

# 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 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 to convey her experiences
- Explore how Anne Frank's story continues to be told today

### TEACHER PREPARATION

- Read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* [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?](#)
- This lesson plan can be used alongside additional curriculum for *The Diary of a Young Girl*.
- Review the 12-minute classroom video, [Anne Frank: Her World and Her Diary](#).

### MATERIALS

- Copies of *The Diary of a Young Girl*
- Printed [Anne Frank timeline cards](#)

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- Printed or digital copies of worksheets for selected activities
- [Anne Frank: Her World and Her Diary](#), 12-minute classroom video

## LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

**The lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications to achieve the educational outcomes.** Technology and teaching strategies are suggested in the instructional sequence; please use other options if they support the learning needs of your students. Consider utilizing graphic organizers, note-taking strategies, reading choices, and online engagement tools.

Educators may choose to use modifications specific to this lesson:

- Teachers can provide students with choices as to how they access information throughout lessons, i.e., read print alone, read print with a partner, read along while the teacher reads aloud, etc.
- Define and post terms that would clarify understanding for students.
- Different versions of the diary exist, including a graphic novel and audiobooks. Select versions that align with the needs of your students.
- Provide worksheets digitally to allow text to speech.

This lesson is available as an [online, asynchronous experience for students](#), which can be accessed through a web browser or LMS files. The online lessons are accessible for all students for in-person and virtual learning, and they provide specific support for students using screen readers.

**Teacher Note:** This lesson is intentionally flexible, recognizing that *The Diary of a Young Girl* is taught in many settings with various educational goals. These lessons also support the teaching of the play “*The Diary of Anne Frank*.” Teachers can use all or parts of this lesson and can modify it as desired.

## PART ONE: BEFORE READING *THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL*

### 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?

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## 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 before 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 a reference throughout the unit. [Note: The Anne Frank timeline cards duplicate several cards from the USHMM's main [Timeline lesson](#). If teachers are already using this lesson, swap the Anne Frank cards in place of the main cards for duplicated events/laws.]

Optional: Watch the beginning of the 12 minute film [Anne Frank: Her World and Her Diary](#), pausing at 4:48.

## 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 the Nazi regime and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945 across Europe and North Africa. The height of the persecution and murder occurred during the context of the Second World War; by the end of the war in 1945, the Germans and their collaborators had killed nearly two out of every three European Jews.

The Nazis believed that Germans were "racially superior" and that Jews, deemed inferior, were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community. While Jews were the primary victims, this genocide occurred in the context of Nazi persecution and murder of other groups for their perceived racial or biological inferiority: Roma; people with disabilities; some of the Slavic peoples (especially Poles and Russians), and Black people. Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, or behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, men accused of "homosexuality" and people that the regime identified as "asocials" and "professional criminals."

## 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 any of the events on the timeline cards.

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## 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 A YOUNG GIRL*

### 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?
- 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)?

Optional: Watch the 4:48-7:45 clip of the film [Anne Frank: Her World and Her Diary](#).

## 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?  
**Teacher note:** you can provide these examples as a modification for students and have them search for the corresponding diary entries.
    - **Examples:** They had a fairly roomy space; they owned their hiding space—not housed at someone else's place; those assisting them were kind and respectful; they had more freedom to move around on the weekends; they were able to hide together as a family.
  - What factors made the lives of the Secret Annex residents more difficult?
    - **Examples:** The addition of another family caused tensions and strained resources; they had to be silent during business hours; Anne

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had to share a room with an older man; the close quarters caused tensions among family; there was constant fear and anxiety about being discovered.

- How does this change over time/the longer the residents are in the Secret Annex?
  - **Examples:** Food supplies become increasingly scarce; Anne and the residents learn more about the horrors befalling other Jews; the longer they are in hiding, the more frayed relationships become; the stress and danger faced by their helpers increases.

Use the diary to find evidence for your arguments. Cite the date of the diary entry and cross reference with events on the timeline.

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? How do her fears shift over time?
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. Find passages where Anne discusses the craft of writing.

- A. What spurred her desire for publication?
  - B. 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.
    - a. Choose a diary entry and place a brief summary of the entry on top.
    - b. Beneath the "water," add what was happening in the world around her: the historical context behind the personal events she recorded.

**Teacher note:** Students or teachers can also select diary entries not represented in timeline cards to research and construct an "iceberg." This activity shows students how individual lives were impacted by the events of World War II and the Holocaust and places unique individual experiences in historical context for greater student understanding of how and why the Holocaust happened.

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## PART THREE: THE LEGACY OF ANNE FRANK

### TIMELINE ACTIVITY

1. Place the remaining [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 aloud or read them as part of a gallery walk.

### ASK THE STUDENTS

- Holocaust survivor and author Ruth Klüger wrote: ‘The [Holocaust] involved millions of people, it was a unique experience for each of them.’ How does adding Anne Frank’s story to the timeline increase your understanding of the unique experiences of individuals during the Holocaust?
- What events in the timeline directly affected the Frank family?
- How does where Anne and her family live impact their experiences? What role does geography play in the impact of World War II and the Holocaust on individuals who lived in places other than Germany and Amsterdam? Use the timeline to support your assertions.

Optional: Watch the 7:46-11:27 remaining clip of the film [Anne Frank: Her World and Her Diary](#).

### DISCUSSION AND ESSAY QUESTIONS, OR ASSESSMENT ASSIGNMENTS

Teachers can select one or more options from the following list.

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

Ask students to 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?

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- Is it fair to judge Anne's family and other residents of the Annex solely based on Anne's observations and opinions? Are there limitations to a first-person diary account?
- 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 *Holocaust Encyclopedia*)
    - i. Teacher Note: This article is available in Spanish.
  - 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

- Otto Frank, Anne's father, edited her diary. Why do you think he wanted to omit some of her writing?

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?
  - Do you think this quote is a realistic representation of the Holocaust?
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:

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- 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?

## 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?

**Teacher Note:** A multiple text inquiry chart can be used to compare the article, diary, timeline, and other resources.

### 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