

CURRICULAR UNIT

for *My Sister's Eyes*

by Joan Arnay Halperin



Prepared by Jane Robins Denny, Olivia Mattis and Joan Arnay Halperin

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“I could not have acted otherwise, and therefore accept all that has befallen me with love.”

- Aristides de Sousa Mendes

PREFACE: MORAL MAN IN AN IMMORAL WORLD



Michael Berenbaum speaks at the opening of *Visas to Freedom: Aristides de Sousa Mendes and the Refugees of World War II* at the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, Jan 23, 2016.

Amidst the current refugee crisis in various countries, many people have looked back at the dismal record of the governments of the world in their failure to respond to the refugee crisis of the 1930s. Hesitant to compare, I only seek to understand and to ponder.

Let us consider the story of one man, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, who was the linchpin of what is most likely the largest rescue operation during the Holocaust. Sousa Mendes was the Consul General of Portugal in Bordeaux at the time of the German invasion of France, the Netherlands and Belgium. Countless refugees swarmed to southern France in the hopes of finding safety from the Nazi menace

through Spain and Portugal to one of the countries that would still accept them.

The government of Portugal had already responded to the refugee crisis precipitated by the German invasion of Poland in 1939 with a document called *Circular 14*, explicitly instructing its diplomats not to issue visas, thereby shutting down its immigration process. Permission to enter Portugal was prohibited at a time when a stamp in a passport would make all the difference between life and death. In the spring of 1940, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, operating in explicit defiance of his government's instruction, responded to the thousands of desperate people swarming his Consulate by issuing them visas.

Once the Portuguese authorities caught wind of his actions and recalled him, Sousa Mendes was put on trial for "disobedience" and was harshly punished and disgraced. The verdict of his contemporaries was that he was a rogue diplomat. The verdict of history is that he was a man of moral courage who saved men, women and children regardless of race or religion.

As one contemplates the life of this noble yet disgraced diplomat, we must ponder how different are the hasty, fearful judgments of governments from the heroic, dissident acts of individual men and women of conscience. Sadder still, we must wonder why all this sounds so familiar. With this book, teachers will have the opportunity to teach the story of one principled man. Their students must be challenged to contemplate what it takes to remain moral in an immoral world. Sousa Mendes should be a model.

- Michael Berenbaum

Michael Berenbaum, Director of the Sigi Ziering Institute and co-founder of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, is one of the foremost Holocaust authorities in the world today. His books include *A Promise to Remember: The Holocaust in the Words and Voices of Its Survivors*; *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*; *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis* and *Witness to the Holocaust: An Illustrated Documentary History of the Holocaust in the Words of Its Victims, Perpetrators, and Bystanders*. In film, his work as co-producer of *One Survivor Remembers: The Gerda Weissman Klein Story* was recognized with an Academy Award, an Emmy Award and the Cable Ace Award. He was the historical consultant on The Shoah Foundation's documentary *The Last Days*, which won an Academy Award for best feature-length documentary. He serves on the Advisory Council of the Sousa Mendes Foundation.

This curricular guide is designed to be used in grades 6-12, including AP classes, based on the decision of the teacher/facilitator as to what time frame is available, what skill set will be highlighted and what level of intellectual challenge is appropriate for the class. An individual lesson can be given in one day or expanded with the extension activities to cover several days. Use the recommended **Resources** and **Addenda** items where indicated. All glossary terms are presented in **bold**.

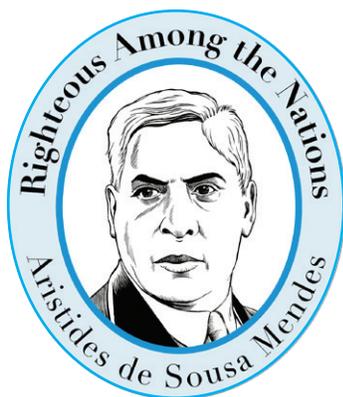
HISTORICAL CONTEXT



In 1933 Hitler was appointed as Chancellor of Germany. He had the power to make his vision come into being. He consolidated power by eliminating his political opposition and intimidating those who might disagree with his policies. He implement **antisemitic** policies of boycotts and expulsion of Jews from German political, social, cultural, economic and religious life. In 1935 he denied Jews their German citizenship in the **Nuremberg Laws**. In 1938 the Nazis burned their synagogues and businesses and

arrested 30,000 men ages 16-60 and deported them to **concentration camps** in a series of nationwide pogroms, called Kristallnacht, resulting in a global **refugee** crisis. In September 1939 the Germans invaded Poland and World War II began.

On Friday, May 10, 1940 the Germans invaded the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg in a **blitzkrieg**, and then continued into France across the **Maginot Line**. Millions of people fled south to escape the bombs and the advancing troops. Many of those who fled were refugees for the second time, having previously left Germany, Austria, Poland, Russia, or elsewhere. As a result, the **moral courage** of individual diplomats became crucial to the future of these desperate people in a world that largely closed its doors. Aristides de Sousa Mendes, **Consul General** of Portugal in Bordeaux, France, was one such hero. He defied his government's official policy (**Circular 14**) by issuing **visas** for temporary safe haven in Portugal to thousands of refugees. By following his conscience, Aristides de Sousa Mendes saved their lives.



ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDY OF SOUSA MENDES & RESCUE

Why did the Krakowiak family become refugees? What were they escaping, and what were they hoping to find?

How is Aristides de Sousa Mendes an exemplar of moral courage? In what way did Rabbi Chaim Kruger serve as a **catalyst** for Sousa Mendes's action?

What is **Yad Vashem**, and what is their **Righteous Among the Nations** program? How can those awarded this recognition serve as a model to inspire people today?

HOW TO USE THIS UNIT

Create a portfolio to serve as a resource kit for this study. Materials saved in this portfolio can be used for cross-curricular study. Read the book aloud in class, with each student reading a chapter or two, depending on the size of the class. Page numbers cited in this unit refer to the text of *My Sister's Eyes*.

ALL GRADES

■ Part I - Yvonne's Family

ACTIVITIES:

1. Identify one or more family experience(s) pictured in the book (e.g. holiday meal, wedding, birth of a child, going to the beach, moving) that resonates with your own family.
2. Choose your favorite photo, describe it, and explain why you chose it.

DISCUSSION:

What will you remember most from the family history in *My Sister's Eyes*? What surprised you? What made you sad?

■ Part II - Mapping the History

ACTIVITIES:

1. Use information from the book to mark the path of Ignas and Hala's journey, starting with their departure from Poland (Lodz and Warsaw) to their arrival in Brooklyn, New York (Resources - [Outline Map](#)). Which moves were voluntary? When did they lose control of the direction of their lives?
2. Use the chart of the births of the Sousa Mendes children (Addenda) to follow the path of the Sousa Mendes family (Resources - [Outline Map](#)). Why do you think the children were born in so many different countries? Were their moves voluntary?
3. Use the map of Europe (1940) to create a list of the places to which **Sousa Mendes visa recipients** emigrated. (p. 31)

DISCUSSION:

Consider the similarities and differences between the Sousa Mendes family and the Krakowiak family in regard to their moves. How would you feel if you had to move from country to country? What might you lose and what might you gain?

EXTENSION:

Use the [Sousa Mendes Foundation website](#) to trace the path of one or more of the Sousa Mendes visa recipients and learn their stories through videotaped interviews, written testimonies, photographs and documents.

SUGGESTED STORIES (AMONG THE THOUSANDS ON THE WEBSITE):

- The **Rand family** and the S.S. Quanza
- **Jean-Claude van Itallie**, a child refugee
- The **Tetzeli family**, refugees for the second time

■ Part III - The Timeline

ACTIVITY:

Create a traditional timeline of Hala and Ignas' life together. Use the time and date stamps and the captions from the photos for reference. Note when and how the lives of the Krakowiak family are impacted by the war.

DISCUSSION:

How and why did the lives of the Sousa Mendes family and the Krakowiak family intersect in place and time? Note: These families never actually met face to face.

■ Part IV - Thematic Units

LIFE BEFORE THE WAR

1910-1939



ACTIVITIES:

1. Use the chart of the births of the Sousa Mendes children to create a family tree for the Sousa Mendes family (Addenda).
2. Use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the Krakowiak and the Sousa Mendes families. How are they like your own family?

THE WAR

1939-1945



ACTIVITY:

Analyze these statements:

1. Aristides de Sousa Mendes (p. 42): *"I would rather stand with God against Man than with Man against God."*
2. Abram Majer Kaplan, Hala's grandfather (p. 16): *"Here in Lodz every stone knows me."*

DISCUSSION:

Use "Letters from the Ghetto" (pp. 77-82) and the postcards from the Kaplan family (pp. 25, 27-28, 52) to discuss the following:

- What was life like for Hala’s family in the Warsaw **ghetto**?
- Did the letters share the whole truth of their situation? Why or why not? What clues inform your answer? Consider censorship and self-censorship.
- When does the correspondence stop? Why did it stop? How do you think the information that Hala learned from the letters affected her state of mind during her escape?

CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR 1942 & ONWARDS



ACTIVITIES:

1. Create a consequences map to show the path of both families during and after the war. Use the book and the chart of the Sousa Mendes children (Addenda).
2. Watch a one-minute excerpt from the video testimony of [Carlos Mendes from the USC Shoah Foundation Archive](#).

DISCUSSION:

What happened to the Sousa Mendes family as a result of his actions? (pp. 73-74)

EXTENSION:

- Do we know how many people were saved by Sousa Mendes’s acts of rescue before Salazar stopped him? (Resources – [Aristides de Sousa Mendes: His Life and Legacy](#))
- What happened to those refugees holding visas that had been issued by Sousa Mendes, but were no longer valid after he was recalled to Portugal by Salazar? See example of [Josefsberg-Stern family](#).

GRADES 10-12



HUMAN INTERACTION AND INSPIRATION

1. Consider the meeting between Aristides de Sousa Mendes and Rabbi Chaim Kruger (pictured left). How did their meeting change the course of history for thousands of refugees? (pp. 39-44)
2. What was Angelina de Sousa Mendes’s role concerning the actions that her husband took in June of 1940? (p. 42)
3. How did Alberto Malafaia help the Krakowiak family during their stay in Portugal? (pp. 49-54)

DISCUSSION:

What role did the beliefs of Aristides de Sousa Mendes and Rabbi Chaim Kruger play in the rescue operation in June of 1940?

CREATIVE WRITING:

Imagine a conversation between any of the people mentioned in the questions above. What might they have said? What would you like to have heard in this conversation?

WORLD RESPONSE TO REFUGEES

ACTIVITIES:

1. Research the plight of refugees from Nazi terror.

Examples: the **Evian Conference** (p. 22 Resources – [Jewish Telegraphic Agency](#)) and/or the Voyage of the St. Louis.

2. Research the actions of other rescuers.

Examples: Varian Fry (USA), Chiune Sugihara (Japan), and/or Raoul Wallenberg (Sweden). How were their experiences similar or different to that of Sousa Mendes?

DISCUSSION:

What were some of the challenges that the refugees faced during World War II?

CREATIVE WRITING:

How might information be exchanged between members of refugee families today? Imagine some of these exchanges. Include info about the particular crisis the refugees are experiencing.

JUSTICE

DISCUSSION:

- How and why was Sousa Mendes punished by his government? (p. 73)
- How and when was he recognized by Israel, the United States, and Portugal?

DOCUMENT STUDY

■ Document 1. Circular 14 (p. 38 and Addenda)

ACTIVITY:

Study the document and respond to the following:

1. Why did the Salazar government issue this document?
2. Who were the 'undesirables'?
3. Which categories of Circular 14 did Sousa Mendes defy in order to grant visas to the Krakowiak family?

■ Document 2. Certificate in Lieu of Birth Certificate (a. original and b. translation)

ACTIVITY:

Use this document to analyze Hala’s journey to the United States.

DISCUSSION:

Where, when and in what language did Hala begin the immigration process?

■ Document 3. Application for Immigration Visa (Quota)

(p. 61 and Addenda parts 1 and 2)

This document was filled out by Hinda (Hala) Krakowiak in August 1943 for entry into the United States.

ACTIVITY:

Study the language of the application and respond to the following:

1. How specific were the questions for the applicant? What was the application attempting to find out about Hala? How difficult might it have been for Hala to fill out and why?
2. How does this document reflect the United States policy toward immigrants at that time? What was the **quota system**?

EXTENSION: Visit the United States government website to get a sense of immigration procedures today. Click [here](#).

CONCLUDING ACTIVITIES (ALL GRADES)

1. Nominate someone living today or in history who displays or displayed moral courage in a time of crisis and should be considered righteous. What actions qualify your nominee for this recognition? Students should form a review board to determine the criteria for nominations and evaluate the merits of the nominees. The honor could be named after Aristides de Sousa Mendes.
2. Create a Facebook or Instagram page that lists the nominations and the criteria. Ask other students to like and make nominations.
3. Like and follow the Sousa Mendes Foundation:



ADDENDA

Click [here](#) to access Addenda items.

- Chart of Aristides and Angelina de Sousa Mendes Children
- Document 1. Circular 14
- Document 2. Certificate in Lieu of Birth Certificate (a. original and b. translation)
- Document 3. Application for Immigration Visa (Quota)

GLOSSARY

Antisemitism

Discrimination and persecution against Jews.

Blitzkrieg

Translation: "Lightning war." An intense military campaign intended to bring about a swift victory.

Catalyst

Person or thing that precipitates an event.

Circular 14

Decree issued on November 11, 1939 by the Salazar government restricting entrance into Portugal.

Conscience

A person's moral sense of right and wrong.

Consul General

High-ranking government representative authorized to issue visas.

Diplomat

An official representing a country abroad.

Evian Conference

July 1938 meeting of delegates from thirty-two countries, led by the United States, to address the plight of the German-Jewish refugees.

Ghetto

Enclosed part of a city, occupied by a particular group of people; in this case forced enclosure of Jewish people by Nazis.

Kristallnacht

Translation: "Night of the Broken Glass." Campaign of terror on November 9-10, 1938 during which the windows of Jewish-owned businesses were smashed and synagogues were burned throughout Germany and Austria by Nazi Stormtroopers.

Maginot Line

France's military defense line constructed in the 1930s along its borders with Switzerland, Germany and Luxembourg.

Moral Courage

The willingness to stand up for and act according to one's ethical beliefs when moral principles are threatened, regardless of the perceived or actual risks.

Nazi Party

Far-right (fascist) political party that ruled Germany and German-occupied countries from 1933-45, predicated on racial supremacy and antisemitism.

Nuremberg Laws

Laws issued in 1935 by the German government to further the legal exclusion of Jews from German life.

Pogrom

An organized massacre of a particular ethnic group, in particular that of Jews in Russia or eastern Europe

Quota System

United States immigration policy in effect from 1924 to 1952 limiting the number of immigrants allowed entry and based on the applicant's country of birth.

Refugee

Person who flees to a foreign country to escape danger or persecution.

Righteous Among the Nations

Honorific used by the State of Israel to describe non-Jews who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews from extermination by the Nazis.

Visa

Official notification placed inside a passport granting permission to the holder to enter a country or stay for a specified period of time.

Yad Vashem

Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust located in Jerusalem.

RESOURCES

[Sousa Mendes Foundation – Aristides de Sousa Mendes: His Life and Legacy](#)

[Sousa Mendes Foundation – Visa Recipients](#)

[“Sousa Mendes List” – The Search for Survivors](#)

[Jewish Telegraphic Agency - Evian Conference](#)

[Outline Map](#)

[United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#)

Contextual material for the history of this period

[Yad Vashem](#)

Research site for the war, the Holocaust and the Righteous Among the Nations

RESOURCES FROM *MY SISTER'S EYES*

Click [here](#) to access resources from *My Sister's Eyes*.

COMMON CORE CONTENT STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES - GRADES 6-8

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1 - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 - Determine the central ideas or information of primary and secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5 - Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6 - Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7 - Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8 - Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgement in a text.

COMMON CORE CONTENT STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES - GRADES 9-10

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1 - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5 - Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6 - Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7 - Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital form.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9 - Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

COMMON CORE CONTENT STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES - GRADES 11-12

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1 - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationship among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6 - Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7 - Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, and in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8 - Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9 - Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE)

CONTENT AREA: 21ST CENTURY LIFE AND CAREERS

9.3.12. AR-VIS.2 - Analyze how the application of visual arts elements and principles of design communicate and express ideas.

9.3.12. AR-VIS.3 - Analyze and create two- and three-dimensional visual art forms using various media.