



Educator's Guide

The Spanish Inquisition

How can a government apologize for an atrocity?

In 2015, the Spanish and Portuguese governments began accepting applications from the descendants of the Jews once forcibly converted, massacred, and expelled from the Iberian Peninsula.

But why offer citizenship?

Why not leave the past in the past?

Because Sephardic Jews still carry the memory and the legacy of the centuries of vibrant Jewish life in Spain. This video honors the astonishing resilience of a community that refused to be destroyed.

[Link to video](#)

Big Ideas

1. Sephardic Jews are proud of their heritage and have managed to maintain their culture despite persecution and expulsion.
2. Forced conversion did not spare the Jews of Spain from the consequences of the Inquisition.
3. Jews whose ancestors were expelled from Spain, may choose to accept Spanish citizenship without forgiving historical wrongs.

Essential Questions

1. Why were the Jews of Spain and Portugal expelled?
2. Should governments apologize for historical atrocities? And can they?
3. How have Sephardic Jews maintained their heritage even though they were expelled from Spain many centuries ago?

Review Questions

1. How have the Spanish and Portuguese governments tried to correct the dark history of historical persecution against the Jews?
 - With a formal, televised apology from their respective leaders
 - With a national 'sorry' day
 - By building museums and memorials
 - **By offering citizenship to descendants of the Jews that were expelled**
2. How old was the "King" of Castile in 1931?
 - 10
 - **11**
 - 12
 - 13
3. Which term is used to describe Jews forcibly converted to Christianity during the Inquisition?
 - Anusim
 - Conversos
 - Crypto-Jews
 - **All of the above**
4. By the mid-1400s how many Jews converted to Christianity to escape persecution?
 - Roughly a quarter
 - Roughly a third
 - **Roughly half**
 - Roughly three-quarters
5. What happened to Jews who converted to Christianity?
 - They were accepted as Christians and welcomed into the Church
 - **They were suspected of heresy and subject to inquisition**
 - They were considered holy Christians for converting
 - They weren't welcome but also weren't persecuted
6. What happened to the first victims of the Inquisition, six prominent anusim from Seville in 1481?
 - They were forced to leave Spain
 - They were forced to convert to Christianity
 - They were stoned to death
 - **They were burned at the stake**

7. What were the names of the Spanish monarchs who expelled the Jews?

- **Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand**
- Queen Maria and King Matthew
- Queen Delilah and King Thomas
- Queen Victoria and King Charles

8. By what date were the Jews of Spain ordered to leave?

- **August 1st, 1492**
- September 1st, 1492
- December 1st, 1492
- January 1st, 1493

Discussion Questions

1. Correcting history

In 2015, the Spanish and Portuguese governments began accepting citizenship applications from the descendants of the Jews once forcibly converted, massacred, and expelled from the Iberian Peninsula. This begs the question about whether countries can and should try to make amends for historical wrongs.

- Think of another historical wrong that doesn't relate to Jews. Has the country tried to make amends?
- If they didn't, should they? If they did, do you think they were successful?
- Are peoples / governments responsible for the sins of the past?
- Is it possible for countries to correct the sins of the past?
- What would it look like for a country to properly address a negative event in its history?

2. The legacy of the Spanish Inquisition

"I always said that was like our Holocaust, I guess, in 1492." - Emmy Cohen (Spanish Citizenship Recipient). The Spanish Inquisition was one of the great tragedies of Jewish history, so much so that it is sometimes compared to the Holocaust.

- Why do you think we don't know as much about the Spanish Inquisition as we do about the Holocaust?
- Do you think that the Holocaust will also fade in our collective memory?
- Do you think it is important that these events are not forgotten over time? Why?

3. The reparations debate

Menachem Begin strongly protested David Ben-Gurion's idea for Israel to accept reparations from Germany in the 1950s, arguing that this was equivalent to forgiving Nazi crimes against the Jews of Europe. The debate nearly led to civil war. On the eve of the Knesset vote, Begin addressed a large protest and called to overthrow the government. The angry protesters reached the Knesset where stones were thrown through the windows injuring a few lawmakers. The protest was eventually quelled and the law accepting reparations was passed.

For some background information listen to [this podcast](#) episode.

- Why was Begin so opposed to receiving reparations from Germany?
- Do you agree with Begin that accepting reparations would be equivalent to forgiving the Nazi crimes against the Jews of Europe? Why or why not?
- Do you think this is similar or different to Sephardic Jews accepting a Spanish passport?

Learning Activities

1. Lesson plan

Lesson plan on Spanish Inquisition - Use our ready made lesson plan on Spanish Inquisition [HERE](#).

2. Stages of persecution

Divide students into pairs. Have students prepare a poster explaining the persecution of Spanish Jews (online or hard copy) based on the Spanish Inquisition video. The poster should include all 4 stages (in order):

- Jewish martyrdom
- Forced conversion
- The Spanish Inquisition
- Expulsion of Spanish Jewry

Each of these stages should include: a title, a brief explanation of what occurred during that stage of persecution, any important dates (e.g. 1492), the names of notable personalities (i.e. Ferdinand and Isabella) and a relevant image.

You may choose to have students present the posters in front of the class or hand them in for assessment.

3. Podcast it!

One of the most powerful women in Jewish history, Dona Gracia, fled Portugal and then used her resources and influence to help other Jews escape from the Iberian Peninsula.

- Divide your students into pairs or small groups. They will record the story of [Dona Gracia](#) as a podcast.
- Teach your students about the three-act structure. Click [here](#) for an explanation.
- Have them use [this resource](#) to plan the story of Dona Gracia according to the three-act structure.
- For an example, listen to our podcast about Dona Gracia: click [here](#).
- On their personal devices ask your students to record a podcast telling the story of Dona Gracia in 5 minutes.
- Your students should send you the recording for assessment.

4. Historical fiction

The Anusim were Jews who were forcibly converted to Christianity but preserved their Judaism in secret. Write a letter from the perspective of one of the Anusim to their child. In your letter, address the following questions.

- Why did you choose to convert outwardly to Christianity?
- What Jewish traditions do you preserve in secret?
- What are your fears?
- How do you hope that the future will be better?

5. Kahoot: Play our [Kahoot](#) about the Spanish Inquisition here!

Reflection Questions

1. Spanish citizenship

In 2015, the Spanish and Portuguese governments began accepting citizenship applications from the descendants of the Jews once forcibly converted, massacred, and expelled from the Iberian Peninsula. Some argue that accepting this citizenship is tantamount to forgiving historical wrongs.

- If you could, would you accept Spanish citizenship?
- By accepting Spanish citizenship do you think Spanish Jews are forgiving the Inquisition?

2. Tradition

Spanish Jews managed to maintain their tradition and heritage despite being

expelled from Spain centuries ago (in the video Armando Cohen highlights tunes in synagogue and Spanish foods as examples)

- What Jewish family traditions or customs are unique to your family?
- What is a Jewish food you grew up with?
- Is it important to you to pass on your family traditions to the next generation? Why or why not?

3. Antisemitism

Many Jews around the world today still experience antisemitism. Antisemitism has a long history of religious persecutions in the Middle Ages but has taken on different forms in the modern period.

- Are there still places where you still feel unwelcome as a Jew?
- Do you think there is a connection between the antisemitism of the Middle Ages and the modern antisemitism of today?
- If so, in what way?
- Why do you think antisemitism persists?

Further Learning

1. Unpacked for Educators:

- [Conversos: the story of Latin America's Crypto Jews](#) (video)
- [Antisemitism Explained](#) (video series)
- [The Shulchan Aruch](#) (video)
- [German Reparations](#) (podcast)
- [Dona Mendes](#) (podcast)

2. Ted Ed, [Ugly History: The Spanish Inquisition](#)

3. New York Times, [Spain Pledged Citizenship to Sephardic Jews. Now They Feel Betrayed.](#)

4. [Map of Jewish expulsions](#)