

*Students act as curators for the 1938Projekt by selecting artifacts from the project website to illustrate how events in 1938 impacted Jewish citizens in Germany and Austria.*



### QUESTION EXAMINED

**HOW DO OBJECTS LEFT BEHIND BY GERMAN AND AUSTRIAN JEWS TELL US THE STORY OF WHO THEY WERE AND WHAT HAPPENED DURING THEIR LIFETIMES?**

Subject  
**ELA and Social Studies**

Grades  
**6–12**

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**THEMES** Belonging, Persecution, Community, Terror, Uncertainty, Displacement, Resilience

## RESOURCES INCLUDED

### FOR TEACHERS

- Context for this Lesson
- Tips for Using this Lesson
- Key Terms and Vocabulary
- Focus Questions
- Big Understandings
- Teaching Points
- Objectives
- Materials
- Procedure
- “Belonging” panel to project for mini-lesson

### FOR STUDENTS

- 1938Projekt Curator Exhibition Themes
- 1938Projekt Curator Artifact List
- 1938Projekt Curator Artifact Record Sheet

*Cover Image:  
Otto Anker's German  
ID card, 12/06/1938,  
marked with the letter  
J; Anker Family  
Collection, AR 5424;  
Archives of the  
Leo Back Institute  
New York.*

**EXTERNAL  LINKS**

[About the Leo Baeck Institute & the 1938 Projekt](#)

[Key Dates: Jews Under the Nazi Regime 1933-1939](#)

**CONTEXT FOR THIS LESSON****Why an exhibition to tell the story of the past?**

Curating an exhibition from artifacts on the 1938Projekt timeline creates an opportunity for students to examine the impact historical events had on real people from the past. Objects communicate information about the people who created and used them. By reading these objects closely people who lived in the past come to feel more immediate and real, and history becomes more relevant to our lives now. By selecting several artifacts to include in an exhibition about 1938, students come to understand how the many subjective accounts of individual lives we study form a larger, objective truth about a time and place.

By witnessing an individual life, we can better contemplate our own place in history and our ability to impact the world around us. Developing empathy for others is what prevents us from repeating the atrocities documented in these artifacts. **The events we explore here are disturbing.** By framing an emotional check-in for students learning about these disturbing historical events as an exercise in concern for the well-being of future exhibit visitors, we can provide a safe channel for communicating the sadness, fear and other negative emotions students might be feeling themselves.

## CONTEXT FOR THIS LESSON, cont.

### **Background information from the Leo Baeck Institute exhibition *1938Projekt: Posts from the Past*, curated by Magdalena M. Wrobel, Ph.D**

The Leo Baeck Institute was founded in 1955 by leading German-Jewish émigré intellectuals who were determined to preserve the vibrant cultural heritage of German-speaking Jewry that was nearly destroyed in the Holocaust. They named the Institute for Rabbi Leo Baeck, the last leader of Germany's Jewish Community under the Nazi regime.

Today, the Leo Baeck Institute — New York | Berlin (LBI) is devoted to preserving and promoting the history and culture of German-speaking Jewry. Its archival, art, and library collections tell the story of Jews in German and world history. As Jews enjoyed growing social and political empowerment in the 19th century, they played a significant role in shaping art, science, business, and political developments in the modern era with leading figures including Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, and Franz Kafka.

In the 20th century, German and Austrian Jews fought in the First World War to demonstrate their patriotism and further their quest for social equality. Following the war, the Weimar Republic provided more opportunities for advancement. After the Nazis rose to power in January 1933, Jews were persecuted, and by 1938 it was clear that Jewish life in Germany, as they knew it, was no longer possible.

Today, as right-wing populism gains new followers around the world, the personal narratives and private thoughts recorded by German and Austrian Jews in letters and diaries in 1938 take on new meaning. They can tell us much about a minority's struggle for civil rights and social integration, as well as the tremendous achievements that follow when such struggles are successful. They also offer a warning about the disastrous consequences of discrimination, exclusion, and persecution.

**1938Projekt  
Timeline****TIPS FOR USING THIS RESOURCE****Using the 1938Projekt Timeline**

For this lesson, students will be examining artifacts posted on the 1938Projekt website. The 1938Projekt was created by the Leo Baeck Institute in 2018, eighty years after the events of 1938, to address the question of how one grasps the mixture of horror and disbelief felt by the victims of the Nazi regime. Over the course of 2018 the Institute posted a collection of letters, diaries, documents, and photographs saved by German and Austrian Jews and their families which are housed in the archives of the Leo Baeck Institute New York | Berlin and those of several partner institutions. These sources were uploaded daily to the 1938Projekt site—one for each day in 1938, corresponding to the dates of the 2018 calendar year. The materials illustrate the range of reactions and emotions of individuals and families in response to quickly changing events under the Nazi regime and the struggles they faced to escape Germany and Austria in order to survive. In addition to the daily posts, significant world events are described alongside the calendar entries to provide a broader context for the individualized stories.

**Before teaching this lesson, take some time to familiarize yourselves with the site's layout.**

**To begin:**

1. Explore the 1938Projekt website by scrolling through daily entries within each month to gain a chronological understanding of the events revealed through artifacts on the site.
2. Follow the hyperlinked dates in the list of artifacts included in this lesson. This will lead you to more in-depth information about the artifacts themselves and the people who created them.
3. Keyword search on the 1938 Projekt website to find artifacts or themes that connect to particular topics, places, and individuals.

## KEY TERMS / VOCABULARY

**Curator**

A person responsible for the care and exhibition of artifacts.

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**Affidavit**

A sworn statement in writing. In many examples we see in these collections, German and Austrian Jews were asking for sworn statements from relatives living abroad that they were, in fact, family members willing to sponsor them if they came to the United States.

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**Kristallnacht**

Also called Night of Broken Glass, November 9-10 1938, when German Nazis attacked Jewish people and destroyed their property.

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**Migration**

The act of moving from one location to another, sometimes across geographic or political borders.

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**Visa**

A certificate granted by a country giving a traveler permission to leave, enter, or stay for a certain amount of time, or to allow certain activities by foreigners like working or going to school. Many Jewish citizens had valid passports, but struggled to get the visas needed in order to leave their home country or enter a new country.

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**Artifact**

Usually an object created by humans and considered valuable due to what we know about why it was created, how it was used or the lives of those who created it.

## **FOCUS QUESTIONS**

**What is the role of a curator?**

**How does a curator tell a story through a collection of artifacts?**

**What can we learn about the impact 1938 had on individuals in Germany and Austria by examining and curating an exhibition of artifacts?**

## **BIG UNDERSTANDINGS**

1. The events of 1938 had a profound impact on the lives of Jews living in Austria and Germany.
2. Curators of history exhibitions make thousands of decisions about what details and people to include and which of them are most important in order to tell an historical story.
3. By acting as curators and doing the work themselves of telling a story through artifacts, students will gain insight into the process of history making itself.

## **TEACHING POINT**

1. The events of 1938 had a profound impact on the lives of Jews living in Austria and Germany.
2. Artifacts tell a story and they need a person who will put them in the right order to tell that story.

## OBJECTIVES

### Students Will:

1. Examine artifacts on the 1938Projekt website.
2. Choose artifacts to illustrate a theme related to the events that occurred in Germany and Austria in 1938.
3. Explain how their chosen artifacts illustrate their theme.
4. Share their artifacts and themes with their classmates.
5. Analyze how exhibitions are curated and organized.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- **Chrome books, iPads, or other devices for students to search the 1938Projekt website**
- **“Belonging” exhibiton panel image**
- **Handouts for each exhibition theme**
- **List of artifacts and their dates from the timeline**  
**1938Projekt Curator Artifact Record Sheets**



## PROCEDURE

### WARM UP

Project the image of the “Belonging” panel on the school Smart Board or other interactive board at the front of the class. Lead students in an exploration of this panel. What text do they see? Which images? What is the story of Belonging that this panel tells? How do the text and images work together to tell the story of the theme of belonging?

### MINI LESSON

Explain that this panel was created by the Leo Baeck Institute (LBI) as part of their exhibition on the impact of the year 1938 on the lives of Jewish people in Austria and Germany. Tell students that they will be taking on the role of curators to assist LBI in finishing their exhibition. A curator’s job is to protect and interpret collections of artifacts in archives and museums.

Explain to the students that curators are storytellers who use objects and spaces to tell their stories. Unlike books that tell their readers a story one reader at a time, exhibitions allow us to discover the story a curator has prepared for us alongside other visitors. Curators have good reasons for each artifact they select and what order they place them inside the exhibit.

Today, we will learn to tell a story like a curator would. We will look at artifacts in a new way, asking ourselves what stories they tell us about the people who owned or made them. We will think deeply about a big idea, or theme, like “belonging,” and look for objects that speak to that theme. And we will think about the people who will visit our exhibit, what we want to make sure they understand and how we want them to feel when they leave our exhibit.

## **PROCEDURE, cont.**

### **ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT**

Show students the 1938Projekt website, demonstrating how each day of the year highlights one artifact and one story. Explain that the project's curator has begun to organize artifacts from the site into themes. In small groups students will be given one theme, and it will be their job to choose several artifacts from a list of artifacts on the site that they feel best illustrate this theme. Students will use the 1938Projekt website to research these artifacts in order to make their choices.

You may choose to click on one of the artifacts from the list below to examine the site in more detail as a whole class.

### **DIRECTIONS**

Place students in pairs or small groups. Assign student groups one theme from the list below, and provide each student an artifact note-taking sheet.

Review the task: The students will use these handouts to guide examination of a collection of artifacts and documents from the 1938Projekt website. After examining the artifacts, students will choose 3–4 they feel best illustrate their theme and make the case as to why. Students will write a summary that explains their theme for visitors to the exhibition.

Though the terms for each theme can be defined in a general manner, the students are specifically trying to illustrate them through this particular lens of 1938. Later in the lesson students will have an opportunity to make connections to today.

### **GROUP WORK**

Students work in their pairs or groups to explore the links provided to artifacts on the 1938Projekt website.

Once students have chosen their artifacts and written a summary, they present their ideas to their classmates so that the whole class sees all of the themes in the exhibition. This can be done by creating posters, Google slides, power-point slides, or through a presentation in front of the class with the Smart Board. These presentations would include the theme, chosen artifacts, and the summary explaining how these artifacts best represent their

## **PROCEDURE, cont.**

### **DISCUSSION**

Guide students in analyzing their class exhibition using any of these guiding questions:

- *Where did we see the same artifact used for different themes? How did that change our understanding of the artifact?*
- *How do these themes work with each other to tell a broader picture of what happened in 1938 and its impacts?*
- *How does one theme transform into another (example: belonging to displacement, persecution to resilience)?*
- *Considering visitor experience: In what order should we organize these themes in our exhibition? How might visitor experience change depending on the order we put our themes?*
- *What would you want a person who visits your exhibition to walk away knowing and understanding?*

### **CLOSE / REFLECTIONS**

Ask students to select one of these questions to answer in a long paragraph:

- *How do these big ideas play out on the personal level? How does the life of one person hold these big themes?*
- *How do these small, subjective, stories help us to understand something larger about the year 1938?*
- *What impacted you, and why?*
- *What new information have you gained about the impact of 1938?*
- *Why might it be important for visitors of today to visit this exhibition?*

# Belonging

**“I am a Jew! A Jew in a desperate position: a Jewish German who in spite of everything that has befallen him or perhaps because of it cannot shed his ties to Germany [...]”**

Frank M. Shurman's letter to a friend on his growing alienation from German society and his realization that he will need to leave Germany in order to remain "German." (May 22, 1938)

LBI Archives, Frank M. Shurman Collection, AR 25219, box 1, folder 25.



Stroh family on vacation, ca. 1929.  
Image top left

Max Strauss seated with a book outdoors during his World War I military service, 1916.  
Image top right

Freudenthal family vacationing at the Stölpchensee near Berlin, 1938.  
Image bottom left

Max Strauss, in uniform, sitting on horse, 1917.  
Image bottom right



When the Nazis came to power in January 1933, over 500,000 Jews lived in Germany. A great majority of them were middle class, urban professionals. German Jews participated in activities that were typical for their social class – art, literature, and vacationing with family. Many of them fought for Germany in World War I and could not imagine that Germany would forget their sacrifice.

Panel from  
the Leo Baeck  
Institute exhibition  
1938Projekt: Posts  
from the Past  
curated by curator  
Magdalena M.  
Wrobel, Ph.D.

**HANDOUTS****EXHIBITION THEMES****Belonging**

People have complex identities. There are many factors that can make us feel part of a group, or like an outsider. Our age, class, religion, gender, sexuality, nationality, and language are just some of the important parts of ourselves that can impact our sense of belonging.

“I am a Jew! A Jew in a desperate position: A Jewish German who in spite of everything that has befallen him or perhaps because of it cannot shed his ties to Germany [...].”

**Persecution**

When those in power systematically humiliate and punish people belonging to a certain group with the goal of eliminating their rights, freedom and property.

“I hereby dutifully report that the above-mentioned four persons will as of January 1, 1939 bear the additional first names ‘Sara’ and ‘Israel’ respectively in accordance with legal requirements.”

**Community**

We are looking here at the various groups of people who support and protect each other. This support can take many forms; emotional, physical, or financial. Communities can be defined by shared characteristics including religion, political belief, family relationships, and language. A community can consist of a small group of people who live closely together, or millions of people living far apart.

“And this year will be a difficult year; the wheel is turning faster and faster. It will really test our nerves and our capacity for careful thought.”

**HANDOUTS****EXHIBITION THEMES****Terror**

Terror exists among the extremes of human emotion. The artifacts in this exhibit help us understand the way Jewish people's lives during this time lost the normal touchstones of reality and became shocking in their horror.

"Not one piece remained intact in our home. All the dishes broken, edibles flung onto the floor, flour, sugar etc., all scattered, part of it trampled on, like cake etc., you can't imagine."

**Uncertainty**

There were not clear answers for Jews about what they could do to save themselves and their loved ones. Through the letters, diaries and other artifacts you will examine, you will see the plans people tried to make, help they requested, and the guesses they made about what the future held.

"I was very happy to hear that you will help us to come to America. I hope that your dear children are in the same age as I am and I shall get good friends."

**Displacement**

When large numbers of people abruptly leave their countries, they leave behind relatives and friends, homes and possessions. Jews had to move quickly and often left with little more than their lives. Displaced people have to start their lives over in ways they could not have imagined.

"What yesterday seemed to me barely fathomable, a thought which I would thrust aside so that it would not enter my mind, is no longer a matter of trepidation and grief to me: emigration."

**HANDOUTS****EXHIBITION THEMES****Resilience**

Despite incredible loss, humans have the capability to survive and rebuild their lives. Resilience is not the final product of that effort, but the effort itself.

“I don't need to describe to you how we are in light of all that is ahead of us—dissolving everything that is there—the family—the apartment—transplantation into foreign, unknown circumstances—dependent on the kindness of others everywhere—parents and children torn apart, without knowing whether there will be a reunion—one barely has the strength to imagine it in advance.”

**HANDOUTS****ARTIFACTS**

Jan 1 – Charity concert

Feb 4 – Diary of a famous bacteriologist on the deteriorating situation of German Jews

Mar 11 – Adolph Markus’ diary – “silence before storm”

Mar 12 – What was yesterday unthinkable, today seems to be the new reality – emigration

Mar 17 – Celebrating Jewish holiday, Purim, at an orphanage home (Ahawah) in Berlin. Half of the children went to Palestine. The other children perished in Holocaust.

Mar 19 – Aryanization of a Jewish company – short letter – significant information

Apr 2 – Kitchen for people in need

Jun 16 – Erika Langstein asks a stranger met on a train for help to receive affidavits

Jul 6 – Dr. Lilian Singer’s odyssey: from Prague – London – Lahore – Ohio

Jul 16 – Don’t come to the USA – a letter

Aug 6 – Waitlist for the visit in a US-consulate

Sep 4 – Last picture of the class before Jewish children expelled from the school

Sept 9 – Good news about affidavits from Pennsylvania

Oct 21 – Muenzer Family’s last picture – only 15-y-o Gertrude will survive

Nov 14 – Weisbaden – Jewish synagogue is destroyed as part of the Kristallnacht pogrom

Nov 20 – 11-y-o Gerda thanks her family in Los Angeles for help to receive affidavits

Nov 23 – Help to receive affidavits for a 16 y/o girl

Dec 5 – Ungrateful Fatherland (passport)



**HANDOUTS****ARTIFACT RECORD SHEET**

**Our Theme is**

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**My Group Members are**

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*Keep notes on your chosen artifacts using the record sheet below. You will use this information for your exhibition.*

**Artifact 1 (name)**

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**Date of the Calendar Entry**

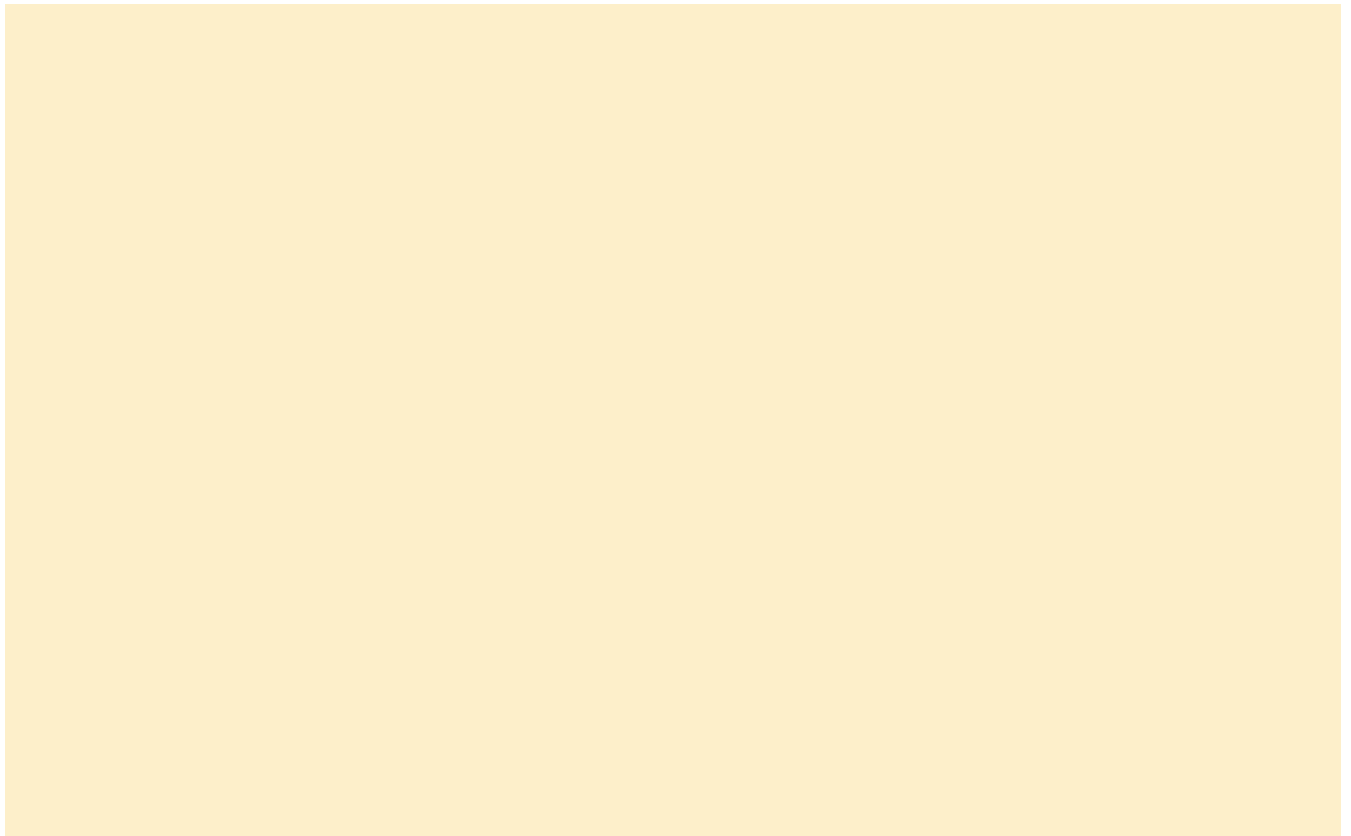
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**Source Type**

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*(example: passport, diary entry, suitcase, telegram, etc.)*

**How does this artifact illustrate your theme? Why did you choose this artifact?**



**HANDOUTS****ARTIFACT RECORD SHEET****Artifact 2 (name)**  
-----**Date of the Calendar Entry**  
-----**Source Type**  
-----*(example: passport, diary entry, suitcase, telegram, etc.)***How does this artifact illustrate your theme? Why did you choose this artifact?****Artifact 3 (name)**  
-----**Date of the Calendar Entry**  
-----**Source Type**  
-----*(example: passport, diary entry, suitcase, telegram, etc.)***How does this artifact illustrate your theme? Why did you choose this artifact?**

**HANDOUTS**

**ARTIFACT RECORD SHEET**

**Artifact 4 (name)**

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**Date of the Calendar Entry**

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**Source Type**

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*(example: passport, diary entry, suitcase, telegram, etc.)*

**How does this artifact illustrate your theme? Why did you choose this artifact?**

