

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *THE CHILDREN OF WILLESDEN LANE*

KEY EVENTS	DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
<b>CHAPTERS 1-3 IDENTITY AND CHANGE</b>	
<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>
<b>CHAPTERS 4-8 REFUGEE EXPERIENCES</b>	
<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>
<b>CHAPTERS 9-12 BUILDING HOPE AND CONNECTION</b>	
<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>
<b>CHAPTERS 13-16 WARTIME CHALLENGES</b>	
<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>
<b>CHAPTERS 17-19 AUDITION</b>	
<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
<b>CHAPTERS 20-24 INCREASING HOPE, INCREASING FEAR</b>	
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>
<b>CHAPTERS 25-26 AND EPILOGUE CONCLUSIONS AND BEGINNINGS</b>	
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.*