

Creating a Safe Haven for Children Escaping War and Persecution – from the Polish Children of Maharaja to the Children of Ukraine

*A webinar and Collaborative Project for American Educators
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Abstract and Goals of the Webinar

Intended for American educators, this webinar, will immerse participants in the historical perspective of the tragic events during World War II, in the Soviet occupied parts of Poland, when thousands of children and families were forced to relocate to labor camps in Siberia. Similarly to how those events forced thousands of Polish families into displacement, today's Ukrainian's children are forced to escape their war-torn country. Listening to invited panelists, the webinar's audience will have opportunities to walk alongside the children who witnessed war and suffering of their loved ones, and who, like all children caught in war and military conflicts experience physical and emotional trauma.

Participants will:

1. Learn how some countries and individuals, guided by a higher calling and deep empathy created safe havens for children escaping war.
2. Hear from an author, Monika Kowaleczko-Szumowska about her work in creating interactive web documents telling the story of the Polish children's journey from the camps of Siberia to the safety offered by an Indian Maharaja.
3. Immerse in the witness account Imogene Salva, a Polish American, memorialized her mother, one of Maharaja's children, in her book, *One Star Away*.
4. Examine trauma-informed strategies to support students affected by the war shared by Alexandra Hernandez, an American educator working with displaced Ukrainian children embraced by Poland after the Russian aggression started in February 2022.
5. Receive links to resources provided during this webinar.



Panelists and Moderators

Monika Kowaleczko – Szumowska

is a Polish author, scriptwriter, producer, and the president of the NGO Nil Desperandum Foundation. She specializes in creative non-fiction for children and youth, with works including Galop '44 (Harper Collins Poland, 2016), Fajna Ferajna (BIS, 2015), and Bapu (Literatura, 2024). Additionally, she writes family adventure stories such as Gupikowo, Wybryki z Ameryki, and Wielki Foch (BIS). Monika is the executive producer of the short documentary A Brave Bunch: The Uprising through Children's Eyes, based on her book, and the scriptwriter and producer of the interactive webdoc Maharaja's Children. Since 2015, she has held countless school meetings in Poland, Europe, and India on the fate of children during wars. Monika graduated with MA degrees from the University of Warsaw and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.



Panelists and Moderators

Imogene Salva - is a first generation American-born Pole. She grew up in Jackson Heights, Queens, NY, and traveled yearly to Poland throughout her childhood. She recently retired from her dedicated career as a teacher of Spanish. As an adult Imogene realized that her mother's wartime story was shared by thousands but known only to a few. She is happy to have this opportunity to broaden the knowledge of this little-known topic. She is the author of the book, *One Star Away*. The story is based on the childhood of her mother, Ziuta Nowicka and detailed research into much-forgotten historical events during World War II. Through Ziuta's eyes, we witness the heroism of her mother and father, the solidarity of her family, and a steadfast faith, and, by extension, the enormous inner strength of the Polish people.



Panelists and Moderators

Alexandra Hernandez is a dedicated bilingual Spanish special education teacher and leader at PS 257 in Brooklyn. In 2022 she volunteered and was part of the American teachers' delegation to participate in the Teaching English in Poland, a collaborative initiative between the American Federation of Teachers and the Kosciuszko Foundation. She taught English to Polish and Ukrainian children. Since then, she has traveled to Poland to teach and this year she was asked to lead one of the summer camps as well as to provide professional development on trauma-informed strategies to all teachers and volunteers there. She has shared this area of her expertise at national conferences for educators in the United States.



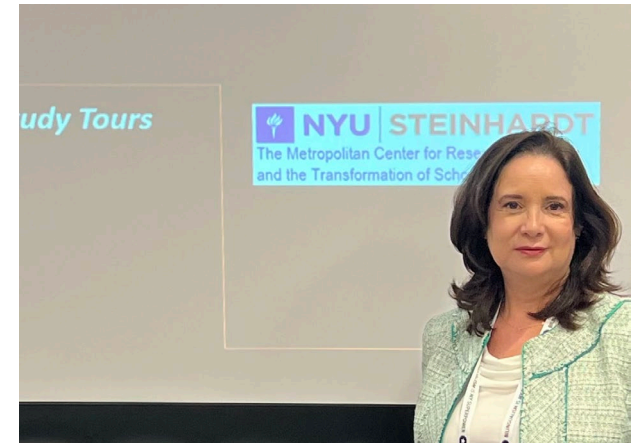
Panelists and Moderators

Iwona Korga a historian and educator, President, and Executive Director of the Jozef Pilsudski Institute of America. She received Ph.D from Pedagogical University of Krakow in the field of humanities and is a graduate from Queens College (CUNY) with the Master's Degree in Library Science. Polish American relations during World War II, with emphasis on the history of the Polish American Diaspora are her areas of special research and interest. She presents and provides lectures on Polish history at international conferences. She writes articles for Polish American newspapers and periodicals in Poland and US and is the author of the book), *Poland fights! Propaganda activities of the Polish Government in Exile towards American society 1939-1945 (2011)*, published in Poland. She served as a board member at the Polish American Historical Association from 2004-2018, and since 2018 she joined as a board member at the Polish and Slavic Federal Credit Union.



Panelists and Moderators

Elsa Nunez is a bilingual Spanish educator and leader who has promoted assets of multilingual students and families through her career as a teacher, principal, and superintendent in New York City public schools. During her tenure as Assistant Superintendent in District 14, Brooklyn, she supported the development of many dual language and bilingual programs, including the Polish DLP in PS 34 in Greenpoint. She traveled to Poland in 2019, as part of the American delegation from NYC, to study the Polish history, culture and educational system. In her current role as a Resource Specialist in the NY Statewide Language Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network at NYU, she continues her advocacy for bilingual education. She presents at national conferences and publishes in professional journals.



Panelists and Moderators

Alicja Winnicki is a life-long bilingual Polish educator. During her almost 30 years in the NYC Department of Education, she worked as an ESL teacher, bilingual coordinator, staff developer, assistant principal, principal, and superintendent. She was a 2010 Fellow in the Columbia University Cahn Fellows Program for Distinguished Principals and received many prestigious awards and recognitions for her leadership. When she was Principal of PS 34 in Brooklyn, the school received the National Blue-Ribbon Award. In her tenure as superintendent, District 14 hosted national delegations of educators featuring promising practices in bilingual and dual language education and in building and sustaining school leaders. She continues her advocacy by engaging in collaborative projects promoting the Polish history, culture and language in American schools and communities. In 2018, she received a prestigious Leadership and Achievement Award from the Pilsudski Institute and from 2022, she serves as a board member of this institution in New York.

She speaks at conferences for teachers and leaders.



Educational resource for the webinar:

<https://www.bravebunchinindia.pl/en>

<https://padlet.com/ahernan162/overcoming-trauma-and-displacement-together-resource-board-n0lg7l29trmkjamg>