

The Holocaust and Wales: Identity

Teachers' Notes

In this lesson, students will learn about the post-war life of refugees in Wales, and how they adjusted to their new identities.

Curriculum links

Key Stages 3 and 4.
History, Citizenship.

Lesson Plan

LEARNING AIMS

- To explore the idea of belonging and what it means to be from somewhere.
- To encourage students to think about global citizenship and self-definition.
- To develop respect for the needs of others.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

- Copies of student worksheet.
- Transcripts of the audio clips.¹

STARTER

On a board, write the word 'Belonging'.

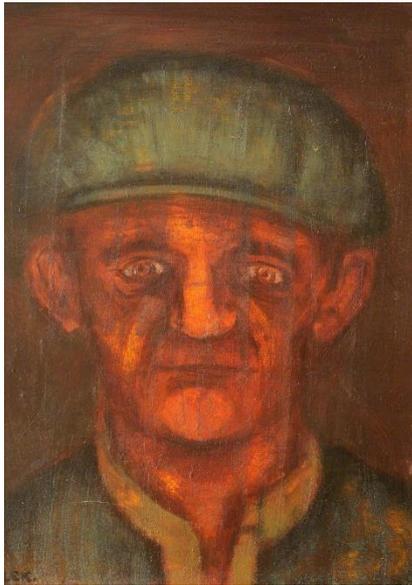
Ask the students to write down or tell the class where they feel they belong. This could be geographical (a particular street, school, city, region, or country) or some other definition, e.g., ethnicity, language, religion. Encourage them to share why they have picked this particular area or definition.

Have they always defined themselves in this way and felt they belonged there, or has this changed over time?

Does where they say they belong matter? Why?

DEVELOPMENT

¹ We added the audio clips' transcripts, which you may choose to share with your students if you think it would be helpful. The transcripts are in English and Welsh whilst the clips are in English only.



Portrait of an Anglesey Man by Karel Lek (1929-2000)
© The estate of Karel Lek
Photo credit: Bangor University.

Belgian refugee Karel Lek, who moved to Bangor in North Wales (and subsequently Beaumaris on Ynys Môn), became an artist after the war. He exhibited his work at numerous galleries in Britain and Europe, including the Royal Academy. Karel was inducted into the Royal Cambrian Academy in 1955 and was awarded an MBE in 2003. Karel's father held Belgian-British citizenship since his great grandfather had worked in London for six years in the late 1800s. Karel later said that "The misfortunes of the last War brought me, as a boy of eleven, from Antwerp to North Wales, where I have lived for over 70 years. I sometimes wonder whether this qualifies me to call myself a Welshman!"² He passed away on St David's Day in 2020.

On the board, display the painting [Portrait of an Anglesey Man](#) by Karel Lek. Ask the students to read a short biography of the artist. Then, ask the students to consider the following questions and discuss them as a class.

1. How might it be possible to qualify as a 'Welshman'?
2. What does it mean to be a 'citizen' of a country?
3. How important is citizenship to a sense of belonging?

MAIN

Gaby Koppel was born in Cardiff in 1957. Her parents, Henry and Edith, were both Jewish refugees – her father from Germany and her mother from Hungary. There was a small community of Jewish refugees in Cardiff, many of whom worked at the Treforest Trading Estate in Pontypridd. Her father worked at Treforest as an engineer for Aero Zipp, which had been founded by Gaby's grandfather Joachim Koppel in the 1930s. Unlike many refugees, Gaby's parents regularly returned to their home countries on business or on holiday. Gaby now works as a journalist and producer in London.

² Cai Parry-Jones, *The Jews of Wales: A History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017), p. 124.

Ask the students to first read a short biography of Gaby Koppel and then listen to [an audio clip where she discusses language and identity](#). Then, working in pairs or individually, students should answer the following questions on their worksheet (**TASK 1**):

1. Why did Gaby Koppel say that she sometimes feels like a fraud?
2. What is the connection between language and identity?
3. How important is language to a sense of national belonging?

Kate Bosse-Griffiths was a Jewish refugee who fled from Germany to Britain in 1937. She married Welshman John Gwyn Griffiths in September 1939 and moved to Pentre in the Rhondda. She learned Welsh and became a passionate advocate for the Welsh language, even publishing poetry and books in Welsh. The family moved to Swansea after the war, where she continued to write for the Welsh-language press, supporting the creation of the Cymdeithas yr Iaith (Welsh Language Society) in 1962. She died in Swansea in 1998.

Ask the students to first read a short biography of Kate Bosse-Griffiths and then listen to [an audio clip of Heini Gruffudd discussing his mother's, Kate Bosse-Griffiths's, identity](#). Then, working in pairs or individually, students should answer the following questions on their worksheet (**TASK 2**):

1. Why does Heini Gruffudd think that his mother became a Welsh-language campaigner after arriving in Wales?
2. What does he mean when he said his mother was “more Welsh than Welsh”?
3. How important do you think the culture of the receiving country is in helping refugees to adjust?
4. How might countries help refugees to adjust to their new lives?

PLENARY

Hiraeth is a Welsh word that has no direct English translation. The University of Wales, Lampeter, likens it to a homesickness tinged with grief and sadness over the lost or departed, especially in the context of Wales and Welsh culture. It is a mixture of longing, yearning, nostalgia, wistfulness or an earnest desire for the Wales of the past.³

There's a similar German word: *Sehnsucht* is a German noun translated as ‘longing’, ‘desire’, ‘yearning’, or ‘craving’. Some psychologists use the word to represent thoughts and feelings about all facets of life that are unfinished or imperfect, paired with a yearning for ideal alternative experiences.⁴

With the class, discuss the concept of *hiraeth* in refugees. Would the events of the 1930s have obliterated any good feelings they may have had for their early childhood?

Sources:

³ Wikipedia, *Hiraeth* (2022) <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiraeth>> [accessed 23 August 2022].

⁴ Wikipedia, *Sehnsucht* (2022) <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sehnsucht>> [accessed 23 August 2022].

Abrams, Nathan, 'Karel (Charles) Lek, MBE, RCA', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 08 May 2020
<<https://www.thejc.com/news/obituaries/karel-charles-lek-mbe-rca-1.501881>> [accessed 23 August 2022]

Art UK, *Portrait of an Anglesey Man, Karel Lek (1929–2020)*, Bangor University
<<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/portrait-of-an-anglesey-man-177834>> [accessed 23 August 2022]

Parry-Jones, Cai, *The Jews of Wales: A History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017)

Wikipedia, *Hiraeth* (2022) <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiraeth>> [accessed 23 August 2022]

Wikipedia, *Sehnsucht* (2022) <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sehnsucht>> [accessed 23 August 2022]

Transcripts

[Gaby Koppel talks about language and identity](#)

So, one of the things that I struggle with the most actually is language, so one of the sort of clearest connections to a nationality is language, but English is the only language I really speak fluently. And my parents spoke German at home, and German was very much the *lingua franca* of all our...so, our kind of milieu in Cardiff all spoke – well, they were from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Vienna, Germany, Hungary, all over the place, and many of them were multilingual, but they all spoke German together. So, I've been brought up in a German-speaking environment but I don't really speak German like a native, and I don't speak Welsh, I don't speak any Hungarian. And so, you feel as though you belong to those identities, but it's very tenuous somehow, there's something a bit...if you don't actually speak the language, your relationship with the identity is much more tenuous, I think, and so you feel, I feel a bit of a fraud, [be]cause if I'm in a lift with people who speak Hungarian to each other, I know they're speaking Hungarian, I can recognise Hungarian – but I can't say anything to them—“Look, I'm Hungarian, mate!”—but, you know, so, you feel as though you're a little bit...it is, it's all a bit intangible.

[Heini Griffiths talks about his mother's, Kate Bosse-Griffiths's, identity](#)

And, in a way, you can relate that to an anti-establishment view. I mean, she, she'd lived under the National Socialist system in Germany—well, I mean, that could be regarded as how an establishment can rule immorally etc. etc. So, she was quite willing here, if, if she saw injustice by the establishment, ‘Well dear me, I'm not going to give into that kind of immoral establishment’. So, you can link it, then, to her experiences; I mean, her positivity for gaining basic rights for the Welsh language would be compatible to her opposition to the regime in Germany. You sometimes see refugees or...becoming more English than English, you know, in order to fit in. Well, I don't know with her if she became more Welsh than Welsh, you know.