



Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

Did Jews Run the Slave Trade?

Step 1: Lesson goals

Goals: What are the goals of this lesson?

Affective – Students will grapple with their own feelings regarding Jewish involvement in the slave trade

Behavioral – Students will be able to demonstrate the difference between fact and exaggeration

Cognitive – Students will be able to describe the role that Jews played in the slave trade, while identifying exaggerations

Essential Questions/Big Ideas:

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| 1. What are the characteristics of an effective lie? | 1. The most effective lies contain kernels of truth. |
| 2. How can we arm ourselves against false information? | 2. The distortion of history can lead to dangerous narratives. |
| 3. How should we navigate moral and ethical dilemmas when facing limited opportunities and potential financial hardships? | 3. Education is an important line of defense against false information. |

Step 2: Learning Plan

Hook/Trigger: (5 minutes)

Play the [game](#) “Yes, and...” with your students. Model the game with the statement: “Throughout history, people have owned slaves”, followed by “Yes, and... some Jews owned slaves”. The first student then responds with, “Yes, and” and then adds another

related statement (for example, Yes, and some Jews were very against slavery). Allow 5-6 students to participate.

Learning Activity: (30 minutes)

- 1. Unpacked [Video](#) (Optional: Play [Kahoot](#) or use the review questions) (5 minutes)**
- 2. Discussion: Kernels of truth (10 minutes):** The claim that Jews controlled the slave trade is an example of the gross distortion and exaggeration of historical fact in order to fit into a libelous narrative. However, the fact remains that Jews did play a role, albeit minor, in the Atlantic slave trade.
 - a.** How do libels that are based on kernels of truth develop?
 - b.** What makes these claims particularly dangerous?
 - c.** What role does modern media, including social media, play in the development and proliferation of such claims?
 - d.** What do you think would be the most effective way to combat these claims?
- 3. Learning activity: Conflicts of interest? (15 minutes)** In the 18th century in Europe, Jewish people often faced discrimination and were excluded from many professions. This led them to work in fields like manufacturing, trade, and finance. With such limited opportunities, Jews found themselves engaged in the industries that were available to them, including the Atlantic slave trade. They had a moral and ethical dilemma: they could accept the opportunities available to them in order to make a living and take care of their families, or they could abstain from engaging in the slave trade because it went against their moral, ethical, and religious principles.

Divide students into groups and have them discuss the following questions. Have each group submit their answers in writing. Then, ask the class to vote on what they would have done.

- a.** If you were living in that time and faced with this choice, would you have chosen to participate in the slave trade to support yourself and your family, or would you have refused even if it meant limited financial options?

- b.** What are some reasons that might have led someone to choose to participate in the slave trade despite their moral and ethical concerns?
- c.** Conversely, what are some reasons that might have driven someone to refuse to participate in the slave trade even if it meant facing financial hardships?
- d.** Is there a moral and ethical difference between directly inflicting suffering on others and indirectly inflicting suffering by enabling it to happen? Can you think of a practical example of each scenario?

Reflection: (5 minutes)

Facing our shortcomings: While Jews did not control the slave trade, the involvement of some Jews in the slave trade is undeniable. How can we grapple with the uncomfortable truth that some of our ancestors were involved in activities that we now find to be morally troubling? Do we have an obligation to demonstrate accountability on their behalf? If so, how might we do this?

Step 3: Assessment

Checking for Understanding: (5 minutes)

3-2-1: Have students list three things they learned, two things they found surprising, and one thing they would like to learn more about.