

No Place for Hate[®] Activity Library

The Holocaust and the Escalation of Hate

Lesson Plan and Overview

Student Activity: [How Does Hate Escalate? An Examination of the Past & Present](#)

From biased attitudes and actions to bias-motivated violence and genocide, understanding how bias and hate escalate is a critical aspect of anti-bias learning. Through the lens of the Holocaust as a case study and the testimony of two survivors of the Holocaust, students will explore and understand the concept of the escalation of hate. The Pyramid of Hate will serve as a tool to help students understand the ways hate accelerates in the past and present and how it can compel us to question, challenge and disrupt hate, bias and oppression.

Note: It is strongly recommended that this NPFH activity be used in schools where a majority of students have had some basic background in understanding the Holocaust.

Grade Level

Grades 6–12

Learning Objectives

- Students will gain a basic understanding of the Holocaust.
- Students will reflect on survivor testimony.
- Students will understand the escalation of hate and be able to connect the levels of the Pyramid of Hate to events during the Holocaust as well as current day examples.
- Students will identify ways to act as an ally to support targets of bias, speak out against hate and take action to address social injustices.

Materials Needed

- [The Holocaust: 1933-1945](#) (optional additional reading)
- Video: [Otto Hertz](#) (57 sec.)
- Video: [Michele Cohen-Rodriguez](#) (2 min., 3 sec.)
- [Timeline of the Holocaust](#) (to project on the board/smart board)
- [Pyramid of Hate](#) (to project for class/group and one copy for each student)
- [Pyramid of Hate Worksheet](#) (blank)—two copies for each student
- [Pyramid of Allyship](#)—two copies for each student

Words You Might Use

Ally: Someone who speaks out on behalf of or takes actions that are supportive of someone who is targeted by bias or bullying, either themselves or someone else.

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.

Bias: An inclination or preference, either for or against an individual or group, that interferes with impartial judgment.

Escalate: To increase in extent, volume, number amount or intensity.

Holocaust: See description below.

Core Activity

First, provide a short background about the Holocaust using this paragraph, or rephrasing in your own words:

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. The primary motivation was the Nazis' antisemitic racist ideology. Between 1933 and 1941, Nazi Germany pursued a policy that dispossessed the Jews of their rights and their property, followed by the branding and concentration of the Jewish population. This policy gained broad support in Germany and much of occupied Europe. In 1941, following the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Nazis and their collaborators launched the systematic mass murder of the Jews, a policy that became known as the "Final Solution." By 1945, nearly six million Jews had been murdered. The Nazis also persecuted many other groups in different ways, including Roma and Sinti, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, some Slavic peoples, Black people, Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others the Nazis deemed "asocials," for racial and ideological reasons.

If time permits and students haven't learned about the Holocaust yet, share [The Holocaust: 1933-1945 handout](#) with students, reading it aloud together or having students read on their own silently. This handout provides more details about the Holocaust.

Ask students if they have any questions or would like to add anything they feel is important to share about their knowledge of the Holocaust. Explain that during the course of this activity, students will watch two short video testimonies of Holocaust survivors. Explain that survivor testimonies provide a window into the thoughts, feelings, motivations, and fears of people who experienced the Holocaust first-hand.

Next, show the video of the survivor testimony of [Otto Hertz](#). and explain that he is sharing a story about some of the early acts of hate his Jewish family experienced in Nazi Germany in 1933. After watching the video, ask students: As you watched the video, what thoughts and feelings came to mind? What is Otto describing? How is the boycott of Jewish-owned stores an incident of hate? How did it impact Otto and others?

Show students the Pyramid of Hate by projecting the image on the board/ smart board and provide a handout of the [Pyramid of Hate](#) to all students. Explain or paraphrase the Pyramid of Hate as follows:

The Pyramid of Hate illustrates the prevalence of bias, hate and oppression in our society. It is organized in escalating levels of attitudes and behavior that grow in complexity from bottom to top. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels; unlike a pyramid, the levels are not built consecutively or to demonstrate a ranking of each level. Bias at each level reflects a system of oppression that negatively impacts individuals, institutions and society. Unchecked bias can become “normalized” and contribute to a pattern of accepting discrimination, violence and injustice in society. While every biased attitude or act does not lead to genocide, genocide takes place within a system of oppression in which the attitudes and actions described at the lower levels of the pyramid are accepted. When we challenge those biased attitudes and behaviors in ourselves, others and institutions, we can interrupt the escalation of bias and make it more difficult for discrimination and hate to flourish.”

Go through each of the levels of the Pyramid of Hate, starting with the bottom (“Biased Attitudes”) and moving to the top (“Genocide”). At each level, explain what the level means and ask a few students to share an example from society today that reflects that level of the pyramid. Provide a [blank Pyramid of Hate](#) to all students. Have students label it “Society Today” and invite them to jot down at least one example for each level on the worksheet.

Next, show the video of [Michele Cohen-Rodriguez](#), who shares a story about her experience as a young girl Jewish girl in France during the Holocaust. After watching the video, ask students: *As you watched the video, what thoughts and feelings came to mind? What does this story reflect about Michele’s experience of hate during the Holocaust? Where would you put those experiences of Michele’s on the Pyramid of Hate and why?* Ask students to share other aspects of the Holocaust that they know about and elicit where it would be placed on the Pyramid of Hate, including Otto Hertz’s example above.

Engage students in a deeper exploration of the Holocaust and the escalation of hate by first projecting the [Timeline of the Holocaust](#) on the board/smart board. If you allow tablets or laptops in your classroom, invite students to follow along the timeline. Together review the timeline, focusing on some of the core details and clicking the boxes to learn more. After reviewing the timeline, distribute another [blank Pyramid of Hate](#), have students label it “The Holocaust” and then fill in this second Pyramid of Hate some of the events in the Holocaust timeline based on where they belong on the Pyramid, asking students to provide at least one or two examples for each level of the pyramid. You can provide an example such as, “The Nazis declare a boycott of all Jewish businesses in Germany” (1933) as an example of “Systemic Discrimination.”

Elicit/explain the definition of ally as “someone who speaks out on behalf of or takes actions that are supportive of someone who is targeted by bias or bullying, either themselves or someone else.” Then provide a [Pyramid of Allyship worksheet](#) and invite students to record at least one or two examples of allyship ideas for each level of the Pyramid that aligns with the act of bias or hate they noted on their Pyramids of Hate based on the Holocaust timeline. Then ask students: *Thinking back to the stories of Otto and Michele, what could someone have done then to act as an ally to them? How would this have helped?* Have students jot down their ideas on the Pyramid of Allyship.

Explain to students that they are now going to add to their Pyramids of Allyship to help explore and consider other ways we can act as an ally to support targets of bias, speak out against hate and take action to address social injustices. Invite them to reflect on their current day examples on the Pyramid of Hate and for each, have them come up with an act of allyship and note that on the Pyramid of Allyship in the correct spot on the Pyramid. If needed, provide these examples:

Biased Attitudes: Being aware of bias and stereotypical thinking in ourselves and others and actively challenging them.

Acts of Bias: Interrupting a joke about a particular group of people.

Discrimination: Attending a rally or march supporting a group that has been discriminated against.

Bias Motivated Violence: Helping to clean a synagogue or rebuild a mosque or church that has been vandalized.

Genocide: Holding a fundraiser to support organizations dedicated to ending genocides.

Have students then turn and talk with someone sitting nearby and invite them to share their examples on both the Pyramids of Hate and Pyramid of Allyship with their partner, pointing out their current day example of hate and the accompanying act of allyship. Reconvene the class and ask some students to share an example from their pyramids. Invite students to place their pyramids around the classroom or other school spaces and have them move around the room to view the other pyramids that students have created.

Then, engage them in a discussion by asking some/all of the following questions:

- What did you notice about the pyramids?
- What thoughts and additional questions came up for you as you looked at other people’s pyramids?
- How is the Pyramid of Hate helpful in understanding more about the Holocaust?

- How is it helpful in reflecting on examples today?
- Describe a time when you acted as an ally. What motivated you to act?
- Are there times when you have not acted an ally when you had an opportunity to do so? What factors led to your decision not to act?
- Has anyone ever shown ally behavior on your behalf? What level of the Pyramid of Allyship did the individual's or groups' behavior represent? How did it make you feel?
- How does ally behavior strengthen individuals and communities?
- What is one ally behavior you will consider doing as a result of this discussion?

Consider displaying the students' Pyramid of Allyship charts around school.

Optional Follow-Up/Going Further

Note: These additional activities can be done as follow-ups to the core activity and they can also serve as an additional NPFH activity if the core activity is completed first.

- Have students review their Pyramids of Allyship from the core activity above, noting the examples of what they can do to act as an ally, support targets of bias and take actions to address social inequities. Invite students to identify one or two of these acts of allyship that they will seriously consider taking on in the coming weeks and months. They can explore this commitment by writing a short essay, speech, social media post or poem/spoken word about the act of allyship, why they think it's important, the impact they believe it will have and how the next steps they will take to make it happen. Share these school-wide either by having an assembly where students share, post them around school, create a video with them, etc.
- Invite students to watch and engage in the Pyramid of Hate mini-lesson [Pyramid of Hate Mini-Lesson](#) and then invite them to share their learnings and examples with each other.

Home Connection (Optional)

Share ADL's Table Talk [Antisemitism Today](#) with families.

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

Students will learn about and reflect on the Holocaust and how it connects to the escalation of hate. They will explore examples from the Holocaust and then from current day examples in order to understand how hate and bias escalate. They will consider ways in which they people can act as allies to support targets of bias, speak out against hate and take action to address social injustices.

This NPFH activity is adapted from the [How Does Hate Escalate? An Examination of the Past & Present](#) digital student activity from Echoes & Reflections, ADL's Holocaust education program in partnership with USC Shoah Foundation and Yad Vashem.

HOLOCAUST 1933-1945

Introduction

The Holocaust was unprecedented genocide, total and systematic, perpetrated by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, with the aim of annihilating the Jewish people. The primary motivation was the Nazis' antisemitic racist ideology. Between 1933 and 1941, Nazi Germany pursued a policy that dispossessed the Jews of their rights and their property, followed by the branding and concentration of the Jewish population. This policy gained broad support in Germany and much of occupied Europe. In 1941, following the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Nazis and their collaborators launched the systematic mass murder of the Jews, a policy that became known as the "Final Solution." By 1945, nearly six million Jews had been murdered.

The Nazis also persecuted many other groups in different ways, including Roma and Sinti, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, some Slavic peoples, Black people, Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others the Nazis deemed "asocials," for racial and ideological reasons.

Historical Context

When the Nazis rose to power in Germany in 1933, their goals were to make Germany into a super power and to cleanse Germany of Jews and anything they considered to be Jewish. For the Nazis, the so-called "Jewish Question" or "Jewish Problem" had to be solved in order for Germans to assume their place as the "master race" in the world.

Hatred of the Jews had long been entrenched in Europe. The image of the Jew as the murderer of Jesus and the fact that Jews had rejected Christianity led to widespread hatred and suspicion. A combination of this antisemitism and ideas about certain races being superior to others invested traditional antisemitism with a new and dynamic image. Racial theories became prevalent in much of Europe, including Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century. With the Nazi rise to power, racial antisemitism became the official policy of Germany.

During the first years of their reign the Nazis isolated German Jews, abolished their citizenship, restricted their role in the economy and society in general, and later appropriated their property. From the beginning, there was violence against Jews, but no policy of state-organized violence. These early measures were designed to stop Jewish influence and convince Jews that they had no future in Germany, so they would leave.

Especially after Germany took over Austria in 1938, the Nazis began using more force to get Jews to leave. Early concentration camps like Dachau and Sachsenhausen that had been established to break opposition to Nazism, were now used increasingly to intimidate Jews. Jewish property was expropriated more forcefully. In November 1938 a violent riot against the Jews, known as the Kristallnacht Pogrom, erupted. It sent a clear message to Jews that they should leave. However, immigration restrictions and later, the outbreak of WWII, made leaving increasingly difficult.

With the outbreak of WWII in September 1939 and the conquest and division of Poland, nearly 2 million Jews came under Nazi German control. Nazi policy forcing Jews into specific territories continued along several tracks, but ultimately all of these plans were abandoned.

While these ideas were being pursued, the Nazis began to isolate Jews in Poland into ghettos in autumn 1939 and continued into 1941. The ghettos were never seen as a solution to the “Jewish Problem” but as a stop-gap measure until a more definitive solution could be found. In Poland and later in the Soviet Union, which the Germans and their allies attacked in June 1941, some 1,100 ghettos were established. Conditions in the ghettos varied, yet most could be characterized by overcrowding, insufficient food, and often, high death rates. Still as individuals, families, and communities, Jews struggled to maintain their lives in the ghettos.

Genocide

The purpose of the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 was to conquer more territory, eliminate the Communist threat, and establish their rule based on their racial ideology. All Jewish men, who were seen by the Nazis as Communists, as well as Communist political officers and to a lesser extent, Roma men, were the first to be targeted in mass shootings. Soon Jewish women and children were being shot as well. The shootings were carried out primarily by special SS groups known as the Einsatzgruppen and many other formations. Over 2 million Jews were shot in this way. After several months, systematic murder was adopted as the overall policy, “The Final Solution.”

By the end of 1941, the Nazis began to establish death camps, where Jews were killed primarily in gas chambers. Chelmno was the first such camp, followed by Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. The Majdanek and Auschwitz camps were both labor and death camps. About half of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust were killed in such camps. The industrialized murder in the camps became symbolic of the Holocaust, with Auschwitz becoming an icon for this murder.

During the course of the war, ghettos were generally liquidated in stages and most of the population sent to death camps. However, the ghettos had also become sites of forced labor. The Nazis exploited Jewish labor in ghettos and labor camps, but never planned to keep Jewish workers alive in the long term. Nonetheless, for a small percentage of Jews, labor became a narrow bridge to survival, since some laborers remained alive long enough to see the defeat of Nazi Germany.

With the advent of the “Final Solution” many Jews tried to resist. Some formed undergrounds in ghettos, others joined partisan units, many tried to hide during round-ups of Jews or sought long-term refuge. Other means were also tried, but as a general rule, the Jews were powerless on their own to stop the murder or achieve large-scale rescue, and very frequently their neighbors were hostile toward them, or unwilling or afraid to help. Only a very small percentage of Jews managed to evade the killings with the help of outsiders.

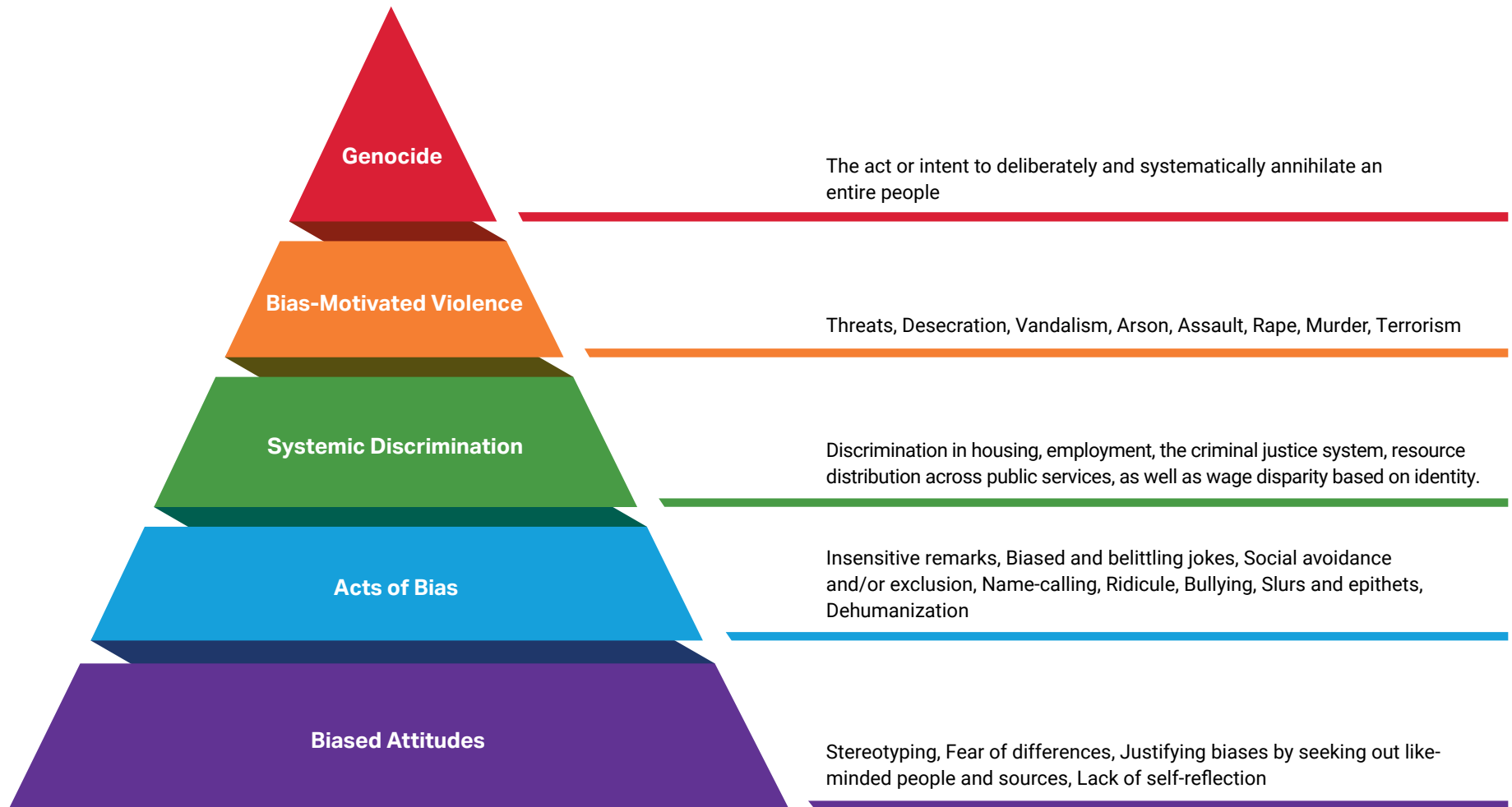
The Allies who fought Nazi Germany and its partners aided Jews to some degree. However, owing to a number of factors, including the difficulty in fully grasping Nazi crimes, their distance from the places of murder, and their intense focus on winning the war, the Allied efforts to help never came close to the Nazi efforts to murder the Jews.

Aftermath

When the Allied troops (led by the United States, United Kingdom, and Soviet Union) defeated the Nazis, they encountered evidence of the Holocaust: documentation, witnesses, mass graves, and concentration and death camps. Europe was in disarray; millions were displaced, and entire cities were destroyed. Displaced persons camps were established to house Jewish survivors. Many Jews continued to face antisemitism and violence and most Jews decided to emigrate. There were many postwar trials, including the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, to prosecute various Nazis for war crimes but the majority eluded justice.

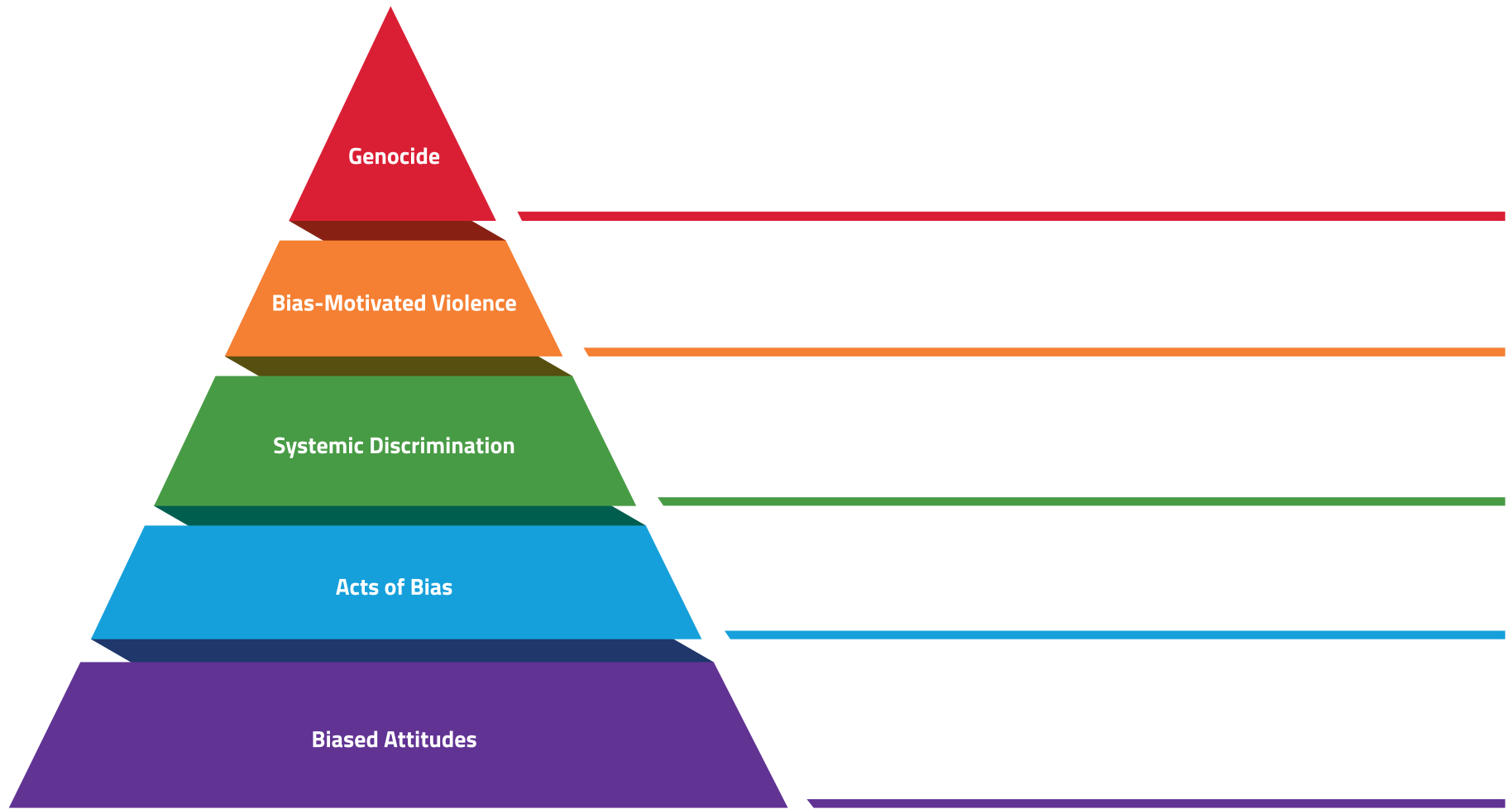
PYRAMID OF HATE

The **Pyramid of Hate** illustrates the prevalence of bias, hate and oppression in our society. It is organized in escalating levels of attitudes and behavior that grow in complexity from bottom to top. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels; unlike a pyramid, the levels are not built consecutively or to demonstrate a ranking of each level. Bias at each level reflects a system of oppression that negatively impacts individuals, institutions and society. Unchecked bias can become “normalized” and contribute to a pattern of accepting discrimination, violence and injustice in society. While every biased attitude or act does not lead to genocide, genocide takes place within a system of oppression in which the attitudes and actions described at the lower levels of the pyramid are accepted. When we challenge those biased attitudes and behaviors in ourselves, others and institutions, we can interrupt the escalation of bias and make it more difficult for discrimination and hate to flourish.



Pyramid of Hate © 2025 Anti-Defamation League

The Pyramid of Hate Worksheet



The Pyramid of Allyship Worksheet

Instructions: Consider ways you can act as an ally to support targets of bias, speak out against hate and take action to address social injustices. Write your groups responses in the appropriate level.

