



LESSON PLAN: Taking A Stand Against Antisemitism

- 1** Display the following statement by Jewish Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel and read it aloud: “What hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor, but the silence of the bystander.”
- 2** Have students share what they think Elie Wiesel meant by this statement and how his sentiment might relate to antisemitism today.
- 3** To begin the conversation about what can be done to stand up to antisemitism, have students consider why it is important for individuals and communities to speak out against this and all forms of prejudice and bias. What are the benefits to a society when individuals and institutions speak out against unfairness? What are the costs to a society that allows bias and prejudice to go unchecked and uninterrupted?
- 4** Help bring the discussion to the individual level by asking students what exactly we mean by “society.” Who comprises a society? If we are all part of the society in which we live, what is the role and responsibility of individuals to be vigilant about how people are treated and to speak out when they see injustice? Ask students whether they think individuals have the capacity to make a difference through their words and actions at home, in school, in the community, and beyond.
- 5** Share with students that ordinary people can inspire others to create positive change. While some actions require moral courage; many only require personal motivation, time, and energy. Tell students that they will be introduced to three young people who, through their words and actions, are confronting antisemitism.
- 6** Distribute the **Profiles of Young Activists** handout. Have a volunteer read the profile of Siavosh Derarkhti aloud. Review the term “xenophobia” in the **Glossary** prior to the reading. Have students share their thoughts about Siavosh and his efforts to address antisemitism and xenophobia using some or all of the following questions:
 - What experiences did Siavosh have growing up that helped motivate him to start the group Young People Against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia?
 - What risks do you think Siavosh has to deal with as the leader of his organization?
 - Who was Raoul Wallenberg¹? What is the significance of Siavosh receiving an award named after Raoul Wallenberg?

¹ For information about Raoul Wallenberg, refer to the student handout *Those Who Dared to Rescue* in the Rescuers and Non-Jewish Resistance unit, Rescuers and Aid Providers lesson.

7 Have a volunteer read the profile of Izzy Lenga aloud. Follow by having students share their initial reactions to the actions that Izzy decided to take when she witnessed antisemitism. Continue the discussion using the questions below.

- Why do you think people post hateful posters and messages on social media, like those that Izzy describes? What are their possible motivations?
- Do you think that the anonymity of social media allows people to come “out of the shadows” and express their racist and antisemitic beliefs in a way that would be much harder to do face to face? Does it help or hurt to know that these attitudes exist? Explain your thinking.
- What is your opinion about the way in which Izzy responded to the antisemitic tweets she received? Do you think you would have handled this situation differently? If so, explain how you might have responded.

8 Prior to reading the next profile, ask students if they have ever heard of the “BDS Movement,” and if so, what do they understand it to be. Explain to students that the BDS Movement is a campaign to support the Palestinian cause by calling on the international community to impose boycotts and implement divestment efforts against Israel. Explain that some supporters of BDS may genuinely believe that these efforts will encourage Israel to change policies with which they disagree; however, the predominant drive of the campaign and its leadership is not criticism of Israel’s policies; but an attempt to delegitimize, punish, or isolate Israel unfairly and seek to place the entire onus of the conflict on one side. For more information, distribute **The BDS Movement** handout or use it as a reference.

9 Have a volunteer read the profile of Leora Eisenberg aloud. Follow with a discussion about the work Leora is doing using the questions below.

- Describing the protesters’ rhetoric, Leora says, “Their protest in the name of “free speech” went against the free marketplace of ideas that an educational institution should stand for and seek to enshrine.” Do you think that free speech can go too far? How do we balance the right to free speech with the harmful impact it can have on individuals and groups?
- Leora uses a variety of platforms to share her ideas about antisemitism—blogs, articles, and social media. What role does each of these play in both promoting as well as combating antisemitism and other forms of hatred?
- When referring to social media, Leora advises, “Be eloquent and use it as a platform to say something important.” What do you think Leora means when she says “be eloquent”?

10 After reading and discussing all three profiles, have students think about what the word “activist” means to them and whether they think Siavosh, Izzy, and Leora are activists, and explain why or why not. Encourage students to share information about activists that they are aware of in their communities.

11 Remind students that there are many ways for individuals to become involved in standing up to antisemitism and other forms of prejudice and hatred today. Elicit from students ideas that they may have, including joining and becoming involved with various organizations.

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Review the meaning of the term “bystander” from the **Glossary**. Have students think about whether or not being a bystander is a choice people make. Ask students why they think the individuals that they have learned about so far in this lesson chose NOT to be bystanders?

13 Tell students that they will now watch two clips of testimony from Holocaust survivors. Encourage students to think about what survivors like **Barbara Fischman Traub (bio)** and **Henry Oertelt (bio)** teach us about prejudice, antisemitism, and the dangers of being a bystander as they watch the testimonies.

14 After students have watched the testimony clips, have them discuss the role that bystanders played during the Holocaust in comparison to the role they might play as witnesses to antisemitic acts today. Continue the discussion with some or all of the following questions:

- What specific examples does Barbara share about how she and her family were treated prior to the ghetto period? Contrast to how they were treated when the Jews of Sighet were rounded up and marched to the ghetto.
- Barbara says that her neighbors “peeked through the windows and turned their faces.” Does this behavior surprise you? In your study about the Holocaust, did you learn about other people who demonstrated similar reactions to seeing their neighbors forced from their homes? What were some of the reasons why people stood by and watched what was happening and did not speak up?
- How does Barbara remember feeling when her neighbors “turned their faces”? How did her feelings about the event change with time?
- What message does silence send to individuals who are being targeted by antisemitism and other forms of hate and bias?
- What can the Holocaust teach us about the impact that bystanders can have on society when individuals or groups are being targeted?
- Henry says that he sees that some progress has been made, but not a lot, in terms of people learning to respect each other. As someone who survived the Holocaust, how do you think Henry might feel saying that there has been little progress?
- What does Henry say we need to learn to do in order to fight against prejudice and hatred?
- Think about your own school and community. Would you describe them as places where people respect each other? What kinds of things could be done to make progress in this area?

15 In this next section, inform students that they will be provided with a scenario that they will discuss in small groups. Distribute the **Taking Action: Scenarios for Discussion** handout and assign each group one of the scenarios to read and discuss using the questions provided.

16 Close the lesson by having students prepare a “Quick Write.” Reflecting on what they have learned about contemporary antisemitism, have students share thoughts on the words of Samantha Power, former US Ambassador to the United Nations: “Antisemitism is not just an issue for Jewish groups

or Jewish individuals. Antisemitism is a human rights threat, a human rights phenomenon, a human rights problem. And it's important, I think, as a predictor of where society is going."

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 60-90 MINUTES