



# SOSÚA

A Refuge for Jews in the Dominican Republic

Un Refugio de Judíos en la República Dominicana

# TEACHER'S GUIDE

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# INTRODUCTION

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## THE MUSEUM

This guide will help you prepare your middle and high school students for a visit to the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, and the special exhibition *Sosúa: A Refuge for Jews in the Dominican Republic / Un Refugio de Judíos en la República Dominicana*.

In the Museum's core exhibition, personal objects, photographs, and original films illustrate the story of modern Jewish history. The core exhibition is presented on three floors: The first floor the Museum introduces the history and customs of Jewish communities around the world at the dawn of the twentieth century. The second floor tells the story of Europe's Jews confronting hatred and violence, and their struggle to endure. Finally, the third floor presents the continuity of Jewish life after the Holocaust, with worldwide Jewish renewal and rebirth. Created as a living memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, the Museum honors those who died by celebrating their lives and legacy, conveying a message of memory and hope that is of universal significance.

Special exhibitions at the Museum complement the core exhibition. *Sosúa: A Refuge for Jews in the Dominican Republic / Un Refugio de Judíos en la República Dominicana*, on view at the Museum February 17 through July 25, 2008, presents story of Jewish refugees who found asylum in the Dominican Republic. With the rise of the Nazis in Germany and the increasing desperation of Jews to flee Europe, 32 nations gathered in July 1938 in Evian, France to discuss the crisis. The conference saw few practical results, but the Dominican Republic made the remarkable offer to take in 100,000 Jewish refugees. This exhibition documents the rescue effort and explores how Jewish refugees from Europe built a new community in what was to them a very foreign land with the help of their Dominican neighbors.

A visit to the Museum for this special exhibition will help students meet New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies for:

**Standard 1: History of the United States and New York** – Major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in U.S. and NY history

**Standard 2: World History** – Major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in World History

**Standard 3: Geography** – Geography of the world in which we live

**Standard 4: Economics** – How societies develop economic systems and institutions

**Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship, and Government** – Governmental systems, and the roles, rights, and responsibility of citizenship

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## SCHEDULING A VISIT

The Museum offers guided tours to all student groups. Gallery Educators accompany small groups of 10 to 15 students to facilitate a more intimate interaction in the galleries, and present a program corresponding to school curricula and adapted to meet the specific needs, interests, and backgrounds of your group.

To book a tour, please make your reservation as early as possible by contacting the Scheduling Coordinator at 646.437.4311.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

A Museum visit does not teach history per se, but rather engages students and sparks their interest and empathy. We believe that the details of the historical narrative are more effectively covered in the classroom prior to the class trip. The classroom learning is then reinforced when the students encounter the personal testimonies and authentic artifacts first hand at the Museum. If the visit is a success, students will leave the Museum with more questions than answers and a desire to know more.

### On their visit to the Museum, students will learn that:

- Jews are an ancient people with unique traditions and customs;
- Jews have encountered anti-Semitism throughout the ages;
- During the Holocaust, the Nazis planned to annihilate the Jewish people;
- The Dominican Republic offered to rescue 100,000 refugees from Europe;
- Jewish refugees established a settlement in Sosúa;
- Jewish settlers are grateful for the opportunity that the Dominican Republic gave them to escape from the Holocaust.

Before students come to the Museum, they should have a basic familiarity with modern Jewish history and the Holocaust. First, students should complete the Museum's Meeting Hate with Humanity workbook. Next, the teacher should conduct a 45-minute pre-visit using this guide, to prepare students for the content of the special exhibition. After visiting the Museum, the teacher may reinforce the lessons of the visit by assigning the post-visit activities from page 14. Alternatively, a teacher may also consider using these post-visit activities before the Museum visit, to encourage students to think about the key issues of immigration and our responsibilities towards others in advance of their tour.

If you require additional background information about Jewish life, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust, please see page 25. The guide also contains a chronology, glossary, and list of additional resources. All words in **bold** are defined in the glossary on page 22.

As you read the guide, please consider which pieces best suit the needs of your students, and how you might best combine these materials with your ongoing curricula in social studies, language arts, and other subjects.

# PRE-VISIT LESSON PLAN

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## PART I: To Stay or To Go? (15 minutes)

The teacher will review information from the *Meeting Hate with Humanity* workbook. Then, the teacher will read aloud the following letter, written by a Jewish teenager named Ernest Michel:

*July 1, 1938*

*To the President of the United States, to the King of England, to the Prime Minister of Canada, to the Prime Minister of Australia, to the Prime Minister of South Africa:*

*I am a young Jewish boy. I am 15 years old, and I live in Mannheim Germany. I'm desperate, trying to emigrate. I can no longer go to school. My parents have difficulties feeding the family. I am healthy and will do any work. We have no relatives outside of Germany to guarantee us.*

*Sir, please help me to leave here before things get worse. I hope you will help me.*

*Thank you.*

The teacher will ask the student the questions the following questions:

- What does Ernest Michel say about his personal identity? [He identifies himself as a Jewish boy from Germany.]
- What does he say about the current circumstances? [Conditions are bad for Jews because of the rise of the Nazis. The teacher may review the information the students learned about Nazi Germany in the *Meeting Hate with Humanity* workbook.]
- What does he ask for? [He asks for help in emigrating.]
- What does he describe as a difficulty in emigrating? What are some other difficulties? [They have no relatives to “guarantee” them. They would also need to learn a new language, gain new job skills, leave their home and family, etc.]

The letter was not answered, and Ernest Michel was unable to emigrate. During the war, he suffered in various **concentration camps**. While Mr. Michel ultimately survived, he lost many members of his family to the Nazi genocide.

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The teacher will then explain that there was one country that tried to help the Jewish refugees during the war. Below is background information for the teacher to use in explaining the relevant history. Please review this information, and present the material that is age-appropriate to your students.

In the 1930s, most of countries of the world had strict **quotas** limiting immigration.

In 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called the **Evian Conference** to address Europe's deepening **refugee** crisis among the Jews in Hitler's Germany. Thirty-two countries sent delegates to Evian, but only one — the Dominican Republic — offered more than platitudes. General **Rafael L. Trujillo**, the country's dictator, renewed an offer he made in 1935 to accept Jews as immigrants to the Dominican Republic.

Dominicans had historically welcomed Jews to their country, but in 1938 Trujillo had additional motives. He was attempting to rehabilitate his reputation after having the year before ordered the slaughter of thousands of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic. He also was intent on "whitening" the population of the Republic. The new offer was to accept 100,000 Jews as agricultural settlers.

On December 9, 1939 the **Dominican Republic Settlement Association (DORSA)** was established as a subsidiary of the New York based **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)**, a Jewish aid organization with years of experience helping Jews around the world. DORSA signed a contract with the Dominican government to create an initial agricultural settlement for refugees at **Sosúa**, an abandoned banana plantation on the Republic's northeastern shore.

DORSA recruited the refugees in Europe, funded and organized their transportation, and provided ongoing support and leadership to the settlement. It also urged an obstinate US State Department to issue the visas needed for transit via American ports, with limited success. All refugees needed exit visas and transit visas, and they were difficult to obtain.

In December 1941, when the United States entered the war, the trickle of refugees leaving Europe ceased. When the last group of refugees arrived in Sosúa on December 7, 1941, the total number of settlers had not reached 500, but they found themselves welcomed and supported by the Dominican government and the people among whom they settled.

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## **PART II: Group Work (10 minutes)**

Prior to the class, the teacher will make copies of the handouts about Sosúa on pages 6 - 13. The handouts are available for use in either English or Spanish. The teacher will make enough copies so that she or he can divide the class into at least three groups and distribute copies of one of the handouts to each of the groups. The teacher will ask students to answer the questions on the handouts and take notes on their group discussions so they are prepared to report back to the class. As the groups discuss their handouts, the teacher will circulate in the room, answer questions, and help the students move forward with their discussion.

## **PART III: Reporting to the Class (5 minutes per group; 15 minutes total)**

Each group will show their pictures to the class and report on their discussion. The teacher will guide the reporting to make sure the following points are covered:

### **GROUP 1: Building a Society**

Sosúa began as an abandoned banana plantation with no infrastructure.  
Jewish settlers worked with local Dominicans to build a society in Sosúa.  
New infrastructure and institutions benefited settlers and Dominicans.

### **GROUP 2: Establishing a Successful Economy**

Many of the settlers were urban, middle-class Europeans.  
Settlers had to learn new skills from their Dominican neighbors.  
With help from Dominican neighbors, their industries were successful.

### **GROUP 3: Pastimes and Cultural Life**

Settlers gained new interests and pastimes.  
Settlers retained customs from Europe.  
Most settlers were not religious, but some maintained Jewish traditions.

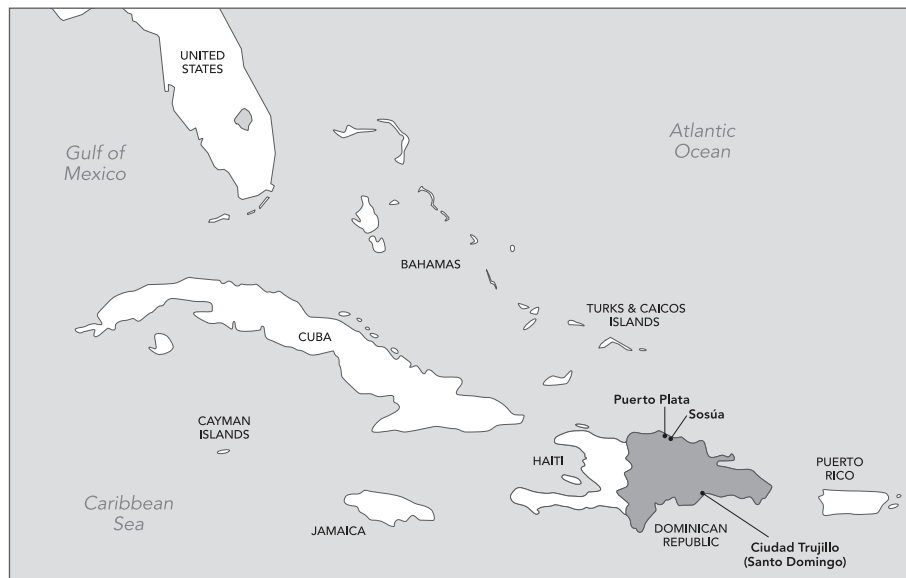
## **PART IV: Discussion of Rescue (5 minutes)**

The teacher will summarize that the students are exploring the story of how Jewish refugees from Europe built a new community in what was to them a very foreign land. The teacher will ask the students to consider this story of rescue, pointing out that it is a complex topic. The teacher may ask:

- Why do you think the Dominican Republic offered to help the Jewish refugees?  
Why didn't other countries offer to help?
- What do you think should be done to honor this remarkable rescue?

The teacher will announce that the students will continue to study this story during their visit to the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

# TO STAY OR TO GO?



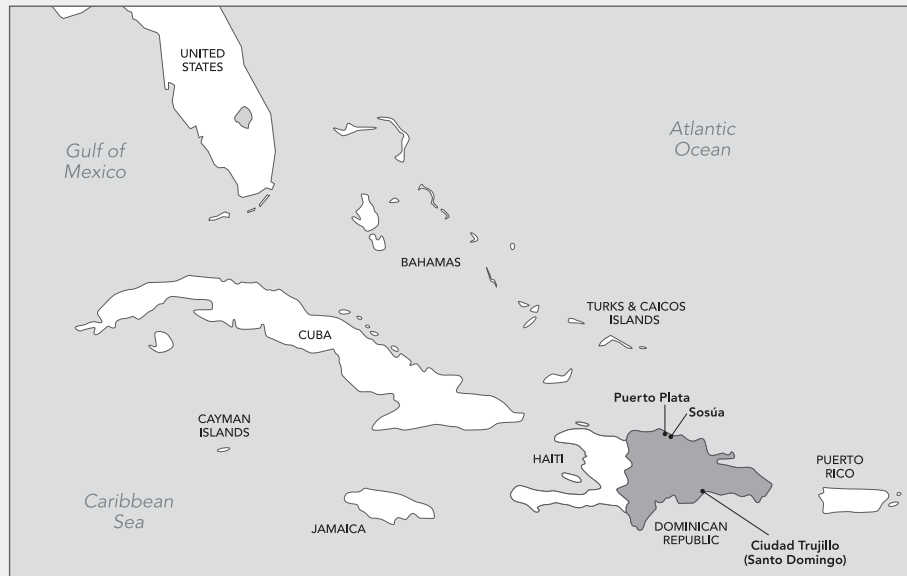
Look at the maps. Where are Germany and Austria? Where is Sosúa?

"I got myself a map and said, where is the Dominican Republic? I have never heard in my life of it. It was a tropical island somewhere in the Caribbean, but that was all I knew about." — FELIX BAUER

"The main reason we signed up was they promised us we can bring our family out of Europe. I was hoping I can save my family." — SARAH KAHANE

"The day came when I got my visa... I left my father, mother, and sister behind." — ERIC THUNA

# ¿QUEDARSE O IRSE?



Observa los mapas. ¿Dónde quedan Alemania y Austria? ¿Dónde queda Sosúa?

“Conseguí un mapa y dije: ¿Dónde queda la República Dominicana? Jamás en mi vida he oído hablar de ella. Era una isla tropical en algún lugar del Caribe. Eso era todo lo que sabía sobre ella.” — FELIX BAUER

“La razón principal por la que firmamos era que nos prometieron que podemos sacar a nuestra familia de Europa. Esperaba que puedo salvar a mi familia.” — SARAH KAHANE

“Llegó el día en que obtuve mi visa... y dejé a mi padre, mi madre y mi hermana atrás.” — ERIC THUNA

# GROUP 1: Building a Society

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- What do you see in this photograph? Describe as many details as possible.
- Why does everyone in the photograph look so happy about the running water?
- Before the Jewish settlers arrived, Sosúa was an abandoned banana plantation. What would be needed in order to build a society there?
- Read and summarize the ideas expressed in the quotes below:

“Sosúa, was a just a piece of land with a few buildings on it. And very sparsely populated.”

— BARBARA STEINMETZ

“There were two barracks and a few shacks. No electric lights, and the mosquitoes were humming.”

— DAVID KAHANE

“No maps were in existence.” — FROM THE MEMOIRS OF FELIX BAUER

- Jewish settlers worked together with local Dominicans to build Sosúa. How could building basic infrastructure (such as running water and roads) and new institutions (such as schools and hospitals) help both the Jewish settlers and the local Dominicans?

# GRUPO 1: construir una sociedad

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- ¿Qué ves en la fotografía? Describe la mayor cantidad de detalles posible.
- ¿Por qué las personas de la fotografía parecen tan contentas con el agua corriente?
- Antes de que llegaran los colonos judíos, Sosúa era una plantación de bananas abandonada. ¿Qué necesitaban para construir una sociedad allí?
- Lee y resume las ideas expresadas en las siguientes citas:

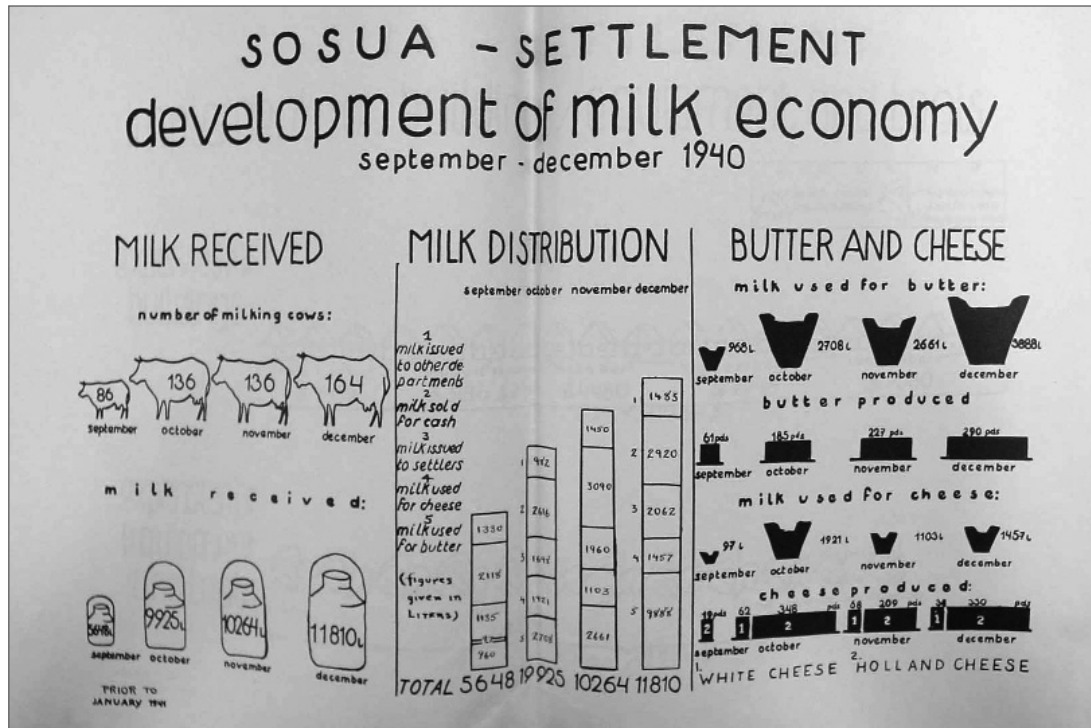
“Sosúa era sólo un trozo de tierra con unas pocas edificaciones. Y con muy poca población.”  
— BARBARA STEINMETZ

“Había dos cuarteles y unas pocas chozas. No había luz eléctrica y zumbaban los mosquitos.”  
— DAVID KAHANE

“No existía ningún mapa.” — DE LAS MEMORIAS DE FELIX BAUER

- Los colonos judíos trabajaron junto a los dominicanos para construir Sosúa. ¿De qué manera construir una infraestructura básica (como agua corriente y caminos) y establecer nuevas instituciones (como escuelas y hospitales) podía ayudar tanto a los colonos judíos como a los dominicanos?

# GROUP 2: Establishing a Successful Economy



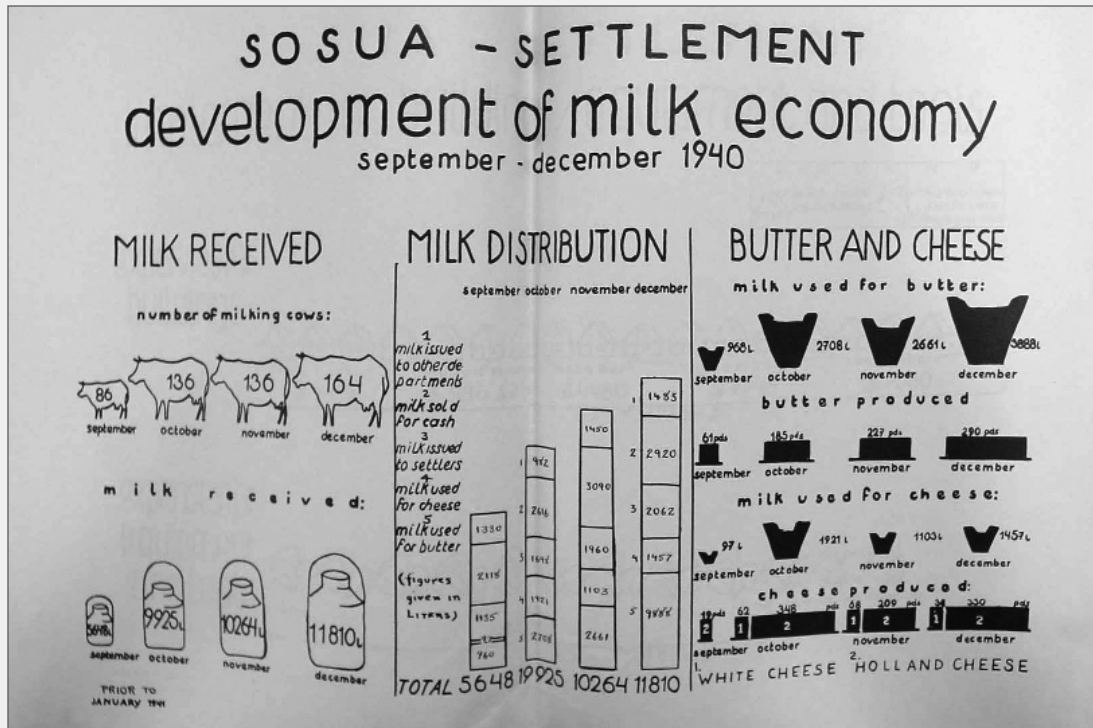
- What do you see in this document? Describe as many details as possible.
- What does this document tell you about the kind of economy the Jewish settlers developed in Sosúa? Were they successful?
- How do you think they learned how to do these activities (milk a cow, make butter and cheese, etc.)?
- What other new skills did they have to learn in order to build a home in Sosúa?
- Read and summarize the ideas expressed in the quotes below:

“We stared at the cows. What happens next? Does one get a hold of the tail and pump until some milk comes out?” — EDITH GERSTEN, from *Strangers at Home and Abroad*

“You’ve got to understand that these people who came over here, they were either merchants, intellectuals, or in business. None of them were in agriculture...” — ERNEST SCHREINER

“In the meat industry, in the cheese industry, they worked and put a lot into it. There were many Dominicans. The relationship between the immigrants and the Dominicans was very, very good.” — OLGA ROMAN

# GRUPO 2: establecer una economía exitosa



- ¿Qué ves en este documento? Describe la mayor cantidad de detalles posible.
- ¿Qué dice el documento sobre el tipo de economía que desarrollaron los colonos judíos en Sosúa? ¿Obtuvieron buenos resultados?
- ¿Cómo crees que aprendieron a hacer esas actividades (ordeñar una vaca, hacer manteca y queso, etc.)?
- ¿Qué otras nuevas destrezas tuvieron que aprender para construir un hogar en Sosúa?
- Lee y resume las ideas expresadas en las siguientes citas:

“Mirábamos las vacas fijamente. ¿Luego qué se hace? ¿Hay que agarrar la cola y exprimirla hasta que de algún modo salga la leche?” — EDITH GERSTEN, *De Strangers at Home and Abroad*

“Y uno llegaba a comprender que esas personas o eran comerciantes, intelectuales u hombres de negocios. Ninguno de ellos eran agricultura...” — ERNEST SCHREINER

“En la carnicería, en la industria del queso, trabajaban y daban mucha vida porque habían muchos dominicanos. La relación entre los inmigrantes y los dominicanos era muy, muy buena.”  
— OLGA ROMAN

## GROUP 3: Pastimes and Cultural Life

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- What do you see in this photograph? Describe as many details as possible.
- Read and summarize the ideas expressed in the quotes below:

"We did a lot of swimming." — FERN WERNICK

"We had plays, we had this café-house where we came together, we were telling jokes, we were singing." — HERMINE KOHN

"They got together to listen to the opera. Between each act, Dr. Robitschek, who was the guy with the most culture, would explain." — JOE BENJAMIN

"We formed our own little Jewish group there. And there was a learned man, he functioned as rabbi. We started to have services in one of the barracks." — PAUL COHNEN

"In school, we celebrated Dominican holidays and celebrated Jewish holidays, too." — LOUIS HESS

"We immediately started learning Spanish." — FERN WERNICK

"It took my parents time to adapt to Dominican culture. My mother only knew German. We always spoke German at home." — JOE BENJAMIN

- How are the activities described related to the European backgrounds of the settlers?  
How are they related to their new lives in the Dominican Republic?

## GRUPO 3: pasatiempos y vida cultural

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- ¿Qué ves en la fotografía? Describe la mayor cantidad de detalles posible.
- Lee y resume las ideas expresadas en las siguientes citas:

"Nosotras nadábamos mucho." — FERN WERNICK

"Teníamos obras de teatro, teníamos una casa de café donde nos reuníamos, contábamos chistes, cantábamos." — HERMINE KOHN

"Se reunían para escuchar ópera. Entre cada acto de la ópera, el Dr. Robitschek, que era el tipo con más cultura, él explicaba que escucharíamos." — JOE BENJAMIN

"Formamos nuestro propio grupo judío allí. Había un hombre culto, que oficiaba de rabino. Empezamos a tener servicios en uno de los cuarteles." — PAUL COHNEN

"En la escuela celebrábamos las festividades dominicanas y también las judías." — LOUIS HESS

"Empezamos a aprender español de inmediato." — FERN WERNICK

"Mi madre solo sabía alemán. Siempre hablamos alemán en casa únicamente." — JOE BENJAMIN

- ¿Cómo se relacionan las actividades descritas con el origen europeo de los colonos? ¿Cómo se relacionan con su nueva vida en la República Dominicana?

# POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

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After the Museum visit, students may review what they learned by answering the following writing, research, and action assignments.

## WRITING:

- Write about your own immigration story or the story of a family member or friend. Discuss how heritage, culture, economy, society, and religion may play a role in the immigration experience. What are the immigrant's reasons for leaving his or her home? What are his or her hopes for the future?
- Write about our responsibilities to help others. When should we feel obligated to help others? What are the considerations must we keep in mind?
- Write about a time you met someone who was different from you. Describe the interaction. Did anything make you nervous? What did you learn from them? What did they learn from you?

## RESEARCH:

- Choose a specific refugee or immigrant group and find out more about their history. Why did they decide to leave their homes? Where did they decide to go? What conditions did they face?
- Choose a specific organization that helps refugees or immigrants and find out more about how they help these groups. What kinds of assistance do they offer?

## ACTION:

- At the Evian Conference in 1938, only the Dominican Republic offered refuge to Jews from Nazi Europe. Why didn't other nations take action? Can we make a difference in the decisions that our government makes today? Write a letter to your congressional representative about an issue related to immigration that is important to you.
- A Jewish organization called the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) helped the Jewish settlers establish new lives in Sosúa. What are some organizations in your community that help others? Get involved with one of these organizations.
- Do a fundraising event to help raise money for an immigrant aid organization.

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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This section provides basic background information about Jewish life, the history of anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust. We hope that you and your students will be familiar with this information before you visit the Museum. Terms in **bold** are listed in the glossary on pages 22 - 24.

## JEWISH LIFE

The Jewish people trace their origins to the Israelites described in the **Torah**, or Hebrew Bible. The Torah, considered the central text of Judaism, recounts many stories, from the creation of the world, to the emergence of a monotheistic religion, to the slavery and eventual exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, to their wanderings in the desert, the revelation at Mount Sinai, and the ultimate entry of the people into the Promised Land.

After creating a kingdom, the destruction of the First and Second Temples, respectively in 586 B.C.E. and 70 C.E., sent the Jewish people into exile, spread out among the countries of the world in what is known as the **Diaspora**. Over the centuries Jews have lived in almost every country of the world. The major concentrations of population today are in North America, Israel, and Europe. Although it is difficult to calculate the exact number of Jews in the world today, it is estimated that the total is about 13 million, with roughly 5 million living in the United States, and another 5 million in Israel.

In addition to narrative stories, the Torah also includes commandments regarding legal and ritual matters. Today, customs and traditions that trace their origins back to the Torah unite a diverse group of Jews around the world.

One important aspect of Jewish practice is the marking of sacred time. A weekly day of rest, known as **Shabbat** in Hebrew, commemorates the creation of the world and God's resting on the seventh day from Friday evening through Saturday night. The Jewish year also includes many holidays celebrating moments in Jewish history or the agricultural cycle. According to the laws of the Torah, traditional Jews do not work on the Sabbath or holidays, and do not perform other tasks such as writing, traveling, or lighting fire. Instead, they pray, study, and spend time with family. Many Jews who do not observe the Sabbath and holidays in the traditional manner also find ways to make these days special and different from the rest of the week and year.

Biblical sources and later interpretations also outline specific Jewish dietary laws, determining which foods may be eaten and how they must be prepared. These foods are considered acceptable and described as **kosher**. Among the details of the dietary laws, Jewish tradition prohibits the consumption of certain kinds of meats, such as pork, and prohibits eating meat and dairy products together. Permissible meats must be prepared by a carefully trained ritual slaughterer in a prescribed manner. Today, many packaged foods are specially marked to show that they have been examined and certified as kosher.

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION (continued)

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In observing tradition, Jewish individuals have come together to form communities throughout the world. The **synagogue** is a Jewish house of worship where members of the community come together for prayer, study, and celebration of Jewish religious and cultural life.

Because Jews interpret their traditions in diverse ways, there is a great deal of variation in the expression of contemporary Jewish life. While we have described Jewish life here in broad strokes, we should also note that not every Jew follows Jewish law in the traditional manner, or even at all.

## ANTI-SEMITISM

Throughout history, the unique practices of Jews (see above) have set them apart and made them seem “different” to outsiders. **Stereotypes** are negative assumptions that can result from the fear and misunderstanding of certain groups that seem “different.” Stereotypes often lead to **prejudice** and **discrimination**. The phenomenon of unjustified hatred toward Jews goes back thousands of years. More recently, hostility toward Jews came to be known as **anti-Semitism**.

Modern, racially based anti-Semitism emerged in Europe during the 19th century, as Jews struggled to find ways of integrating their Jewish and European identities. More and more, Jews were moving to big cities and participating in the local culture. Many Jews, particularly in Western Europe, believed they could effectively integrate and **assimilate** into European society. Many Jews in Central and Western Europe were granted legal equality and civil rights by the governments of the countries in which they lived. Unfortunately, emancipation did not eradicate anti-Jewish attitudes and behaviors. In fact, in many countries, Jews became **scapegoats** for social and economic problems. In the Eastern Europe, for example, Jews violent persecution in waves of riots called **pogroms**.

Many Eastern European Jews believed that **emigration** was the only solution to their problems. Over two million Jews came to the U.S. between 1880 and 1920 in search of freedom. Although America offered them greater opportunities, their arrival also contributed to a rise in anti-Semitism and xenophobia in this country. Another Jewish response to anti-Semitism was **Zionism**, a growing political movement to reestablish a national home in the ancient Jewish homeland known by Jews as the Land of Israel. Some young European Jewish idealists followed the call to settle in the land and struggled with competing visions of how to build a new Jewish society.

In Western Europe, modern anti-Semitism was further supported by the rise of popular new pseudo-scientific “racial” theories. These theories contended that physical differences between groups of people also implied differences in character and behavior. These false notions were advocated primarily by people of Northern European background, who considered their own group to be the “superior race,” supposedly endowed by

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the greatest characteristics of intelligence, beauty, and moral judgment. Jews and other minorities, on the other hand, were considered “inferior races” and were portrayed with fearsome, grotesque stereotypes.

While religious conversion may have been an option for Jews confronting hatred in the past, this new anti-Semitism targeted all Jews, regardless of their beliefs or religious traditions. This new and virulent hatred came to be a powerful tool in the rise of the Nazis and the events known today as the **Holocaust**.

## THE HOLOCAUST

One of the most influential events in the early 20th century was World War I, which lasted from 1914 to 1918. Germany was particularly devastated by the war and its aftermath. The **Treaty of Versailles** required Germany to pay reparations, give up land, reduce its army, and accept blame for the war. The German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, abdicated, and the country became a democratic republic, called the **Weimar Republic**.

Support for this government was weak, however, and parties opposed to democracy thrived. Economic chaos weakened the Republic and strengthened right-wing extremists. By the early 1920s, **inflation** made German money nearly worthless and caused a rapid rise in unemployment. Many Germans blamed the situation on a mythical “international Jewish conspiracy.” Anti-Semitic parties fanned this hatred.

The National Socialist German Workers’ Party (also known as the **Nazi** party) was founded within this climate in 1919. By 1921 **Adolf Hitler** took control of the party. The Nazis utilized all types of anti-Semitic **propaganda** and even physical intimidation and violence to strengthen their position in the government, and in January 1933 Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor (Prime Minister) of Germany. Sensitively attuned to the beliefs and fears of those around him, Hitler focused upon the Jews as the source for Germany’s ills, using racism and bigotry to unify an insecure people.

In 1935, Germany passed the **Nuremberg Laws**, which provided a legal foundation for the Nazi exclusion and degradation of German Jews. Most critically, these laws revoked the citizenship of Jews and others who were not considered “Aryan.” The term “**Aryan**” was used to denote members of a “superior race,” while Jews and other minorities such as Roma (Gypsies), Africans, homosexuals, and people with mental and physical disabilities were considered “inferior.”

The atmosphere became increasingly oppressive for Germany’s Jews. On November 9-10, 1938, the Nazi party organized a “spontaneous” anti-Jewish pogrom that raged through Germany and Austria. That night, thousands of attacks were made on Jews, Jewish-owned property, and synagogues. The Nazis called it **Kristallnacht**, “Night of Broken Glass.” At least 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up and deported to **concentration camps**, 91 Jews were killed, over 1,400 synagogues were desecrated, and thousands of

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION (continued)

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Jewish-owned shops were destroyed. This was a turning point for German Jews who now understood they had to get out.

As the situation deteriorated for Germany's Jews, many sought refuge in other countries. Most other nations of the world, however, retained strict immigration laws during this period. Almost no countries would let Jewish **refugees** in, and the Nazis made it very difficult for them to leave. In July 1938, at the **Evian Conference** in France, representatives of 32 countries, including the United States, met to discuss the issue of German and Austrian "political" refugees. The conference saw few practical results. Only the Dominican Republic made a tangible offer to take in up to 100,000 Jews. This unusual story is highlighted in the Museum's special exhibition and explored further in the pre-visit activities on pages 3 - 13. Through these activities and the tour, students will learn more about why and how Jewish refugees decided to escape to the Dominican Republic, how they established a community on this tropical island in a place called Sosúa, and how their experiences affected their own personal identities. The exhibition documents a remarkable story of escape and rescue.

The predicament of the Jews of Germany, however, was more generally epitomized by the voyage of the German ship *St. Louis* in 1939. On May 13, 1939, the *St. Louis* set sail from Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba, with 937 passengers. The overwhelming majority of the passengers were Jews with Cuban landing certificates. The Cuban government, however, revoked these certificates, and only 28 of the passengers were allowed to land. The ship subsequently sailed toward Florida, but the U.S. government **quota** policy did not let them enter the U.S. The ship returned to Europe, where England, Belgium, Holland, and France finally agreed to accept the refugees. However, on September 1, 1939 Germany began World War II with the invasion of Poland, and within a year, three of the nations that gave refuge to the passengers of the *St. Louis* came under German occupation.

As Germany and the **Axis Powers** continued their assault on Europe, many more Jews came under Nazi control. Jews in Eastern Europe were forced into crowded **ghettos**. The Nazis created the first ghetto in 1939 in Piotrkow, Poland. The following year, the Warsaw Ghetto was established. With almost 400,000 Jews, the Warsaw Ghetto was the largest of the ghettos. Most of its residents eventually died from the terrible conditions of hunger and disease. Many others were eventually deported, subjected to slave labor, and, finally, systematically massacred in the six **killing centers** in occupied Poland - Auschwitz, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, and Treblinka. In 1942, the Nazis had decided to call this plan "The Final Solution." The "solution" to their problems was the extermination of European Jewry. By the conclusion of the war in 1945, six million Jewish men, women, and children were systematically murdered as part of the Nazi plans for **genocide**.

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When the **Allies** finally **liberated** the camps, they were shocked and horrified to encounter the physical evidence of the tragedy that had taken place in Europe. The liberators did their best to care for the survivors and nurture them back to health, establishing **Displaced Persons (DP) Camps** for the homeless, stateless refugees. For the survivors, even if they could return to their former homes, they often had no interest in going back. In many cases, their former neighbors had collaborated with the Nazis and even taken over their property. Furthermore, the survivors had been separated from their families and often didn't know if any of their loved ones were still alive. They were haunted by the memories of the hell they had endured, and urgently wanted to move forward to rebuild new homes and new lives.

Some Jews spent years in the DP camps, searching for loved ones, starting new families, and waiting for the countries of the world to open their doors to them. Even after the war, it was difficult to find a country that would allow Jewish refugees to gain entry. The establishment of the **State of Israel** in 1948 gave new hope to many. In fact, about two-thirds of the DP population moved there. Many of the rest found refuge in the U.S. and Canada. The last DP Camp closed in 1953.

Over the years since the Holocaust, there has been a renewal of Jewish life in all parts of the world, but, of course, we can never regain the millions of lives that were lost. We who live in the shadow of the Holocaust have a responsibility to remember and honor those who perished, and to work for justice and humanity in the world today.

# HOLOCAUST CHRONOLOGY

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- JAN 30, 1933** Nazi Party leader **Adolf Hitler** takes office as Chancellor of Germany.
- APRIL 7, 1933** The Nazi government begins dismissing Jews from certain professions, including the civil service, health services, and courts.
- FEB, 1935** Dominican Republic announces willingness to take Jews.
- SEPT 15, 1935** The Nazis enact the **Nuremberg Laws**, which strip Jews of their German citizenship.
- OCT, 1937** Dominican massacre of Haitians along Haitian-Dominican border.
- AUG 17, 1938** Nazis order Jews to have “Jewish” names, and those who do not are forced to take “Israel” or “Sara” as middle names.
- NOV 9-10, 1938** Anti-Jewish attacks are organized across Germany and Austria, in which 91 Jews are murdered, over 1,400 synagogues are desecrated, Jewish-owned shops are destroyed, and 30,000 Jewish men are arrested. The night comes to be known as **Kristallnacht** or, the “Night of Broken Glass.”
- NOV 12, 1938** Decrees force Jews to pay for the damage of *Kristallnacht*, order Jewish firms to close, and expel Jewish children from public schools.
- JULY 6 - 15, 1938** At the **Evian Conference**, called by the United States, 32 nations discuss the refugee crisis yet take little action.
- The U.S., under its restrictive 1930 immigration rules, accepts fewer German Jews than its **quotas** allow.
- The Dominican Republic announces plans to accept 100,000 Jewish refugees.
- DEC, 1938** Compulsory “Aryanization” of all remaining Jewish businesses in Germany.
- MAY 13, 1939** The German ship *St. Louis* sails from Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba. Almost all of the 937 passengers are Jews with Cuban landing certificates. Most had applied for U.S. **visas** and planned to stay in Cuba only until they could get into the U.S. The Cuban government, however, only lets 28 passengers disembark. The ship sails toward Florida, but the U.S. government quota policy prevents their admittance. England, Belgium, Holland, and France agree to accept the **refugees**.

SEPT 1, 1939	German troops invade Poland and begin World War II.
OCT, 1939	Roosevelt endorses Sosúa plan.
OCT 31, 1939	German military begins to confine Jews to <b>ghettos</b> in Poland. Inside the ghettos, Jews cope with overcrowding, starvation, and disease.
Dec, 1939	Dominican Republic Settlement Association (DORSA) is founded in New York by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).
March, 1940	First refugees come to Sosúa.
APRIL 9 - JUNE 14, 1940	Germany invades Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, and June France. Most of Western Europe is in Nazi hands.
JUNE 22, 1941	German troops invade the Soviet Union.
OCT, 1941	Nazis forbid emigration of Jews from the Reich.
DEC, 1941	Last group of refugees from Europe arrives in Sosúa.
DEC, 1941	Pearl Harbor; United States declares war on Japan; Germany declares war on United States.
JAN 20, 1942	At the Wannsee Conference, German officials discuss plans to kill all the Jews in Europe. The six <b>killing centers</b> were all located in Poland. These included Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz, and Majdanek.
MAY 7 - 8, 1945	The <b>Allies</b> declare victory in Europe. During the course of the Holocaust, 6 million Jews are murdered.

# GLOSSARY

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**Allies:** Also known as the Allied Powers or United Nations, the nations united to fight the Axis of Powers in World War II. Primarily: Great Britain, the Soviet Union (after June 22, 1941), the United States (after December 11, 1941), and China. It also included the Polish government-in-exile, and the free French.

**American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC or "Joint"):** An American Jewish relief agency.

**Anti-Semitism:** Hatred of Jews.

**Aryan:** Term used by the Nazis to describe what they considered the "superior race." Jews and other ethnic groups were considered "inferior" in all characteristics, including physical, intellectual, and moral qualities.

**Assimilation:** Adaptation to the surrounding culture. In modern times, many Jews have tried to assimilate to fit in to the majority culture.

**Axis Powers:** The nations who fought against the Allies. Primarily: Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Japan.

**Concentration Camps:** Prison camps created by the Nazis. During the war, millions of Jews and others were forcibly sent to these camps, where many were killed or died of starvation, overwork, and disease.

**Diaspora:** The dispersion of a group of people outside their homeland. When capitalized, it generally means the scattering of the Jews around the world.

**Discrimination:** Differential treatment of a group of people based on race, class, ethnicity, religion, or other category.

**Displaced Persons (DP) Camp:** A camp set up to help individuals taken from their families and homes during the course of war or whose families and homes were destroyed by war, who refuse to return to their home countries. After the Holocaust, DP Camps provided temporary shelter and other services as survivors struggled to rebuild their lives.

**Dominican Republic Settlement Association (DORSA):** A subsidiary of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, established to help bring with the settlement of Jewish refugees in Sosúa.

**Emigration:** The act of leaving one's country and settling in another.

**Evian Conference:** An international meeting of 32 nations convened in Evian, France in July 1938 to deal with the German Jewish immigration problem. Only the Dominican Republic took action as a result of the conference, offering refuge to 100,000 Jews.

**Genocide:** A word first used in print in 1944 to describe an official, governmental policy of killing an entire people.

**Ghetto:** During World War II, a segregated, sealed area where Nazis confined Jews in cities or towns. Jews confined to these areas suffered and often died from overcrowding, starvation, poor sanitation, and disease.

**Holocaust:** The word used to describe the murder of European Jewry by the Nazis and their collaborators.

**Hitler, Adolf (1889 - 1945):** Nazi party leader and German Chancellor who led Germany into World War II and the Holocaust. An extreme racist, Hitler placed anti-Semitism at the center of Nazi politics. He committed suicide in Berlin on April 30, 1945.

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**Inflation:** A general increase in consumer prices which causes a decline in the value of currency.

**Killing Center:** Camp set up by the Nazis in occupied Poland for the mass murder of Jews and other “undesirables,” primarily by poison gas. The six Nazi killing centers, also known as Death Camps, were Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, and Treblinka.

**Kosher:** Literally meaning “fit” or “proper,” the term applies to anything that is suitable for use according to Jewish law. Most often the word “kosher” refers to food that is acceptable by the Jewish dietary laws. According to these laws, certain kinds of meat may not be eaten, kosher meat must be slaughtered in a specified manner, and milk and meat may not be eaten together.

**Kristallnacht:** Commonly translated from the German as “Night of Broken Glass,” a series of organized anti-Semitic riots that occurred during the night of November 9 - 10, 1938 across Germany and Austria. Mobs looted and destroyed Jewish homes and businesses, attacked 1,400 synagogues, and arrested approximately 30,000 Jews.

**Liberation:** Term used to describe the events of the end of World War II, when the Allies freed the occupied countries and the victims of the Nazis.

**Nazi:** A member of the Nationalist Socialist German Workers’ Party, which was led by Adolf Hitler. The Nazis gained control of Germany in 1933. They believed in the supremacy of the “Aryan race,” and violently persecuted “non-Aryan” groups.

**Nuremberg Laws:** Laws issued in 1935, which, among other things, banned marriage between “Aryans” and “non-Aryans” and took away German citizenship from “non-Aryans.”

**Pogrom:** A brutal mob-led attack against a particular group of people, especially Jews. Pogroms in Eastern Europe were often carried out with the support of local authorities. The term comes from a Russian word for “outrage” or “havoc.”

**Prejudice:** A judgment about other people that is formed before the facts are known. Often, prejudicial opinions are based on stereotypes or unproven suspicions.

**Propaganda:** Materials created and disseminated to sway public opinion or to spread false information. Nazi propaganda spread lies about Jews in order to garner support for Nazi policies.

**Quota:** In relation to immigration, the number or percentage of persons of a specified nationality permitted to immigrate to a country in a given year. During the Holocaust, immigration to many Western countries was restricted by quotas. In the United States, for example, quotas had been established in 1921 and 1924 to limit immigration.

**Rabbi:** A Jewish religious leader trained in Jewish law. The term comes from the Hebrew word for “my teacher.”

**Refugee:** One who flees in search of refuge, as in times of war, political oppression, or religious persecution.

**Scapegoat:** Someone who is made to take the blame for others.

**Shabbat:** The Jewish Sabbath, which begins on Friday evening and ends on Saturday night. It is a day of spiritual rest and reflection.

**Sosúa:** An abandoned banana plantation in the Dominican Republic converted into a settlement for Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi occupied Europe.

# GLOSSARY (continued)

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**State of Israel:** The Jewish State, established in 1948.

**Stereotype:** A generalization about the members of a group. Often stereotypes perpetuate negative assumptions and false beliefs about an ethnic, religious, or racial group.

**Synagogue:** A communal center where Jews worship, study, and celebrate holidays and community events. In Hebrew it is called a *beit kneset*, in Yiddish it is known as a *shul*, and in English many Jews also call it a temple.

**Torah:** Literally meaning “Teaching,” Torah usually refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), or a scroll containing these books. A Torah scroll is handwritten on parchment and read from out loud in the synagogue during certain prayer services.

**Treaty of Versailles:** This peace treaty, signed in Versailles, France, in 1919, officially ended World War I between Germany and the Allies. The treaty required Germany to claim responsibility for the war, pay extensive reparations, cede territory it had conquered, and limit its military forces.

**Trujillo, Rafael L. (1891 - 1961):** Dictator of the Dominican Republic, 1930 - 1961. He offered refuge to 100,000 Jews at the Evian Conference, and established a settlement for them in Sosúa.

**Visa:** An official government document that permits the holder to enter the nation that has issued it.

**Weimar Republic:** The government established in Germany in 1919 following the country’s defeat in World War I. The Weimar Republic was Germany’s first democracy, but it fell in 1933 when Hitler’s Nazi party took control.

**Zionism:** A movement concerned with establishing and supporting a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. It comes from the Hebrew word *Tzion*, a biblical name for Jerusalem. Modern Zionism began in the late 19th century and included several different ideological factions.

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