

LESSON PLAN: HISTORY OF ANTISEMITISM AND THE HOLOCAUST

Grade level: 7-12

Subject: multidisciplinary

Time required: one class period (extensions available)

Common Core standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2
 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
 - Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8
 - Evaluate premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

OVERVIEW

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.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After the lesson students will:

- Understand the origins and history of anti-Semitism
- Identify ways that antisemitism has changed over time
- Reflect on the dangers of prejudice and hate speech
- Recognize examples of antisemitism today, and how people have chosen to act in response

PART ONE: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ANTISEMITISM

- **What are the origins and history of antisemitism?**
- **How has antisemitism evolved over time?**

1. Ask students the differences between belief, opinion, and fact. Write responses on the board or padlet. Then, provide definitions:

- **A fact is verifiable.** We can determine whether it is true by researching the evidence.
- **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.**

2. Complete a [KWL chart](#) with the class for the term **antisemitism**.
3. When finished, provide students with a definition of antisemitism to add to their chart:
 - The word **antisemitism** means prejudice against or hatred of Jews.
4. 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 anti-Semitism
 - where they see distortion of facts impacting opinions and beliefs
5. 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 addressing the questions below. List responses on board/padlet.
 - 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?
6. Students continue to populate their KWL charts.

PART TWO: ANTISEMITISM AND THE HOLOCAUST

- **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?**
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:
 - 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. List student responses on the board or padlet. Responses will 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:

- 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

- **How do you recognize antisemitism today?**
- **When your community has encountered antisemitism, what measures have people taken in response?**

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

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?

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?

ASSESSMENT

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

2. 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.

3. 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?

4. 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 quote. Revisit your original answer. Would you adjust it? Why or why not?

5. Ask students to reflect on this letter written by [Holocaust survivors to Pittsburgh Jewish Community](#).

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](#)

Please share how you plan to use this lesson plan in your classroom by e-mailing us at education@ushmm.org.