

# DORA'S STORY

**an oral history  
learning resource  
Key Stage 3 / GCSE**



**UNIVERSITY OF  
LEICESTER**

East Midlands Oral History Archive



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# About *Dora's Story*

*Dora's Story* focuses on one single oral history interview: Dora Northern (born Dora Schutte) was interviewed in 2004 by Colin Hyde from the East Midlands Oral History Archive.

Dora was born in Berlin in Germany in 1923. When she was ten years old, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in her country. Dora lived in Germany until the end of the Second World War. In 1950, she married an Englishman and settled in Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire where she ran a tailoring business.

This resource offers a way in to Dora's life story through a series of 20 extracts from the original interview.

In part one - **living in Nazi Germany in the 1930s** - Dora talks about growing up and attending school under the Nazi regime, witnessing the disappearance of Jewish neighbours, attending the 1936 Berlin Olympics and the outbreak of World War Two in 1939.

In part two - **Moving to Postwar Britain** - she talks about leaving East Berlin in the 1940s, her journey to Leicestershire and some of the challenges she faced as a German living in England after the Second World War.

*Dora gives us an insight into the opinions, beliefs and behaviours of a young woman during a turbulent period of 20th century history.*

# Curriculum links

You can use *Dora's Story* to

learn about **challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day** including topics such as the **Rise of Hitler and the Nazis, Persecution of Jews in Germany 1933-1939** and **Migration and Movement**

extend and deepen pupils' chronologically secure knowledge and understanding of world history by considering the lives of ordinary people in Germany between 1933 and 1945

identify significant events, make connections, draw contrasts, and analyse trends by considering Dora's life against the backdrop of national and international political upheaval and conflict

use historical terms and concepts in increasingly sophisticated ways by using oral history as a historical source and comparing it with other sources

pursue historically valid enquiries and create relevant, structured and evidentially supported accounts in response

understand how different types of historical sources are used rigorously to make historical claims and discern how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed by using first-hand oral testimony and considering the benefits and challenges of this source

# Oral history in the classroom

The practice of oral history can be defined as the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information, based on the personal experiences and opinions of the speaker.

It may take the form of eye-witness evidence about the past recorded through interviews. It can also include folklore, myths, songs and stories passed down over the years by word of mouth.

The outputs of oral history – often recorded interviews – are valuable historical sources that can be used by researchers investigating the past.

Oral history is particularly useful for capturing stories from minority groups or small communities who may not be represented in more formal histories. It is useful when there is a lack of other sorts of written or visual evidence.

*Using oral history archives in the classroom can encourage active listening and offer a sense of the past by listening to first-hand accounts of people who lived through historical events. It can show how people have different points of view and can experience things differently.*

## Useful links

Oral History Society  
<https://www.ohs.org.uk/>

East Midlands Oral History  
Archive  
<https://le.ac.uk/emoha>

British Library Sounds  
<https://sounds.bl.uk/>

# Analysing oral history

There are many ways in which you can analyse an oral history interview. You may like to consider the following approaches.

## Story



Transcribe the extract.  
Are there any themes emerging?  
Who is telling the story (the narrator)?  
Who is the story about (characters)?  
Where is the story set?

## Impact



What impact do you think the story had on the narrator?  
What impact did the story have on you?  
What does hearing the story add to its impact?  
What questions do you think the interviewer was asking?  
What else do you want to know? What questions would you ask?

## Research



What is the historical context of this oral history?  
What does the oral history add to our understanding of that historical context?

## Creative response



Does the narrator use any descriptive language, such as metaphors or similes?  
Rewrite the story, telling it in the third person.  
Compare your stories as a whole class.

# Themes

## Living in Nazi Germany 1933-1939

### 01 She just left

Dora talks about a girl from her school disappearing with her family in the early 1930s.

### 02 Father was always a communist

Dora recalls her uncle holding a communist meeting at his house which was raided by police. He was sentenced to ten years in a prison camp and his adopted daughter was taken away.

### 03 The first shot I ever heard

Dora relates her experience of hearing a gun fired on the streets of Berlin in 1932 and tells us how she reacted to it.

### 04 Everything new had a force behind it

Dora talks about how adult and children were expected to use the Nazi salute as a public greeting and the sense of fear that lay behind not complying.

### 05 They disappeared and nobody heard anymore

Dora recalls local Jewish families disappearing in the late 1930s and Jewish businesses being burned down.

### 06 Gossip

Dora reflects on her mother's habit of gossiping and how she felt that she couldn't trust her.

### 07 I don't think it was ever mentioned

Dora attended the Berlin Olympics in 1936. Here she recalls watching black athlete Jesse Owens win his race and the reaction of the Nazis.

### 08 We were in the dark

Dora remembers a synagogue burning down. She recalls how she used to think that Jewish families who disappeared had emigrated overseas.

### 09 A big war coming

Dora remembers how when World War Two broke out everyone around her thought that it would be an easy war for Germany to win.

### 10 We didn't think about people dying

Dora recalls where she was when the outbreak of war was declared and how everyone around her was pleased that they were at war.

## Moving to post war Britain

### **11 I always wanted out**

Dora talks about her childhood dreams of leaving Berlin. She explains how she tried to leave Germany after World War Two.

### **12 I decided I will go**

Dora recalls her last night in Berlin before she left, how she dared not tell her mother that she was leaving and the send-off her work colleagues gave her.

### **13 I had to sneak out**

Remembering how she had to move secretly between East and West Berlin in order to flee Germany, Dora recalls the difficulties of getting the papers she needed to leave.

### **14 I couldn't talk**

Dora recalls a train journey from London to Melton Mowbray when she first arrived in England and the difficulties of not speaking English.

### **15 Goose**

Remembering her first Christmas in England, Dora relates how language barriers caused confusion.

### **16 I couldn't form friendships with anybody**

Dora reflects on how she felt like an outsider when she came to England and how she struggled to form bonds with other people.

### **17 I couldn't answer back**

Dora talks about her neighbours in Melton Mowbray and some of the prejudices that she experienced as a German living in England.

### **18 Don't volunteer to say where you come from**

Dora recalls the hostility she received from a customer who found out that she was German.

### **19 I couldn't understand that we could have been so awful**

Dora reflects on the atrocities committed by the Nazis during World War Two.

### **20 Integrated**

Dora talks about settling in to life in England and how people were interested in her and her life in Germany.



# Dora's biography

Dora Schutter was born in Germany on 2nd February 1923. She lived in an apartment block in Prenzlauer Berg, a suburb of north-east Berlin. Dora's family were not well-off and she remembers many of her clothes being second-hand. Her parents had a volatile relationship. Her father developed an alcohol problem after the First World War and, at times, was violent towards Dora's mother. He ran a shop for a while but Dora remembers him as often being out of work. As a result of his alcoholism, he was estranged from most of his extended family. Dora describes her mother as 'nice and friendly,' but also as 'a gossip'. Her parents had both been married before and had sons from their previous marriages who were much older than Dora. This meant that she grew up as the only child in her household. She says that she rarely met other children, had very few friends and felt like an 'outsider'.

Dora started school in 1929 at the age of six. Despite the strict discipline of school, she enjoyed it because 'it got me away from home'. When Hitler came to power in 1933, pupils were told that they were 'the special race' and everyone had to salute and say 'heil Hitler' in the classroom.

In 1936, the Olympics were held in Berlin and Dora was selected to be part of a school exercise demonstration team. They were allowed to watch some of the events and she remember watching black American athlete Jesse Owens compete and being told off for clapping him when he won.

Despite having an opportunity to go to grammar school, Dora's family couldn't afford to pay for the uniform, so she was unable to attend. She left school in 1937 at the age of 14 and later went on to learn shorthand at night school. Her first job was at a dry-cleaners run by a Jewish family. When this business was closed by the Nazis, Dora became a shorthand-typist for a military map firm.

Dora was still living in Berlin in 1939 when World War Two broke out and remembers some of the bombing raids. In 1941 she left Berlin to take up an agricultural job at Rugen in the north of Germany. She also worked for air and sea rescue during this time. In 1944, she left Rugen and moved to the Isle of Sylt.

At the end of the war, Dora found herself without a job or money. She returned home to Berlin in January 1946, having worked in an English camp for a few weeks. At this time, the Russians were moving further into Germany and she remembers an uneasiness in the air. Berlin had changed beyond all recognition because of the bombing raids and Dora found it difficult to navigate the streets when she got back. She found work cleaning bricks from the rubble of the bombed-out buildings before securing a job with a magazine in before it was taken over by the Russians.

Dora planned to leave Germany when a friend offered to put her in touch with a doctor based in Melton Mowbray in England who could help her. She left East Berlin and lived in West Berlin for a year, obtaining papers which meant she was finally able to travel to England. When she first arrived she had problems with the language and was not able to pronounce 'Leicester'. She remembers still feeling like an 'outsider'. She took a job at a local isolation hospital working with other Germans, but had trouble forming friendships. She also experienced negative attitudes from her neighbours.

Dora met her husband in a pub in 1950. She set up a business as a seamstress and slowly began to integrate into British society. In 1987, she visited East Berlin for the first time since leaving in the 1940s.

# Timeline

1921	Adolf Hitler became head of the National Socialist German Workers' (Nazi) Party
1923	Hitler led a failed coup in a beer hall in Munich Dora was born in Berlin
1929	Global depression and mass unemployment Dora started school aged six
1933	Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Systematic persecution of German Jews escalated
1934	Hitler proclaimed the Third Reich
1935	German Jews were deprived of their citizenship after the introduction of the Nuremberg Race Laws
1936	Berlin Olympics Dora attended the Berlin Olympics
1937	Dora left school
1938	Annexation of Austria and Sudetenland. Kristallnacht - Night of Broken Glass - saw attacks on Jews, their property and synagogues
1939	Dora left Berlin to go and work in Rugen in northern Germany
1941	Germany invaded Poland and triggered World War Two
1945	Germany was defeated. Hitler died by suicide. The Allies divided Germany and Berlin, into occupation zones.
1946	Dora returned to Berlin
1950	Dora got married and was living in England
1987	Dora revisited Berlin
1989	The Berlin Wall came down

# Transcripts and suggested activities

These transcripts provide a written record of the audio recordings which form part of *Dora's Story*.

They have been transcribed using a 'smooth verbatim' style of transcription. That means that the spoken words captured on the recording are written down word-for-word with light editing, such as the removal of 'ums' and 'ers' which the narrator (or interviewee) might add and the listening responses, such as 'uh-huh-' and 'okay' that the interviewer might add.

This form of transcription gives a sense of not just what the narrator says, but how they say it, whilst still making it easier to read than a fully unedited verbatim transcript.

## She just left

## Transcript 01

I didn't have much contact with anybody outside our little family. One girl I liked very much in school and she disappeared without trace. She had a Czechoslovakian name, she might have been Jewish, I don't know. But it was the time when, round about '34, '35, when the Jews were still allowed to leave Germany if they had papers from another country that would take them. And whether she was one of these, I don't know. She wasn't ill or anything like that, we asked in the class, asked the teacher, and he said, he doesn't know, she just left.

# Transcript 01



## Story and impact

What impression does this source give about Dora's childhood?

How would it feel today if someone disappeared without a trace?

What do you think about the teacher's response?

Why do you think nobody knew anything?

## Research

Dora believes that this incident happened 'around '34, '35, when the Jews were still allowed to leave Germany.' What changed after this time?

Dora says that her friend had a Czechoslovakian name. Find out more about Czechoslovakia – when did it cease to become one country and what is it today?

Read more about *The (im)possibilities of escaping. Jewish emigration 1933-1942* on the Anne Frank House website

<https://www.annefrank.org/en/anne-frank/go-in-depth/impossibilities-escaping-1933-1942/>

# Father was always a communist

## Transcript 02

Father was always a communist, I must tell you that. And the only aunt we had contact – I was allowed to go and spend my summer holiday from school at her place – she lived outside Berlin. And my uncle – and he was an ardent communist. In fact, he was the leader of a group in that village or round about. And Father took me so that I would stay there for the holiday. And my uncle apparently, he had a meeting, invited all his communist friends to his house. And Father was there. And then all of a sudden the Black Maria came and the police came and loaded them all up. Took them away. I don't know. They took them to inside Berlin somewhere, to a police station. And my aunt, she had adopted a little girl. I don't know, she was about two or three months old, something like that. That girl was taken away from her and said she wasn't a fit mother. My father was let out on following morning. Mother had to come to the police station and fetch him. And my uncle was sentenced to imprisonment and he went into some sort of *lager*\* outside Berlin. And he was there for ten years. And that was in 1936, I remember because he came out in '46 when I went back to Berlin.

\**lager* a German prison camp

## Transcript 02



### **Story and impact**

Why do you think Dora's uncle and father were arrested?

Why was having communist views against the law at this time in Germany?

### **Research**

Dora says that her father was a communist. Find out more about communism as a political belief system.

Read more about communism in Nazi Germany on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/communism-1>



# The first shot I ever heard

## Transcript 03

But I do remember vividly, in 1932, I think, we came out of school and I went, I saw a mass of people, and I, you know what kids are like, they want to know what's going on. So I went, and it was a — Danzigstrasse\* — it was an underground and there were an awful lot of people there and shouting and god knows what. And then also — I got nearer — and then also suddenly I heard a bang and it was the first shot I ever heard in my life. And, of course, when people started running, I run home. It wasn't very far from home. And I told Mother. And I got such a slap [laughs]. She told me off and I shouldn't have gone and all that, you know. But it was, to me, it was exciting because it was something new and I had never had anything like that.

\***Danzigstrasse** a street and name of an underground station in Berlin

# Transcript 03



## **Story and impact**

Dora describes this incident as exciting. Do you find this surprising? Why do you think she finds it exciting?

How might other witnesses have responded to the event and why?

## **Research**

What might have caused a shot to be fired on the streets of Berlin in the early 1930s? Read more about Hitler's measures against enemies of the state in Germany on the Facing History UK website <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/outlawing-opposition>

## **Creative response**

Write a fictional news report about the incident that Dora recalls in her account. Use some of her personal testimony in your report.

# Everything new had a force behind it

## Transcript 04

All of a sudden everybody had to say 'Heil Hitler'\*. It was offensive and wrong if you didn't do that. As a child you could have been slapped. As a grown-up you might get black marks and you never know, you know, we were in such a state, everything was new and everything new had a force behind it so that you, you do it as you were told or else. But 'or else' was – we didn't really know but we knew it was bad, you know what I mean. They didn't say 'well, you'll go to prison if you don't say 'Heil Hitler', but the way they told us, we knew if we didn't we would be in trouble somehow. We accepted it. It was the way it was now. You see, there was no people that said 'well we're not putting up with that.' At least they didn't say it openly.

*\*Heil Hitler* a salute that Hitler required people to use as a public greeting

# Transcript 04



## **Story and impact**

What does Dora mean by 'black marks?'

Why do you think that people just 'accepted it'?

## **Research**

The Nazi salute is one of the most recognisable symbols of Nazism. Do some research to find out more about the meanings behind the salute and how it is viewed in western society today. You can find out more about its origins in this video from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8iujof6IL8>

## **Creative response**

What could 'or else' mean to a child? Explore this idea through creative writing.

# They disappeared and nobody heard anymore

## Transcript 05

*What was the attitude to Jewish people in your circle?*

Well we knew quite a lot. By that I mean, Mother used to clean for them or do things for them, shopping or whatever. And I remember, it must have been '37, '38, perhaps '38 more, opposite, the other side of the road, block of flats like ours more or less and there lived a couple, Mother used to clean for them, and they were Jews. We knew that, but I mean, we didn't go round and say, 'oh they are Jews,' or whatever. To us they were people. But one day Mother said, they want me to go over and I should do some sewing for them. So, but it had to be on the quiet. And, I mean, I was hopeless in sewing at school, but anyway, I did whatever they said. And then two days later they disappeared and nobody heard anymore, so I presume they went to a concentration camp. Whether they had warning from somebody I don't know. I've no idea. And they used to have a business in the centre of Berlin and that just went up in flames and that was it. Yeah, that was a bad time, bad time, terrible time.

## Transcript 05



### **Story and impact**

What does it mean to be a refugee?

'To us they were people' - what might this tell us about Dora's attitudes towards her Jewish neighbours?

### **Research**

Find out more about the definitions of refugee, asylum seeker and migrant on the Amnesty International website

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants>

### **Creative response**

Imagine that you are Dora and write a diary entry which talks about people living locally to you just 'disappearing'. Reflect on how it makes you feel in your writing.

*So, your father and your mother, would they discuss politics with you as a child?*

No. No, no, no, no. Nobody dare in case anything goes – and my mother she was very nice, but she was an awful gossip. And you couldn't trust her. I mean, I couldn't trust her when I left Berlin. I told her the night before that I was going, otherwise it – I wouldn't be here, you know. So, no, you couldn't trust her. She wasn't bad, just a habit of talking, you see. She couldn't help that.

## Transcript 06



### **Story and impact**

How would you describe the atmosphere in Germany at this time?

Why do you think having 'a habit of talking' might not have been a good thing?

If you were interviewing Dora, what else would you like to find out about her mother?

What questions would you ask?

### **Research**

Find out more about the role of women at this time. What were the expectations of being a woman in Nazi Germany? Read more about life for women in Nazi Germany on the BBC

Bitesize website:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zxb8msg/revision/1>

### **Creative response**

Imagine you are Dora about to leave Berlin to go and work in northern Germany. You are worried about telling your mother that you are leaving so write her a letter laying out your reasons for going.



# I don't think it was ever mentioned

## Transcript 07

I remember the Olympics when every school could take part in some exercise. Oh, yes. And you had to have a white sleeveless shirt on and black shorts. And then we, as a pay-off, we then were allowed to watch the races, you see. Well! Jesse Owens\* won the race and we clapped. And then we were told not to because Adolf didn't like it. And it was the first time I saw a black man. And of course we had been told to behave and greet everybody with 'Heil Hitler'. And as far as I remember – I can't really say for certain – but I don't think it was ever mentioned that he won afterwards in the class. It was a little bit, you know, we don't talk about things like that when we don't win. We only talk about winning.

\***Jesse Owens** (1913-1980) a Black American track and field athlete

# Transcript 07



## **Story and impact**

Why do you think Dora was told not to clap Jesse Owens?

## **Research**

Find out more about the athlete Jesse Owens and his role at the Berlin Olympics in 1936.

You can use the Olympics website as a starting point.

<https://olympics.com/en/athletes/jesse-owens>

# We were in the dark

## Transcript 08

Not far from where we used to live was a synagogue. That went up in flames, of course. And we went by to see it. And it was terrible but we, I don't know, we – nobody dare say anything, you see, that's the trouble. You daren't – you daren't say, 'well they shouldn't have done that' or anything like that because you don't know what would happen then. You see, everybody was a little bit afraid of that. So, they didn't say anything and kept quiet. Pity, but there you are.

*At the time when Jewish families disappeared, what did you think had happened at the time?*

Well, we didn't think – we used to – the idea was that they were going back to America, to England, whatever. They didn't tell us they were going into a concentration camp, of course. And we had no idea, honestly, we – my father and mother, I don't think they ever knew anything about that. No, we, we were in the dark about that. Well, they of course, told us only that they left. Full stop, you know. That was it.

# Transcript 08



## **Story and impact**

Why do you think people 'daren't say anything'?

## **Research**

Read more about the beginning of the persecution of Jews in Germany in the 1930s on the Yad Vashem - World Holocaust Remembrance Center website.

<https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/nazi-germany-1933-39/beginning-of-persecution.html>

## A big war coming

## Transcript 09

I don't think we actually thought about a big war coming. We just took it for granted that everyone agreed what Adolf says and did. I mean, we didn't have much trouble to go into Czechoslovakia to start with, did we? We just walked in and that was it. So, we took it for granted that everywhere he wanted to go, it would be an easy job done, you know. No, I don't think I was particularly politically minded because I didn't understand it and you're always being told, by my father and mother, not to say anything, you know, so you don't take any notice. You just take it for granted that that is life.

## Transcript 09



### **Story and impact**

Why do you think people didn't question what was happening at that time?

### **Research**

What is propaganda? How does it work and what does it do? Find out more about propaganda in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1939 on the BBC Bitesize website.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z2932p3/revision/2>

# We didn't think about people dying

## Transcript 10

*Do you remember where you were at the outbreak of war?*

That was when I still belonged to that sports club, somehow. We were there. We had a meeting in the morning and over the wireless it came that we are now at war. Everybody shouted, 'Hooray!' Oh, yes, we were all for it.

*Do you remember how you personally felt at the outbreak of war? Were you jumping up and down with everybody else?*

Oh, yes, naturally, of course, he's going to do it better now, you know. We would have a better time. We didn't think about people dying, oh no. That wasn't mentioned. We were just victorious. He could do anything. Yes. I mean, we had been told that it was inevitable unless they give in, which they didn't. So we believed that. And we thought it was a good job. Having seen no doubt that it was easy going in to Czechoslovakia and Poland, you know, so we thought it would be the same. But no, you see, war that was something new now to people like me. And I wouldn't say exciting exactly, but different and see another side of life. And of course if you have an idiot like Hitler telling you everything is right, what he does, you believe that. And so you accept it. At that time we had been indoctrinated so much that nobody dare say anything much about it, you see, especially not to children or youngsters. But no, lots of people naturally didn't like it but there wasn't enough people that had the courage to come forward and then I don't think they would have got very far anyway. And they knew that no doubt.

## Transcript 10



### **Story and impact**

Why do you think the people around Dora all supported the war?

Dora says that 'we had been indoctrinated'. What does she mean by this? How do you think children and young people in Nazi Germany were indoctrinated?

Dora says that 'war was something new now to people like me'. Explore this idea and why Dora may have felt like she did about the outbreak of the war.

### **Research**

Find out more about when the outbreak of war was declared in Britain. You can listen to the announcement that the then prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, made to the public on 3rd September 1939 on the History of the BBC website.

<https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/100-voices/ww2/country-at-war/>



## I always wanted out

## Transcript 11

I always wanted out, away from, into another country, I don't know, ever since I was small. I used to read books from Sven Hedin. He was a Swede. He used to go Far East travelling and I used to have his books from the library. Oh, I loved it. And I think I got the urge because of that, you know, to leave. And in any case, I mean, it wasn't very nice in Berlin. So, I saw an advert in the paper. A colleague of mine he had his parents in the West – he lived in the East – and sometimes they sent him the paper in some sort of way, I don't know. And he gave it to me. And I saw an advert in there saying that somebody would supply jobs for girls abroad. And so, I thought, well, I'll write. Can't do any harm. And that was in Dublin, I think it was. And they said that they'd consider me. I would hear from them again, but it might take time. So, I waited and waited. I mean, I didn't speak English or anything like that. It was difficult anyway. Now I wanted out. I thought, 'once I'm out I might be able to go somewhere else if I didn't like it.' That was my idea. Anyway, it then fell through. And I had then to start all over again. And anyway, I got eventually a letter from him saying it was all arranged again and saying that to be ready – and that was in '48 I think – he said to be ready in a fortnight. And, roughly in a fortnight, and he would send tickets and everything. That friend of mine, colleague of mine, I'd shown him the letter. Of course, he had to translate it for me because that was in English and I couldn't read that. And, so he told me what happened and I said, 'oh, all right.' And then he came a week after or so, he came with the paper. Very excited. And he said, 'read that,' and in the paper it says that chap that has been contacting me, going to send me everything, has been arrested because they found out that he shipped young girls to South American brothels. You see, again, I was lucky. All my life just escaping from something.

## Transcript 11



### **Story and impact**

Write a list of possible reasons why Dora wanted to leave Germany. Think about possible reasons why she might have stayed.

### **Research**

Find out more about what life was like for people living in Berlin just after the Second World War. A starting point might be this short film, Pathé Pictorial Looks at Berlin from 1947.

## I decided I will go

## Transcript 12

So, I was excited. Naturally I said yes. So, I decided, I will go. I didn't tell my mother. Father, in the meantime, has died. And, I daren't tell my mother. I mean, I wouldn't be here. Anyway, I only told Mother the night before I went. She was upset, naturally, furious, hated me. I had to fly from out from Berlin – from Gatow – and nobody was allowed there. We met in, I don't know, some travel agency office or something. The boss knew, naturally. I told him. I could trust him, you see. And he said, 'well, I offer you the job. I'll hold your job open for three months. If you don't like it and you come back you can have the job back.' Which was rather nice. Oh yes, he was once in a million I think. And then, not knowing, they came, quite a few of the colleagues came to that place to see me off. And I had a few drinks. And I can't [laughs], I can't remember walking up steps into the plane. I can't.

## Transcript 12



### **Story and impact**

Dora keeps her plans to leave Germany secret from her mother. She confides in her boss through, telling us that she could 'trust' him. What does this tell you about her relationships with these people in her life?

### **Research**

Find out more about the division of Berlin and Germany after 1945 under the administration of Britain, France, America and the Soviet Union.

## I had to sneak out

## Transcript 13

I had to sneak out from the East to the West, of course. But, you see, in between time, knowing that I was going out, I had my things over. I mean, I used to – not that I had much to take – but I had the two skirts on instead of one, you know, hoping that they wouldn't want me to undress for some reason. So, I got things out like that.

*How long did it take you to get all you needed?*

Oh, almost a year, from the time they said yes, because then, you see, I had to have the papers. They knew that I was still living in the East, you see. It was a bit difficult getting the papers in the West, you know. In the East I have actually told my authority that I was going to Leipzig or Dresden, I forget, one of the two I went to, I said, and I would have my ration cards new from there. So, I give my ration cards from the east sector to the police. That was clear, so they couldn't tell me that I have done anything wrong.

# Transcript 13



## **Story and impact**

Create a mindmap of all the things that Dora may have had to consider in planning to leave Germany. Think about some of the things that Dora might have to have left behind. How would you feel having to make choices about what to take and what to leave behind.

## **Research**

After World War Two, Germany and the city of Berlin were divided into different zones of occupation under the control of the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union. The Berlin Wall was put up in 1961 and fell in 1989. Find out more it. You can find some background on the Imperial War Museum website.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-was-the-berlin-wall-and-how-did-it-fall>.

## I couldn't talk

## Transcript 14

Up till then I was feeling quite normal. But once I'm in England, I had a big shock because now I couldn't talk, you see [laughs]. And I had difficulty. I got to St Pancras on my own on the underground. That was nothing difficult. But then the difficulties start because I wanted to go to Lie-cest-er, you see, and everybody laughed. And I was very upset that they laughed about me and I took a dislike to them. But anyway, somebody took pity on me and explained that we say Leicester. I didn't believe it, mind you. I pointed out it said Lie-cest-er. Is Leicester the same as Lie-cest-er? I mean, in sort of a funny sort of way and pointing, we understood eventually and he nodded and then he actually saw that I got on the right train to Lie-cest-er. And then I had to change there. But in the train, I sat there, I mean, I had nothing to read or anything like that and opposite me sat a gentleman, elderly, and he read a paper. And when he finished with that, he handed it to me. Now, what do you do? Do you say, you can't, I couldn't say 'I can't read.' And so I just took it and after ten minutes or so I handed it back. I could say thank you and please and could count to twenty and say yes and no in the wrong places – and handed the paper back. And then he started talking to me and of course that was my downfall. I felt such a fool. But I didn't know what he said, you know. So eventually he cottoned-on and knew I couldn't talk. And then when the ticket collector came, he wanted to see my ticket and I showed him that and he apparently told me I had to change at Leicester to go on the train to Melton and I just stared at him. I didn't know what he said. And that old gentleman, apparently, told him that he would see that I get out. He did, actually, he was very nice. It could have gone wrong, but it didn't. He was nice. And there I was then on the train to Melton Mowbray.

# Transcript 14



## **Story and impact**

Dora tells us that she experienced an array of emotions on her journey. Identify some of those emotions and think about why she may have felt like she did. For example, she was upset that people laughed at her. Why do you think she felt like this?

## **Research**

Using Dora's testimonies, plot as much of her journey from Berlin to Melton Mowbray on a map as you are able to. Where there are gaps, make suggestions about her route and mode of transport.

## **Creative response**

Write a diary entry for Dora reflecting on her journey from St Pancras Station in London to Melton Mowbray. Tune in to the emotions that she may have been feeling as she made her journey.



## Goose

## Transcript 15

Another thing at Christmas, before Christmas, the doctor's wife said about Christmas, we were going to have a goose for Christmas. Well, I didn't know she said goose. I took goose for guest. So, I started making the guest-room, the spare bedroom, ready for them. And she came up and she asked what for. I took a long time to explain that I was going to do that for the goose [laughs]. Everybody laughed and I didn't like that then. Oh god, yes, I had some blunders. Then I learned eventually – I could understand a lot eventually because I listened to, what was it, Mrs Dale's Diary. Yes, well, I used to listen to that. And I remember the doctor came once and he said, 'are you listening?' you see, and I didn't know 'listening', what that meant. And I said, 'no.' So he switched the wireless\* off you see. So, then I looked in my dictionary. I had a German dictionary. I brought it with me. And I looked in and I couldn't find 'listening' because you spell it different. Terrible, isn't it. So, I said, 'well, couldn't have been that when I was hearing it,' you know. And, oh, for days and days I tried to find out what he meant. So, I switched the wireless on again, you see. He didn't say anything when he came in but I don't know what he thought. It's not easy, you know, if you don't know the language, is it?

\***Wireless** an old-fashioned word for the radio

## Transcript 15



### **Story and impact**

Think about the process of language learning for Dora. What different ways does she use to try and learn English?

### **Research**

Find out about Christmas traditions in Germany that may have been part of Dora's life growing up. Compare those with traditions that we have in the UK.

# I couldn't form friendships with anybody

## Transcript 16

I don't think I was liked very much for some reason. I wouldn't talk very much, only if somebody talked to me. I wouldn't start a conversation, I know that. I wouldn't go out – I hadn't got a boyfriend and I wouldn't start any friendship with any boys that was there. No, I seemed to be the outsider, always have been the outsider. And I think that was still here in England. Perhaps more so, I don't know. No, the other girls I met, they – one, two, three I think there were – three other girls, they worked in the Isolation Hospital as it then was. And, actually, then the doctor got me the job there. He thought I might be better off with the Germans rather than all English and not being able to talk much. And, no, it wasn't me. I couldn't form friendships with anybody. I don't know why that was. It must have been me. It must have been my fault, I don't know.

## Transcript 16



### **Story and impact**

Research published in 2014 by Forum, a charity supporting migrant and refugee communities in London, found that loneliness and isolation were the biggest challenges facing migrants, refugees and asylum seekers living in the capital. They identified a number of factors which contributed to loneliness and isolation: loss of family and friends; lack of social networks; language barriers; lack of access to services and resources; loss of status; loss of identity; loss of job or career, cultural differences, discrimination and stigma connected to being a foreigner; isolating impact of government policies. Could any of these factors have impacted on Dora?

### **Research**

Find out more about the impacts of loneliness and isolation on the Campaign to End Loneliness website

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

## I couldn't answer back

## Transcript 17

When I got married and we lived in the railway cottages – my husband was working on the railway – and there were five, six cottages in the row and we were living in number five. It went from one to six, so we lived in number five. So, number one, he was a communist. Number two, I didn't talk much, see much about him or his wife. But they weren't for me, I don't think. Number three was an awful gossip. Ghastly woman. Blamed me that her son was ill because he was a marine and he got something to do with a lung infection or something. Number four was an old woman and she was the worst of the lot. Yes, no that woman, I started doing alterations to dresses and things like that and when anybody forgot the number and accidentally knocked on her door, which was always ajar so that she could hear who's coming and what they said, you see, and she told them then, if they knocked on her door, there was no, it wasn't the right address. 'Not here. Nobody sewing here,' you see, and sent them away. Yes, I found that out. I had a hard time with them. But then, you see, I couldn't talk. It was a good job, I didn't talk English. I couldn't. Not enough to retaliate. Otherwise it might have been horrible, I think. It was a good thing that I couldn't talk. I could understand everything they said, but I couldn't answer back. And my husband said, 'don't. Try not to.' And I didn't, and that was it. But, you see, they were all older than I was. I was the youngest. They were mainly sixties, you know. And their sort of type, they were knit together, right. Everybody knew about everyone else and now a new one comes and they can't find out anything about me. So, that really annoyed them, you see. And that made it worse for me, but I didn't care.

## Transcript 17



### **Story and impact**

Imagine yourself in Dora's position where she can understand everything that people say but is not able to 'answer back'. Who would it make you feel? Discuss the idea of powerlessness.

### **Creative response**

Think about the characters who Dora describes as living in the railway cottages. Bring them to life by developing a character sketch for one of them. Think about the reasons why your chosen character might behave the way that they do.

## Don't volunteer to say where you come from

## Transcript 18

Apart from these neighbours, I don't think, except for one woman, I never had any difficulty otherwise. No, no. When I started the so-called business, I had one woman and she came and I did some work for her and she sat with me hours teaching me English. That was very nice, yes. She was a very kind woman, yes. No, I only had one old woman, she came and she said – she didn't actually start saying, 'are you German?' – she said, 'are you Austrian?' I said, 'no.' Now, my husband always said, 'don't volunteer to say where you come from.' So, I waited, you see. And then she went to Holland and I said, 'no.' Then to Denmark. I said, 'no.' And then she asked me direct where I came from and I said, 'Germany.' 'German!' she said and got up and walked out. So that was that. And then, I don't know, about a year later or so, she came again to the door. And to this day I regret it. I felt so bad, but I had to do it, at that moment. I said, 'I'm still from Germany,' and I shut the door. I shouldn't have done that, I know, but that was it.

## Transcript 18



### **Story and impact**

Imagine you are interviewing Dora after she has moved to England. You would like to find out how she feels about coming to a country where she doesn't know anyone and she can't speak very much English. What questions might you ask her? Think about open questions as well as closed questions.

### **Creative response**

In pairs, role play an interview using the questions that you have prepared in the activity above. One of you take on the role of interviewer and the other take on the role of narrator (or interviewee), imagining that you are someone who has come to Britain from overseas.



# I can't understand that we could have been so awful

## Transcript 19

*Over the years, after the Second World War, when we became aware of all the horrible things that had happened in Europe, how did you feel when all this started coming out?*

Didn't believe it to start with. We couldn't. I mean, to think that people I might have known have done something like that. You couldn't take it, no. But then, you see, perhaps the wrong attitude, but then you just put it to one side and try to forget. In fact, most of it I learnt here in England, rather than in Germany because it was still taboo, you know, nobody really wanted to talk about it. Whether they were ashamed or whether they just didn't want it, I don't know, but I found out most of it since I've been in England. I don't know. I can't understand how people can be like that, but.

*Looking back, to you is it quite understandable how people wouldn't have known or if they would have known they wouldn't have said anything? Or do you still find it's a bit surprising that it could go on?*

No, I don't find it surprising because if you had said anything you would have been one of them. I mean, and lots of people rather live the way they did and try to forget about it than do anything about it, I think. The people that could have done something about it were nearest to Adolf and they didn't do it. I mean, when they tried to assassinate him they just made a mess of it. No, I can't understand that we could have been so awful.

## Transcript 19



### **Story and impact**

Explore the word 'taboo'. Why do you think what happened in Europe during World War Two was a taboo subject for Dora to talk about?

Why do you think Dora tried to 'forget'?

What does Dora mean by 'if you had said anything you would have been one of them'?

### **Research**

The July 20th plot was a failed attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler in 1944. The key conspirators were members of both the German military and civilians. Find out more about this plot and its failure. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website is a good starting point.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-july-20-1944-plot-to-assassinate-adolf-hitler>

It took a little bit longer to be integrated. It started when people recognised me and said 'hello.' That's another thing, when I first came I was surprised how people say 'good afternoon' or whatever not knowing me. I found that very strange. But then, when I started sewing and that, people then actually knew me by name. Apart from that old woman, I never had any difficulties when I had the business, with people, you know. I mean, often they would ask me about Germany and I used to have them there, hours, sitting and talking, you know. And it was always nice and they were interested to find out. No, I can't really complain about that.

## Transcript 20



### **Story and impact**

What have you learned about Dora by listening to her story?

Explore these terms: 'integration', 'stigma', 'isolation'. How do you think they relate to *Dora's Story*?

### **Creative response**

Think about the various stories that Dora tells about her life in Nazi Germany and Moving to Postwar Britain. Choose one and retell it in your own words.

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