



# Educators' Guide

## Sidonia's Thread

### Crafting a Life From Holocaust to High Fashion

A young Hungarian woman finds herself totally alone after the Holocaust,  
the only survivor of her family.

With her toddler in tow, she makes her way to America.

She survives in a new country through her wits, her imagination,  
and above all, her hands.

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# Introduction

## Purpose

This Educators' Guide walks students and teachers through the life of Sidonia Perlstein, in conjunction with the exhibit entitled "Sidonia's Thread: Crafting a Life from Holocaust to High Fashion." With the aid of her beautiful clothing designs, Sidonia's story is linked together with historical background and essential concepts in an effort to provide a meaningful and unique way to uncover the story of a remarkable Holocaust survivor. This Educators' Guide facilitates an engaging connection between students, teachers, and the exhibit, and is separated into sections based upon the following goals:

1. To promote an understanding of the concept of how an ordinary person, under certain circumstances, can lead an extraordinary life.
2. To promote knowledge regarding the particular plight of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust.
3. To bring about a greater knowledge regarding the lives of immigrants in the United States in the last half of the twentieth century.
4. To enhance knowledge about the relationship between creative design, dressmaking, and textiles and the Holocaust and its aftermath.
5. To learn some nontraditional methods of remembering those who have had a meaningful impact on our lives today.

The goals listed above showcase themes central to Sidonia Perlstein's life, incorporating the important history of Hungarian Jews and their experiences during the Holocaust, the topic of immigration, and the struggles and successes of starting a new life in a different country in the aftermath of World War II. The perseverance demonstrated by Holocaust survivors like Sidonia Perlstein is stressed throughout the themes, historical pieces, and activities included in this guide.

This guide provides historical background or context pieces accompanied by visuals and educational activities suitable for high school and college-aged students. While all five sections of the guide provide valuable educational experiences, teachers may not be able to utilize every section, and may have to pick and choose what to use. Each section is designed to provide a comprehensive experience related to the section goal. Educators may choose whether some or all of the sections and activities are suitable for their particular classrooms.

As a prerequisite for utilizing this guide, students and teachers should have background knowledge regarding the causes, events, and impact of the Holocaust. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, specifically the "Learn About the Holocaust" link contains valuable information to aid with the building of this foundation. In addition, the Echoes and Reflections website offers lessons that are useful for gaining this background information. Both organizations also offer teacher-training programs for Holocaust education.

United States Holocaust  
Memorial Museum "Learn  
About the Holocaust" Link:  
<https://www.ushmm.org/learn>

Echoes and Reflections link:  
<https://echoesandreflections.org/teach/>

## Resources

Resources consulted and used for the narratives included in each section can be found at the end of this guide, in the “Resources” section. Each narrative is followed by suggested activities for high school and college-aged students, including internet resource links that are immediately accessible, without cost. A glossary of important terms is included at the end of this guide as well.

## Standards Addressed in this Educators' Guide

The reputable Echoes and Reflections organization, which specializes in Holocaust education, created a Standards Alignment Chart for the lessons included in their program, which incorporates standards from both the Common Core and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) C3 Framework. Due to the comprehensive nature of this chart, the connected content, and the credibility of the Echoes and Reflections program, the Echoes and Reflections Standards Alignment Chart was used as a guide for addressing applicable standards in this Educators' Guide. Most or all of the Common Core and NCSS C3 Framework standards listed in the Echoes and Reflections chart have the potential of being covered throughout the activities in this guide. The educators' choice regarding which activities they wish to use for their classrooms, along with adaptations, will impact which standards they address.

Please consult the first link to the left to access the Echoes and Reflections Standards Alignment Chart. Note that the lessons referenced in the Echoes and Reflections Standards Alignment Chart are lessons included in that program, and not this Educators' Guide. However, the standards from the Common Core and the NCSS C3 Framework listed in the Echoes and Reflections chart can be addressed through the activities in this guide.

Furthermore, the second link from the Museum of Jewish Heritage also includes standards from the Common Core that are applicable to this Educators' Guide. While many of them are also included in the Echoes and Reflections chart, it may be worthwhile to view this link from the Museum of Jewish Heritage when considering standards.

Echoes and Reflections  
Standards Alignment Chart  
[https://echoesandreflections.org/wp-content/themes/twentyxixteenechoes/fileview.php?source=1&file\\_nm=2020/02/11\\_Acadmic-Standards-1.pdf](https://echoesandreflections.org/wp-content/themes/twentyxixteenechoes/fileview.php?source=1&file_nm=2020/02/11_Acadmic-Standards-1.pdf)

The Museum of Jewish Heritage  
<https://education.mjhnyc.org/aligning-with-the-common-core/>

## *Educators' Guide Acknowledgments*

**Hanna Perlstein Marcus** Sidonia's Daughter, Author, Contributor, Lead Editor

**Anya Sokolovskaya** Associate Professor of Theater in Costume Design at Eastern Connecticut State University, Exhibit Curator

**Jennifer Wilson** Social Studies Teacher, Lead Educators' Guide Developer

**Hope Marie Cook** Head of Curriculum Center, Lead Education Librarian, J. Eugene Smith Library, Eastern Connecticut State University

# From Ordinary to Extraordinary

*How an ordinary person, under certain circumstances, can lead an extraordinary life.*

**ORIGINAL  
TO BE GIVEN TO  
THE PERSON NATURALIZED**

**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

No. 7234775

**OPENED HERE**  **HERE OPENED**

Petition No. 37155

Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization: Date of birth February 28, 1919; sex female; complexion medium; color of eyes gray; color of hair brown; height 5 feet 5 inches; weight 133 pounds; visible distinctive marks none; Marital status Unmarried; former nationality Hungary

I, certify that the description above given is true, and that the photograph affixed hereto is a likeness of me.

*Sign here*

*Sidonia Perlstein*  
(Complete and true signature of holder)

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, s.  
Hampden

Be it known that at a term of the Superior Court of Hampden County held pursuant to law at Springfield, Massachusetts on November 5, 1954 the Court having found that SIDONIA PERLSTEIN then residing at 64 Osgood St., Springfield, Massachusetts intends to reside permanently in the United States (when so required by the Naturalization Laws of the United States), had in all other respects complied with the applicable provisions of such naturalization laws, and was entitled to be admitted to citizenship, thereupon ordered that such person be, and she was admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.

In testimony whereof the seal of the court is hereunto affixed this 5th day of November in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and fifty-four and of our Independence the one hundred and seventy-eighth

*Sidonia Perlstein*  
Seal

*Edward G. Shea*  
Clerk of the Superior Court.

By \_\_\_\_\_ Deputy Clerk.

**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

*It is a violation of the U. S. Code (and punishable as such) to copy, print, photograph, or otherwise illegally use this certificate.*

Sidonia's naturalization certificate

## Who was Sidonia Perlstein?

On November 5, 1954, Sidonia Perlstein became a United States citizen. In preparation for this event, Sidonia spent several nights a week for nearly five years, walking to citizenship classes with her young daughter Hanna. This momentous event was marked by a new sense of optimism, as well as a legal change to the spelling of Sidonia's name, removing the "z" following the "S" in her first name. Yet, nothing could erase the events that brought Sidonia and Hanna to America or stop Sidonia from using her lifesaving skill and expertise as a seamstress to provide for herself and for her daughter.

Sidonia was born in February of 1913 in Dámóc, Hungary, a small town far from the urban centers like Budapest, with only a handful of Jewish families, where she lived with her parents



Sidonia's Hungarian home

and her five older siblings. Sidonia and her siblings learned to sew at a very young age. The family's clothing was simple, work related garb, using sturdy fabrics that were suitable for farm chores and country living in the early twentieth century. Sidonia, her three sisters, and her mother shared their Singer sewing machine, and used their expertise in both machine sewing and hand sewing to earn money for the family. Their abilities were recognized in their community, as their Catholic neighbors would bring the embroidered cloth they used in their Easter baskets to Sidonia's mother to inspect. Thus, for three decades, Sidonia lived a contented life in Dámóc as part of a large family, and helped her father to run his grocery store and trading business, often taking a train to nearby Sátoraljaújhely to trade for her father and to visit her older sister Etel there.

World War II began with the invasion of Poland in 1939. Although Sidonia and her family had been impacted during the late 1930s by the restrictions placed upon them by the Hungarian government of Miklos Horthy, the Jews in Dámóc knew nothing of Adolf Eichmann, or the plan already well underway of carrying out the Final Solution. Many Jews in Hungary's countryside believed they had been spared deportation, or that deportation would mean forced labor only. One of the first groups of Jews to be deported in Hungary, Sidonia, her family, and the other Jews in Dámóc were sent to the ghetto created in Sátoraljaújhely. They were among thirty or forty people staying in her sister Etel's apartment. In May, she was deported again, this time by train, in a horrifying trip to Auschwitz. Upon arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Sidonia and her family faced a selection, where she and her sister Laura were separated from the rest of her immediate family.

After working as slave laborers and surviving multiple selections in Auschwitz, Sidonia and Laura were transferred to Dachau in July of 1944, where they arrived on August 1, 1944. While in Dachau, Sidonia and Laura walked several miles daily to a nearby castle taken over by the Wehrmacht (German army), in order to help with cooking and cleaning. A while later, Sidonia was transferred to a subcamp where she broke her leg. An injury in these circumstances often led to death. The next day, a guard appeared at the roll call and asked if any of the prisoners could sew. Sensing this was a life or death moment, as her injury meant she could no longer do the job she had been given, Sidonia loudly volunteered, catching the attention of the guard. By volunteering to sew, her life at Dachau was spared, and from that point on she sewed various projects for soldiers, officers, and clerks.

In December 1944, Sidonia and Laura were sent to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. It was there that Sidonia met Yuri, a Czech prisoner who was designated by the Nazis as a *kapo* or supervisor. Toughened by her own situation yet empathetic to the prisoners, Yuri often helped the prisoners get food or easier labor jobs at the camp. Her grit and compassion not only helped Sidonia survive the camp, but became a model of resilience. Unfortunately, due to the inhumane conditions, it was also there that Laura tragically died, leaving Sidonia to face liberation alone, when British troops arrived and liberated Bergen-Belsen on April 15, 1945.

The survivors of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp then transferred to a nearby army training camp, converted to a displaced persons (DP) camp. Sidonia stayed, had a brief relationship, and gave birth to her daughter Hanna in August of 1947. Sidonia remained in the DP camp in Bergen-Belsen from 1945-1949, sewing clothing for herself, as well as sewing items for trade; even sewing for a few paying customers, allowing her to purchase the few items she would bring with her to America, including a sewing machine.

### ***From Europe to America***

Sidonia also tried to locate family in the United States who could sponsor her and her daughter, but she was unable to gain sponsorship from prosperous relatives in California. Thus, with the passage of the Displaced Person's Act in 1948, and with the help of several organizations, Sidonia and Hanna set sail for the United States on the USAT General R.L. Howze, with Sidonia's paperwork noting her intended occupation as a seamstress. She and Hanna arrived in New York City, without any family to meet them, on July 3, 1949.

Sidonia and Hanna were sent shortly after their arrival to Springfield, Massachusetts into a neighborhood with around one hundred other survivors, where Sidonia set about the overwhelming task of restarting her life. Despite her skill as a seamstress, it took nearly two years to locate a job. Knowing relatively little English, and a single mother with a sixth-grade education and no professional training, she started working at the Victoria Dress Company in Springfield in 1951. Fast and efficient, Sidonia's talent was recognized, and she was promoted after a few years to forewoman. This promotion increased her self-esteem as well as her income.

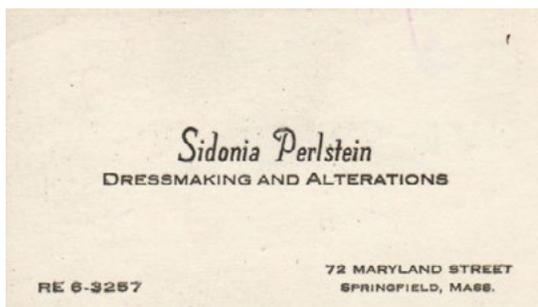


Sidonia (Left) and Hanna's (Right) visa photographs

Her boss, Charles Podell, respecting her skill and resilience, made sure that Sidonia and Hanna's basic needs were met. He often gave Sidonia advice regarding how to navigate through her new life in America, especially how to cope with the hostile attitudes that many of the refugees faced. Sidonia assimilated into American life in part due to her job at the Victoria Dress factory, where she continued the development of her skill and expertise as a seamstress and a leader.

While she sewed pre-cut pieces into clothing items during the day at the factory, at home she created one-of-a-kind clothing with Hanna as her favorite model. Her careful attention to the look and feel of fabric, and to the placement of patterns on her chosen fabric pieces, allowed her to design perfectly fitting clothing items for Hanna to wear throughout her life. She was able to maintain accuracy while quickly completing garments, supplying Hanna with a plentiful wardrobe while testing her ideas regarding modern fashion.

When Mr. Podell retired and sold the factory, Sidonia was devastated that the new owner would not honor her position as forewoman. She chose to leave the factory and, taking a leap of faith but trusting her expertise, she began her own design and tailoring business. Within weeks, she proudly showed Hanna her business cards pronouncing her new enterprise: "Sidonia Perlstein, Dressmaking and Alterations."



Sidonia's business card

Her clients grew from a few customers to many, as she became widely known throughout Western New England. Sidonia reinvented herself again, and became a confident, popular and well-respected member of her community, keeping all of her customers' information carefully handwritten in her four by six spiral notebooks, written both in Hungarian and English. While at a fitting, they all confided in her and asked her for advice, appreciating her ability to "peer into a person's soul" while designing clothing that made them feel special. She always managed to make a living and provide for her daughter, even helping others with loans when they were in need. Sidonia never married and never lost her charming Hungarian accent. She continued to design and sew until the age of ninety, only a few years before her death at ninety-three in 2006.

# Activities

## Essential Question

- How can ordinary people do extraordinary things?

### Activities

Students can complete the following activities individually or in small groups.

1. Make a three-column chart either digitally or on paper. Go back through the overview of Sidonia's life, and make a list of times when Sidonia faced adverse circumstances in the left column. In the middle column, list what actions Sidonia took, along with any other outside factors, to deal with each circumstance. In the third column, list attributes or character traits that would be needed in order to deal with circumstances such as these. If needed, consult the link to the left for attribute/trait ideas.

Underneath the chart, write at least a paragraph reflection describing the difficult circumstances that Sidonia faced in her life, and the ways in which she managed to overcome them. What was remarkable about her story?

2. How and why do ordinary people do remarkable things? Read the three articles linked to the left by Laurel Dalrymple from [npr.org](https://www.npr.org/2014/06/06/319404315/heroes-among-us-when-ordinary-people-become-extraordinary), social psychologist Philip Zimbardo from the Facing History and Ourselves website, and Dr. David Sack from *Psychology Today*. What characteristics do they believe takes a person from ordinary to extraordinary? After reading all three, make a list of these characteristics, and then compare them to your list in the third column of the chart you made for Sidonia's story. What makes someone a hero? Is a hero a perfect person? Can anyone be extraordinary?

Narrowing down the list of characteristics from the third column of the chart regarding Sidonia, and the list from the three articles, decide what the MOST significant and necessary characteristics or traits are that makes an ordinary person extraordinary. Try to narrow it down to 1-3 characteristics or traits. Write a reflection about why these are the most important, and also why a hero, and/or an extraordinary person, is not a "perfect person." What can we learn from these traits? How can an ordinary person lead an extraordinary life?

3. Finally, consider a person you believe to be ordinary that did something extraordinary or lived an extraordinary life, or research a person who fits this ideal. If you do not know a person, looking up biographies is an interesting way to find stories about remarkable people. There are several links on the next page that may help locate a name to research. Once a person has been chosen, locate information about this person online, or in the

<https://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-attributes.html>

Laura Dalrymple:  
<https://www.npr.org/2014/06/06/319404315/heroes-among-us-when-ordinary-people-become-extraordinary>

Philip Zimbardo:  
<https://www.facinghistory.org/rescuers/philip-zimbardo-what-makes-hero>

David Sack:  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/where-science-meets-the-steps/201503/the-5-traits-extraordinary-ordinary-people>

Websites with biography suggestions and information: Biography.com  
<https://www.biography.com/people>

Encyclopedia of World Biography:  
<https://www.notablebiographies.com/>

Time 100  
<https://time.com/collection/100-most-influential-people-2020/>

A+E Biography  
<https://www.aenetworks.com/brands/biography>

Book Riot (recommendations for biographies):  
<https://bookriot.com/best-biographies/>

Also, researching Holocaust survivors provides for remarkable stories as well. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is a good place to locate Holocaust survivor testimonies: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum link to testimonies:  
<https://www.ushmm.org/remember>

To connect to the overall theme of this exhibit, two Holocaust survivors who had a family history in the garment and fashion industry before the war, and who became notable fashion designers after the war, are Lucie Porges and Renee Firestone. See links below:

Lucie Porges:  
<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/porges-lucie>

<https://vimeo.com/9628493>

Renee Firestone:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCjd3lYUjQ8>

[https://jewishjournal.com/current\\_edition/177290/](https://jewishjournal.com/current_edition/177290/)

school, university, or local library. Choosing a local individual and completing an oral interview would work as well. See tips for completing oral interviews here: <https://www.oralhistory.org/best-practices/>.

Using your research, document the background of the person, and the circumstances that made his or her life extraordinary. A three-column chart as described in #1 would also be appropriate for processing this research. Are the characteristics or traits noted for Sidonia, as well as those noted by the articles in activity #2, present in the actions and choices of the person you researched? Why or why not? Share your stories with classmates or partners, and compare traits.

4. As a final activity, make a digital product such as a brochure, slide presentation, digital poster, or similar application that can be shared with others, or a bulletin board display for the classroom, hallway, library, or other area of the school or university to showcase the stories of the remarkable people that were discovered through your research, including Sidonia Perlstein. Search for photographs of each person, and place important information near their photograph. Finally, scatter the characteristics and traits of extraordinary people, which were discovered through the research and the article links, prominently throughout the display or digital product. If desired, use more than the 1-3 traits that were reflected upon for activity #2. Once completed, the display can be used as a motivational tool especially with discussions related to resilience. It can also be a way to honor local heroes, or provide a foundation to create a personal or collective Code of Ethics.

# Hungarian Jews

## *The Particular Plight of Hungarian Jews During the Holocaust*

### **A Brief History of Jews in Hungary**

The existence of a Jewish population in Hungary can be traced back to the Ancient Roman Empire. By the latter part of the 11th century, waves of Jewish immigrants poured into Hungary from Germany, Bohemia and Moravia. During this time, King Koloman provided protection for Jews in return for taxation, giving Hungary a reputation as a safe haven for Jews. For the next few centuries, Hungarian Jews faced both advancements and restrictions. They were allowed to have leadership positions in businesses, were provided legal protection, and were granted continued immigration rights. Yet, they also faced anti-Jewish laws, were unable to lease land, and had to wear badges. They were banished from Hungary during the Black Plague in 1349, but were allowed to return decades later, where they continued to face the ebb and flow of restrictions and improvements.

Ottoman Rule in the sixteenth and seventeenth century allowed for religious tolerance for Hungarian Jews. The eighteenth century brought Hapsburg rule, and with it, a growth of antisemitism and the expulsion of Jews from Hungarian cities, plus an added “toleration” tax. The eighteenth century also began a marked increase in the population of Jews in Hungary. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, Hungarian Jews experienced a lifting of restrictions and emancipation, allowing Jews to partake in many aspects of Hungarian life, ranging from agriculture to business to the arts. From 1735 to 1869, the Jewish population in Hungary grew from 11,600 to 542,000. By the early twentieth century, Hungary had become a diverse national and religious state, with over 800,000 Jews who represented both Central and Eastern European Jewry.

The massive growth in the population of Hungarian Jewry during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was especially due to immigration. Most Jews were peppered throughout the countryside and small villages, as innkeepers, distillers, butchers, tailors and other craft trades. Some were established merchants and tradesmen, ranging from peddlers who sold goods out of a sack to local villages, to those who created trade networks that linked together large estates, warehouses, and even urban centers. Hapsburg centralizing policies afforded more Jews the chance for university education, but also the expectation to assimilate. By the mid-nineteenth century, many Jews still remained in the countryside, while thousands of Jews lived in urban centers, and most remarkably, around 40% lived in market towns, which became thriving communities.

By the late nineteenth century, a rift between Orthodox, reform/conservative and other Jewish groups was evident. Assimilation grew among Hungarian Jews, and Jewish participation in the political, economic and cultural realms of Hungarian life grew. Jews were recognized as a religion and given the same rights as Protestants and Catholics. Jewish merchants made up over 50% of all Hungarian merchants by World War I. While Hungarian Jews faced antisemitic laws prior to World War I, the aftermath of the war brought the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and an escalation of violence against Jews. Despite 10,000 Jewish casualties during

World War I, anti-Jewish legislation throughout the 1920s and 1930s caused hundreds of thousands Hungarian Jews to be reduced to poverty. Hungarian Jews created self-help agencies to provide aid to those in need.



OUTLINE MAP OF THE AUSTRIA-HUNGARY EMPIRE. Drawn and engraved especially to show the Provinces comprising the Empire, and their locations as they were at the beginning of the war. This is a country of many nationalities and languages.

**Pre-War boundaries for Austria Hungary.**  
 Kelly Miller's History of the World War for Human Rights, Washington, DC: Austin Jenkins Company, 1919, page 266. Red Square denotes area important to the Perlstein family; arrow is pointing to approximate location of Dámóc, where Sidonia and her family lived.



THE PARTITION OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARY: SHOWING THE BOUNDARIES AS DEFINED IN THE TREATIES.

**Post-War boundaries for Austria-Hungary.**  
 The Times History of the War: Volume XXI, London: Printing House Square, 1920, page 416.

416 THE TIMES HISTORY OF THE WAR.

## The Nazi Occupation of Hungary

Miklos Horthy took over the government in Hungary as regent in 1920. The Numerus Clausus Law was put into effect, which limited Jews in universities, and a harsh crackdown against counterrevolutionaries and Jews also began. In the 1930s and early 1940s the Horthy government began to impose further restrictions on Hungarian Jews, especially related to certain professions and schools. Jewish men were often drafted into forced labor, and Jews in general were subjected to racial laws similar to the Nuremberg Laws in Germany. Hungarian Jews were also required by the government to present their birth certificates, a strategy that was consistent with the Nazi method of “registering” Jews in an effort to determine their numbers and their locations, in preparation for further action. For instance, once Sidonia’s father Simon verified his paperwork, he was no longer permitted to operate his grocery store or tavern; he could only continue to trade.



Map of Hungarian Expansion from United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Even though Horthy had entered into an alliance with Germany in 1941, after losing many Hungarians to battles in the Soviet Union, he attempted to withdraw from this alliance. Germany responded by invading Hungary. On March 19, 1944, Operation Margarethe began in Hungary. German Wehrmacht paratroopers followed by occupation forces which included Einsatzgruppen, SS and Gestapo, invaded and took over Hungary without resistance from the Hungarian military, or the civilian population. Once the military operation was deemed successful, the Wehrmacht soldiers were dispersed to the front within a month. The government of Hungary was reorganized to align with both German military goals and the goals of the Final Solution. Adolf Eichmann and his Special Commando, with the help of certain departments within the Hungarian police, led the effort towards the latter.

The invasion of Hungary meant the brutal imposition of Nazi genocidal policies at a terrifying pace. Eichmann's actions towards the implantation of the Final Solution meant an immediate seizure of Jewish property, the decree for Jews to wear the yellow star, and the deportation of Jews to ghettos. The duration of Hungarian Jews in ghettos was shortened considerably, usually from two to six weeks, due to the invasion of Hungary happening so late in the war. From May to July of 1944, well over 400,000 Hungarian Jews were deported mostly to Auschwitz, many of whom were gassed upon arrival. Within these events, the Jews of Dámóc were some of the first Hungarian Jews to be rounded up during this operation. The Perlstein's were removed from their home in March or early April of 1944, driven away by a neighbor's horse and wagon, and sent to the ghetto in Sátoraljaújhely. In May, the Jews in the ghetto were rounded up for deportation to Auschwitz, including the Perlstein family

Horthy managed to halt the deportation in July, although most of the Jews had already been deported. The only considerable population of Hungarian Jews remaining resided in Budapest. Horthy's government was overthrown by the fascist Arrow Cross Party, and the Hungarian Jews in Budapest were subjected to an intensely brutal purge of the city, where tens of thousands of Jews were shot on the Danube River or forced on death marches; the remaining Jews were forced into a ghetto with horrific conditions. Foreign diplomats like Raoul Wallenberg and Carl Lutz worked to try to save as many Hungarian Jews as they could in Budapest. Hungary was liberated by the Soviets in April of 1945. In the short period of time that the Hungarian Jews faced Nazi persecution around 568,000 perished.



Map of Deportation from Hungarian Ghettos from [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#). Red circle shows the location of Sátoraljaújhely, also labeled on the map, the ghetto from which the Perlstein family was deported to Auschwitz.

# Activities



- How did Hungarian Jews compare or contrast to other European Jews?
- How did Sidonia's life in Hungary affect her life later in the United States?
- How did it affect her creative designs?

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## Activities

### 1. Timeline of Hungarian Jews

A. Using the brief historical summary in this guide where helpful, plus the websites to the left, construct a written or digital timeline with around ten specific dates important to the history of Jews in Hungary. This can be completed individually, in partners, or small groups. More or less events could be included based upon preference and time. The possible dates to include on the timeline are plentiful. Therefore, thoughtfully choose the type of items to include, focusing upon political, economic, religious, social, intellectual and geographical changes related to the history of Jews in Hungary. Each item listed on the timeline should have the date and a brief description of the item.

The timelines should be available to share, either by hanging them around the classroom for a gallery walk, or sharing them in a digital format.

B. Once the timeline is completed, evaluate the timeline to find several turning point events. The number of events required on the timelines may determine the amount of turning points, but around three turning point events are desired. A discussion about what constitutes a turning point event should occur first, with ideas shared about possible turning points (a change or shift in direction) in a person's life, community, country, or the world. Then, circle or indicate three turning points on the timeline. More or less turning points can be chosen if desired. Include a brief explanation on the timeline as to why each of these items was a turning point.

C. Next, share timelines and compare events and turning points. This can happen in a gallery walk around the classroom, or by sharing timelines digitally. As timelines are shared, focus on the turning points on each. How do the turning point events on each timeline compare to each other? Which turning point events are the same across and which are different? Through discussion or a written assignment indicate why and how turning points were determined.

These website links should be used to research information for the timeline in question 1A:

The YIVO Encyclopedia for Jews in Eastern Europe:  
[https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hungary/Hungary\\_before\\_1918](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hungary/Hungary_before_1918)

The Jewish Virtual Library:  
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hungary-virtual-jewish-history-tour>

## 2. Comparative Study of European Jews

**Websites for question 2B:**  
**Overview of European Jews in Western and Eastern Europe from United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM):**  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-life-in-europe-before-the-holocaust>  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-population-of-europe-in-1933-population-data-by-country>  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-communities-of-prewar-germany>

**Specific resources on Hungarian Jews from the USHMM:**  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-community-of-munkacs-from-the-eighteenth-century-to-world-war-i>  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/hungary-before-the-german-occupation>  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/hungary-after-the-german-occupation>  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/raoul-wallenberg-and-the-rescue-of-jews-in-budapest>  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/collections-highlight-auschwitz-through-the-lens-of-the-ss?series=12>

**Specific resources on Hungarian Jews from Yad Vashem:**  
<https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/prewar-jewish-life-in-munkacs.html>  
<https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/prewar-jewish-life-in-budapest.html>  
<https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/jews-of-hungary-during-the-holocaust.html>

**Specific resources on Hungarian Jews from the Jewish Virtual Library:**  
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hungary-virtual-jewish-history-tour>

A. To get a better sense on how the history of Hungarian Jews compares to other groups of European Jews, create a four-column chart, either handwritten or digitally, individually, in partners, or in small groups. The first column should contain elements for comparison, such as (but not limited to) the following about Jews and Jewish groups:

- Important countries, cities, or towns mentioned in the research
- Languages spoken
- Professions/jobs mentioned
- Political/social status of Jews (especially in terms of rights given or taken away)
- Traditions, unifying factors, strengths
- Concerns or problems

The second column should contain the title “Western European Jews” which would include German Jews, and the third column should contain the title “Eastern European Jews.” Finally, the fourth column should be titled “Hungarian Jews.”

B. Next, using the websites to the left if desired, fill in the charts finding information pertaining to the items for assessment listed in column one for Western European, Eastern European, and Hungarian Jews. Consult all of the “Overview” websites for the sake of filling in the second and third columns of the chart. For the fourth column specifically on Hungary, several websites should at least be consulted, although time constraints may prohibit all of them from being viewed. The websites on Hungary could also be divided among individuals and groups, if consulting all of them is desired.

C. Using the timeline and the Comparative Study chart, make a list of unique features regarding the history of Hungarian Jews up through 1945 or so. What made their history the same or different? Are there any groups that are similar to Hungarian Jews in terms of what happened to them from 1933-1945? Despite these similarities, overall, what makes Hungarian Jews unique?

*For enrichment, watch this video from Centropa regarding Hungarian Jews, and compare its narrative to your research: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwscZpz-SLI>*

## 3. Connecting to Sidonia: How did Sidonia’s life in Hungary prior to her immigration impact the way in which she lived in the United States?

A. In order to answer this question, add to your knowledge regarding Sidonia’s life in Hungary and in the United States after her immigration using the resource suggestions to the left. Make a two-column chart to write down some notations regarding the information uncovered in this research. One column should be labeled “Life in Hungary,” the other should be labeled “Life in the United States.”

As you read or look through the following resources, write down important details about Sidonia’s life from Hungary and the United States. For the first column, consider

what her family did for a living in Hungary, how she and her siblings contributed to her family's way of life, and how the Perlstein's and their town of Dámóc fit into the overall history of Jews in Hungary. For the second column, consider how Sidonia and Hanna made their way to America, and how citizenship, language, the community in which they lived in Springfield, and the way in which Sidonia earned a living impacted their lives.

**Sources to consult include:**

- The brief summary of Sidonia's life in Section I of this guide.
- The information discovered in the timeline activity on Hungarian Jews and the comparative chart on European Jews may be helpful to put Sidonia's early life in Hungary into context.
- Look through the pictures marked as the "Original Exhibit" from the website, "[Sidonia's Thread: Crafting a Life from Holocaust to High Fashion.](#)" Focus especially upon the pictures of the display cases, especially the case that shows Sidonia's tools for her trade, such as the pincushion, shears, measuring tape, and pattern. Also note in this same case the picture of Sidonia's studio, and her notebook where she kept track of her customers.

Sidonia's tools



\*A resource to consult regarding possible available fabrics in Hungary can be found [here](#), in the *Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers, 1650-2000*.

**If desired, consult:**

Pages 67–81 of the book *Sidonia's Thread*, written by her daughter Hanna Perlstein Marcus, for more information regarding Sidonia's life in Hungary.

Pages 83–87, 105–112, and 127–134 of *Sidonia's Thread* which contain a few vignettes from Sidonia and Hanna's life in the United States

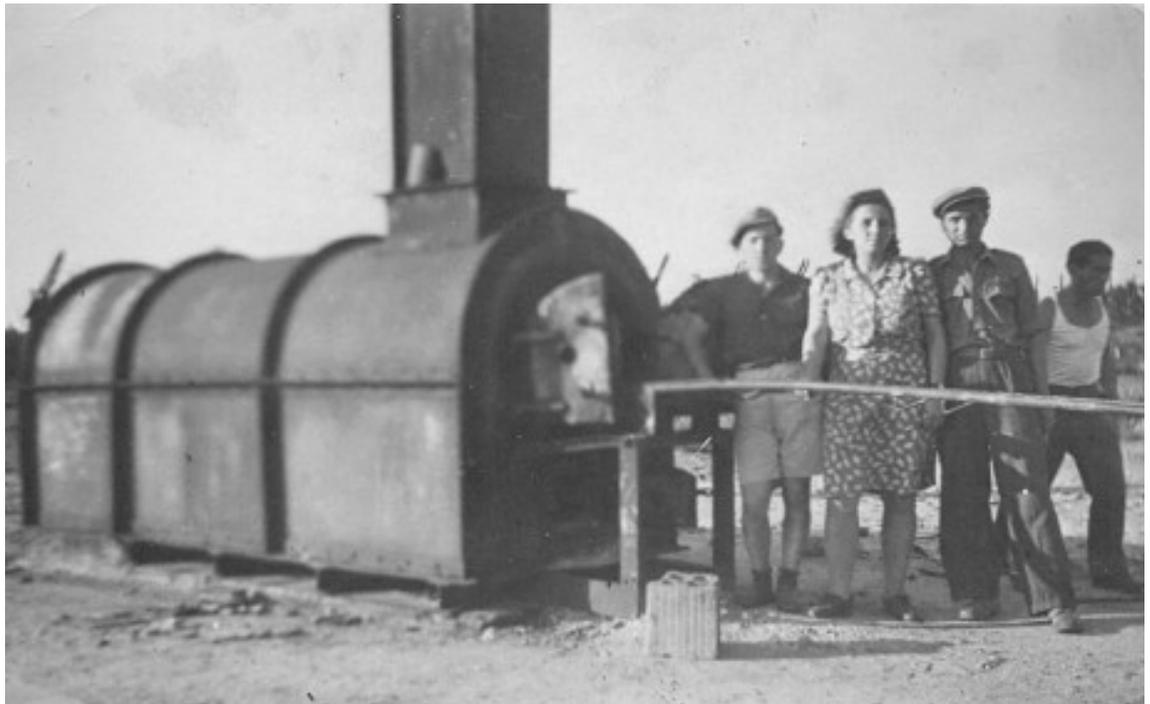
Using the same part of the exhibit, look through the pictures of the clothing pieces Sidonia designed for her daughter and granddaughter, Brenda. Consider the organic fabrics\* that Sidonia, her siblings, and her mother used to sew clothing for the Perlstein family in Hungary, and then consider her choice of fabric and design when she sewed for her daughter, granddaughter and customers in the United States. Note any similarities and differences. Write an essay or reflection beginning with a thesis statement and support it with your research evidence.

# Immigration and a New Life in America

*Challenges of Post-World War II Immigration and Starting a New Life in the United States.*

## Liberation

Liberation for Holocaust survivors like Sidonia Perlstein was a complicated experience that contained significant challenges. The many legal restrictions enacted by the Nazis and their collaborators prior to World War II made for a range of obstacles for survivors in its aftermath. Educational pursuits had often been interrupted or their ability to work in their chosen career had been banned. For some, as in the case of Sidonia, their skill in sewing may have helped to keep them alive, as the Nazis forced them to sew uniforms or other items in ghettos and camps around Europe. Regardless of skill level or education, a monumental task in starting over awaited Holocaust survivors.

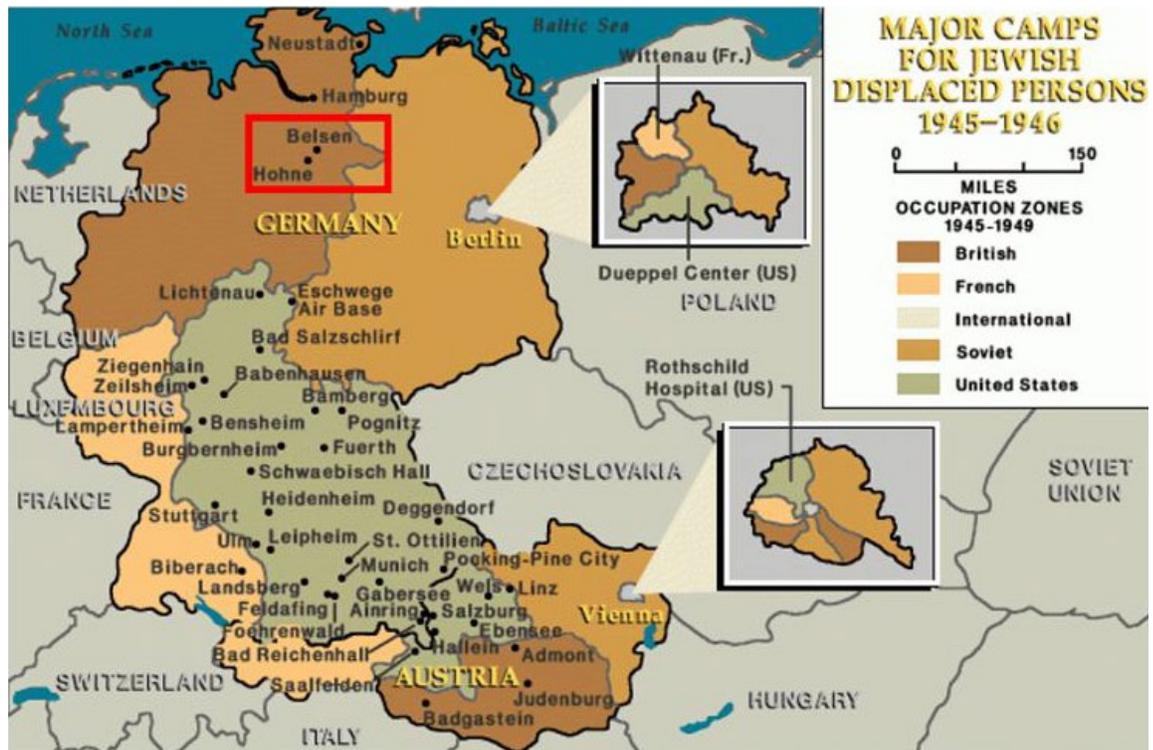


Sidonia at Bergen  
Belsen crematorium

Inmates liberated from Nazi camps, along with refugees who found themselves homeless, usually ended up in displaced persons (DP) camps. Jewish survivors typically found themselves stateless, homeless, impoverished, physically debilitated, and emotionally traumatized. In addition, the United States immigration quotas imposed in the 1920s provided a barrier to immigration that would not start to ease until 1948. Various organizations throughout Europe, and especially in DP camps, promoted the acquisition of vocational training and skills in an effort to gain employment and to promote a type of spiritual healing. This push for technical skills began before and even during World War II, in an effort to aid Jewish refugees in preparation for emigration. After the war, certain skills like Sidonia's ability to sew became a valuable asset when seeking acceptance as an immigrant into a new country.

### Major camps for Jewish displaced persons, 1945–1946

Following World War II, several hundred thousand Jewish survivors remained in camps for displaced persons. The Allies established such camps in Allied-occupied Germany, Austria, and Italy for refugees waiting to leave Europe. Most Jewish DPs preferred to immigrate to Palestine but many also sought entry into the United States. They decided to remain in the DP camps until they could leave Europe. At the end of 1946 the number of Jewish DPs was estimated at 250,000. [US Holocaust Memorial Museum](#). The red rectangle denotes the camp where Sidonia Perlstein was liberated and where her daughter Hanna was born.



## A Brief History of Jewish Immigration and the Garment Industry in the United States

The immigration of European Jews to the United States, especially for the purpose of partaking in the garment industry, can be traced back for well over a century prior to World War II. The years from around 1820 to 1920 brought approximately three million European Jews to the United States. While the earliest Jewish immigrants, typically from Germany, did not yet benefit from the mechanization of clothing production that would begin a few decades after their arrival, they were drawn to the vast landscape in America. They could set up networks for peddling that provided services and items for rural residents. During these early years of Jewish immigration, the system of clothing production, involving cutting and sewing overseen by a clothier, started the tradition of chain immigration, where immigrants would follow each other from the same small towns in Europe to the United States to peddle.

The next stage of the garment and fashion industries in Europe and the United States was marked by the invention of the modern sewing machine mid-nineteenth century, and the growth of ready to wear clothing. In the United States, chain immigration for Jews continued to increase, due to the growing number of garment manufacturing workshops that popped up because of the sewing machine. Important networks grew between big and small garment firms among Jewish entrepreneurs. More self-help local agencies emerged, and continued to aid incoming immigrants while maintaining connections to villages, towns and cities in Europe. These networks and agencies proved crucial later during the Nazi Era and its aftermath, as the lives of Jewish refugees often depended upon these agencies.

## Immigration During the Nazi era, World War II, and the Immediate Aftermath

Immigration regulations and procedures continued to change and to tighten prior to World War II during the Nazi era. European nations like France and the United Kingdom required more stringent visa stipulations. Switzerland demanded that the infamous red “J” be stamped on the passports of German Jews. Steamship ticket prices rose, and the required amount of money that immigrants had to possess in order to immigrate increased. Nazi Germany, until the war began, worked with agencies to allow Jews to transfer money out of Germany at a cost; those with money had to help finance the emigration of those without money. The battle zones of World War II made immigration harder. Members of various organizations worked with many groups, both Jewish and non-Jewish, risking their lives to provide networks for immigrants until all legal options were exhausted. The Jews of Europe found that throughout the 1930s, it was possible to leave Germany and other Nazi held lands, but they struggled to find a place to go; the 40s brought with it the end of emigration, and the beginning of the unimaginable events of the Holocaust.

### *The Critical Role of Jewish Agencies*

The dire circumstances faced by Jews at the beginning of the twentieth century in Europe spurred an uptick in action from the agencies that had existed to aid Jewish immigrants for decades. By the end of the nineteenth century the HIAS or Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society had helped Russian Jews immigrate to the United States. By 1927, a major conglomeration of three important agencies worked together to aid Jewish emigration by obtaining and distributing information, providing protection, giving advice and intervening on the behalf of immigrants if necessary. This agency became the HICEM, which continued to aid Jewish immigrants by connecting them with agencies in 32 countries in the first decades of the twentieth century.

At the end of the war, Jewish Holocaust survivors faced enormous challenges. Despite the extensive range of survivor experiences spanning multiple countries, most who were still in Europe in 1945 shared the same immediate fate: they had nowhere to go. Displaced persons (DP's), a person from one country stuck in another country, often waited in refugee camps for the resources necessary to travel, including the appropriate paperwork to live in a new country if they could not go home. Overall, the situation regarding displaced people of all types was overwhelming.

Historians estimate that there were some twenty million people moving around Europe at the end of the war, with many millions more during it. Within these numbers, an estimated 90,000 Jews were liberated in Nazi concentration camps, including Sidonia. As early as 1943 the

United National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), a cooperative effort among over forty nations, offered necessary items and services to victims of war found in any country of the United Nations.

The aftermath of World War II though proved to be nothing short of chaotic: supplies were low, destruction extensive, boundaries were changing, political tension was mounting, and the discovery of thousands of Nazi camps meant both an affirmation of what the world already knew, coupled with a reality check over what they did not. The UNRRA quickly set up basic camps for refugees and DPs that were expected to be temporary for the purpose of sending people back home. However, with many people unable to return home, they realized they had to facilitate immigration for many people to new countries. After President Truman authorized an investigation into the DP camps in the American Zone, it was evident that the DP camps needed to improve their services. They also realized they needed to operate longer than originally planned.



Sidonia's defiant pose at the monument in Bergen Belsen

In the United States, President Truman passed the Displaced Person's Act, allowing 100,000 displaced persons to immigrate to the United States between 1948-1949. The United States followed up this act with the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, allowing for refugees displaced by the war to immigrate to the United States if they had not been able to previously under regular immigration laws. Subsequent United States immigration acts throughout the 1950s and 1960s allowed for some refugees to escape Communist countries and immigrate to the United States.

Along with Israel, the United States was a preferred destination for Jewish DPs seeking to emigrate. The United States allowed for sponsorships for DPs, in the form of an affidavit, to be provided by both individuals and institutions. American Jewish organizations stepped up to help; Jewish organizations that often began with the influence of the leaders of the garment industry provided funding

and contacts. The United Service for New Americans (USNA) was created, and overall, Jewish community organizations in the United States provided necessary services and stability. They serviced the approximately 140,000 Jewish DPs who made their way to America from 1946-1954.

## The Complicated Emigration Process

The process for one DP to emigrate took around nine months, including multiple passport photos taken and copies of birth, marriage or divorce certificates located or made, along with character references, forms claiming the death of family members, and some sort of documentation for residency prior to the war. After this process, a visa could be issued; then the wait for an opening began. For Sidonia and Hanna, they were sent to Camp Wentorf in order to process the documentation necessary for their emigration. They needed affidavits of birth, certificates of character, applications for immigration visa and alien registration, eligibility as displaced persons, and medical certificates. It took two months to complete this process with multiple government officials representing various commissions, organizations, and committees. They were also examined for contagious diseases, mental conditions and physical defects.

Surname PERLSTEIN	Christian Name SIDONIA
Nationality Hungarian	Sex female
Date of Birth 30.12.1918	Place of Birth Galacz
Height 5' 9"	Colour of Eyes brown
Colour of Hair dark	
Visible Distinguishing Marks	
Place of Issue Tulne Polska Camp	Date of Issue 3.3.42
Signature of Holder Perlstein Sidonia	
Stamp of DP Assembly Centre B.P.C. 45	
Signature of D.C. representing DP Assembly Centre [Signature]	
DP Assembly Centre at which Registered and Date (1) B.P.C. 45 6.11.45	
Date of Renewal [Signature]	Date of Renewal [Signature]
Signature of Authority [Signature]	Signature of Authority [Signature]
Date of Renewal [Signature]	Date of Renewal [Signature]
Signature of Authority [Signature]	Signature of Authority [Signature]

Sidonia's PWX/DP card marked "EMIGRATED"

## Life in America

In addition to those whose training and education were interrupted prior to and during World War II, many Holocaust survivors came to the United States after World II with prior vocational training, skills, and professional backgrounds, but lacked the paperwork to prove it. As a result, they were expected to and often did take jobs that were beneath their educational level. The range of employment experiences for Jewish Holocaust survivors in the United States during the aftermath of the war was broad, from those who became extremely successful to those struggling to find employment.

It was not unusual to find survivors working together in certain occupations; the garment industry was one trade where this frequently occurred. Much like the immigrants of the prior century, the post war Jewish immigrants who settled into the garment industry found themselves surrounded by people with a shared language and shared experiences which provided a sense of community. Unlike the immigrants of the prior century, these shared experiences involved memories of the horrors of the Holocaust that were unfathomable to those who did not experience them, coupled with a profound sense of loss. Jewish Holocaust survivors greatly appreciated the value of work; but for many their economic success was intertwined significantly with the way in which they and others addressed the considerable suffering they had endured.



Sidonia and Hanna on corner

The mental state of survivors was usually ignored or passed off as a phase. The remedy to their physical complaints or their emotional turmoil was typically to view their workplace as rehabilitation, and to put great effort into acculturating into the United States. Names were changed (usually simplified), and birth dates were sometimes adjusted. Stories about prior lives that included lost spouses, children, parents, and grandparents, and memories of times spent in camps, forests, or in hiding, were shared only in private settings.

Nonetheless, survivors like Sidonia Perlstein were determined to succeed. They suffered immense physical and emotional trauma and loss due to the Holocaust. They also had to overcome the typical hardships for immigrants, such as language barriers, obtaining jobs and housing, and taking steps towards citizenship. Yet, they came to the United States and set about starting their new lives as American citizens. Many of them had children and began new families, often living in communities with other survivors, at least initially, for support.

Over time, as they became more acclimated with American culture, Holocaust survivors often moved into other areas. In the case of the group of survivors Sidonia and Hanna lived near in the north end of Springfield, Massachusetts, most of them left the area and moved to more affluent areas of Springfield. Along with their own efforts to live and work in America, the children of these survivors, including Hanna, bore the fruit of their labor and efforts to have a normal life. From this select group in Springfield, most of their children went on to college and professional careers. Around the nation and the world, similar patterns of immigration, acculturation, and revitalization emerged among Holocaust survivors.

# Activities



- How did Holocaust survivors acculturate and, in some cases, assimilate into American culture?
- What were Sidonia's challenges in America and how did she overcome them?
- Would you do anything different to enhance your life situation?

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## Activities

### 1. The History of America and Immigration

A. The long history of immigration to the United States has shaped who we are as a nation and as individuals. Researching the immigrant experience is a worthwhile investigation, and adds a layer of meaning and knowledge to comprehending the impact that immigrants have made to the development of the United States. To review a piece of this history, consider consulting the resources to the left on Ellis Island and Angel Island, two sites especially important to the waves of immigrants who came to the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Depending upon time, and how much attention is desired with this topic, the following activities could be considered.

There are also lessons and activities on each website. Students could also spend a period of time simply viewing the websites.

- Look through both websites and take notes on the experiences of the immigrants who came through each. Then, write a post card, or a letter, pretending to be either a European immigrant that checked into Ellis Island, or an Asian immigrant that checked into Angel Island. In the letter, describe the push and pull factors that brought immigrants to America, and the experiences that most immigrants had at Ellis or Angel Island. Also describe the challenges of being an immigrant in a new land, and the steps taken by immigrants to assimilate into America, and also to preserve traditions from their home countries.
- Make a comparative graphic organizer for the experiences of immigrants at both Ellis and Angel Island. Include photographs for both in the organizer.

### B. The Impact of Twentieth Century Immigration Laws

- The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website link entitled "United States Immigration and Refugee Law 1921-1980" provides an excellent, concise review of immigration laws, especially concerning refugees, throughout the twentieth century. It has 11 sections chronicling different time periods throughout the century.

Ellis Island website:  
<https://www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island/overview-history/>

Angel Island website:  
<https://www.aiisf.org/curriculum>

Individually or in small groups, each group will take one or more sections, and answer several questions either in writing, on poster paper, or digitally. The questions focus upon the attitudes and impact that contributed to decisions to keep or change immigration laws. Each section should be denoted by the title on the website, but underneath the title, answer the following questions:

- What laws were passed and which groups of immigrants were addressed?
- Why were these laws passed?
- What impact did the laws have on immigrants at the time?
- What other factors influenced the laws that were passed, such as world events or American public opinion?

USHMM Link on Immigration:  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/united-states-immigration-and-refugee-law-1921-1980>

- If the questions are written out by hand, each set of questions can be written on poster paper per section, and a short presentation can be given to the class by the individual or group that answered the questions. After each presentation, the posters can be hung around the room. If done digitally, each section could be shared to a Google Slides (or a similar program) presentation. Individuals and groups could also present their sections using a program like Flipgrid. When all parts are shared, students can look across all of the posters, slides, or videos and search for trends and connections that occurred over time with immigration laws.
- For enrichment and a more advanced activity, if desired, after completing the above activity, consider the article from the *Hungarian Review* website on “American foreign policy and immigration”, especially focusing on the Cold War after World War II, and *The Georgetown Law Library’s* “Historical Overview of Immigration” link. What information do they add to the activity above? What factors contributed to immigration policies in American History?

Hungarian Review Link:

[http://hungarianreview.com/article/20170517\\_migration\\_as\\_a\\_tool\\_of\\_us\\_foreign\\_policy\\_in\\_the\\_cold\\_war](http://hungarianreview.com/article/20170517_migration_as_a_tool_of_us_foreign_policy_in_the_cold_war)

The Georgetown Law Library Link:

<https://guides.ll.georgetown.edu/c.php?g=592919&p=4171684>

USHMM link to “America and the Holocaust”:

<https://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/museum-exhibitions/americans-and-the-holocaust>

USHMM link to “America and the Holocaust” teaching materials

with downloadable lesson plans, worksheets and other resources:

<https://www.ushmm.org/teach/teaching-materials/americans-and-the-holocaust>

The lesson plans provided by the USHMM for this exhibit include a thorough and thoughtful analysis of immigration before, during, and after World War II.

### C. America and the Holocaust: Immigration

- The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has an excellent exhibit on American responses during the Holocaust. The topic of immigration is significant throughout this exhibit. The link to the left is to the online exhibit, which contains an excellent and informative 39-minute tour by the curator, Dr. Daniel Greene. In addition, the second link (this link is also easily accessible through the first link to the online exhibit) has teaching materials for this online exhibit.
- In addition, the Facing History and Ourselves website had a review of the American response to the Holocaust. There are connection questions at the bottom, and related content regarding refugees and immigration as well.

## 2. Life after the Holocaust in America

- ### A. For many Holocaust survivors, life after World War II meant starting over in a new country. The United States was the preferred place for many. Historian Hasia Diner noted in her book, *The Jews of the United States*, that a baton had been passed for

Facing History and Ourselves link:  
<https://www.facinghistory.org/defying-nazis/america-and-holocaust>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Links:  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/displaced-persons?series=89>

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-aftermath-of-the-holocaust?series=89>

These links can simply be discussed, or focus questions could be assigned first, followed by discussion.

In addition, it may be useful for discussion to look at this important link from the Southern Poverty Law Center's "Teaching Tolerance" Teaching Tolerance magazine regarding myths about immigration:

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2011/ten-myths-about-immigration>

Article from Stanford University:  
<https://siepr.stanford.edu/research/publications/immigrants-assimilate>

Graphic poster of research results from New York University:  
[https://research.steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/jm2734/Psych\\_Cafe/TC\\_Posters/Holocaust\\_Coping.pdf](https://research.steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/jm2734/Psych_Cafe/TC_Posters/Holocaust_Coping.pdf)

USHMM website link About Life After the Holocaust, with several stories from survivors:  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/about-life-after-the-holocaust?series=89>

Article from the New York Times called "Holocaust Survivors had Skills to Prosper," from October 6, 1992, Section C, Page 1.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/06/science/holocaust-survivors-had-skills-to-prosper.html>

*More resources for 2D on next page.*

European Jews to the United States after World War II. Settling in as immigrants, however, was complex, and included a range of experiences with both successes and failures. Prior to beginning the activity below, study the links on the left from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum regarding displaced persons and the aftermath of the Holocaust.

- B.** While every immigrant has a unique story to share, Holocaust survivors who immigrated to a new country after the war had experiences that were similar, and some that were different from those of other immigrants who were not Holocaust survivors. To begin this activity, brainstorm the general challenges that all immigrants face when they emigrate from one country to a new country. Consider information recently viewed in the Ellis Island and Angel Island websites, and the way in which immigration laws can and did influence the experiences of immigrants. This brainstorm can be written on the board, or shared through a digital platform like a shared Google Document, a Google Jamboard, or a Nearpod assignment.
- C.** Next, define the words "acculturation" and "assimilation." Then, read through the article from Stanford University entitled "What history tells us about the assimilation of immigrants." While reading, list the ways that immigrants assimilate into a new society, and the challenges they face during the process, including the attitudes from those around them. This could be completed in a two-column chart as well. When finished, compare to the brainstorm above. Are there any challenges that were missed? What should be added?
- D.** Now, consider the experiences of Holocaust survivors as immigrants in the United States after World War II, using the resources to the left. What made the immigration experiences of Holocaust survivors different from other immigrants? What was the same? A graphic organizer for comparison could be created to organize the information uncovered in this research, or a comparative essay could be written that analyzes the similarities and differences between immigrants who were and were not Holocaust survivors. Much of the literature written about Holocaust survivors who immigrated to new countries describes survivors as having unique challenges. What were they? How did these challenges influence their lives as immigrants after the war? How did they overcome these challenges?

### 3. Sidonia as Survivor

- A.** Look over the short biography of Sidonia in Section I of this guide. Think about what you would have done in some of the situations that Sidonia faced after World War II. Would you have made the same decisions? Pick three situations where Sidonia faced difficult or challenging circumstances, and write a personal reflection contemplating her choices in these circumstances. Would you have made the same choices if faced with these situations that Sidonia dealt with? Consider the following questions: how hard was/is it

If desired, the websites below (or anything similar) can also be consulted to provide a range of immigrant stories and experiences, for comparison.

Series of websites that have stories of modern immigrants:  
<https://www.iamanimmigrant.com/stories/>  
<https://theimmigrantstory.org/immigrant-story/>  
<https://cla.umn.edu/ihr/immigrant-stories>  
<https://diversity.utexas.edu/2017/06/04/coming-to-america-students-and-faculty-share-their-american-immigration-stories/>

to be an immigrant? What goals did Sidonia and other immigrants have, when it came to living in America as an American? What added burdens did Sidonia and other survivors have, with being a Holocaust survivor?

- B.** An alternative to writing a reflection would be to create three “web” style organizers. Each organizer would have the difficult or challenging circumstance listed inside a circle in the middle, along with Sidonia’s reaction to the circumstance. Then, have several lines (or arrows) radiating from the circle. At the end of each line, list the variables that contributed to Sidonia’s decision to react in the way that she did to each circumstance. Lines can be added if necessary.
- Short reflective statements regarding Sidonia’s choices could also be added around the center circle relating to the difficulties of being an immigrant with the added burden of being a Holocaust survivor. If desired, this activity could be done individually or in small groups, and each web could be shared among students, so that they could take turns commenting on the web organizers that were shared.
- C.** For enrichment, write a letter to Sidonia as if you were preparing to interview her. What questions would you ask her? What advice would you seek from her, when it comes to making tough decisions in your own life? What can you learn from how she problem-solved through the challenges she faced?

# Design, Dressmaking, the Holocaust and its Aftermath

*The relationship between creative design, dressmaking, and textiles and the Holocaust and its aftermath.*

## Holocaust Survivors and the Garment and Fashion Industries

Sidonia was one of many Jewish Holocaust survivors who pursued a career in the garment or fashion industries after World War II. Within the thousands of written and visual records documenting the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, especially those concerning the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime, a common thread emerges. Despite many experiences spanning various countries, and regardless of socio-economic background or religious practice and beliefs, references to the garment and/or fashion industries are peppered regularly throughout Jewish Holocaust survivor testimonies and other documents. Jewish Holocaust survivors often had family members prior to the Nazi era who were tailors, seamstresses, sold textiles, had department stores, or designed clothing. The same skill set that many Jews acquired out of necessity during centuries of restrictions, persecution, and diaspora, allowed them to become leaders in the garment and fashion revolution of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, they became targets for destruction in the twentieth.

There does not seem to be one single factor that contributed to Holocaust survivors partaking in the garment and/or fashion industries after World War II. In addition to family background, skills such as sewing and tailoring were often promoted by organizations and Jewish societies for the purpose of immigration. Yet, for those unable to emigrate from Europe during World War II, it was sometimes this same skill set that provided some individuals a chance for survival during the Nazi era.

While there were many variables that contributed to the survival of Holocaust victims, it is worth noting that for some, their skills in the garment industry in the ghettos and camps created by the Nazis, which were ultimately designed to be a part of a system engineered to destroy Jews and Jewish life, may have had a part to play in their physical survival. For instance, Sidonia volunteered to sew in Dachau, when she knew it was a moment of life or death. Her bold action saved her life.

Jewish Holocaust survivors who arrived in America were not ordinary immigrants. They often bore the burden of the memories of their experiences during the Holocaust, the memory of their loved ones who perished, and the physical and emotional traumas they may have endured. Thus, survivors obtaining jobs working with other survivors possibly provided some comfort, especially if their emotional needs were not being met elsewhere. The garment and fashion industries were places where many survivors began their quest for a new life after the war,



Hanna in the “turning point silk dress”

and where they could possibly connect with other survivors in the same situation. Jewish societies in both Europe and America worked tirelessly to aid in this process of rehabilitation.

Whether it was consciously or coincidentally, many survivors of the Holocaust who came to America began to create beauty again after the war, in factories, design studios, and tailor and dressmaking shops. They came to America in the post-war era as the garment and fashion industries were in the midst of an “explosion of casual culture,” contributing to a new generation of American fashion powerhouses. In addition, as “sewing knows no language,” it is evident that skills in sewing and tailoring, whether by hand or by using the sewing machine, were often the means for economic survival, especially when living in a new country.

Sidonia worked during the day sewing pre-designed dresses at the Victoria Dress Company, but in the evening and on her own time she designed unique, modern, and beautiful clothing for her daughter Hanna. A talented designer and seamstress, Sidonia used her exceptional skill as a way to cope with the trauma she experienced, and as a creative outlet for her ideas. Her talent and skill became a way to generate new opportunities for herself, helping her to provide for her daughter Hanna, while making items that people loved.

## *The Importance of Seeking Beauty*

The quest to make something beautiful after the destruction and devastation of World War II also factored into the decision by some Holocaust survivors to partake in the garment and fashion industries after the war. Choosing these industries meant becoming involved in the creation of something new, which helped to counteract what was destroyed. By making something beautiful, such as a well-made suit or brightly colored dress, survivors who were tailors, seamstresses or crafters defied the ugliness they had endured, making beauty rather than sorrow their lasting legacy.

# Activities



- How can creative clothing design and fashion express emotion, philosophy, ambition, and redemption?
- What can you tell by viewing Sidonia’s designs?

## Activities

### 1. The Importance of Fabric: “It Matters How Fabric Behaves.”

A. Sidonia grew up sewing in her small Hungarian village of Dámóc. The fabric available to Sidonia and her family in the decades before World War II would have most likely been natural (versus synthetic, or manmade) fabrics such as wool, cotton, linen, and silk. Hanna recalled her mother, Sidonia, carefully examining fabric with her eyes and hands, feeling the fabric between her fingers, studying the grains, and precisely placing patterns on the fabric in just the right way in order to craft the look that she wanted.

Professor Anya Sokolovskaya from Eastern Connecticut State University, curator of Sidonia’s exhibit, describes a designer’s choice of fabric as one based upon how the fabric “behaves.” In other words, how does the fabric drape when used with certain styles and body shapes? How does the fabric look in certain positions?

- Research the characteristics of the natural fabrics that Sidonia favored, such as wool, cotton, linen and silk, which remained some of her favorite fabrics throughout her life. Make a list of interesting and important details regarding these fabrics. If possible, have swatches of these fabrics available for students to access during this research. The two sites to the left could be a starting place for this research.
- Look through the pictures or actual pieces of Sidonia’s clothing creations in the exhibit “Sidonia’s Thread: Crafting a Life From Holocaust to High Fashion.” Search for evidence of those natural fabrics that Sidonia used in her life in Hungary, and in her life in America. Look for descriptors like wool, cotton, linen and silk. Note the pieces in Sidonia’s collection that seemed to use these fabrics the most.

B. Combining the research on natural fabrics (hopefully with the help of fabric swatches), and the observations made after viewing pictures or pieces from Sidonia’s collection, write a reflection or engage in discussion addressing the following questions:

- Why did Sidonia possibly favor natural fabrics such as wool, cotton, linen and silk throughout her entire life?

University of California Science  
Line: Materials Research  
Laboratory  
[http://scienceline.ucsb.edu/  
index.html](http://scienceline.ucsb.edu/index.html)

Understanding Your Fibers:  
University of Georgia:  
[https://www.fcs.uga.edu/  
extension/textile-basics-  
understand-your-fibers](https://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/textile-basics-understand-your-fibers)

In addition, the following video  
resource may be useful:  
Fabric 101: How to ID Fabric by  
Fiber, Weave, and Fire  
[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=iMV0K89rbSg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMV0K89rbSg)

## *Professor Sokolovskaya on Fabric*

Consider the texture of a fabric, meaning how it looks and feels. Texture is determined especially by the fabric's material composition, its weight, and how it feels to the touch.

The fabric's structure can determine its texture and behavior. Structure is based upon the fibers of the fabric, and if the fibers are knit, woven, or unwoven.

The color of the fabric can also determine the designer's choice of a fabric for a particular piece of clothing.

- What kind of clothing items in Sidonia's collection utilized these fabrics? What are some possible reasons for Sidonia to use these fabrics in certain pieces of clothing, potentially based on the way that fabric "behaves?"
- Think about the following: What possible emotional connection did Sidonia have to these fabrics? How can emotional connections influence clothing choices? Have you ever purchased clothing items based upon emotional connections, perhaps due to their color, style, purpose, or fabric? Discuss the influence of emotional connections on the choices we make regarding clothing or other textiles that are crafted or purchased.

—  
Red and black crepe wool  
three-piece ensemble



- C. Sidonia was also very frugal when it came to her sewing. She tried not to waste fabric, often using remnants from prior projects to create new pieces. When considering fabric remnants, Sidonia transformed them into skirts, vests, scrunchies, and other items. She also made zipper bags, which she used to organize her materials, and which she often gave away as gifts that many people cherished.
- Look back over the activities in this section so far, and consider her choice of fabrics and style, and determine through discussion or written reflection (or visual representation in the form of a collage or graphic organizer) how her frugality influenced and impacted her fabric and style choices. What factors may have contributed to her desire to utilize every piece of fabric?
- D. If desired, consider creating a type of "fabric swatch collage" of various fabrics, either in a tangible display with actual swatches, or digitally with photographs. Students could research fabrics that are often used for particular types of clothing pieces, and include swatches of those fabrics with explanations as to why the fabric's "behavior" is best suited for particular types of clothing. For an added creative twist to this activity, students could also research fabrics that represent their own personal qualities or emotions that could be incorporated into designs. They could then add those swatches with explanations, to their collages.

## 2. The Human Connection to Design

A. A crucial event happened to Sidonia in 1965, while Hanna was in college. By this point, Sidonia had been crafting one-of-a-kind, notable pieces of clothing for Hanna for years, all while working at the Victoria Dress Company, where she had been promoted to a forewoman. However, her beloved boss, Mr. Podell, decided to retire and to sell the factory. Sidonia decided to take the risk of starting her own business as a seamstress. Having already gained the attention of community members through the beautiful clothing she sewed for Hanna, Sidonia was able to steadily build up her clientele. Furthermore, she also gained the confidence to fully embrace couture fashion and creative design.

Observing the fashion trends around her, and taking advantage of the range of fabrics available to her, Sidonia thrived in her new business venture. Her apartment bustled regularly with clients getting fitted for that perfect outfit, while they engaged in meaningful conversations. Sidonia offered a sympathetic ear and intuitive advice to her customers. Her impact on their lives not only came out in her words, but also in the clothing that she crafted for them. Sidonia worked very fast, sewing for her customers and also continuously sewing clothing for her daughter, Hanna, and eventually her granddaughter, Brenda as well.

Website with fashion trends by decade:  
<https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/category/20th-century/>

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum Link:  
<https://www.jfklibrary.org/visit-museum/exhibits/museum-artifacts/first-lady-jacqueline-kennedy-clothing>

Helpful Youtube Videos explaining and showing Jackie Kennedy's style:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBO513jTFVc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlmL7WlJq50>

Wool challis ensemble for Brenda

Check wool tweed ensemble for Brenda



- Sidonia loved the fashion of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, wife of President John F. Kennedy. She was known for her elegant, fashionable style. Research the fashion trends in America for the 1960's, possibly using the website to the left. Then, look at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum website for the link entitled "First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy Clothing."
- Next, look again through the pictures or actual pieces of Sidonia's clothing creations in the exhibit "Sidonia's Thread: Crafting a Life From Holocaust to High Fashion." Is there a piece that especially resembles the fashion of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy? Furthermore, are there design features among multiple pieces that seem to resemble the type of designs that Jacqueline Kennedy wore? Why do you think Sidonia appreciated Jacqueline Kennedy's style? How important was Jacqueline Kennedy's clothing at the time?
  - For a more thought-provoking discussion, consider that Sidonia was born in a small Hungarian village where peasant clothing

was most likely what she was surrounded by, prior to World War II. However, once she immigrated to America after the war, she was able to design and create high fashion clothing. How was Sidonia able to do this? Why did she want to? What factors contributed to her success with modern fashion?

- B.** Sidonia continuously sewed for her daughter Hanna, who became a social worker. Sidonia wanted Hanna to be successful, which influenced the clothing she made for her. Look through the website above again (or a similar source) that shows fashion trends throughout the decades, paying particular attention to the trends for the 1980s, as Sidonia started sewing professional pieces for Hanna in that decade. What trends for clothing for professional women were popular then?
- Next, look through the collection of Sidonia’s pieces from her exhibit, especially those from the 1980s and 1990s. Consider selections that would have most likely been appropriate for Hanna to wear as a social worker. Do these pieces seem to match the trends in your research? How does this garment collection, which features many of her creations from the 1980s and 90s, coincide with the women’s movement of that time? How does this show Sidonia’s dedication as a seamstress, designer, and mother? Have a class discussion or complete a written reflection addressing these questions. Consider the website on the left in your discussion.

Power Dressing:  
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/fashion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/power-dressing>

- C.** When deciding which pieces to group together for Sidonia’s exhibit, Anya Sokolovskaya used concepts, topics and themes that she believed were evident in Sidonia’s pieces. For example, for the section of the exhibit highlighting Sidonia and Hanna’s immigration to the United States, Anya used “spring” themed clothing to symbolize a sense of renewal. She grouped Hanna’s suits from work together, as well as the Bar Mitzvah collection that Sidonia made for Hanna and her granddaughter, Brenda. The visual impact of these groupings in Sidonia’s exhibit was highly effective, encouraging the visitor to think about Sidonia’s life, work, and creations in a multifaceted and meaningful way.

To demonstrate how garment styles can manifest different themes and qualities, create a collection of clothing items that showcases a theme of your choice. Professor Sokolovskaya suggests the following guidelines when considering fashion choices for your theme:

- Consider the “strength” in the garment’s performance, especially in its shape and form. For instance, structured garments such as jackets with lapels and padded shoulders project strength and independence and might provoke thoughts about similar traits of the creator/wearer. Similarly, garments with soft shapes made of draped fabrics might symbolize feminine qualities.
- Consider accessories or elements of the garment that enhance the design, such as pleats, frills, and lapels. Or, consider the absence of these details as a design statement.



—  
Group of four ensembles

Fashion Shows and Themes:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kwJZK1R3T0>

Why Clothes Matter:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8da1nXckEy4>

- ◉ Consider elements of the design such as color, shape, and texture. What elements seem most important to you and what does this say about your personality?
- To help create the collection, research the ways that designers craft their collections and shows. Then, either draw your own designs, or find fashion pictures online to include in your collection. Have several pieces that showcase your theme. Include fabric swatches or pictures of fabric, if desired. Consider the videos to the left for your research.
- Place your illustrations or pictures into a brochure that can be created digitally, or on paper. Have a “fashion week” or day to showcase these collections. Have a class discussion where students share their visions regarding the themes and qualities of their fashion collections.
  - ◉ Connecting to the exhibit, write a reflection, essay, or have a class discussion regarding the power of creative design to be both therapeutic and a form of personal expression. In what ways did they manifest the theme, ideas, and qualities they hoped to include in their fashion collection? What challenges did they have? What were their successes and failures with putting their vision into a collection? Why do you think Sidonia went above and beyond working at a garment factory, to become a designer herself? What does her collection in the exhibit reveal about her?

# Nontraditional Ways of Remembering Important Individuals

*Exploring nontraditional methods of remembering those who have had a meaningful impact on our lives today.*



## The Importance of Studying Individuals in History

Studying people helps to develop the ability to think critically, and to understand the role of individuals in the world, especially when it comes to maintaining democratic institutions. Studying people also helps to connect and sympathize with situations that other humans face, which helps to debunk myths and prejudices that individuals hold against other individuals and groups. Overall, studying people is therefore a significant aspect of studying history, which allows us to see patterns of how people behave in society. The study of history can be viewed as a type of laboratory, one that provides data to better understand the complex nature of human behavior and action. By studying history, we see how society functions, so that humans can figure out how to navigate current situations and make changes for the future.

History often is a source of inspiration, especially when discovering how individuals persevered through adverse circumstances. Researching history can also provide a sense of identity based on how families, groups, institutions, and countries were formed. The study of individuals, and their place in history is often done through primary and secondary textual resources, perhaps with the aid of photographic and/or video material. These traditional methods of historical analysis include collecting evidence about the person, assessing and interpreting the evidence, comparing resources, and generating conclusions. By studying individuals and their impact on their families, communities around them, and potentially their broader influence, we develop important skills that are helpful in all parts of human life.

Providing a way to remember those who had a significant impact on the lives of others can come in a variety of forms. The use of artifacts to study and remember a person provides

a human connection that is powerful. Sidonia Perlstein's exhibit is able to capture the essence of Sidonia in a deeper way because it includes artifacts from her life. Known in her local area for her exceptional talent as a seamstress, seeing samples of Sidonia's work and the tools of her trade adds a layer of meaning and understanding that is hard to capture by words alone.

While someone may not remember some of the details of Sidonia's life that they read, they may never forget seeing the picture of her standing next to the monument for those who perished at Bergen-Belsen, and the admiration they felt while viewing the beautiful suits and other clothing items she was able to create for decades after her experiences during World War II. The viewer may think of clothing items they or their loved ones have owned that are similar to Sidonia's pieces. These types of engaging experiences forge lasting memories, condition our mind to think in more advanced ways, and spark a desire to learn more.

# Activities



- What are some other ways we can remember important people other than through history books?

## Activities

*\*Choose between the Museum Exhibit or the Memorial/Monument Activity, if desired.*

### 1. Museum Exhibit

A. Museum exhibits can be an excellent way to learn about a person or event. Sidonia's exhibit provides a multifaceted way to learn about Sidonia's life, as well as the context in which she lived. The Smithsonian Institution has many museums in Washington DC that make for an excellent way to learn about a variety of topics in human life, from history, to science, to art. For this activity, construct a "traveling" exhibit that showcases the life of an important person of your choice. This person can be either deceased or living.

- First, look through the Smithsonian Institution's website using the link to the left. View the various museum links, and also the "Explore and Learn" tab and view the collections, learning labs, and artifacts available digitally. Consider the items that seem to represent the various topics in the most interesting and meaningful way. List ideas about the types of items that could be included in the traveling exhibit.

B. Next, plan the three parts of the exhibit, which include the background, photographic display, and artifacts:

- **Background:** Research key information regarding the person that the exhibit will showcase, in order to provide background for the potential viewer. Write or type a summary about the person, being careful to include the reasons why this person is important, and the way he or she impacts(ed) those around them. Make sure to record and cite your sources.
- **Photographic Display:** Using the background piece as a guide, create a visual display of pictures, either digitally or on a poster or tri-fold, about the important person. Make sure detailed captions accompany each picture, along with source citations.
- **Artifacts:** Locate or create artifacts that represent important aspects of this person's life. In many cases artifacts may not be available. Students can re-create artifacts using photographs as inspiration. In addition, they can craft models symbolizing important aspects of their subject's life. Students can recreate artifacts or make models using materials that are accessible to them, like cardboard boxes, paper, printed photographs, and other household items they bring in, or materials

Smithsonian website:  
<https://www.si.edu/explore>

"What is an Artifact?" Washington State Historical Society:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDRfoH6ZiEw>

provided by the teacher or school. Consider the video on the left regarding choosing artifacts for a museum display.

- C. Finally, create a title for the display and pull the three parts (background, photographs, and artifacts) into a digital program, or design a tangible display that is easily moveable.
- D. Have a "Museum Day" event where all of the museum exhibits are shared with the class, the school, and even the community, if desired. Students should make available their digital displays using a presentation program, or their tangible display meant to be viewed in person. For a "Museum Day" in the classroom, students can perform presentations explaining their displays before they view the displays created by their classmates, or students can take turns viewing displays while other students are available to answer questions about their displays. If the event becomes a school wide or community event, consider having students use a larger space like the school library to showcase their displays for visitors.

## 2. Memorials and Monuments

- A. Memorials and monuments are a powerful way to commemorate, honor, and remember a person, event or place in history. Featured many times in this Educators' Guide, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is a museum, a memorial, and a research facility striving to teach about the Holocaust, to remember the victims and rescuers, and to aid Holocaust victims and their families with documents and resources. Washington DC also has many other memorials and monuments honoring, commemorating and remembering important people and events. View some of them at the Washington DC travel website on the left, or a similar website.
- B. Read through the article on the left regarding the creation of your own monument, using Washington DC for examples.
  - In addition, review the website link from the "Facing History and Ourselves" organization about making memorials. This link is specifically about the Holocaust, but could be applied to other subjects.
- C. Choose a person to commemorate, honor or remember by designing a memorial or monument. Brainstorm the important aspects of his or her life that warrant a memorial or monument. Put in writing the purpose of the memorial or monument, and what the overarching goal is to be accomplished. What should the viewers gain and learn from visiting the memorial or monument? Then, do the following:
  - Either digitally, or by hand, sketch the blueprint of the monument or memorial. What will it be made of? How large will the monument be? How will people view it? Where will it be? Why?

Washington DC Travel Website:  
<https://washington.org/node/21445>

Design Your Own Monument:  
<https://invention.si.edu/design-your-own-monument>

Facing History and Ourselves:  
<https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/analyzing-and-creating-memorials>

- D. Write a description about the following:
- What important elements of the person's life will be included, and how will they be represented?
  - What will the memorial or monument be called?
- E. If possible, design a model of the memorial or monument, a detailed "blueprint" design on a poster, or create a digital representation of the memorial or monument. Create a way to share them, making sure each project includes the original design along with the final product, as well as descriptions of the important features and elements of the memorials and monuments.
3. Regardless of whether a Museum Exhibit, Memorial, or Monument was created, after projects have been shared, have a final discussion about the added gains of studying the lives of important people through a variety of means. What was learned from the creation of projects that was unexpected? What were some favorite parts? What types of items or displays were especially memorable?

Contact:  
[https://sidoniathreadexhibit.org/  
contact/](https://sidoniathreadexhibit.org/contact/)



# Resources

*The following resources were either consulted for the narrative introductions to each of the five sections of this guide, or they are resource recommendations for that section. For resources related to the educational activities, please see the suggestions included with the activities for each section.*

## Resources for Part I

Marcus, Hanna Perlstein. *Sidonia's Thread: The Secrets of a Mother and Daughter Sewing a New Life in America*. New Charleston: Create, 2012.

*Surviving Remnant: Memories of the Jewish Greenhorns in 1950s America*. Middletown: Buttonhole Publishing, 2017.

## Resources for Part II

Braham, Randolph L. *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000.

Haraszti, György. "Hungary from 1918-1945." *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hungary/Hungary\\_from\\_1918\\_to\\_1945](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hungary/Hungary_from_1918_to_1945)

"Historical Background: The Jews of Hungary During the Holocaust." *Yad Vashem*. <https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/jews-of-hungary-during-the-holocaust.html>

Marcus, Hanna Perlstein. *Sidonia's Thread: The Secrets of a Mother and Daughter Sewing a New Life in America*. New Charleston: Create, 2012.

Silber, Michael K. "Hungary before 1918." *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hungary/Hungary\\_before\\_1918#id0e1pak](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hungary/Hungary_before_1918#id0e1pak)

Weiner, Rebecca. "Hungary Virtual Jewish History Tour." *Jewish Virtual Library*. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hungary-virtual-jewish-history-tour>

## Resources for Part III

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Cohen, Beth. *Case Closed*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

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*The Jews of the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Helmreich, William B. *Against All Odds: Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996.

Marcus, Hanna Perlstein. *Sidonia's Thread: The Secrets of a Mother and Daughter Sewing a New Life in America*. New Charleston: Create, 2012.

*Surviving Remnant: Memories of the Jewish Greenhorns in 1950s America*. Middletown: Buttonhole Publishing, 2017.

"Post War Years." *US Citizenship and Immigration Services*. <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/overview-of-ins-history/post-war-years>

Segev, Zohar. "Remembering and Rebuilding: The World Jewish Congress, In the Shadow of the Holocaust." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 14, no. 2 (July 2105): 315-352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725886.2014.957917>.

Stone, Dan. *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and its Aftermath*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.

Wilson, Jennifer. "Creating Beauty in the Wake of the Holocaust: Jewish Holocaust Survivors and their Post-War Careers in the Clothing Industry." MHGS Thesis. Gratz College, 2019.

## Resources for Part IV

Gabriel M. Goldstein and Elizabeth E. Greenberg, ed. *A Perfect Fit: The Garment Industry and American Jewry, 1860-1960*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press for Yeshiva University Museum, 2012.

Kaplan, Marion. *Between Dignity and Despair*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. (Quotation "Sewing Knows No Language" page 114)

Kremer, Roberta S. ed. *Broken Threads: The Destruction of the Jewish Fashion Industry in Germany and Austria*. Oxford, Berg: Vancouver Holocaust Education Association, 2007

Martin, Sean. *A Stitch in Time*. Cleveland: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 2015.

Newman, Johanna. "Modern Jewish History: From Ghetto to Glamour-How Jews Redesigned the Fashion Business." *The Jewish Virtual Library*. Accessed March 15, 2019. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/from-ghetto-to-glamour-how-jews-redesigned-the-fashion-business>.

Postrel, Virginia. *The Fabric of Civilization: How Textiles Made the World*. New York: Basic Books, 2020.

Wilson, Jennifer. "Creating Beauty in the Wake of the Holocaust: Jewish Holocaust Survivors and their Post-War Careers in the Clothing Industry." MHGS Thesis. Gratz College, 2019

## Resources for Part V

Lambros Fatsis. "The Importance of Studying People." *The Sociological Review*.  
<https://www.thesociologicalreview.com/the-importance-of-studying-people/>

Stearns, Peter N. "Why Study History (1998)." *American Historical Association*.  
[https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/historical-archives/why-study-history-\(1998\)](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/historical-archives/why-study-history-(1998))

# Glossary

*The majority of the following terms were defined using the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website (ushmm.org), unless noted otherwise. Glossary terms are listed in alphabetical order.*

## **Adolf Eichmann**

Eichmann was a crucial figure in the implementation of the Nazi's Final Solution, which eventually became the mass murder of the Jewish population of Europe. Eichmann had experience with organizing emigration and forced deportation of Jews in the early years of World War II, and continued to do so until the end of the war. He was the main figure involved with organizing and managing the deportation of Hungarian Jews starting in 1944. He escaped US custody at the end of the war in 1946, but was discovered in Argentina in 1960 and brought to Israel, where his trial was widely publicized, bringing attention to the events of the Holocaust. He was hanged for his crimes in 1962.

See the following link for the documents required by Nazi Germany in order for Jews to leave:  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/documents-required-to-obtain-a-visa>

## **Affidavit**

A sworn statement in writing. In order to emigrate during the Nazi era, German Jews had to obtain many documents, including affidavits. Affidavits were also necessary for Holocaust survivors who wanted to emigrate after the war.

## **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee**

Also known as "The Joint" or the JDC, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was created in 1914 in New York from forty Jewish organizations, which met to provide relief efforts for Jews in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The JDC continued its efforts throughout World Wars I and II, providing money and food to European Jews in peril, even while their European offices were ransacked or closed. They helped to facilitate the escape and emigration of Jewish refugees during the Nazi era, as well as supplied aid to rescuers like Raoul Wallenberg and Carl Lutz. After the war, the JDC continued to operate, often working in conjunction with other agencies to provide aid to Jewish Holocaust survivors.

National Park Service, US Department of the Interior:  
<https://www.nps.gov/places/u-s-immigration-station-angel-island.htm>

## **Angel Island**

Sometimes called the "Ellis Island of the West," Angel Island is located in California's San Francisco Bay, and was the point of entry for Asian immigrants. It processed approximately one million Asian and other immigrants between 1919 and 1940.

Anti-Defamation League:  
<https://www.adl.org/anti-semitism>

## **Antisemitism**

The belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish.

It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews. Hostility toward Jews dates back to ancient times, perhaps to the beginning of Jewish history.

In the late 19th century, Jews were associated with modernity and liberalism, ideologies that were at odds with the growing trends of conservatism and nationalism. Hatred and discrimination of Jews, however, predates the 19th century and can be traced back hundreds of years. Antisemitism during the Nazi era was especially associated with Nazi racial ideology, where Jews were considered an enemy race.

Smithsonian Institution:  
<http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/idealabs/ap/essays/looking.htm>

### **Artifact**

An object created by and used by people, allowing researchers to make connections between history and people. Artifacts have a way of bringing the past back to life.

Merriam-Webster:  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/assimilation>

### **Assimilated/Acculturate**

Assimilation occurs when groups from different cultures absorb the dominant culture by acquiring its habits, language, and modes of life.

Acculturation is a process of social, psychological, and cultural change that stems from the balancing of two cultures while adapting to the prevailing culture of the society (Google Dictionary).

The Jewish Virtual Library:  
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/bar-bat-mitzvah-and-confirmation>

### **Bar/Bat Mitzvah**

A ceremony for Jewish children where they formally are obligated to observe the commandments, usually around age 13 for males, and age 12 or 13 for females.

National Geographic:  
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/health-and-human-body/human-diseases/the-plague/>

### **Black Plague**

After starting possibly in China and spreading along trade routes in the early 14th Century, the Black Plague killed about twenty-five million people in Europe, and continued to appear for centuries. The cause was later discovered to be fleas infecting rats with the *Y.pestis* bacteria. However, during the 14th century, when the cause was unknown, Jews were often blamed for the Black Plague.

Wikipedia:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casual\\_wear](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casual_wear)

### **Casual Culture**

Also called casual wear, or leisure wear, casual culture clothing includes comfortable, relaxed everyday wear that is not formal. Casual culture became especially popular in Western society starting in the 1960's.

### **Code of Ethics**

A set of guidelines for moral or ethical conduct for personal and/or professional use.

### **Nazi Concentration Camps**

Camps where people targeted by the Nazis were imprisoned and confined in harsh conditions without legal processes. Concentration camps served to incarcerate people considered a security threat, often involving forced labor. Concentration camps also resulted in the killing of groups targeted by the Nazis. There were tens of thousands of Nazi concentration camps. Sidonia

Perlstein was in Auschwitz, which was both a concentration camp used for slave labor and a Killing Center. She was also in Dachau and Bergen Belsen.

### **Dámóc**

A small, agrarian town where the Perlstein's lived, near the border of northeastern Hungary and Czechoslovakia, at the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. (Information taken from *Sidonia's Thread*, by Hanna Perlstein Marcus)

### **Killing Center**

The Nazi camps designed specifically for large-scale murder. While some victims sent to these camps were kept alive for various reasons, the main task of these camps was to use a systematic and industrial program to put to death, often upon arrival, the victims who were sent there. There were a handful of Killing Centers, including Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Chelmo, and Auschwitz Birkenau.

### **Deportation**

The removal of Jews from their existing home and their subsequent relocation to ghettos, camps, or killing fields. Once Jews were removed from their homes, their property was often confiscated by the Nazis and/or looted by non-Jewish community members. Deportation involved a mass coordination especially of railways, involving Nazis, military personnel, and civilians (like train engineers) from various countries.

### **DP Camp/Displaced Persons Act**

The end of World War II revealed around ten million “Displaced Persons,” or “DPs,” who were often forced laborers, prisoners, or concentration camp survivors left on German soil. During the process of sending them back to their home countries, called repatriation, camps called “DP camps” were set up to house the DPs until they acquired the necessary paperwork to leave. Among the millions of DPs were Jewish Holocaust survivors, who often had no home to return to. Thus, their situation often resulted in emigration. In 1948, the United States passed the Displaced Persons Act, allowing 400,000 DPs (68,000 of which were Jews) to immigrate into the United States between 1949-1952.

### **Einsatzgruppen**

These were Nazi mobile killing groups that followed the German army in its march eastward and murdered over one million civilians to “secure” the occupied territory. The invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 intensified the number of killing squads as well as the amount killed, the vast majority of which were Jews. The mobile killing squads by then consisted of a variety of collaborating groups including the Nazi SS, army and police, along with local officials.

### **Ellis Island**

Located in New York Harbor, Ellis Island served as an immigration station for 62 years, starting in 1892. During this time, 12 million immigrants especially from Europe were processed at

Ellis Island in a series of inspections that lasted around three to five hours. All but around two percent made it through to start a new life in America.

Wikipedia:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textile\\_sample\\_](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textile_sample_)

### **Fabric Swatch**

A small piece of fabric left over from an existing project, or ordered as a sample from a textile company or other retail establishment.

### **Final Solution**

The Final Solution was the name of the Nazi plan to solve what they deemed the “Jewish problem.” The “solution” changed over time, from forced emigration of Jews out of Germany, to the mass murder of the Jewish population. The specific point when the Nazis decided to switch from forced emigration to mass murder is unclear. However, somewhere between 1941 and 1942, the steps towards the annihilation of the Jewish population (and other Nazi targets, especially the Roma population) began, which included deportations, gassing, shooting, acts of terror, disease, and starvation.

Case Western Reserve:  
<https://case.edu/ech/articles/g/garment-industry>

### **Garment Industry**

Usually a reference to the creation and growth of ready to wear clothing that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, especially due to the mechanization of clothing production by the sewing machine. Trends in urbanization and immigration often contributed to the growth of the garment industry.

### **Genocide**

Coined by Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin in 1944, the term genocide comes from the Greek word “genos,” for tribe, and the Latin word “cide,” for killing. Legally the term genocide means the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group as such, by killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, inflicting conditions of life to bring about the group’s destruction, preventing births, or forcibly transferring children from one group to another group.

### **Ghetto**

The name “ghetto” comes from the Jewish quarter created by authorities in the sixteenth century in Venice, Italy. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Jewish quarters called ghettos were created in various cities around Europe. During World War II, the Nazis created ghettos, starting in Poland, to concentrate and isolate Jews from non-Jewish populations. The conditions of life were designed to cause great suffering.

Jewish Virtual Library:  
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hapsburg-monarchy>

### **Hapsburg Empire**

The Hapsburg Dynasty ruled a multi-national empire centered in Austria for centuries, from the late thirteenth century until the end of WWI. Within the Hapsburg Empire were areas with considerable Jewish populations. Jews experienced an ebb and flow of restrictions during the

centuries of Hapsburg rule; towards the end of the nineteenth century, they began to gain civil equality within the empire, until it fell after WWI.

### **Holocaust**

The Holocaust was the state sponsored, systematic persecution and killing by the Nazis of six million Jews, two-thirds of them **European Jews**, as well as other targets considered inferior or a threat by the Nazi party. The Nazi regime led Germany starting in 1933 until 1945. Legal restrictions and discrimination marked the beginning of the Nazi regime, until the violent events of Kristallnacht in 1938, the beginning of World War II in 1939, and the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 which resulted in the mass murder of Nazi targets by bullets and in killing centers. Holocaust survivors often found themselves in DP camps awaiting immigration into the United States and other countries.

### **Horthy, Miklos**

Miklos Horthy, who had been an officer in the Austro-Hungarian navy, came to power at the head of a conservative-nationalist coalition, which unraveled most of the democratic reforms created in Hungary immediately after World War I. Horthy presided for the next 24 years over an authoritarian, almost feudal system of aristocratic rule.

### **Hungary**

A country located in Europe surrounded by Austria, Czechoslovakia (at the time of World War II), Romania, and Yugoslavia (at the time of World War II). The Jews of Hungary were a diverse set of communities including modern and traditional Jews, which were by and large still alive in the middle of 1944. Despite the impending loss of Germany and the Axis Powers, and despite world leaders acknowledging the mass murder of Jews prior to 1944, the Jews of Hungary were still deported and put to death in large numbers in the last year of the war. (DO Arrow Cross Party)

### **Immigration/Emigration**

Immigration is the process of moving to a new country while emigration is the process of moving from another country. Immigrants trying to move to the United States after World War I faced quota limitations and had to obtain many documents including an American immigration visa. Jews trying to emigrate from Germany in the 1930s as the Nazis increased their restrictions often found it incredibly difficult to do so, due to emigration requirements.

### **Isolationism**

The policy of reducing involvement with foreign affairs. The United States practiced isolationist policies after World War I by not joining the League of Nations, creating new laws with immigration restrictions, and passing Neutrality Acts.

Jewish Virtual Library:  
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/kapos>

### **Kapo**

Supervisors in Nazi concentration camps, some of which were Jews. They were sometimes as harsh as their German non-Jewish counterparts, creating an ethical dilemma in the aftermath of the war among Jewish Holocaust survivors.

### **Liberation**

In the context of World War II, liberation meant the freeing of survivors in Nazi concentration and killing centers by Allied troops starting in July of 1944.

### **Nazi**

The name for the National Socialist German Workers Party, a far right, nationalist, racist, and anti-democratic political party in Germany led by Adolf Hitler. Created right after World War I, it especially gained followers due to the Great Depression. The meaning of the word “socialist” for Nazis was not the same as the socialistic movements elsewhere; socialism for the Nazis meant a unified country based upon Nazi racial ideology, with a German community of people (the Volk) that were devoted to the state.

### **Numerus Clausus Law in Hungary**

This law was enacted in Hungary in 1920 and severely restricted the number of Jews in institutions of higher learning. It is considered the first antisemitic piece of legislation put forth by a European country after World War I. (Peter Tibor Nagy, The Numerous Clausus in Interwar Hungary, *Eastern European Jewish Affairs*, Volume 35, No.1, June 2005).

### **Operation Margarethe**

In March of 1944, Operation Margarethe began in Hungary; German Wehrmacht paratroopers followed by occupation forces, which included Einsatzgruppen, SS and Gestapo, invaded and took over Hungary without resistance from the Hungarian military, or the civilian population. Once the military operation was deemed successful, the Wehrmacht soldiers were dispersed to the front within a month, and the government of Hungary was reorganized to align with both German military goals and the goals of the Final Solution. Adolf Eichmann and his Special Commando led the effort towards the latter with the help of certain departments within the Hungarian police. (Jennifer Wilson—see citation in Resources, Part III)

ORT Impact Through Education:  
<https://www.ort.org/en/>

### **Organization for Rehabilitation and Training**

Created in Russia in 1880, the ORT provided skills training for impoverished Jews. It grew throughout Europe and provided loans, training, and equipment to Jews, especially refugees, and continued to grow worldwide, helping Jewish DPs after World War II. The ORT continues its work today providing vocational training around the world.

### **Ottoman Empire**

Founded in 1299, The Ottoman Empire grew to dominate the area around the Mediterranean Sea with a multilingual, multiethnic empire. The Ottoman Empire ruled southern and central

medieval Hungary during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Hungarian portions of the Empire were taken over by the Hapsburgs in the eighteenth century. Already faltering on the eve of World War I, the Ottoman Empire collapsed after the war, resulting in the creation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and other states in the Middle East.

### **Peddlers**

Individuals who traveled the countryside, selling goods to customers often from a sack that was carried on their back. It was common for young Jewish men to do this in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially due to restrictions that prohibited other occupations for European Jews.

### **Refugee**

A person outside of their native country who cannot return due to fearing for their life because of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, or affiliation with a certain group.

<https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>

### **Resilience**

Defined by the American Psychological Association as the means to adapt and even achieve personal growth in the face of adverse circumstances and traumatic events.

### **Sátoraljaújhely**

Located at the base of the Sator Hills at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains, Sátoraljaújhely was at one time the capital city of the region that included Dámóc. Prior to the war, the Perlstein family visited this town frequently. During the war, it became a ghetto, where the Perlstein family was sent before their deportation to Auschwitz. (Information taken from *Sidonia's Thread*, by Hanna Perlstein Marcus)

### **Seamstress/Tailor**

A seamstress typically sews items; a tailor alters items to fit. It is generally accepted that both seamstresses and tailors can alter and create clothing, so their occupational titles are often grouped together.

### **SS (Schutzstaffel)**

Originally Hitler's personal bodyguard unit, the SS was made up of elite, "pure" German party members and became the leading enforcement organization that oversaw internal security and the execution of Nazi racial policies. The SS ran the Nazi concentration and killing camp system, and the intelligence branch of the SS (the SD) participated in the Einsatzgruppen.

Diane von Furstenberg,  
Master Class:  
<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/natural-vs-synthetic-fibers>

### **Synthetic versus natural fabrics**

Synthetic fabrics are man made; natural fabrics are made from animal or plant-based fibers.

**UNRRA**

United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, created in the United States in 1943. It was designed to help European nations after World War II with their massive refugee and displaced persons population. It helped millions of refugees and displaced persons with a variety of services and administered displaced persons camps.

YIVO Archives:

<http://www.yivoarchives.org/index.php?p=collections/controlcard&id=32628>

**USNA**

The United Service for New Americans, created in New York in 1946 that assisted immigrants, especially Holocaust survivors, with integrating into American society.

See the USHMM link here to learn the steps for this process:

<https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/what-did-refugees-need-to-obtain-a-us-visa-in-the-1930s>

**Visa**

The necessary documentation to enter into a foreign country, issued by the foreign country. For Jewish refugees trying to leave Europe, obtaining a visa to enter into a new country was particularly difficult.

**Wallenberg, Raoul and Lutz, Carl**

Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg and Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz worked in Budapest, Hungary, to provide tens of thousands of Jews their certification papers claiming they were under the protection of neutral powers. Lutz and Wallenberg worked with local Jewish agencies as well to gain protective papers and shelter for the Jews in Budapest.

**Wehrmacht**

The official German military, which often assisted the SS in perpetrating Nazi crimes.

**World War I/World War II**

World War I was the first significant international conflict of the twentieth century, occurring from 1914-1918. The devastation and destruction from World War I, coupled with the unease and economic crises of the interwar period, gave rise to dictatorships and eventually World War II, which occurred from 1939 to 1945.

**Yellow star of David**

The yellow Star of David was the “Jewish badge” that the Nazis forced the Jews of Germany and occupied territories to wear, in order to label, humiliate, segregate, and control their movements. While the yellow Star of David was common, other areas had variations, such as the white armband with a blue Star of David in areas of Poland.