



LESSON PLAN: WHAT IS ANTISEMITISM AND WHAT ARE FEATURES OF ANTISEMITISM TODAY?

INTRODUCTION

Utilizing expertise from scholars and examples of historic and current antisemitism, this lesson seeks to help students to define and identify some of the essential features of antisemitism, particularly its enduring nature and ability to be manipulated in times of fear and uncertainty.

PART ONE: HOW IS ANTISEMITISM ITS OWN IDEOLOGY?

1 Students turn and talk to a partner about what the term antisemitism means to them. The handout, **Antisemitism**, is distributed or displayed and students discuss together, noting similarities to or differences from their personal definitions. Students learn that antisemitism is latent in parts of society, often laying relatively dormant until periods of social unrest when it can ignite.¹

2 In pairs, students are assigned one of the two sections below. After completing the **Features of Antisemitism** graphic organizer about the videos they watched, students switch partners and share their findings with their new partner who watched the other videos.

- a. Section 1: Students view the brief video, **The Nature of Antisemitism**, in which Professor Peter Hayes of Northwestern University discusses whether antisemitism has unique characteristics that distinguish it from other prejudices. Then, students watch the testimony of high school student **Stephanie** about her specific experience with antisemitism.
- b. Section 2: Students view the **Video Toolbox** on Antisemitism. They note key ideas, paying particular attention to stereotypes that appear repeatedly in different eras and the religious origins of antisemitism. Then, students watch the testimony of **Anneliese Nossbaum (bio)**.

3 As a culminating activity, in groups or as an entire class, students discuss the following questions:

- What were some common features of antisemitism that you found throughout the different videos?
- What illustrations of contemporary antisemitism do Anneliese and Stephanie provide? What other examples are you aware of in your own communities that show the destructive impact of antisemitism?
- How do you think social media has contributed to the mainstreaming of antisemitism? Why is it dangerous for antisemitism to become socially acceptable?

¹ Highlight that antisemitism has existed for millennia and is still prevalent today, which is why it is referred to as the “longest hatred.” Explain that we use the term contemporary antisemitism to describe this form of hatred in today’s world, and that it both reflects old hatreds and expresses itself in new and problematic forms.

- According to Professor Hayes, what makes antisemitism distinct from other forms of hate?
- How are Anneliese and Stephanie's lives harmed by the antisemitism they have faced? How is society harmed?

PART TWO: HOW HAS ANTISEMITISM BEEN EXPRESSED OVER TIME?

4. Students learn that they will investigate the ways in which antisemitism has been expressed over time and its connection to current manifestations in the world today. Students learn that antisemitism is latent in certain parts of society, often surges in times of fear and uncertainty (although it may surge in other contexts as well), and often functions as a skewed worldview that makes people vulnerable to conspiracy theories. Students view the testimony of **Anita Lasker Wallfisch (bio)** (Clip 6, 5:01-7:30) and the interview with **Dr. Dave Rich (bio)** and discuss the following questions:

- What are some features of antisemitism that Anita and Dave describe?
- Anita mentions the cycle of antisemitism that can often be triggered by a specific event. What are some recent examples of events that have sparked a rise in antisemitism?
- How has antisemitism become more normalized in your community today?
- According to Dave Rich, how does antisemitism differ from other types of prejudice?

5 The handout, *The Through Lines of Antisemitism*, is distributed and students review the directions. In small groups, they prepare for the exercise by replicating the chart from the handout on large sheets of chart paper or other format. They then proceed as follows:

- Part 1 – Historical Survey: Small groups are assigned at least one of the six sources in the handout, *Antisemitism Over Time*, which tracks some of the ways antisemitism has manifested over the past century. Groups review the assigned source(s) and add notes to their chart.
- Part 2 – Contemporary Examples: Small groups are assigned at least one statement and one visual from the *Antisemitic Words and Images* handout, which focuses on modern-day examples of antisemitism. As students review, they add notes to their chart, paying attention to the ways in which the contemporary manifestations are similar to and distinct from the historical case studies.

OPTIONAL: Consult the historical antisemitic tropes: antisemitism.adl.org

6 When groups have finished, students post their charts so they are visible to the whole class. Volunteers share back or highlight significant facts or ideas from the sources. The following questions are discussed:

- What enduring elements of antisemitism continue to show up time and again? From your perspective, why has antisemitism endured?
- What similarities and differences did you notice between earlier and more recent examples of antisemitism?
- How do these examples of antisemitism harm Jewish individuals?
- How does the persistence of antisemitism cause harm to society?

7 The quotes below from historian and Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, and Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi of Britain, are posted. Students journal in reflection of this lesson using the following prompts: “How has the blaming of Jews for the ills of society and the belief in conspiracy theories fueled antisemitism in the past and today? How does believing in antisemitic myths harm a person, a community, and society?”

“Antisemitism is not simply the hatred of something ‘foreign,’ but the hatred of a perpetual evil in the world. Jews are not an enemy but the ultimate enemy.”

“The hate that begins with Jews does not end with Jews.”

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 60-90 MINUTES