

Graffiti Theatre Company

**Teacher's Guide
to the
Kindertransport Box**

**This is a brief guide to the items in the
box and ideas for how to use them
with your class.**

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Rules for the Journey:

- Each child must have a valid ID card on the train.
- Each child must have a label designating their host family.
- No adults allowed on board the train under any circumstances (excepting driver and train guard).
- Each child is permitted to have one checked and sealed suitcase.
Conditions: No money may be carried in the suitcase. No valuable artefacts may be carried in the suitcase. No official documents may be carried in the suitcase. Items of personal use and value only may be carried. The suitcase must be checked by the authorities and sealed at the child's place of residence. It cannot be opened again until arrival at final destination.
- The train will stop for inspection at the German border in Furth im Wald. Any illegal or undocumented persons aboard at that point will be ejected from the train and taken into German custody.
- The German authorities may stop the train at Furth im Wald or at any other station until the western border if any of the above rules are broken. All occupants of the train will then be taken into German custody.

Section 1: Before the Workshop

Pre-workshop activities to do before the workshop day:

Photos: In the box there are some laminated photographs of real children on the Kindertransport trains. You could introduce the session by showing them the picture of the boys playing music on the train (A). Are they in a good mood? Where are they? What are they doing? Why are there no adults? You could then explain to the class what the Kindertransport trains were and why they happened (see fact sheet). Then show some of the other photos (B, C, D) – how do the children look? What do the labels mean? (see labels activity).

Yellow stars: The box contains a four-star template but you can make them (out of paper) for each child. In the drama, the children will be playing the role of Jewish children so they should each wear the star. While making the stars discuss what it means to make labels for people. Can your class think of any other examples of how people are labeled (modern examples)? How do they think it made the Jewish people feel to wear the stars? Why did the Nazis want to make it clear who was Jewish and who was not?

Labels: We have included one complete label in the box but the class can help to finish the rest (add the numbers, the holes and the string).

The labels were used to identify the children on the transports, so in the drama it is very important that each child wears their label. Not only was the label their train ticket, but it was also the way of identifying their host family at their destination. Most of the children were met in Britain by a family who would 'adopt' them for their safety. The number on each label corresponded to the number given to the host family.

Friends, brothers and sisters were likely to be separated so their numbers were completely different. Therefore the

numbers on the labels made by the class should not be consecutive – they should be random.

Map of Europe 1939: This map will allow you to trace the journey taken in July 1939 – the day of the last Kindertransport – from Prague (now in the Czech Republic) to the Hook of Holland in the Netherlands. This is the journey we are going to recreate in the drama.

List of cities: Use this to compare the journey on the 1939 map with a more detailed map of Europe. Notice that most of the journey is through Germany and that there will be a stop in Furth im Wald (the border town). In the drama, our train will travel this route.

Train Windows: (no materials supplied) This art activity could help to make the journey more real for the children. Having researched the geography of the journey and the places that they will pass through, you could research images online of some of the kinds of views they might have from the train windows. Ask the children to recreate their impressions (drawing, painting or whatever medium you like) of what might be outside the windows of the train as they travel – perhaps framing their pictures with a train window frame. You can later reference this in the narrative sections of the workshop.

Fact Sheet: The fact sheet gives you some information which could introduce the topic of Kindertransport to the class and give you ideas for areas of research. The story of Sir Nicholas Winton is particularly interesting – and is a positive, hopeful story in a dark time.

Photo of Departure and Rules for Journey and ID cards (all in envelope): *Please try to do these activities the day before the workshop visit.*

Photo of departure: Pass the photo around the class. Tell the class that in the drama they will play the children in this photo. In the drama, this group of children all came to the Kindertransport from the same orphanage. Some were sisters and brothers, many were friends. Ask them to look very carefully at the children in the picture and decide who they want to be – it's fine if more than one chooses the same person, their interpretations will be different anyway. Then ask them to stand exactly like the child in the photo and try to have the same facial expression – pass the photo around for reference again. Place the children in a group together and figure out where the train is. Ask the children to freeze in position. This is the moment of the 'Photo of Departure'. Ask the class to remember their exact positions as they will be coming back to this tomorrow/for the workshop. They can relax now and come out of role.

Rules for the Journey: Next tell the class that you are preparing them for their journey by reading them the Rules for the Journey. You will read them again right before the journey tomorrow/for the workshop. Read through the rules and discuss any questions that arise.

ID cards: There are two ID cards given as examples in the envelope. Each child had their ID card with them. Each child in the class can make their own ID card and decide on their name, age and other details (based on their photograph work). They could research typical Czech and Jewish names. Some examples of boys' names: Otto, David, Hans, Joel

Some examples of girls' names: Hannah, Eva, Anna, Vera

Suitcase Activity: *(no materials required except pens/slips of paper)* As a wind-down activity after the above, ask the children to sit quietly at their desks (with their eyes closed, perhaps). Ask them to think about the character they chose from the photograph and imagine that child preparing for the journey. They each have one small suitcase to pack. What would they put inside? Books? Photographs of family

and of home? Souvenirs? Clothes? Some of them may not have very many possessions to choose from. Remember in the drama, all the children come from the same orphanage. Ask them to write a list on a small piece of paper of all the things they pack (remembering the restrictions in the Rules for the Journey). Then ask them to imagine and to mime packing the night before the journey. All the bags will be checked and sealed by the Nazi authorities before being given back to the children.

Section 2: The Workshop

Please make sure you have completed the activities in the envelope the day before the workshop (Photo of Departure, Rules for the Journey, ID cards and Suitcase Activity). Make sure you are familiar with the workshop and with the Teacher's role (see separate sheet).

1. **Set up** the classroom as the train (rows of chairs) and the platform (open space beside train).
2. **Distribute the Yellow Stars** the class has made – each child should wear one.
3. **Introduce yourself in role** as the teacher from the orphanage (see Teacher's role below). You could use a clip-board (with this guide attached!) and/or a scarf to show you are now the orphanage teacher. It might also be useful to have a whistle. The class now takes on the roles of the children from the orphanage. In role, you should now **distribute the labels** and check that each child has their label, star, ID card and an imaginary suitcase packed with what they have decided they need for their trip. Try to be positive and encourage the children to look on their journey as an adventure – but be strict if necessary, as this is a dangerous situation.
4. Tell them you are going to **take a photo** of them before they leave. Arrange the photo as you had it previously and freeze the group for the photo. (You don't need to take a real photo but you can if you like.)
5. Now step out of role by leaving down your clip-board or scarf. Go to the children and explain that when you place your hand on their shoulder they should say what their character is thinking at this moment. (This is called **Thought Tracking**.) You can also ask some questions like "Do you have any brothers and sisters in the group?", "Have you ever travelled this far before?", "Are you nervous?", "Do you know what your label means?", "Do you know what your star means?".

6. During this time the facilitator (Sile) should arrive. She will fit in to whatever stage of the drama you are at – you do not have to introduce her. She will communicate with the class when needed.

7. Step back into role (pick up your clip-board or scarf) and get out the **Rules for the Journey** (separate sheet or last page of this guide). It is important to try to keep the children's morale up despite your own (character's) worries. Now it is time to organise the children to get on the train (without you – no adults allowed on board!).

8. You should now try to communicate with the children through the train 'windows' and **let them encounter the facilitator in role themselves**. Help if necessary. The facilitator will talk with the children, possibly tell them her story (or some of it) and ask the children to let her stay in the carriage, hidden, for the journey.

9. In role, call goodbye to the children as **the train moves off**. Step out of role. You can read the following narrative aloud:

(Note: if appropriate you can reference the Train Windows art activity during this narrative.)

“And so the train moves off from Prague Main Station. At first the children recognise some of the things they passed. The park. The synagogue. The castle in the distance.

Gradually the train picks up speed and the children do not recognise the landmarks any more. They travel through the country. When the train slows down they sometimes see people watching them. They even see other children waving.

They pass through several Czech towns without stopping. Eventually the train begins to slow down. There are guards everywhere in this town. As the train pulls into the station, the children can read the sign: Furth im Wald. This is the town on the German border. The train stops.”

10. Pause in **Furth im Wald (the border town, just in Germany)**. You and the facilitator can share the drama here. (Let's assume the children have agreed to let the facilitator remain on the train.) If you feel comfortable, you can **take on the role of a border guard**. You can put on a coat/hat

and walk up and down the 'platform' like a guard. You can even come on to the train and check the children's IDs and stars etc. Be as intimidating as you like! It is still probably best if the facilitator is not discovered in hiding as the consequences could be disastrous. After some tension-building, the border guard can leave the train.

11. Narrative section:

"After what seemed like a very long time, the train shudders into life again and one of the guards blows a whistle. The train begins to move out of Furth im Wald. It crosses the whole of Germany: Nuremberg, Cologne...the train stops again at the border town, Emmerich, in Holland. It is getting dark by the time the children arrive at the ferry at the Hook of Holland. They are tired, hungry, bored and some of the smaller children are crying."

Option 1: Ask the children (in small groups) to create **two freeze frames** to show how the journey is going for them – each group can decide which part of the journey to show in their freeze frames. Are they talking/sleeping/playing/crying/looking out the windows? You could thought-track this too (touch their shoulder and find out what they are thinking). Make sure everyone gets to look at each freeze frame.

Option 2: Ask the children to think about how they pass the journey. In groups, allow them to prepare short **improvised scenes** to show how the journey is going. Walk down through the train carriage and point to one group at a time. When you point to them, their scene should come to life; when you point to a different group, the first group fades to silence. Make sure that each group watches the others. Return to any scene that is particularly interesting and ask questions or investigate it further.

12. *If the children have prepared lists of what they would bring in their suitcase as part of the preparation, the facilitator will lead the following activity:*

Ask the children to take out their lists and think about **what is in their suitcase**. What one thing is most valuable to them? Now that they are on the train, they can open their case. Ask them (all working individually and quietly) to **mime** opening their case and taking out that one item.

What do they do with it? What does it remind them of? What are they thinking and feeling while they hold this item?

If the group is willing, you could ask questions about the items and individuals could tell the rest of the group what they chose.

13. Announce that the train has arrived at its final destination.

“Finally, after travelling 1300 km by train and by ferry, the Kindertransport arrives in Liverpool Street Station, London. The children have safely reached their destination. They will now be matched up with their new families according to the number on their labels.”

Ask the children to **pose for a photo** for the local newspapers (is the facilitator in the photo?). Tell them it is now time to get ready to meet their new families and start their new lives. The facilitator will leave quietly.

14. As a closing activity, ask the children to **write their first letter back to the orphanage** (once the classroom has been returned to normal). Who will they write to? A teacher, a brother or sister, a friend? What will they tell them? Will they mention the person they met on the train? What is their new family like? Will they tell the truth?

15. A homework activity could be to write a **Diary Entry** (different to a letter as it is for their eyes only) on their first night in the new family – their hopes and fears, their memories of home and of the journey. This allows them to really reflect on it themselves.

(We at Graffiti would love to see some of the work done after the workshop, if you are willing to send us some copies – thank you!)

Teacher's Role: *During the workshop you will be using the technique Teacher in Role which means you will be playing a different role some of the time. You can always stop the drama and step out of role if you need to. It also helps if you use a 'signifier' (eg a clipboard or a scarf) to make clear to the class when you are in role and when you are just yourself.*

Your role is a teacher from the orphanage (your class will play children from the orphanage) so it is not unlike your own role with your class. You are in authority. However, the more you can add to the role the richer the drama will be.

Here are some ideas for how to complicate your role:

- As you are a teacher in a Jewish orphanage in Prague, you are yourself Jewish. Maybe you can choose a Jewish name and use that name in the drama.
- As you are Jewish in Nazi-occupied Prague in 1939, life is not easy. You are probably very worried for your own safety, not just the children's.
- It is important that the children follow the rules and do what they are told. You are also concerned that they should make a very good impression on their host families in London.
- Not all the children from the orphanage could get a place on the Kindertransport. It costs money – the train fare plus £50 guarantee to the British government (to help send the children home when it is safe to do so). You and the other orphanage staff were only able to find money (from rich patrons) for some of the children. (How did you select them?) These ones are very lucky as this is the second last Kindertransport train from Prague.
- There is only one more train scheduled to leave Prague on the 3rd September. Some of the other children from the orphanage will be on that train. However, you know that the political situation is getting more and more dangerous.
- You are worried about your family and friends too. Some of them have disappeared recently and you do not know if they are safe or not.
- The station is heavily guarded, some of the guards are looking at you strangely and you do not feel safe waiting around there.

Facilitator's Role: Greta Rosenfeld:

(this information may be revealed by the facilitator during the workshop)

- Greta is desperate to get on the train even though she is not a child.
- She is Jewish, from a wealthy family in Prague. She has been married for one year.
- Her husband David is a scientist. He works for the university. He has been allowed by the Nazis to continue work since the occupation, but he is being watched. He has to report to the Nazis once a week.
- Yesterday, he went to report on his work to the Nazis and did not come home. When Greta got home herself, their flat had been searched.
- Greta is frightened for David and for herself. They had agreed that if anything happened to him, she should try to get away. David's father has been helping Mr Winton to organise the Kindertransport. He told Greta to try to get on this train, today.
- Greta is pregnant and wants her baby to have a chance, like the other children on the train.

Section 3: After the Workshop

Post-workshop activities to do after the workshop day:

The letter from Papi: This is a real letter from a father to a daughter who had escaped on a Kindertransport.

You could read the letter with the class and investigate the father's story through drama: recreate the moment where Papi tells Cilly about the Kindertransport and ask the children to play this scene (see also

http://www.youtube.com/NIEfilm#p/u/5/gHcnCB_wptw

for a beautifully dramatised interpretation of a similar scene by NIE theatre company). You could also take the story back further and recreate the scene where Papi and Cilly's mother decide to send her away (before they tell her). Investigate the goodbye scene at the station – how does Papi feel? How does Cilly feel? Ask the class to write the letter from Cilly to Papi.

Extract from Body, Space, Image: This extract seems to fit perfectly with an exploration of Kindertransport. It could be used to create an atmosphere and a soundscape (maybe for drama work). Read the piece together slowly and then find ways of distributing the text between the class. Use choral speech, repeats and silences to create an effective 'performance'. You and the class could add images and movement to support the atmosphere.

It could also be used to link with art work based on the drama.

The poem 'Pigtail' by Tadeusz Rozewicz: This is a beautifully dark and evocative poem. The transport mentioned is not a Kindertransport but a train destined for a concentration camp. There are many ways you could use this poem with the class – read and discuss; ask the class to respond or interpret through art; create a series of still images etc.

Images from Shaun Tan's book The Arrival: These images could link back to Papi's story (see the letter from Papi). The image of the mother and father's hands on the suitcase could be used to investigate the scene before the child's departure. Ask the class to recreate this image in pairs and then use thought-tracking to find out how the parents are feeling. What has been packed in the case? What did the parents want to put in the case?

Note – this beautiful book is available in Vibes and Scribes. Strongly recommended!

Teacher in Role activity: (see activity page in box) This activity would be suitable a few days after the main workshop. It encourages the children to empathise with the Teacher's role. It would help if you reminded yourself of the details given on the Teacher's Role page before trying the activity. If you have used a particular prop (clipboard, scarf etc) in the workshop, it would be useful to use it again here to remind the class of your role.

Lives in Britain activity: (see activity page in box) This activity is designed to bring the story forward – at first by a year and then further. The idea is to emphasise that these children had lives in Britain after the journey – that their escape enabled them to have a future. There are many ways that you could then develop the theme further through drama and in cross-curricular work.

NOTE: While the Kindertransport children survived and the majority of them built new lives in Britain and elsewhere, they were of course the lucky ones. Few of their parents survived. The Kindertransport is a story of hope, but it is important to acknowledge the very great losses surrounding these children too. Books such as The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas and The Diary of Anne Frank can help the class to understand the context of the Kindertransport story.