

Death March

In January 1945, the Russians are at the gates of Auschwitz. On 18 January 1945, Roosje, her two Belgian friends Rachel and Martha and thousands of others receive the SS order to get prepared for the departure from Auschwitz-Birkenau. Those prisoners who can still walk are driven to the West before the camp is liberated. Those who are too sick remain behind. Martha and Roosje cover 90 kilometres on foot, in icy snowstorms, between 18 January and 23 April. They continue by goods train from the city of Loslau (Now in Poland). Via camp Ravensbrück they arrive in Hamburg on 30 April 1945. Rachel dies on the road.

The journey they made was made by many others in the severe winter month of January 1945. They were later called Death Marches. Only a small number of the prisoners survived such a journey.

ASSIGNMENT 1

In source 1 you hear how the Dutchman Rob Cohen survived his death march. As a 17-year-old Rob had been arrested in Amsterdam in 1943. Eventually he arrived in the so-called *Kanadalager* of Auschwitz.

Assignment:

- In what way does Rob Cohen survive the death march in the train (source 1)?
- How does that make him feel?
- Do you agree with him? Explain why you do/don't.

SOURCE 1

The Jewish Rob Cohen was arrested in Amsterdam in 1943. The then 17-year-old boy was transported to Auschwitz via camp Vught and camp Westerbork. In Auschwitz he ends up in the so-called 'Kanadalager', (Canada section) a relatively favourable part of the camp. On 18 January, the Russians are so close to Auschwitz that a complete evacuation of the camp is ordered. Anyone who can still more or less walk, has to leave.

(Dutch spoken)

Translation/ summary

Crying to heaven

Cohen's group is deported after an uninterrupted walk of two days: "We were crammed in an open freight wagon with about 70 to 80 people. It was completely cold. We stayed on the same train for ten days. It was crying to heaven. " Horrible scenes are set in the train, Cohen says: "If someone died, he would be undressed immediately." The rags are attracted by others and the still warm body is used as a pillow: "You can hardly believe it now, but if the bodies eventually became so stiff that nothing could be started anymore, they were thrown overboard."

Cohen is in a wagon with his comrades from the "Kanada-lager". They are stronger than the rest of the emaciated prisoners and can fight for a more comfortable place in the packed car. Moreover, they still have their sausages, so they are not really hungry. The rest are: "Those poor people were starving," Cohen says emotionally, witnessing a number of cases of cannibalism on the train. Yet he does not share his sausages: "When it comes to your life, there is no solidarity at all. Terrible."

Bekijk de video hier: <https://vimeo.com/311507078>

ASSIGNMENT 2

Together with her two best friends, Roosje undertakes the journey West. Rachel has difficulty walking since she was ill-treated by a guard. She wants to come anyway because she is afraid she will be killed by the SS if she stays behind in Auschwitz.

Source 2 describes the last moments of Roosje, Martha and Rachel together.

Assignment:

Read source 2. How do you feel about Roosje's decision to step out of the line and address the SS officer? I think she is:

- Brave
- Cruel
- Stupid
- Compassionate
- Or would you choose a different term?
- Explain your answer.

SOURCE 2

After hours of walking Martha was doing well but Rachel was having a hard time with her leg. We talked about what to do. Rachel knew she couldn't keep it up much longer. (...)

Then the report reached us that the Russians had penetrated German lines. We had to keep going, pick up the pace. By that point Rachel had to drag her leg so much, she could barely walk. Without our help she would be finished. As the three of us marched arm in arm, Rachel talked about leaving us. Martha and I didn't argue with her. She was a realist. Rachel asked us to go to her home, find perhaps a brother or sister. Her parents had been sent to a camp a long time back. (...)

This was her last will and testament. "It's time to let me go. You won't make it if you have to drag me along. Soon the pain and the fear will be gone. I've made my peace. I love you dearly. Kiss me and adieu". (...)

I stepped out of the line and asked a nearby SS man in German if we could take a moment to say goodbye to our dying friend.

Paul Glaser, Dansen met de vijand (Dancing with the Enemy), 191

Homecoming?

When the Germans surrender in May 1945, most of the camp prisoners want to get home as soon as possible. However, they ask themselves: will my house still be there? Which family members survived? Will they want us back? How will those who stayed behind react?

When you feel strong enough to go, you leave. The railway lines in Germany are no longer functioning so occasionally you hitch a ride with an American or English army transport. But most of the time you walk. Thus, hundreds of thousands of people are walking through defeated Germany. For Roosje and Martha liberation begins in Hamburg at the end of their death march. Danish survivors are exchanged for German prisoners of war. Roosje and Martha are mistaken for Danes and arrive in Sweden. The Swedish Red Cross looked after all the Scandinavian victims.

ASSIGNMENT 3

Most prisoners wanted to get home fast but Roosje, after her liberation, did not much feel like that. Her experiences and memories of home were not very good.

Assignment:

- Write down 3 reasons why Roosje might not feel like going home to the Netherlands. Use information from earlier chapters.

ASSIGNMENT 4

Dienke Hondius researched how the Jews were received by the Dutch population on their return from the camps. She distinguished several responses.

Assignment:

- Read sources 3, 4a, 4b, 4c, 5, 6 and 7. Some of the responses can be put into Hondius' schedule (source 3). Match the sources with one of the type of responses from source 3 and explain why you are making this choice.
- Re-read the sources you think do not fit in the schedule. Explain how you would describe the responses from these sources and explain why you choose this description.

SOURCE 3

The Jews return from the camps: the response. Researcher Dienke Hondius has described five different types of reactions to the return of the Jews from the camps.

Type 1	A bureaucratic attitude (Formalism)	After the war everybody is equal and all have to comply with the same rules. When Henri Hartog returns from a concentration camp he asks his life insurance company for compensation. His request is denied because he is behind with his premium payments.
Type 2	A discriminatory attitude (Anti-Semitic prejudices)	There is a prejudice that the Jewish people always give each other the best jobs. The government has to see to it that 'the Jews' do not

	semitic prejudices)	become too powerful.
Type 3	A disbelieving attitude (Incomprehension)	People do not believe the stories of those returning from the concentration camps. For example: Mrs 't Hoen tells a good friend how her parents were murdered in the camp. "She looked at me as if I were lying and said she didn't believe me."
Type 4	A humiliating attitude (a warning to the Jews)	Jews had to know their place and had to be grateful. They had to remember that they owed their lives to the Christians.
Type 5	A racist attitude (fierce forms of anti-Semitism)	The idea that the 'Jewish threat' was still imminent. The resistance magazine 'De Vrije Katheder' (The free Lectern) wrote in July 1945 that: "it was a pity so many had returned alive". These words were published without anyone objecting to their content.

Dienke Hondius, *Anti-Semitism in the Netherlands, just after the liberation: research into the negative response of non-Jews to the returning Jews in the summer 1945*

<https://psychotraumanet.org/nl/antisemitisme-nederland-vlak-na-de-bevrijding-een-onderzoek-naar-negatieve-reacties-van-niet-joden>

SOURCE 4

Three responses to those Jews who returned from the concentration camps. They were registered by the Jewish artist and journalist Jo Spier who, with his family, was held prisoner in Theresienstadt.

A. THE INTELLECTUAL WOMEN

Amsterdam, 1945

We spoke with Dutch friends about the war and how grateful we had to be that it was all over. The intellectual woman told us about the misery in the Netherlands. The lack of food and coal and the oppression. She said that the feeling of being locked up in the small country had been so awful. We felt this was not all that unbearable. The intellectual woman said: "but at least you all got out." Today she denies ever saying anything like that.....but could I have made something like that up?

B. FARMER KLOK

Broek in Waterland, 1945

Farmer Klok lived in the middle of the meadow. He knew exactly where every Lapwing's nest was, and before the war he used to give us lapwing eggs often. After our return I immediately visited him. "Look what I have got for you", Klok said. He had kept the five lapwing eggs for us in a water glass. He put the eggs in a brown paper bag and gave them to me: "I was always convinced I would see you again," Klok said

C. DE BEWARIËRS (The Keepers*)

Broek in Waterland, 1945

In 1940 we had asked friends to keep all kinds of things safe for us. Asking for them to be returned was not a great success.

One of the acquaintances said: "Once a gift, always a gift." It was a beautiful model of a ship.

Another said: "We are so used to the antique cupboard now. We would like to keep it."

A 'friend' said: We gave your linen away in 1944. We thought: they won't be coming back anyway."

Jo Spier, *Dat alles heeft mijn oog gezien. Herinneringen aan het concentratiekamp Theresienstadt*, (This is all my eyes have seen, memories of concentration camp Theresienstadt). Amsterdam/Brussel, 1978

*People who were looking after the belongings of arrested Jews.

SOURCE 5

G.L. Durlacher's homecoming.

My neighbour greeted me kindly but surprised. She recognized me and asked me to come in. She blushed when she asked after my parents and our lodgers. My answer disconcerts her and she tries to hide her bewilderment by calling her husband. When he appeared in the doorway, my breathing faltered. Even before I saw his eyes I saw his suit. It was my father's suit, the grey suit made of the herringbone cloth.

G.L. Durlacher, *Quarantaine*, citation in <https://horl.yolasite.com/terugkeer-joden.php>

SOURCE 6

Eva Roselaar's homecoming.

Two fragments from *NPO-Na de bevrijding*, (After the liberation)

Dutch spoken

Summary:

Mrs. Roselaar is liberated in Hoogeveen, where she was in hiding.

As soon as the Canadians came, she came out and was introduced to the neighbor of the person who had provided her hiding. She responded with: "... and what does Mrs. Roselaar her husband do?" R. replied, "My husband is an accountant and probably dead."

She quickly went to Amsterdam where she had lived before the war. When she rang the bell of acquaintances, they responded as follows: "Damn, aren't you gassed?" She did not get back the piano that had been deposited with these acquaintances.

When the interviewer asks if that was not a cold shower, R. responds with: "Of course it was a cold shower, but we were happy that we were still there."

Bekijk de video hier: <https://vimeo.com/311507102>

SOURCE 7

We came back from the war and had lost all our possessions

Dutch spoken

Summary:

Mrs. Gelderblom-Lankhout returns to The Hague.

She points to the new building and says that before the war there was the printing house of her father, who, among other things, printed pieces for the royal family.

In the war, the Germans expropriated her father and then killed him.

After the war, the possessions were not returned to the living family members by the Dutch government. Also a life insurance policy on her father has never been paid. She is still baffled about such a cold, legal approach by that government.

Bekijk de video hier: <https://vimeo.com/311507121>

The government and the survivors.

The Dutch government considers how to treat the war victims after the war was over, while it was exiled in London. In 1944 it decides not to make a distinction between Jewish and other war victims. Afterwards, the Dutch Jews do not agree with this decision.

ASSIGNMENT 5

- The introduction text talks about Jewish and other war victims. Find out from source 8 who these other victims were.
- What do you think was the reason for the Dutch government to treat Jewish and non-Jewish war victims the same?
- Do you think it was right that Jewish and non-Jewish war victims were treated the same? Explain your answer.

SOURCE 8

Losses of the Dutch population.

Translation

It is estimated that around 250,000 Dutch people lost their lives in the Netherlands, Indonesia or elsewhere during the Second World War as a result of direct acts of war or measures taken by the occupiers. The following categories can be distinguished

Different sources, such as: L. de Jong, The Kingdom of the Netherlands in the Second World War; NIOD, List "losses of the population", August 1986; B.A. Sijes, The labor commitment; N.K.C.A. in 't Veld, The SS and the Netherlands (Amsterdam 1976)

- Victims of the Jews: around 102,000.
- Deceased as a result of the decline in public health: around 50,000
- Civilian casualties of acts of war: approx. 30,000.
- Hunger Winter Victims 1944-1945: around 15,000-25,000
- Killed as a result of labor deployment in Germany: approx. 8,500
- Killed volunteers in German service: approx. 4,000-6,000.
- Killed in prisons and concentration camps in Germany: around 4,400
- Killed Royal Netherlands Navy: around 2,900.
- Royal Dutch Army casualties: approx. 2,300
- Executions in the Netherlands (almost all illegal workers): around 2,000
- Fallen merchant navy personnel: approx. 1,600
- Killed in concentration camps in the Netherlands: ca. 570.
- Died in German captivity: around 300-400

- Interned civilians killed in Indonesia: approx. 13,000-16,800,
- Deceased in Japanese captivity: ca. 8,200,

Bekijk de video hier: <https://www.niod.nl/nl/vraag-en-antwoord/verliezen-nederlandse-bevolking>.

ASSIGNMENT 6

After the war Germany pays damages to war victims to compensate for the terrible suffering caused by them. This payment 'Wiedergutmachung' (reparation) is paid through the Dutch government to the victims who put in a claim. Roosje also puts in a claim in 1945. It takes a long time before she receives a response.

Assignment:

Write a comment to the words of the civil servant in source 9. Choose from:

- I think the civil servant's response is logical (explain);
- I think the civil servant's words are discriminatory. (explain);
- I think that the civil servant's words are cold and distant (explain);
- I think that the civil servant's words are..... (make your own choice and explain).

SOURCE 9

'Wiedergutmachung'. (Reparation)

For almost twenty years Roosje's request for 'Wiedergutmachung' remained unanswered. Then, in 1964, she receives a letter from a civil servant:

While I can certainly sympathize with the reasons you put forward, I regret to inform you that it is impossible for me to satisfy your request.

My office is overwhelmed with written and telephone requests similar to yours.

The supplementary treatment of such requests would involve an incredible amount of extra work, which would of course lead to serious delay in the settlement of regular claims.

I must therefore ask you to be patient (...)

In order to avoid additional work, I would appreciate it if you would refrain from further correspondence, or telephone calls.

ASSIGNMENT 7

Why do the Dutch population and the Dutch authorities respond to the Jews returning from the camps in the way they do?

Assignment:

- Write down per source which explanation is given in source 10, 11 and 12 for the attitude of the Dutch authorities and population.
- How did the Jews respond to the attitude of the Dutch authorities and the population according to sources 10, 11 and 12?
- Which of these responses do you understand best? Why?

SOURCE 10

Thank you Netherlands

Aalders describes the circumstances immediately after the war

Lipschitz talks about the 'the little Shoah'.

Dutch spoken

Summary:

Mr. Aalders is a researcher at NIOD (Netherlands Institute for War Documentation). He describes that there were only 30,000 Jews living in the Netherlands after 1945. That was a small number that received little response. The population was busy rebuilding the country and there was no room for the Jewish pain. Much later, people looked back on this with shame and the moral guilt question began to play an increasingly strong role.

Mr. Lipschitz was a professor of modern history and had a Jewish background. He finds a better word for the Holocaust "the Shoah." That means absolute destruction. While the war was over, that absolute destruction might have ended, but anti-Semitism and the cold approach were still smoldering. L. calls that "the little Shoah."

Bekijk de video hier: <https://vimeo.com/312598284>

SOURCE 11

Emigration of Jews from the Netherlands after 1945

Bekijk de video hier: <https://kampwesterbork.nl/en/the-persecution-of-the-jews/return-and-reception>

SOURCE 12

Resurgent Anti-Semitism in 1945.

In 1945 anti-Semitism still exists. In the summer of 1945 it even increases. Researcher Dienne Hondius explains this as follows:

The Germans instigated a systematic difference between Jews and non-Jews during the war. Gradually, the Jews are isolated from the non-Jews. The anti-Jewish measures were not put into place at once but one by one. The single measures did not impress non-Jews much. In this almost invisible way the distinction between Jews and non-Jews was created. Thus a split between Jews and non-Jews came about.

Since there was hardly any open contact between the two groups, the deportations could start in 1942, while hardly being noticed. Especially non-Jews were not aware of this state of affairs. Because of this the fate of the Jews was largely unknown to the Dutch population, in the summer 1945.

Dienne Hondius, Anti-Semitism in the Netherlands, immediately after the liberation: research into negative responses of non-Jews to the returning Jews in the summer of 1945.

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ASSIGNMENT 8

Final assignment:

The title of this chapter is 'Homecoming?'

- Summarize why this title was chosen.
- Think of a different title than 'Homecoming?' and explain why you chose your title.

REVIEW YOUR FIRST CHOICE.

- In the introduction lesson you formulated an answer to the question: Do you think that some people should have more rights than others?

Has your point of view changed or not? Explain what made you change/ not change your mind?