published in The Washington Post. Have students view the cartoon, below, and reflect on how the voyage still resonates today.

## Citations

- 1 : Alexandra Zapruder, ed., *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 24.
- 2 : Summary of what occurred annotated from the archives of the American Joint Distribution Committee, "Records of the Dominican Republic Settlement Association (DORSA), 1939-1977," Accessed July 26, 2015.
- 3 : "History in a Whole New Light," Cengage Learning website, accessed on April 29, 2015.
- 4 : To understand how the history of the city is directly relevant to their immigration policy at the time, see "Shanghai: a Haven for Holocaust Victims"

## Assessment

After incorporating the information learned through the activities in this lesson, students should write an essay responding to the following question, "Why didn't the Jews of Europe *just* leave?"

## Extensions

### Across Diary Comparison: Emigration, Escape, and the Refugee experience

Other diarists wrote about being forced to leave their homes as the German occupation spread and the persecution of Jews through anti-Jewish measures continued. To explore this topic from a range of experiences and perspectives see the diaries and lessons for Elisabeth Kaufmann, Peter Feigl, and Moshe Flinker.