England's Child Migrants – Teacher's Notes

An Introduction

This animated video – Threads of Migration - tells the story of two different children at two different times and from two different places who move on their own to live in a different country – child migrants. The illustration is the story of Max, a Jewish boy escaping Nazi Germany in 1939. The video and illustration are composite stories based on archive material and Dr Ala Sirriyeh's empirical research and media news stories about children seeking asylum (see reference list).

The video and associated script, and the illustration, are available to download free of charge for use with children in schools and other settings.

The stories

The first story is set in the 1930s and is about children who were sent from England without their families to live in Australia. They were chosen and sent by charities and religious organisations with the support of the British government. At the time the Australian government wanted more people to move there to settle and work on farmland. They particularly wanted white British people to move there as part of the racist policy of the time to increase and maintain Australia's white population. It was thought children would settle in and integrate better than adults. Britain wanted to maintain a close relationship with Australia especially at a time when the British Empire was coming to an end. Many of the children who went were taken from children's homes. It was argued that they would have a chance for a better life in Australia.

This story is about Anna. Anna lives with her mother in the north of England but is sent to live in a children's home in a nearby city in 1935 when she is 10 years old. In 1936, when Anna is 11 years old, she is selected to leave on her own and move to Australia. Only children who were healthy and who had perfect hearing and eyesight were allowed to go. Whilst she is in Australia, WW2 breaks out. Although the fighting is in other parts of the world, such as in Europe where her mum remains, and not in Australia, some soldiers went from Australia to fight on Britain's side.

Ibrahim is a 15-year-old boy who left Sudan to escape the fighting there and seek safety in England in 2026. His family only had enough money for one person to travel as they had to pay for the transport and for people to help him travel. He doesn't have a visa so can't travel on a plane like someone might do on holiday. He must go a more secret way, but he is not breaking any rules by doing so. The rules are just complicated, and this is the only way he can escape. The rules are that you must get to Britain first before you can ask for safety here (what is called 'asylum'). There isn't a way you can ask for permission to travel to Britain (a visa) because you are in danger so you must get here and then ask permission to be here. The UN Refugee Convention says that people have the legal right to ask for asylum

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and that the route they travel should not affect their claim. It recognises people might have to travel in unauthorised ways or with false documents to escape safely. He is travelling to England because he already speaks some English so will find it easier to settle here and he already knows people living here so wouldn't be alone. When he arrives in England, the immigration officers think that he and his friend might be adults and that would mean they would have to stay in a different house without an adult looking after them. This is why the officers want to check their ages. Ibrahim is only 15 so he is sent to live with a foster family until he is 18 years old. Foster families look after children if they cannot live with their birth family. Children nowadays are more likely to live in foster families than in children's homes if their birth families cannot look after them.

Also available is the illustrated story of Max, a 15-year-old Jewish boy who leaves Germany on a Kindertransport in 1939 and goes to live in a hostel for Kindertransport boys in England. He left Germany after Kristallnacht, 'the night of broken glass'. This took place in November 1938 when Nazis attacked Jewish people, their homes and businesses, harming people and destroying and stealing their possessions. Life became very dangerous for Jewish people in Germany because the Nazis were antisemitic. Antisemitism is a form of prejudice, hatred and discrimination against Jewish people. It was difficult for Jewish people to leave Germany because countries like Britain restricted the visas available. Some children were able to escape but had to leave their parents behind. Charities and Jewish organisations in England arranged for some Jewish children to get visa waivers and to travel to England (without their families) on trains in what became known as the Kindertransport. Max gets a place on one of these trains. He would rather live in a hostel than with a family because he hopes his parents will be able to escape so they can move to United States together.

Links to the Primary Curriculum in England

The video and accompanying resources aim to promote discussion and understanding of the experiences of children moving to and from England. They are aimed at children in upper KS2 and have been developed to take into account the current primary curriculum in England. In particular, these resources are useful for learning in the KS2 history curriculum for England where children are asked to "study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066", such as migration. Through these stories, children will learn about the diversity of people who have shaped Britain and how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world.

The resources are also useful for associated learning in other areas, including English, computing, philosophy, PSHE and citizenship.

In trial activities with upper KS2 children whilst developing this resource, children often found it useful to watch the video twice. After the first time, it was useful to have some discussion with a teacher to address any factual questions or misconceptions by using the

resource introduction and story overviews. This enabled the later discussion after the first viewing to be focused on some of the bigger questions.

Possible triggers for trauma

Please be aware of the content in this resource and how it may affect children in class, especially those who have experienced migration themselves or have close family members/friends who have done so or care experienced children.
Many refugees, especially children, have experienced traumatic experiences related to war or persecution that may affect their mental and physical health. These experiences of trauma can leave a child or young person constantly alert to potential danger or threat. Asking questions to learn more can unintentionally trigger distress, particularly for those who may not feel comfortable discussing their experiences. This might include content related to war, violence or the threat of it, separation from family, hazardous journeys, exploitation, and detention. Content may also trigger memories of lost homes, severe deprivation, and abuse. Survivors may experience PTSD symptoms like flashbacks, panic, or fear of authority.

For children in this situation, it is recommended that you refer to colleagues and local services with pastoral safeguarding responsibilities. There are also resources available from specialist organisations such as the Refugee Council:
https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-help/my-view-childrens-therapy/

The Children and Families Wellbeing Support service in Yorkshire also has useful resources:
https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/children-and-families-wellbeing-support

The UK Trauma Council also has a variety of resources and links to further resources available here:
https://uktraumacouncil.org/research_practice/refugee-asylum-seeking-resources

How could this video be used in a 20-minute assembly for KS2?

Questions for discussion:

What was the same and what was different about Anna and Ibrahim's experience?
What do you think it felt like for Anna to leave her Mum behind?
What do you think it felt like for Anna going to Australia?
In what way do you think it might have felt different for Anna leaving the children's home for Australia rather than leaving her Mum and moving to the children's home?
What do you think was different about living in Australia and England?
What do you think it felt like for Ibrahim living as a young child in an area where war is taking place?
What do you think it felt like for Ibrahim coming to England?

What do you think it felt like not being able to speak the same language as fluently as everyone else?
What do you think was different about living in Sudan and England?
Have you ever moved house from one place to another? Do you know anyone that has done? What was it like?
What could help children like Anna and Ibrahim to settle into their new homes?

How could the video and associated script and the illustrated story be used in a 1-hour lesson or series of lessons for KS2?

History
Investigate the video, the script and the illustrated story as secondary evidence. What was the same and what was different about Anna, Ibrahim, and Max's experiences? What do we know for sure? What assumptions could we make? How could we research them further to check the accuracy of those assumptions? What does it tell us about different times and different places?

Other useful resources for further research:
BBC resource for KS2 geography in Wales: https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z47dmbk
BBC KS2 history resource for Black British stories: https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/articles/z3w84xs
BBC KS2 history resource for British Asian stories: https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/articles/zxdkdp3
Holocaust Memorial Day Trust resource for KS2 on the Kindertransport: https://hmd.org.uk/resource/primary-kindertransport-lesson-plan/
Kindertransport Association lesson plans for 7-18 year olds: https://kindertransport.org/education/teacher-guides/
Further local history research
Find out about people who have moved from one place to live in another amongst your family/friends/neighbours (including within the same country).

English
See Reading Comprehension worksheet based on script available to download

Beyond these stories, there are a wide variety of children's novels that describe the experience of child migrants. Some of them can be found here:

https://www.booksfortopics.com/booklists/topics/pshe-emotional-literacy-citizenship/refugees-immigration-ks2/

Roleplay (including hotseat, drama, debate) leading to writing (e.g. a diary) – Imagine you are one of the characters, a character who meets/interviews them, another child migrant –

How do you feel? What would you bring with you? (perhaps a maximum of 5 items), What would you miss/what would you NOT miss? How do you feel about not being with someone important anymore (e.g. your mum)?

Write a letter - What do you think will happen to Anna, Ibrahim or Max next? What would their next letter say?

Philosophy

Questions/prompts – What makes a child a child? Are you only a child if you are with your parents? What does it mean to be safe? What does it mean to be home? Is moving from one place to another to live there anything like being a tourist?

Computing

Make and present your own video (for example as a child migrant, as a journalist reporting on child migration)

Art

Make your own illustrations/comic strip/posters inspired by the videos (retelling the story of these child migrants or creating your own story)

Reference list

Central British Fund Kindertransport interviews. London: World Jewish Relief, The British Library.

The Fairbridge Archive, Special Collections and Archives. Liverpool: Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool.

Holocaust Centre North Archive_HCN/1/BJRH/2_Bradford Jewish Refugee Hostel_Courtesy of the Eger family archive.

Sirriyeh, A. (2025) How new asylum policies will affect child refugees, *The Conversation,* 24th November 2025, https://theconversation.com/how-new-asylum-policies-will-affect-child-refugees-270118

Sirriyeh, A. (2013). Hosting Strangers: hospitality and family practices in fostering unaccompanied refugee and asylum seeking young people. *Child and Family Social Work*, *18*(1), 5-14.

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