Between the years of 1933 and 1945, many European Jews attempted to seek safety by moving to countries that were not controlled by or allied with the Nazis. Unfortunately, they encountered numerous barriers to leaving, such as lack of money, the inability to obtain the necessary documents, and finding another country that would take them in.

The escalation of Nazi persecution of Europe's Jews coincided tragically with Jews desperate to find safer places to live. Finding a country to welcome them became increasingly difficult since most countries — including the United States — placed strict limits on the number of immigrants allowed to enter every year. After Kristallnacht—the violent anti-Jewish attacks in Germany and Austria on November 9 and 10, 1938—approximately 125,000 people, mostly Jewish, struggled to get one of the 27,000 immigration spots open to the United States. While some people succeeded in fleeing Europe, others could only get as far as neighboring countries such as France or the Netherlands. Most of these countries would later be invaded and occupied by the Nazis and a majority of those who had moved would become one of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Following the Holocaust and Second World War, the refugee crisis continued. Most Jewish survivors were unable to return home because of the destruction or appropriation of their home and property or unwilling because they feared antisemitic attacks from their neighbors. For years, Jewish people were housed in Displaced Persons camps until the international community could find a new place for them to live.

The 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol both came as a direct result of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Countries around the world re-evaluated their legal responsibility and moral obligation to protect people who were in danger. What resulted was a new definition of a refugee as someone unable to return to their country of origin due to their fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The international community also agreed that refugees should not be punished for entering or staying in a country illegally until their case for asylum could be heard.

Prompt: Reflecting on Holocaust history, create a piece of writing or work of visual art that examines the plight of Jewish refugees during the Holocaust and how their experiences might inform the choices that individuals and governments make in responding to refugees today.
Recommended Resources

• *Refugee* by Alan Gratz

• “Refugees” Encyclopedia Article from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
  https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/refugees

• Americans and the Holocaust: The Refugee Crisis Virtual Exhibition by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

• Americans and the Holocaust: The Refugee Crisis Unit Plan by Facing History and Ourselves and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

• Responding to a Refugee Crisis Lesson by Facing History and Ourselves

• “Refugees Today” Encyclopedia Article from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
  https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/refugees-today

• Teaching about Refugees Lesson Ideas from the United Nations High Commission on Refugee

• Text to Text: Comparing Jewish Refugees during the 1930s with Syrian Refugees Lesson by the New York Times

• OJMCHE Oral History Collection (Search Holocaust Refugees by Category)
  https://www.ojmche.org/collections/oral-history/

• iWitness Collection of Refugees’ Testimonies by the USC Shoah Foundation
  https://iwitness.usc.edu/watch?TopicID=55&searching=false&theme=55&clip=762&entry=0_ov5omhq