Addressing Anti-Semitic Stereotypes and Prejudice

Teaching Aid

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WORDS INTO ACTION
TO ADDRESS ANTI-SEMITISM

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Addressing Anti-Semitic Stereotypes and Prejudice

Striving for equity, inclusion and opportunity for all is a universal goal. By incorporating each individual's unique talents and identities, society is better able to ensure a prosperous future. However, with diversity often comes a series of generalizations and stereotypes that can be hurtful. A stereotype is an oversimplified image of a certain group of people. People often laugh about or dismiss stereotypes. However, stereotypes encourage prejudice and pose a danger to the classroom environment.[1] They can lead to negative repercussions and facilitate hate.

Stereotypes of the Jewish people and their communities have permeated European history for thousands of years. They contribute to a negative image of Jewry that has the potential to foster prejudiced attitudes and behaviours towards Jewish people in the community.

Stereotypes against Jews can enter the classroom in different ways that include, but are not limited to, the following:

• Students might repeat an anti-Semitic stereotype or prejudiced view they have heard and then act upon it by behaving prejudicially toward Jewish classmates; and

• Anti-Semitic stereotypes may be reflected in the literature, religious texts, art or historic sources being used in the school.

The purpose of this teaching aid is to provide an overview of the role and function of stereotypes, a summary and "debunking" of the most common stereotypes and myths against Jews, and concrete suggestions as to how teachers might address them in their classrooms.

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[1] *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2018), p. 41, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/383089>.

Background

Stereotyping, bias and prejudice are natural human phenomena. People may choose to believe stereotypes to help simplify the complexity of the world around them. Unfortunately, many stereotypes about particular social groups can be found in the culture and community at large. Prejudices prevalent in a community can unconsciously guide our behaviour and lead us to inappropriate or harmful conclusions. This has a negative impact on the equity and justice we strive for in a democratic society: in education, employment, conflict resolution and maintaining peace and harmony among social groups.

At their worst, stereotypes have been deliberately used as a way to stifle social change and to maintain existing systems of political power. This has been seen through the ages, for example, in discussions of gender relations as women gained greater political and economic independence.

For thousands of years, anti-Jewish images, notions and myths have led to stereotypes, spurring hatred and the persecution of the Jewish people. They continue to emerge around the world, in both overt and concealed ways, despite being officially rejected by international, regional and national authorities. New stereotypes, defamations and images are continuously generated, while old ones are recycled in new forms. Anti-Semitic prejudice is frequently expressed, perhaps at different times and by different people, in contrary terms.[2]

Traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes may be seen in anti-Semitic attacks either motivating or accompanying the behaviour. These may include assertions that "the Jews" are rich and greedy, that they are conspiring to control the world, or that "the Jews" killed Jesus Christ. Anti-Semitic defamation frequently manifests itself through a conspiratorial worldview. For example, on both the political left and right, there are people who falsely claim that Jews planned the terrorist attack in the United States on 11 September 2001. Recently, new conspiracy theories have emerged that falsely allege Jewish involvement in the European refugee crisis.[3]

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[2] For example, Jews are criticized both as rootless cosmopolitans and as narrow-minded communitarians, or portrayed as both all-powerful and subhuman.

[3] Péter Krekó et al., "Migrant Invasion' as a Trojan Horseshoe", in Péter Krekó et al. (eds.), *Trust within Europe* (Budapest: Political Capital, 2015), pp. 63-72, <http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_OSIFE_Trust_Within_Europe_web.pdf>.

Researchers from Germany and the United States investigated how contemplating another's psychological experiences makes people less likely to display automatic expressions of bias. After considering the perspective of an elderly person, test subjects were less likely to apply elderly stereotypes like dependency or infirmity. Prejudice towards black people decreased when participants were instructed to imagine the victims' feelings while watching incidents of racial discrimination.

Source: A. R. Todd et al., "Perspective Taking Combats Automatic Expressions of Racial Bias", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 100, June 2011, pp. 1027-1042.

In order to respond effectively to stereotypes and misconceptions, it is necessary to be able to identify their various forms and understand how these falsehoods developed over time. Below are some of the most persistent myths, tropes and memes about Jews, and are intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.[4]

Blood Libel

Since ancient times, Jews have been falsely accused of killing non-Jews for ritual purposes and purported to be in league with the devil. In medieval Europe, beginning in the 12th century, this was often accompanied by accusations that Jews used their victims' blood to bake matzah for the Jewish holiday of Passover. Historically, these false allegations have frequently been followed by anti-Semitic riots and mass murders. Echoes of this blood libel can still be heard in discourse today.

Communists

The involvement of some Jews in communist and social democratic movements in Europe has often become the basis for claims of Judeo-Bolshevism or Judeo-Communism. This myth was widespread across Europe in the first half of the 20th century, and Nazi propaganda actively promoted it within both Germany and the territories it occupied during World War II. The internationalism of early Communism, combined with the fact that some Jewish resistance fighters joined Soviet partisan units or national Communist parties, often supplemented claims that Jews collectively or as individuals lacked loyalty to their homelands. In modern times, the trope of the communist Jew re-surfaces in discussions about national identity or the history of World War II as claims that local crimes against Jews before, during and after the Holocaust were the result of anti-Communist fervour.

Deicide Myth

Since the early years of the Christian church, some Christians have condemned Jews for the death of Jesus Christ and have held Jews collectively responsible for this action.[5] The deicidal myth has reinforced the association of all Jews with traits that are imagined to accompany the killing of a messiah, e.g., supernatural powers, intransigence and conspiratorial treachery.

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[4] The preceding paragraphs and the examples of myths and stereotypes are taken from *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education*, *op. cit.* pp. 80-83.

[5] The "Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican ('Nostra aetate')" repudiated this myth in 1965.

Dual or Lack of National Loyalty

Jews are often subject to claims that they conspire to shape public policy for Jewish interests, or that their patriotism is less than that of other citizens. This occasionally manifests as claims that Jews, collectively or as individuals, are not loyal to their home countries. To be accepted as national compatriots, Jews are sometimes asked to disavow their connection with Israel, despite the fact that Israel often forms a central part of Jewish identity. This myth can also appear in claims that Jews do not participate proportionally in military service or other public spheres of life in democratic states.

Media

Allegations of Jewish control over the media have been present since at least the early 19th century and were repeated in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.[6] In the 20th and 21st centuries, individuals of presumed or actual Jewish ancestry, who may have personal influence as a result of the position they hold within a particular media outlet, have been conflated with claims of general "Jewish control" over the entire media industry. Some groups refer instead to "Zionist control" of the media. The idea asserts that these individuals act together over time in a conspiratorial manner to make decisions, but ignores the fact that many other individuals, who may be similar in some way, are also employed in the media industry, and that its variety, vastness and constant development make it impossible for it to be controlled in such a way.

Money and Criminality

Claims of Jewish control of and fascination with finances are as old as the New Testament, in which Jews are occasionally portrayed as moneychangers engaged in unholy practice at the Temple in Jerusalem. This continued into the medieval period, when Christians were forbidden from lending money at interest, leaving the field open to others. Since Jews were severely restricted from entering most trades and from owning agricultural land, some began to lend money. Since then, Jews have been depicted as wealthy, powerful and menacing. In some countries, Jewish women have been stereotyped as dressing ostentatiously to demonstrate wealth. Today, it is found in references to "Rothschild money", or the identification of a Jewish conspiracy with international banking and criminality.

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[6] The Protocols of the Elders of Zion is a forged anti-Semitic text which purports to describe a Jewish plan for global domination. It was first published in Russia in 1903 and exposed as clumsy plagiarism in 1921. It has been translated into multiple languages and disseminated internationally since the early part of the 20th century.

Strategies for Identifying and Debunking Anti-Semitic Stereotypes in the Classroom

Teachers should hold discussions about general patterns of stereotyping as an entry point for raising awareness about specific stereotypes, including anti-Semitism. This may involve using examples of types of stereotypes and related patterns to guide students to understanding the negative impact of stereotyping and the (often attractive) simplified approach to complex issues that it encourages and enables.

Once students have reflected on how these concepts relate to group identity, teachers can use a human rights based approach to combat intolerance and discrimination against Jews because they are Jews, drawing parallels with the experiences of other groups.

Three questions to debunk a narrative

Who is behind the information?
Ask the learners who they think is behind the information. Is the source identified? Is it anonymous? Is it a primary source?

What is the evidence for the claim or statement?
Ask learners if there is evidence within the information. If there is evidence, is it credible? Is there a way to verify the possible evidence?

What do other sources say?
Ask learners if they have heard this information before. Are there other sources of the same or similar information? Is there different potential evidence available from these other sources?

SOURCE: Adapted from Stanford History Education Group, *Civic Online Reasoning*, <https://sheg.stanford.edu/civic-online-reasoning>.

Examples of exercises that educators can use to challenge and prevent anti-Semitic stereotypes[7]

Type of exercise	Example
Use personal narratives	Share personal narratives that highlight: • Diversity within the Jewish world to demonstrate that Jews, like people of other traditions, have a wide range of religious beliefs and practices, or none at all; • Commonalities between Jews and others, such as cultural, socio-economic, geographical, linguistic and other characteristics; and • Jewish individuals and other people of diverse religious or cultural communities who have had positive impacts on local, national and/or international contexts.
Integrate into history lessons	• Teach the history of the Jews at school as part of local, national or international history;[8] • Individualize the history and tell personal stories of Jewish individuals (ordinary people and well-known figures who have contributed to science, the arts, philosophy, etc.); • Consider how various stereotypes accepted in societies have and do impact the rights enjoyed by men, women and members of certain communities or groups, including Jews, at different times in history as well as today; and/or • Include lessons about anti-Semitism from before the Holocaust through to the present (this does not replace essential lessons about the Holocaust).
Focus on students' diverse identities	• Students can create their own self-portraits (in writing, painting, poems, etc.) to reflect on their own diverse identities; • Have the students present their self-portraits and ask them to identify the diversity in their class (e.g., race, colour, language, nationality, national or ethnic origin, religion, culture, sex, sexual orientation, hobbies, interests, ideals and idiosyncrasies); • Guide students to identify certain aspects of their self-portraits that may reveal or generate a stereotype. To do this, ask students to focus on who they are and what factors influence the formation of their identity (including their own internal choices and external pressures); and/or • Explore the relationship between a student's self-perception of particular traits and others' perceptions of them to demonstrate how social narratives are constructed.

[7] These examples have been taken from *Addressing Anti-Semitism Through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2018), p. 41, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/383089>.

[8] For a comprehensive bibliography of background information sources on the Middle East, see the Yale Library Near Eastern Collection, <https://www.library.yale.edu/neareast/politics1.html>.

What to do if …?

…someone expresses a stereotype, for example: "All Jews love money – that's why they're rich and run the banks"?

In a non-threatening way, try to find the roots of the generalization. Are they stereotyping because they only have limited experience with Jewish people? Do their ideas come from family, friends, movies, television or books? Help them think about the sources of this misinformation. This is a good time to talk about how easy it is to draw erroneous conclusions from a few examples. It can also be helpful to recognize that personal experience is limited and to note that researchers usually look at thousands or hundreds of thousands of examples before drawing conclusions.

Many stereotypes against Jews have complex historical roots – such as the ones mentioned above – and it is worth exploring their origins. If you are not equipped with knowledge to address the stereotype when it is raised in the classroom, respond by explaining that you suspect this to be a stereotype, and that you will come back to it at a later time with more information.

Is there tension in the room after the stereotype was spoken aloud? If there is, it can be helpful to remind students that we can all make generalizations based on preconceived notions, even if we ought not to. This allows everyone to relax and be open to a more constructive exploration of the problematic statement in follow-up work.

Activity

Write down on the board some generalizations, leaving the subject blank. For example: "All ___ like spaghetti" or "All ___ drink tea". Ask the class to contribute ideas and to fill the blank with different groups. What do they notice? What happens when one's own in-group (e.g., "students") is placed in the blank space: Does it feel true to life? What if these statements were negative generalizations? Would that feel different? Introduce or remind the class what a stereotype is. Connect this activity to the stereotype against Jews that was expressed earlier in the class and lead a discussion with the class about the dangers of stereotyping.

Help students gain an awareness of the emotions they are experiencing when discussing various stereotypes. Anger can correlate to feelings of attack, while fear can be reflected in wanting to escape or get away. Stereotypes often connect with how power or security are experienced. Sometimes approaching these ideas from an emotional point of view can help to clarify the underlying concepts that are being voiced in a student's choice of stereotypical imagery.

Counter-stereotyping is a technique whereby alternative images are provided, expanding our notions of the characteristics of particular groups of people. Regarding physical characteristics of Jews, ask students to prepare a list of photos of ten well-known Jewish people from history or today, representing a wide variety of social sectors (e.g., science, sport, politics, arts, business and philanthropy) and countries around the world.
Did you know that people of colour account for about one-fifth of Jews in the world today?
For a rap video about Jewish diversity, see Y-Love's "This is Unity": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvRy8bGSpDU&list=PLvlhxOY_PTr2QjL2dwP8_hgPlg_R2mXQm>

...someone gives an example that seems to confirm a stereotype as true, for example: "Jews have big noses, just look at [...], he is Jewish and has a big nose"?

This particular statement refers to an old racial stereotype that Jews have large and crooked noses. Explain that some Jews, just like some non-Jewish people, may have big noses, but that it is a generalization. Jews live all over the world and have intermarried with local populations for centuries, resulting in the fact that there is no particular Jewish "look" at all (Jews are not a race). There are red-haired and pale Jews, dark-skinned and dark-haired Jews and everything in between. The "Jewish nose" stereotype is a powerful visual image that links medieval Christian art to Nazi propaganda and anti-Semitic cartoons today,[9] the goal of which is to portray Jews as threatening, despicable, evil or socially distant.

Ask students questions that challenge their assumptions and encourage the development of their critical thinking skills. Questions can include: Where does this idea come from? Is it based on your own experience or are you repeating something you have heard? Do you know the source of the information you have chosen to repeat? Can you share any evidence for your claim? Are you open to investigating your opinion? Are you open to changing your opinion after your investigation?

...a source or teaching material includes an anti-Semitic stereotype?

It is important to understand that many influential figures of history, including religious leaders, politicians, philosophers, writers and artists, held

9 Sara Lipton, "The Invention of the Jewish Nose", *The New York Review of Books*, 14 November 2014, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2014/11/14/invention-jewish-nose/>.

anti-Semitic views. As a result, those views may be introduced to students while studying historic sources, literature and other materials. For example, the famous Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire is known for his anti-Semitic writings, as is the British poet T.S. Eliot and the key thinker of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther.[10] Political figures,

For an example of how to teach about a piece of literature that employs stereotypes, see the Anti-Defamation League's guidance on Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice": <https://www.adl.org/news/article/anti-semitism-and-the-merchant-of-venice>.

including Franklin D. Roosevelt,[11] have also been associated at times with anti-Semitic ideas.

There are many opportunities to address hidden or controversial histories within already existing curricula. It is also worth

Stereotypes in sources: Analysis checklist

- When was the source written and by whom? What was the social context and the author's perspective at the time?
- What is the source writing about? Is it a piece of literature about a particular place and time? Is it about an important historical period with uncomfortable elements from society's past?
- Was there any political or social agenda behind the source's writing? Could that have influenced the way it was written?
- What stereotypes are portrayed? What is the origin of these stereotypes? Why might stereotypes have been employed in this source? Could the author have done it differently?
- Why is this source still worth using today? What can we learn from it?

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[10] Anti-Semitism in the works of these influential figures in Western thought is well documented. For example, see: Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); Anthony Julius, *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); "Martin Luther", Florida Holocaust Museum, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080522013514/http://www.flholocaustmuseum.org/history_wing/antisemitism/reformation.cfm>.

[11] "Eleanor Roosevelt and the Jews" by Warren Boroson, Jewish Standard, New Jersey, United States of America, 26 July 2013, <https://jewishstandard.timesofisrael.com/eleanor-roosevelt-and-the-jews/>

identifying writers, politicians, popular heroes and local or national stories that depict Jewish people and communities in a positive light, and to introduce their work to the class.

Identifying and challenging stereotypes of Jews in sources or teaching materials offers an important learning opportunity about historical context and how to relate to controversial texts and materials. These texts can also contain stereotypes about women, persons with disabilities, people of colour and others. It is an opportunity for students to practice their critical thinking, identify their own values and become more confident in rejecting certain ideas while considering others.

Teachers can encourage students to accept their shared responsibility in identifying and deconstructing stereotypes. Through the process of identifying, researching and diffusing a harmful stereotype from their learning space, students may also identify their own personal biases, which they may not have realized they and their society had and that may have had a negative impact on Jewish or other people around them, such as peers in their class. Shared responsibility among students creates an atmosphere of support within classrooms and encourages teamwork, notably between students who may have previously held prejudice towards one another.

Resources and Materials for Further Reading

Key publications:

Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for policymakers (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2018),
www.conspiracywatch.info.

- For information and activities to encourage self-reflection among educators and students, see page 32;
- For examples of exercises to challenge and prevent anti-Semitic stereotypes, see pages 41 and 42;
- For information on educating children about stereotypical images, see page 43; and
- For information to help recognize anti-Semitic stereotypes, see Annex 2 ("Examples of Anti-Semitic Tropes or Memes") and Annex 3 ("Examples of Anti-Semitic Symbols").

A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism (Paris: UNESCO, 2016),
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244676.

For more information on anti-Semitic myths and facts, see:

Anti-Defamation League, "CAS Myths and Facts",
https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/CAS-Myths-and-Facts.pdf

Anti-Defamation League, *Using Facts to Respond to Anti-Semitism*, 2006
https://www.adl.org/media/5137/download

European Network Against Racism, "Debunking Myths about Jews", October 2015
www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/debunkingmyths_lr.pdf

For more on implicit bias, see:

Implicit Bias Project (including tests to measure individuals' implicit bias towards different groups), see:
www.implicit.harvard.edu/implicit
www.projectimplicit.net/index.html

For teaching ideas about stereotypes, see:

Teaching Tolerance, "Teaching About Stereotypes"
www.tolerance.org/magazine/teaching-about-stereotypes-20 and
"Learning Plans"
www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/learning-plans?keyword=stereotypes

Anti-Defamation League, "Lemons – An Activity on Generalization and Stereotypes for Elementary School Children",
www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/Lemons-from-Empowering-Children.pdf

Discovery Education, "Understanding Stereotypes"
www.discoveryeducation.com/teachers/free-lesson-plans/understanding-stereotypes.cfm

Education World, "'Bursting' Stereotypes",
www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/03/lp294-01.shtml