

HACKNEY ROOTS

EXPLORING IDENTITY & CULTURE - EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Look at this selection of images and print texts from a range of sources. In pairs, familiarise yourself with the material. Use this stimulus material to discuss ideas about Jewish identity and culture then add more information and ideas to your online or written spidergram.



EXPLORING IDENTITY & CULTURE - EXTENSION ACTIVITY



The following extracts are from: *Wolfy and the Strudelbakers* by Zvi Jagendorf; published by Dewi Lewis Publishing 2001.

EXTRACT 1

They were all *refijees*. Chaim was and Frida, though she was more a sick person than a *refijee*. Mendl was one certainly. He was a jumpy *refijee* always waiting for the worst to happen like being sent to Australia in a ship for enemy aliens. Rosa was a good *refijee* because she had read the booklet put out by the LONDON REFUGEE COMMITTEE and knew what to do and what not to do. Like you definitely must not speak German loud in the street. Suppose you're on the bus and Chaim is upstairs smoking; you can't go to the stairs and shout "*Chaim wir steigen aus*" when you get to your stop. There are two reasons for this; first the English don't like names like *Chaim*, they hurt their ears and second they can't stand hearing German spoken right in the middle of their own country. What do you expect with a war on? Rosa also knew that you could get blankets from the Bible Mission in Commercial Road but you had to be careful because they were doing it for Jesus. As for the boy, Wolfy and Bernard were too young to know what they were. But they did know that they had left in a panic and had got on trains and been picked up and put down many times. Then there was a ship and then they were in a new place where their parents were called *refijees* and sometimes *bloody refijees*

Wolfy and the Strudelbakers by Zvi Jagendorf; published by Dewi Lewis Publishing 2001; p.13

EXPLORING IDENTITY & CULTURE - EXTENSION ACTIVITY

EXTRACT 2

At the end of the high street they reached the sea front, a bright little promenade with gaudy shops and stalls, then a pebbly beach and the steely grey sea.

“Breathe the air, Mendl,” she said, “fill yourself up with it.”

He stood there in front of the sea and sighed. She tried to laugh him out of it but he was deep in a cloud.

“What’s the matter?”

“We lost everything.”

“So we’ll start again. The boy will be an Englishman”

“They hate us here like everywhere.”

“If they hate us so much why did they take us in?”

He was silent

“To make us Christians.”

Rosa laughed and put her hand under Mendl’s shirt.

“What kind of a Christian will they make out of you, Mendl, you were cut when you were a baby and that is that”

Wolfy and the Strudelbakers by Zvi Jagendorf; published by Dewi Lewis Publishing 2001; p.20-21

EXTRACT 3

Rosa wasn’t so excited by modern Hebrew [class] but it was free and it solved a problem. Bernie had been refusing to continue at Hebrew school in the evenings threatening to go to a youth club instead where non-Jewish kids were occasionally seen.

Wolfy and the Strudelbakers by Zvi Jagendorf; published by Dewi Lewis Publishing 2001; p.81

EXTRACT 4

“Bernie please my *tzitzsiss*, I left them in the swimming pool”

Bernie’s head came up with a jerk. He was smiling at the vision of the captured fingers in Willy’s lost property bin ...“You twit, now you’re going to have beg the Ripper to give them back to you” ...

...Wolfy’s Black Monday came too quickly. All through the weekend he rehearsed the horrible scene in his head. He would creep up to the gym in one of the breaks and try to get near Willy who was usually surrounded by his athletic favourites...

Wolfy opens his mouth and says: Please sir, I think I left something in the changing rooms on Friday afternoon.

Harmless so far but Willy’s got a feeling he’s onto something funny for the sportsboys around him.

He says: “What did you leave, sonny?”

You say: “An article of clothing”

He says: “A sock or a shoe?”

EXPLORING IDENTITY & CULTURE - EXTENSION ACTIVITY

You: "No sir"

He: "What was it sonny, a diaper or a jock strap?" The sportboys are laughing and enjoying the play. You are sweating and your glasses are sliding down your nose. They know who you are; you are the one who came in last in the cross-country run and left one shoe in the bog. You try again.

"It was a kind of scarf sir"

"Not Arsenal or Spurs was it?"

"No sir, a kind of scarf you wear inside"

"Inside what?"

"Inside your shirt sir"

Willy is looking really interested now...

"Why do you wear this scarf inside your shirt then, doesn't it tickle?"

"No sir, it doesn't tickle and I wear it for religious reasons."

Bernie stopped there and Wolfy put his head in his hands. He could never go through with it. He would just have to abandon his fringes to slavery. There was a limit to the mockery and trouble you had to bear for religious reasons.

Wolfy and the Strudelbakers by Zvi Jagendorf; published by Dewi Lewis Publishing 2001; p.104-105

EXTRACT 5

Will and Rosa, still alive, sat in a hot tunnel under the heavy weight of the city to which they had all fled fifty years before. Once they had been refugees, then aliens, then evacuees, always transients with suitcases on the way to somewhere else. Now they were commuters but neither would ever get home again. Home had been taken away by armies of looters, by a fading and falsifying memory, by restlessness and unease and in the end by the ghosts who dispossess the living and who will inherit the earth.

Wolfy and the Strudelbakers by Zvi Jagendorf; published by Dewi Lewis Publishing 2001; p.183

The following extracts are from: ***The 43 Group*** by **Morris Beckman**; published by Centreprise Publications 1992

EXTRACT 6

During the Thirties ... Jewish people [in Hackney] were afraid to venture out after dark and even during the day, when gangs of arrogant Blackshirts roamed the streets abusing and molesting Jews they encountered....I remember going out at night and keeping a wary watch for Mosley's gangs. Fortunately, they tended to be noisy and one could hear the chants of 'Heil Mosley!' and 'Get rid of the Yids!'

From *The 43 Group* by Morris Beckman; published Centreprise Publications 1992; p.8-9

EXPLORING IDENTITY & CULTURE - EXTENSION ACTIVITY

EXTRACT 7

By February 1946, fourteen identifiable fascist groups were operating on the streets and inside schools and halls in London alone. And they were concentrating provocatively on those same Jewish areas they had seven years earlier... Their magazines and papers were now being sold at regular pitches outside selected tube stations including West Hampstead, Finchley Road, Edgware the Angel, Mile End and the Whitechapel... Nothing was done [about the publications being sold]; free speech was hallowed. If one of the 'Sons of St. George stood on a chair in Hackney and shouted "The Nazis were right to have gassed the Jews!" it would be terribly provocative and inexcusably vile, but he had the right to say it. If a Jew in hearing protested, he could be arrested for causing a breach of the peace.

From *The 43 Group* by Morris Beckman; published Centreprise Publications 1992; p.14-15

EXTRACT 8

The high incidence of broken jaws and fractured cheekbones indicated the use by fascists of knuckledusters and the 'halfpenny cylinder' – twenty copper coins wrapped inside a handkerchief and held inside a clenched fist. It felt like being hit with a wooden mallet.

From *The 43 Group* by Morris Beckman; published Centreprise Publications 1992; p.32

EXTRACT 9

The Hackney and Kingsland Gazette recorded: "*On August 31st 1946 the British League held a meeting in Dalston. The fascists shouted 'Down with the Yids! Up with Mosley...'*"

A rash of attacks on synagogues in Edgware and Burnt Oak took place... [there] were flyposting ... campaigns bearing slogans such as 'Jews must go' and 'War on the Jews'.

From *The 43 Group* by Morris Beckman; published Centreprise Publications 1992; p.49-50

EXTRACT 10

Many [43] Group members still living at home were ever conscious of protecting their families from harm. Often leaving their houses they would be ambushed by waiting fascists and beaten up. An incendiary device was pushed through the letter box of Gerry Flamberg's* house in Hackney, but fortunately the fire did not take hold. Cars were vandalised, walls daubed with Nazi graffiti and windows smashed.

From *The 43 Group* by Morris Beckman; published Centreprise Publications 1992; p.57

*Gerry Flamberg was a founding member of the 43 Group.

EXPLORING IDENTITY & CULTURE - EXTENSION ACTIVITY

EXTRACT 11

[On September 5th 1947 a letter from a parent published in the] Hackney and Kingsland Gazette reveals the disturbing effect upon children of fascist activity in their neighbourhood:

“ Walking down Colveston Crescent one Sunday evening I heard a shout. ‘The fascists are coming!’ Instantly, children playing happily were whisked indoors by their parents. In Dalston HighStreet, gangs of youngsters with older instructors in their midst paraded up and down shouting anti-Jewish slogans and catch phrases...”

From *The 43 Group* by Morris Beckman; published Centreprise Publications 1992; p.96

FOR DISCUSSION

In your groups, discuss the following questions. If there are questions that you can't answer, make a note to find out more from family members at home:

- What connections can you see between Anglo-Jewish culture today and this stimulus material from the past?
- To what extent do you speak and understand Jewish languages such as Hebrew and/or Yiddish? Give examples of what you know.
- What is your favourite Jewish food and why?
- Where are your family originally from? How long has your family lived in the UK and why did they come here? Where have they moved from and to in the UK? Why?
- What do you know about fascism in the past and today?
- What else could we include (as well as language, food etc) to help define Jewish culture?

INDEPENDENT STUDY

Ask your family about their ideas, knowledge and understanding of the term 'culture'.

- How do they define 'Anglo-Jewish culture'?
- Apart from religion, is there anything (or a combination of things) that make British Jews a distinct group?