

Students will examine personal documents created in 1938 to consider why some people are motivated to make a heroic effort on behalf of others.

PERSONENBESCHREIBUNG

Beruf	Hilfsschlosser
Geburtsort	Ludernach
Geburtstag	22. 9. 1918
Wohnort	KÖLN
Gestalt	müßig
Gesicht	oval
Farbe der Augen	braun
Farbe des Haares	braun
Besond. Kennzeichen	keine

KINDER

Unterschrift des Paßinhabers
Paul Egon Vahn
 und seiner Ehefrau

QUESTION EXAMINED

**WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE
TO TAKE HEROIC ACTION
ON ANOTHER'S BEHALF?**

Subject
**Social
Studies**

Grades
8-12

Authors
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KRUCOFF
& Natalie
MILBRODT**

THEMES Family, Migration, Persecution,
Resilience, Terror, Altruism

RESOURCES INCLUDED**FOR TEACHERS**

- Context for This Lesson
- Tips for Using This Resource
- Biographies
- Key Terms / Vocabulary
- Focus Questions
- Big Understandings
- Teaching Point
- Objectives
- Materials
- Procedure
- Document lists
- Document Packets

FOR STUDENTS

- Worksheet #1: Notes on Sources
- Worksheet #2: Prepare for Class Discussion
- Document list: Helen Kleinman & Kurt Kleinmann
- Document list: Paul Egon Cahn
- Transcriptions: Kurt Kleinmann's letters
- Transcriptions: Paul Egon Cahn's letters
- Helen Kleinman and Paul Egon Cahn
Primary Sources Packets
- 1938Projekt website
- Copies of Key Dates:
Jews Under the Nazi Regime (optional)

Cover image:
Passport of
Paul Egon Cahn,
1938. Archives
of the Leo Baeck
Institute, Paul Egon
Cahn Collection
(AR 25431,
Box 1, folder 10)

EXTERNAL  LINKS

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

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

CONTEXT FOR THIS LESSON

In this lesson students will explore how the escalating persecution of Jews in Austria and Germany in 1938 motivated Jewish individuals living abroad to take action on their behalf. Students will examine the sources of two people: Paul Egon Cahn in Kenya, and Helen Kleinman in New York. They will explore how these individuals threw themselves into the rescue of others trapped under the Nazi regime, the obstacles they faced in doing so, and how they attempted to solve these problems. Students will consider what ties people together and motivates them to work on each other's behalf, as well as the limitations and opportunities that Jewish individuals living abroad had to advocate for those trapped in Europe.

This kind of historical inquiry builds empathy for people in the past and creates an important opportunity to discuss the human impact of complex and powerful events happening in the world today. Students will consider various factors that lead to each person's choices and their ability to help others in what was a uniquely dire situation.

This lesson could be placed within a unit on the Holocaust, where students already have some understanding of the time period and the pogrom of Kristallnacht. It could also take place within an ELA unit of Holocaust related literature.

Background resources for introducing the topic:

This excellent resource from the [US Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) is a valuable introduction for students to explore before getting into the case studies. Relevant aspects of the immigration process and vocabulary are explained.

Lesson Extension: Connections to Today

As a meaningful extension to the lesson, teachers can consider ways to create opportunities for students to discuss their understanding of the issues facing people in their own communities, in their state or country, or around the world, including who has access to choices and who does not, and what motivates or prevents people from helping.

Note: The following lesson adapts materials from Jody Madell, Social Studies teacher at Lyons Community School, Brooklyn, NY.

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.

TIPS FOR USING THESE RESOURCES

DOCUMENTS & ARTIFACTS

The documents in this lesson consist of official records, letters, diary entries, and photographs.

When working with historical sources it is important to keep the following questions in mind:

- **Who created this source?**
- **What do we know about this person and time in which they were living?**
- **What is the tone of the entries?**
- **What is the point of view?**

Additional Questions:

The impact of collections and archives

The documents for this lesson each come from the collections of one individual whose papers were donated to the archives of the Leo Baeck Institute. Examining papers from one collection raises some additional questions that could be meaningful to consider:

- **Why might this person have had this document in his or her collection?**
- **What kinds of documents do you feel are important to save for future generations?**

These questions will be most meaningful at the end of the lesson, once students have examined and discussed their research.

BIOGRAPHIES

PAUL EGON CAHN

Paul Egon Cahn was born in Andernach, Germany, on September 22, 1918 to Sigfried Simon Cahn (born 1888) and Regina Cahn (born Levy, 1893). He had two sisters, Inge and Erika. In the 1930s Paul Egon Cahn learned the auto mechanic trade in Andernach and subsequently worked as a car driver in Cologne, where the family moved in 1937. In 1938/1939 the three children were able to escape Germany; Erika immigrated to England, Inge immigrated to Australia and Paul Egon immigrated to Kenya. Shortly after arriving in Africa, Paul Egon attempted to help his parents leave Germany. Unfortunately, his effort to secure visas for his parents was unsuccessful. His parents were deported to Nazi occupied Riga, Latvia on December 6, 1941. In 1942 his father died. His mother was deported to Auschwitz, where she most likely died shortly after the liberation in 1945. Paul Egon remained in Kenya, living and working until he immigrated to the US in 1951.

HELEN KLEINMAN

When 28-year-old Kurt Kleinmann of Vienna wrote to the Kleinmans in America, he could not have hoped for a kinder, more exuberant response than what he received from 25-year-old Helen. After finding the address of a Kleinman family in the US, Kurt had asked the total strangers in a letter dated May 25 to help him leave Austria by providing him with an affidavit. He had finished law school in Vienna and was now running his father's wine business. Helen readily adopts the theory that the Kleinmanns and the Kleinmans might actually be related to one another, promising her "cousin" to procure an affidavit for him within the week. Affably and vivaciously, she assures him that the Kleinmans will correspond with him to make the time until departure feel shorter. The extensive correspondence contains not only detailed information about the procedure and the emotional background of Kurt Kleinmann's immigration from Switzerland to the US. It also offers a fascinating insight into the relationship between Kurt Kleinmann and Helen Kleinman, who fell in love with each other through their letters. In February 1939, Kurt Kleinmann finally succeeded in coming to New York, and a few months later he got married to Helen Kleinman.

KEY TERMS / VOCABULARY

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.

Auschwitz

The Auschwitz concentration camp was a complex of over 40 concentration and extermination camps operated by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland during World War II and the Holocaust.

Migration

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

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.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

What were the things that tied people together and motivated them to ask for and offer help?

What were the series of obstacles that advocates faced, and their attempted solutions?

What are other times when people have taken heroic action to help others? What do those situations have in common?

BIG UNDERSTANDINGS

- Jewish Individuals around the globe were powerfully impacted by the escalation of persecution of the Jewish population of Austria and Germany under the Nazi regime.
- Religion, family relations, and strong feelings motivate heroic acts.
- Reading the personal accounts of those who lived through powerful events develops empathy and deepens historical understanding.
- Historians draw conclusions about events by interpreting primary sources.

TEACHING POINT

Jewish people around the world took enormous steps to advocate for those trapped under the Nazi regime in Germany and Austria to various degrees of success.

OBJECTIVES

- 1** Students will examine and interpret the personal documents of Jewish people who lived through the events of 1938 to understand how the Nazi Regime impacted the lives of Jews living around the world.
- 2** Students will piece together specific actions of two people living abroad who chose to advocate on behalf of other Jews in peril.
- 3** Students will evaluate what ties people together and how that can motivate people to make a heroic effort on behalf of others experiencing dire situations.

MATERIALS NEEDED

EXTERNAL LINKS

[Paul Egon Cahn Document Set](#)

[Helen Kleinman & Kurt Kleinmann Document Set](#)

- **Laptops, tablets or other electronic devices that students can use to access the 1938Projekt site.**
- **Printed document sets:** *(one set per student pair)*
 - 1 Paul Egon Cahn**
 - 2 Helen Kleinman and Kurt Kleinmann**
- **Copies of Key Dates: Jews Under the Nazi Regime, 1933–1939**
- **Copies of Student Worksheet 1: Notes on Sources**
- **Copies of Student Worksheet 2: Preparing for Class Discussion**
- **Copies of Document Lists**
- **Copies of Letter Transcriptions**

PROCEDURE

WARM-UP

Free Write: Can you think of an example of a time when you or someone you know went out of their way to help someone in need? Write a description of the situation.

As students write, circulate to conference with students, asking select students if they would be comfortable sharing their answers.

Students who feel comfortable can share (This can first be done as a Turn-and-Talk). As you are discussing students' answers draw out how the students, their families or the people they know were tied to those they were trying to help. Were they drawn by family relationships? Religious belief? Did they come from the same home town or country? Were they motivated by feelings of love?

MINI-LESSON

Transition the lesson to explain that students will be learning about two Jewish people living far from Germany and Austria who took heroic steps to advocate for others who were trapped under the Nazi regime. Explain that many Jews around the world were highly concerned about Jewish people living in Germany and Austria in the 1930s and some took enormous steps to help those trapped to escape Europe despite overwhelming obstacles.

Consider reviewing the document *Key Dates: Jews Under the Nazi Regime, 1933–1939* to provide a context for the increasing level of persecution that Jewish people living in Austria and Germany experienced living under Nazi rule.

You may also wish to review with students this [excellent resource](#) from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. It is a valuable introduction for students to explore before getting into the case studies. Relevant aspects of the immigration process and vocabulary are explained.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Explain that students will examine a set of documents from one of two people: Paul Egon Cahn, or Helen Kleinman, both of whom made heroic efforts to save people trapped in Nazi Germany or Austria in 1938. As students read these document sets, they will be working to piece together the story of who these people were, who the people were that they were trying to save, as well as the challenges they faced and their attempts to overcome those challenges.

**INDEPENDENT
WORK**

Place students in pairs or threes. Give each pair or small group one document set, one copy of Key Dates: Jews under the Nazi Regime (alternatively, have students link to the timeline online), and each student a copy of Student Worksheet 1.

Tip: Because placing the documents in chronological order is a powerful learning tool, it is recommended that you print out the documents separately for students.

Activity #1 (1-2 periods)

Each student, or pairs of students, will explore **one** person's experiences advocating for those trapped under the Nazi regime by reading a set of documents from 1938–1939. There are two different stories.

Once they get their document set, tell students to look through the documents and place them in chronological order. Be sure to stress that the story unfolds chronologically so this step is very important. After the students have organized the documents chronologically they will closely read them and take notes using Worksheet 1. They can use the timeline to help contextualize events they are reading about.

Explain that some of the documents are handwritten and can be hard to read. Tell them that typed transcriptions are available for all the handwritten documents. Explain that both the handwritten and typed transcriptions will help them to get a sense of the tone of the documents and the events taking place, so they should be sure to examine both.

Distribute the readings to students and give them time to read the materials and to record their reactions and observations using Worksheet 1. You can make extra copies of the worksheet, make double-sided copies, or have students write on loose leaf for notes on more sources.

**PAIR
DISCUSSION****Activity #2 Discussion & Analysis** (10 minutes)

Once students have finished reviewing the documents in their set and taking notes, have them discuss the following questions (They will likely be talking about these questions as they work with the documents):

In your pair, discuss:

- ***How is this story unfolding?***
- ***What stands out to you about the people and situations?***
- ***What more do you want to know about this situation or the people involved?***

Activity #3

Once pairs have discussed these questions, give them the bio of their person from the context section of this lesson and time to read and discuss.

**INDEPENDENT
WORK**

Then, students independently prepare for a whole class share using Worksheet 2, by making notes on the following questions:

- ***What stood out to you about the people and situations that you studied?***
- ***What are some of the most important events that you read about in this series of documents? Why are these events important?***
- ***What are some of the sentences that you read that stood out to you? Why?***
- ***How did you feel when you learned about each person's fate?***

**WHOLE GROUP
DISCUSSION**

Once students are ready with their notes, guide a class discussion. After each person has shared you can extend the discussion using the following focus questions:

- ***What were the things that tied people together and motivated them to ask for and offer help?***
- ***What were some of the obstacles that advocates faced, and their attempted solutions?***
- ***What are other times in history or events today when people have taken heroic action to help others? What do those situations have in common?***

WORKSHEET 1**NOTES ON THE SOURCES**

PERSON STUDIED

Use the space provided to take notes on each source as you read. If you need additional space, use sticky notes or loose-leaf. You will use these notes when you write your reflection at the end of the unit and also for sharing out later in the week.

Date	Written by	Description of Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is discussed in this document?</i> • <i>What do you learn about the situation of Jews trapped under the Nazi regime?</i> • <i>What do you learn about the people who are trying to help?</i> • <i>What do you learn about the challenges to rescuing Jews and how people tried to solve those problems?</i> • <i>What is the tone of the document?</i> • <i>What questions do you still have?</i>

PREPARE FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

- *What stood out to you about the people and situations that you studied?*
- *What are some of the most important events that you read about in this series of documents? Why are these events important?*
- *What are some of the sentences that you read that stood out to you? Why?*
- *How did you feel when you learned about each person's fate?*

This image shows a full page of handwriting practice paper. It features multiple sets of horizontal dashed red lines spaced evenly down the page, providing a guide for letter height and placement. The background is white, and there are no other markings or text present.

DOCUMENT LIST**HELEN KLEINMAN & KURT KLEINMANN**

Date	Written by
June 25, 1938	Kurt Kleinmann
July 12, 1938	Helen Kleinman
July 21, 1938	Kurt Kleinmann
Aug. 23, 1938	Helen Kleinman
Sept. 22, 1938	Helen Kleinman
Oct. 27, 1938	Helen Kleinman
Oct. 31, 1938	Legation of the United States of America
Nov. 14, 1938	British Passport Office
Nov. 14, 1938	Helen Kleinman

DOCUMENT LIST PAUL EGON CAHN

Date	Written by
Feb. 26, 1938	Passport
Nov 29, 1938	Paul Egon Cahn
Dec. 8, 1938	Mr. I. Somen, Kenya Jewish Refugee Committee
Jan. 9, 1939	Mr. I. Somen, Kenya Jewish Refugee Committee
Jan. 5, 1939	Paul Egon Cahn
Feb. 15, 1939	German Jewish Aid Committee, London
Feb. 28, 1939	Paul Egon Cahn
March 4, 1939	Mr. I. Somen, Kenya Jewish Refugee Committee
March 29, 1939	German Jewish Aid Committee, London

TRANSCRIPTIONS KURT KLEINMANN'S LETTERS

Photo of Kurt Kleinmann, 1930s. Archives of the Leo Baeck Institute, Kurt & Helen Kleinman Collection (AR 10738, Box 1, folder 4)

Transcriptions of handwritten letters by Kurt Kleinmann, a German Jew who escaped to Switzerland in 1938, after the rise of the Nazi regime.

In 1938 Kurt Kleinmann wrote urgently to the Kleinman family of New York City in hopes that he was a distant relative and that they would be moved to sponsor his affidavit to the US. Copies of the original handwritten letters are included in the Helen Kleinman packet along with her responses.

Close examination of the handwritten letters show that Kurt Kleinmann has a strong grasp of English. However, the typed letters below include any original misspellings and grammatical errors. Words that were illegible in the original documents are here inserted in brackets as [unreadable].

EXTERNAL LINK

[Photocopies of Helen Kleinman & Kurt Kleinmann's Original Handwritten Letters](#)

TRANSCRIPTIONS KURT KLEINMANN'S LETTERS

[stamp]

25 V/38 [June 25, 1938]

M. Kleinmann

[illegible]

Weingrosshandlung [=wholesaler for wine]

Vöslau-Gainiarn [?]

Hauptstrasse Nr. 59

Dear Sir

I am obliged to leave Austria now, you understand. And I beg you to help a young Austrian Jew, who has the same name as you by procuring him an affidavit security to America. I don't know if you are able to help me or not. I hope you are. If you are not able, please give my letter one of your acquaintances who is able to stand for me. I can assure you that it is not easy for me to write in this way. But I have no other possibility to receive the permission to emigrate into an other country. Here is my biography following: Jew 28 year old, single and of a good Jewish family. I frequented the college and then the university where I went through three examinations on the judicial faculty. Then I learned to play on the piano and I can say without being proud, I play very well. I lead my father's business, he is a wine-merchant. I speak a little English and I am learning now to be perfect. My father, Meyer Kleinmann, was born in Odessa Russia his parents are from Poland and they were graindealers. I don't know my relatives who were emigrated to America and it is possible that you are a relation of me.

I beg you instantly to send me an affidavit. I can ensure you [unreadable] that I will never be a burden for you. I am in a good state of health and I am able and willing to do every work I get. Will you kindly accept my petition and answer as soon as possible. I'm thanking you in anticipation.

Yours very respectfully

Kurt Kleinmann

If you are willing to send the affidavit, here you can get the information from the shipping companie.

TRANSCRIPTIONS KURT KLEINMANN'S LETTERS

Wien, 21. Juli 1938

Dear Aunt and Uncle

I have got your dear daughter's letter just now and you cannot fancy how happy I was. It was not very easy for me to write to relatives at all and ask for something because I was not well situated and really myself. [unreadable] time was stranger and so I have tried all I can emigrate. I can assure that you help not an unworthy man and I will be thankful to you always. I wrote to Helene about my family affairs already. My brother Walter Kleinmann will arrive at New York with his wife in the midst of August. They will live at the relations of my sister-in-law, He probably will write to you detailed when he is in Italy. There he can better than I here. My family [unreadable] over to Argentina, but I like better to be near my brother and therefore I prefer to go to the U.S.A. I hope that you are all well with the best greetings to your little daughter.

I am respectfully yours,
Kurt

Kurt Kleinmann

TRANSCRIPTIONS PAUL EGON CAHN'S LETTERS

From passport of Paul Egon Cahn, 1938. Archives of the Leo Baeck Institute, Paul Egon Cahn Collection (AR 25431, Box 1, folder 10)

Transcriptions of handwritten letters by Paul Egon Cahn, a German Jew who escaped Nazi Germany to live in Kenya, Africa in 1938, after the rise of the Nazi regime.

In late 1938 and early 1939 Paul Egon Cahn wrote urgently to the Jewish Refugee Committee of Nairobi and the German Council for Jewry in London, England requesting a loan of 100 pounds to secure passage of his parents out of Germany to him in Kenya. Copies of the original handwritten letters and the responses he received are included in the Paul Egon Cahn packet.

Close examination of the handwritten letters shows Paul's struggle to formally communicate in English as a second language to administrators and officials his urgent request for funds.

The typed letters below include original misspellings and grammatical errors. Words that were illegible in the original documents are here inserted in brackets as [unreadable].

EXTERNAL  LINK

[Photocopies of Paul Egon Cahn's Original Handwritten Letters](#)

TRANSCRIPTIONS PAUL EGON CAHN'S LETTERS

Paul Egon Cahn
Slip Farm
?C. Rongai

Rongai, November 29, 1938

Dear Mr. Somen!

Just been an hour I got this letter from my parents in Germany. The first one since the horrible event in Germany. The contents of the letter is so full of depression and so depressive, that I at once sit down and write a letter to you with the courteous inquiry, if you are able to help out to advise me how I can take my parents to me. My parents only hope to get them out is me. I can promise you that you have no costs with them here in Rongai so it only the question how and where from to get the 100£* I have to deposit. You know that I have not got so much money and it may be just enough in one or two months to pay the travelling expenses. That is all what I can do at the moment, perhaps not enough for this. You can believe me that I should always be thankful to you.

Now Mr. Somen – whatever your and the community answer is, please send me the answer this week if it is possible for you.

Also I remain your hopeful,
P.E. Cahn

*£ = the symbol for the English pound, the British currency, in the same way that \$ is the symbol for the US dollar. Paul Egon Cahn refers to the need to provide 100£ to secure passage for his parents to come to Kenya.

TRANSCRIPTIONS PAUL EGON CAHN'S LETTERS

Paul Egon Cahn
P.O. Box 25
Kenya Colony

Nakuru, January 5, 1939

To the German Council for Jewry, London

Dear Sir,

First of all I will tell you something about me. I am a German Jew of 20 years and my vocation is motorcar-mechanic. I left Germany in the march last year and am now over 10 months here in Kenya. All of this time I was working and saved so much I could to get once my parents out of Germany so quick as possible. Now, since this least horrible outrages in Germany, and here in Kenya the immigration restriction put much higher. I got now from my parents very bad letters all the time and so I wrote to the (Kenya) Roinga Regugee Committee in Nairobi a letter in which I made an application to assist me to get my parents out. There answer was that they were willingly to sign a bond for me but they were unable to make the deposit of 100£* (50 per person) at Mombasa. They suggest me to write a letter to you with the proper application to assist me to getting my parents out to me. You see I got the bond from the committee here and so it is only the question where to get the 100 pound to Mombasa. I was all the time looking here to find anybody who may lend me this money but I was not successful.

Now I beg you, if you would kindly make the deposit for me or may lend me the amount. I suppose you know that after a year you get this money at once-back and you do not loose anything at all.

You may believe that I will always be very thankfull to you and so my parents too and expecting an answer very soon please.

I remain your hopefull
Paul Egon Cahn

*£ = the symbol for the English pound, the British currency, in the same way that \$ is the symbol for the US dollar.
Paul Egon Cahn refers to the need to provide 100£ to secure passage for his parents to come to Kenya.

TRANSCRIPTIONS PAUL EGON CAHN'S LETTERS

I. Somen Esq.
P.O. Box 1334
Nairobi

January 24, 1939
Nakuru P.O. Box 25

Dear Mr. Somen

Yesterday I got receipt the answer to my letter I wrote to the committee in London. On your advice I made advance a proper application for the 100£* which I want to get my parents out of Germany.

The committee in London wrote to me that I should discuss the matter with you, but I already did that. I really do not know what to do now. Please Mr. Somen can't you possible let me have the amount? I shall give it back as soon as I can and I am [unreadable] some rate of interest as much as you like. [unreadable] if I do not get my parents out very quickly I may not see them again after all the news I get but I think you know exactly what time it is so it is not needfull to tell you all that. I heard from some people that they get their parents or someone else out of Germany but I do not think they get the money from the English people here.

In expectation of your answer I remain

Yours hopefully

P. E. Cahn

*£ = the symbol for the English pound, the British currency, in the same way that \$ is the symbol for the US dollar.
Paul Egon Cahn refers to the need to provide 100£ to secure passage for his parents to come to Kenya.