



Educator's Guide

The Kishinev Pogrom

When two young Christians were murdered in Kishinev, the heart of Moldova, in 1903, popular journalist Peva Krushevanl seized the opportunity to blame the Jews for their deaths.

Using his daily newspaper as a personal soapbox, he riled up thousands of Kishinev's civilians to take revenge against the Jews in a deadly pogrom which killed 49 people.

This attack inspired Jewish poet Chaim Nachman Bialik to publish works to awaken the Jewish spirit and successfully invoked Jews across the world to take action against the rampant antisemitism in Europe.

[Link to video](#)

Big Ideas

1. Key moments that aren't the most well known can have a profound impact on Jewish history.
2. The media can play a powerful role in shaping public perception and opinion.
3. The Kishinev Pogrom and its aftermath had a profound impact on the development of Zionism and Jewish self-defense groups.

Essential Questions

1. How do we identify and understand the "moments that change everything" in Jewish history?
2. How can we prevent and address antisemitism in society?
3. What was the impact of the Kishinev Pogrom on modern Jewish history?

Review Questions

1. Who was Pavel Krushevan?
 - A journalist who incited anti-Jewish sentiment in Kishinev

- The Chief of Police in Kishinev who allowed the pogrom to take place
 - A Holocaust survivor
 - The creator of the modern State of Israel
- 2.** What was the excuse used for the Kishinev Pogrom in 1903?
- **The deaths of two young Christians**
 - A plot by the Jewish community to take over the world
 - The establishment of the State of Israel
 - The Holocaust
- 3.** How many Jews were killed during the Kishinev Pogrom?
- **49**
 - 25
 - 100
 - 6 million
- 4.** What was the response of the chief of police to the potential pogrom in Kishinev?
- He tried to stop it from happening
 - **He allowed it to take place**
 - He was on vacation
 - He was not aware of the potential pogrom
- 5.** What happened to the self-defense squads that the Jews in Kishinev formed?
- They successfully protected the Jewish community from the attackers
 - They were allowed to protect the Jewish community with the help of the police
 - **They were disbanded by the police**
 - They were not formed
- 6.** How many people participated in the Kishinev Pogrom?
- Hundreds
 - **Thousands**
 - Dozens
 - Only a handful
- 7.** Which of the following was NOT an immediate consequence of the Kishinev Pogrom?
- The destruction of thousands of homes and businesses
 - The rape of countless women

- **The establishment of the State of Israel**
- The wounding of 500 Jews

8. Whose work after the pogrom led him to become Israel's national poet?

- **Chaim Nachman Bialik**
- Yehuda Amichai
- Natan Alterman
- Dahlia Ravikovitch

Discussion Questions

1. The power of media

The journalist Pavel Krushevan had a tremendous influence on public opinion with his antisemitic writings. So much so, that he inspired thousands to commit a horrific pogrom on the Jews of Kishinev on a date that he promoted in advance.

- How does Pavel's impact in newspapers compare to today's antisemitism on social media?
- Are they similar or are they different?
- Why do you think different forms of media are so often used to spread hate?
- What should our reaction be when encountering hate and antisemitism on social media? What can be done to encourage the use of media to spread love and understanding?

2. Bialik's response to the Kishinev Pogrom

In Chaim Nachman Bialik's famous poem "In the City of Slaughter", he intentionally made the Jews of Kishinev look pathetic in how they responded to the pogrom. He wanted to shock his readers and emphasize the worst of the Diaspora. His goal was to encourage Jews to make aliyah to the Land of Israel and to adopt Zionism.

- Do you think that ridiculing Jews from Kishinev was the right response to the pogrom? Why or why not?
- Why do you think that in the wake of the pogrom, Bialik called for Jews to make aliyah to the Land of Israel, reminding them that they are descendants of Maccabees and Kings? What was his rationale?
- Bialik describes the Jews as weak and pathetic, because they hid instead of fighting back against their attackers. Is this a fair criticism? Are there other types of resistance besides physical that should be respected?

- One of the Jewish self-defense groups formed in the aftermath of the pogrom and inspired by Bialik's writings became the precursor to the Israeli army. Do you think Bialik should get credit for the development of Jewish self-defense groups or do you think this would have happened anyways?

3. The Jewish reaction to Kishinev:

In reference to the Jewish reaction after Kishinev, historian Anita Shapira writes:

"the impotent rage was a kind of revolutionary explosive charge that demolished traditional Jewish responses, insisting on a new demonstration that the Jew was also a human being, whose blood would not be shed with impunity."

What does Shapira mean that the Jew was also a human being, whose blood would not be shed with impunity? Compare and contrast this sentiment with the post-Holocaust sentiment of "never again".

4. Fake news

Pavel Krushevan, who incited thousands to take part in the Kishinev Pogrom and afterwards was the first publisher of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, took advantage of what we refer to today as "fake news." What did the Kishinev Pogrom and the events both before and after it teach the world about "fake news" and how are these lessons still relevant today?

5. Conspiracy theories

Why do people believe [conspiracy theories](#)? What is the best way to stop the spread of dangerous conspiracy theories? Is it possible to convince someone who believes in a false conspiracy to change their beliefs?

Learning Activities

1. The moments that changed everything list

The Kishinev Pogrom and its aftermath is considered one of the events in Jewish history that changed everything. Develop a list of the top ten events in Jewish history that changed everything. Be sure to rank them in order of their impact. Write a short explanation to go with each ranking. The explanation should include what the event was and how it impacted Jewish history.

2. Writing a letter from Kishinev

Write a letter from the perspective of a Jewish person living in Kishinev during the pogrom, describing their experiences and emotions during and after the event. Share these letters with the class and discuss the personal impact of the pogrom.

3. Analyzing Bialik's City of Slaughter

Read an excerpt from Chaim Nachman Bialik's poem "[In the City of Slaughter](#)", written in the aftermath of the Kishinev Pogrom. Ask your students to read the excerpt in small groups, to take notes on what jumps out at them and to then each write a one-page reflection that answers some of the following questions:

- What kind of picture does Bialik paint about the Jews in Kishinev?
- What point is Bialik trying to make about the state of the Jews in the Diaspora?
- What is your main takeaway from the poem?

4. Using social media

Pavel Krushevan was able to incite terrible violence and antisemitism through his newspaper platform and publishing the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Unfortunately, today a large amount of antisemitic comments can be found online and on social media (that usually increases when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict gets heated).

- What should our reaction be when celebrities with large platforms post antisemitic comments or conspiracy theories? (See our resources on [Unpacking Kanye's Antisemitism](#)).
- Watch [this video](#) with your students and discuss the best practices to adopt when consuming social media online. When is it appropriate to respond and when is it better to ignore comments?
- How can we use our platforms to educate people about antisemitism? Can our small voices make a difference?

5. Kahoot: Play our [Kahoot](#) about the Kishinev Pogrom!

Reflection Questions

1. Moments that change history

Throughout history, there have been numerous events that changed the world

and impacted everybody who was alive during that time. Many people remember exactly where they were when they heard that President John F Kennedy and Yitzhak Rabin were assassinated or when 9/11 took place.

- Is there a global event that took place in your life that you remember where you were when you heard about it?
- Why do you think it made such an impact on you?

2. Important lessons learned

What do you think are three salient lessons that the Jewish people can learn from the Kishinev Pogrom, even today? What are three lessons that you personally learned from this important moment in history?

3. Kishinev and antisemitism

How does learning about the Kishinev Pogrom affect your understanding of the history of antisemitism and the Jewish experience? With the rise in antisemitism today, was it a surprising event to learn about or just more of the same?

4. A new type of Zionist Jew

Bialik wrote his poem, "City of Slaughter", in order to shock Jews in the Diaspora into understanding that something had to change. A new type of proud Zionist Jew was needed, one who fights back and doesn't cower in fear during a pogrom.

- Imagine you lived during that time period. How would you have felt, reading Bialik's characterization of the Jews of Kishinev, if you had survived the pogrom by hiding, and or had lost relatives who had been killed? Would you have a different reaction if you hadn't experienced the pogrom?
- Would reading this poem have pushed you to make Aliyah or to take any specific actions? Why or why not?
- What are the advantages of emphasizing this new image of the proud, tough, Zionist Jew? What are the disadvantages to highlighting this model?

5. Different models of resistance

- Imagine Bialik had been alive during the Holocaust. How do you think he would have reacted to the limited Jewish physical resistance to the Nazis? Would he have written a similar critical poem like "City of Slaughter"?
- After the Holocaust, some survivors in Israel were embarrassed to tell their stories, as the Jews of Europe were seen as going "as sheep to the slaughter", the antithesis to how Zionist Jews were "expected" to act.

Much of this changed when the [Eichmann trial](#) was broadcast live on Israeli TV, and Israelis heard the stories of survivors firsthand. Why do you think viewing the Eichmann trial testimony changed the perspective of many Israeli Jews?

- What are other models of resistance that existed during the Holocaust besides physical (ex: spiritual)? Do you view these models on the same level as physical resistance?

Further Learning

1. Unpacked for Educators:

- [When the Jewish State was Almost in Uganda](#)
- [Herzl and the Non-Promised Land](#) (podcast)
- [The Chmielnicki Massacres](#)
- [Jewish Life in the Shtetl](#)
- [The Origin of Antisemitic Conspiracies](#)

2. Jstor, [The Kishinev Pogrom of 1903: A Turning Point in Jewish History](#)

3. Times of Israel, [How a small pogrom in Russia changed the course of history](#)

4. Chaim Nachman Bialik's famous poem about Kishinev: [In the City of Slaughter](#)