

LESSON PLAN

Myth: Jews Killed Jesus

Compelling Question: How does the myth that Jews killed Jesus fuel antisemitic attitudes and behaviors?

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-1	2-6	50-60 minutes	Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language.
7-8	9-12		

**Web Related Connections**

LESSON PLANS

[Historical Antisemitism](#)[Contemporary Antisemitism](#)[Pyramid of Hate Minilesson](#)[Swastikas and Other Hate Symbols](#)[One-Day Lesson Plan: Responding to an Antisemitic Incident](#)[Being an Ally, Advocate and Activist](#)

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

[Antisemitism: What do Educators Need to Know](#)[Online Courses](#)

STUDENT LEARNING

[Introduction to Contemporary Antisemitism](#)[Student Digital Activities](#)

Other Resources:

[Antisemitic Attitudes in America in 2024](#)[Video Toolbox: Antisemitism](#)[Antisemitism in the Classroom](#)[9 Ways for Teaching Jewish American Heritage Month](#)[Conversations that Matter: Understanding and Discussing Antisemitism with Young People](#)**LESSON OVERVIEW**

In this series of lessons, students will examine seven of the most common antisemitic myths. For each myth, students will use ADL's *Antisemitism Uncovered* resource to examine its history and historical context. Students will analyze historical and contemporary examples of each myth to understand its impact of antisemitism on the Jewish community and society at large. This lesson will examine the myth that the Jewish people are collectively responsible for the death of Jesus Christ.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand the definitions of antisemitism, myth and trope and their connection.
- Students will examine the myth that the Jewish people are collectively responsible for the death of Jesus Christ.
- Students will analyze the impact of contemporary and historical examples of the antisemitic myth that the Jews killed Jesus Christ.
- Students will recognize the connection between antisemitism and other forms of hate, bias and oppression.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- [Definitions: Antisemitism, Myth and Stereotype Handout](#) (one copy for each student)*
- [Antisemitism Uncovered Video: Myth of Deicide](#)
- [Myth: Jews Killed Jesus Handout](#) (one copy for each student)

*This handout is only required if the class will be using *Information Sharing: What is Antisemitism, Myth and Stereotype?*

PROCEDURES

[This lesson is part of a unit exploring the different antisemitic myths that repeatedly show up in society. Begin with this introductory section if this is students' first lesson of the series; if students have already experienced this section during another lesson of this series, skip to the next section "Reflect on Prior Learning".]

 **Information Sharing: What is Antisemitism, Myth and Stereotype? (20 minutes)**

1. Inform the students that today's discussion will be about antisemitism and how myths and stereotypes about Jewish people fuel this form of bias and oppression. To activate students' thinking, ask:
 - Why do people share false information?
 - Where do stereotypes and myths come from?
2. Distribute the [handout with the definitions of antisemitism, myth and stereotype](#).
3. Instruct students to read the definitions and to annotate them by marking significant words or phrases in the definition by underlining, circling, or a dot; and to use a question mark for any part of the definition they're unsure about.
4. 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.

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

5. Display the following statement and ask the students to analyze it:

Antisemitism relies on applying simple, false explanations to complex social problems. These explanations are often myths and stereotypes about the Jewish people fueled by false or warped interpretations of Jewish identity, culture, religion, and history. In nearly every generation, centuries-old antisemitic stereotypes and myths are recycled.

6. Instruct the students to answer the following:
 - What do you know about Jewish people and Jewish identity? Where does most of your information about and exposure to Jewish people/Jewish identity come from?
 - Why do false stereotypes persist from generation to generation?

[Note: It is important to note that students don't need to offer a "right" answer. This question is meant to activate and prime the discovery aspect of this learning experience]

[Begin with this section if this is not students' first lesson of the "Antisemitism Uncovered" Series.]

 **Information Sharing: Reflect on Prior Learning (10 minutes)**

1. Invite students to share what they remember from their prior lessons about antisemitic myths.

 **Video Viewing (15 minutes)**

1. Inform the students that they are now going to watch a [short video](#) from ADL's Antisemitism Uncovered series about the myth that the Jewish people are collectively responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. They will be asked to discuss the following questions:
 - What surprised you about this myth?
 - In your opinion, what is the impact of this myth?
 - Where do you see this myth being played out today?

[Sample Script: As antisemitism in the present draws inspiration from ideas of the past, exploring the historical origins of these antisemitic myths is the first step toward understanding and addressing antisemitism. In this video, part of a series produced by the ADL called Antisemitism Uncovered, we will examine the myth that the Jewish people are collectively responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. After the video is over, partner with someone next to you to discuss what we watched. While you are watching, please write down your answer to the first question: What are your thoughts and feelings while you watch this video?]

2. Turn and Talk: Have students pair up with another student near them and invite them to discuss the reflection questions above.
3. Bring the students back together and debrief the reflection questions as a group.

Reading Activity (20 minutes)

1. Break students into small groups and pass out the **"Myth: Jews Killed Jesus" handout**.
2. Instruct students to read the handout about the myth of blood libel and the three sections: Know It, See It and Address It. Students should discuss the reflection questions in each section:
 - **Know it**
 - Why do you think the myth that the Jewish people are collectively responsible for the death of Jesus Christ has been repeatedly used by groups in different time periods and parts of the world?
 - How have Christian movements used the myth that Jews killed Jesus Christ to demonize Jewish people?
 - **See it**
 - How does the myth that the Jewish people are collectively responsible for the death of Jesus Christ manifest in these examples?
 - What is the impact of these examples on the Jewish community and society at large?
 - Which expressions of this myth are the most mundane or least likely to get noticed? Which are the most extreme or violent?
 - **Address it**
 - How does this myth contribute to antisemitic attitudes today?
 - What information helps you reject this myth?
 - Consider the Catholic Church's 1964 edict that acknowledged the antisemitism inherent in the church perpetuated-myth that Jews killed Jesus. What can authentic repair look like when hateful ideas are perpetrated?
3. Bring the students back together and debrief with the following reflection questions as a group.
 - Why do you think Jewish people are repeatedly misrepresented or distorted in society, now and in the past?
 - Why do you think this idea has persisted from generation to generation?
4. [Optional] Instruct students to complete a journal entry reflecting on their observations and experiences to turn in during the next class.

☆ **Closing (5 minutes)**

Have students consider what they learned over the course of this lesson on the myth of deicide, reflecting on the impact of this myth and how it connects to antisemitism. Ask each student to identify and share aloud one thing that they learned today because of the lesson. [This activity can be used via digital tool such as [Google Jamboard](#) or [Mentimeter](#)]

○○ **Additional Reading and Resources**

- [Christian Persecution of Jews over the Centuries](#)

Common Core Anchor Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
<p>Reading</p> <p>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.</p> <p>R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.</p> <p>R3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.</p> <p>R4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.</p>
<p>Writing</p> <p>W7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.</p> <p>W8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.</p> <p>W9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</p>
<p>Speaking and Listening</p> <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>
<p>Language</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>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>

Definitions of Antisemitism, Myth and Stereotype

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.

Myth

An unfounded or false notion that becomes a popular belief or tradition in society.

Stereotype

An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences.

Myth: Jews Killed Jesus

Know It

The myth that Jews collectively murdered Jesus, also referred to as “deicide,” has been used to incite violence and even murder against Jewish communities for centuries. In the New Testament, Jesus is said to have been tried in a Jewish judicial body called the Sanhedrin before being turned over to Roman authorities. Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem sometime around 30 CE. Pontius Pilate, then serving as the Roman prefect (or governor) of Judaea, both presided over the trial of Jesus and gave the order for his crucifixion. Time and again, these circumstances have been cited as proof of Jewish deicide.

One of the earliest and clearest examples appears in Matthew 27:25, written several decades after the events. When Pontius Pilate second-guesses his decision to have Jesus crucified, Jews are caricatured as a bloodthirsty lynch mob. This narrative is patently false. While certain leaders in the local Jewish community felt that Jesus’ teachings were politically subversive, experts have gathered that Jesus was not perceived as particularly threatening or enraging to the Jews around him. Modern readers misinterpret the trial of Jesus as a conflict between Jews and Christians, but this does not correspond with the Jewish origins of Christianity or with the fact that Christianity emerged years after Jesus’ death. The only non-Jews present in the story of Jesus’ crucifixion were the Romans.


Historians as well as Christian leaders have agreed that the claim is baseless. While the Christian community has by and large abandoned the accusation of deicide, it was not until the Catholic Church under Pope Paul VI finally discredited the notion of Jewish deicide in 1964 in its “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” (*Nostra aetate*), published by the Second Vatican Council. In no uncertain terms, the Declaration states that the crucifixion of Jesus “cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today.”

Despite this reckoning, the myth of Jewish deicide has persisted for millennia. What’s more, over the centuries, it has inspired derivative myths, such as accusations that Jews desecrate the Eucharist or poison wells to kill Christian villagers. Because the Qur’an explicitly states that Jews did not kill Jesus [Qur’an 4.157], a more common version of this trope in the Muslim world utilizes certain contested anecdotes from scripture involving Jewish individuals to make unfair and inaccurate generalizations that collectively accuse all Jews of being killers of divine prophets.

Reflection

1. What information about this antisemitic myth surprised you?
2. Why do you think the myth that the Jewish people are collectively responsible for the death of Jesus Christ has been repeatedly used by different groups in different time periods and parts of the world?
3. After watching and reading about it, what do you think is the impact of this myth?

See It

<p>“Catholics have lost every single battle in the culture wars because they cannot bring themselves to say the word Jew. Because they cannot say the word Jew, they cannot identify the enemy. Am I saying that the Jews are our enemy? Yes, the Jews are the people who killed Christ. They are enemies of the entire human race.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">–E. Michael Jones <i>Traditionalist Catholic antisemitic ideologue</i></p>	<p>“It was the whole crowd in front of Pilate, about to riot... which made Pilate give way by their calling down upon themselves and their descendants the responsibility for the deicide (death of God in His human nature). Now this crowd was overwhelmingly Jewish, and the crowd identified themselves as such (“Us and our children”). Therefore the blame for the deicide rests upon those descendants unless and until collectively they recognise and adore their own true Messiah, but Scripture says this will only happen at the end of the world...”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">– Bishop Richard Williamson, a provocative traditionalist Catholic preacher with a history of antisemitism and Holocaust denial, April 13, 2019.</p>
<p>Title of a book sold on Amazon perpetuates the trope of Deicide. <i>Why the Jews Killed Jesus: A Comprehensive Investigation of Judaism and the Source of Their Hatred of Christ</i> (Spanish Edition, Sept 2020).</p>	<p>Mel Gibson’s film, <i>The Passion of the Christ</i>, depicts Pontius Pilate as having been entirely reluctant to sentence Jesus. Only when he is blackmailed into submission by Jewish authorities does he go through with the sentencing.</p>
 <p>May 16, 2021 anti-Israel rally in Miami: “Jesus was Palestinian and you killed him too!”</p> <p><i>Image Credit: Signs from an anti-Israeli rally in Miami.</i></p>	 <p><i>Image Credit: Political cartoon from Sound Money magazine, April 1896</i></p>

Reflection

1. How does the myth that the Jewish people are collectively responsible for the death of Jesus Christ manifest in these examples?
2. What is the impact of these examples on the Jewish community and society at large?
3. Choose one example. Who is the target audience for the example? Why?

Address It

In the long history of Jewish scapegoating, deicide is the original and most damning false accusation. It set the terms for the most foundational Christian theological condemnations of Jews and Judaism within contexts ruled largely by religion.

The notion of Jewish deicide might seem like a harmless historical speculation, but in fact, those who spread the myth are usually less concerned with historical facts than they are with essentializing and demonizing Jews. In any case, historians and theologians agree: Jews are not responsible for the death of Jesus – not then and not now.

Reflection

1. How does this myth contribute to antisemitic attitudes today?
2. What information helps you reject this myth?