LESSON PLAN

Deadly Shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue

Compelling Question: Is the recent deadly shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue a reflection of the rise in antisemitic incidents in the U.S.?

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<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Common Core Standards</th>
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<tr>
<td>K-2</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Reading: R1, R4</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Speaking &amp; Listening: SL1, SL2</td>
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<td>Language: L4, L6</td>
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LESSON OVERVIEW

On the morning of October 27, 2018, at Sabbath services—the holy day of the week for the Jewish community—Robert Bowers entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA and yelled "All Jews must die," then opened fire upon the congregants. He was armed with an assault rifle and several handguns and killed eleven congregants and wounded six others, four of whom are police officers. When surrendering to law enforcement, Bowers told an officer that he "wanted all Jews to die" and that Jews "were committing genocide against his people." This shooting is the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in the U.S.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to analyze this incident in the context of the shooter's background and history of antisemitism, as well as the nationwide rise of antisemitic incidents over the last year. In this lesson, students will learn more about the incident, understand and consider the larger context of antisemitism in the U.S., explore how the escalation of hate operates and how allyship can make a difference.

[Note to Teacher: Because this lesson is specifically about antisemitism, it is important to consider that you may have students in your classroom who are Jewish. Be prepared and sensitive to those students, taking into account the extent to which they are a minority or majority of your classroom and plan accordingly. Some students who are Jewish may feel relieved and comfortable discussing these issues in class and others may feel nervous, uncomfortable or angry to be talking about a topic so close to home. You may want to talk with those students in advance and determine how they can discuss this topic while feeling comfortable and safe.]

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand more about the deadly shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA on October 27, 2018.
- Students will reflect on the larger context of the recent increase in antisemitic incidents and crimes.
- Students will explore the escalation of bias into hate and understand how this incident fits into that concept.
- Students will identify ways to act as an ally to those targeted and victimized by the attack and by antisemitism in general.

Web Related Connections

Lessons
- Antisemitic Incidents: Being an Ally, Advocate and Activist
- Challenging Antisemitism: Debunking the Myths and Responding with Facts
- Antisemitism Around the World: Global 100™
- Swastikas and Other Hate Symbols

Table Talk
- Gun Violence and Mass Shootings

Other Resources
- 10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism
- Empowering Young People in the Aftermath of Hate (In English and En Español)
- Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories About Bias and Injustice
- 2022 Audit of Antisemitic Incidents

Key Words

(See ADL's Education Glossary Terms.)

allyship, animus, antisemitism, condemnation, de-humanization, discrimination, disparage, empathy, free speech, genocide, microaggressions, moral equivalency, neo-Nazis, offensive, opprobrium, permissive, pipe bomb, platitudinous, systematic, unequivocally, white supremacists, xenophobic
MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- Background Information: Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting Incident (for teacher)
- Pyramid of Hate (one for each student)
- Pyramid of Allyship Worksheet (one for each student)
- Index cards (one for each student)
- Several pieces of chart paper and markers (optional)

PROCEDURES

Information Sharing

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: Does anyone know what happened at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA in 2018?
2. Share some or all of the background information on the incident.
3. If students don’t know the definition of antisemitism, elicit/provide the following definition:
   Antisemitism: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are Jewish based on the belief in stereotypes and myths about Jewish people, Judaism and Israel.
4. Engage students in a brief discussion by asking:
   - When you first heard about what happened at the Tree of Life Synagogue, what were your thoughts and feelings about it?
   - What did you learn now that you didn’t know before?
   - Why do you think there has been an increase in antisemitic incidents?
   - How does the increase in antisemitism impact our society?
   - Do you think the increase in reports of antisemitism is related to this recent incident? Please explain.

Reading Activity

1. Distribute a copy of the article, “The Hate Poisoning America” to each student. Explain that the article is a New York Times editorial article. Explain that an editorial is an article that is written by the senior editorial staff of a newspaper/publication and it expresses a point of view or opinion on an issue. Give students ten minutes to read the article.

   Note: As an alternative to reading in class, you can provide the article for students to read for homework the evening before you teach this lesson.

2. Engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
   - What is The New York Times’ editorial staff’s point of view about “the hate poisoning America?”
   - What evidence do they give for their position that hate is on the rise?
   - What did you learn about the shooter, his background and his motivation to engage in the deadly shooting spree in the synagogue?
   - Besides antisemitism, what other forms of bias does the article reference and how are these biases connected?
   - What do you think about the editorial’s ideas for solutions?
What did you learn that you didn’t know before?
If you could, what would you add to their editorial or how would you respond in your own editorial?

Examining Levels of Bias Activity: Pyramid of Hate

1. Distribute the Pyramid of Hate handout to each student. Go over the different categories in the Pyramid of Hate, defining any words that the students do not know. Review the following points:

   - The Pyramid shows biased attitudes, behaviors and actions, growing in complexity from the bottom to the top. Although the behaviors at each level negatively impact individuals and groups, as one moves up the pyramid, the behaviors have more life-threatening consequences. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels. If people or institutions treat behaviors on the lower levels as being acceptable or “normal,” it results in the behaviors at the next level becoming more accepted.

   - The Pyramid of Hate demonstrates the way that biased attitudes and behaviors can escalate if they are unchecked or unchallenged by others. It also illustrates how systemic oppression and genocide is built upon the acceptance of behaviors described in the lower levels of the pyramid. Conversely, when those lower levels are addressed and confronted, the escalation gets interrupted and the more serious levels of hate are halted.

   - Many people describe the behaviors at the bottom level of the pyramid as being “subtle and insignificant.” Like a pyramid, however, the levels above are supported by the lower levels. If people or institutions treat behaviors on the lower level as being acceptable or “normal,” it may not be long before the behaviors at the next more serious and potentially violent levels become more accepted. While the “higher” levels of the pyramid are more life-threatening (e.g., violence, genocide), the impact on the individual of experiencing the lower levels should not be underestimated—particularly if they experience them over a long period of time.

2. Engage students in a discussion using the following questions:

   - How does the Pyramid of Hate relate to the recent shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA?
   - Where would you place this incident on the Pyramid of Hate?
   - If we look at the Pyramid of Hate through the lens of antisemitism, what behaviors and attitudes might be at the bottom levels of the pyramid?
   - What is the value of the Pyramid of Hate when learning about bias, prejudice, discrimination and specific forms like antisemitism?
   - What new information did you learn through exploring the Pyramid of Hate?
   - At what level of the pyramid do you think it would be easiest for someone (or an institution) to intervene with biased behaviors?

Ally Behavior Activity: Pyramid of Allyship

1. Explain that there are ways we can address and prevent bias, hate and discrimination in our lives. Ask students: What does it mean to act as an ally? Elicit a definition of ally as follows:

   Ally: Someone who speaks out on behalf of someone else or takes actions that are supportive of someone else.

2. Briefly brainstorm some ways that people acted as allies (or could) in relation to the deadly shooting at Tree of Life Synagogue. Keep this short because students are going to engage in a more in-depth exploration of allyship in their small groups.

3. Divide students into small groups of 4–5 students each. Distribute the Pyramid of Allyship Worksheet to each student or give them one piece of chart paper and markers for their whole group. Have the students assign a reporter and recorder. Have the small groups work together to identify actions that individuals, groups or institutions can take to address bias and in this specific case, antisemitism. Instruct students to refer to their
Pyramid of Hate handout and use it as a guide for identifying actions and ally behavior at each level. They should record their groups’ responses in the appropriate level on the Pyramid of Allyship in the categories listed below. If you want to provide an example for each level, some general ideas are provided below. Explain to students that they should come up with at least two ideas per section of the Pyramid.

**Biased Attitudes:** Reflecting on my own stereotypes about different groups of people

**Acts of Bias:** Interrupting an offensive joke

**Discrimination:** Attending a rally or demonstration to highlight institutional discrimination

**Bias-Motivated Violence:** Helping to repair a mosque or synagogue that has been vandalized

**Genocide:** Holding a fundraiser to support organizations dedicated to ending the crisis to the Rohingya people in Myanmar

4. Reconvene the class and have the recorders from each group share their group’s Pyramid of Allyship.

5. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
   - Was it difficult or easy to come up with specific action to act as an ally?
   - Can you describe a time you acted as an ally? What motivated you to do so?
   - Are there times that you have not acted as an ally when you had the opportunity to do so? What factors led to your decision not to act as an ally?
   - Has anyone ever acted as an ally on your behalf? How did that make you feel?
   - How can you tell what someone wants you to say or do to be their ally?
   - What is one ally behavior you will consider acting upon as a result of this discussion?
   - What did you learn by doing this activity?

**Closing**

1. Distribute index cards to each student. Have them complete the following sentences about today’s lesson.
   - I feel …
   - I learned …
   - I will …

2. When finished, do a go-round and have each student share what’s on their card. If time is limited, have each student read one of their sentences.

**ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES**

- “11 people were gunned down at a Pittsburgh synagogue. Here are their stories” (CNN, October 30, 2018)
- Antisemitism Uncovered (ADL)
- Deadly Shooting at Pittsburgh Synagogue (ADL blog, October 27, 2018)
- “Synagogue shooting ‘will not break us. It will not ruin us,’ rabbi says at vigil” (CNN, October 29, 2018)
- “The terrible numbers that grow with each mass shooting” (The Washington Post, October 29, 2018)
- “Trump laments Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, then suggests victims should have protected themselves” (Vox, October 27, 2018)
## Common Core Standards

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT AREA/STANDARD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>R4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking and Listening</strong></td>
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<td>SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</td>
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<td>SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.</td>
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<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
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<td>L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.</td>
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Background Information: Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting Incident

- On the morning of October 27, 2018 which was a Saturday (Sabbath, or the holy day, for the Jewish community) Robert Bowers entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA and yelled “All Jews must die,” and opened fire on the congregants. He was armed with an assault rifle and several handguns and killed eleven congregants and wounded six others, four of whom are police officers. When surrendering to law enforcement, Bowers told an officer that he “wanted all Jews to die” and that Jews “were committing genocide against his people.” This deadly shooting is the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in the U.S.

- The shooter, Robert Bowers posted on Gab, a social media site frequented by right-wing extremists, which highlighted his virulent antisemitic beliefs. The vast majority of his posts are anti-Semitic in nature. Alongside his antisemitic comments, Bowers also posted xenophobic anti-immigrant content, claiming that Jews are helping to transport members of the large groups of undocumented immigrants making their way north towards the U.S. from Latin America. The last of his social media posts claimed that “HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in.” (HIAS is a Jewish organization that provides humanitarian aid and assistance to refugees.) The post, made just a short time before the attack on the synagogue began, may help explain the shooter’s motivation for the attack.

- The names of the victims are as follows: Irving Younger, Melvin Wax, Rose Mallinger, Bernice Simon, Sylvan Simon, Jerry Rabinowitz, Joyce Fienberg, Richard Gottfried, Daniel Stein, Cecil Rosenthal, David Rosenthal. To learn more about them, use the article below.

- Each year, ADL tracks incidents of antisemitic harassment, vandalism and assault in the United States. In 2022, ADL tabulated 3,697 antisemitic incidents throughout the United States. This is a 36% increase from the 2,717 incidents tabulated in 2021 and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979.

- There was a total of 3,697 incidents, which fall into three major categories: (1) harassment, where a Jewish person or group of people feel harassed by the perceived antisemitic words, spoken or written, or actions of someone else; (2) vandalism, where property is damaged in a manner that indicates the presence of antisemitic animus or in a manner that victimizes Jews for their religious affiliations, and (3) assault, where people’s bodies are targeted with violence accompanied by expressions of antisemitic animus.

- Vandalism saw the largest increase in 2022. With 1,288 incidents recorded, this is an 51% increase over the 853 incidents reported in 2021. Antisemitic incidents took place in a wide variety of locations, including places of business, private homes, public areas such as parks and streets, Jewish institutions like temples and synagogues, schools, and colleges/universities. Although the largest number of incidents typically occur in public areas, in 2022 there were 331 incidents being reported in K-12 schools.
Pyramid of Hate

- **Biased Attitudes**
  - Stereotyping, Fear of differences, Justifying biases by seeking out like-minded people, Seeking out information to confirm one's existing beliefs and/or biases, Lack of self-reflection or awareness of privilege

- **Acts of Bias**
  - Non-inclusive language, Insensitive remarks, Microaggressions, Biased and belittling jokes, Cultural appropriation, Social avoidance and/or exclusion, Name-calling, Ridicule, Bullying, Slurs and epithets, Dehumanization

- **Systemic Discrimination**
  - Criminal justice disparities, Inequitable school resource distribution, Housing segregation, Inequitable employment opportunities, Wage disparities, Voter restrictions and suppression, Unequal media representation

- **Bias-Motivated Violence**
  - Threats, Desecration, Vandalism, Arson, Assault, Rape, Murder, Terrorism

- **Genocide**
  - The act or intent to deliberately and systematically annihilate an entire people
Pyramid of Allyship Worksheet

Genocide
Bias-Motivated Violence
Systemic Discrimination
Acts of Bias
Biased Attitudes

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