

## LESSON PLAN

# Ruining the Game: Antisemitism in Sports

*Compelling Question: Why does antisemitism manifest in sports and why is it not taken as seriously?*

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Competencies
K-2	3-5	45-60 Minutes	Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language
MS	HS		



## Web Related Connections

### Lesson Plans

[Challenging Antisemitism Antisemitism Around the World: Global 100](#)

[On the Rise: Antisemitism in Europe](#)

[Antisemitism and Sports Unit](#)

### Other Resources

[Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice](#)

[Athletes and Activism Believe in Something: Nike, Kaepernick and Social Change](#)

[Major League Baseball and the Negro League: Correcting an Injustice](#)

## Key Words

Antisemitism  
Bias  
Ethnicity  
Genocide  
Hate  
Identity  
Injustice  
Oppression  
Prejudice  
Race  
Religion  
Stereotype

## LESSON OVERVIEW

The role of sports and organized athletics is most often considered to benefit society and elevate our shared experience as a culture or nation. Throughout history, sports have been a means of recreation, social interaction, communal and national pride, and recently, a growing economic enterprise. Sports have played an essential role in the construction and reshaping of social identity. While sports have offered the promise of social mobility and opportunity to marginalized groups, sport can also be a vehicle for harmful elements in society like racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination such as antisemitism.

Antisemitism in sport follows the same patterns as other areas of society. Historical antisemitic myths and tropes are used to justify exclusion or oppression of Jewish athletes, coaches, and supporters. In this lesson, students will examine how antisemitism manifests in the context of sport and the impact of this form of oppression.

**[Note to Teacher:** It is important to consider that you may have students in your classroom who are Jewish. Be prepared and sensitive to those students, considering 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 sensitive topic. You may want to communicate with those students in advance and determine how they can discuss this topic while feeling comfortable and safe.]

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand the definition of antisemitism and how it functions as a system of oppression.
- Students will explore how antisemitism can manifest in sport.
- Students will examine the impact of antisemitism in sport.

## MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- Paper
- Pens

- Large Post It Notes or Chart Paper
- Individual Post It Notes
- Supplemental Resource: “[Definitions of Antisemitism and Oppression](#)” handouts (1 per participant)
- Supplemental Resource: “[Antisemitism in Sports](#)” (1 per participant)

## PROCEDURES

### Information Sharing: What is Antisemitism and What is a System of Oppression? (10 minutes)

1. Distribute the handout with the definitions of antisemitism and oppression.
2. Instruct students to read the definition and to annotate it by marking significant terms or phrases by underlining, circling, or a dot; and to use a question mark for any part of the definition they’re unsure about.
3. Discuss the definition with students. Invite students to share out the parts of the definition they marked and elaborate on their meaning and to ask questions about the definition. Ask students to consider what aspects of the definition they find most useful or clarifying and which parts of the definition they find challenging or confusing.

*[Instructor should model writing out these notes/questions/etc. around the definition.]*

### Information Sharing: Antisemitism in Sports (20 Minutes)

1. Instruct students to count off from one to seven to form seven small groups. Tell students that they will be exploring the handout “Antisemitism in Sports”.
2. Before sending students to begin the task, share that they should read the document in order and one recorder should write the group’s responses to the questions and any additional reflections. Direct the groups to begin the activity.

*[For individual student accountability, you may also have the students record their own responses on a worksheet or have the recorder put their initials below what they wrote.]*

3. Support the students as they reflect on the following questions while they explore the stories:
  - a. What are your thoughts and feelings after reading this story?
  - b. What new information did you learn by reading the stories?
  - c. What surprised you about this story?
  - d. In your opinion, what is the impact of this story?
4. Bring the class back together to discuss their responses to the handout.

### Closing (10 Minutes)

1. Once you have concluded the previous discussion, inform the group that you will conclude the lesson with a final reflection.
2. Ask the students to reflect on the following questions and write their responses.
  - What was something that we learned today that impacted you the most or changed your opinion on something you previously thought?
  - Based on these stories we’ve read today, what do you believe the impact of antisemitism has been? Are you surprised to see antisemitism and sports?
3. Invite the students back together to share some of their answers aloud.

### Additional Reading and Resources

- [Antisemitism Uncovered](#)
- [ADL Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2022](#)
- [ADL Sports Leadership Council](#)
- [Dutch Soccer Player Steven Berghuis Targeted by Lurid Antisemitic Mural After Signing for Club Ajax](#) (European Jewish Congress, July 29, 2021)
- [Details emerge of Jason Bailey's suit](#) (Associated Press, Jan 26, 2011)
- [Ford's Anti-Semitism](#) (PBS)
- [NBA player Meyers Leonard caught using anti-Semitic slur on video game platform](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, March 9, 2021)
- [NBA player Meyers Leonard opens up on his antisemitism scandal to Jewish ESPN reporter](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 31, 2023)

## Common Core Anchor Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
<p>Reading</p> <p>R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.                      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.                      R7: Integrate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text with a version of that information expressed visually (e.g., in a flowchart, diagram, model, graph, or table).</p>
<p>Writing</p> <p>W9: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis reflection, and research.</p>
<p>Language</p> <p>L1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.                      L3: Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.                      L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 6-12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies                      L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.                      L6: Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.</p>

## CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
<p>Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.</p>
<p>Self-Management: The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.</p>
<p>Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, &amp; contexts.</p>
<p>Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.</p>
<p>Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.</p>

# Definitions of Antisemitism and Oppression

## 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.

## Oppression

A system of mistreatment, exploitation and abuse of a marginalized group(s) for the social, economic or political benefit of a dominant group(s). This happens within a social hierarchy where people are ranked according to status, often based on aspects of social identity.

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# Antisemitism in Sports

Organized sports and athletics are a unique cultural phenomenon that have become interwoven with our societies today. Throughout history, sports have evolved and adapted as means of recreation, social interaction, communal and national pride, and in recent years, a growing economic enterprise. Sports have also played an essential role in the construction and reshaping of social identity. Sports and athletics have offered the promise of social mobility and opportunity to marginalized groups, but sports have also been a vehicle for harmful elements in society like racism, sexism, discrimination and forms of oppression such as antisemitism.

As antisemitism appears in different layers of our society, we unfortunately see this hateful ideology manifest in the world of sports. Antisemitism in sports follows the same patterns as other areas of society, rooted in the stereotypes and myths about the Jewish people that have been recycled and repurposed for centuries. These false interpretations and fantasies about the Jewish people have led to antisemitism being used to justify exclusion or oppression of Jewish athletes, coaches, and supporters. The most common antisemitic tropes include:

1. The myth that the Jewish People are inherently disloyal or more loyal to Israel
2. The myth that Jews have too much power
3. The myth that Jews are greedy, overly wealthy or fixated on money
4. The myth that the Jewish People are collectively responsible for the death of Jesus Christ
5. The myth that Jews use Christian blood for religious rituals
6. The myth that the events of the Holocaust did not occur or were exaggerated
7. The misappropriation of the events of the Holocaust and the comparison of actions of Jews or the State of Israel to Nazis
8. The myth that anti-Zionism or criticism of Israel is never antisemitic

Many incidents of antisemitism in sports have clear intent, however, some incidents of antisemitism are rooted in a lack of understanding about Jewish people and the belief in antisemitic stereotypes. Just because no harm was intended does not mean no harm was caused. It is important to consider not only intent, but impact.

When antisemitism manifests in sports and other elements of society, such as entertainment, antisemitic stereotypes, tropes and myths are adapted and molded to the particular context. In the stories below, you will see examples of these manifestations of antisemitism in sports. Please read each story carefully and answer the discussion questions provided as a group. Please be prepared to share some of your answers with the class if you are comfortable.

## Steven Berghuis

In historical context, the city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands has been considered a “Jewish city”<sup>1</sup>. Prior to the Holocaust, most of Amsterdam’s Jews lived in a ghetto in the center of the city. The center of the city was also the home to Ajax Amsterdam, a soccer club that would eventually become one of the world’s most prominent and successful teams. The club that was home to iconic elements of soccer history also celebrated a connection to the Jewish community that had inhabited the city. Despite the decline in actual Jewish population, Ajax’s supporters have continued to celebrate this part of the club’s history and supporters call sing “Hava Nagila”, a traditional Jewish song, in the stands.

In the summer of 2021, Steven Berghuis, a player for rival Dutch team Feynoord, was transferred to Ajax and supporters responded by creating a mural<sup>2</sup> which depicted Berghuis, who is not Jewish, as a victim of the Holocaust. The mural went further by enlarging Berghuis’ nose, a Jewish physical stereotype and giving him a yarmulke. The mural also included the words “Jews always run away” in Dutch. The banner was condemned by both Ajax and Feynoord. The perpetrators were caught on camera and were found guilty. They were sentenced to community service and were also required to visit Amsterdam’s Holocaust memorial.

### Discussion Questions

1. What are your thoughts and feelings after reading this story?
2. What new information did you learn by reading your article?
3. What surprised you about this story?
4. What do you think the impact of this story is?

<sup>1</sup> (*Why Are Ajax and Spurs Fans so Connected to Jewish Symbolism?*, n.d.)

<sup>2</sup> (*ejc*, 2021)

## The Dearborn Independent and the 1919 World Series

The 1919 World Series featured the Cincinnati Reds and the Chicago White Sox. The Sox were the reigning World Champions and owned by former player, Charles Comiskey. Comiskey was notorious for underpaying his players and, players had no leverage to change teams. Arnold Rothstein, a Jewish mobster, conspired with eight of the White Sox players to fix the World Series. The following season, accusations about their defeat followed the White Sox players. The offending players were banned for life. The story of the “Black Sox” as they became to be known was front page sports news.

At the time, one of the most widely circulated newspaper was famed American industrialist and automobile magnet Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent*. The *Dearborn Independent* was required by Ford Motor Company to be distributed in all their dealerships and at its peak had a circulation of almost one million. The newspaper became infamous for its sharply antisemitic content<sup>3</sup>, often posting disparaging articles about the Jews in addition to antisemitic conspiracy theories. Ford's paper seized on the Jewish connection to the scandal with headlines such as “Jewish Gamblers Corrupt American Baseball”. The *Dearborn Independent* continued to publish anti-Jewish stories over 91 weeks until a libel lawsuit was filed by Aaron Sapiro after the paper blamed the Jewish people for provoking violence against themselves. The lawsuit and a sustained effort by the ADL to boycott the paper and Ford products led to the eventual collapse of the paper. Ford issued a public apology but there have been doubts raised about its sincerity or if he authored it. When its last issue was published in 1927, the paper had the second largest reach in the United States.

### Discussion Questions

1. What are your thoughts and feelings after reading this story?
2. What new information did you learn by reading your article?
3. What surprised you about this story?
4. What do you think the impact of this story is?

<sup>3</sup> (Jaher, 2001)



## Jason Bailey

Jason Bailey was a Jewish professional hockey player in the Anaheim Ducks organization. Bailey was a top pick in the 2005 NHL Draft and was a highly touted prospect. However, Bailey ultimately filed a lawsuit in 2011<sup>4</sup> against his team alleging systemic and consistent antisemitic abuse while he was assigned to the Bakersfield Condors, the Ducks ECHL affiliate.

He alleged that both the head coach, Martin Raymond, and assistant coach, Mark Pederson, directed antisemitic slurs towards him and made multiple comments regarding Jews and money. Raymond allegedly told Bailey that his ex-wife was Jewish “and that she was taking all of his money,” and Pederson was alleged to have said “Well, I don’t know if we can trust him with the money. He’s Jewish,” regarding if Bailey could be trusted to look after money collected for a team event. The attacks persisted with additional comments about Bailey’s Jewish faith with Raymond saying that he would never want his child to be raised Jewish or to wear a Yarmulke, a traditional Jewish head covering. The coach went even further to call out the player by commenting that Bailey should “go over there and fight in the war.” after seeing a news report about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The lawsuit also included evidence that Raymond issued an apology. While the coaches involved were suspended, the lawsuit alleged that Bailey’s development was impacted by the events.

### Discussion Questions

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<sup>4</sup> (Docs Detail Anti-Semitism Claims against Ducks, 2011)

## Myers Leonard

In the spring of 2021, NBA player Myers Leonard was a popular streamer on the website Twitch. The then Miami Heat player had developed a healthy following that regularly watched him play the video game “Call of Duty: Warzone” while he rehabbed an ankle injury. While playing the game, Leonard inexplicably shouted “Don’t f\*\*\*ing snipe me, you f\*\*\*ing k\*\*\* b\*\*\*\*.”<sup>5</sup> The “K word” is a highly offensive ethnic slur for Jews that originates from the late 19th century. The word is connected to Jewish immigration into the United States in reference to how Jews from eastern Europe marked their immigration forms.

The response to the use of the slur was swift, with the Miami Heat suspending Leonard and the NBA issuing him a substantial fine. Leonard issued an apology the following day stating, “While I didn’t know what the word meant at the time, my ignorance about its history and how offensive it is to the Jewish community is absolutely not an excuse and I was just wrong.” Leonard did not stop at just an apology and took it on himself to engage with the Jewish community to make amends. Leonard forged a relationship with Rabbi Pinny Andruiser<sup>6</sup>, with the Chabad-Lubovitch movement, and went on to meet with Holocaust survivors, Jewish youth in addition to the ADL and the Miami Jewish community. Leonard continues to talk openly about his journey and his hope for others to not repeat his ignorance.

### Discussion Questions

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2. What new information did you learn by reading your article?
3. What surprised you about this story?
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<sup>5</sup> (Friedman, 2021)

<sup>6</sup> (Gurvis, 2023)

## Steven Berghuis

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## The Dearborn Independent and the 1919 World Series

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## Jason Bailey

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## Myers Leonard

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