



LESSON PLAN: ACTION AND AGENCY - COMBATING ANTISEMITISM

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students consider the skills and qualities needed to act effectively to advocate for Jewish people and combat antisemitism by reflecting on case studies and testimonies. They learn practical ways to respond to antisemitism in their communities and identify a range of actions they might take in response to real-life scenarios of antisemitism.

WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES AND SKILLS NEEDED TO COMBAT ANTISEMITISM?

1 The lesson begins with students reflecting on quotes from Miep Gies about courage and our responsibility to take action against prejudice and hate. Background information from the **Miep Gies Quotes** handout is shared with the class and some or all of the quotes from the handout are displayed around the room. Students walk around the room, reviewing the quotes and choosing one to stand by that resonates for them. In small groups, they discuss some of the following questions:

- What resonated for you about the quote? Why is it meaningful to you? [Self-reflect on what values/skills are mentioned in this quote. Why is this value important in society?]
- 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?¹

2 Students reflect on Miep Gies’ sentiment that even an ordinary person can “turn on a small light in a dark room.” They learn that, during this lesson, they will investigate ways that ordinary people (them!) can stand up against prejudice and intolerance in their communities.

3 Students identify people they know in their own lives or in public life or history who have worked for a more just society. They turn and talk to a partner about what they think enabled these people to help others. The handout, **Profiles of Young Advocates**, is distributed, which features stories of ordinary people who have embodied characteristics such as being proud of their identity, combating antisemitism, and building bridges between different groups of people. In small groups, students read at least one of the profiles and create a list of attributes and values that enabled that person or people to advocate for a better society.

After creating their lists, each group decides on three qualities they think are most important to be proud of one’s identity, combat antisemitism, and build bridges. They write those qualities “graffiti style” on

¹ If you have taught *Echoes & Reflections Unit 8 on Rescue and Righteous Among the Nations*, refer back to Miep Gies’ speech, Anne Frank’s Legacy, and make relevant connections.

large sheets of chart paper posted at the front of the room. The class discusses why they prioritized these qualities and what they think it might take for them to manifest these characteristics in situations involving antisemitism and hatred in their own lives.

4. Students next practice applying some of the behaviors they have thought about to real-life scenarios. The handout, **Action Planning**, is distributed and the directions are reviewed together. In small groups students are assigned a scenario from the **Taking Action: Scenarios for Discussion** handout (or they select one that feels relevant to them). Students discuss the scenario using the questions provided and then complete the action planning grid in response to the scenario.

5 When students have completed the task, they 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, students report back on the highlights of their initial discussions and share the action plans they have devised.

6 Students review the biographies and view the testimonies of **Henry Oertelt (bio)** and **Jair Melchior (third one) (bio)**, which emphasize the importance of creating understanding across our human differences and standing against all forms of prejudice. They discuss some or all of the following questions:

- Jair Melchior stresses self-reflection. What can you personally do better to learn more and better understand antisemitism and its damaging effect on Jews and society? What can your community do?
- 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 hatred around us?
- What can and should we do to combat antisemitism that calls for violence, particularly calls to kill Jews wherever they are?
- Why is combating antisemitism an essential component of protecting diverse democracies? Why is it important for Jews and non-Jews to fight antisemitism?

7 As a summative assessment, students design a bookmark, bumper, sticker, t-shirt, or social media content that speaks to the essential question, “What can we do to make a difference in the face of antisemitism?” Students draw on relevant information and ideas from the featured sources to devise a main slogan for their product and 3-5 brief accompanying phrases that challenge a specific example of antisemitism that they encountered in this unit. Students create their designs individually or in small groups. As an optional follow-up, they can print and distribute their designs to others.

OPTIONAL EXTENSION: 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. The **Group Action Project** document offers 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.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 60 MINUTES