ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.



















White Bird

COMPANION TEACHER RESOURCE

PARTICIPANT MANDEVILLE FILMS KINGDOM STORY COMPANY participant.com/whitebird USC Shoah Foundation | IWITNESS LIONSGATE

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Introduction

This Companion Teacher Resource to bring ***White Bird*** to the classroom identifies a variety of materials that will help students understand the film within the proper historic context and that are aligned with the Pedagogical Principles for Effective Holocaust Instruction developed by Echoes & Reflections, a partnership of ADL, USC Shoah Foundation, and Yad Vashem, provides classroom resources and professional development to support the teaching of the Holocaust responsibly, accurately, and effectively.

Film – Historical Context

White Bird is a work of fiction that takes place during the Second World War during the Nazi occupation of France. The German army invaded France in May 1940. In June, the French surrendered and signed an armistice with the Nazis. France was then divided in two: northern France (the occupied zone) was placed under German control, while southern France (the unoccupied zone) was placed under the control of a new French government, that was established in the spa town of Vichy.

Specifically, the film's setting is in Vichy France (the unoccupied zone). The core of the plot occurs from the Autumn of 1942 to the end of August 1944, in the peak years of the "Final Solution," the Nazi plan to annihilate the Jews of Europe in what became known as the Holocaust, where six million Jews were murdered, of them approximately 1.5 million were children.

This film seeks to emphasize the dignity of humanity, the power of agency, and the difference one person can make when they choose kindness in the face of hatred. ***White Bird*** is the fictional story of a rescuer, who might have been recognized as Righteous Among The Nations.

The Righteous Among the Nations, honored by Yad Vashem, are non-Jews who took great risks to save Jews during the Holocaust. Rescue took many forms and the Righteous came from different nations, religions and walks of life. What they had in common was that they protected their Jewish neighbors at a time when hostility and indifference prevailed.

On the eve of the Second World War there were between 300,000 and 330,000 Jews in France. At that time, the total population of the country was about 41,000,000. Yad Vashem has recognized 4,206 Righteous Among the Nations from France as of January 1, 2022.



A German military unit, marching down the Champs-Élysées; Paris, 4 July 1940

For more information on the history of France during WWII and the Holocaust, see The Holocaust of the French Jews – A Historical Review from Yad Vashem. See also The German Occupation of France, which contains photographs and testimonies collected by Yad Vashem on this topic.

Additional discussion questions and activities are intended to promote thoughtful discussion about complex topics including antisemitism, Nazi ideology, Jewish resistance, rescue, the "Final Solution," and choices individuals made during the Holocaust.

Preparing to View the Film

To maximize students' understanding of events depicted in the film, review the materials outlined below prior to viewing and discussing the film, and encourage students to revisit these resources as needed.

Glossary

Introduce students to the Audio Glossary where they will find the definition and, in some cases, the pronunciation, of many terms and phrases used in the film.



Timeline of the Holocaust

Although the characters are fictional, the events depicted in ***White Bird*** take place primarily between 1942 and 1945. Provide students with an overview of what took place prior to when the film begins by having them review events before 1942 using the Timeline of the Holocaust. Encourage students to revisit the Timeline for additional information about the years and events depicted in the film. For example, what else was taking place in the winter of 1942 when Sara was first taken in by Julien and the Beaumier family, and what was going on in Europe before then? E.g., the death camps of Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka were already operational and were murdering Jews en masse.



Film Synopsis

From the world of *Wonder*, which sparked a movement to "choose kind," comes the inspirational next chapter: ***White Bird***. Struggling to fit in at his new school after being expelled for his treatment of Auggie Pullman, Julian (Bryce Gheisar) is visited by his grandmother (Helen Mirren) and is transformed by the compassionate and heroic story of her rescue and survival in Nazi-occupied France during WWII.

From the director of *Finding Neverland*, ***White Bird*** reminds us to be brave and choose kind.

Major Characters

Grandmere *(Helen Mirren): Grandmere is a Holocaust survivor who opts to give her testimony to her grandson, Julian, in order to inspire him to hold himself accountable for treating others with kindness.*

Julian *(Bryce Gheisar): Julian was previously expelled from school for bullying a young man with facial deformities. He is transformed by listening to his grandmere's testimony.*

Sara *(Ariella Glaser): Teenage Grandmere lives a charmed life until antisemitism and Nazi ideology invades her village in Vichy France.*

Julien/Tourteau *(Orlande Schwedt): Despite suffering from the effects of polio, Julien shows strength, kindness, and courage in hiding Sara from the Nazis.*

Vivienne *(Gillian Anderson): Julien's mother who shows Sara courage and kindness while she is hiding.*

Vincent *(Jem Matthews): Sara's teenage crush/ schoolmate turned Nazi sympathizer.*

Echoes & Reflections Lessons

The following lessons and their accompanying assets will introduce students to important topics associated with the Holocaust and prepare them for the events leading up to or represented in ***White Bird***.

Studying the Holocaust

Antisemitism

Jewish Resistance

Rescue and Righteous Among The Nations

Complicity and Responsibility

Activities

Below are recommended activities to engage students with the film's content. Some activities can be completed beforehand to understand the context of the film, some can be completed while students are watching the film, others upon completion.

1. Students are provided the handout, About Jews and Judaism and watch What does it Mean to be Jewish? and Glimpses of Jewish Life before the Holocaust videos, to fill in any gaps they may have about who the Jewish people are. Then, in pairs or small groups, students read the handout, A Picture of Jewish Life in Europe before World War II. In addition, students are provided with some authentic photographs of Jews in France prior to WWII, attached. Students share what they learned about Jews and the world in which they lived prior to World War II. Why is it important to understand the lives of Jewish people before the tragedy of the Holocaust?
2. Provide students with the ***White Bird*** Viewing Guide (appendix) and have them complete it during or after watching the film.The handout, Definition of Antisemitism, is projected or distributed, and students learn that antisemitism is the name given to prejudice and hatred against Jewish people. In groups, students discuss the major characters, the choices they made throughout the film, and the many instances of antisemitism that occur.



   a. Additionally, students can complete the IWitness activity ***White Bird*** – Humanity in the Face Hatred to hear from Jewish survivors from France about their personal experience with antisemitism during the Holocaust.

3. In the film, Julien gifts Sara a wooden bird he had carved. Students discuss the meaning of the artifact, how it demonstrates resistance, and its importance utilizing the Artifact Reflection handout.

4. Introduce students to the phrase "Righteous Among the Nations." Explain that in 1953, the Knesset (Israeli parliament) passed the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority Law, which created Yad Vashem. In the same law, Yad Vashem was given the mission to identify and recognize non-Jews who had risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews during the Holocaust, in order to convey the gratitude of the State of Israel and the Jewish people by granting them the title "Righteous Among the Nations." Tell students that an independent committee composed of Holocaust survivors and historians, headed by a former Israel Supreme Court justice discusses each and every person who is a candidate for becoming a "Righteous Among the Nations," and that this project is a unique and unprecedented attempt by victims to pay tribute to people who stood by their side at a time of persecution and great tragedy.

Students read through the criteria and create a test case for the fictional Beaumier family to be nominated. What actions of theirs should be considered in rescuing Sara? Two examples from France to help students in this activity can be found in the stories of Joseph Migneret and the Roger and Perret Families, courtesy of Yad Vashem.



a. Additionally students can complete the IWitness activity ***White Bird*** – Rescuers and the Rescued in France to delve deeper into the topic of rescue through survivor testimonies.

Discussion Questions/Writing Prompts

The questions below can be used to generate discussion to help students process the film. The questions—covering both content and the making of the film—can also be used as prompts for journaling or other writing assignments. Begin with the first question to help students process the film emotionally; then return to students' answers to the first question after the other questions have been discussed to gauge whether the answers have changed as a result of analysis and discussion.

Write one sentence about the film and something you've learned from the film. The sentence could be any of the following:

"The film is about people who _____ "

"The film presents a complex situation where _____ "

"One lesson I will take from this film is _____ "

"I think the film is actually about _____ "

Testimony Connection: Jewish Identity

Although Sara is a fictional character, how is her life as a child described? What was she like? What were her interests? What are the filmmakers trying to tell us about Jewish life in France before WWII? Refer to the photographs provided to see authentic pictures of Jewish life in France before the Holocaust.



Listen to the testimony clip of Lily Redner, who speaks about her experience growing up in France.

Lily Redner was born on December 13, 1930, to German immigrants in Nancy, Meurthe-et-Moselle, France. She was one of four daughters.
When Germany occupied France, her family was forced to leave their home and move north. By 1940, anti-Jewish laws began to take hold in France and her father could no longer work.

In 1942, the deportation of Jews began and French police came to arrest her parents. Lily was saved by being smuggled to farms by a baker who worked for the underground resistance.
They traveled in secrecy, constantly on the move, hiding under flour sacks and inside cars. She was taken in by a devout Catholic couple who had lost their own children. They took her to church, in hopes of adopting and baptizing her, but Lily refused, clinging to the hope that her parents would return and find her still Jewish.

After the war, Lily attended Jewish summer camps for orphans, reconnecting with her Jewish community. In 1984, she learned through the Red Cross that her parents had perished in Auschwitz. She met her husband, Alex, a fellow Jewish survivor from Poland, at her university. They moved to Uruguay due to the difficulties of obtaining an American citizenship. She had four daughters and seven grandchildren. Lily was interviewed on October 6, 1995, in Los Angeles, California, by the USC Shoah Foundation.

What can this teach us about Jewish life before the Holocaust?

Testimony Connection: Rising Antisemitism

The characters of Sara and her family experience antisemitism personally in ***White Bird***—what were their first experiences of hatred? In what ways was the escalation of antisemitism represented, both in the society and in their personal relationships as shown in the film?

How did the Nazi system embolden hatred and normalize violence within the territories it occupied, such as in France? How did the persecution of Jews lead to devaluing life in general? In the film, the lives of the hospital patients and Julien's character are shown as being devalued—what is there a connection to the normalization of hatred and violence?



Listen to the testimony clip of Michele Cohen-Rodriguez, who speaks about her experience with antisemitism in France during the Holocaust.

Michele Cohen-Rodriguez was born in Paris, France on March 26, 1935. Her parents were from Kracow, Poland, moving to France with her three siblings. Her family, deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, spoke Yiddish at home and lived a middle-class life in Paris. Her younger brother, Maurice was deported to Auschwitz at 18 and never returned. Her father worked in the thread and linen business. Her family observed Jewish holidays with large gatherings. During the outbreak of war, she experienced antisemitic restrictions. Most of her family was deported during the war, leaving only a few survivors. Michele was interviewed by the USC Shoah Foundation on Nov 23, 1998, in Santa Monica, California, U.S.A

What can this teach us about the impact of antisemitism?

Testimony Connection: Resistance

"In dark times, small things remind us of our humanity. Vive l'humanite" (Long live humanity) is an exchange between Vivienne Beaumier and Sara as Vivienne was brushing her hair in the loft. What are some simple actions that maintain and reinforce the humanity of Sara, both actions she does as well as those who care for her? How is this a form of resistance? Do you think real children during the Holocaust exhibited these types of resistance?



Listen to the testimony clip of Egon Gruenhut, who speaks about his experience with passive resistance in France during the Holocaust and the impact of Pastor Andre Trochme, a church leader in the French village of Le Chambon sur Lignon, who encouraged his congregants to hide Jews during the Vichy regime.

Egon Gruenhut was born in Mannheim, Germany on Aug 24, 1922. Egon grew up with one brother in a middle-class family. Due to his father's service in World War I, Egon was one of the last Jewish students allowed to stay in a public school before being forced to attend a Jewish school in 1936. By 1940, Egon and his family were rounded up with only an hour's notice. They were deported from their homes with minimal belongings and sent to a series of internment camps in France.

In 1941, Egon was transferred to Rivesaltes from Gurs, another internment camp near the Spanish border. At this camp, Egon became involved in cultural activities and performances. He learned that his father was ill at the same camp and managed to travel to his father's barracks in Rivesaltes. Egon got into a fight with the French guard preventing him from seeing his father and he was transferred to a nearby village. He attempted to cross over to Switzerland, guided by a Protestant priest. After being briefly detained, they were returned to France and back to Rivesaltes.

The Cimade, a French humanitarian organization, helped him avoid being sent to the death camps. Egon was released just before the camp fell under Nazi control. He made his way back to a village called Chambon-sur-Lignon. He finally reached Switzerland with proper documentation and with the aid of local resistance networks. During his time in Switzerland, Egon found work as a part-time social worker and full-time bookkeeper, gradually re-establishing his life after the war. Egon lost both his father and older brother. In 1947, he immigrated to New York City with help from his uncle. Together, Egon and his wife had four children. Egon was interviewed by the USC Shoah Foundation on Apr 7, 1998 in New York, New York, U.S.A.

How impactful was passive resistance? What can this teach us about the value and importance of different types of resistance?

Symbolism

What does the forest symbolize throughout the film, both in the winter, in the spring/summer, during the chase, and in the character Julien's death?

What is the symbolism of the white bird and why is it an appropriate title for the film?

Reflections

In Sara's speech at the end, she states, "We must, all of us, use the light within ourselves, to stop the injustices of today. For only then can we be certain that the darkness of the past will never be repeated." What are some injustices you see in your community and world today? What are some actions, small ones you can start today, as well as larger ones, to combat them?

The Use of Fiction to Teach the Holocaust

White Bird is a fictional film that takes a composite of many stories and weaves them into one dramatic narrative. Students discuss the utility of fiction to teach important lessons, such as what happened during the Holocaust. Is this an appropriate medium to teach such important lessons? What are the advantages and disadvantages of film to teach these lessons?

How is Sara's experience similar to or different from the real experiences of Lily Redner, Henriette Gersohn, Michele Cohen-Rodriguez, Peter Feigel, Egon Gruenhut, Betty Eppel, Shlomo Fischer-Shenkar or Ehud Loeb?

Appendix

A PICTURE OF JEWISH LIFE IN EUROPE BEFORE WWII

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Before World War II, about 9.5 million Jews lived across Europe, from Scandinavia to Greece, as well as in the Russian Empire, the Middle East, and North Africa. They had lived in certain lands for hundreds of years; in others, for nearly two thousand. The Jewish world was diverse, with different languages and cultures.

A TIME OF CHALLENGES

The turn of the 20th century was a dynamic period in the life of the Jewish people. For the first time in history, Jews had equal rights in every country in Europe and the opportunity to join the modern world. But this required them to make choices about their identities. Should they integrate into local society, sacrificing some or all of their culture and religious traditions? Should they give up on integration and immigrate to places full of economic promise, like the United States, or establish their own homeland in British Mandatory Palestine (the region that encompasses what is today Israel), reviving the ancient Hebrew language? Or should they remain in Europe but develop their own separate culture in languages like Yiddish or Ladino? The Jewish future was hotly debated in the Jewish press, in a rainbow of political parties and youth movements, and within families.

MODERNIZATION

Most Jews lived in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the century, with over 8.5 million living in the vast territory that includes areas we refer to today as Poland and Russia. A large percentage still lived in small market towns called *shtetls*, where modernization was often slow in coming and Jewish life often had not changed much for centuries. Life was ordered by Sabbaths and holidays, and by religious traditions and institutions. Yiddish was the most widely-spoken language of daily life, which created solidarity but also separated the Jews from their neighbors in many ways. *Shtetls* were vibrant centers of Jewish spirituality, despite often grinding poverty. Prohibited for centuries from farming, most Jews were tailors, shoemakers, watchmakers, and artisans, who worked in family businesses or in small workshops.

Others were merchants or peddlers carrying goods to sell from place to place in a pack on their backs. As new ideas penetrated the *shtetls*, Jews began to take advantage of educational opportunities, becoming doctors, lawyers, engineers and writers, as they were doing in the cities.

In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, there was a mass exodus from the *shtetls* and a move to the big cities to take advantage of new opportunities. By the 20th century Jews were the most urbanized people in Europe. Many of the cities they moved to – Warsaw, Vilna, Paris, Vienna, Berlin – became cultural and intellectual centers.

In Western and Central Europe, where there were fewer Jews, there was more integration. Jews adopted the culture and language of the societies they lived in, many moving away from the Yiddish language and religious



Two unidentified boys working the wheel of the town pump, Otwock, Poland
SOURCE: 2014 YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

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traditions; some completely assimilating into the local culture.

Throughout Europe during the early 1900s, from east to west, the contribution of Jews to culture reached new heights. In Paris, Amedeo Modigliani, Marc Chagall, and Marcel Proust created masterpieces of art and literature. In Vienna, Sigmund Freud changed the face of psychiatry. In Prague, Franz Kafka wrote classics.

Jews made inroads in positions that had previously been closed to them, such as public service and government. Italian, German, French, and Polish Jews became mayors and ministers. Italy and France even had Jewish Prime Ministers.

There was a flowering of the arts in cultural capitals like Warsaw, Poland, which had the largest Jewish community in Europe. Yiddish press, literature and theater flourished. For instance, more than half a million people visited the Jewish theater in Warsaw in 1935, where classical Yiddish plays were presented alongside works by William Shakespeare and Molière, all in Yiddish.



Siblings Welwel and Hershel Ilewicki riding a bicycle, Baranowice, Poland
SOURCE: Yad Vashem Archives 9169/13

Jewish youth movements thrived in these years. They were a mirror of the debate about the Jewish future and the competing ideas of tradition, integration, or Zionism, the movement for a Jewish independent state in what today is Israel. The one thing they agreed on was criticism of the older generation. They created a "youth culture" transmitted by peers, which often replaced their parents' values.

Education changed as well, also reflecting this debate. In many places, religious boys still began to study the Torah (first five books of the Bible) at the age of three as they had done for centuries. But now competing school systems developed. Some encouraged integration, teaching in French, Polish, German, or whatever the local language happened to be. Others promoted Zionism, teaching Hebrew. Girls began to be educated in movements like Beys Yaakov, an Orthodox Jewish educational movement for girls and young women. More and more Jews also attended public, non-Jewish schools, and their numbers grew among university students.

By the 1920s, more than ever before, Jews were part of the fabric of society. Jewish Nobel prize winners included Paul Ehrlich, inventor of chemotherapy, and Albert Einstein, author of the theory of relativity. Jews were more visible, going to coffeehouses and sporting events, wearing the latest styles, attending the opera and the cinema.

Perhaps this increased visibility led to resentment, for at the same time as this progress was being made, antisemitism was spreading and intensifying, with accusations that the Jews were trying to take over Europe.

RISING ANTISEMITISM AND NATIONALISM

As the new century dawned, pogroms (organized violent riots) swept through Russia, leaving thousands of Jews dead in hundreds of towns and villages. In an infamous antisemitic incident in France, a Jewish military officer, Alfred Dreyfus, was falsely accused and convicted of treason in 1894. Most of the evidence against him was forged, and as his trial progressed, it became obvious that he had been targeted because he was a Jew. It took 12 years until he was declared innocent. The "Dreyfus Affair" proved to many that no matter how integrated Jews became in society, they were still subject to intolerance and persecution.

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The trauma of World War I increased anti-Jewish feeling. In the wake of Germany's unexpected and humiliating defeat in 1918, Jews became scapegoats and were unfairly blamed for society's problems. In pogroms and mass murders during wars and civil wars following WWI in Eastern Europe, some 100,000 Jews were killed or perished.

At the same time came rising nationalism, the idea that the majority population of a nation is united by a common language and shared culture, religion, and traditions. This belief promoted national unity. However, it also meant that minorities like the Jews, who did not share these defining elements, were excluded as outsiders.

In the interwar period in Poland, for example, inflamed nationalism led Jews to be called an "alien nation." Cries arose for their emigration. Violent anti-Jewish riots there increased steadily in number. The governments of Poland, Hungary, and Romania adopted policies to intentionally exclude Jews from their economies. These laws imposed new requirements for licensing of craftspeople and other workers, or required shops to close on Sundays, creating two days during which Jews were unable to work (since religious Jews could not work on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath). Other laws limited higher education for Jews. As a result, many Jews fell into terrible poverty and could no longer support themselves.

JEWISH REACTIONS

Jews responded in different ways to the worsening conditions.

Many religious Jews continued to maintain their traditions and remain in their often insular communities, praying for better times and appealing to governmental authorities to protect them.

Other Jews gave up on Europe, seeing no hope and no future. In a massive wave of immigration, about 2.75 million Jews fled between the mid-1800s and 1914, most going to the United States. At the turn of the century, Warsaw was the world's largest Jewish community. By 1914 New York had surpassed Warsaw with one million Jews - over double the number in Warsaw. Among the immigrants to the U.S. were Supreme Court justice Felix Frankfurter, film pioneers Louis B. Mayer and Samuel Goldwyn, and cosmetics giants Helena Rubinstein and Max Factor. Irving Berlin, originally from the Russian Empire, became a beloved American songwriter, who wrote "White Christmas." In the wake of World War I, however, America became isolationist, closing its doors to other countries and severely restricting immigration.

The poverty and distress of the working classes attracted many Jews to revolutionary ideas and groups that fought for the equal treatment of workers, such as socialism and Marxism.

Still others, disappointed that their integration led neither to the promised equality nor to acceptance, advanced the solution of a Jewish national homeland. This movement was known as "Zionism." As pogroms spread, Zionism became more popular. Youth movements fired up enthusiasm for this ideology among teenagers, as they trained their members for immigration to British Mandatory Palestine.



Members of the Socialist-Zionist youth group, Hashomer Hatzair, during the Jewish holiday, Lag ba'Omer, Wloclawek, Poland, 1937
SOURCE: Yad Vashem Archives 1592/1

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WHITE BIRD VIEWING GUIDE

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In the chart below, list adjectives, characteristics, and take notes on the choices made by the following major fictional characters:

Sara	Julien (Tourteau or Crab)
Vivian and Jean-Paul Beaumier	Vincent (School boy, Nazi collaborator)

Below, list acts of bias, hatred, and persecution against Jews in the film:

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ARTIFACT REFLECTION

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Title of Artifact: _____

1. Describe the significance or meaning of the artifact. How does it reflect what or why people resisted?

2. What type of resistance does the artifact reflect? What does it show about the spirit of the resisters?

3. What is your reaction to the artifact? What feelings, thoughts, or questions does it bring up?

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PREWAR PHOTOS OF CHILDREN IN FRANCE

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Borowicz Collection. *France, Anni Gurfinkiel.* [photograph]. Yad Vashem.



Tsipora Izbotzki. *St. Georges, France, Girls bathing.* [photograph]. Yad Vashem.

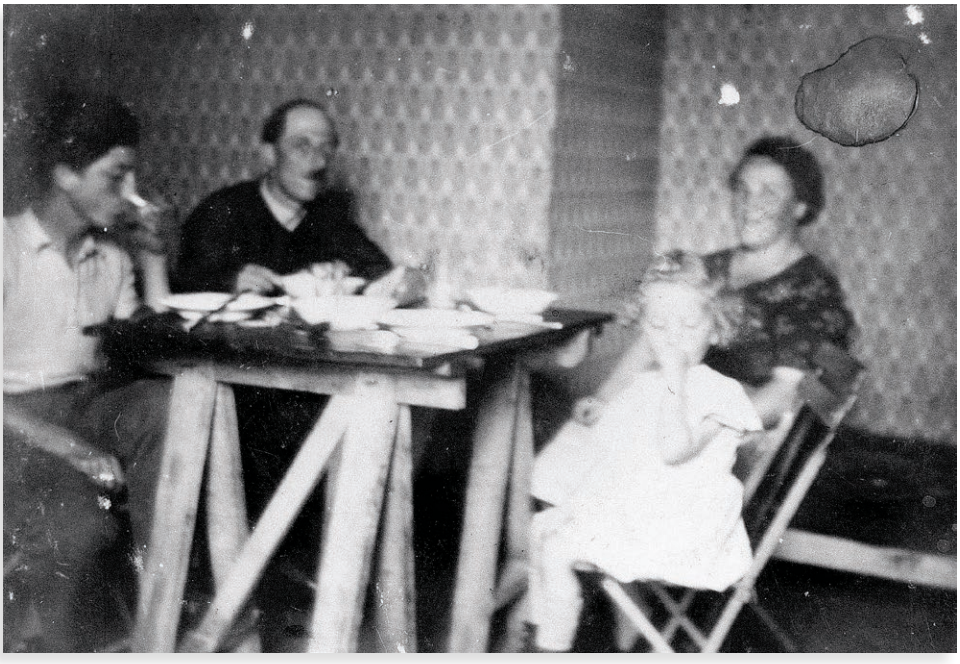
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PREWAR PHOTOS OF CHILDREN IN FRANCE

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Tsipora Izbotzki. *St. Georges, France, Children dressed up for Mardi Gras.* [photograph]. Yad Vashem.



Ruth Benist. *St. Georges, France, The Gelberger family.* [photograph]. Yad Vashem.

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