

A guide to the exhibition “Stolen. Uprooted.”

Please read the guide to the exhibition “Stolen. Uprooted.”.

Here, you will find information, which will help you take a tour of the exhibition – or explore it on your own.

By using this guide you do not have to scan the QR codes placed on the respective boards. You will have all the required information in the further part of this guide.

BOARD 2: THE GREATEST WAR IN HISTORY

What to look out for:

1. The QR code leading to the additional text **“World War II and its course”** can be found in illustration 1 (map):

World War II (1939–1945) was the greatest armed conflict in the history of mankind. The Anti-Hitler Coalition (United States, United Kingdom, Soviet Union and their allies) fought against the Axis States (Germany, Italy, Japan and their allies. Note: until 1941, the United States remained neutral and the Soviet Union was an ally of Germany).

The main cause of the war was the aspirations of the Axis states, for political and economic domination in the world.

1939–1941 – The Axis states conquer almost all of Europe and many areas in Asia and Oceania

1941 – Germany attacks the Soviet Union and Japan attacks the United States

1943–1945 – The armies of the Anti-Hitler Coalition drive the Axis States out of the territories they occupy.

In the summer of 1945, Germany and Japan capitulate.

As a result of the war, the countries of eastern Europe and part of Germany are captured by the Soviet Union. This division lasts until 1989.

At least 60 million people died during the military operations and as a result of the criminal occupation policies in the world.

2. Next to the map showing the political and military situation in Europe in mid-1941, there should be remark that the map indicates:
 - which countries were allied with the Third Reich,
 - which countries were occupied by the Germans and their allies (or whose territory was incorporated into the Third Reich),
 - which countries were subjugated to Soviet rule or lost part of their territory to the USSR.

BOARD 3: MARYSIA'S STORY**What to look out for:**

1. This is the first board (excluding the title board) that features a character who stands out from the rest – as she has clothes in a distinct colour (in this case yellow). This is an intentional trick which will be repeated on later boards. This is to help locate the given character in the respective illustrations of this board (and sometimes in later boards), emphasising that we are following the story of a particular character.
2. Marysia (and also Janek, who will appear on the next board) are fictional characters. The presented events, both on this and the subsequent boards are, however, very strongly inspired by biographies of authentic people – stolen children. The character of Marysia was inspired by the story of Alodia Witaszek and Barbara Paciorkiewicz – Polish children taken to Germany for Germanisation.
3. During the guided tour, some may observe that Marysia has dark hair. The racist pseudo-science created by the Nazis referred to numerous traits which qualified given people to belong to the so-called Aryan race. However, in the common perception, the Aryans were supposed to have blonde hair and blue eyes, this issue was much more complicated – and even a dark-haired person could be considered a person of 'good blood', if they fulfilled most of the other requirements.
4. The QR code leading to the additional text "**Racial ideology of the German Nazis**" can be found in illustration 5:

Racial beliefs of the Nazis:

- People are divided into 'races', some of which are better, and others worse. They differ in appearance, intelligence and abilities.
- The races fight each other to the death. A race, in order to survive, must gain an advantage over others.
- The Germans belong to the best race – the Aryan race.
- The Poles, Russians and other Slavs are representatives of exceptionally vile races. Sub-humans who must become slaves of the German master race. The territories inhabited by them are to become living space for the Germans.
- The Jews and the Roma are even worse races and, on top of that, dangerous. They must all be killed.
- The Germans must take care of the purity of their own race. Their good blood must not be mixed with the blood of the less valuable races, lest they degenerate.

5. **Additional task:** ask the group to independently search for information about Alodia Witaszek and/or Barbara Paciorkiewicz. Interviews with these people, who are among the most recognisable witnesses, are available, among others, on the website of the Krzyżowa Foundation for Mutual Understanding in Europe at <https://bit.ly/3EVSC3k> (in Polish). An interview with Barbara Paciorkiewicz is available on this website: <https://kurzelinks.de/gn7q> (in German).

BOARD 4: JANEK'S STORY**What to look out for:**

1. Janek (just like Marysia) is a fictional character. The inspiration for his story is the biography of Hermann Lüdeking.
2. The contents presented in illustrations 1-4 are contradictory to the texts next to the illustrations. This is a deliberate measure which is supposed to highlight the lies in which Janek was brought up. The lies which have affected his whole life (more about this can be found on board 8).
3. Next to illustration 3, there is a QR code leading to the additional text **"The system of child theft in countries occupied by Nazi Germany"**:

- Removal of children from their families. This pertained especially to children from mixed families, where one parent was of German origin, also to children from care centres or who were brought up by only one parent or grandparents, and to so-called 'children of bandits', i.e. people who fought against the occupants.
- Selection of children who had desirable 'racial characteristics' (body build, skull shape, hair and eye colour) and with psychological characteristics (obedience, willingness to submit).
- Creation of a new identity. Traces of family history were erased and a new, false one was created in its place, in which the alleged German origin was emphasised. Children were given German names and surnames.
- Placement in foster care, with the aim of complete Germanisation.
- The youngest children (up to the age of 8): transfer for adoption.
- The older children and teenagers (8-16 years): placement in a Bund Deutscher Mädel educational centre or Hitlerjugend training camp.

4. **Additional task:** ask the group to independently search for information about Hermann Lüdeking.

BOARD 5: WHY DID THEY DO IT TO US?**What to look out for:**

1. The statements shown next to illustration 1 are authentic quotes from various speeches and writings of Heinrich Himmler – one of the supreme leaders of the Third Reich, chief ideologist and implementer of racial policies, including the theft and Germanisation of children.
2. Next to illustration 2 there is a QR code linking to the subject **"What does 'good blood' mean?"**:

Nazis are racists. They believed that the Germans were representatives of a race superior to other peoples. They treated Jews, Roma and Slavs, whom they considered subhuman, with particular contempt. However, they believed that the 'good blood' inherited from Germanic ancestors flowed in the veins of some representatives of 'inferior' races. Nazi experts, based on pseudo-scientific theories, developed a list of 21 traits by which they determined a person's race. With these, they determined whether 'good' or 'bad' blood flowed in someone's veins. The few representatives of conquered peoples who possessed these traits could become part of the German national community. The others were to be exterminated, displaced or become slaves serving their German masters.

3. Illustration 2 depicts a scene that may have taken place in one of the transition centres to which children undergoing the Germanisation process were sent. There they were subjected to further observation as to whether they were suitable for Germanisation, and forced to learn German – and severely punished for speaking their mother tongue, and any disobedience.

BOARD 6: THERE WERE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF US

What to look out for:

1. One of the major problems that we face when discussing the topic of child theft by the Nazis is the scale of this phenomenon. Due to the lack of new detailed historical studies, as well as the destruction of the documentation by the Nazis, we may only suppose that the Germans took up to 250,000 children from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe with the aim of Germanising them. This figure does not include, among others, children and minors who were sent to Germany as forced labourers or born in Germany from relationships between female forced labourers and Germans (and – if they survived – were brought up as German children).

The largest group of children came from Poland, whose authorities said after the end of World War II that there were about 200,000 of them. This figure has not yet been verified. The latest findings of German historians say that 'only' 20,000 children can be confirmed. This contradicts the figures provided by Polish researchers – who speak of 50,000–200,000 children.

In illustration 2, we cite figures that are commonly used in the connected literature. In the case of Poland, we have not yet settled this issue, leaving it to further research by historians. Therefore, we give a figure that takes into account both possibilities – between 20,000 and 200,000 children.

2. Next to illustration 1 there is a QR code leading to the additional text "**What was Lebensborn?**":

Lebensborn e. V. (German: 'source of life') was an association founded in 1935 and run by the Nazi organisation – the SS. Its aim was to strengthen the 'Aryan race' by increasing the number of births of racially pure children. To this end, Lebensborn took various measures. One of these was the theft of children in occupied countries and their Germanisation, which had been going on since 1942. Lebensborn developed a whole system aimed at removing children from their families, selecting children considered racially valuable, depriving them of their identity, obliterating their traces of origin and germanising them. The final stage of this process was to place the children in foster care or offer them up for adoption. Committed Nazis were often chosen as adoptive parents, which guaranteed that the children would be raised as 'good' Germans, loyal to Hitler.

BOARD 7: SOME RETURNED ...

What to look out for:

Illustrations 1-3 show the renewed trauma experienced by children who had managed to adapt to life in German families and were now forced to return to their home country. This is a pretext to invite the group to a discussion concerning the ethical dimension of the post-war returns of stolen children.

BOARD 8: ... OTHERS STAYED

Additional task: Ask the group to juxtapose the story from boards 7 and 8 and to consider the legal and moral rationale behind the two stories. Emphasise that both stories are inspired by authentic events.

BOARD 9: CRIME WITHOUT PUNISHMENT

What to look out for:

1. Next to illustration 1 there is a QR code leading to the additional text "**Impunity of criminals**":

The activities of Lebensborn were dealt with at the eighth Nuremberg trial, conducted by American judges (1947-1948). Among others, stolen children testified as witnesses. However, the court found Lebensborn to be a 'welfare institution' and did not convict those responsible for the kidnapping of the children. Though the German Denazification Tribunal concluded in 1950 that Lebensborn's activities were indeed criminal, this did not result in further trials against its members. The long-time head of Lebensborn, Max Sollmann, was only sentenced to two years and eight months in prison after the war. The sentence was passed for his membership of the SS, not for his activities in Lebensborn. After his release from prison, he worked, among other things, as a director in a company in Munich. He died in 1978.

2. Please note that the above-mentioned UN Convention from 1948 (illustration 4) is still a valid legal basis. This will be of importance when discussing boards 11 and 12.

BOARD 10: HEAD AGAINST THE WALL**What to look out for:**

1. The story depicted on this board is true and shows the fate of Hermann Lüdeking, who tried unsuccessfully for years to obtain the status of victim of the Nazi system – as a symbolic recognition of his suffering.
2. Next to illustration 5 there is a QR code leading to the additional text **“Stolen children – forgotten victims”**:

For a very long time, the German public was unaware of the problem of stolen children, and the offices and courts of the Federal Republic of Germany rejected their complaints. The situation began to change thanks to a history teacher from Freiburg in Baden-Württemberg, Christoph Schwarz. He helped the victims set up the association Geraubte Kinder – vergessene Opfer (German: Stolen Children – Forgotten Victims) whose aim is to tell the story of the stolen children to the German public and to force the German state to pay compensation. Schwarz also reached out to journalists from the German Deutsche Welle and the Polish Interia, who began publicising these stories in 2017. In 2022, Baden-Württemberg became the first federal state to declare its readiness to pay compensation to stolen children living on its territory.

BOARD 11: THE WORLD HAS NOT LEARNED ITS LESSON**What to look out for:**

1. In illustration 2, the child being carried away by the militiamen is wearing a blue nappy. This is a symbolic reminder of Janek’s fate – from board 4 (and 8).
2. This board was created to show the scale of the phenomenon of child theft – which was committed throughout the 20th century on practically every continent, and a reminder that victims of this practice, like the children stolen by the Nazis during World War II, may be living right next door to us today. Perhaps they are completely unaware of their true history.

BOARD 12: A STORY WITH NO HAPPY ENDING**What to look out for:**

1. This is a special board which is supposed to make one aware – even more strongly than board 11 – that the subject touched upon by the exhibition is still relevant. According to various international organisations, the Russians may have deported many thousands of children from Ukraine (it is even said that there are about 600,000 children – and this is as of October 2022) who are to be raised in Russia as citizens there. This is an extremely tragic situation that is happening before our eyes.
2. Illustration 3 is a modernised version of Illustration 3 from Board 3. It is an indication that history may just be repeating itself.