

**LESSON**

# Responses to Rising Antisemitism and Antisemitic Legislation in North Africa

## Overview

### About This Lesson

In the previous lesson, students learned about Jewish life in North Africa going back to pre-Islamic times and extending through the early 1900s. This lesson explores the ways that the political actions of European colonial powers in Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia influenced the fate of North African Jewry during the Holocaust. The Italian and Vichy French governments passed antisemitic race laws in Europe and brought that legislation to their colonies in North Africa. This legislation was implemented differently, depending on particular colonial histories and geo-political contexts. These laws had wide-ranging impacts on North African Jews and included expropriation of property, expulsion from schools and professions, and forced relocation.

Responses to the rising antisemitism and antisemitic laws reflect a range of choices that people can make in the face of persecution and hate. Through the voices of individuals who experienced the changing treatment of Jews in North Africa (including the voice of a Jewish teenager), students can gain insight into questions of identity and belonging that are both particular to the context and universal in their relevance to the world today.

Choices to resist are central to this lesson, from stories of individual defiance in Libya to stories of organized resistance in Algeria. The web of choices and consequences in North Africa fosters reflection on agency and responsibility more broadly.

### Essential Question

- In what ways do the experiences of Jews in pre-war and wartime North Africa provide a more complete story of World War II and the Holocaust?

### Guiding Questions

- How might the perceptions and prejudices of others impact one's sense of identity and belonging?
- What were the range of choices available to people in response to occupation and antisemitic racial laws in North Africa?
- In what ways did European colonization impact the communities of North Africa?
- What can we learn from the choices of many North Africans leading up to and during the Holocaust?

## Learning Objectives

- Students will deepen their understanding of the experience of the Holocaust and wartime North Africa through an analysis of primary and secondary sources that include personal reflections of North African Jews.
- Students will reflect on the range of responses to discriminatory laws and actions.

## What's Included

This lesson uses the following texts and materials. Access materials in [this Google Folder](#).

- **Video:** Colonialism and the Jews of North Africa
- **Handout:** Viewing Guide for "Colonialism and the Jews of North Africa"
- **Timeline:** Shifts in Power and Antisemitic Legislation in North Africa from Colonialism through WWII
- **Reading:** "A Jewish Adolescent Ponders Her Identity (1939)"
- **Handout:** Map the Internal World of a Writer
- **Reading:** Jewish Resistance in Algeria
- **Reading:** Interview with Benjamin Doron, Child Survivor from Libya

## Preparing to Teach

### A Note to Teachers

#### 1. Engaging with Challenging Content

In this lesson, students will read a range of sources that illuminate the realities of antisemitism in North Africa. For this reason, it is crucial that students have the opportunity to process individually and together the emotions and questions this history evokes. It is especially important for you to look at students' work and their participation in class discussions for evidence of how they are processing what they have encountered in this lesson. If necessary, follow up with individual students to offer support, or set aside additional class time for students to talk through and articulate their thoughts and feelings about this challenging history. We also recommend that you do the following:

- Preview each resource in this lesson before you share it with your students. Let students know in advance when they are about to encounter material that involves harm and injustice. If necessary, omit resources that you believe will be too disturbing for your students.
- Briefly review the class contract with students before beginning the lesson. This will help to reinforce the norms you have established and the idea of the classroom as a safe space for students to voice concerns, questions, or emotions that may arise.
- For more information, refer to the **Prepare to Teach** section for this mini-unit

## Lesson Plan

### Activities

#### 1. Journaling about Community Belonging

Start the lesson with [journaling](#) for 5 minutes in response to the following prompts:

- What does it mean to belong to a place? What is the relationship between who you are and where you live?

While students should not be expected to share their journal entry, they could be invited to share any thoughts/reflections with a partner or in a class discussion.

#### 2. Levels of Questions in Response to Scholar Video

Following the journal reflection, frame the video, **Colonialism and the Jews of North Africa**, with reference to the fact that European powers had colonized North Africa. The focus here is Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia. Share the map [The World After World War I](#) to clarify the connection of different countries in North Africa to colonial powers. Explain to students that the specific colonial histories were factors in shaping the ways in which WWII and the Holocaust impacted the lives of individuals and groups across the region.

Distribute the **Viewing Guide for “Colonialism and the Jews of North Africa”**. Inform students that they will now watch the second video, **Colonialism and the Jews of North Africa**. Explain that there are two types of questions on this video viewing guide: factual questions and inferential questions. They will be able to find the answers to the factual questions as they watch the video. After watching the video, students will work with a partner to check their answers to the factual questions and then work together to answer the inferential questions.

If time permits, discuss the answers to the questions as a class, prioritizing the answers to the inferential questions.

Share the timeline **Shifts in Power and Antisemitic Legislation in North Africa from Colonialism through WWII** with students. Invite clarifying questions, and open a discussion about how European colonization of North Africa relates to the history of WWII and the enforcement of antisemitic legislation.

#### 3. Mapping the Internal World of a Writer

Remind students that the European colonization of North Africa had tremendous ramifications for all inhabitants of North Africa, including Jews. Reinforce the scholar video’s description that as Italy and France continued their control of areas in North Africa, they also brought the ideologies of fascism and antisemitism that would deprive Jewish and

Muslim North Africans of legal and social protections. As students study this time period, they will read sources that highlight how North African Jewish communities responded to fascist and antisemitic ideologies.

Review the timeline with students and address any questions or points of confusion.

For this activity, students will read the source **“A Jewish Adolescent Ponders Her Identity (1939)”**. Before reading the primary source document, it is important to share the following additional history:

The Italian government, led by fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, passed antisemitic race laws called “Race Protection Laws” in 1938. While these laws were not fully enforced in Italian-controlled Libya until 1940, they did start to impact Jewish life in that period.

This history provides important context as students go on to read an essay by a North African Jew in which she reflects on her high school experience. After reading the text, they will work together with a partner to **Map the Internal World of a Writer**. Once the maps are completed, debrief the activity as a class with the following questions:

- What are ways in which the perceptions and prejudices of others impacted the writer’s sense of identity and belonging?
- What choices did the writer make in the face of the changes she was experiencing in the world around her?

If time permits, students can post their maps of the internal world of a writer in the classroom and participate in a brief [gallery walk](#) to view what their classmates created. Students can note their reflections on the patterns, similarities, and differences in their maps before coming back together for a class discussion of their takeaways from the activity.

#### 4. Choices and Consequences

This activity is designed to bring students into further reflection on the range of choices associated with rising antisemitism in North Africa and the passage of antisemitic race laws. The readings bring in compelling stories from Algeria and Libya that illuminate the choices and their consequences. Provide the following context for students before they begin to read:

France surrendered to the Nazis in June 1940 and established the puppet government of Philippe Pétain in southern France and the French colonies of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. This pro-Nazi government was also called the “Vichy” government because its administrative center was located in Vichy, France. The Vichy government passed antisemitic race laws, which were enforced differently across French-controlled North Africa depending on the particular colonial history, the proximity of the Jewish communities to centers of colonial power, and the choices of local non-Jewish leaders.

Tell students that they will now transition to identifying the choices that were made by the Jewish community during the rise of antisemitism and violence of war in North Africa.

There are two readings in this activity, **Jewish Resistance in Algeria** and **Interview with Benjamin Doron, Child Survivor from Libya**. The first is drawn from a secondary source that focuses on Jewish resistance in Algeria. The second reading is a primary source testimony from Libya. In pairs, students should be assigned one of the two texts with the following instructions:

As you read, look for instances of decision-making and action. Use colored pencils to underline the choices in the text and their consequences. Choose one color for the choice and a second color for the consequences or results of that choice.

After students complete first reading, they can engage in a discussion about the choices and consequences in the texts with the following questions:

- What were examples of choices that stood out to you in the reading?
- What can learning about the choices people made in these readings teach us about the power and impact of our choices today?