

What was it like for children in the Second World War?

Learning Objective:

To learn about the experience of Jewish children during the war and that war created many refugees.

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Different groups of people had very different experiences during World War II. For some people, like Jews and Gypsies, there wasn't just danger from falling bombs. For these people, the war was much more brutal than for everyone else.



Why do you think the war was harder for people like Jews and Gypsies?

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Think, pair, share your ideas.

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Adolf Hitler, the leader of the German Nazi party, believed that German Aryans, who were white with blond hair and blue eyes, were the 'master' race and that all other people were lesser races. It was Hitler's plan to get rid of as many of these lesser races as possible to make Germany great again.



This was called ethnic cleansing. He wanted Germany to be a pure Aryan race and he particularly wanted to 'cleanse' Germany of all Jews.

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Why were Jews targeted?

Racism against Jews, known as anti-Semitism, was not particular to Adolf Hitler. Jewish people had been persecuted for nearly 2000 years. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, Jews don't accept that Jesus was the Son of God and some Christians blame Jews for Jesus' death. Lots of Jews also had success as traders, merchants and bankers and gained a reputation for being money-thirsty. Some societies shunned Jews and made them live in ghettos wearing a yellow star to identify them as Jews. To some people, Jews were seen as the ultimate enemy.



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What was the Holocaust?

As soon as he came to power, Adolf Hitler began making life difficult for Jews. Jewish shops were marked with the star of David so that people wouldn't shop in them. People were encouraged to boycott anyone and anything associated with Jews. And then, in November 1938, a Jewish boy murdered a German officer in France. This was used as an excuse to attack the Jews. In one night, over 1 000 synagogues (Jewish places of worship) were burned, and Jewish homes, schools and shops were vandalized. Lots of Jews were killed.



Jewish shops were boycotted

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The very next day 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and taken to a concentration camp simply because they were Jewish.

Concentration camps were places to put people that the Nazis wanted to remove from society. Soon, there were lots of concentration camps, as well as labour camps where people had to work for the Nazis. By January of 1945 it is estimated that there were 700,000 prisoners in these camps.



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But the plan wasn't just to keep Jews out of sight. Hitler wanted to make sure they wouldn't 'contaminate' society. So the Nazis systematically killed Jews in the concentration camps. Many were killed in gas chambers. They were told that they would have a shower so they undressed and went into a chamber where they would be gassed to death. By the end of the war, more than 6 million Jews had been killed.



This picture shows a group of Jewish women and children making their way towards a gas chamber.

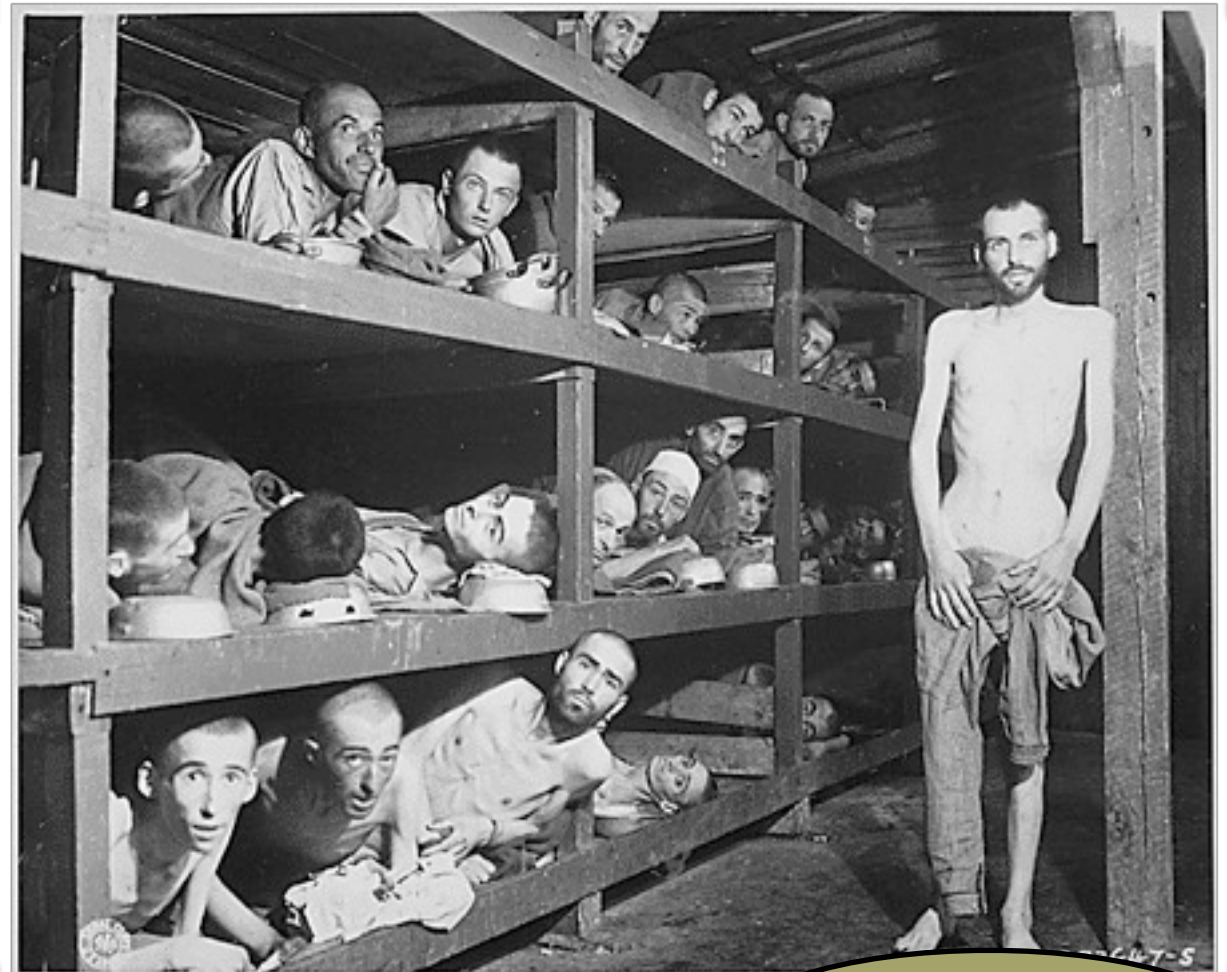
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For those who weren't selected for death, life in concentration camps was extremely difficult. They were given little food to eat and no warm clothes. Lots of people were forced into one room and not everyone had a bed. All their possessions were taken and their heads were shaved. Thousands died from malnutrition and illness.



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Who was Anne Frank and why is she remembered?



Anne Frank was a normal Jewish girl who was born in Germany and lived with her mother Edith, her father Otto, and her sister Margot. When Hitler came to power, the Frank family moved to Amsterdam in Holland, hoping that they would be safe there from the German persecution of the Jews.

But in 1940, Germany invaded the Netherlands and it became clear that Jews were no safer in Holland than they were in Germany. Anne Frank and her family decided they needed to go into hiding.

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Otto Frank knew that there was an empty annex above the office where he worked so he started to organise the family's hiding place by secretly putting furniture in. He also covered the entrance with a bookcase so anyone who came looking wouldn't realise there was a door. He had some friends to help him. In July 1942, Anne Frank and her family went into their hiding place.

This was the bookshelf that concealed the staircase up to the annex



The secret stairway to the annex.

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The Frank family lived with another family in the secret annex for more than 2 years. They had to be very quiet when there were people in the office downstairs and they had to make sure that no one could see them from their windows. They had some friends who brought them food and other items they needed even though they would have been killed if they had been found to be helping them.



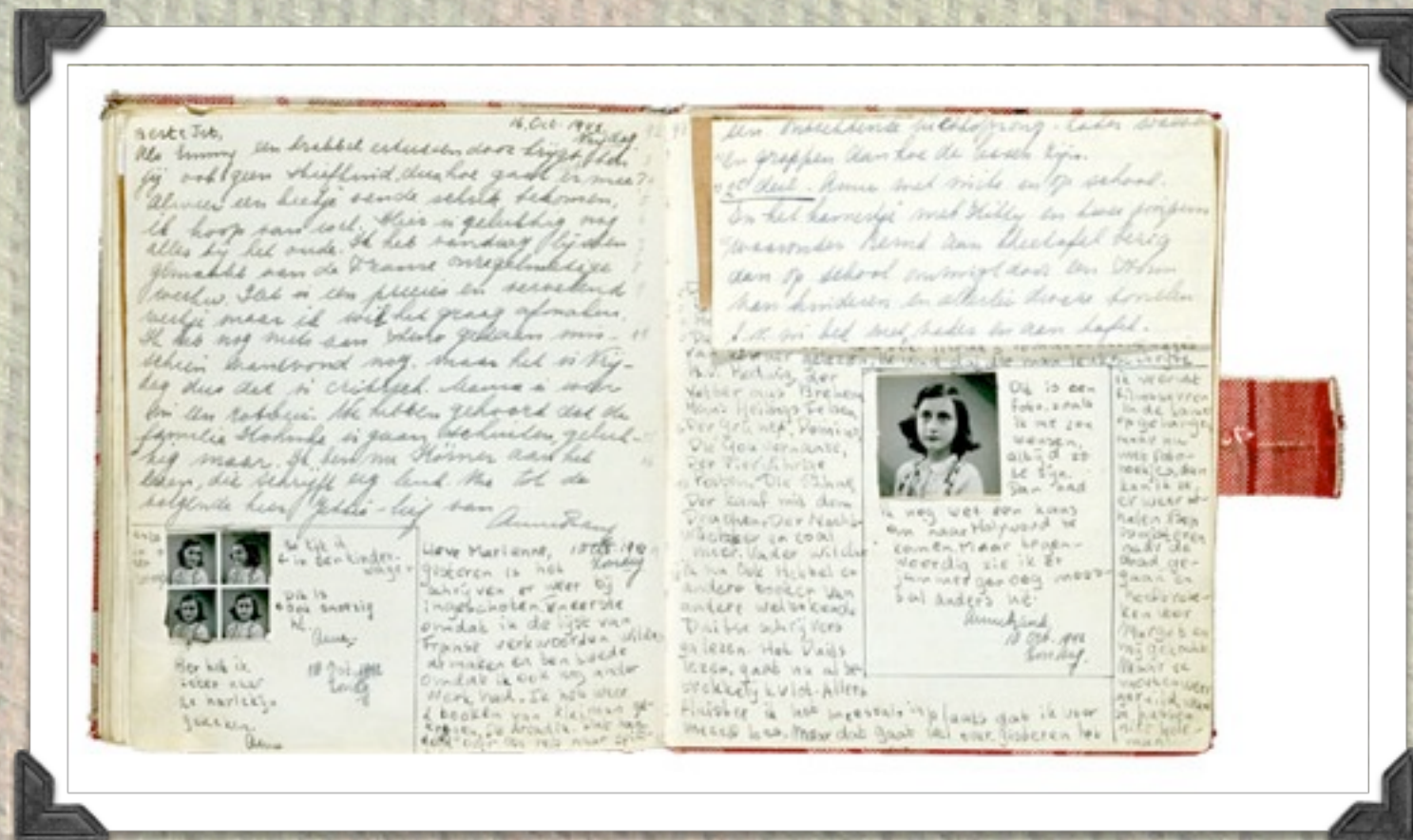
This photo shows Otto Frank and the people who helped conceal the Frank family for so long.

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We know a lot about Anne and her family because Anne wrote a diary about her time in the annex. She was given the diary on her thirteenth birthday, just a few months before the family went into hiding. In her diary, she wrote about the events of those two years and described her fears, hopes, dreams and emotions. She called her diary 'Kitty'.

12th June 1942: I hope I shall be able to confide in you completely, as I have never been able to do in anyone before, and I hope that you will be a great support and comfort to me.



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21st September 1942: I was being discussed today and they decided I'm not completely stupid after all, which had the effect of making me work extra hard the next day. I certainly don't want to still be in the first form when I'm fourteen or fifteen.

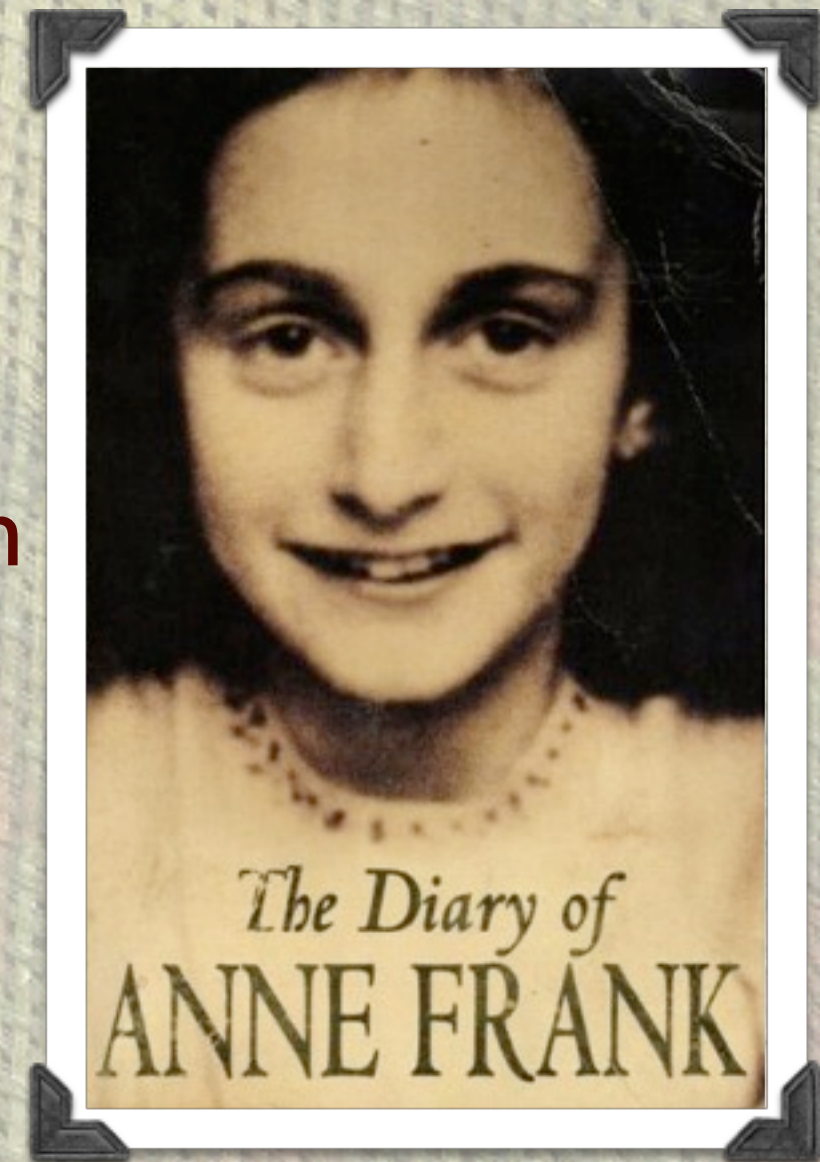
16th September 1943: Relations between us here are getting worse all the time. At mealtimes, no one dares to open their mouths (except to allow a mouthful of food to slip in) because whatever is said you either annoy someone or it is misunderstood.

4th April 1944: I can shake off everything if I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn. But, and this is the great question, will I ever be able to write anything great, will I ever become a journalist or a writer? I hope so, I hope so very much, for I can recapture everything when I write, my thoughts, my ideals and my fantasies.

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But then, in August 1944 the hiding place was discovered. Anne and her family were transported to the Aushchwitz death camp in Poland. A few months later, Anne and Margot were transported to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp where they both died from Typhus. Edith Frank also died. Only Anne's father, Otto, survived. Miep Gies (one of the people who had helped the family to hide) found all of Anne's writing, including her diary, on the floor of the secret annex after they had been taken away. She gave them to Anne's father. Otto was amazed at what he read and decided to publish the book. Now, millions of people all over the world have read the story of one Jewish girl and her experience of World War II.



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