

2025 JAKOB AND SALA KRYSZEK ART AND WRITING COMPETITION

Between the years of 1933 and 1945, many European Jews and other targeted groups of Nazi discrimination 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 coincided tragically with targeted groups 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 eleven million victims of the Holocaust.



A Child Waiting to Leave the Deggendorf Displaced Persons Camp. Photo courtesy of USHMM



Jakob and Sala Kryszek 1950.
Photo courtesy of OJMCHE

Jakob and Sala Kryszek both were unable to flee Europe with their families, and found themselves swept up in the horrors of the Holocaust. Both endured tremendous suffering at the hands of the Nazis in ghettos, slave labor camps and killing centers. Jakob survived five camps, narrowly escaping death many times. He was shot in the leg by a low-flying Allied plane when being moved by train from one camp to another and spent the end of the war in traction in a camp hospital. Sala survived both life in the Łódź ghetto and Auschwitz, eventually forced on a death march by the Nazis until she was liberated by Russian soldiers. They both survived, and became post-war refugees. Unable to return to their respective homes, they met in Germany after the war and came to Portland in 1952.

Following the Holocaust and Second World War, the refugee crisis continued. Most 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 and those targeted by the Nazis were housed in Displaced Persons camps until the international community could find a new place for them to live.

COMPETITION PROMPT

Reflecting on Holocaust history, create a piece of writing or work of visual art that examines the plight of Holocaust refugees which could include forced deportation to ghettos, deportation to killing centers or slave labor camps, and/or post-liberation struggle for identity, survival and renewal.

Recommended Resources for Project Research

1. "Flight" digital curriculum from *The Holocaust: An Oregon Perspective* from Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education
[Click here to access the digital curriculum](#)
2. Alan Gratz, *Refugee*, (New York: Scholastic Press), 2017
[Click here to order a copy of the book on Amazon](#)
This book is also available through [The Walter Pick Memorial Holocaust and other Genocide Book Box](#) program at OJMCHE. Teachers can order copies of the book for free.
3. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Refugees" *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, 2024
[Click here to access the article](#)
4. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "The Refugee Crises," *Americans and the Holocaust*, 2024
[Click here to access this interactive, on-line resource](#)
5. Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education, "Jakob Kryszek, 1918 - 2019" *Oral History*, 1989
[Click here to access the full interview with Jakob Kryszek by OJMCHE](#)
6. USC Shoah Foundation, "Refugees," *Witness*, 2025
[Click here to access several different interviews with Holocaust refugees curated by the USC Shoah Foundation](#)