

# **Sample Lesson: Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans**

Theme: Identity

Disciplinary Area: Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 3, 4, 6

Standards Alignment:

CA HSS Analysis Skills (9–12): Chronological and Spatial Thinking 1; Historical Interpretation 1, 3, 4

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7 10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9

## **Lesson Purpose and Overview:**

This lesson introduces students to antisemitism and its manifestations through the lens of Jewish Middle Eastern Americans, also known as Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews, whose contemporary history is defined by recent struggles as targets of discrimination, prejudice and hate crimes in the United States and globally. Students will analyze and research narratives, primary, and secondary sources about Mizrahi Jews. The source analysis contextualizes the experience of Jewish Middle Eastern Americans within the larger framework of systems of power (economic, political, social).

## **Key Terms and Concepts:**

Mizrahi, antisemitism, indigeneity, ethnicity, prejudice, refugees, diaspora, immigration, intersectionality

## **Lesson Objective (students will be able to...):**

1. Develop an understanding of Jewish Middle Eastern Americans (who are also referred to as Arab Jews, Mizrahi Jews, Sephardic Jews, and Persian Jews) and differentiate the various identities, nationalities, and subethnicities that make up the Jewish American community.
2. Develop an understanding of contemporary antisemitism and identify how the Jewish Middle Eastern American community today is impacted by prejudice and discrimination against them, as intersectional refugees, immigrants, and racialized Jewish Americans.
3. Students will construct a visual, written, and oral summary of antisemitism in the United States using multiple written and digital texts.

### **Essential Questions:**

- Who are Jewish Americans? Who are Jews of Middle Eastern descent?
- What is antisemitism? What are the manifestations of antisemitism as experienced by intersectional, Jewish Middle Eastern Americans?
- What new possibilities can students imagine and actions can they take to address antisemitism?

### **Lesson Steps/Activities**

#### Day One: Antisemitism and Jewish Ethnic Diversity

Introduce the lesson by posting the words “Antisemitism” and “Jewish Americans” to engage students in a discussion of who Jewish Americans are and about the discrimination that they face.

1. Begin by asking students what is antisemitism and who are Jewish Americans? Write their responses on the board under the columns of *Antisemitism* and *Jewish Americans*. After responses have been written on the board list the various subethnic groups under the *Jewish American* column such as Ashkenazi/Eastern European, Mizrahi & Sephardic/Middle Eastern and North African, Iranian/Persian, Israeli, Ethiopian, Russian, and Latinx.

2. Tell students “that following expulsions by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the Romans in 70 CE from the land of Israel, many indigenous Jews established new homes in the Middle East and beyond forming the Jewish diaspora. In a Jewish historical context, the term *diaspora* refers to Jews living outside of Israel. More broadly, the term diaspora refers to ethnic or religious populations that are dispersed from modern-day Israel. Today, Jews are a racially and ethnically diverse group that continues to face antisemitism in the United States and in countries around the world.

Tell the students that today “they are going to delve deeper into the experience of discrimination, hate, and violence against Jewish Middle Eastern Americans at present while imagining a response to it. Explain to students that since the 1940s, one-million Jewish refugees from the Middle East, who are also known as Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews, fled antisemitic persecution to countries around the world.

Today, the U.S. has a population of an estimated 900,000 Jews who descend from Mizrahi and Sephardic Jewish refugees from the Middle East including an estimated 250,000 – 300,000 in California. Individuals in these communities have intersectional identities as a result of experiencing prejudice and discrimination as Jewish Americans, as Middle Eastern refugees and immigrants, and some as people of color.”

Today and for homework, the students will explore primary and secondary sources to understand antisemitism as it is experienced by Jewish Middle Eastern Americans in the U.S.

3. Provide Handout A and read it together.
4. Distribute Handout B to each student in groups of six. These graphic organizers have hyperlinks for all the sources but students will need to take notes in a notebook. If computers are available, students can use them to read material and

watch videos. Within groups, students can work in elbow pairs to complete one or two sources on the graphic organizer.

5. Explain the columns of the graphic organizer and provide a small amount of context for the sources (e.g., highlighting primary or secondary sources, identifying narratives, and including a review of secondary sources like credible news articles, scholarly research, interviews, statistics, informational videos, etc.).
6. Provide students with class time to work on the assignment. They should also work on the assignment as homework.
  - a. For individual student assessments, each student is required to hand in their graphic organizer notes in the form of an essay.
7. As follow up, teachers should facilitate a discussion about antisemitism experienced by Jewish Middle Eastern Americans utilizing the following questions:
  - a. How have the intersectional identities of Jewish Middle Eastern Americans resulted in multiple experiences of discrimination? How have other ethnic groups experienced similar forms of discrimination?
  - b. What is the effect of hateful images and speech? Do images and words reflect existing attitudes or create them?
  - c. How is antisemitism similar to or different from other forms of group hatred?
  - d. What can we do to make a difference?

**Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection:**

1. Students will conduct research on antisemitism (past and present) of Mizrahi Jews in the United States through primary and secondary sources.

2. Students will write a five paragraph essay detailing the impacts of antisemitism and linking them to past and present events. Students are encouraged to imagine new possibilities to combat antisemitism by developing potential responses to it.

## **Materials and Resources:**

### **Day One:**

-HANDOUT A - Definition of antisemitism

-HANDOUT B – Graphic Organizer (note all sources are also hyperlinked)

- Naar, Devin. “The Myth of Jewish Immigration.” Jewish in Seattle Magazine, 29 Aug. 2018 <https://mag.jewishinseattle.org/community/2018/08/the-myth-of-jewish-immigration>
- Samuel, Sigal. “For Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, Whiteness Was a Fragile Identity Long Before Trump.” Forward, 6 Dec. 2016 <https://forward.com/opinion/356271/for-sephardic-and-mizrahi-jews-whiteness-was-a-fragile-identity-long-before/>
- Melamed, Karmel. “We survived Khomeini, we’ll survive this attack on Nessah.” The Times of Israel, 16 Dec. 2019. <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/we-survived-khomeini-well-survive-this-attack-on-nessah-synagogue/>
- Ellis, Emma Grey. “The Internet Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” Wired, 12 Mar. 2017 <https://www.wired.com/2017/03/internet-protocols-elders-zion/>
- Facing History and Ourselves, Antisemitism on UC College Campuses <https://www.facinghistory.org/standing-up-hatred-intolerance/antisemitism-us-campuses>
- Los Angeles County Commission on Human Rights, 2018 Hate Crime Report, <https://hrc.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2018-Hate-Crime-Report.pdf> Please note that this resource contains explicit language that will need to be redacted or contextualized for students.

## Videos Options to Screen

- CNN, Has antisemitism returned with a vengeance?  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJQ3x9YDiYE>

## Podcast

- UCLA, Then and Now. Are Jews White? A Conversation on Race, Erasure, and Sephardic History with Devin Naar  
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/952522/5280526-are-jews-white-a-conversation-on-race-erasure-and-sephardic-history-with-devin-naar>

## HANDOUT A: Defining Antisemitism

### History: Antisemitism as a form of racism

In the late 1800s, many European and American scientists continued to divide humankind into smaller and smaller “races.” One of these was the “Semitic race,” which they used to categorize Jews. The term antisemitism was coined by German Wilhelm Marr, who published a pamphlet in 1878 titled “The Victory of Judaism over Germandom.” Filled with lies and myths about Jews, Marr’s pamphlet argued that Jews were more than a distinct “race.” They were dangerous and alien, intent on maliciously destroying German society.

Historian Deborah Dwork explains that, “The move from anti-Judaism—against the religion—to antisemitism with this notion of ‘race’ was only possible when Europeans conceived of the idea of race. And once they had conceived of the idea of race in the 19th century, Wilhelm Marr had the notion that Jews constituted a ‘race.’ And thus, antisemitism can be seen as a form of racism.” <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-holocaust-and-human-behavior/roots-and-impact-antisemitis>

### Modern Definitions of Antisemitism

According to the **Anti-Defamation League (ADL)**, the world’s leading organization committed to stopping the defamation of the Jewish people antisemitism is, “*The belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews.*”

According to the **International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)**, the only intergovernmental organization mandated to focus solely on Holocaust-related issues, “*Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.*”



## HANDOUT B: Graphic Organizer

Use the graphic organizer below to gather pertinent information from the articles. Each student is required to take notes and write a 5-paragraph essay. Your essay could provide information on the historical background, factors that led to antisemitism, impact of antisemitism, and what resolutions/responses have been or could be created to combat antisemitism. Use your binders to take notes!

Article	Source (primary or secondary)	Historical Background, Summary	Factors Leading to antisemitism	Effects/ Impact of antisemitism	Response, Advocacy, Resolution
<a href="https://mag.jewishinseattle.org/community/2018/08/the-myth-of-jewish-immigration">https://mag.jewishinseattle.org/community/2018/08/the-myth-of-jewish-immigration</a>	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]
<a href="https://forward.com/opinion/356271/for-sephardic-and-mizrahi-jews-whiteness-was-a-fragile-identity-long-before/">https://forward.com/opinion/356271/for-sephardic-and-mizrahi-jews-whiteness-was-a-fragile-identity-long-before/</a>	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]
<a href="https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/we-survived-khomeini-well-survive-this-attack-on-nessah-synagogue/">https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/we-survived-khomeini-well-survive-this-attack-on-nessah-synagogue/</a>	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]
<a href="https://www.wired.com/2017/03/internet-protocols-elders-zion/">https://www.wired.com/2017/03/internet-protocols-elders-zion/</a>	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]
<a href="https://www.facinghistory.org/standing-up-hatred-intolerance/antisemitism-us-campuses">https://www.facinghistory.org/standing-up-hatred-intolerance/antisemitism-us-campuses</a>	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]
2018 LA Hate Crimes (Read pages 34-37)	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]	[fill in]