



Lesson 8: The Long Hatred

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Objective: Students will learn that anti-Semitism has a long history which continues right up through today.

Activity:

The teacher offers the students a snack--matzoh with honey or jam. She does not say much about the matzoh; she lets the students simply enjoy it. As they snack, she revisits a key term with her students:

Anti-Semitism is the hatred of Jews, and it has been around for a long time.

The students eat while the teacher outlines the barest history of Anti-Semitism:

- *In ancient times, Jews were misunderstood and despised because their religion was different from other religions: the Jews worshipped one God only (Judaism was the first monotheistic religion), while the other religions—pagan religions—worshipped many gods.*
- *During the time of the Roman Empire, Jews enjoyed little freedom. Many Jews were enslaved and only a few were allowed to become citizens.*
- *During the early days of Christianity, Christians asked Jews to denounce their religion and become Christian. When Jews refused to abandon their faith, early Christians resented them.*
- *Since the 4th century (and perhaps earlier) Christians have accused Jews of **deicide**—the murder of Christ. Even today, this unjust accusation is still believed by some people.*
- *As the centuries wore on, Christians increasingly viewed Jews as “outsiders.” This was in part because Jews followed their own dietary laws, practiced their*

own customs, and in short lived in ways that were different from the ways Christians lived. The Jews paid a high price for being different.

- *As history continued into the Middle Ages, Jews were forced to live apart from non-Jews, in **ghettos**. Often Jews were not allowed to own land. They were frequently forced to wear labels or clothing that marked them as different.*
- *Some Jews became money-lenders. Handling money was viewed as “dirty” by many Christians, so they forced this “dirty work” on Jews.*
- *Starting in the 11th century, with the Crusades, Christian knights murdered thousands of Jews and destroyed their homes as they rode across Europe, heading for the Holy Land in order to occupy it.*
- *For the next several hundred years, throughout Europe, Jews suffered simply because they were Jews. They were massacred. Their homes were looted and destroyed. Their sacred texts—the Talmud and the Torah—were publicly burned, and sometimes Jews themselves were burned at the stake.*
- *During the 18th and 19th centuries, the French Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment brought some freedom and safety to the Jews who lived in Western Europe.*
- *But for the Jews of Eastern Europe, violence and persecution increased. **Pogroms**—mob attacks—terrorized Jews in Eastern Europe and Russia.*
- *Throughout Western and Eastern Europe, anti-Semitic legends and folktales were well-known. Some anti-Semitic legends portrayed Jews as evildoers who poisoned the water in town wells. Other legends portrayed Jews as power-hungry conspirators plotting to overthrow the world.*

The teacher pauses and asks the students if they have questions. She answers them. Then she offers the students more matzoh. As they eat, she tells them about matzoh:

I gave you matzoh today so you could enjoy a food that has been a staple for Jewish people for centuries. It’s an interesting food for us to think about while we discuss anti-Semitism.

Hundreds of years ago, ignorant people spread lies about Jews. One popular is known today as the Blood Libel. According to the Blood Libel, Jews kidnapped and killed Christian children then used the children’s blood to make their matzoh—bread like the bread you’re eating right now.

Ignorant people all over Europe believed the Blood Libel.

The teacher invites the students to discuss popular lies that circulate now. The students discuss the dangerous nature of these lies, and the harm they do.

Then the teacher shifts gears:

Who can explain what a fairy tale is?

The students discuss fairy tales. They throw out examples, and the teacher makes her point:

Throughout history, parents have told their children fairy tales to make them afraid—of the forest, for example. “Hansel and Gretel” is a fairy tale with an unspoken message. That “hidden” message is a warning: Stay out of the forest! It’s full of danger.

If anti-Semitic parents wanted their children to stay clear of Jews, they might tell frightening stories about them.

Here’s an example of an Anti-Semitic story. It was published in Germany in 1938, in a children’s book. The story is called “The Poisonous Mushroom.” Please listen carefully:

The story may be downloaded at <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/story2.htm>.

When the teacher finishes reading the story, she opens a discussion that leads to certain understandings:

All of us have been influenced by stories. Scary stories have made us fear the dark, or the Boogey Man, or the Hook.

“The Poisonous Mushroom” is a story that made young children fear Jews. “The Poisonous Mushroom” encouraged anti-Semitic feelings in children.

Now let’s talk about another kind of story.

The teacher holds up a picture book. The book is *The Golem, A Jewish Legend*.

Anti-Semitism was such a problem for Jews that they also told stories--stories of Jewish resistance, Jewish strength. One such story was the legend of the Golem. Please listen.

She reads *The Golem* to the students. She is careful to show students the illustrations as she reads.

When the story is finished, she asks the students guiding questions:

- *In Prague, Czechoslovakia, Rabbi Lev created a superhero. Why did Rabbi Lev believe the Jews needed a superhero?*

- *At first, how did the Golem protect the Jews?*
- *At the end of the story, what was Rabbi Lev forced to do? Why?*

The students discuss Rabbi Lev's decision to destroy the Golem. The teacher continues:

Stories are powerful. Some stories, like "The Poisonous Mushroom," fill children with fear and revulsion. Some stories, like The Golem, offer children hope but also make them think. The Golem asks an important question: What happens when power goes unchecked?

The next time you read or hear a story, ask yourself, What is this story really saying? Beneath the surface of the words, what message is hiding?

She brings the conversation back to the Holocaust:

Anti-Semitism is sometimes called the Long Hatred because it has gone on for centuries. Hitler didn't invent it. Hitler simply repeated lies that were already in the air. Hitler exploited anti-Semitism. He took advantage of it. He played on people's fear and hatred of Jews to fulfill his goal of ridding the world of Jews.

If anti-Semitism didn't exist, would Hitler have had a harder job murdering Jews?

She connects anti-Semitism to the students' lives:

When we talk about anti-Semitism, we also need to talk about our own prejudices and fears too. Are there groups we pre-judge? Groups we fear out of ignorance?

The students discuss their prejudices and fears. The teacher encourages openness and honesty. Then she asks them to open their Journals:

Please write about a lie you've heard—a lie against others. What was the lie? Did you believe it? Did you spread it? Whether you believed it or not, did it affect your thinking? Your behavior?

The students write. If time permits, volunteers share their writing.

The teacher instructs the students to add key terms to the word list in their Holocaust Journals:

- **Ghetto**
- **Pogrom**
- **Other terms at the teacher's discretion**

Class ends. The teacher thanks everyone for their honest participation.

Materials:

- Matzoh and honey or jam
- “The Poisonous Mushroom,” available online from the German Propaganda Archive.
- <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/story2.htm>
- Note: The German Propaganda Archive of Calvin College is an invaluable resource for examples of all forms of Holocaust-related propaganda. Access the archive at www.calvin.edu.
- *The Golem: A Jewish Legend*, by Beverly Brodsky McDermott. Published by J.P. Lippincott, 1976.
- The Students’ Holocaust Journals and pencils or pens