NCSS Notable Trade Book Lesson Plan
*Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto*
Written by Susan Goldman Rubin

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This lesson uses *Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto* to introduce students to a true story of a Catholic, Polish social worker who saved the lives of thousands of Jewish children during World War II by relocating them. Students are asked to consider Irena’s actions and her motives. Students then are introduced to the Kindertransport, a series of rescue missions of Jewish children from Nazi Germany, by reading the stories of children who were involved in the event. To help students understand the relocation of children during World War II was not an isolated incident in history, students examine the Pedro Pan Airlift of 1959-1960 in order to compare and contrast the event to the Kindertransport of World War II.

| Title and Author of NCSS Notable Trade Book: | Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto  
By Susan Goldman Rubin  
Illustrated by Bill Farnsworth  
(2012 Notable)  
New York, NY: Holiday House  
ISBN: 978-0823425952  
Recommended Grade Level: Grades 5-6, ages 10-12  
Time: 2-3, 45 minute class periods |
|-----------------------------------------------|

**Book Summary:**
This is the story of a young Catholic social worker living in Warsaw when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. After joining the Polish Resistance Movement, Irena was given command of the Department of Help for Jewish Children. During the next five and one half years, Irena rescued more than 400 children. She simultaneously led Zegota, an underground resistance organization, which saved more than 2000 children. Many children were given new names and sent to England to live with new families. Irena preserved a list of the children’s original names, which allowed some to find their families and helped others to immigrate to Israel after the war. Irena’s story remained untold until the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Poland became a democratic republic in 1989.
### NCSS Standards
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- Individual Development and Identity
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

### Materials:
- *Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto* by Susan Goldman Rubin
- *Rescuing the Children: The Story of the Kindertransport* by Deborah Hodge
- *Kindertransport* by Olga Levy Drucker
- *Kiki* by Hilda Perera
- *Children of Pedro Pan* by Maria Armengol Acierno
- *Flight of Pedro Pan: An Untold American Story* (DVD available from WPBT-TV in Miami)
- Internet access to view the following websites: [www.kindertransport.org](http://www.kindertransport.org) and [www.pedropan.org](http://www.pedropan.org).
- Venn Diagrams
- Poster board
- Markers
- Construction paper

### Objectives:
1. Students will describe the attributes of a hero.
2. Students will evaluate Irena’s motives for aiding Jewish children.
3. Students will compare and contrast the children’s experiences in the Warsaw rescues and in the Kindertransport.
4. Students will analyze the children’s experiences in the Pedro Pan airlift.
5. Students will compare and contrast children’s experiences in the Kindertransport and the Pedro Pan airlift.

### Procedures:
**Exploration Introduction:**
2. Ask, “what do you know about the Holocaust?”
3. Discuss students’ responses and correct any misconceptions.
4. ‘After discussing the attributes of a hero, ask “who do you think might have been heroes during the Holocaust?”
5. Read *Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto*.
6. Ask, “why do you think Irena did what she did?”
8. Following this discussion, ask “do you know of any other individuals who helped children during World War II or the
Development:

1. Tell students that many books, including first person accounts of survival during World War II and the Holocaust have been written, but much less has been written by or about children who survived. There were several other efforts to save children during World War II. One of these efforts was known as the Kindertransport, which rescued more than 10,000 children.

2. Show YouTube video, Sel Hubert: The Kindertransport.

3. Divide students into no more than eight groups and provide each group with one child’s story from Rescuing the Children: The Story of the Kindertransport.

4. Have student groups discuss their child’s story, analyzing what life was like for the child and evaluating how the parents and child felt about the situation. Provide guiding questions such as:
   - What hardships did the children suffer prior to going to England?
   - How did the children’s life change when they went to England?
   - What happened to the children at the end of the war?
   - What were the parents most concerned about for their children?
   - Do you think you could send your child away to protect him or her knowing you might never see him or her again?

5. Rearrange groups so that one person from each of the original eight groups are together.

6. In the student groups, each person shares the story of his or her child.

Closure:

1. After all students’ have shared, lead a discussion with questions that ask students to consider:
   - How are the children’s stories similar?
   - How are they different?
   - How did the children’s lives change after they were rescued?
   - Do you think the children’s parents did the right thing? Why or why not?

2. If time permits, the teacher will have students visit www.kindertransport.org and select the “Voices” tab to read some additional first person accounts of participants’ experiences.

Assessment:

1. Have students individually complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting experiences of the rescued children from the Warsaw ghetto and those children involved in the Kindertransport.
| Expansion: | 1. Explain to the class they are going to examine another instance of children being relocated due to political upheaval. This incident happened during 1959 and 1960.  
2. Show the video *The Flight of Pedro Pan* available from WPBT-TV in Miami (full video is 90 minutes).  
3. Divide students into groups to research the Pedro Pan airlifts of 1959 and 1960.  
4. Provide resources for students such as: *Embracing America: A Cuban Exile Comes of Age, Operation Pedro Pan, Children of Flight Pedro Pan, and Kiki.*  
5. Provide websites on Pedro Pan where students can read first hand accounts of some of the participants. They can listen also to an oral history with Monsignor Bryan O. Walsh.  
5. Determine how much time students will need to research about Pedro Pan and what life was like for those involved, but allow for at least one 45-minute class period.  
Students should consider:  
- What life was like for children before the airlift?  
- How did life change for the children?  
- Were parents and children reunited?  
- How would the students and their parents feel in such a situation?  
- Do you think that there will ever be a need for an airlift or rescue operation in the future for children? Why or why not? |
| Assessment: | After groups have completed their research, instruct each group to create a digital story comparing and contrasting life for children during the Kindertransport and the Pedro Pan Airlift.  
1. Students individually will complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting life for children in the Warsaw ghetto who were rescued and those involved in the Kindertransport.  
2. Groups of students will complete a digital story comparing and contrasting life for children during the Kindertransport and the Pedro Pan airlift. |
| Extension Activities: | 1. Have students research other instances of children being relocated during times of political upheaval. Examples of this are Basque children that were sent to England and France during the Spanish Civil War and English children who were sent to the United States during the Blitz of 1940.  
2. Have the class conduct a Skype interview with a participant of the Pedro Pan airlift.  
3. Contact the Holocaust Commission for your state and invite a Holocaust survivor to speak to the class. |
### Additional References and Web links

### Children’s Literature Resources

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher &amp; Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hodge, D.</td>
<td><em>Rescuing the children: The story of the Kindertransport</em></td>
<td>Plattsburgh, NY: Tundra Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perera, H.</td>
<td><em>Kiki</em></td>
<td>Coconut Grove, FL: Pickering Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner, B.</td>
<td><em>One Little Suitcase</em></td>
<td>New York, NY: Penguin Putnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watts, I.N.</td>
<td><em>Finding Sophie</em></td>
<td>Plattsburgh, NY: Tundra Books</td>
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### Teacher Literature Resources

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<tr>
<th>Author</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conde, Y.M.</td>
<td><em>Operation Pedro Pan: The untold exodus of 14,048 Cuban children</em></td>
<td>New York, NY: Routledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris, M.J. &amp; Oppenheimer, D.</td>
<td><em>Into the Arms of Strangers</em></td>
<td>New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishers</td>
</tr>
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### Video resources


### Web resources:

- Wiener Library website (n.d.). Retrieved from [www.wienerlibrary.co.uk](http://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk)
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<tr>
<th>YouTube website. <em>Sel Hubert.</em> (2011). Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiAupVS69KE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiAupVS69KE</a></th>
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