

Everyday Jewish Life, Creativity, and Culture in Europe Before the Holocaust (Pre-war Europe)

 45 min

 GRADES 6-8

LESSON PLAN

LENS/DOMAIN

Jewish Identity

SUBJECT

Pre-war Europe

TOPIC

Resilience

Enduring Understanding

Jewish identity before WWII was rich, diverse, and rooted in both tradition and modern life. Understanding how Jews lived helps us appreciate resilience and culture, not only loss, in Holocaust education.

Essential Questions

1. In what ways does centering Jewish life, rather than only suffering, deepen our understanding of identity, resilience, and community?
2. What does learning about the richness of Jewish life before the Holocaust reveal about what the world lost when these communities were destroyed?
3. What does the survival of Jewish life and identity today, despite this loss, teach us about resilience and resistance?

Readiness

 10 MIN

Quick Write: Ask students to answer the question, “Who are you?” in as many ways as they can in five minutes. They may use adjectives or roles that they have.

Group discussion: Ask everyone to star three answers that they would be willing to share and do a quick round robin asking each student to provide one answer. Look for commonalities and the things that make us each unique. Alternatively, you could have each student write one of their answers on the whiteboard and look for patterns as a class.

Teacher frames today’s focus: “We often study the Holocaust through loss. Today, we’ll center on how Jews lived, including their music, celebrations, and everyday hopes, to understand identity better.”

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Input

 25 MIN

Video Activity: Glimpses of Jewish Life Before the Holocaust – Yad Vashem (4 minutes)

Step One: Silent Viewing (2:18–end, no sound – 5 min)

- Students jot “I Notice / I Wonder” statements on a note-catcher.
- Pair & Share: partners exchange one notice and one wonder.
- The teacher calls on 2–3 pairs to share with the class.

Step Two: First Half with Sound (0:00–2:17 – 7 min)

- Students jot: “What stood out?” (phrases, images, contrasts).
- Think–Ink–Pair–Share: 1 min jot, 3 min partner share, 3 min whole-class highlights.

Step Three: Replay Second Half with Sound (2:18–end – 6 min)

- Students add to their notes: “How did the narration confirm, contradict, or expand what I noticed?”
- Consider emotional tone and personal stories.

Output

 15 MIN

Prompt: What surprised you about Jewish life before the Holocaust, and why is it important to study how people lived as well as how they died?

Step One: Quick Write (Individual, 5–7 min):

Students write 4–6 sentences citing at least one detail from the video that challenged or expanded their understanding.

Step Two: Think-Ink-Pair-Share (Partner, 5 min):

Students share part of their response aloud with a partner. Each identifies one “powerful line” from the other’s writing and records it in their notebook as a quote including the author’s name.

Step Three: Whole-Class Wrap-Up (3–5 min):

Teacher invites volunteers (or cold calls pairs) to share one “powerful line.” Capture these on the board/projector as a collective reflection.

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TEACHER TIPS:

On Think–Ink–Pair–Share

- **Why writing before pairing matters:** Research shows that giving students 1–2 minutes to write before speaking increases participation, especially for quieter or hesitant students. It also deepens the quality of responses.
- **Timer strategy:** Project or say aloud “You have 90 seconds to write.” The urgency keeps students focused.
- **Clear expectations:** Model a sample “I notice / I wonder” to show what you expect (e.g., I notice the children are playing in groups. I wonder what holiday they’re preparing for).

During Video Viewing

- **Silent first round:** Emphasize that the first viewing is without sound so students can focus on visual details. Remind them they will hear the context later.
- **Chunking the video:** Breaking it into halves (0:00–2:17 and 2:18–end) prevents cognitive overload and allows reflection at each stage.
- **Equity in sharing:** When calling on pairs, consider using a “randomizer” (sticks, wheel, digital tool) to ensure all voices have a chance to be heard.

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Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for ELA:

Reading

R.6.6 / R.7.6 / R.8.6 (RI) Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. Rationale: Students watch the Yad Vashem footage first without sound, then with narration, and directly ask how the narration confirmed, contradicted, or expanded what they noticed visually. They are analyzing how perspective and framing shape the meaning of a source.

Writing

W.6.2 / W.7.2 / W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly. Rationale: Students write 4–6 sentences responding to the prompt "What surprised you about Jewish life before the Holocaust, and why is it important to study how people lived as well as how they died?" They must cite at least one specific detail from the video.

W.6.4 / W.7.4 / W.8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience. Rationale: The quick write is tied to a specific purpose (honoring Jewish life, not only tragedy) and a specific audience (classroom discussion). Teacher modeling and timed writing support coherence and voice.

W.6.9 / W.7.9 / W.8.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. Rationale: Students cite specific details from the Yad Vashem footage to support their written response about Jewish identity, resilience, and what was lost.

Speaking and Listening

SL.6.1 / SL.7.1 / SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing one's own clearly. Rationale: Students use Think–Ink–Pair–Share across all three video steps and in the Output, sharing responses with partners and the whole class. They identify and elevate a "powerful line" from their partner's writing during the wrap-up.

SL.6.2 / SL.7.2 / SL.8.2 Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue. Rationale: Students analyze archival footage of Jewish life in three structured viewing steps -- first silently, then with narration. They record "I Notice / I Wonder" observations and track how the visual and audio layers together deepen understanding of Jewish daily life, community, and loss.

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Wisconsin Model Academic Standards (continued):

SL.6.4 / SL.7.4 / SL.8.4 Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using relevant descriptions, facts, and details. *Rationale: During the whole-class wrap-up, students share a "powerful line" from their partner's writing and connect it to the Essential Questions about identity, resilience, and what the world lost. This requires presenting evidence and explaining its significance.*

WISCONSIN STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

Social Studies Inquiry Practices and Processes

SS.Inq1.a.m Formulate open-ended questions for further research within one or more social studies disciplines. *Rationale: The "I Notice / I Wonder" note-catcher asks students to generate genuine questions from what they observe in the footage, moving from observation to inquiry.*

SS.Inq2.a.m Explore evidence from multiple reliable sources representing a range of perspectives and media that have been selected through research to guide the inquiry. *Rationale: Students engage with archival primary source footage from Yad Vashem as evidence, analyzing both its visual content and narration as distinct layers of a historical source.*

Behavioral Sciences

SS.BH1.a.m Identify patterns such as culture, prior knowledge, family, peers, school, communities, and personal interests that influence a person's identity and development. *Rationale: The lesson opens with a Quick Write asking "Who are you?" Students examine their own layered identity before connecting it to how Jewish identity in pre-war Europe was shaped by culture, tradition, community, and belonging.*

SS.BH3.a.m Examine the role of culture, cultural diffusion, and cultural change on the development of societies and individuals. *Rationale: The Yad Vashem footage centers on Jewish music, celebrations, family life, and daily practice as evidence of a rich, diverse culture. Students analyze what that culture meant to the people who lived it.*

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Wisconsin Model Academic Standards (continued):

History

SS.Hist2.a.m Analyze patterns of continuity and change over time and explain historical contexts that influenced those patterns. *Rationale: The footage shows Jewish life as it existed before the Holocaust, requiring students to hold both the richness of that world and the historical forces that destroyed it. The lesson explicitly frames the Holocaust through life, not only loss.*

SS.Hist4.a.m Evaluate a variety of primary and secondary sources to interpret historical context, intended audience, purpose, and/or author's point of view. *Rationale: Students analyze the Yad Vashem footage as a primary historical source, attending to what the filmmakers chose to capture, how narration frames the images, and what that reveals about the intended audience and purpose.*

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