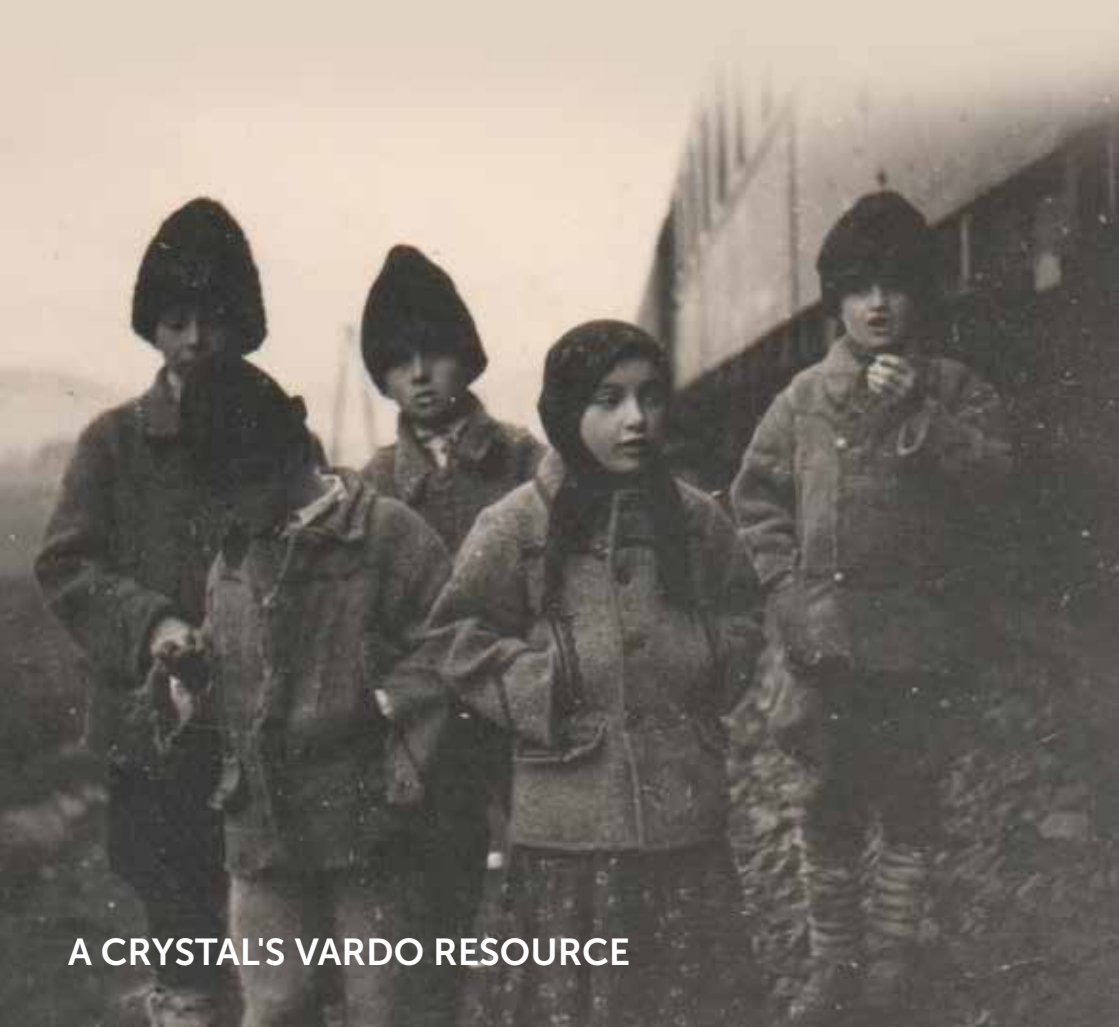


# THE GYPSY HOLOCAUST **FORGOTTEN VICTIMS**



A CRYSTAL'S VARDÓ RESOURCE



#### NOTE

Gypsy people in Europe are generally referred to as Roma and Sinti. Sinti are those living in Western and Central Europe and Roma are of Eastern and South Eastern European origin. The word Gypsy usually refers to English Romanies and is derived from 'Egypt' as Europeans mistakenly believed that when the Roma first arrived in Europe, they were natives of Egypt. For the purposes of this booklet and the play all English Romany Gypsies, Roma and Sinti will be referred to as Gypsies.

## INTRODUCTION

The genocide of over 500,000 Gypsy people during the Holocaust still remains a relatively unknown fact. There is no provision in the curriculum to specify this is taught in school as part of Holocaust education and yet Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have been part of British history for centuries.

It is generally acknowledged that Romany Gypsy populations in Britain today originated from Northern India possibly as early as the sixth century. Over the following centuries they made their way through Europe, both seeking work and fleeing from persecution until many arrived on the shores of Britain by the 16th century.

The Roma Holocaust is part of a long history of persecution that in many places still continues. I hope the performance and the resources will give you an insight into this history and of how Gypsy people were affected by the Holocaust. Racism against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers society still exists in our society today.

Genocide is still going on and it is important we take responsibility and recognise the seeds of hatred and discrimination against another race or group of people.

## THE GYPSY HOLOCAUST **FORGOTTEN VICTIMS**

The Roma Holocaust is also known as The Porajmos (from the Romany word devouring)

It is estimated that over 500,000 Gypsies were murdered during the Holocaust.

In 1937, Gypsies were officially labelled second-class citizens, depriving them of all or any of their civil liberties. It was enough to have only one great grandparent who were considered Gypsy to be sent to the camps or be killed. This was even stricter than the rules applied to part-Jewish people and shows how Gypsies were considered a significant racial menace to those in power.

In December 1942 Himmler issued an order to send all Gypsies to concentration camps (with only a few exceptions)

Gypsy people were identified in concentration camps by a brown triangle on their uniform.

Medical experimentation and sterilization were also a large part of the role of Gypsies in concentration camps. The best known doctor who led medical experimentation was Dr. Mengele at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Mengele took a particular interest in Gypsy children.

At the Nuremberg war crimes trials murders of Gypsies did not even get a mention.

The Gypsy holocaust was not widely acknowledged until 1982 and it wasn't until 1987 that a Gypsy person was allowed to join The US Holocaust Memorial Council.

In 2016, Roma organisations chose the 2nd August as the official Roma and Sinti Genocide Remembrance Day.

Many British Gypsy and Traveller men helped defend Britain against the Nazi's in World War 2 and they received a number of military medals and at least one Victoria cross.

Back on the home front Gypsy and Traveller women also did their bit, working as auxiliary nurses and in the munitions factories.

150,000 Gypsies resided in Serbia and they were compelled to register and wear yellow armbands inscribed ZIGEUNER.

Trams and buses bore signs saying 'NO JEWS, NO GYPSIES'. In 1941 Gypsies were treated the same as the Jews.

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## Zekia's story

Crystal's journey takes her to Serbia where she meets a Zekia, a young Serbian Gypsy girl not unlike herself.

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Zekia lived with her five brothers and one sister in the 'Gypsy Quarter' of Stocni in Nis, which was one of Serbia's largest cities at the time of the Second World War. Both her parents and her brothers were arrested and

Zekia was left to fend for herself so she went to live with some other Gypsy women whose husbands had been arrested. One day when Zekia was in the village she was approached by one of the locals, a man called Milan who knew Zekia's parents as they had helped with the harvest on his farm. Milan and his wife took Zekia in to their home and dressed her as a traditional Serbian girl.

We do not know what happened to Zekia, we only know that one of her brothers survived the war.

After the war when some of the Gypsies returned to Nis, many of them were told they were not welcome and understood, 'they did not want us because we were Gypsies'.

PHOTO: YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE ZEKIA WHO WERE INTERNED BY THE NAZI'S

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**My name is Zekia, I am 12 years old. My parents and brothers were arrested and taken to the concentration camp in Crevni Krst.**

## ACTIVITIES

**Can you identify something positive about this story?**

**What do Zekia and Crystal have in common?**

**Get into pairs and act out the scene or a few lines from it (you can change the sex of the characters if you prefer and give them different names).**

**Alternatively you could improvise a scenario based on events the characters in the scene refer to.**



### ZEKIA'S STORY EXERT FROM THE PLAY

**Crystal** I wonder where we are this time. The 21st Century please. All this time traveling is exhausting – I may be a Gypsy and accustomed to travelling, but this is ridiculous.

**Zekia** (Emerging from the haystack) Gypsy did you say? – I thought you were the soldier coming back. You must be quiet. I thought all the Gypsies had been taken away or gone into hiding?

**Crystal** Who are you?

**Zekia** My name is Zekia, I am 12 years old. My parents and brothers were arrested and taken to the Crevni Krst concentration camp. I was taken in by a friend, Milan. His wife dressed me in these clothes so I look like a Serbian Country girl and not a Gypsy. Every day the Germans come to the house to take eggs and hens. I have to stay outside all day tending the sheep. Only at night is it safe for me to return to the farm.

**Crystal** Are you telling me we have arrived in the Second World War? (To the audience) This is not good. It was suspected that half a million Gypsies were killed during the Holocaust under Hitler's Regime.

**Zekia** Of course! We are in Nazi occupied Serbia, 1943. Today, the Germans are doing a search of the farms hunting for Gypsies and Jews. I have been hiding under this haystack all day knowing if I coughed or sneezed at the wrong time I would meet the fate of my family.

**Crystal** Were all your family arrested and taken to the concentration camp?

**Zekia** I have a sister Dudija who was shot. I heard this from one of the villagers. I do not know whether she is alive but all she did was try to push some bread through the barbed wire of the camp for my hungry brothers. People are left to starve in the camps, young girls robbed of their fertility. I heard a story that Gypsy inmates were ordered to walk around the camp barefoot in the snow and all because they are like you and me. But you must go now quickly for I fear the soldier may return, what is your name?

**Crystal** Crystal. Zekia it is not safe for either of us to be here! Come with me!

**Zekia** Where to?

**Crystal** Back home to England

**Zekia** No, I must remain in the village and wait for my family to be returned. The war must surely end soon.

**Crystal** (To herself) The war on Gypsies goes on.

# EFFECTS

Life before and after the Holocaust for Gypsies

**B**efore the Nazis came to power there were already many anti-Gypsy laws in place. Gypsies were unable to enter parks or public places. Unemployed Gypsies were sent to work camps and all Gypsy people were registered with the police.

Even after the war, Gypsies were still viewed by many as criminals and many people did not want them in their neighbourhoods. Unlike other Holocaust survivors who had families waiting for them in other countries, the Gypsies often had no one. Their caravans had been burned, their horses shot and their belongings confiscated. Whole Gypsy communities had been destroyed and they had no foreign organisations to fight their cause. There was no Kindertransport for Gypsies, their plight was ignored.

(The Kinder Transport was an organised rescue effort that took place during the nine months prior to the outbreak of war.)

## ACTIVITIES

**Discuss how the lives of other communities' also affected by the Holocaust might have been different both before and after the Holocaust.**

**Not very much changed for the Gypsies after the Holocaust, has very much changed for modern Gypsies, Roma and Travellers since they first migrated from Northern India?**

**Even after the war Gypsies were still viewed as criminals and many people did not want them in their neighbourhoods.**





**NAZI GERMANY HEADLINES**

**“VAGABONDS: NEW WAYS OF COMBATING THE GYPSY PLAGUE.”**

TRANSLATION OF GERMAN PAPER



**MODERN DAY UK HEADLINES**

**“TO STOP THE FLOOD OF GYPSIES: STAMP ON THE CAMPS”**

**“TRAVELLERS INVADE MILLIONAIRES’ ROW - HOME TO SOME OF THE REGION’S WEALTHIEST PEOPLE”**

EXAMPLE OF PROPAGANDA HEADLINES

# THE POWER OF WORDS

Holocaust Memorial Commemoration

The theme explores how language has been used in the past and how it is used in the present day.

Words have a huge impact on all of us as they are the main means by which we communicate what we think and feel. They can have both a negative and a positive impact.

Throughout history words have been used to manipulate public opinion and used in propaganda to incite hatred. Hitler ran a very effective propaganda machine in Nazi Germany to do just that.

Some modern day newspaper articles could be seen as verging on propaganda. Carefully chosen words are used in the media to have the greatest impact. Below are examples of both a Nazi anti-Gypsy piece of propaganda and some modern day newspaper headlines

It is important to be aware of the words we use in everyday speech and take great care not use language that is offensive or hurtful to others.

**PROPAGANDA IS THE ART OF PERSUADING PEOPLE THAT YOU ARE RIGHT USING PAMPHLETS, POSTERS, IMAGES, AND NEWSPAPERS.**



## ACTIVITIES

What similarities can you see between the Nazi propaganda and the modern day newspaper headlines?

How might each these headlines impact on people's attitudes?

Highlight words that have been used to try and sway public opinion that could be offensive.

How might the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities feel about these headlines?

Put together a positive article about the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities based on something you have learnt from the play. Identify one of the positive stories and make your own positive newspaper headline.

You might also want to discuss the different methods the Nazis used to transmit their propaganda and compare that to current methods used by the media to get a message across. Think about new technologies such as social media.

**Propaganda and the media are one way we can use words to influence people but words are used all the time to express the way we feel and often they are used without giving given thought to their meaning or impact.**

## THE POSITIVE POWER OF WORDS

There are many ways we can use words to good and positive effect. Words tell stories of life events and we have chosen to tell Crystal's story through theatre.

Through the play we have been able to bring to life the story of Zekia told through Crystal's eyes.

Can you name another story about the Holocaust and how has this story has been told?

Why is it important to keep telling these stories about the Holocaust?

What lessons do these stories teach us?

**It is important to note that owing to the low literacy levels within Gypsy communitiies, very little has been recorded about their personal stories. Theirs is an oral history and so it is vital to keep sharing the stories we hear.**





# BEYOND WORDS

Words are possibly the most powerful way we can tell a story and the easiest way to communicate our opinions and ideas.

Sometimes in the absence of words we can find other mediums to draw information from such as imagery and music. Below are stories of two other young people who lived during the Holocaust and whose stories have been communicated through images.

It was assumed for a long time that this well-known image from a film about Westerbork transit camp was of a young Jewish girl but it was later revealed in 1994 that this image was.

Settela's father worked as a horse trader and a violinist in a Sinti orchestra at village festivals and fairs. Her mother ran the household and raised the seven children while moving from village to village. The family had originally come from Germany before moving to the

Netherlands. In May 1940, the Nazis occupied the Netherlands and in July 1943 an order was issued prohibiting them from travelling.

The Steinbach family tried to evade the order, but eventually were deported to the central assembly camp in Eindhoven. In 1944 Settela and her family were moved again and this time to Auschwitz-Birkenau and it was on the journey there that this photo was taken.

Settela wore a head scarf to cover her head as it had been shaved. She was sent to the gas chambers as were most of her family. Only her father survived the war and died in 1946.

PHOTO: SETTELA STEINBACH A YOUNG SINTI GIRL

**This photograph is a well known image of an assumed young Jewish girl being transported on a train to a concentration Camp, the girl is actually a young Dutch Gypsy girl called Settela Steinbach**



CEIJA STOJKA'S PAINTING

## ACTIVITY

Based on what you have learned create your own interpretation of the Holocaust.

This could take the form of a story, a scene from a play, a diary excerpt, a collage of photos or a painting.

It could reference one of the stories in this booklet or another you have been learning about.

Ceija Stojka, a Gypsy girl living in Austria, was just nine when the Germans annexed the country and began arresting Gypsy people. Ceija survived the Holocaust and told her stories through paintings.

Ceija's family also worked as horse-traders, but had already been forced to abandon their lifestyle when Germany annexed Austria.

**"Our wagon was parked for the winter... the Germans ordered us to stay put. My parents had to convert our wagon into a wooden house, and we had to learn how to cook with an oven instead of on an open fire.**

Ceija's mother had sewed pieces of bread into her clothes to help them survive. After the family were sent to the concentration camp, Ceija's mother hid her children under her skirts to ensure they were

sent to work barracks rather than the gas chambers. Ceija's mother persuaded the guards to allow her to work in the quarry convincing them she was sixteen and very strong. She and her mother survived by eating "paper and pieces of leather",

Ceija was just 12 when the war ended and she and her mother were liberated by the allies from the concentration camp. Ceija's mother then pushed her 700 miles in a wheelbarrow to Austria's third largest city, Linz, which was a meeting place for Gypsy people.

Miraculously, her surviving four siblings found their way to the city, and the family were reunited. Ceija was homeless for nine years, selling carpets because her family occupation of horse-trading was still banned.

She later wrote and painted about her experience, becoming a well-known artist and an activist for awareness of Gypsies killed in the Holocaust.

Ceija had a brother Karl Stojka who was also an artist. He too survived the Holocaust but died in 2003. Ceija died in 2013.

## SOME USEFUL LINKS WITH ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

<http://hmd.org.uk/genocides/porrajmos>

Holocaust Museum, Washington DC

<https://www.ushmm.org/>

The Anne Frank Trust

<https://annefrank.org.uk/>

The Forgotten Genocide Project

<http://romasinti.eu/>

The Travellers Times

<http://travellerstimes.org.uk/News/The-Gypsy-Holocaust.>

Gallery Kai Dikhas in Berlin

<http://www.kaidikhas.de/en/gallery>

Settela's last road by Janna Eliot

Unknown publisher but can be purchased on Amazon

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Artwork by Louise Willers



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