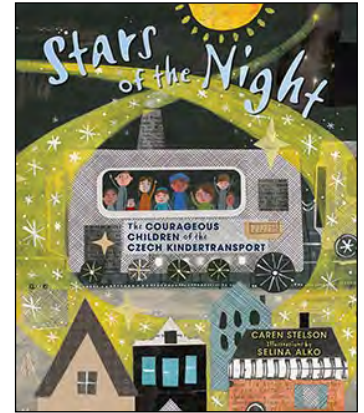


Teachers Resource Guide  
*Stars of the Night:*  
*The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport*  
by Caren Stelson, 2023, Carolrhoda Books

### WHAT IS IN THIS TEACHERS RESOURCE GUIDE?

- Introduction, maps, and questions to enter the story
- Page by page discussion questions
- Discussion of literary and artistic devices
- Going deeper ideas
- Connecting *Stars of the Night* to our lives today
- Project possibilities
- Bibliographies for Younger Students, Interested Older Students, and Adults



### INTRODUCTION

Told from the collective voices of the children, *Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport* recounts the true story of 669 mostly Jewish children from Czechoslovakia rescued from what we now know as the Holocaust. As anti-Semitism increases under Hitler's Nazi regime, the narrative follows the children's journey on the Kindertransport from their homes in Czechoslovakia to the safety of England. As parents wave goodbye, the children step into train cars and leave behind all that they have and have known to come to live with strangers in a far-away country. After the war, the children, now young adults, return to Czechoslovakia, realizing for many that their families have not survived the war. Still, they carry on, courageously. Fifty years pass before they learn of the man most responsible for saving them, for giving them their "ticket to life" and a future – Nicholas Winton.

*Stars of the Night* is a story about a perilous time, but it is also a story about *love, resilience, and courage* – the courage to stand up and do what is right. Approaching *Stars of the Night* from love, resilience, courage, and the willingness to help others is an appropriate starting place for young readers to begin to learn about the hard history of World War II and the Holocaust.

For older readers and adults, the back matter of *Stars of the Night* provides (1) a time line of important events in the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party, (2) information about the Kindertransport Movement of 1938-39, the refugee organizations in Europe who helped 10,000 mostly Jewish children to safety in England, and (3) biographical notes about Nicholas Winton who worked tirelessly to save the 669 Czech children, the true heroes of this book.

### CREATING A PEACE CULTURE IN SCHOOLS AND AT HOME

The true story *Stars of the Night* is written for elementary children to help them learn about the struggles parents and children faced during this perilous time during World War II. Children can bring their empathy and compassion to the children on the Kindertransport who faced separation from their families – children who were of similar ages to the children listening to this story. Questions of justice and fairness are sure to arise. Courageously facing bullying behavior, prejudice, discrimination, and scapegoating are important conversations to have in the classroom and around the dinner table. Helping children add to a life-long

toolbox of skills in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is critical to living in a peaceful environment by finding peace in ourselves and helping others. The links below are guides for children and their adults to explore pathways to peace and justice:

- World Citizen Peace  
<https://www.worldcitizenpeace.org/>
- The Peace Pad  
[www.thepeacepad.org](http://www.thepeacepad.org)
- SEE Learning: Social, Emotional, Ethical Learning -Emory University  
<https://seelearning.emory.edu/>
- Learning for Justice  
[www.learningforjustice.org](http://www.learningforjustice.org)
- Peace-ology series of article found in Bookology and this website  
[www.bookologymagazine.com/peace-ology](http://www.bookologymagazine.com/peace-ology)

## TEACHING HARD HISTORY: THE HOLOCAUST

Teaching the history of the Holocaust within the context of World War II is both challenging and necessary both in the classroom and at home. The rise of the Nazi party in Germany and the targeted plans for genocide of the Jews throughout Europe provide disturbing lessons to learn. We must prevent such events from happening again to any people anywhere.

Educators at the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. suggest teaching and discussing the particulars of the Holocaust begin in the sixth grade when students are developmentally ready to absorb unfolding events of this time. *Stars of the Night* certainly can be included in the canon of Holocaust literature for young people 12 years and older. For support in teaching Holocaust history, the organizations below provide excellent information, primary materials and guided curriculum for middle and high school levels:

- U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum  
<https://www.ushmm.org>
- Yad Vashem : The World Holocaust Remembrance Center  
<https://www.yadvashem.org/museum.html>  
<https://www.yadvashem.org/remembrance/commemorative-sites/children-memorial.html>
- Facing History and Ourselves  
<https://www.facinghistory.org>

## ENTERING THE STORY

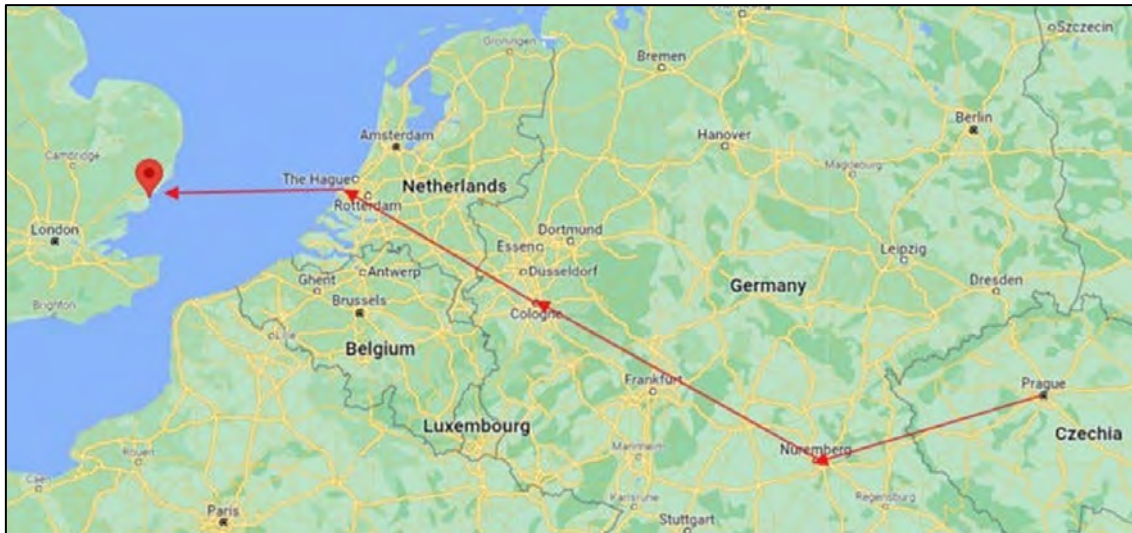
Some helpful photos and maps:



Europe just before World War II, omniatlas.com



Prague, Czech Republic, © Moyan Brenn, WikiCommons, CC BY 2.0



Route by train and boat from Prague to England.  
Image from Google maps, annotated by Gill McCulloch.



United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,  
*Holocaust Encyclopedia*

What is a safe place? How would you describe a place that is **safe**?

If you were traveling to this safe place, what might you put in a suitcase?

How might it feel to leave your home and go to a new place without your parents?

## PAGE BY PAGE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

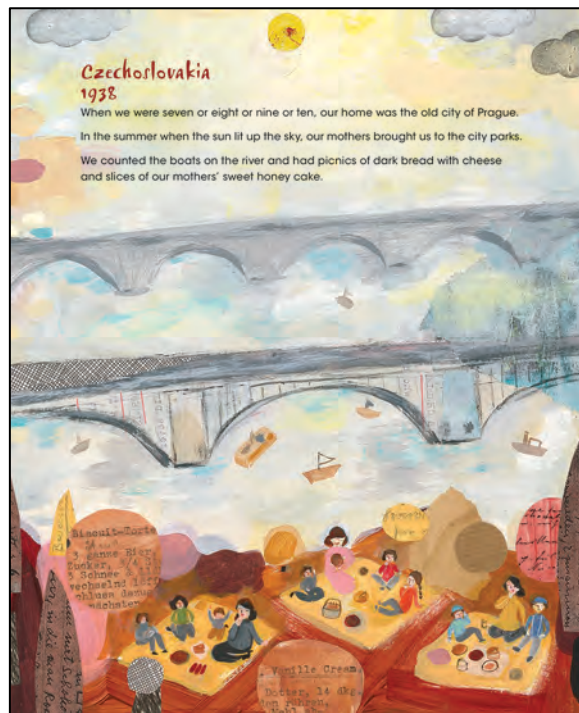
Read and share the story of the children of the Czech Kindertransport then return to the beginning and discuss, using some or all of the questions below:

Who tells this story? Why do you think author Caren Stelson chose to use “we” as first-person plural rather than choosing one child to tell the story through that individual’s experience?



Why do you think author Caren Stelson started the story by describing the peacefulness of the children’s lives?

What is the significance of illustrator Selina Alko’s use of bright and somber colors to shift the mood of the story? How does author Caren Stelson do the same with words?



Did you notice how illustrator Selina Alko consistently dresses five children in certain colors all through the story? Look to the back matter of the book and see if you can identify these children. They represent real children on the Czech Kindertransport.

All through the illustrations, Selina Alko layers in bits of newspaper or recipes. Is this effective? Can you explain why?



How would you describe what is happening to the child in blue? How is life changing for the Jewish children in the neighborhood? How does Selina Alko show how the parents are feeling in the illustrations?



Why do you think parents brought drawings that the children had made to the hotel where they would meet the man?



What is war? How would you describe a particular place that is at war?



Parents received letters that signaled that "it was time." What do you think the parents were thinking when they received their letter in the mail?

Why would the children's mothers refer to their departure from Czechoslovakia to England as a "holiday"?

How do you think the children of the Kindertransport felt when their parents answered this question: "Aren't you coming?" by stating "No, my loves. But good people will be there to take care of you."

How would you describe the meaning of the mothers' words to their children :

*There will be times when you'll feel lonely and homesick. Let the stars of the night and the sun of the day be the messenger of our thoughts and love.*

Are these words comforting to you? In what ways?

Can you find places throughout the story where author Caren Stelson repeats the phrases, *stars of the night* and *sun of the day*? Why do you think she did that? How does repetition help the telling of the story?



How would you describe Selina Alko's illustration of Prague's Wilson Railway Station?

What adjectives would you use to express the thoughts and feelings of the children as they approached the station?

Can you give an example of a time when you were separated from someone you loved? (It could even be a pet.) Was it temporary? Was it permanent? How did you feel before, during, and after the separation?





What do the children mean when they say, “We shared our sandwiches of dark bread with cheese and slices of honey cake. We shared our family photos and told ourselves we would be home again soon. **It was a big adventure, until it wasn’t.**”

How would you describe the thoughts and/or feelings of the children as the German soldiers opened their suitcases and dumped out their belongings? What words would you use to describe their reactions?



“Strangers with open arms ran to greet us...These strangers, our new foster mums and dads, spoke English words we could not understand.” What do you think these foster families said to the children as they greeted them at the Liverpool Street Station?

What would the children have wanted to hear?



The children missed their dark bread, hot cocoa and sweet honey cake. How does food trigger memories of the past? Have you ever been homesick? What does homesickness feel like?

What kinds of news stories do you think the children listened to as they gathered around the radio in their foster homes? What emotions are expressed in the illustration with the children surrounding the radio? How would you describe their facial expressions?

What strengths would the children need to cope during this time?

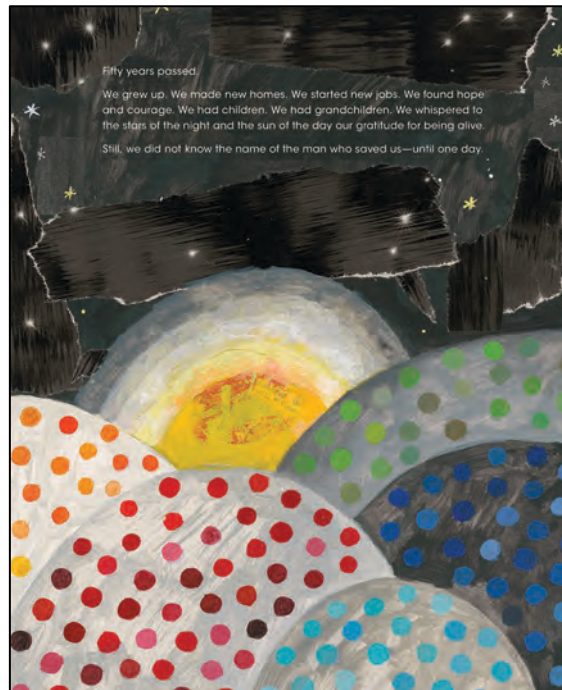


During the war, traumatic and horrific events were happening throughout Europe. Bombings. Scapegoating. Cattle cars filled with friends and family. “We prayed to the stars of the night and the sun of the day that these people were not our parents.” How does Selina Alko show in her illustrations what is happening to the Jewish people?

After the war, the children returned to Czechoslovakia and searched for family members. How do the illustrations show that years have passed for the children on the Kindertransport?

Their families were not saved, “Most of us never found them...” but the “Kinder” had survived. How might it feel to be a survivor? Who was instrumental in saving them? How would they find out?

What do you think the polka dots represent in this illustration?

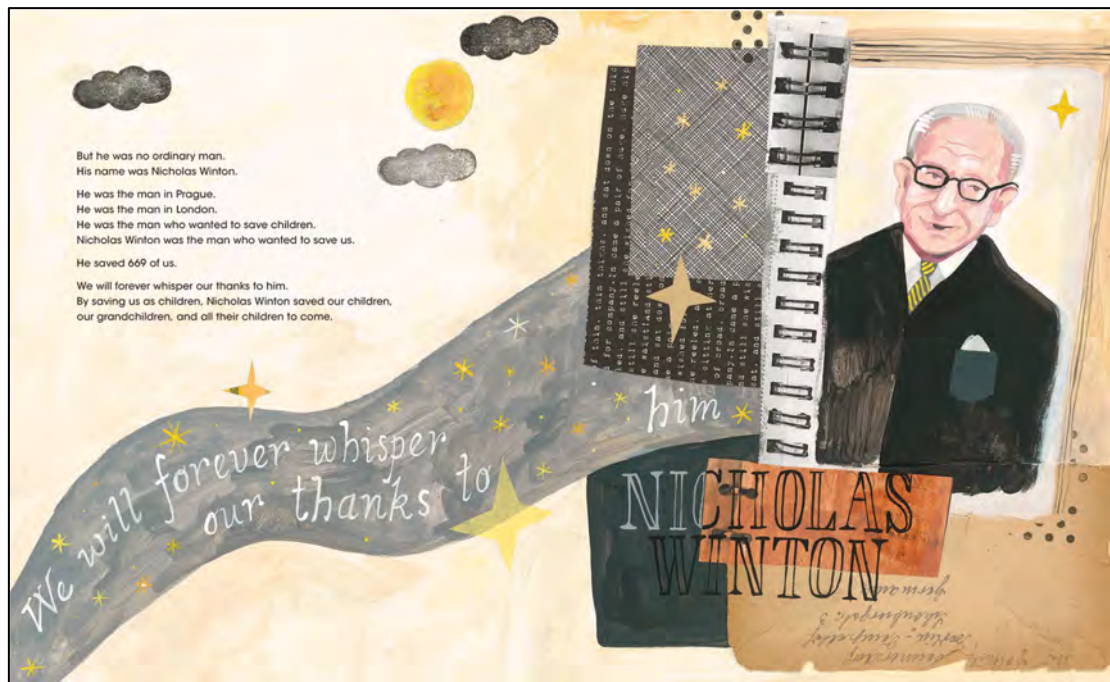


Selina Alko sees the dots as new generations of children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and more related to the children who survived on the Kindertransport. Why do you think Selina Alko chose those specific colors?

Author Caren Stelson wrote about the Kinder growing up and having families of their own “ ... We found hope and courage. We had children. We had grandchildren ...” How might the dots represent *hope* and *courage* too.



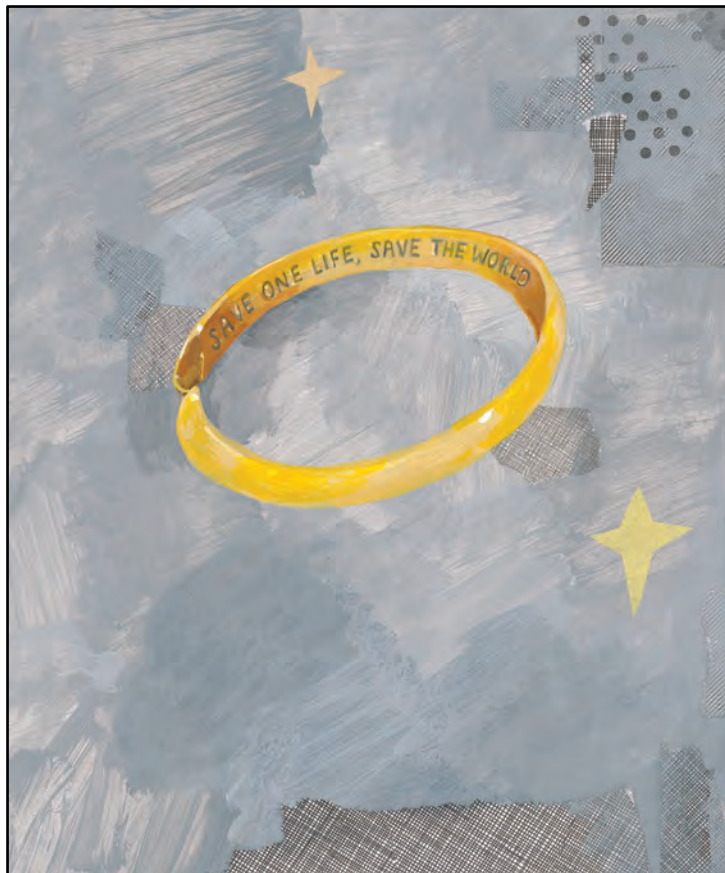
In Winton’s scrapbook, there were photos, drawings, passports, stamps, letters. What role do these primary sources and artifacts play in solving the mystery of who saved the children? His name is listed. How would you describe the initial meeting of the “Kinder” and the man – Nicholas Winton? Why do the children say that “he was no ordinary man”? What made him extraordinary?



Why do you think the children say, “We will forever **whisper** our thanks to him?”

Do you think *Stars of the Night* is a good title for this story? Why?

What are the various ideas or *metaphors* the “stars of the night” can represent?



Selina Alko illustrated the ring Kindertransport children gave to Nicholas Winton when they were adults. What do you think the words mean to the adult “kinder”? What do the words on the ring mean to you?

## CONNECTING STARS OF THE NIGHT TO OUR LIVES TODAY

What knowledge or insights does Caren Stelson want the readers to gain from reading this collective narrative of the children of the Czech Kindertransport?

How might knowing *Stars of the Night* prepare you for challenges you may face now and in the future?

Discuss the word “prejudice” (attitudes) and discrimination (behaviors). How do they show up in the story? How have these words appeared in the news today?

What are the definitions of perpetrator, by-stander, up-stander, and ally?

- *Perpetrator* – a person who wrongs others, sometimes for reasons of prejudice and discrimination.
- *Bystander* – a person who sees a problem but takes no action.
- *Upstander* – a person who speaks up and acts in support of a someone being harmed, attacked or bullied.
- *Ally* – a person who helps another in a continuing struggle, standing with and supporting that person who is being harmed by a larger group.



Is it possible for a person to change from being a bystander to an upstander? What might make a person change? What might make a person change from being a perpetrator to being an upstander or ally?

What are ways we can be with a person who has been hurt or harmed by someone else?

Slight or angry comments can hurt. When we may be responsible for that hurt, how can we apologize in meaningful ways?

What specific actions can students and teachers take to help shift the atmosphere so everyone in the classroom and throughout the school feels safe and more peaceful? What can we learn from making a classroom or school more peaceful to making our communities safer and more peaceful?



Global impact on refugees, UNHCR

There are more refugees in the world today than after World War II. Are there specific action we can take to help refugee children? What organizations help refugees? What refugees live in our communities? Are there ways classrooms and schools might want to reach out in service to support and help?

## PROJECT POSSIBILITIES

Kindertransport memory quilts capture the experience of Kindertransport children. <https://kindertransport.org/history/memory-quilts/>. With a team, create a paper quilt that illustrates the experiences of “kinder” you and your team research – both their childhood histories and who they became as adults. (The Kindertransport Memory Quilt Book, is available from The Zekelman Holocaust Center, Farmington Hills, Michigan.)

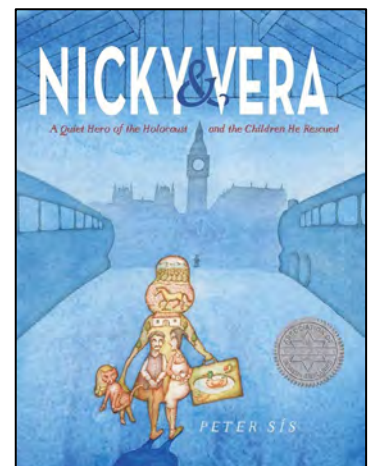
Design shadow puppets that represent the “kinder,” the children on the Kindertransport. Act out the story either by reading *Stars of the Night* or telling the story in your own words.

Read the picture book *Nicky and Vera: A Quiet Hero of the Holocaust and the Children He Rescued* by Peter Sis. What new information did you learn about Nicholas Winton? What else can you find out about Winton? Compare and contrast the illustrations of Peter Sis and illustrator Selina Alko of *Stars of the Night*.

Create a large poster of Nicholas Winton (could be life size) that layers biographical information about him while reflecting the style of either Selina Alko or Peter Sis.

Design a map from Prague to London. Find out other Kindertransport routes from Germany, Austria, and Poland and add them to your map. How will you design your map? Will you illustrate it? Will you borrow ideas from illustrators Selina Alko or Peter Sis?

Brainstorm words the “kinder” must have felt, or you have felt at times. Resilience. Courage. Hope. Kindness. Loneliness. These words may be on a classroom list. Write a journal entry or poem about one of these words.





Take one more step. Study illustrator Selina Alko's artistic style then design a collage that illustrates your Word poem.

Take another step and notice the way illustrator Selina Alko uses light and shadows to express emotion. Extend your poem or write a new one that explores the emotional journey of a "kinder" or a journey you have had, illustrating it with light and shadows.

As a journal entry or personal narrative, write about when a stranger helped you or you helped a stranger. Perhaps that stranger was a person or an animal. What did you learn from that experience?

When have you seen someone put compassion into action? What happened? How did it change you and others witnessing this action? Write a script for a play about it and present it as a skit.

Nick Winton, Nicholas Winton's son, wrote this note for the back cover of the book:

*This book tells my father's story through the eyes of the children he helped to save from the Holocaust. It is a reminder of the huge difference any one of us can make in the lives of others. Our world depends on it. It is down to people like him, people like us, to make the change we want to see.*



Nick Winton and author Caren Stelson at Hope Square, Liverpool Street Station, London, where 10,000 children arrived escaping the Nazi regime.



What does this mean, “make the change we want to see?” What issue is important to you that you would like to see a change for the better? What is one step you could take to make a contribution to that change? Who else could help you?

Watch this video about upstander vs bystander. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JegGjYtstyw> Work as a team. Design a series of posters to stop bullying. Have each poster highlight one idea that helps stop bullying.

What does the word grateful mean to you? What might you be grateful for? Create a “Grateful Jar” with others and fill it with strips of gratefulness to share at specific times of year.

What does it mean to build bridges instead of walls?



Jamaica Plain, Boston. Photo by Caren Stelson

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*Special thanks to Amy Faust Mayer who shared many ideas for this Teachers Resource Guide.*

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