

# **Nicky and Vera - A Quiet Hero of the Holocaust and the Children He Rescued**

**By Peter Sis**

## **Lesson Plan:**

### **Grade Level:**

This lesson was developed for grades 2-5. We are following the [Age Appropriate](#) Guidelines from the USHMM. Can be adapted to Middle and High School.

### **Subject:**

History; English/Language Arts; Multi-disciplinary

### **Rationale:**

Nicholas Winton became an upstander on a trip to Czechoslovakia.

### **Key Question(s):**

- What did Nicholas Winton do and why did Nicholas do it?

### **Educational Outcome(s)**

- Apply the concept of **Upstanding** to the Holocaust
- Hear and understand one story of how **Upstanding** was accomplished during the Holocaust.
- Apply the ideas of **Upstanding** to one's own life

### **Teacher preparation:**

We encourage teachers to familiarize themselves with background knowledge on the Holocaust by viewing this [site](#) at the USHMM and view the [Introduction to the Holocaust](#).

Pre-read the Picture book *Nicky and Vera* by Peter Sis. Look for stop points and discussion areas.

### **Lesson details**

- Review content
- Prepare by pre reading the book

## Materials:

- *Nicky and Vera*- Picture book
- Construction paper or white paper
- markers/colored pencils/or crayons

## Common Core Standards:

CCSS RI.3.1

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

CCSS RI.3.2

Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.

CCSS RI.3.3

Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.

CCSS RI.3.5

Use text features and search tools (e.g., key words, sidebars, hyperlinks) to locate information relevant to a given topic efficiently.

CCSS RI.3.7

Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).

## Vocabulary:

Courage  
Upstander  
Perpetrators  
Bystanders  
Century

Prague  
Czechoslovakia  
Border region  
Visas  
invaded

## Steps to the lesson:

1. Place the words Upstander and Bystander on the board. Explain or Review the terms.
2. At this point explain to the students that this book is about the Holocaust and Sir Nicholas Winston who helped Jewish children. You may have students ask you

questions or tell you things about the Holocaust. Try to keep this within the guidelines of Age Appropriate teaching.

3. Read aloud *Nicky and Vera*. Your Read Aloud plan could include stopping points at the following points.

- **A century full of progress** - Why does the author state this?
- **Vera was a queen of cats**- The author changes the main character at this point of the story. Why might that be?
- **“I had no time to take everything,” the barefoot girl said**- Why did she not have time to get her shoes?
- **“In the family’s cellar and barn suddenly extra food and clothing.** - Why is there food hidden just in case.
- **Vera’s mother heard about an Englishman who was helping children leave Czechoslovakia to escape the Germans.** Who is this English man?
- **Spies kept watch.**- Who are the spies and who are they watching?
- **After three days and nights they arrived in London?** How do you think Vera feels? Why did the children tell stories to each other
- **And the train never left**- Why did the train not leave Prague.
- **Nicky was out of time**- Why was Nicky out of time. Why couldn’t he help more children?
- **She did not stay in Czechoslovakia**- What happened to Vera’s family. Why do you think she did not want to stay in Czechoslovakia?
- **When Nicky was an old man, his wife found the records.**- What did Nicky do after the war?
- **I only saw what needed to be done.**- Why does Nicky say this?

After you finish the book, Discuss the following questions:

- **Who might be the Upstanders in this story?**
- **Why do you think the author writes about Nicky’s early life?**
- **Was Nicky rich? Was it easy? Did he rescue everyone?**
- **How do you think the parents of the 669 children who were able to get on the train felt?**
- **How do you think Vera felt when she left her parents?**

- **What do you think happened when the children and Nicholas met each other?**
- **What might be the reason that Nicky tried to rescue the children of Prague?**

5. Have students look at a map.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/gallery/czechoslovakia-maps>

**Do the following:**

- Show the students the map of Czechoslovakia (map #1). Ask them to find Prague? Ask them if it is close to Germany?
- Using map #2 and #3, you may wish to talk about the fact Hitler invaded a part of Czechoslovakia and how close it was to Prague.

**Map of Europe:**

<https://www.vox.com/2014/11/13/7148855/40-maps-that-explain-world-war-ii>

- Use this map of Europe to show students how far it would be to leave Czechoslovakia and get to England.

6. Nicky and Vera is really a story of two lives that intersect. Have students make a list of events in each of Nicky's and Vera's lives. Look to see what event became their intersection. This could be done as a large group on the board or a small group with other students. A Venn diagram could be created.

7. Finally, The pictures in this book are excellent. They bring together the idea of those two lives being brought together. Using as a starting place the picture of Sir Winston's life, create a picture timeline of Vera and Sir Winston's life. Have the timeline intersect where they match up.

(hint- Nicholas getting Vera out of Czechoslovakia and when they meet at the tv show.

8. Have students present. At the end ask them, Was Sir Winston a hero? Was Vera a hero?

**Extension to the lesson:**

A taped copy of an outloud reading

[Nicky and Vera](#)- Read Aloud

For older readers gathering a list of picture books and having each group prepare a different Holocaust Rescuers would increase knowledge and skills.

**Other resources:**

[Meet The Author- Peter Sis](#)

**Information about Sir Nicholas Winton:**

[60 Minutes Saving the Children](#)- Video on Sir Nicholas Winton

[Holocaust hero Sir Nicholas Winton \(That's Life - 1988\)](#) British TV

[Sir Nicholas Winton, November 2014 - BBC HARDtalk](#)

[NICHOLAS WINTON AND THE RESCUE OF CHILDREN FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1938–1939](#)- Article

[Nicholas Winston in His Own Words](#)- USHMM

Information on Czechoslovakia and World War II:

[Czechoslovakia - Holocaust Encyclopedia](#) - USHMM