

Makor for Middle School

A teacher's guide for grades 6–8 · The Makor Project · makorproject.org/teachers-middle-school · free, no login

You have one unit, thirty students, and limited time. This page hands you the plan: what to teach first, what a week looks like, and where single lessons fit the classes you already teach.

Makor is a free online textbook of Jewish history, and the history of antisemitism, built from primary sources. It is written at high-school level and can anchor a full course; this guide is the grades 6–8 path into it. You do not need to learn its 57 Chapters. You need one good lesson for tomorrow, and a plan for one week. Both are below, everything prints, and nothing requires a login.

I have one class period

A fully planned 40-minute lesson.
Prep: read one page.

I have one week

Five Chapters, five days, one story:
the lie, the laws, the machinery, the
response, the aftermath.

I want a standalone lesson

Single Chapters for world history,
U.S. history, and ELA.

THREE FACTS

Why would I teach this?

- **Your state likely requires it.** More than twenty-five states now mandate Holocaust education, several from the middle grades up. The requirement usually arrives without a curriculum. Building one is left to you.
- **Your students have already met the subject.** Antisemitism reaches them online before any teacher reaches them with the history.
- **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 below shows where each fits.

YES. HERE IS WHY.

Am I qualified to teach this?

If you teach social studies, world history, or ELA in grades 6–8, in a public, private, or religious school, yes. You do not need to be a specialist. Every page assumes the reader starts from zero: terms are defined, events are dated, people are introduced. If you can assign a reading and lead a discussion, you can teach this.

Where does it fit what I already teach?

Makor slots into units you already have. Your WWII or Holocaust unit gets the five-day unit below. And 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
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
The rise of Christianity	Adversus Judaeos (“Against the Jews”) · where it started: the hostility of the ancient world, the Church’s teaching, and the accusations that lasted centuries
World religions or cultures	Who Are the Jews?, Ritual Objects, The Jewish Life Cycle · a people and its practices, taught like any tradition
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
The Islamic world	The Dhimma, Maimonides · Jewish life under Islamic rule, and its most famous philosopher
Immigration and the industrial era	Emma Lazarus, American Jewry · immigration history through one people’s story
The Cold War	Soviet Jewry · two million Jews the Soviet state would not let leave, and the movement that got them out
Scientists and inventors	Albert Einstein, Jonas Salk · the physicist the Nazis drove out, and the developer of the first polio vaccine
Media literacy and civics	The Protocols, Hate Symbols · how a lie is built, and the symbols that carry hate today

These Chapters sit at the site’s regular reading level, grades 9–12. Strong readers handle them.

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 RH strand). The Chapters also 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](#). And 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.

Each Chapter named in this guide lists its standards codes in its Classroom Connections section, so the alignment work is already done.

ONE CLASS PERIOD, FULLY PLANNED

What do I teach tomorrow?

Teach this one first: **The Years Before the Killing, 1933–1939**. It answers the question students actually ask (“How did this happen?”) with dated laws and documents, in plain language for middle-school readers.

ONE CLASS PERIOD, NO PREPARATION BEYOND READING THE PAGE

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

First 5 minutes. Put three laws on the board: 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 opening aloud: “None of it was hidden.”

Next 15 minutes. Read the first two sections together: the day Hitler took power, then the first year of laws. On their handouts, students circle every date.

Next 15 minutes. Discussion question 1, straight from the page. Then read aloud the Chapter’s short account of the fine imposed after Kristallnacht (the November 1938 attack on Jewish homes, shops, and synagogues across Germany), and ask question 4. Both ask students to reason from documents, not to share opinions.

Last 5 minutes. Exit ticket: “Name one law, its year, and what it took away.” Every answer is checkable on the page.

That is one complete lesson. If it works for your room, the week below extends it.

FIVE DAYS, ONE STORY

What if I have a week? The five-day unit.

Five Chapters, in an order that tells one story: the lie, the laws, the machinery, the response, the aftermath. Each is a full lesson on the model above. The history is told through documents and numbers, and the imagery is memorials and records, not atrocity photographs.

The story does not begin in 1933. Day 1 opens with a lie that was already centuries old. And keep one question running through the week: why did it keep coming back? Taught as a bare list of persecutions, this history can backfire. A student may quietly conclude that so much hatred must have had a cause. The record answers that. Every era gave a different reason for the same target: enemy of the faith, then economic parasite, then racial threat, then hidden conspiracy. The reasons contradict each other. The target never changed. Students can reach the conclusion on their own: when the reason keeps changing, the reason was never the cause. If the question comes up in class, [The Nazi Synthesis](#) holds the evidence on one page.

DAY 1 • THE LIE

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion

A faked record of a “Jewish plot to rule the world,” exposed by the Times of London in 1921. It spread anyway. Students see how a lie is built, what it was used for, and how historians took it apart.

DAY 2 • THE LAWS

The Years Before the Killing

Six years of laws, dated one by one. How a modern country legalized hatred step by step.

DAY 3 • THE MACHINERY

The Camp System

What the camps were, told through the perpetrators’ own records: counted, dated, and documented.

DAY 4 • THE RESPONSE

Jewish Resistance & Rescue

Gunpowder smuggled into Auschwitz a pinch at a time, archives buried in milk cans, and the rescuers. The answer to a question students always ask: did anyone fight back?

DAY 5 • THE AFTERMATH

Liberation and the Displaced

The war ends and the story does not. Where the survivors went, in their own documents.

Short on days? Teach Days 2, 3, and 5. The story still holds.

FOR WORLD HISTORY, ELA, AND CIVICS

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.
- **Ritual Objects** · the easiest read on the site. A civilization told through the objects it made. Fits any culture or world-history unit.
- **Emma Lazarus** · the poet whose “Give me your tired, your poor” gave the Statue of Liberty its meaning. Fits U.S. history and ELA.
- **The Jewish Life Cycle** · birth to mourning, taught the way schools teach any tradition’s customs.

THE SITE’S CLASSROOM TOOLS

What else can I use in class?

Beyond the Chapters, the site keeps a set of tools built for the classroom:

- **Timeline.** Project it as a warm-up, or have students place the day’s lesson on it.

- **The Museum.** Manuscripts, coins, and objects, each credited to the institution that holds it. One object on the board opens a class.
- **Virtual Field Trips.** Plug-and-play visits to archaeological sites, memorials, and historic Jewish quarters, from your projector.
- **Films.** Curated film and video by Unit, with grade bands marked: documentaries, archives, survivor testimony.
- **The Legal Record.** The judgments, treaties, and statutes of the post-Holocaust era, each dated and linked to its primary document. The natural next page after Day 5.
- **The Recurring Cycle.** The pattern behind the week's running question, named step by step on one page.
- **Misconceptions.** Beliefs students bring to class, set beside the documented record, one claim at a time.
- **Glossary.** Every term defined plainly. Students can look up their own.
- **The K–5 program.** Full ready-to-teach lessons on the foundations. They double as background reading for teachers and students who want the basics first, and as the starting point where this history never reached your district's earlier grades.

THE SECTION TO READ BEFORE YOU NEED IT

What if a parent or my principal pushes back?

The real fear is usually not the material. It is being accused of teaching a side. Here is why this material holds, and what to say if someone challenges you.

- **Every claim carries its source, on the page.** Dates, laws, and figures link to the archive or museum that holds the record. You are not asking anyone to trust you, or us. You are showing them a document.
- **The site documents; it does not argue.** Its standing rule is that the reader draws the conclusion. Contested questions are labeled contested. Where scholars disagree, the page says so and names them.
- **No political side is taken.** On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the site says plainly that it is “a subject with legitimate arguments on both sides,” and it does not adjudicate it. You will not find an endorsement anywhere, of a party, a policy, or a position.
- **Hate texts are cited, never linked.** Students learn what a forgery like the Protocols did without the site ever sending anyone to read it.
- **The standards are public.** Every editorial rule the site follows is published at [Editorial Standards](#), and the Chapters in this guide name the state standards they support.
- **You can answer “who runs this site?”** The Makor Project is a free, independent educational resource. Its [About page](#) explains how it is built, and its [published standards](#) govern every page.

If a parent or administrator asks, you can say: “This lesson is built from primary documents, each linked to the institution that holds it, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem (Israel’s Holocaust memorial and archive), even the German state’s own federal archives. Here is the page. Every claim can be checked.”

And if a student repeats something antisemitic mid-lesson: put the document back on the screen and ask what it says. The site’s [Misconceptions](#) and [Hate Symbols](#) pages were built for exactly those moments. Each takes one claim, or one symbol, and sets the record beside it.

THE ANATOMY OF A CHAPTER

Quick answers

What is on a Chapter page?

- **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 it? The Years Before the Killing is written in plain language for middle-school readers. The site overall sits at grades 9–12: strong readers work from the pages, and the printable PDFs make excerpting easy for everyone else. Teaching grades 9–12? [Makor for High School](#) is that guide. For grades K–5, there is a [separate program](#) with full ready-to-teach lessons.

Do I need approval to use this? 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. Either way, this material is built to pass review: every claim sourced, standards named, editorial rules public. Adopting it as a core text, or building a course on it, goes through your school’s normal process, and the [Sample Syllabi](#) page carries an approval packet built for it. If your district’s web filter blocks the site, your IT office can unblock it; it is a free educational reference with published standards.

What does it cost, and how do I print? Nothing, ever, and no login. Every Chapter prints from its own “Open PDF” button. This guide itself is [a printable PDF](#), ready to hand a colleague. The [For Teachers hub](#) has the full Teacher Guide, a free professional-development course, and the ten principles for teaching this history with care. Questions, or a story about how a lesson went: hello@makorproject.org. We read everything.

Start with the one lesson. The rest is here when you want it.