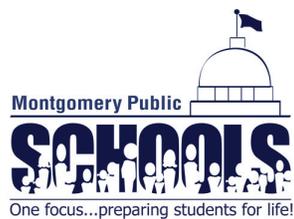


Citywide Reading Guide for
THE CHILDREN OF WILLESDEN LANE



ABOUT THE BOOK

The Children of Willesden Lane is a powerful memoir of music, hope and survival set in Europe during the Holocaust. In the book, authors Mona Golabek and Lee Cohen tell the story of Lisa Jura, Golabek's mother. In 1938, 14-year-old Lisa was an amazing young musician who dreamed of becoming a concert pianist. When Hitler's army invaded the family's hometown of Vienna, Austria, Lisa's parents made the difficult decision to send her to London as part of the *Kindertransport*, a rescue mission that took nearly 10,000 Jewish children to safety in Britain. There, separated from her family, Lisa built a community with other refugees in a children's hostel on Willesden Lane and fought to realize her dreams against a backdrop of war, loss and despair. Her music became a lifeline—not only for herself, but also for those around her—and helped form a web of support and connection that enabled people of all ages to maintain hope, endure tragedy and rebuild their lives.

GOALS FOR THE CITYWIDE READING

The Children of Willesden Lane has both historical and contemporary relevance, and Montgomery's city-wide reading is designed to spark dialogue on both the past and the present. Specific goals include:

- ➔ introducing students to the upcoming 9th-grade study of World War II and the Holocaust;
- ➔ examining powerful historical themes related to identity, moral responsibility, courage, survival and resilience; and
- ➔ helping students connect these themes to their own lives and to issues in today's society.

As part of the reading project, author and concert pianist Mona Golabek will share her mother's music with students in a series of live performances in April.

This guide is intended to support a reading of *The Children of Willesden Lane* and help teachers prepare their students for Golabek's concerts. Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, produced this guide to support Montgomery Public Schools.

INTEGRATED LEARNING:

INCORPORATING LITERATURE AND MUSIC INTO THE STUDY OF HISTORY

It can be very powerful to use memoirs and other works of literature in the study of history. Memoirs put a meaningful human face on world events and help students develop critically needed skills in interdisciplinary reading, writing, vocabulary-building and analysis. For anyone interested in additional background and resources on developing engaging literature-based assignments, we recommend visiting the websites of Read-Write-Think (www.readwritethink.org) or Teaching Literature (www.teachingliterature.org).

In addition, because of the central role that Lisa Jura's music plays in *The Children of Willesden Lane*, the book offers an opportunity to integrate the study of classical music, as well as literature, into the history classroom. For many students, the works of Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy and other composers mentioned in the narrative may be unfamiliar. Providing some background on this type of music, and listening to some of the musical selections from Lisa's story, can go a long way toward deepening students' appreciation of Golabek's work. The Annenberg Foundation's Learner website includes several music selections from the book. They are available in two formats: as solo instrumental pieces and as part of a musical performance narrated by Mona Golabek. As noted below, we particularly recommend including "Piano Lessons," Chapter 1 of Golabek's performance, at the start of your study; we also recommend using some of the pieces from Lisa's debut concert in Chapter 26 as part of a closing activity. These selections, along with other musical pieces, can be found at www.learner.org/series/cowl/theauthor/intro.html.

KEY THEMES

The Children of Willesden Lane touches on many issues—some personal, some interpersonal, some political. The citywide reading project will focus on a few overarching themes. These themes have been chosen to align with the 9th grade’s upcoming study of World War II and the Holocaust; they also aim to highlight connections with Montgomery’s civil rights history and to help students reflect on their own roles as historical and social actors.

Identity and History

- How do time, history and circumstance shape people’s identities?
- How do people’s identities shape what happens to them in key historical moments?
- What parts of ourselves are most important to hold on to when things get hard?
- How do we use these aspects of our identities to support others and ourselves in times of struggle?

Response and Responsibility in Times of Crisis

- Why is it that some people are able to stand up and help others in times of crisis while others do nothing?
- Who are we responsible for, and how far are we willing to go when they are in need or in danger?
- How can we create conditions that support courageous responses to injustice—for others and ourselves?

Resilience and Survival

- How can personal dreams and promises help people endure hardship and triumph over adversity?
- What role does community play in supporting people through times of distress?

FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

This “Citywide Reading Guide” draws on a curriculum guide developed by Facing History and Ourselves (www.facinghistory.org) in partnership with the Annenberg Foundation. For teachers interested in a deeper look at the book, this curriculum offers chapter-by-chapter analysis. The curriculum guide, which is downloadable as a free PDF at www.facing.org/resources/publications/the-children-willesden-lane, includes detailed historical background information, along with a set of discussion prompts, activities, writing assignments and musical tie-in activities for each section of the book. It also includes several Final Project activities, which can be used to evaluate student learning.

Facing History’s curriculum guide for the book is also available through the Annenberg Foundation’s Learner website at www.learner.org/series/cowl. The website includes additional resources such as teaching tips, classroom videos, online musical selections and additional information about the author.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

If students are reading *The Children of Willesden Lane* before they begin to study World War II and the Holocaust, you may wish to provide some basic background information on the times. The curriculum

guide by Facing History and Ourselves includes an excellent chapter, “Historical Context,” which includes sections on:

- ➔ Race and Anti-Semitism
- ➔ Hitler’s Rise to Power
- ➔ German Expansion and Anti-Semitism
- ➔ *Kristallnacht*: A Turning Point
- ➔ The *Kindertransport*

If you choose to provide your own background information, be sure to mention the *Kindertransport*, which is not always included in Holocaust overviews, but which figures centrally in the story of Lisa Jura.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY: RESPONSE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The following activity introduces key themes in *The Children of Willesden Lane*, tying them to Montgomery’s history with the civil rights movement and social justice activism. It is designed to be used before reading the book but can be adapted for later use.

1. Share with students the following quote by Martin Luther King Jr.: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” *Strength to Love, 1963*

2. Read the quote aloud, then discuss the following questions (consider Think-Pair-Share, small-group or whole-class format):

- ➔ What do you think this quote means?
- ➔ What did it mean for Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement?
- ➔ What does King’s statement mean today? Personally? Politically?

3. Explore students’ thoughts about the importance of King’s idea in the study of World War II and the Holocaust. If they do not have enough information to fully answer the questions, be sure to provide additional background and share your own thoughts about the quote’s relevance.

Optional Extension

1. If you wish, you may introduce or follow your discussion of King’s quote by having students share with a partner a time they witnessed something that they felt was unjust—and where they did or didn’t speak up and take action. Ask what caused them to make the choices they did. How did they feel about their decision? After both partners in each pair have shared their stories, engage the full class in discussion. Chart (without judgment) the scenarios that came up as leading to either action or inaction, and normalize the fears and challenges that often accompany a decision to stand up against injustice.

2. At the end of the activity, you may ask students to write their responses to the following prompt:

- ➔ What role do individuals have a responsibility to play in times of social or political crisis? Share three to five guiding principles for how you think people should behave in the face of injustice toward themselves or others.

3. Close the lesson by offering a few words about how the concept of response and responsibility connects to *The Children of Willesden Lane*. For example, you may mention that many people in the book faced difficult choices in relation to Hitler’s aggressive and anti-Semitic actions, and that their responses varied greatly. Some people were willing to make great personal sacrifices and exhibit tremendous

courage to help others and resist injustice; others stood by out of fear or complacency, afraid to put themselves at risk to challenge what they knew to be wrong. One of the key themes in the book is how powerful it can be when individuals take action and stand with those in need and how even seemingly small contributions can have significant impacts.

Going Deeper: Understanding Our “Universe of Obligation”

For readers interested in exploring these ideas further, Facing History’s curriculum guide for *The Children of Willesden Lane* introduces sociologist Helen Fine’s concept of a “universe of obligation,” which refers to the individuals and groups “toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends.” This can be a powerful concept to discuss in connection with both the Holocaust and contemporary social issues, as it raises the question of how far our circle of responsibility extends, and what we owe to people who are outside our usual spheres of connection.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR MONTGOMERY CITYWIDE READING

This part offers a series of reading, journaling and discussion questions to frame students’ analysis of the book and its historical content. The questions in the chart on the next page are clustered in seven groups, corresponding to different sections of *The Children of Willesden Lane*.

Each section of the chart covers approximately three to five chapters, with questions that link events in the book to the overarching citywide discussion about the themes of identity, responsibility and resilience. As students use these questions to critically engage with the text, they will strengthen their understanding of how the events of World War II and the Holocaust affected both Jews and non-Jews in Europe and grapple with issues of hope, morality and power in times of crisis. They will also have the chance to apply the lessons of Lisa Jura’s story to their own lives and present-day social realities.

The questions are listed, by section, in the chart. They can be used in a variety of formats—for student journaling, in book groups, as the foundation for creative activities, and/or to structure class discussions or formal writing assignments.

As noted above, for groups that may be unfamiliar with the classical music at the heart of Lisa Jura’s story, we recommend introducing *The Children of Willesden Lane* with a short clip from Mona Golabek’s “special performance” (included on the Annenberg Learner website). Chapter 1, “Piano Lessons,” runs 10 minutes and provides an engaging overview of the book and its musical themes. In the clip, Golabek frames her mother’s story, shares key points from Chapter 1 of the memoir and performs excerpts of several important piano pieces from Lisa’s young life. To access the clip, please visit www.learner.org/series/cowl/theauthor/intro.html.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *THE CHILDREN OF WILLESDEN LANE*

KEY EVENTS	DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
CHAPTERS 1-3 IDENTITY AND CHANGE	
<p>Lisa's love of music and talent as a pianist; growing mistreatment of Jews in Vienna; loss of her piano teacher after he has been told that he can no longer teach Jews; closeness of Lisa's family; <i>Kristallnacht</i>; parents' difficult decision to send Lisa to safety in England.</p>	<p>What do you think are some of the most important aspects of Lisa's identity?*</p> <p>What changes are taking place in Vienna, and how are they affecting Lisa and her family?*</p> <p>Imagine the discussion Lisa's parents must have had in deciding to send her on the <i>Kindertransport</i>. What considerations do you think they were weighing? How do you think they felt after making the decision? Do you think it was a good decision?</p>
CHAPTERS 4-8 REFUGEE EXPERIENCES	
<p>Journey on the <i>Kindertransport</i>; arrival as a refugee in London; inability of family to take Lisa in; placement as housemaid to rich family in the countryside; Lisa's decision to leave her placement to "make something of herself"; arrival at Willesden Lane.</p>	<p>What are some of the most important challenges you think Lisa faced as a refugee in a new country? What can you learn from her story about the experiences of immigrants and refugees coming the United States today?</p> <p>What parts of Lisa's past life did you see her holding on to as she left home and made her way to Willesden Lane? How did these things help her?</p> <p>What do you think Lisa means when she says she wants to "make something of herself"?*</p> <p>How do you see the roles of Mr. Hardesty, the lady of Peacock Manor, Mrs. Cohen, and others in supporting Lisa or holding her back from fulfilling her promises to herself and her family?</p>
CHAPTERS 9-12 BUILDING HOPE AND CONNECTION	
<p>Settling in at Willesden Lane and beginning to build a circle of friends; finding a job in the garment factory; Lisa's reconnection with herself and her music dreams as she begins to play the piano at the hostel; intensive effort to find a place for sister Sonia; Sonia's passage secured on one of the last <i>Kindertransport's</i> before war declared; England declares war on Germany.</p>	<p>How does Lisa's reconnection with her piano playing affect her and how does it affect others? In Chapter 12, Lisa and Hans talk about the gift of music and its role in helping offset the bleakness of life around them. Does this ring true to you? To what extent does supporting Lisa's playing seem like an important priority, given the difficulties and uncertainties of wartime?</p> <p><i>The Children of Willesden Lane</i> includes many examples of people who stand up on behalf of others in need—in some cases, including people they don't even know. Discuss the contributions you found most meaningful in this set of chapters. Whose actions inspired you—and why? Was there anyone who you thought could have helped more but didn't? If so, how did their actions make you feel?*</p>
CHAPTERS 13-16 WARTIME CHALLENGES	
<p>Nightly bombings of London; growing fear and anger; deepening connection among youth and sharing of their own difficult stories; lack of family news and awakening to the realities of Nazi atrocities; bomb hits Willesden Lane and children need to move out; Lisa stays temporarily with Mrs. Canfield; upon return, Mrs. Cohen encourages Lisa to audition for London Royal Academy.</p>	<p>Soon after the war begins, Lisa, Gina, Gunter and Aaron ask Mr. Hardesty at the Bloomsbury House for news of their families. Frustrated by the limited information he offers, Aaron angrily remarks, "Why would he care, anyway? He's not Jewish!" What do you think Aaron is trying to say with this comment? Do you think he's right about Mr. Hardesty? About other non-Jews? How would you respond?*</p> <p>Despite the fear and danger caused by the escalating war, this section of the book also highlights many examples of resilience. What does the term <i>resilience</i> mean? What are some instances of resilience during the bombing of London?*</p> <p>When Lisa arrives at work after a night of heavy shelling by the Germans, she is amazed to find all of her fellow workers on the job. How would you describe her reaction to their courage? What does it suggest about the way we draw hope and strength from the people around us?*</p> <p>Discuss Lisa's complex response when Mrs. Cohen encourages her to audition for a scholarship to the Royal Academy. What do her feelings say about how she sees her past and her future?</p>
CHAPTERS 17-19 AUDITION	
<p>Preparation for Lisa's audition at the Royal Academy; support of friends, neighbors and coworkers; Aaron's arrest and internment as an enemy alien; expansion of the war through Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and American involvement.</p>	<p>Lisa's preparation process for the Royal Academy audition is supported in a variety of ways by many different people in her life. Describe the help she receives from various sources.*</p> <p>What do you think motivates the people who support her to do so? How does their assistance affect Lisa? How are they themselves affected?</p>

continued

KEY EVENTS	DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
CHAPTERS 20-24 INCREASING HOPE, INCREASING FEAR	
Acceptance to Royal Academy; conflict between music studies and factory work; leaves factory job to perform at Howard Hotel; increasing fear for family; deaths of Johnny and Paul; Aaron enlists in military and is changed by experience on front lines; preparation begins for debut concert; Gina and Gunter's engagement; end of war in Europe.	<p>What does Lisa's acceptance to the Royal Academy mean to her? What does it mean to Mrs. Cohen, to Lisa's friends and to her family?</p> <p>Reread pp. 243-246 describing Lisa's response to the end of the war. What does her decision to return home to Willesden Lane, rather than celebrating with her classmates from the Royal Academy, say about her identity? Who are "her people"? Where are her loyalties? What does she need in order to feel that the war is really over?*</p> <p>As Lisa learns more about the atrocities of the Holocaust, she becomes increasingly distraught and worried about her family. How does this affect her music? How do you think it will affect her future?*</p> <p>What else stands out to you about this segment of the story?</p>
CHAPTERS 25-26 AND EPILOGUE CONCLUSIONS AND BEGINNINGS	
Gina and Gunter's wedding; arrival of concentration camp survivors at Willesden Lane; news that Rosie and Leo have survived; reunion and rekindling of Lisa's ability to play music; debut concert surrounded by friends and family; future plans.	<p>How has Lisa changed from the beginning of the story to the end? What has she gained and lost? What helped her spirit survive and endure?*</p> <p>In what ways is Lisa's piano debut important to her and her friends? What besides musical success does it symbolize?*</p> <p>The closing passage of Chapter 26 expresses a deep sentiment at an important moment. Read the paragraph aloud, then discuss how Lisa viewed the journey described in this book.*</p> <p>What does the story of Lisa Jura and her friends suggest to you about the responsibility—and the potential power—we all have in times of crisis?</p>

*Question adapted from the curriculum guide for the book *The Children of Willesden Lane* produced by Facing History and Ourselves

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES BASED ON CORE THEMES

Finding Strength in Difficult Times

Throughout the book, Lisa Jura draws on her music to support herself in dealing with the troubles she faces. After examining this dynamic in Lisa's life, offer students a chance to think about what they themselves hold most dear and how they would find hope and courage in the face of loss and danger. This activity will help students develop a greater understanding of Lisa's experience and enable them to explore the foundations of resilience in their own lives.

Begin by asking students to think about what *they* hold on to in difficult times. What gets them through? What promises would they make to themselves or their families and friends if they were in a situation like Lisa's? Based on their reflections, have each student write or draw about a part of themselves they would (or have) called upon to help deal with personal or political loss, trauma or injustice. The elements they discuss can be personal qualities, talents, values, beliefs or relationships.

Once students have completed their responses, invite them to share their reflections with each other, and consider as a class the range of things on which people can draw in dealing with challenging circumstances, both personal and social.

Monument to Willesden Lane

Honoring the individuals who have made a positive difference in our lives is a way of remembering the past and teaching future generations. Most of the men and women who organized the *Kindertransport* and supported the children during the war years are no longer living. Ask the class to design a monument in honor of those involved in the rescue mission. What would be a fitting monument? Where should it be built? What materials should be used? What words or quotations might be inscribed on it? What should it be called?

After the class has brainstormed ideas, ask students to design their own monument. Explain that the monuments will be displayed, so each should be accompanied by a brief explanation, title, ideal location and list of necessary materials.

Note: This lesson excerpted from Facing History's curriculum guide for The Children of Willesden Lane.

Take a Stand

The Children of Willesden Lane highlights a variety of ways in which individuals resisted the injustices of Nazi Germany and supported each other to escape, survive and rebuild their lives. The book shows how the generous and courageous acts of ordinary people—some large, some small—came together to create a huge impact in very difficult times. This activity will offer students the chance to consider the power of individual responses and contributions to addressing social problems and help them apply lessons from Lisa Jura’s story to the needs of their world today.

After completing your study of *The Children of Willesden Lane*, ask students to consider which situations today call upon individuals to take a stand. These situations can be global, national, or based in their own schools and communities. Brainstorm a list together, exploring what makes each situation worthy of attention and action. Please note that, although some of the situations students identify may be worthy of worldwide response in the way Nazi atrocities were, many may be much smaller in scope.

Each student should then select a problem in the community or in society that troubles her personally. It may be one from the class list, or something else she cares passionately about. Invite students to work individually or with a partner to create a poem, an essay or an art or media piece about how ordinary acts by ordinary people could make a difference in addressing that problem. Encourage them to think broadly and to include things that might be easy to do, as well as things that might take great courage or sacrifice.

Once students’ projects are finished, share the completed pieces with others in the school or community to inspire action.

CONNECTING WITH MONTGOMERY’S HISTORY AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Many of the themes in *The Children of Willesden Lane* echo experiences from the American civil rights movement. The following two activities offer opportunities for students to explore these connections, linking their study of Golabek’s memoir with struggles for hope and justice in Montgomery and throughout the United States.

Activity: Drawing Parallels

One simple yet powerful way to examine the connections between *The Children of Willesden Lane* and the civil rights movement is to engage in an open-ended conversation about parallels between the two. Working in pairs or small groups, students should identify 8-10 connections they see between Lisa Jura’s story (including the events of World War II and the Holocaust) and what they know about experiences in the civil rights era. These connections can be at any level of specificity—from large-scale political trends to reflections on personal resilience and community building. For instance:

- Both situations highlight deep racial injustices that some people resisted, while others stood by out of ignorance, fear or self-protection.
- Both cases show how the courageous actions of everyday individuals can add up to meaningful change (in *The Children of Willesden Lane*, for example, through the *Kindertransport*; in the civil rights movement, through participation in boycotts, marches and other non-violent resistance).
- Both stories reflect the power of music to motivate and heal people in times of struggle.
- Both include social and political victories, which are often accompanied by personal pain and loss.

As students are working, encourage them to think broadly and creatively, and invite them to push beyond their initial, most obvious ideas to deeper and more nuanced observations. It is often helpful to begin with a few examples, such as those noted above.

When pairs or groups have finished, bring the class back together to share two or three key connections per group. You may wish to map the connections by theme (for example, political realities, bias and

discrimination, ways individuals respond to the mistreatment of others or resistance and hope)—or simply list them.

Wrap up the activity by asking if these connections offer any lessons for our own times. You may ask students to write about this, discuss it as a group or simply think about it.

The Power of Music in Times of Struggle

Just as Lisa Jura’s music deeply affected the people around her as they faced loss and despair during World War II, so too was music a powerful healing and motivating force in the civil rights movement. Students can explore this connection by researching civil rights songs—their origin, use and impact. Some songs you may wish to include are “We Shall Overcome,” “A Change Is Gonna Come,” “Oh Freedom,” “Eyes on the Prize,” “People Get Ready,” “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” and “This Little Light of Mine.”

Students can synthesize their findings in writing or share them with the class verbally or through multimedia presentations. Ideally, analyses should include some larger reflection drawn from both the World War II and civil rights contexts. For example: What do these two stories suggest about the role and power of music in challenging times? What are some similarities and differences in the ways Lisa’s music and music from the civil rights era affected their audiences? Why do you suppose music is such a powerful force in people’s lives?

CLOSING LESSON AND PREPARATION FOR CONCERT

Chapter 26 describes Lisa Jura’s debut concert at Wigmore Hall in London. Throughout the performance, the music she played moved many people to think about aspects of their experiences during the war.

Many students today are unfamiliar with classical music, but they are often as passionate about the music in their lives as Lisa and her audience were about the music from the debut.

To close your study of *The Children of Willesden Lane*, have students reread the description of Lisa’s time on stage (pp. 265–267) aloud, and follow the reading by sharing Golabek’s recordings of two of the pieces featured in Chapter 26: Beethoven’s “Pathétique” sonata (selection 19) and Rachmaninoff’s “Prelude in C-sharp Minor” (selection 21). Recordings can be found online at www.learner.org/series/cowl/music.html.

As students listen to the music, have them imagine they are one of the characters in the book. Given the experiences their character has lived through, what images does the music conjure? What emotions? You may wish to have students write or draw their responses, and then open a class conversation.

In preparation for Golabek’s concert, we also recommend giving students a chance to share their reactions to the music they have heard. What questions do they have about these particular selections? Do they have any questions or opinions about classical music in general? What do they hope to learn from hearing Golabek perform?

If students are having a hard time connecting with the music, you may wish to play additional selections from the *Children of Willesden Lane* website. It may also be helpful to partner with the school’s music teacher to provide background on composers or pieces and to find other ways of opening students’ minds to an unfamiliar genre.

End the lesson by giving students time to generate questions they would like to ask Mona Golabek—about her mother’s experience, about the legacy of the Holocaust in her family, about themes they have been discussing, or about Golabek’s music or writing. Students should take their questions to the concert, in case there is time for discussion with the author.

ABOUT US

THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER is a nonprofit organization that combats hate, intolerance and discrimination through education and litigation.

TEACHING TOLERANCE, a project of Southern Poverty Law Center, is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children.

The program provides free educational materials to educators for use by millions of students. *Teaching Tolerance* magazine is sent to 450,000 educators, reaching every school in the country, twice annually. Tens of thousands of educators use the program's film kits and more than 5,000 schools participate in the annual Mix It Up at Lunch Day program.

Teaching Tolerance teaching materials have won two Oscars, an Emmy and more than 20 honors from the Association of Educational Publishers, including two Golden Lamp Awards, the industry's highest honor.

The generosity of the Southern Poverty Law Center's supporters makes our work possible.

TEACHING THE MOVEMENT

The civil rights movement is one of the defining events in American history—a bracing example of Americans fighting for the ideals of justice and equality. Teaching the civil rights movement is essential to ensuring that American history is relevant to students in an increasingly diverse nation.

Teaching Tolerance undertook a comprehensive review—the first of its kind—of the coverage accorded the civil rights movement in state educational standards and curriculum frameworks. The results of that review are set out in *Teaching the Movement: The State of Civil Rights Education in the United States 2011*. It provides a national report card on the state of civil rights education in our country. Alabama received an A (70%). Most states, unfortunately, received a failing grade.