



LESSON PLAN: REBUILDING JEWISH LIFE AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

INTRODUCTION

Antisemitism is fueled by misconceptions and ignorance of what it means to be Jewish, and therefore a critical place for students to begin is to build knowledge and foster empathy for Jewish peoplehood. In this lesson, students will engage with primary sources, an interactive map and testimony from Jewish individuals, designed to help build students' understanding of the effects that antisemitism has had on every aspect of Jewish life, culture, traditions, and places of residence after the Holocaust.

1 Students learn they will be introduced to some of the core components of Jewish peoplehood and Judaism, and the diversity of culture, values, and people that exist throughout the world. The graphic organizer, ***Who are the Jewish people?***, is distributed for students to take notes and engage with the following resources:

- [What Does it Mean to be Jewish? Video](#)
- ***Brief History of Israel*** handout
- ***About Jews and Judaism*** handout

2 Students watch the testimonies of **Rachel Slagter (23:45 - 24:50)**, **Rena Bernstein (18:44 - 20:26)**, and **Liron Velleman (Clip 22, 22:42 -25:59)**. As they watch the clips, they add more details onto their graphic organizer and then discuss the following questions:

- Why did Rachel decide to live in Israel? What makes life there special to her?
- What is your reaction to Rena's testimony? How do her experiences complicate your understanding of what it means to be Jewish, especially for a Jewish person who had to pretend to be Christian in order to save herself during the Holocaust?
- How do Liron's experiences reduce his identity to being solely Jewish? How does reducing someone to this one element of identity limit our understanding of Jews as well as limit our understanding of who Liron is as a person?
- How has your understanding of Jewish identity evolved? Explain the various ways that Jewish identity is complex, dynamic, and deeply personal to each individual.

3 Students learn that the Holocaust had a dramatic effect on Jewish life, especially in terms of the devastation of the Jewish population in much of Europe, most dramatically in Poland, the Netherlands, and parts of Eastern Europe. It also caused a large influx of Jews to Mandatory Palestine, later Israel, and the United States and other countries (including Australia, Canada, and countries in Latin America) during and after the Holocaust.

4. Students explore the [Map of Jewish Populations](#) that details the countries of the world and their respective Jewish populations over the last 125 years. Students are instructed to search several countries throughout the world on different continents and of different sizes. Students are to pay particular attention to the countries of the Middle East and North Africa where approximately 850,000 Jews were forced to leave once Israel was established in 1948. Then, students discuss the following questions:

- How does this map help build on your knowledge of what it means to be Jewish? What are some additional characteristics you would add to your graphic organizer?
- Wherever Jews have lived, except for Israel after 1948, they have been a small percentage of the population. How does this map help you understand the effects of antisemitism?
- What can you infer by exploring the change of Jewish populations throughout the world?

5. The student handout, ***Jewish Migration and Antisemitism after the Holocaust***, is distributed. Individually or in pairs, students read and annotate the handout by highlighting push factors for why Jews would want to leave Europe after the Holocaust. The class then discusses some of the following questions:

- What were some of the legal restrictions that existed to limit emigration of Jews out of Europe?
- What were some of the emotional factors experienced by Jews to either return to their prewar home or to leave? And if they decided to leave, where do you think they should have tried to go? Where did they go?
- Refer back to ***The Brief History of Israel*** handout if necessary. Were you surprised by the event of the *Exodus 1947*? How does this event help you understand the complex nature of postwar Europe, British Mandatory Palestine, and the founding of the State of Israel?

6. In small groups and utilizing the [Map of Jewish Populations](#), students complete the graphic organizer, ***The Perseverance of Jewish Life***, to examine a case study of Jewish life and culture after the Holocaust and how antisemitism has shaped the experiences of Jewish life in three distinct areas of the world: Poland, Israel, and the United States.

- Poland:
 - ***Reclamation of Jewish Life in Poland after near Annihilation***
 - **Andy Reti, (bio)**, describing the reasons he ultimately left Poland in 1956.
 - ***Life and Tragedy: The First Jewish Preschool in Lodz in 50 Years***
- Israel:
 - ***Postwar Jewish Life in Israel***
 - **Ruth Pearl, (bio)**, describing what she experienced during the Farhud, the anti-Jewish pogrom in Baghdad, Iraq, 1941.
 - **Moshe Shamir (bio)**, describing his emotions when he arrived in the State of Israel after surviving slave labor camps and a ghetto in Transnistria, and an internment camp in Cyprus.
 - ***A Survivor of the Holocaust and October 7, 2023***
- USA:
 - ***America: Land of Antisemitism, Refuge, and Opportunity***
 - **Regina Clipper (bio)**, describing antisemitic discrimination in the workplace while working in New York City. (Clip 74: 13:41-15:25)

7 Students present their findings to the class, tracing the human story they encountered in Poland, Israel, and the United States. As a summative task, the class then discusses some or all of the following questions:

- Regardless of where they were, how did antisemitism shape the lives of the Jewish people you studied?
- Reflecting on this lesson, what is the most significant aspect of Jewish life, populations, and culture that you have learned?

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 150-180 MINUTES