

Examining Anti-Semitism Over Time
Making Connections

This is a series of three lessons which, although each can stand alone as a single class exercise/activity, shall ultimately work best if they are taught as a sequence. The overall purpose is to examine different (and, at the same time, similar) Jewish responses to anti-Semitic incidents which occurred during three different periods of time.

The first lesson examines anti-Semitic sentiment and actions during the Middle Ages, using the text: "A Jewish Lament, 1242" (by the Meir of Rothenburg). The second lesson examines anti-Semitic sentiments and actions during the Holocaust, using the text: "Terezin" (by Hanuš Hachenburg) and the final lesson examines present-day anti-Semitic sentiments and actions as reported in an article written by Sheri Shefa, for the *Canadian Jewish News*. There are several discussion points to address within each separate lesson; however, it is strongly recommended that connections be made among all three texts.

Two additional texts, "Basic Time Line Ancient World" and "Christian Attitudes and Legislation Concerning Jews: Late Antiquity and Middle Ages", have also been provided. Although these texts are not specifically associated with any of the discussion questions that have been prepared for "A Jewish Lament, 1242", "Terezin" or the article, "Toronto Public School Responds to Anti-Semitic Incident", it is highly recommended that educators familiarize themselves with the information that these texts contain and take some time to discuss it with their classes in association with the prepared lesson plans.

Basic Time Line: Ancient World

- 586 B.C.E. Babylonia Conquers the Kingdom of Judah, destroy Jerusalem and the First Temple; the Babylonian exile – Most Jews in Babylonia; some in Egypt
- 538 B.C.E. Persia defeats Babylonia. Decree of Cyrus, King of Persia, allowing Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple; Persian rule
- [c. 420s – 400 Jews serve as soldiers in Persian garrison in Elephantine (Yeb), Egypt. Correspondence with Temple in Jerusalem. Attack on shrine at Elephantine by Egyptians.]
- 332 B.C.E. Alexander the Great conquers the region, including Judah (Grk. Judea); spread of Greek language, culture, settlements, cities, populations. Hellenization. Contact between Greeks and native “ , including Jews.
- Late 4th C. Wars between Alexander’s (d. 323) successors.
c. 300 B.C.E. Ptolemy dynasty rules Egypt [and Judea (till 198)]
Seleucid dynasty rules Syria/Mesopotamia (takes Judea in 198). During 3rd C. B.C.E., the Torah is translated into Greek. Rise and spread of philo-Jewish and anti-Jewish ideas, especially in Egypt, but throughout the Hellenistic world.
- 167 B.C.E. Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV desecrates Temple in Jerusalem; forbids practice of Jewish religion. Conflict between Hellenizers and observant Jews. Martyrdom and Revolt.
- 164 B.C.E. Temple rededicated by Judah the Maccabee and his followers. Hanukah.
- 160s- 142 B.C.E. Judah’s brothers, Jonathan (d. 142) and Simon gain Power in Judea. Seleucid rule declines. Simon – high priest and head of state – independent Judea under his and successors’ rule from 142- 38 B.C.E. – the Hasmonean dynasty

Time Line: Jews in the Ancient World (Continued)

- 60s – 31 B.C.E. Roman Expansion in Mediterranean; conquest of Asia Minor (Turkey) and Syria – end of Seleucid Dynasty. Rome changing from Republic to Dictatorship to Empire. Roman Empire founded in 27 B.C.E. by Octavian, i.e., Augustus Caesar. Rome conquers Egypt in 31 B.C.E. – end of Ptolemies (last is Queen Cleopatra IV) Egypt & Syria Roman provinces – large Jewish population
- 63 B.C.E. Roman army under Pompey enters Judea.
- 62-38 B.C.E. Civil unrest in Judea; End of Hasmonean dynasty. Herod takes Jerusalem in 37 B.C.E. with Roman aid and Army.
- 37- 4 B.C.E. Herod the Great rules Judea
- 4 B.C.E. – 6 C.E. Herod's son: Archelaus rules Judea; Herod II—Gallilee; Phillip – Golan
- 6 C.E. – 41 C.E. Archelaus deposed; direct Roman rule in Judea by prefect
- 38 C.E. Pogrom against Jews of Alexandria (cooperation of Roman governor and Greek population); Jews appeal to Emperor
- 41- 44 C.E. Agrippa I, Herod the Great's grandson, rules entire country.
- 44- 66 C.E. Direct Roman rule by procurator; deteriorating situation; Jewish revolt against Rome
- 66-70 C.E. Great Revolt; Attacks on Jews in Alexandria
Defeat of Galilee in 67 C.E.
Jerusalem and Temple destroyed in 70 C.E.; Fiscus iudaicus
- 73 or 74 C.E. Masada – final rebel stronghold taken by Romans
- 115-117 C.E. Diaspora Uprisings in Egypt, Cyrene, Cyprus\ Roman victory
- 132-135 C.E. Revolt led by Bar Kokhba in Judea\Roman victory; Hadrianic Decrees and persecutions
- 63 B.C.E.

**Christian Attitudes and Legislation concerning Jews:
Late Antiquity and Middle Ages**

Rivka Duker Fishman

Legislation of Christian/Roman Emperors (and others)

I. Separation

Laws of the Council of Elvira Spain (300)

No intermarriage; no Jewish blessing of crops
No eating with Jews; no cohabitation

Council of Nicea (325)

No celebrating Easter according to the date of
Passover

Law of Emperor Constantius (339)

No intermarriage **Law of Constantine (315)**
No conversion to Judaism

II. Degradation

Law of Constantius (339)

No owning or circumcising Christian slaves
Removal of Christian slaves from Jewish owners

Law of Theodosius II (439)

No holding of public office (civil service)
No building new synagogues – only repair of
existing ones

Laws of Theodosius II (415)

Demotion and restriction of Nasi's Authority
429 – Abolition of office of Nasi

Law of Justinian (531)

No testifying in court against Orthodox Christians

III. Regulation and Intervention

Justinian: synagogue service in 553

IV. Protection: persons, property, no forced conversion

A JEWISH LAMENT, 1242

IN 1242, as a result of the sentence passed against the Talmud, wagonloads of Hebrew books were brought to Paris and burned. For French Jewry, and indeed for all northern-European Jewry, the conflagration was a tragic event and threatened profoundly the flourishing intellectual tradition which these Jews had painstakingly created. An elegy over the burned tomes was penned by the young Meir of Rothenburg, then a student in Paris and destined to become one of the foremost authorities of German Jewry. While revealing few specific details of the tragedy, the poem conveys the deep sense of Jewish shock and loss.

O THOU CONSUMED BY FIRE — seek out the welfare of those who mourn thee,
 Who desire desperately to dwell in your courtyards;
 Those who yearn for the soil of the one true land,
 Who suffer in astonishment over the scorching of your parchment pages;
 Those who walk in dark despair without illumination,
 Who hope daily for a light that will burst forth upon them and upon you.

Seek out the welfare of a shattered man who cries out with a broken heart,
 Who mourns incessantly over your pain,
 Who howls like a jackal and an ostrich,
 Who offers a bitter eulogy over you.

How were you given over to a consuming fire?
 How were you devoured by man-made flames and the oppressors not scattered
 by your coals?

How long, O lovely one, will you lie quietly,
 While my young ones bear your shame?

You must rather sit in grandeur, judging even the heavenly beings,
 Bringing all cases before your tribunal.
 You shall yet decree the burning of the religion of fire;
 Blessed is He Who shall award you your due.

Did our Redeemer give you to us in a pillar of fire,
 So that ultimately your pages would be consigned to the flames?

Was it for this, Sinai, that God chose you,
 Rejecting greater mountains and shining forth upon you?
 Was it to serve as a beacon for a failing faith, one whose glory declines?
 I must offer a fitting parable:
 You are, Sinai, like a king crying at his son's banquet,
 Knowing that the lad is to die—thus do you weep over the Torah.
 Instead of your normal covering, O Sinai, you must don sackcloth,
 You must put on the garb of widows, you must exchange your raiments.

I shall pour forth my tears until they become a stream,
 Until they reach the graves of your two great ministers,
 Moses and Aaron, buried there in the hills.
 Then shall I ask—Is there a new Torah,
 Thus permitting the burning of your pages?
 The third month ended, and the fourth began,
 A time for destroying your delight and all your beauty.
 He smashed the tablets of law
 And then repeated the calamity by burning it—is this your recompense?

I am stunned—how can eating be pleasurable
 After I have seen how they gathered your booty?
 Gathered it throughout your isolated quarter,
 Then burned the holy booty, so that you are unable to join your people.
 I know not how to find a straight path,
 So burdened with mourning are your paths of righteousness.
 To brew a cup of tears would be sweeter to me than honey;
 O that my legs might be chained in your irons.
 To draw the waters of my tears would be sweet to my eye,
 So they might be exhausted for all those who hold fast to your cloak.
 But those tears dry up as they drop on my cheeks,
 For my pity has been aroused by the departure of your master.
 He has taken his gold and gone off afar,
 And with him have departed your shadows.
 And I bereft and abandoned remain alone,
 Like a standard at the top of your fortress.
 No longer shall I hear the voice of the singers,
 For the strings of your lyre have been snapped.
 I shall put on sackcloth, for the souls of your deceased,
 As many as the sands, were so very dear.
 I am shocked by the sun, which shines for all,
 But remains dark for me and for you.
 My cry to the Lord is bitter, over your decline and your doom—
 May He recall the love of your youth!
 Put on sackcloth yourself over the conflagration
 That broke forth and consumed your people.

May the Lord comfort you in accord with your suffering;
May He return the tribes of Jeshurun and raise you from lowliness.
You shall yet bedeck yourself with scarlet and take up the drum,
Going forth in dance and exulting.
My heart also shall be uplifted when my Lord shines forth upon you,
Lighting your shadows and illuminating your darkness.

Discussion Questions for "A Jewish Lament, 1242"

1. The author, the Meir of Rothenburg, personifies the Torah in his lament. How does he do so and what effect does it create? Why is his decision to use this technique appropriate to the larger overall context of anti-Jewish sentiment?
2. How does Rothenburg characterize himself and his people? Please find three examples that support your opinion.
3. Rothenburg makes several references to subjects that / who are recognizable and important to the Jewish faith. Please find three examples and explain how each one contributes to the meaning of his composition.
4. What universal human reaction does Rothenburg display in the seventh stanza of his "Lament"? Why should it be easy for us to identify with how he is feeling? What might prevent somebody from empathizing with the author?
5. How does the tone shift in the last six lines of this piece? What is the reason for this shift and why do you think that Rothenburg chooses to conclude in this way?
6. How did you find yourself reacting as you read "A Jewish Lament, 1242"? Please describe some of the thoughts and emotions that you experienced (at least two) at different parts of the composition – and explain why.
7. A very well-known statement by Heinrich Heine claims that: "Where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too." What is your understanding of this connection and why is it a suitable warning for all times and places?

TEREZIN

That bit of filth in dirty walls,
And all around barbed wire,
And 30,000 souls who sleep
Who once will wake
And once will see
Their own blood spilled.

I was once a little child,
Three years ago,
That child who longed for other worlds.
But now I am no more a child
For I have learned to hate.
I am a grown-up person now,
I have known fear.

Bloody words and a dead day then,
That's something different than bogeymen!

But anyway, I still believe I only sleep today,
That I'll wake up, a child again, and start to laugh and play.
I'll go back to childhood sweet like a briar rose,
Like a bell that wakes us from a dream,
Like a mother with an ailing child
Loves him with aching woman's love.
How tragic, then, is youth that lives
With enemies, with gallows ropes,
How tragic, then, for children on your lap
To say: this for the good, that for the bad.

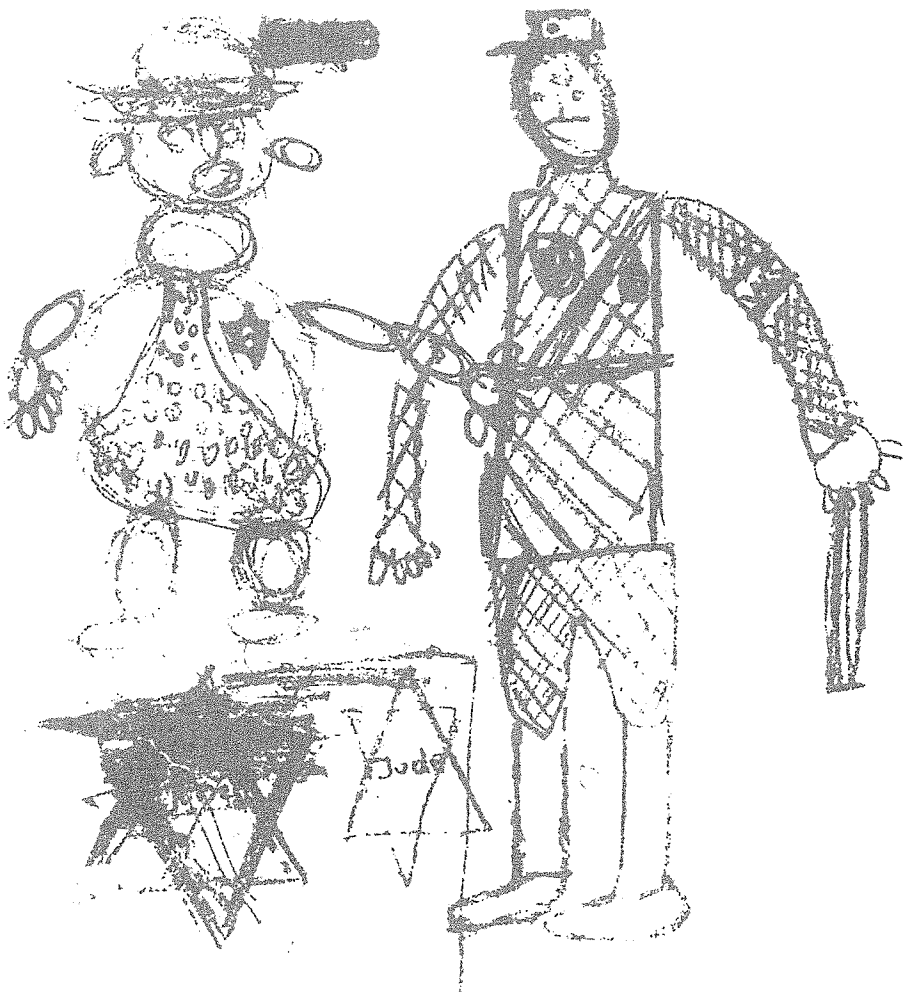
Somewhere, far away out there, childhood sweetly sleeps,
Along that path among the trees,
There o'er that house
That was once my pride and joy.
There my mother gave me birth into this world
So I could weep . . .

In the flame of candles by my bed, I sleep
And once perhaps I'll understand
That I was such a little thing,
As little as this song.

These 30,000 souls who sleep
Among the trees will wake,
Open an eye
And because they see
A lot

They'll fall asleep again . . .

Hanuš Hachenburg
IX. 1944



Discussion Questions for "Terezin"

1. How does the author, Hanuš Hachenburg, capture the setting for his reader in the first stanza? What emotions are being expressed and how?
2. Like Rothenburg, Hachenburg also provides characterization details for himself. Please list three different traits that Hachenburg ascribes to himself with a supporting example for each one.
3. What do you think is meant by the lines: "Bloody words and a dead day then, / That's something different than bogeymen!"
4. According to Hachenburg, what does it mean to be "grown-up"? Please expand upon this idea using examples from your own observation and / or experience.
5. Both "Terezin" and "A Jewish Lament, 1942" contain elements of hope. How does Hachenburg develop a feeling of hope in his composition?
6. How do you understand the last six lines of "Terezin"?
7. How did you find yourself reacting as you read "Terezin"? Please describe some of the thoughts and emotions that you experienced (at least two) at different parts of the composition – and explain why.

Toronto public school responds to anti-Semitic incident

[cjnews.com/news/canada/toronto-public-school-responds-to-anti-semitic-incident](https://www.cjnews.com/news/canada/toronto-public-school-responds-to-anti-semitic-incident)

April 19, 2018



A Jewish student club flyer that was defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti. (Robert Walker/Facebook)

Northern Secondary School, a public high school in midtown Toronto, is being applauded by a Jewish advocacy group for the way it has responded to an anti-Semitic incident.

Robert Walker, national director of Hasbara Fellowships Canada, said he was invited to the school on April 18, to speak to a Jewish student club run by Northern students who are also members of NCSY, an Orthodox youth group.

"We were discussing anti-Semitism on campus and one of the students mentioned that anti-Semitism is everywhere and that there was even anti-Semitic graffiti on one of the flyers at the school," Walker said.

A hand-drawn flyer inviting Jewish and non-Jewish students alike to enjoy free pizza on Wednesdays during lunch was defaced with swastikas, as well as the phrases, "F-k the Rothschilds," "Heil Hitler" and "Gas 'em all."

"I asked what had been done about it and the student told me that it was still up. I had them take it down and we reported it soon after to the administration," Walker said.

READ: THE POWER OF WORDS AND THE NEED TO STOP ANTI-SEMITISM

"Within three hours of being informed about this, the principal was there all night going through security footage, contacted the police and were in touch with the school board."

Walker said he hasn't yet been informed about whether the security cameras caught the incident on tape.

Gillian Gibbons, the school's principal, told Walker that in her view, this constitutes a hate crime.

Gibbons sent a letter to parents and students addressing the incident and promising to take action.

"This is completely unacceptable and upsetting for all of us at Northern. It is not reflective of who we are and what we stand for as a school and as a community," Gibbons wrote.

Who we are as a school will be measured by how we collectively respond to this situation.
– Gillian Gibbons

"Northern is a place that promotes and celebrates diversity, inclusion and respect for all in creating a caring and safe learning environment."

Gibbons said that school staff would be addressing the incident with students and encouraged anyone with information to come forward.

"This also speaks to the need for us as a school to continue to educate our students in human rights education, so that we can learn from our past, in order to better our future as an inclusive society," she said.

"Who we are as a school will be measured by how we collectively respond to this situation and not by this single despicable action."

Walker said he was pleased that the school administration acted so quickly and decisively.

"Obviously, one incident, while extremely troubling, doesn't represent the student body there, or the school. There is no evidence to suggest that this is systemic and the response of the school has been exactly what we want to see. If only we saw this from universities," Walker said.

"This is exactly what we would want to see."

Discussion Questions for "Toronto Public School Responds to Anti-Semitic Incident"

1. Describe your reaction to the picture of the defaced poster that is included in this article. Explain why you reacted in this way.
2. What is your understanding, in general, of the Northern Secondary Student's comment that "Anti-Semitism is everywhere"?
3. What is a "hate crime" and how does this incident display elements of a hate crime?
4. The school responded quickly and appropriately once staff members became aware of this incident; however, it took some time before the concern was brought forward. Why do you think that this was so and what do you think can be done to ensure faster recognition of discriminatory actions at our schools and in our communities?
5. "Who we are as a school will be measured by how we *collectively* respond to this situation. Why is it integral to emphasize a collective approach?"
6. The last major paragraph in this article contains a comment by Robert Walker wherein he states: "If only we saw this [call to action] in universities." What is your understanding of this statement?

Text Source Credits

The text, "Basic Time Line Ancient World" was generously provided by Dr. Rivka Duker-Fishman, Rothberg International School, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

The text, "Christian Attitudes and Legislation Concerning Jews: Late Antiquity and Middle Ages" was generously provided by Dr. Rivka Duker-Fishman, Rothberg International School, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

The poem, "A Jewish Lament, 1242" (by the Meir of Rothenburg) was generously provided by The International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem Source Book (International School for Educators program).

The poem, "Terezin" (by Hanuš Hachenburg) was photocopied from . . . *I never saw another butterfly . . . Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp, 1942-1944*, Compilation Copyright, 1993, by Schocken Books Inc. New York.

Illustration credit – The illustration: "Nazi Threatening Jew" that accompanies "Terezin" was drawn by Jiri Beutler who, like Hanuš Hachenburg, was forced to stay at Terezin.

The article "Toronto Public School Responds to Anti-Semitic Incident" (by Sheri Shefa) appeared in *The Canadian Jewish News* on April 19, 2018.