THE TEACHING GUIDES

Teaching Grades 6–8

One lesson, one unit, or a year · Free, ready to teach · Social studies, world history, and ELA

Start at your size. Fifteen minutes: add one chapter's story, source, and question to the unit you are teaching, at teachjewishhistory.org/for-tomorrow. One lesson tomorrow: The Years Before the Killing, planned on page three, beat by beat. Five lessons: the full Holocaust unit, which has its own guide in this series. The year: the chart on page two drops a chapter into nearly every unit you already teach.

Two facts

It fits more than one unit. The same history runs through classes you already teach: ancient civilizations, medieval Europe, U.S. immigration, World War II, the Cold War. The chart shows where each piece fits.

Your state likely requires it. A 2026 federal review found that 42 of the 50 states and D.C. require Holocaust education through academic standards or state law. Several of the statutes reach up from the middle grades. Many requirements arrive without a curriculum, and building one is left to the teacher.

AM I QUALIFIED TO TEACH THIS HISTORY?

If you teach social studies, world history, or ELA in grades 6 to 8, in a public, private, or religious school, yes. You do not need to be a specialist. The pages are written for readers new to the subject: terms are defined, events are dated, people are introduced. If you can assign a reading and lead a discussion, you can teach this.

OPEN EVERY LESSON WITH THE STORY SO FAR

Five sentences, spoken aloud, ground any lesson from this guide. Each has a chapter behind it if the class wants more.

1. The Jews are a people, with a faith, a language, and a calendar, more than 3,000 years old. /topic-who-are-the-jews
2. Their homeland is the Land of Israel, where their two Temples stood in Jerusalem. /topic-land-of-israel · /topic-temples
3. The diaspora spread Jewish communities across the world, before and after the Second Temple fell in the year 70, and some always remained in the land. /topic-diaspora · /topic-continuous-presence
4. Wherever they lived, they kept the same book, the same calendar, and the same hope of return. /topic-sacred-texts · /topic-calendar
5. The hatred they met kept changing its reasons, faith, then money, then race, but the target never changed. /topic-adversus-judaeos · /topic-nazi-synthesis

Where the site fits what you already teach

The site slots into units you already have. Your WWII or Holocaust unit gets the five-lesson unit, planned lesson by lesson in Teaching the Holocaust, this series' companion guide. Most other units in a middle-school year have a chapter that fits inside them as a single lesson:

IF YOU ARE TEACHING	ADD THIS CHAPTER
Ancient civilizations	The Land of Israel · ancient Israel, from the Israelite kingdoms forward · /topic-land-of-israel
Ancient Greece and Rome	The First and Second Temples · The Diaspora · Jerusalem under Greece and Rome, the year 70, and the Greek-speaking Jewish world of Alexandria · /topic-temples · /topic-diaspora · /topic-continuous-presence
The rise of Christianity	Adversus Judaeos · where it started: the hostility of the ancient world, the Church's teaching, the accusations that lasted centuries, and the Church's rejection of the deicide charge in 1965 · /topic-adversus-judaeos
World religions or cultures	Who Are the Jews? · Ritual Objects and Material Culture · The Jewish Life Cycle · a people and its practices, taught like any tradition · /topic-who-are-the-jews · /topic-ritual-objects · /topic-life-cycle
Medieval and early-modern Europe	Rashi · The Blood Libel · The Expulsions · The Ghetto System · Jewish life and scholarship in medieval Europe, and the libel, the expulsions, and the walled quarters that closed in on it · /topic-rashi · /topic-blood-libel · /topic-expulsions · /topic-ghetto-system
The Islamic world	The Dhimma · Maimonides · The Jews of Spain and the Sephardic World · Jewish life under Islamic rule, its most famous philosopher, and the courtiers and poets of Córdoba and Granada · /topic-dhimma · /topic-maimonides · /topic-sepharad
Immigration and the industrial era	Emma Lazarus · American Jewry · Levi Strauss · Samuel Gompers · immigration history through one people's story, and two immigrant arcs: the merchant behind the blue jean, and the cigar maker who led the American Federation of Labor · /topic-lazarus · /topic-american-jewry · /topic-strauss · /topic-gompers
The Cold War	Soviet Jewry · more than two million Jews the Soviet state largely barred from leaving, and the movement for their right to go · /topic-soviet-jewry
Scientists and inventors	Albert Einstein · Jonas Salk · the physicist the Nazis drove out, and the developer of the first effective polio vaccine · /topic-einstein · /topic-salk
Media literacy and civics	The Protocols Forgery · Hate Symbols · how a lie is built, and the symbols that carry hate today · /topic-protocols · /hate-symbols

IN ELA

Every chapter is document-based reading practice: primary sources, discussion questions, and close reading, aligned to the Common Core literacy-in-history standards. The chapters pair with books your classes already read. Teaching The Diary of a Young Girl or Night? The Years Before the Killing and The Camp System hold the history around them. Teaching Number the Stars? The real Danish rescue is in Jewish Resistance & Rescue. Two books on the site's own shelves reach the middle grades: Number the Stars itself, and All-of-a-Kind Family, the Lower East Side in 1912 through five sisters, a natural companion to Emma Lazarus and American Jewry.

One lesson, fully planned

The planned lesson: **The Years Before the Killing, 1933–1939**. It answers how this happened, with dated laws and documents, in plain language for middle-school readers. The plan is a floor, not a script: teach it as written, or take the chapter your own way. The chapter page carries the full set of discussion questions, its sources, and key takeaways: the plan below uses the first question, and the rest are there when you want them. teachjewishhistory.org/topic-1933-1939

Before class. Open the chapter. Read it once. Press Open PDF if you want handouts. That is the whole prep.

First 5 minutes. Open with three laws, fifteen centuries apart: 438, Jews barred from public office. 1215, Jews ordered to dress differently. 1935, Jews stripped of citizenship. Ask what students notice. Then read the chapter's first sentence aloud: "None of it was hidden."

Next 15 minutes. Read two sections together: "January 30, 1933," the day Hitler took power, then "The legal machinery, built in eleven months." On their handouts, students circle every date, and underline what German Jews organized in answer.

Next 15 minutes. Discussion question 1, straight from the page. *Listen for: the order. Exclusion from jobs and schools came first, the 1935 Nuremberg Laws defined "Jew" in law, and each step relied on the one before it.* Then read aloud the chapter's line: "German Jews organized to meet the crisis."

Close, 5 minutes. Return to the three laws. The steps came in order, each one making the next easier. Leave the question with the class: what made each step possible?

What if I can only spare one lesson?

Each of these stands alone and fits a course you already teach:

- **Who Are the Jews?** · the site's front door: a people, not only a religion. The right first chapter when the subject is new to your class. /topic-who-are-the-jews
- **Ritual Objects and Material Culture** · one of the most accessible reads on the site. A civilization told through the objects it made. Fits any culture or world-history unit. /topic-ritual-objects
- **Emma Lazarus** · the poet whose sonnet has been on a plaque in the Statue of Liberty's pedestal since 1903. Fits U.S. history and ELA. /topic-lazarus
- **The Jewish Life Cycle** · birth to mourning, taught the way schools teach any tradition's customs. /topic-life-cycle

The anatomy of a chapter

Every chapter page holds a readable history, written to be taught or assigned. Primary sources and images, each credited to its holding institution. Discussion questions that ask students to reason from the documents. Classroom Connections: the courses it fits and the standards it supports. Key takeaways, for review and exit tickets. A printable PDF: one button, the whole chapter.

CAN MY STUDENTS READ THE CHAPTERS?

The Years Before the Killing is written in plain language for middle-school readers. The site overall sits at grades 9 to 12: strong readers work from the pages, and the printable PDFs make excerpting easy for everyone else. A full chapter is a half hour's read: the lesson plans assign sections, not chapters.

DO I NEED APPROVAL TO USE THE SITE?

That depends on your district's materials policy. In many districts, supplemental materials for a course you already teach sit within a teacher's discretion. In others, a principal or department signs off.

If a parent or your principal asks

Here is what to point to.

- **Each Chapter cites its sources on the page.** Documents, laws, and figures are credited, most with a link to the archive or museum that holds the record.
- **For the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, start with the dates.** The Modern State of Israel sets out the main events since 1967 in order, with its sources listed at the end of the Chapter.
- **Hate texts are cited, never linked.**
- **Teaching about religion as history and culture is settled ground** in public schools, drawn in 1963 in Abington v. Schempp: the chapters study a tradition and never practice one.
- **The standards are public.** Every editorial rule the site follows is published at teachjewishhistory.org/editorial-standards, and the chapters in this guide name the state standards they support.

> ### What the site adds TO YOUR MIDDLE GRADES
>
> The chart in this guide fills the centuries between the ancient world and the Holocaust one lesson at a time, inside the units already on your calendar, so that when the Holocaust unit arrives, it lands on ground students already know.

What Teach Jewish History is

It's ready. Every chapter can anchor a lesson, with questions, sources, and a print-ready PDF.

It fits. Chapters drop into the units you already teach, with no new course to add.

It's solid ground. Primary sources and verified standards.

It's free, with no logins and no ads.

The classroom toolkit

- **The Timeline.** Project it as a warm-up, or have students place the day's lesson on it. teachjewishhistory.org/timeline
- **The Museum.** Manuscripts, coins, and objects, each credited to the institution that holds it. One object, projected, opens a class. teachjewishhistory.org/museum
- **Virtual Field Trips.** Visits to archaeological sites, memorials, and historic Jewish quarters, from your projector. teachjewishhistory.org/field-trips
- **Films.** Curated film and video by unit, grade bands marked. teachjewishhistory.org/films
- **Misconceptions and the Glossary.** The beliefs students bring to class, set beside the documents, and every term defined. teachjewishhistory.org/misconceptions · teachjewishhistory.org/glossary
- **Standards & Mandates.** The state requirements, on one page: find your state's. teachjewishhistory.org/state-mandates
- **The Incident Record.** Documented antisemitic incidents of the contemporary era, each entry ending with its record: a verdict, a plea, or an official finding. teachjewishhistory.org/incident-record
- **The source-literacy lessons.** Reading documents against headlines, and recognizing propaganda, with printable handouts. teachjewishhistory.org/for-teachers

Find your way on the site

Home · teachjewishhistory.org

The Curriculum Gap, why the site exists · /curriculum-gap

Table of Contents, the whole site on one page · /table-of-contents

For Teachers, the guides, a self-paced course, and registration for updates · /for-teachers

For Students · /for-students

K–5, the early-grades program · /k5

EVERY CHAPTER CAN ANCHOR A LESSON

Each one can anchor a lesson, with discussion questions, sources, a print-ready PDF, and a Where-this-Chapter-fits note naming the courses it supports, all on the chapter page. The shelf is a menu, not a syllabus: take the chapter your unit calls for, and leave the rest where they are. The lessons planned in this guide come from this shelf, and any other chapter teaches the same way.

Unit 1 · The Jewish World · /section-1
Who Are the Jews? · The Land of Israel · The Continuous Jewish Presence in the Land · The First and Second Temples · The Synagogue · The Sacred Texts · The Calendar & the Cycle of the Year · Ritual Objects and Material Culture · The Jewish Life Cycle · The Diaspora

Unit 2 · Communities Across the World · /section-2
A Connected People · The Jews of Iraq · The Jews of Iran · The Jews of North Africa · The Departure from MENA · The Jews of Spain and the Sephardic World · The Jews of Poland and Lithuania · Soviet Jewry · American Jewry · Ethiopian Jewry, Beta Israel · The Modern State of Israel

Unit 3 · The Evolution of Antisemitism · /section-3
Adversus Judaeos · The Blood Libel · The Ghetto System · The Expulsions · The Racial Turn of 1879 · The Russian Pogroms · The Protocols Forgery · The Nazi Synthesis · The Dhimma · The Eastward Turn · The Terror Record · Contemporary Antisemitism

Unit 4 · The Holocaust Era · /section-4
The Years Before the Killing · Aktion T-4 · The Nazi Ghettos · The Camp System · The Einsatzgruppen · The Holocaust in the Middle East and North Africa · Jewish Resistance & Rescue

Unit 5 · Jewish Contributions · /section-5
Across the Fields · Rashi · Maimonides · Joseph Karo · Moses Mendelssohn · Levi Strauss · Emma Lazarus · Samuel Gompers · Theodor Herzl · Albert Einstein · The Founders of Hollywood · Jonas Salk

Unit 6 · Memory, Responsibility, and Today · /section-6
Liberation and the Displaced Persons · The Postwar Trials · Hannah Arendt · Postwar Restitution · The Memory Architecture · Nostra Aetate · Holocaust Denial and the Response · The Afterlife of the Image · The Hatred That Outlived the War

Teach Jewish History (teachjewishhistory.org) is a free online textbook of Jewish history and the history of antisemitism, built from primary sources. It was built to close a gap: in many standard textbooks, the Jewish people appear in the ancient world, then reappear more than two thousand years later as victims of the Holocaust, a history with no in-between. Read in order, its six units and more than 60 chapters form a full course. Taken singly, each chapter drops into lessons teachers already teach. Every chapter names the standards it supports in its Classroom Connections section.

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