

LESSON PLAN

Antisemitism and Sports: Manifestations of Antisemitism

Compelling Question: Why and in what ways does antisemitism manifest in sport?

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Competencies
K-2	3-5	50 minutes	Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language
MS	HS		



Web Related Connections

Lesson Plans

[Ruining the Game: Antisemitism in Sports](#)

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

LESSON OVERVIEW

Sports are often touted as a great equalizer, ensuring that playing the game is open to all. However, sports can also be a vehicle for harmful elements in society like racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. Unfortunately, this means that sports have not been immune from the impacts of antisemitism. Antisemitism in sport follows the same template as other adaptations of antisemitism across society. Antisemitic myths and tropes are used to justify the exclusion or oppression of Jewish athletes, coaches, and supporters; and antisemitic conspiracy theories are used to denigrate those same groups. Teams and organizations that are Jewish or perceived to be Jewish have also been targeted with antisemitic discrimination. In recent years, these antisemitic attitudes in sport have led to an increase in antisemitic incidents: Jewish athletes and supporters have experienced antisemitic chants and imagery, Israeli athletes barred from competitions and in some rare instances, incidents of violence directed towards Jewish athletes and fans have occurred.

In this lesson, students will examine vignettes of antisemitism in sport to examine the ideology of antisemitism and the impact that this form of oppression has had not only on the Jewish community, but society at large.

[Pedagogy Note: This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn about antisemitism and how it manifests and sports. This lesson should be preceded by the lesson *Antisemitism and Sports – Jewish Identity through Sport* and followed by *Antisemitism and Sports – Antisemitism, Sports, and Society* as part of a mini unit. If conducting this lesson in isolation, be sure to provide and/or review information that helps the learner recognize Jewish identity through the lens of peoplehood, religion, and culture.]

[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 examine the definition of antisemitism and its function as a system of oppression.
- Students will explore common antisemitic myths and tropes about Jewish people and their manifestations in sports.
- Students will examine the impact of these antisemitic myths and tropes on the Jewish community and society at large.

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 group)
- Supplemental Resource: “[Antisemitism and Sports](#)” posters (1 set to be set up around the instructional space)
- Room Setup
 - Place the handouts *Antisemitic Myths and Tropes and Sports* around the room so student groups can participate in the carousel interactive.
 - Each story should be posted along with a place to write notes (e.g. large Post-It Notes, white board, etc.
 - Groups should be able to respond to the story prompts on the space that you have created.
 - Please ensure there is ample space between groups.

PROCEDURES

Information Sharing: What is Antisemitism and What is Oppression? (5 – 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 annotating out the definitions with notes/questions/etc.]

Information Sharing: Who are the Jewish People? (30 - 35 Minutes)

*[At this point, the handouts *Antisemitic Myths and Tropes and Sports* should be placed up around the room so student groups can participate in the carousel interactive. Each story should be posted along with a place to write notes (e.g., large Post-It Notes, white board, etc. Groups should be able to respond to the story prompts on the space that you have created]*

1. Instruct students to count off from one to seven to form seven small groups. Tell students that they will be exploring the posted “Antisemitic Myths and Tropes and Sports”.

2. Before sending students to their starting stations, share that they should read what is posted and one recorder should write the group's responses to the questions at the bottom of the story and any additional reflections on the chart paper next to each story.
3. Using a timer, allow each group 5 minutes to read and respond to each station, and then instruct groups to rotate one station. Repeat until each group is back at their original station, and then allow 5 minutes for a gallery walk. Students are invited to make additional comments.
4. Allow a final 5 minutes for students go back to their first station to read all that was added to their first response and allow students to cycle through each station.
5. Reconvene the whole class and invite students to return to their seat.

Closing (10 Minutes)

1. Review the responses from the stories read during the gallery walk.
2. Inform the group that you will conclude the lesson with a final reflection.
3. Guide the students in discussing the following questions:
 - What surprised you while reading about antisemitism and sports?
 - How does the story change your perception of the athlete or organization involved?
 - Identify one story or myth that impacted you the most. How did it change or complicate your perspective?
 - Based on these stories we've read today, what do you believe the impact of antisemitism has been on Jewish athletes and sports fans? Are you surprised to see antisemitism and sports?
4. Close the class by asking students to write down their takeaways from today and what they learned.

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)
- [Comments by 2 Knicks Called Anti-Semitic](#) (New York Times, April 21, 2001)
- [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
Reading
<p>R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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>
Writing
<p>W9: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis reflection, and research.</p>
Speaking and Listening
<p>SL1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher- led) with diverse partners on grade 6-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <p>SL2: Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.</p> <p>SL4: Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.</p>
Language
<p>L1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</p> <p>L3: Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.</p> <p>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</p> <p>L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p> <p>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, & contexts.</p>

Antisemitism and 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 and 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 and 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.

Steven Berghuis

In historical context, the city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands has been considered a “Jewish city”¹. 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 Feyenoord, was transferred to Ajax and supporters responded by creating a mural¹ 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 Feyenoord. 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?

¹ (Why Are Ajax and Spurs Fans so Connected to Jewish Symbolism?, n.d.)

Charlie Ward

In the lead up to the 2001 NBA Playoffs, the New York Knicks were engulfed in controversy when comments made by Charlie Ward about Jews were published in the New York Times². Eric Konigsberg, the Times' reporter focused on the Knicks, reported that while attending a Bible study hosted on the team's road trips that Ward confronted him by asking provocative questions about the relationship between the Jewish people and Jesus Christ. Ward was quoted by Konigsberg as saying "Jews are stubborn, E. But tell me, why did they persecute Jesus unless he knew something they didn't want to accept?" He drove home his point by adding "They had his blood on their hands."

Ward's comments drew condemnation upon their publication and the Knicks were quick to condemn his remarks. Ward's attempt at clarification drew even more criticism when he stated, "...The context of the article is taken out as if Jews persecuted Christians, which biblically is what happened during that time. But if people want to be offended by what happened biblically, that's on them. But I'm not attacking any one group."

Discussion Questions

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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?

² (ejc, 2021)

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 2011³ 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

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?

³ Broussard, Chris. “Comments by 2 Knicks Called Anti-Semitic.” *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 21 Apr. 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/21/sports/pro-basketball-comments-by-2-knicks-called-anti-semitic.html>.

⁴ (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****.”⁵ 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 Andruiser⁶, 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

1. What are your thoughts and feelings after reading this story?
2. What new information did you learn by reading your article?
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⁵ (Friedman, 2021)

⁶ (Gurvis, 2023)