

Memories of *Kristallnacht*: Destruction and Flight

INFORMATION SHEET AND ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNERS

1. Information about *Kristallnacht*

On 9 and 10 November 1938, the Nazi regime and their collaborators conducted a series of attacks called 'pogroms' against the Jewish population in Germany and the other occupied territories. Pogrom is a Russian word meaning 'to wreak havoc, to demolish violently'. This event became known as *Kristallnacht* or 'Night of Broken Glass' because of the shattered glass that filled the streets after the vandalism and destruction of synagogues, Jewish-owned businesses, and homes. As you will hear in the audio clip from an oral history interview with former Welsh resident Julius Weil, who was a young child in Germany at the time, schools were also targeted and destroyed.



[Interior view of the destroyed Fasanenstraße Synagogue, Berlin, burned during the November Pogroms, November 1938.](#)

Image: Center for Jewish History, New York City.
Courtesy of Leo Baeck Institute.



[Germans pass by the broken shop window of a Jewish-owned business that was destroyed during Kristallnacht, 10 November 1938.](#)

*Image: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives # 86838.
Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park.
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During *Kristallnacht*, at least 91 people were murdered, and many others took their own lives. Around 30,000 Jewish males were taken to concentration camps, particularly those at Buchenwald, Dachau and Sachsenhausen. Concentration camps were areas where large numbers of people were imprisoned and subjected to forced labour (in World War 2, they were also places to await deportation to death camps). This was the first time that Nazi officials made large-scale arrests of Jews simply because they were Jews.

Following *Kristallnacht*, the Nazi regime forced the Jewish community to pay a 1 billion Reichsmark 'atonement tax' and introduced new anti-Jewish measures with the aim to isolate and segregate Jews from their fellow Germans: All Jewish-owned businesses were closed; Jews were barred from all public schools and universities, as well as from cinemas, theatres, and sports facilities.

Kristallnacht was the trigger for many Jews to flee Germany if they could. Julius Weil came to England with his school and later moved to Merthyr Tydfil, becoming an active member of the local Jewish community.

2. Julius Weil's Biography

Julius Weil was born in Dortmund, Germany, on 11 October 1925. Julius then lived in Köln (Cologne) with his parents and younger brother until 1938. After his Jewish school was destroyed during the Kristallnacht pogrom on 9-10 November 1938, the headmaster arranged for the whole school to be transferred to London. Julius recalls that he was on the first Kindertransport train to leave the country; sadly, this was the last time that he saw his parents and brother.

Julius originally lived in London before being evacuated to Bedford to stay with a non-Jewish family. He left school at the age of fifteen and initially took work in the fur trade but had to give this up as he turned out to be allergic to fur. In 1942 he went to work for the Ministry of Supply (MOS). He began this work in Bedford and then relocated to Surrey at the end of World War 2. Julius then left the MOS and found work in a factory in Surrey for several years.

In 1956, he was contacted by the first friend he made in England, who was also a Jewish refugee, who asked if he wanted to work at the company his uncle owned in Pentrebach, near Merthyr Tydfil. Julius accepted and spent the rest of his life working for the Standard Box and Carton Company, eventually becoming its director.

Julius died in Cardiff in 2021.



[Julius Weil's brother, Arnold, Köln, April 1936.](#)
[Arnold was murdered during the Holocaust.](#)

*Image: Jewish History Association of South
Wales/Cymdeithas Hanes Iddewig De Cymru
(JHASW/CHIDC).
Courtesy of Julius Weil.*

3. Activities

ACTIVITY 1

a) Read the information about *Kristallnacht* and listen to an [audio clip](#) from an interview with a Holocaust survivor Julius Weil. In the clip, Julius talks about *Kristallnacht* in Köln, Germany, the destruction of his school and how his headmaster tried to get the whole school transferred to London.

Oral History Transcript:

Interviewer: So, you mentioned Kristallnacht.

Julius Weil: Yes.

Interviewer: So, you have some memories of, of that?

Julius Weil: [Pause.] Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more?

Julius Weil: Well, I, I wasn't out and about when it happened, but all the sort of Jewish businesses in, in Cologne [Köln in German] were smashed up. Windows broken; more or less closed down. My synagogue, well, all the synagogues were trashed, burnt, and smashed up. The school I went to, which was sort of attached to one of the synagogues, was also completely destroyed. So, school did not continue after the ninth, tenth of November, but there were some facilities organised in, in a big building which, which had rooms in it, which was a Jewish community centre, I suppose. So, that's where the schooling continued. My headmaster, immediately, [pause] got very busy trying to get the whole of the school transferred to Britain. And my class, which was the sort of third class of high school, in other words thirteen, twelve, thirteen-year-olds, was the first class to come over to England.

b) Create a graphic organiser (e.g., a concept map, an idea web, or a mind map) to organise the information (different descriptions and key facts about *Kristallnacht*). This activity can be done individually or as a group.

ACTIVITY 2

a) Consider and discuss in small groups:

- How might Julius Weil and other Jewish young people have felt during and after the events of *Kristallnacht*?
- Many Jews who survived the attacks decided to flee. How would they have felt doing so? Consider the positive and negative reactions.

b) Communicate the main discussion points to the whole class.

ACTIVITY 3

a) Consider and discuss in small groups:

- How can you identify prejudice, discrimination, and injustice in their own lives and the wider world?
- What action can you take?

b) Communicate the main discussion points to the whole class.

ACTIVITY 4

a) Write a short report from the perspective of an **independent observer** (i.e., not a perpetrator or a victim) who witnessed *Kristallnacht* events. Learners may find it helpful to consider these questions to help create their piece:

- Where are you? (E.g., outside the synagogue.)
- What can you see? (E.g., glistening broken glass covering the streets.)
- What can you hear? (E.g., the sound of smashing glass).

b) Share the report with the class by reading it.