LESSON: History of Antisemitism and the Holocaust

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 7–12
SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary
TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 60–75 minutes (extensions available)

This is a foundational lesson that introduces key concepts and information to students.

RATIONALE
One of the factors leading to the Holocaust was a long history of antisemitism in Germany, Europe, and the world. The Nazi-led government built on existing beliefs and prejudices in creating a racial ideology that resulted in the persecution and murder of Jews in Europe. Antisemitism alone did not lead to the Holocaust, but it was a necessary precursor, contributing to an environment in which prejudice, hate speech and violence could occur. This lesson will focus on the history of antisemitism and its role in the Holocaust to better understand how prejudice and hate speech can contribute to violence, mass atrocity, and genocide. Learning about the origins of hatred and prejudice encourages students to think critically about antisemitism today.

Included is a review of key definitions distinguishing fact, opinion, and belief when analyzing historical events.

NOTE: This lesson is not intended as a crisis response to antisemitic acts on campuses but rather an approach to understanding the historical origins of antisemitism.

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
- What are the origins and history of antisemitism?
- How has antisemitism evolved over time?
- How was racial antisemitism in Nazi Germany different from the religious antisemitism of the past?
- How did antisemitism permeate German society legally and socially, and what was its impact on the Jewish community?
- How do you recognize antisemitism today?
- When your community has encountered antisemitism, what measures have people taken in response?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES
At the end of this lesson, students understand:
- The difference between belief, opinion, and fact
- The origins and history of antisemitism
- Ways that antisemitism has changed over time
- The dangers of prejudice and hate speech
- Examples of antisemitism today, and how people have chosen to act in response
LESSON: History of Antisemitism and the Holocaust

TEACHER PREPARATION

- Print or electronically share KWL chart
- Preview Antisemitism film and print transcripts, if necessary
- Preview and print Holocaust Encyclopedia for students, if necessary
- Preview chapter 3 of the Path to Nazi Genocide and print transcripts, if necessary
- Preview testimony clips: Ruth Rack (1:23) and Hannah Altbush (1:21)
- Review assertion, reasoning, and evidence (ARE) method
- Preview and print Holocaust Encyclopedia article about Niemoller quote, if necessary

MODIFICATIONS

Word Cloud generator, Padlet, Google Slides, or non-technology dependent means to visually record student responses are suggested; however, the lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications for recording student responses. For remote instruction, a google document or Padlet can assist with student responses.

LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS

- Belief, opinion, and fact definitions displayed on a word wall
- Offer audio version or text-to-speech options for research articles
- Holocaust Encyclopedia articles are available in 12 languages, including Spanish
- The Path to Nazi Genocide is available in 12 languages

PART ONE: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ANTISEMITISM

1. Ask students the differences between belief, opinion, and fact. Write responses on the board, menti, or padlet. Are there similarities to the responses?

2. Next, provide definitions:

DEFINITIONS

- A fact is verifiable. We can determine whether it is true by researching the evidence. How do you know this? Does it always mean the same thing? What are the possible multiple meanings?
- An opinion is a judgment based on facts, an honest attempt to draw a reasonable conclusion from factual evidence.
- Unlike an opinion, a belief is a conviction based on cultural or personal faith, morality, or values

3. How do the definitions compare with the original class brainstorming about belief, opinion, and fact?
LESSON: History of Antisemitism and the Holocaust

4. Tell students that they are going to research and learn about antisemitism. As a class, in groups, or individually complete the KWL chart for the term antisemitism.

5. Next, provide students with a definition of antisemitism for their charts:

   The word **antisemitism** means prejudice against or hatred of Jews.

6. Distribute the film transcript to students before watching the 13 minute film *European Antisemitism from its Origins to the Present*. Ask them to annotate the transcript while watching the film, and ask students to especially underline/highlight areas:

   - that illustrate the origins and evolution of antisemitism
   - where they see distortion of facts impacting opinions and beliefs

7. Debrief with the class about what they learned from the film. Project or distribute the Holocaust Encyclopedia article for the class to reference during the film debrief, OR working in groups, pairs, or individually students can read the articles after the film and before the discussion.

8. List responses on board/menti/padlet to the following discussion questions.

   - What are the historical origins of antisemitism?
   - How has antisemitism changed throughout history?
   - How have facts been ignored, misconstrued, or distorted to justify antisemitic beliefs?
   - When have political or religious leaders espoused antisemitic ideas? What was the purpose?

9. Students continue to populate their KWL charts during and after the discussion.

**PART TWO: ANTISEMITISM AND THE HOLOCAUST**

1. To illustrate the racial nature of Nazi antisemitism show students Chapter 3 of *The Path to Nazi Genocide: From Citizens to Outcasts*. Provide a copy of the transcript for students to annotate as they watch, and share prompts that will frame discussion after viewing:
LESSON: History of Antisemitism and the Holocaust

- How and why did Nazi Germany gradually isolate, segregate, impoverish, and incarcerate Jews between 1933 and 1939?
- How did antisemitism permeate German society legally and socially, and what was its impact on the Jewish community?

2. After viewing, discuss and list student responses on the board or padlet. Responses should include:

- Examples of the legal measures the Nazi-led German government used to gradually excluded Jews from public life, professions, and public education.
- Ways that Nazis demonized Jews and created a climate of hostility and indifference toward their plight.

3. View the following two videos:
   - Ruth Rack - Friends joined mob after Kristallnacht (timestamp 2:20-3:45)
   - Hannah Altbush - Solidarity of classmates (timestamp 6:59-8:22)

4. After viewing, ask the following questions. Record answers on Menti, Padlet, or board:

- How did the antisemitism permeating German society legally and socially impact Ruth Rack and Hannah Altbush, members of the Jewish community?
- What do these two testimonies illustrate about the possibility for individual choices and actions during the Holocaust?

PART THREE: ANTISEMITISM TODAY

1. Ask: what are examples of antisemitism today?
   - In your local community?
   - State community?
   - In the United States?
   - On a website or on social media?
   Record answers on Menti or Padlet.

2. Choose an example. Where do you see fact, opinion, and belief intersect? How can understanding the difference between fact, opinion and belief be used to counter prejudice and antisemitism?
LESSON: History of Antisemitism and the Holocaust

3. Ask students to identify ways that people or groups in their communities have responded to antisemitism. How effective do they find these responses? What responses would they recommend? Chalk Talk is one way to structure the discussion.

CONCLUSION

ASSESSMENT

- Students revisit their KWL charts to complete the “learn” column citing textual evidence from the resources presented in the lesson.

- Using the charts, students construct their own ARE (assertion, reasoning, and verifiable evidence) on antisemitism. This ARE, along with the KWL chart, can be used to write a summary paragraph or guide the research and writing of a research paper.

- Working in pairs, students select current events or memes related to antisemitism to analyze. Use the ARE framework to discern between facts, opinions, and beliefs: What is being asserted? What is the reason for this assertion? Can you find three pieces of evidence to support the assertion?

- Develop your assertion about the message of the meme and how it might be countered. What questions does it generate?

- Ask students to reflect on this letter written by Holocaust survivors to the Pittsburgh Jewish Community.

- Writing prompt: consider the quotation below. What do you think it means?

  “First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out-- Because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out-- Because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out-- Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me-- and there was no one left to speak for me.”

  Martin Niemöller (1892-1984)

  When finished, ask students to read the Holocaust Encyclopedia article discussing the quotation. Revisit your original answer. Would you adjust it? Why or why not?

EXTENSIONS

1. Listen to this podcast: Construct before/after identity charts for Frank Meeink.
2. Listen to Mark Potok discuss the devastating effect that propaganda from small hate groups continue to have in America. How do social conditions encourage and allow lies to spread? How does that relate to belief, opinion, and fact?

3. Divide students into six groups. Each group will research a different type of antisemitism and report back to the class:
   - Antisemitism in History: From the Crucifixion of Christ to 1400
   - Antisemitism in History: The Early Modern Era, 1300-1800
   - Antisemitism in History: The Era of Nationalism, 1800-1918
   - Antisemitism in History: Racial Antisemitism, 1875-1945
   - Antisemitism in History: World War I
   - Antisemitism in History: Nazi Antisemitism

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Teaching about Antisemitism
- Lesson plans for teaching about propaganda