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History Denied and Defined: Combatting Holocaust Denial

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Lesson for Montclair High School

Combatting Holocaust Denial

Duration: 40 Minutes

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Central Focus: The focus of the lesson is to analyze what Holocaust denial is, how deniers’ claim use “evidence” to support their claims, and how these claims affect the world today regarding anti-Semitism.

Handouts:

* Safe Space Contract: use echoes and reflections pg. 2
	+ The purpose of the contract is to allow the students to understand that the classroom is:
		- A safe place and a learning community
		- A comfortable place to be uncomfortable
	+ Another purpose is to allow the students to realize that the lesson is very emotional and takes a lot to think about because they have to take into account:
		- The knowledge they had previously learned about the Holocaust
		- The claims presented by the deniers
		- The “evidence” deniers use
		- Be able to analyze and refute deniers’ claims

Essential Questions:

* What is Holocaust Denial?
	+ Holocaust Denial is the minimization or refusal to acknowledge the systematic execution of Jews during WWII, as well as the minimization or refusal to acknowledge the fault of Hitler and the Nazi Party.
* What is Soft-Core Denial?
	+ Soft-core denial is the refusal to acknowledge the facts of the Holocaust through a “veiled or rhetorically concealed form…” (Heni, 75)
* Why does this matter?
	+ Holocaust denial not only effects Jewish individuals and groups in the present, with increasing growth in Anti-Semitic crimes, but it washes away history by denying the truth of the confessions during the Nuremburg trials and by refusing to accept that the gas chambers were used to kill and not used for “fumigation” purposes
* What can we do about it?

 “There is no other reason that it exists other than to hurt Jews and rehabilitate the image of Hitler and the Nazi Party.” (Echoes and Reflections)

Activities

Opening Activity: And Honest Discussion When it Comes to Analyzing Holocaust Denial (5 minutes)

“students have to reflect on the historical truth of the Holocaust…” (Echoes and Reflections): contract as a whole but emphasize on responsibilities when discussing this topic

This is more for the students and to kind of go into “What can we do?” discussion, because discussing the things to consider will also help students understand how important and complicated this can get

Activity 2: an interactive vote (3 minutes- slide two)

* + The teacher will ask a question that he/or she knows is true based on past experience and/or what they were taught- for example, George Washington was the first President of the United States.
	+ Have the students raise their hand if they believe the statement to be true. Then pick on a student to explain with one word or a phrase as to how they know that statement to be true
	+ Ask four questions with these activity
		- George Washington was the first president of the United States. How do you know that to be true?
		- Barack Obama served two terms of presidency. How do you know that to be true?
		- World War II took place from 1939 to 1945. How do you know that to be true?
		- The Holocaust was a part of WWII and took the lives of over 12 million people. How do you know that to be true?

Closing Activity: Using New Knowledge for Thought- “Think, Pair, Share” (5 minutes- slide 15)

This activity is for the students to use their new knowledge on the importance of debuting holocaust denying claims, to think of a way to avoid generalizations and refute holocaust deniers when and if that opportunity presents itself

On a blank sheet of paper, the teacher should instruct the students to write down one reason why holocaust denial is harmful and how they can make sure their sources are thoughtfully researched and clear cut truth rather than propaganda or surface level information, so as to avoid soft-core denial or soft –core anti-Semitism

Give sources and advise them on checking credibility of sources- slide 15

Point of Discussions Leading to Conclusion:

Why does this matter? Real World Examples (slide 12)

Trump administration participating in soft-core anti-Semitism

Lipstadt article: The Trump Administration released a statement on Holocaust Remembrance Day that emoted the systematic slaughter of six million Jewish citizens, instead generalizing it to the “innocent victims” of the Holocaust. This article and this occurrence is extremely important to note because of course, it is important to address the millions of victims sadly killed by the Holocaust, however as Lipstadt put it, “Had the Germans won, they probably would have eliminated millions of other peoples, including the Roma, homosexuals, dissidents of any kind, and other ‘useless eaters.’ But it was only the Jews whose destruction could not wait until after the war.” This is what Lipstadt defines as “soft-core Holocaust Denial”

An increase in Anti-Semitic crimes throughout the U.S and Europe

“They Spit When I Walked in the Street”: this article is meant to show the increase in aggression towards Jewish individuals all over the world, including in countries that were Axis Powers in World War II.

Important Past Courses of Action in Reaction to Holocaust Deniers (slide 12)

Bischoping Article: This article discusses a university’s reaction to a student run newspaper, challenging readers to come forward and give “actual” evidence that the Holocaust took place. Bischoping then gave 180 students a questionnaire and interviewed another 40 face-to-face, asking for their reaction, how they felt about the article passing through the editor and teacher head of board, and how they learned about the Holocaust. Discussing this situation and article is to show students that teenagers and young adults just like them have had to face the product and questioning of a Holocaust denier head on, while also seeing the debate between free speech/ freedom of the press and Holocaust denying propaganda.

Mel Mermelstein case in court: This case is to showcase what one survivor went through with a Holocaust Denier, who was “giving” a reward for anyone that could bring “actual evidence” from the Holocaust or about the Holocaust to prove it was true. Mel Mermelstein had been working to collect artifacts from the Holocaust for years, teaching his children about it from a young age and going back to visit Auschwitz every few months. For the students, this showcases how Holocaust denial really affects the people that were apart of the Holocaust and those who survived.

Excerpt from Lipstadt film *Denial*

All can be used for analyzing and challenging deniers

What can we do? Discussion (slide 14)

* NJ law: requiring Holocaust education
* Not allowing any denier a grip on legitimacy or their claims
* Checking the credibility of sources: discussion the importance of checking a source’s credibility is becoming more important now more than ever with the new age of technology and reaching information with the flick of a finger. Giving the students a few examples of how to make sure their sources are reliable is good to provide for them

Notes for the Presenter

Used so PowerPoint isn’t filled with excessive paragraphs of information.

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* What can we do about it?

Second Activity: Interactive Voting

1. George Washington was the first president of the United States. How do you know that to be true?
2. Barack Obama served two terms of presidency. How do you know that to be true?
3. World War II took place from 1939 to 1945. How do you know that to be true
4. The Holocaust was a part of WWII and took the lives of over 12 million people. How do you know that to be true?

How did it begin?

* Maurice Bardeche: an academic that wrote and travelled with a fascination in fascism. Began writing for a fascist journal called “Je suis partout” or “I am Everywhere” that became bias with “right wing” opinions and eventually “matched the racist propaganda in Nazi Germany”
* Paul Rassinier: having experienced prison by the S.S in 1944 due to false papers and experienced firsthand what the concentration camps were like, Rassinier came to disdainfully deny the picture of the concentration camps being presented by the media after the war and claiming them to be untrue. He published a book in 1964 entitled “The Drama of the European Jews”.

Holocaust Depreciation

* The Nuremberg Trials were multiple military tribunals arranged and held by the Allied forces after the end of World War II and is most notable for the prosecution of dangerous Nazi officials and doctors that took great part in the torture of the Jews in the concentration camps during the war.

Immoral Equivalences

* The Dresden Bombing: British and American air forces dropped a multitude of bombs on the capital of the German state of Saxony, Dresden, between February 13th and 15th of 1945, destroying over 1,600 acres of land and having a total number of 25,000 casualties. These casualties were mostly refugees and citizens, thus sparking German propaganda claims after the attack and after the end of the war
* Conflict between Israel and Palestinians: This conflict began in the mid-20th century and has continued until the present day. The main issue between the people was Jewish immigration and conflict between Jewish people and Arabic people. Over 711,000 Palestinians have been forced to flee or have been expelled from Israel following the establishment of the country as a Jewish country/state.

Why does this matter?

* Bischoping article was in response to a student ran newspaper at a university which published an article asking for a “conversation” on real evidence of the holocaust. Bischoping conducted 180 oral interviews and gave out 40 surveys to students, asking about their thoughts on the article. The response was overwhelmingly insightful:
	+ Most students knew of the Holocaust through their past educational programs and condemned the article
	+ Others wanted to be politically correct and thus, knew the newspaper had freedom of speech and of the press protecting them from taking any real action against the paper
	+ This brings to the question, when does freedom of the press and freedom of speech become harmful in regards to matter such as holocaust denial and anti-Semitism
* Mel Mermelstein: a holocaust survivor that had to go to court against a Holocaust Denying organization because they advertised for anyone to bring them evidence that the Holocaust happened at its full extent without bringing evidence presented from the Nuremburg Trials

Closing Activity

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	+ Give sources and advise them on checking credibility of sources- slide 15