

# **Martin and Erica's Journey**



**Notes for  
Teachers**

**New edition**

## **Background**

*Martin and Erica's Journey* is based on the memories of Martin Stern, a Holocaust survivor now living in the UK. Martin was a young child living in the Netherlands when Nazi troops invaded in 1940. He went on to survive the Westerbork transit camp in Holland, and the Theresienstadt camp-ghetto in then Czechoslovakia.

The book gives students a human perspective on this catastrophic period of history by focusing on Martin's testimony. The language used is appropriate for younger students and does not dwell on the horrific descriptions of events in the camps. Martin gives moving descriptions of his experiences as well as the actions of adults who put their own lives at risk to help him and his younger sister. There are also various images and photographs in the book which make the events described accessible to all students.



## **Martin and his family**

It is important that pupils understand that Martin was a young boy who had committed no crime, but was persecuted due to prejudice and bigotry. Allow your pupils time to look at the family photos of Martin and his sister (*Martin and Erica's Journey*, page 22). Encourage them to answer questions with supporting evidence from the photos. The aim is to move away from stereotypical responses and realise that we are all unique human beings.



Martin and Erica



# Pedagogical Issues and Educational Principles

When planning to teach a lesson or deliver a Scheme of Work on the Holocaust, there are a number of pedagogical issues that teachers need to consider. The Holocaust was a highly complex series of historical events, the majority of which were horrific and traumatic. The subject matter of the Holocaust is therefore challenging for teachers and students alike, and careful consideration must be given to how this history is approached in the classroom; for while the Holocaust raises a range of important questions and touches on a variety of contemporary themes, there are specific issues around its educational delivery.

In recent years an international consensus has developed around what constitutes good practice in relation to Holocaust education. An extensive list of these educational principles is available from the Holocaust Educational Trust ([www.het.org.uk](http://www.het.org.uk)) as well as the International Task Force ([www.holocausttaskforce.org](http://www.holocausttaskforce.org)) websites. For the purposes of this resource, the following are particularly relevant:

- **Rehumanise and Personalise**

In scale and scope the Holocaust was an enormous occurrence, which is frequently reduced to statistics alone. This is an impersonal approach which makes the events difficult to grasp, and should be countered by focusing on individual experiences and emphasising the humanity of all those who were involved in them.

- **Avoid horror**

Sensitivity should be shown to students, victims and survivors. This means avoiding the use of horrific imagery, for this can upset and desensitize students, dehumanise victims, and portray those affected by the Holocaust in a manner recognisable to the perpetrators. With younger students it also means avoiding the more graphic events that occurred in the ghettos, camps, and round-ups.

- **Use testimony**

A mass of documentation relating to the Holocaust thankfully still survives today, but does not necessarily reveal the human impact of the events. The testimony of victims and survivors is therefore invaluable in bringing to life this history.

For various reasons the Holocaust is not an “easy” subject to learn about, so careful consideration needs to be given to the age at which students are introduced to it. With younger students it becomes all the more important to have clear planning and intended outcomes which are realised through good educational practice.



## Resource Guidance and Suggested Activities

*Martin and Erica's Journey* is a resource designed in accordance with international educational principles and as such is suitable for use with students in Year 6 and above when teaching about the Holocaust. The book lends itself to class reading and, after completing the story, the teacher may wish to arrange through the Holocaust Educational Trust for a Holocaust survivor to visit the school and speak to students about their experiences.

*Martin and Erica's Journey* touches on a number of issues that are relevant to students of all ages, and teachers should consider addressing these when using the resource. These include the following:

### Family:

At the centre of the story are the experiences of Martin and his family. One activity teachers may wish their students to undertake is to construct a family tree, which can record information like dates and places of birth and death, and this can also be used to explore matters of chronology and continuity through time.

### Geographical Scale and Scope:

Martin's journey traverses a number of different countries at different times during the period of the Third Reich, and in so doing highlights the scale and scope of the Holocaust. While some students may already be familiar with some of the places referred to in the story, a possible activity would involve students marking onto a map of Europe all of the towns and cities mentioned by

Martin. These markers might also have a box of information about each particular place, including what happened to Martin and his family there. The journeys of various family members could also be shown on the map by way of coloured wool and directional arrows. This activity could be extended further by students additionally plotting the journey of Martin's contemporaries Anne Frank and Paul Oppenheimer. In turn, students might consider the following:

- How is Martin's journey different to Anne's and Paul's?
- How is it similar?
- Which parts of Martin's journey helped him and his sister to survive?



Martin's mother  
and father



## Persecution:

Martin and his family committed no crime and yet they were discriminated against on account of their religious background. Teachers might make use of the photographs of Martin and his family found in the book to encourage students to consider:

- Can we tell by looking at a person where they are from?
- Can we tell from someone's appearance what religion they believe in?
- How are these photos similar to others that you or your family may have?

The issue of persecution runs throughout the story, and makes itself apparent at various different junctures. On each of these occasions the teacher can use events described by Martin to open discussions in the class, depending on the age, ability and maturity of students. One instance of persecution is found on pages 4-5. Martin begins by telling us that Jewish people weren't allowed to keep pets before going on to talk about his parents. Students could discuss the following:

- What was the point of stopping Jews from keeping pets?
- Is it fair that Jews and non-Jews were not allowed to marry?
- Why do some people discriminate against others?

Another episode described by Martin is his arrest on page 8. Here students could consider:

- Why did the teacher tell the young Dutch men that Martin had not come into school?
- Martin remembers the teacher had an "ashen face". What does this mean?
- What possible reasons could the Nazis have for arresting a five-year-old boy?

On page 15 Martin describes being deported from Westerbork. Questions that might be discussed include:

- Why didn't people try to escape from the railway station?
- What words might you use to describe conditions in the cattle trucks?
- How would Martin have felt at the end of this journey?

Martin's arrival at Theresienstadt sees his world turned upside down even more. While reading this section, the class could think about the following:

- What does Martin mean when he says that he probably did not think about his sister?
- Why did the boy and the Dutch woman decide to help Martin?
- How were people able to survive such conditions?

## Other People's Actions

A distinctive feature of Martin's story is the various people who in one way or another helped him and his sister. This theme is a very important one, and appears throughout the book in different ways. One activity which can help to explore the issue of relief and rescue would be for students to create a wall display focusing on the individuals who helped. The display could consist of brief profiles outlining who the person was, what they did, what risks they were taking, and what happened to them. In turn, this display could form the basis of a class discussion on why more people did not try and hide or help Jewish people.

At different stages in the book, Martin outlines particular events that could also be used to stimulate discussion on other people's actions. The first of these is on pages 5-6, when Martin goes to stay with his father's friends, the Rademakers. Here, students could discuss:

- Why did the Rademakers treat Martin as if he were their son?
- What reasons did the Nazis have for punishing people who helped Jews?
- What might the "terrible consequences" be?



Martin's maternal grandparents



Martin then outlines how the Rademakers were arrested

and Erica was captured. Here, students could answer these questions:

- How did Martin's actions put Jo Rademaker in danger?
- Why did people like the Rademakers and the Bangmas decide to take the risks they did?
- Were the Bangmas right to hand over Erica?

In the following section, Martin tells us what happened to the Rademakers and the Bangmas. Students could now consider:

- Was Jo Rademaker an enemy of the Nazis?
- Who was responsible for Jo's death?
- What made some people resist the Nazis while others decided to help them?

Another opportunity to discuss other people's actions arises after Martin is deported from Westerbork (pages 14-15). En route to Theresienstadt, Martin's train stops at "a big railway station in Germany" and he describes seeing people carrying on with their own lives and not paying any attention to the Jewish people huddled on the floor. By this point, Martin and the other Jews would have been severely malnourished and dirty from their journey. In small groups, students could discuss:

- Why do the German people at the railway station ignore the Jewish people?
- Could the German people have done anything to help, or was the situation too difficult?
- Why do we sometimes ignore unpleasant things we see taking place, rather than getting involved to do something about them?

## **Rebuilding**

A frequent shortcoming of Holocaust education is that students studying the events don't consider how survivors tried to rebuild their lives after the war ended. Martin's testimony ends with descriptions of his journey to England, what he did in the years after 1945 and his reasons for telling his story. As students read this section, they could be encouraged to discuss the following:

- What feelings might Martin have had when he started school in England?
- How can we make people who are new to our school or country feel more welcome?
- Why is it important that survivors like Martin share their stories with us?
- What can we do to make sure that the Holocaust is remembered and not forgotten?

In addition to the above themes and issues raised by the book, Martin and Erica's Journey also provides students with key pieces of historical knowledge, such as significant dates, events, and developments. Important concepts and initiatives are also referred to, with Martin mentioning things like deportation, concentration camps and ghettos. It is crucial that the teacher's understanding of these terms is secure, and the following glossary may be useful in this regard.



## Glossary

Antisemitism	Prejudice against and persecution of Jewish people.
Auschwitz-Birkenau	The largest Nazi death camp, located in Poland.
Buchenwald	One of the largest concentration camps in Germany, constructed in 1937 and liberated in April 1945.
Cattle truck	Railway cars commonly used to transport livestock were used during the Holocaust to take Jews to the death camps in Poland.
Concentration camp	A site built by the Nazis to imprison individuals and groups of people they considered “enemies of the state”, such as political opponents, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Jews.
Death camp	A site established by the Nazis with the sole purpose of killing people. There were six such camps, all located in Poland.
Deportation	The rounding up of Jews from their homes for transportation in cattle wagons to ghettos and camps in Poland.
Ghetto	An enclosed area of a city, town or village where Jews were forced by the Nazis and their collaborators to live. Jews were not allowed to leave the ghetto without permission, and disease and overcrowding were rife.
Judenrat	Jewish councils established in ghettos across Europe, the Judenrat were forced to implement orders from the Nazi authorities and were responsible for providing the community with basic services. They remain shrouded in controversy, with some members of the councils accused of collaboration.
Liberation	The freeing of those imprisoned under the Nazis by Allied soldiers of Britain, the United States and Soviet Russia.
Neuengamme	A sub-camp of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in northern Germany.
Star of David	A traditional symbol of the Jewish people, used by the Nazis as a method of identifying and discriminating against Jews. The Star was sewn on to people’s clothes.
Theresienstadt	Also known by its Czech name “Terezin”, Theresienstadt was a hybrid camp-ghetto housed in a garrison town in Czechoslovakia. Part transit centre, part ghetto, part labour camp, Theresienstadt operated from November 1941 to May 1945.
Transit camp	These camps served as gathering sites for Jews and were usually the last stop before deportation to the death camps in Eastern Europe.
Westerbork	A camp in Holland which from 1942 to 1944 served as a transit centre for Jews who were being deported to Eastern Europe.



# Notes



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## HOLOCAUST EDUCATIONAL TRUST

[www.het.org.uk](http://www.het.org.uk)

Founded by Lord Janner of Braunstone and the late Lord Merlyn Rees, the Holocaust Educational Trust was formed in 1988. The Trust was developed by MPs and Peers as a result of renewed interest and need for knowledge about the Holocaust during the passage of the War Crimes Act in the late 1980s. Our aim is to raise awareness and understanding in schools and amongst the wider public of the Holocaust and its relevance today. We believe the Holocaust must have a permanent place in our nation's collective memory.

One of the Trust's first achievements was to ensure that the Holocaust was included in the National Curriculum for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 1991 – for Key Stage 3 students (11-14 year olds). We also successfully campaigned to have the assets of Holocaust victims and Survivors released and returned to their rightful owners.

Having played a crucial role in the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK, the Trust continues to play a key role in the delivery of this national commemorative event.

In 2010 the Government issued a new award to recognise the small group of British men and women who worked to aid and rescue Jewish people and other persecuted groups during the Holocaust – as a direct result of an initiative by the Trust to raise their profile and secure formal recognition for them.

We work in schools, colleges and higher education institutions, providing teacher training workshops and lectures, as well as teaching aids and resource materials.

For further information about the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust, please contact:

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## NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS

[www.teachers.org.uk](http://www.teachers.org.uk)

Tolerance, equality of opportunity, a good local school for every child and human rights generally are at the heart of the philosophy, policies and activities of the National Union of Teachers.

The NUT is the largest teachers' union. It has a proud record of campaigning for the rights of children and those who teach them.

Recognising that schools are at the heart of promoting social progress, equality and justice, the NUT pursues humanitarian objectives through the preparation and dissemination of materials which provide practical help and act as resources for teachers.

Through national training courses; national advisory committees on gender, race, disability and sexual orientation; and its work within Education International the NUT seeks to educate and involve its members and the broader teaching profession in issues of social justice and international understanding.

The marking of Holocaust Memorial Day each year exemplifies the commitment of the National Union of Teachers to peace, social justice and international understanding.

