



LESSON PLAN: Antisemitism Before the Holocaust

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students investigate the history of antisemitism and ways in which it has been expressed across different times and places, based on religion and political ideas. They view testimonies that reflect the lives of Jewish people in Germany before and after the Nazis took power in order to understand the precipitous rise of antisemitism in Nazi Germany in conjunction with Nazi ideology and racist hierarchical theories. Students then analyze text and video sources that explicate the roots of this antisemitism and how it morphed in the Nazi era, and create a timeline illustrating what they have discovered.

PART 1: WHAT WERE THE EXPERIENCES OF JEWISH PEOPLE IN GERMANY BEFORE AND AFTER THE RISE OF THE NAZIS?

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

1 Students watch testimony clips of two individuals who describe their lives in Germany before the rise of the Nazi Party: **H. Henry Sinason (bio)** and **Margaret Lambert (bio)**. As they watch the clips, students take notes on the **Testimony Reflections** handout, found at the beginning of this unit. After viewing the clips, the class discusses the following questions¹:

- How do H. Henry Sinason and Margaret Lambert describe their relationship to Germany? Is this surprising to you? Why?
- How does Margaret describe the relationship between Jews and non-Jews before the war?
- Henry mentions that his father considered himself “German first and Jewish second.” What does this lead you to believe about how some Jews identified with their country during this time period?

2 The quotes below from the testimonies are posted. Students journal in response to the quotes using the following prompt: “What coming changes are H. Henry and Margaret signaling?” After writing, students form small groups and share their ideas.

QUOTES

- “We were comfortable economically, at least before the Nationalist Socialist regime took over in Germany.” (H. Henry Sinason)
- “I was the only Jew in my class and it never made any difference...I never felt any antisemitism, until a certain time.” (Margaret Lambert)

3 Students watch testimony clips of two individuals who were affected by rising antisemitism in the years after the Nazis took power in 1933: **H. Henry Sinason (bio)** and **Henry Laurant (bio)**. As they watch the clips, students take notes on the **Testimony Reflections** handout, found at the beginning of this unit. After viewing the clips, the class discusses the following questions:

¹ *It is often beneficial for students to watch each clip twice, completing the **Testimony Reflections** handout during the second viewing.*

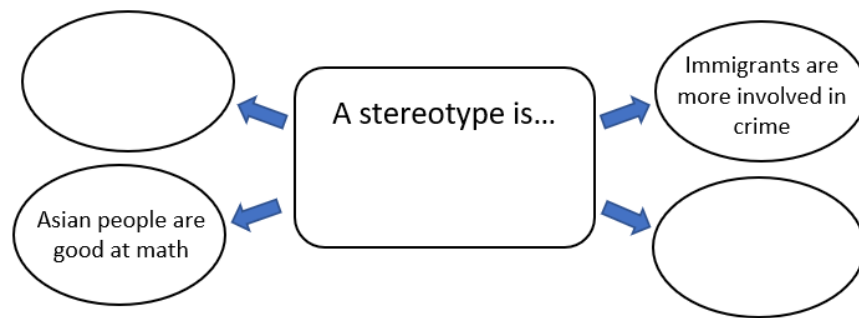
- How do these stories reflect the changes signaled by H. Henry and Margaret in the previous clips?
- How does H. Henry say that his friendships changed over time?
- Describe the picture that formed in your mind of Henry’s father upon discovering the vandalism. Though he was aware of rising antisemitism in Germany, how did this event surprise or affect him on an emotional level?
- How do these testimonies add to your understanding about how the atmosphere in Germany was changing after 1933? How do they make you feel?

4. Students return to their journals and respond to the following prompt: “Do you think the antisemitism experienced by H. Henry and Henry was something new or a form of hatred that had been present before the Nazis rose to power? Explain.” As time allows, students discuss their ideas as a class. They learn that in part two of the lesson, they will investigate this question further.

PART 2: WHAT IS ANTISEMITISM AND HOW HAS IT AFFECTED JEWISH PEOPLE THROUGHOUT HISTORY?

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

5 In pairs or small groups, students define the term *stereotype* in their own words and create a concept map with examples of stereotypes they have observed or experienced.



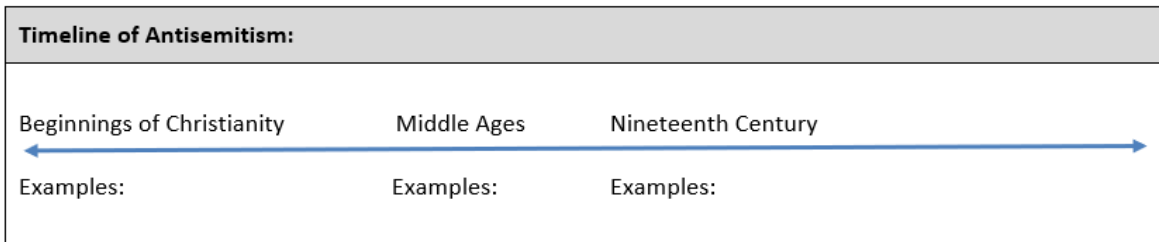
6 Groups share their definitions and reach a common understanding that a stereotype is “an oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences.” As a class, they discuss the following questions:

- Why might people believe and spread stereotypes?
- Why are certain groups in a community or society more subject to stereotypes?
- Why are stereotypes dangerous? How do they affect both the targeted groups and the wider community?
- In your experience, what groups are subject to stereotypes and prejudice?

7 Students engage in a think-pair-share in response to the following question: “What is the relationship between stereotypes and prejudice?” The class discusses some of the thoughts that surfaced and explores the idea that generalizations about a group of people can lead to negative beliefs, thoughts, or feelings about that group.

8 The handout, *Definition of Antisemitism*, is projected or distributed, and students learn that antisemitism is the name given to prejudice and hatred against Jewish people. They read the handout together and discuss any questions that arise. Students learn that they will delve more deeply into the ways in which anti-Jewish stereotypes and other forms of antisemitism have been expressed throughout history.

9 In pairs or small groups, students read the *Summary of Antisemitism* handout and view the **Video Toolbox** on antisemitism, from 2:00-5:29. They note key ideas, paying particular attention to stereotypes that appear repeatedly in different eras and the religious origins of antisemitism. They then create a timeline depicting anti-Jewish stereotypes and other expressions of antisemitism described in the sources, indicating which are unique to particular periods and which have been persistent over time.



OPTION: Small groups each focus on one era (e.g., “Middle Ages”) and contribute items to a timeline that the class creates collaboratively.

10 Students post their timelines so that their peers can view the ideas they’ve captured. As a class, they discuss the following questions:

- How are antisemitic stereotypes rooted in religion?
- Which stereotypes about Jewish people repeat themselves in different periods and seem most lasting?
- How did the Nazis use antisemitic stereotypes and prejudice to gain and build their power?
- How is it that the experiences of Jewish people like H. Henry and Margaret changed from acceptance/inclusion to rejection/exclusion in a short period? What do you think caused antisemitism in Germany to rise so quickly?
- What factors can cause a society to turn against or “other” a group of people that have long been a part of that society?

11 As a summative task, students write a definition of antisemitism in their own words. Below their definition, they list at least two ways in which antisemitism has been deeply rooted in societies, citing evidence from lesson sources to support their responses.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 90 MINUTES