



LESSON 3: Action and Agency—Standing Against Antisemitism and Hate

“Speak your mind even if your voice shakes.”

—MAGGIE KUHN, FOUNDER OF GRAY PANTHERS

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 110 - 120 MINUTES

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson students learn practical ways that they can take action in response to antisemitism and bias in their communities. They consider the skills and qualities needed to act effectively by reflecting on case studies and testimonies. They then identify a range of actions they might take in response to real-life scenarios of antisemitism and reflect on the interconnectedness of all forms of oppression.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

What can we do to make a difference in the face of antisemitism and other forms of hate?

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Reflect on the skills and dispositions needed to respond effectively to antisemitism and other forms of bias.
- Identify specific actions that they can take in their daily lives to combat hate.
- Communicate their ideas about how different forms of prejudice are interconnected.

PROCEDURES

PART 1: What are the qualities and skills needed to take action against bias and hate?

Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 50 - 60 MINUTES

I Begin this lesson by having students reflect on and discuss quotes from Miep Gies about courage and our responsibility to take action against prejudice and hate. Share the biographical information from the **Miep Gies Quotes** handout with students. Post some or all the quotes around the room and have students stand by one that resonates for them. In small groups, have them discuss some of the following questions.

- What resonated for you about the quote? Why is it meaningful to you?
- Do you think that elevating people to the status of “hero” is helpful or harmful in our society? Why?
- What is your personal definition of moral courage?
- What qualities or skills does it take for ordinary people to display courage?
- Do you find Gies’ idea of “remorse” to be a motivating emotion? Why?

*NOTE: If you have taught Echoes & Reflections Unit 7 on Non-Jewish Resistance and Rescue, refer back to Miep Gies' speech, **Anne Frank's Legacy**, and make relevant connections.*

- 2** Highlight Miep Gies' sentiment that even an ordinary person can "turn on a small light in a dark room." Tell students that, during this lesson, they will investigate ways that ordinary people (them!) can stand up against prejudice and intolerance in their communities.
- 3** Ask students to identify people they know in their own lives or in public life or history who have stood against bias or hate. Have them turn and talk to a partner about what they think enabled these people to help others. Tell students that they will read profiles of ordinary young people who have stood up against prejudice and list specific qualities and skills that enabled them to do so. In small groups, assign students to read one or more of the case studies in the handout, **Profiles of Young Activists**, and create a list of attributes.

Ask each group to decide on three qualities from their profiles that they think are most important. Have them write those qualities "graffiti style" on large sheets of chart paper posted at the front of the room. Discuss why students prioritized these qualities and what they think it might take for them to manifest these characteristics in situations involving bias in their own lives.

- 4** Tell students that they will practice applying some of the behaviors they have thought about to real-life scenarios. Provide each student with the handout, **Action Planning**, and review together. Assign small groups a scenario from the **Taking Action: Scenarios for Discussion** handout or allow them to select one that feels relevant to them. Have them discuss the scenario using the discussion questions provided and then complete the action planning grid in response to the scenario.
- 5** When groups have completed the task, create new groups using the jig-saw method, so that each new group contains students who have worked on different scenarios. In their new groups, have students report back on the highlights of their initial discussions and share the action plans they have devised.

PART 2: How does prejudice against one group affect all people?

Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 60 MINUTES

- 6** Post the following quotes:

*"Rising antisemitism is rarely the lone or the last expression of intolerance in a society."
—FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS, SAMANTHA POWER*

*"It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality."
—DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.*

Ask students to react to the quotes and consider how antisemitism and other forms of prejudice affect all people, regardless of their identities or membership in targeted groups. Have them turn and talk with a partner about this question.

7 Tell students that they will read about the ideas of some notable people on “the interconnectedness of oppressions” or the notion that prejudice of any kind affects all people. Explain that they will write a response to one text that does one of the following:

- **Gives an opinion** – tells what you think or feel about a part of the text and why
- **Poses a question** – inquires into something you don’t understand or something the text made you consider
- **Makes a connection** – discusses how the text relates to your own life, another text, or something in the larger world
- **Discusses a significant line or section** – highlights a part of the text that is important and discusses what it means

8 Distribute **The Interconnectedness of Oppressions** handout and assign students to read one or more of the texts. After they write their response paragraphs, have students share them aloud and discuss in small groups.

9 After introducing students to **Suzanne Cohn (bio)**, **Herschel Gluck (bio)**, and **Henry Oertelt (bio)**, conclude the lesson by playing one or more of their testimonies, which emphasize the importance of creating understanding across our human differences and standing against all forms of prejudice. Discuss some of the following questions with students:

- In what ways do Holocaust survivors see past injustices being repeated today?
- Suzanne Cohn says, “you can be *one* making a difference.” What can one person do to reduce bigotry?
- What did you learn from Herschel Gluck about the most effective way to break down prejudices?
- Henry Oertelt says he is the prime example of what can happen when no one speaks up against prejudice. What can we all do to speak up when we experience or witness prejudice around us?

10 As a summative assessment for this lesson, have students design a bookmark, bumper, sticker, or t-shirt that speaks to the essential question, “What can we do to make a difference in the face of antisemitism and other forms of hate?” Students should draw on relevant information and ideas from the featured sources to devise a main slogan for their product (that serves as a claim) and 3-5 brief accompanying phrases that reflect strategies for making a difference (and that serve as evidence). Students can create their designs individually or in small groups. As an optional follow-up, students can print and distribute their designs to others.

Optional Extension: Have students complete a Group Action Project to apply the knowledge and skills they have gained throughout the unit by forming a response to antisemitism or another type of bias in their community. Refer to the Group Action Project document for suggestions and resources for planning actions, documenting and sharing project results, and reflecting on and evaluating student work. Kath Murdoch’s “inquiry cycle” is offered as a guide to help students pace and organize their work.