



Remembering the Holocaust and Combating Xenophobia on January 27th Lesson Plan

Ages: **Junior and Senior High School Students**

Duration: **1 Hour**

- **Introduction**
- **Background**
- **Classroom Activity**
- **Contemporary Connections**
- **Conclusion**

Introduction

In recent years, a number of European countries have established a Holocaust Remembrance Day. Denmark, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom, as well as other nations, have legislated that annually on the 27th of January (the day on which Auschwitz was liberated by the Red Army), ceremonies and other special events will be held to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust.

Although several European governments have instituted an annual Holocaust Day of Remembrance, racism, antisemitism and xenophobia have not abated. Clearly, as indicated in a recent European Union commissioned report, antisemitism has dramatically risen in many European countries.

In an effort to promote Holocaust awareness, as well as to foster consciousness about the dangerous rise of antisemitism in Europe, the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem has developed this classroom activity for junior and senior high school students about the racial, antisemitic discrimination of Jewish children during the Holocaust and its contemporary connections.

Background

Within a few months after Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, many Jewish pupils in public school already began feeling ostracized from their peers and teachers. Almost overnight, Jewish students in Nazi Germany had become social outcasts. As Martin Buber, a well-known twentieth-century philosopher, noted in 1933, *"...One had a friend; the friend was taken for granted like the sunlight. But suddenly he becomes a total stranger and mocks you. One had a teacher, one felt that in his presence all was in order; but suddenly he lost his voice, refusing to answer questions. In the field where one played with schoolmates, one is unwelcome."*



On November 15, 1938, Jewish children were officially banned from German schools. This law, promulgated after *Kristallnacht* (the Night of Broken Glass) expelled Jewish pupils from the general education system, even where special classes for Jews existed. Even before the official ban, many children had switched from public schools to Jewish schools because of the antisemitic climate and harassment on the part of non-Jewish teachers and students.

Classroom Activity and Discussion Questions



'The Jewish Nose is Wide at the End and Looks like the Number Six'

After looking carefully at the above illustration, read the following testimonies of Jewish pupils, Rosemarie Moskin, who was fourteen years old, and Moshe Sandberg (Sanbar), who was seventeen years old, recounting their experiences in school.

Rosemarie Moskin

"I sat down by myself in one of the back rows of the auditorium, wondering what the principal wanted from us. And without really listening to his words I knew what he was going to say. 'Someday you will return - we will welcome you back with open arms. But now we must part. My heart is heavy as I tell you this news. But I have no choice.'"

Moshe Sandberg/Sanbar

"...One teacher in particular went out of his way to humiliate me. He was a history teacher named Bencur. During one lesson he began to quote from a speech of Hitler's to the effect that the Jews should be wiped off from the face of the earth. Turning to me he asked what I thought of the speech and of that particular sentence. I did not know what to reply and I think I said nothing. So he began to shout, saying that I was treating the question and him and all of the teachers disrespectfully, and he finally dismissed me from the class."



Source material taken from: I. B. Tatelbaum, *Through Our Eyes: Children Witness the Holocaust* (Yad Vashem: Jerusalem, 2004).

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the antisemitic caricatures highlighted on the blackboard?
2. Compare and contrast the actions of Moshe's teacher with those of Rosemarie's principal. Do you think that Rosemarie's principal was antisemitic? Why or why not?
3. In the end, both Rosemarie and Moshe had to leave school. The way in which both teachers related to their students was different, yet the end result was the same. Should we place both educators in the same category?
4. How would you describe the feelings of Rosemarie and Moshe as students in public schools under Nazi rule?

Contemporary Connections

The Holocaust happened approximately sixty years ago, yet antisemitism has not disappeared. We must not simplistically equate today's situation to that of Nazi Germany in the 1930s. After all, Jews in Europe live as equal citizens in democratic nations and they enjoy civil rights protected by law.

However, in several European countries, Jewish pupils and their families have recently been the victims of violent antisemitic attacks. Synagogues have been burned, Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated with swastikas, and walls in Jewish neighborhoods have been defaced with graffiti calling for "*Death to Jews*" and "*Jews to Gas Chambers.*"

In summer 2005, Jewish cemeteries across the European continent have been vandalized. For instance, in Budapest approximately 130 graves were desecrated. In the East London district of West Ham, 90 headstones were vandalized. In Prestwich near North Manchester, 96 Jewish graves were smashed, and in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, vandals spray-painted red swastikas on 26 tombstones in the local Jewish cemetery.

Discussion Questions and Suggested Activities

1. Does the spraying of Nazi symbols in Jewish cemeteries hurt the image of today's Europe? Explain your answer.
2. Are you aware of antisemitic incidents that have taken place in your school or in your region? If so, how were they handled by the authorities?



3. Check local newspapers, magazines and Internet news sources. How does the media report recent antisemitic incidents in your area?

Conclusion

During the Weimar Republic, the Nazis began assaulting Jews with words. Following their rise to power in 1933, verbal attacks were gradually followed by economic discrimination and later by physical destruction. It is important to remember that man's inhumanity to man in Auschwitz did not originate in Auschwitz, but rather it began with the demonization of Jews: antisemitism.

Antisemitic slurs such as, "*Burn in the Oven, Jews*", refer to the crematoria that were built at Auschwitz and other Nazi camps during the Holocaust. On the 27th of January, the day on which we mark the liberation of Auschwitz, we must honor not only the memory of human beings who were murdered simply because of their race, but we must also confront how the Holocaust has become part of contemporary antisemitic slogans and strongly combat antisemitism in our midst.

By fighting contemporary antisemitism and other forms of xenophobia in our respective schools, we safeguard Holocaust memory and thereby put its universal lessons into practice.

