

# LESSON: Exploring Anne Frank’s Diary

**GRADE LEVEL:** Adaptable for grades 7–12

**SUBJECT:** Multidisciplinary

**TIME REQUIRED:** Approximately 55–75 minutes per part of the lesson used (extensions available)

**This is a *thematic* lesson that builds on fundamental knowledge and provides in-depth exploration of a topic.**

## RATIONALE

Students will examine Anne Frank’s diary as both a historical and a deliberately-created literary text, and will understand how the Holocaust affected the lives of the Frank family.

## OVERVIEW

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How were Anne Frank’s Holocaust experiences shaped by her own individual circumstances?
- How did the events of the Holocaust and World War II affect the lives of the Frank family?
- What choices did Anne make in writing her diary? How does she describe life inside the “Secret Annex”?

### EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

**At the end of this lesson, students will:**

- Have a nuanced understanding of the Holocaust as an event that affected individuals differently
- Identify how Anne Frank made choices in her writing in order to convey her experiences
- Explore how Anne Frank’s story continues to be told today

### TEACHER PREPARATION

- Read *The Diary of Anne Frank* [Note: There are many different published versions of Anne’s diary. In some earlier editions, Otto Frank eliminated passages in which Anne wrote about her changing body and budding sexuality; these passages have been reintroduced into many recent editions. Depending on the age of your students, you may wish to prepare them for these passages.]
- Read USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia articles [Anne Frank: Biography](#) and [Anne Frank: Diary](#)
- Read Anne Frank House articles [The Two Versions of Anne’s Diary](#), [A Choir of Voices: Anne Frank’s Diary and Other Young Writers](#), and [How Did Anne’s Diary Become So Famous?](#)

### MATERIALS

- Copies of *The Diary of Anne Frank*
- Printed [Anne Frank timeline cards](#)
- Printed copies of worksheets for selected activities

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## MODIFICATIONS

This lesson is intentionally flexible, recognizing that *The Diary of Anne Frank* is taught in many settings with various educational goals. These lessons can also be used to support the teaching of the play “The Diary of Anne Frank.” Teachers may choose to use all or parts of this lesson, and can modify it as desired. This lesson can also be modified for remote instruction.

## LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS

- Preview and post key definitions
- Class activities can be modified for group or individual instruction
- Class activities can be modified for online instruction
- Different versions of the diary exist, including a graphic novel. Select versions that align with the needs of your students

## PART ONE: PRIOR TO READING *THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK*

### WARM UP

1. Show students this [video clip](#), without telling them anything about the film in advance. After viewing, ask students to describe what they saw in the clip.
2. Play again and pause at 00:12. Explain to students that this is the only known video footage of Anne Frank, a teenager who was murdered in the Holocaust, who wrote a diary that has sold over 30 million copies and translated into over 70 languages.

### ASK THE STUDENTS

- If the film footage was the only record of Anne Frank’s life, what would we know about her?
- In 100 years, what do you think might exist to help historians learn about your life right now?

### TIMELINE ACTIVITY

3. Pass out the first eighteen [timeline cards](#) to the class (from June 12, 1929, “Anne Frank Born” to April 29, 1942 “Jews in the Netherlands Forced to Wear Star of David”). In chronological order, have the students read the card to the class, then place it on the wall. If it is easier to have the cards on the wall prior to the beginning of class or you are under time constraints, have students read the cards as part of a gallery walk. Leave these cards on the wall as reference throughout the unit. [Note: The Anne Frank timeline cards duplicate several cards from the USHMM’s main [Timeline lesson](#). If teachers are already

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using this lesson, swap in the Anne Frank cards in place of the main cards for duplicated events/laws.]

## DEFINITION

4. Read the definition of the Holocaust to the class, defining terms and answering questions. (Teachers should use the [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#) to assist in answering more challenging questions.)

*The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of 6 million Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. By the end of the war in 1945, the Germans and their collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews. While Jews were the primary victims, German authorities also persecuted and killed other groups for their perceived racial or biological inferiority: Roma; people with disabilities; some of the Slavic peoples (especially Poles and Russians), and blacks. Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological or behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.*

## BIOGRAPHICAL ACTIVITY

5. Ask the class to read the June 20, 1942 diary entry, beginning with “My father...” Using this [worksheet](#), students underline, circle, or highlight the events in Anne’s description of her life that relate to events on the timeline cards.

### ASK THE STUDENTS

- What events does Anne include? What does she leave out?
- What do you notice about her descriptions?
- How has Anne’s life been shaped by antisemitism?

## PART TWO: WHILE READING *THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK*

### TIMELINE ACTIVITY

1. As students read the book, add the [timeline cards](#) to the wall after they read about the events.

### ASK THE STUDENTS

- Does Anne write about this event as it is happening? Why might she know about some events and not others?

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- How do Anne and the other Secret Annex residents learn about the outside world? Document different ways in which they received information.
- What information did Anne know about the murder of European Jews (the Holocaust)?

## POTENTIAL DISCUSSION AND ESSAY QUESTIONS

2. Anne Frank's life in hiding was challenging and traumatic, but Anne often reflected on how privileged her family was to have the ability to hide. She wrote on July 11, 1942 that "*there's probably not a more comfortable hiding place in all of Amsterdam.*"
  - What factors made the lives of the Secret Annex residents easier?
  - What factors made the lives of the Secret Annex residents more difficult?

Use the diary to find evidence for your arguments.

3. Fear is a consistent theme in the diary. Document passages where Anne discusses fear. What does she fear, and how does she cope with it?
4. On April 5, 1944, Anne wrote:

*I can shake off everything if I write, my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn. But, and that is the great question, will I ever be able to write anything great, will ever become a journalist or a writer? I hope so, oh, I hope so very much, for I can recapture everything when I write, my thoughts, my ideals and my fantasies...So I go on again with fresh courage, I think I shall succeed, because I want to write!*

Anne was an exceptional writer and wanted her diary to be published. Harvest passages where Anne discusses the craft of writing.

- What spurred her desire for publication?
  - What advice does she have for young writers?
5. For each of the timeline cards on the wall find the entry in Anne's diary closest to the date on the card. Using this [worksheet](#), construct an "iceberg" of Anne's life. Choose a diary entry and place a brief summary of the entry on top. Beneath the "water," add what was going on in the world around her: the historical context behind the personal events she recorded. Students or teachers can also select diary entries not represented in timeline cards to research and construct an "iceberg."

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## PART THREE: THE LEGACY OF ANNE FRANK

### TIMELINE ACTIVITY

1. Finish placing the [timeline cards](#) (August 4, 1944, “The Annex is Discovered” to Summer 1947 “Het Achterhuis is Published”) on the wall. Either have students read the cards out loud, or read them as part of a gallery walk.

### ASK THE STUDENTS

- What does the Anne Frank timeline reveal about the Holocaust?
- What events in the timeline directly affected the Frank family?
- What role does geography play in the impact of World War II and the Holocaust on individuals like the the members of the Frank family?

### DIARIES AS HISTORICAL SOURCES

2. Use the USHMM lesson [Diaries as Historical Sources](#), which introduces students to other young diarists. Ask them to consider the ways in which Anne self-edited her diary and encourage them to explore how young people are recording their own lives today.

### POTENTIAL DISCUSSION AND ESSAY QUESTIONS, OR ASSESSMENT ASSIGNMENTS

3. Every story is subjective, and critical readers always need to ask: who is telling the story? Why? What factors construct their unique perspective?

As classwork or homework, ask students to select an entry in which Anne describes a scene with other Secret Annex residents and rewrite an entry from what you imagine would be another resident’s perspective.

Ask students to reflect on the exercise and answer the following questions:

- In her July 15, 1944 entry, Anne writes that she “has a great deal of self-knowledge.” How does Anne use this self-knowledge to reflect on her own actions while writing her diary? Find an example of Anne changing her mind after writing about a situation or person.
- How might Anne’s view of the others in the Annex have been affected by her age? Did she mature while writing her diary, and did her relationships change?
- What might Anne have added or changed if she knew her diary would be published and read by others?
- Margot Frank also kept a diary, but that diary was probably destroyed and has never been found. Based on what Anne wrote about Margot, what do you think Margot’s diary might have been like?

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4. Anne wrote her final diary entry on August 2, 1944, two days before the Secret Annex was raided and the residents were arrested. Ask students to read one of the following articles (choose the one that works best for your classroom):
  - a. [Anne Frank: Diary](#) (from the USHMM's Holocaust Encyclopedia)
  - b. [The Two Versions of Anne's Diary](#) (on the Anne Frank Haus website)
  - c. [Who Owns Anne Frank?](#) (Cynthia Ozick, "Who Owns Anne Frank? The New Yorker, September 29, 1997.)

## ASK THE STUDENTS

- Who edited the diary and why?
- Do these edits change what we remember about Anne? If so, how?

5. On July 15, 1944, in one of her final and most famous diary entries, Anne wrote:

*It's difficult in times like these: ideals, dreams, and cherished hopes rise within us, only to be crushed by grim reality. It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart.*

Ask students to reflect in writing:

- Why do you think this quote appeals to so many people?
6. Using information on the timeline, discuss or ask students to reflect in writing:
    - Can we learn about the Holocaust by just reading Anne Frank's diary? What are we missing when we do this?
    - Since Anne's diary ends in August 1944, readers do not generally learn about what happened to the residents of the Secret Annex after they were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Why do you think it is important to understand what happened to the residents of the Secret Annex after Anne's diary ends?
  7. Anne Frank is probably the most famous person killed in the Holocaust, and her story has been told in children's books, graphic novels, plays, films, digital sources, and other medium. Ask students to find an adaptation of Anne's story. Keeping in mind the intended audience of their chosen adaptation, ask students to answer:
    - What is similar between this adaptation and the diary? What is different?
    - Do you have any hypotheses about why the creators of the adaptations might have made these decisions?

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## CONCLUSION

### EXTENSIONS

1. Have students read the article written by US Holocaust Museum and Anne Frank House historians, [German Bombs and US Bureaucrats](#) which describes the Frank family’s attempts to immigrate to the United States between 1938-1942.

Using information from the article, the diary, the timeline, and the Museum’s resource “[What did Refugees Need to Obtain a US Visa in the 1930s?](#)” have students answer in class discussion or in writing:

- Why did Anne’s family leave Germany for the Netherlands in 1933?
- What challenges did Otto Frank face in his quest to immigrate with his family? What factors helped them with their quest to immigrate, and what factors contributed to their inability to leave?
- How does Anne discuss immigration in her June 20, 1942 entry?

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. [Challenges of Escape](#) (USHMM lesson on immigration to the United States, 1938-1941)
2. [Anne Frank The Writer: An Unfinished Story](#) (2003 USHMM exhibition)
3. [In Danger: Otto Frank](#) (from the USHMM *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibition)
4. [Digitized primary and secondary sources](#) about Anne Frank in the Museum’s collections