

## LESSON PLAN

# Antisemitic Incidents: Being an Ally, Advocate and Activist

*Compelling Question: Why is there an increase in antisemitic incidents and what can we do about it?*

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-1	2-6	45 minutes	Reading, Speaking and Listening, Language.
7-8	9-12		

## LESSON OVERVIEW

The surge of antisemitic incidents in the United States is alarming to many. Several reported incidents include graffiti using swastikas, bomb threats, vandalism and shootings, bomb threats targeting Jewish Community Centers (JCC) and Jewish institutions across the country.

In 2018, a gunman armed with an assault rifle and several handguns, entered the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA and opened fire killing 11 congregants and wounding others. In the aftermath of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack and murder of more than 1200 Israelis and the war that followed, antisemitic incidents in the U.S. have surged. In the face of these incidents, it is important to reflect upon how people act as allies, advocates and activists to do something on large and small scales to make a difference.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn about and reflect on current antisemitic incidents, understand how people and groups can make a difference, and explore the various ways different people and groups can act as allies, advocates and activists in order to enact change.

**(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, 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 sensitive topic. You may want to talk with those students in advance and determine how they can discuss this topic while feeling comfortable and safe. Consider reflecting on this resource: [6 Tips for Supporting Jewish Students in the Classroom](#))

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will define and provide examples for incidents of antisemitism.
- Students will read and reflect upon a story of how a small group of people can make a difference when faced with antisemitism.



## Web Related Connections

### LESSON PLANS

[Challenging Antisemitism: Debunking the Myths and Responding with Facts](#)

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

[Anti-Muslim Bigotry and Being an Ally](#)

[Contemporary Antisemitism](#)

[Swastikas and Other Hate Symbols](#)

### Other Resources:

[Awareness to Action](#)

[Antisemitism Today](#)

[6 Ways to Act as an Ally](#)

[Pyramid of Hate](#)

[Audit of Antisemitic Events 2023](#)

### Key Words

activism  
advocacy  
bias  
challenge  
discrimination  
immigrant  
institutional  
interpersonal  
stereotype  
systems of bias

- Students will explore the different ways to be an ally, advocate and activist and what roles different people can play in making a difference.

## MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- “Subway Riders Scrub Anti-Semitic Graffiti, as ‘Decent Human Beings’” (*The New York Times*, February 5, 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/02/05/nyregion/swastika-nyc-subways.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/05/nyregion/swastika-nyc-subways.html?_r=2))  
**Note: For those without access to a New York Times subscription, please use this article as an alternative:** “New York Commuters Unite to Remove Antisemitic Graffiti On Subway” (*NBC News*, February 5, 2017, [www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-york-commuters-unite-remove-anti-semitic-graffiti-subway-n716961](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-york-commuters-unite-remove-anti-semitic-graffiti-subway-n716961))

## PROCEDURES

### ? Opening: Information Sharing: What is Antisemitism?

1. Ask students: *What is antisemitism?* Elicit and define **antisemitism** as follows:  
**Antisemitism** is the marginalization and/or oppression of people who are Jewish based on the belief in stereotypes and myths about Jewish people, Judaism and Israel.
2. Ask students to share any examples of antisemitism they have seen or heard about. Explain that antisemitism can include attitudes, stereotypes, incidents, acts of discrimination or bias. Explain that a stereotype is a belief about a person or group of people, prejudice is an attitude about a person or group of people and discrimination is an action that can follow prejudicial attitudes. Record the examples that students share and include the following on the list:
  - Swastikas.
  - Nazi symbols.
  - Throwing a penny at a Jewish person.
  - Thinking that all Jews are rich and/or cheap.
  - A Jewish person being assaulted or attacked.
  - Jokes about the Holocaust.
  - Denying housing to a Jewish family.
  - Anti-Jewish graffiti.
  - Vandalism in synagogues and Jewish cemeteries.
  - Antisemitic comments made on social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).
  - Bullying a Jewish student because of their Jewish identity.
3. Ask students if they have heard about any recent incidents of antisemitism in the news. Share the following incidents or other recent incidents at the time of conducting this activity:
  - ADL has tracked antisemitic incidents in the U.S. since 1979. The annual audit of reported incidents compiles data on assaults, vandalism and harassment in every U.S. state and the District of Columbia. In 2023, ADL recorded 8,873 antisemitic incidents throughout the U.S. This is a 400% increase from incidents tabulated in 2022 and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents. The findings include 1,162 incidents at non-Jewish K-12 schools and 922 incidents at colleges and universities.
  - In 2023, there were 1,162 antisemitic incidents tabulated in non-Jewish schools (mostly public schools). This is a 135% increase from the 495 incidents of 2022. Of the 1,162 K-12 school incidents, 672 were

cases of harassment, 464 were cases of vandalism and 26 were cases of assault.

The 672 incidents of harassment in K-12 schools represent a 161% increase from the 257 incidents of harassment in 2022. Of the 672 incidents of harassment, 154 incidents (23%) included an image of a swastika (such as students drawing swastikas on classmate's notebooks or on classroom chalkboards and desks).

School-based harassment in 2023 also included one-off incidents such as when a middle school administrator received a note containing antisemitic death threats or when a high school student threatened their Jewish classmates stating that if they supported Israel, they would beat them up.

Harassment incidents also included recurrent antisemitic bullying, such as classmates taunting Jewish students with Holocaust jokes and references as well as anti-Zionist comments.

The 464 incidents of antisemitic vandalism in K-12 schools in 2023 represents a 100% increase from the 232 incidents tabulated in 2022. Of the 464 vandalism cases recorded, swastikas were present in 87% of K-12 vandalism cases (402 incidents).

The 26 incidents of antisemitic assaults in K-12 schools in 2023 represents a 360% increase from the five incidents tabulated in 2022.

- On October 27, 2018, a gunman, identified as Robert Bowers, armed with an assault rifle and several handguns, entered the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA and opened fire. Described as the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in the U.S., at least 11 congregants were killed, and four police officers and two others were wounded.
- There were three major attacks on the Jewish community in 2019, all resulting in fatalities. On April 27, a white supremacist opened fire at a synagogue in Poway, CA. A Jewish grocery store in Jersey City, NJ was attacked on December 10. And on December 28, an individual entered a rabbi's home in Monsey, NY during a Hanukkah party injuring five people, one of whom died.

#### 4. Engage students in a discussion by asking:

- What thoughts and feelings come up for you in hearing about these antisemitic incidents?
- Why do you think these incidents are happening now?
- Who are the targets of these incidents and do you think it involves Jewish and non-Jewish people? Explain.
- What do you think the perpetrators of these incidents are trying to accomplish?
- What impact does it have on the Jewish community?
- What impact does it have on the larger society?
- What should we, as a society, do about it?

### Reading Activity

1. Distribute one copy of the article "[Subway Riders Scrub Anti-Semitic Graffiti, as 'Decent Human Beings'](#)" or as an alternative, "[New York Commuters Unite to Remove Antisemitic Graffiti On Subway](#)" to each student. Give students ten minutes to read silently.
2. After reading, engage students in a discussion by asking:
  - What happened?
  - Why do you think the other New Yorkers joined in when they started using hand sanitizer to erase the graffiti?
  - Why do you think so many people responded to and shared Gregory Locke's Facebook post about the incident?
  - What do you think is meant by the quote: "Everyone kind of just did their jobs of being decent human beings?"

- What do you think you might have done in this situation?
- What is the message in this story?



### Defining Terminology: Ally, Advocate, Activist

1. Explain to students that in addition to what happened with the subway incident in New York City where the subway passengers removed the antisemitic graffiti, there have been other situations where people acted as allies, advocates and activists.
2. Ask students to define the words: **Ally**, **Advocate** and **Activist** and come up with the following definitions, asking students to come up with an example for each. (There are examples in the definitions but first see if students can come up with examples.) Explain that there is overlap between the three; sometimes a person or group is acting as an ally and an advocate at the same time.
  - **Ally:** Someone who speaks out on behalf of someone else or takes actions that are supportive of someone else. *Example: Hearing someone use an antisemitic slur and reaching out to that person and telling them you think that was wrong.*
  - **Advocate:** Someone who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy. *Example: Writing a letter to your Congressperson to urge her/him to support legislation about antisemitism.*
  - **Activist:** Someone who gets involved in activities that are meant to achieve political or social change; this also includes being a member of an organization which is working on change. *Example: Participating in a demonstration that is focusing on antisemitic hate crimes.*
3. Explain that what the three roles have in common is that they involve people who stand up to bias, bullying or hate in some way.
4. Engage students in a brief discussion by asking:
  - Why do people engage in ally, advocacy and activist behavior?
  - What impact does acting as an ally, advocate and activist have on the people engaging in it?
  - What message does it send to others?



### Small Group Activity: Acting as an Ally, Advocate or Activist

1. Explain to students that now that they have learned about some of the recent incidents of antisemitism in the U.S., they are going to think together about what can be done about it by engaging in role playing around acting as an ally, advocate or activist.
2. Divide students into eight small groups based on these constituency groups:
  - Individual person living in the U.S.
  - School principal
  - Legislator (senator, congressperson, city council)
  - Community-based organization
  - Social justice activist group
  - Small business
  - Faith/Spiritual-Based Organization
  - News reporter
3. Playing the role of the group/person assigned to them, have students brainstorm what they can do about incidents of antisemitism from the perspective of their assigned role. For example, if they are

in the faith/spiritual-based organization group, one of their ideas may be to go as a congregation and paint over a swastika that was painted on a neighboring synagogue. Ask the groups to come up with 3–5 ideas that will be shared later with the rest of the class. Give students 10 minutes to complete this task.

4. Have each small group share their ideas with the whole class.

### Closing

Engage students in a go round where every student shares one way they can act as an ally, advocate or activist in the future.

### Additional Reading and Resources

- [“With white supremacists driven online by the pandemic, anti-Semitism trackers watch for new threats”](#) (Jewish Telegraph Agency, April 23, 2020)
- [“Jewish communities face ‘enduring threat’ in the US, federal authorities warn”](#) (ABC News, January 4, 2020)
- [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2023](#) (ADL)
- [“Hate crime charges filed in Pittsburgh synagogue shooting that left 11 dead”](#) (CNN, October 29, 2018)
- [“Another Wave Of Bomb Threats Targets Jewish Community Centers”](#) (NPR, February 21, 2017)
- [“Bomb threats called into more than 30 Jewish organizations across the nation”](#) (The Washington Post, January 18, 2017)
- [Man who scrubbed swastikas from subway train honored](#) (PIX, February 16, 2017, includes video)

## Common Core Anchor Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
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.
Speaking and Listening
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. SL3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
Language
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.

## CASEL's SEL Competencies

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