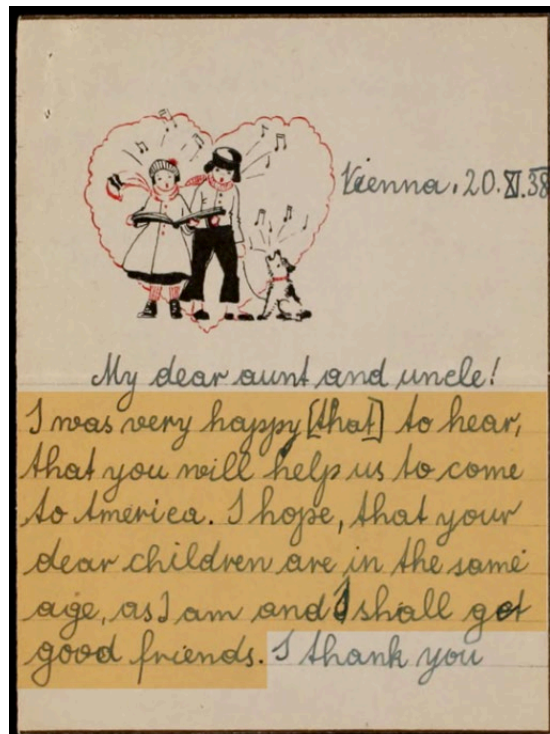


Students will read the personal letters of German and Austrian Jews to examine the obstacles to immigration by American federal law.



QUESTION EXAMINED

**HOW DID GERMAN AND
AUSTRIAN JEWS OVERCOME
IMMIGRATION OBSTACLES IN
1938?**

Subject
Social Studies

Grades
9-12

Author
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THEMES Family, Migration, Persecution, Resilience

RESOURCES INCLUDED

FOR TEACHERS

- Context for this lesson
- Tips for Using This Resource
- Key Terms / Vocabulary
- Focus Questions
- Big Understandings
- Teaching Point
- Objectives
- Materials
- Procedure
- Source Analysis Sheet

FOR STUDENTS

- Source Analysis Sheet
- Primary Sources (1938Projekt online)

Cover image: Letter from Gerda Feldstein, November 20, 1938, to the Feldstein family in California; Fritz Feldstein Family Collection, AR 3250; Archives of the Leo Baeck institute New York

EXTERNAL LINKS



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

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

[American Immigration Act of 1924 \(The Johnson-Reed Act\)](#)

CONTEXT FOR THIS LESSON

Why read personal letters to understand a federal immigration law?

Through this lesson, students will explore the impact of American federal immigration law on German and Austrian families seeking to flee persecution. These letters provide students with an ideal opportunity to engage in the work of historians. Students will read primary source documents with sourcing, context, and close reading in mind. After a deep analysis of their source, students will consider what evidence their source provides to understand how German and Austrian Jews navigated the factors that blocked immigration to the United States in 1938.

This kind of historical inquiry builds empathy for people in the past and creates an important opportunity to discuss the human impact of immigration laws today. Students will consider the role of federal legislation, wealth, and international networks in determining who was able to escape Nazi persecution and who was not.

Teachers could consider ways to create opportunities for students to discuss their understanding of immigration policy today, including who is privileged and who is excluded.

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 THIS RESOURCE

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 shock 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 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 yourself 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 1938Projekt website to find artifacts or themes that connect to particular topics, places, and individuals.

KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

Affadavit	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.
Immigration Act of 1924	A federal law that restricted immigration to the United States. Under this law, the number of new immigration visas would be limited for each country of origin. That limit, called a quota, would be equal to 2% of the current immigrant population from that country living in the United States.
Migration	The act of moving from one location to another, sometimes across geographic or political borders
Quota	A limit on the number of immigrants granted government approval to enter the United States, determined by their country of origin.
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

In 1938, why were some Jewish families allowed to enter the United States while others were denied entry?

How did German and Austrian Jews seek to overcome immigration obstacles?

BIG UNDERSTANDINGS

- As the events of 1938 made life increasingly more dangerous for German and Austrian Jews, many sought to migrate to the United States.
- American immigration laws placed restrictions on who could gain a visa to the United States. German and Austrian Jews hoped to overcome those obstacles through connections with close and distant relatives.

TEACHING POINT

In order to obtain a U.S. visa, German and Austrian Jews had to follow a difficult immigration process, which included providing proof of an American financial sponsor.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will research the immigration process for Austrian and German Jews wishing to immigrate to the United States.
2. Students will analyze primary sources to find the main idea.
3. Students will identify evidence to support a claim.
4. Students will write a formal body paragraph that includes a topic sentence, evidence, analysis, and a concluding sentence.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Chromebooks, iPads, or other devices for students to access the 1938Projekt website
- Link to [August 6 post](#) for Mini-Lesson
- Handouts for each activity
- Looseleaf for final synthesis paragraph
- Easily accessible links to the following 1938Projekt Posts:
 - Kurt and Helen Kleinman ([Letter 1](#), [Letter 2](#))
 - Bruno and Betsy Blum ([Letter 1](#), [Letter 2](#))
 - Gerda Feldstein ([Letter 1](#))
 - Erika Langstein ([Letter 1](#))
 - Eva Metzger ([Letter 1](#), [Letter 2](#))

PROCEDURE

WARM-UP

Project the image of the “August 6” post on the school Smart Board or other interactive board at the front of the class. Ask students to complete a T-chart for Observations and Inferences about the image.

You may wish to print individual copies of the artifact for students to examine at their desks, along with the accompanying text.

MINI LESSON

Explain that the Immigration Act of 1924 was a federal law that restricted immigration to the United States. Under this law, the number of new immigration visas would be limited for each country of origin. That limit, called a quota, would be equal to 2% of the current immigrant population from that country living in the United States.

Share with students the seven steps required for refugees to obtain a visa, as described on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website. Explain that we will be focusing today on Step 3, in which refugees had to provide proof of a financial sponsor.

GROUP WORK

Introduce the group work by sharing with students that they will read one of five letters written from German and Austrian Jewish families seeking a financial sponsor in America. Share that families were required to produce both a recommendation letter and an affidavit, in which the sponsor claimed financial responsibility for the person wishing to immigrate.

Consider linking all 5 of the letters on a shared Google Doc, or post the links to an online group page. If internet access is limited, you can download and print the letters.

PROCEDURE, cont.

GROUP WORK, cont.

Ask each student to complete the Source Analysis Sheet for his or her assigned source. Then, each student should gather evidence from that same source that helps address the guiding question:

How did German and Austrian Jews seek to overcome immigration obstacles in 1938?

Once students identify a claim and supporting evidence from their source, ask them to share their findings with their group. Provide sentence starters, as needed:

- “What evidence did you find in your source?”
- “According to my source...”

SYNTHESIS

Finally, ask students to write a formal body paragraph (Topic sentence, Evidence, Analysis and Link back to their topic sentence) that addresses the guiding question. Once students have finished, ask students to share out with the whole class.

REFLECT

In a whole class discussion, consider raising the following questions:

- **How did these sources provide new evidence to understand the experience of German and Austrian Jews in 1938?**
- **What additional evidence do we need to answer our guiding question?**

HANDOUT

SOURCE ANALYSIS SHEET



SOURCING

Author

Who created this source? What do we know about this person?

Audience

For whom was the source created?

Purpose

Why was this source created when it was?

CONTEXT

Time Period

What was going on at the time of the source? At the place?

CLOSE READING

Main Idea

What is the main idea of the source? Include a quote.

Tone

What is the tone of the source? Include a quote.