IMPACT-se

European Textbooks: Germany Review

(State of North Rhine-Westphalia)



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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2
INTRODUCTION 4
MAIN FINDINGS 9
METHODOLOGY 14
JEWISH RELIGION, IDENTITY, AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS 19
JEWS AND JUDAISM IN MEDIEVAL HISTORY 38
THE HOLOCAUST 51
THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT 74
CONCLUSION 91
LIST OF TEXTBOOKS 94

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Executive Summary

This textbook study reviews how the German textbooks used in secondary schools (*Gymnasien*) throughout North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) teach about Judaism and Jewish history, including the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is based on a corpus consisting of twelve textbooks used throughout the German state. The reviewed German textbooks demonstrate the value of historical contextualization, primary evidence, Jewish perspectives, and critical inquiry in teaching Jewish and Holocaust-related subjects. However, greater consistency is needed where comparative frameworks create false equivalencies or multi-perspectivity results in uneven treatment of competing narratives and actors, particularly in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- Judaism is presented as a living religion and part of contemporary German society, with students learning about Jewish communities before and after the Shoah, contemporary Jewish life, religious practices, local Jewish history, and Jewish cultural contributions.
- Catholic and Protestant religion textbooks contextualize the development of Christian antisemitism through scripture, religious literature, theology, and liturgy, while introducing key modern Church statements—particularly *Nostra Aetate*—that explicitly reject supersessionism, affirm the continuing significance of Judaism, condemn antisemitism, and promote Jewish-Christian dialogue.
- The textbooks explicitly reject collective Jewish responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus, contextualizing Jesus and his followers within first-century Judaism, explaining that disputes surrounding Jesus occurred within a Jewish context and involved specific Jewish authorities, emphasizing that the execution itself was carried out under Roman authority.
- Students encounter a broad range of Jewish beliefs, sacred texts, rituals, ethical questions, thinkers, and theological concepts, although some comparative treatment is problematic, particularly in one lesson that places Jewish circumcision alongside a purported Islamic right of husbands to punish their wives and Christian infant baptism.
- The treatment of Jews under Islamic rule presents both periods of coexistence and Jewish intellectual and social participation and the unequal status of Jews as *dhimmīs*, with competing accounts of al-Andalus. This encourages students to critically assess idealized narratives of *Convivencia* rather than portraying Muslim-Jewish relations as either uniformly tolerant or oppressive.
- Medieval Christian persecution is addressed through the massacres, plunder, and forced baptisms of Jewish communities during the First Crusade, although the treatment remains relatively brief and some descriptions simplify or inaccurately characterize aspects of medieval Jewish history. Antisemitism receives explicit historical treatment within Holocaust education, tracing the transformation of earlier Christian antisemitic traditions into modern racial antisemitism and explaining how racial theories, nationalism, Social Darwinism, and conspiracy theories were combined in the Nazi worldview to portray Jews as an existential threat to Germany.
- Students examine how Nazi antisemitism was translated from ideology into practice through propaganda, discriminatory legislation, racial laws, exclusion, and escalating persecution, while primary sources such as Hitler's speeches and Victor Klemperer's diaries allow them to analyze antisemitic language, its normalization, and its consequences.
- Holocaust education is detailed and source-rich, tracing the progression from discrimination and segregation to deportation, forced labor, mass shootings, extermination camps, and the systematically organized murder of approximately six million Jews.
- The textbooks emphasize that the Holocaust depended not only on Nazi ideology but also on bureaucratic planning, institutional cooperation, individual participation, and wider societal complicity, using victim, perpetrator, and bystander sources to examine responsibility from multiple perspectives.
- Jewish resistance is explicitly presented as extending beyond armed revolt to hiding, rescue, underground activity, service in Allied armies and partisan movements, and uprisings in the Warsaw Ghetto and extermination camps, countering the misconception that Jews went passively to their deaths.

- Germany's post-Holocaust reckoning is presented as an evolving and contested process involving criminal accountability, debates over responsibility, memorials and remembrance culture, and the continuing civic role of Holocaust memory in strengthening democratic values and confronting antisemitism.
- Religious education adds Holocaust theology and theodicy to the historical treatment, exposing students to Jewish responses associated with Elie Wiesel, Hans Jonas, *tsimtsum*, and the *Shekhinah* and asking how Auschwitz challenges traditional understandings of divine goodness, omnipotence, suffering, and human responsibility.
- History and political-education textbooks provide substantial coverage of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including Jewish historical ties to the land, Zionism, Palestinian nationalism, the Arab-Israeli wars, the Intifadas, Oslo, settlements, and proposed solutions, while religion textbooks provide little sustained coverage of Israel or Zionism.
- The curriculum emphasizes multi-perspectivity, but this sometimes creates false equivalencies, particularly by paralleling Hamas with extreme national-religious settlers or presenting an Israeli soldier and a Hamas fighter as equivalent "mutual threats," without explicitly identifying Hamas as a terrorist organization.
- The Intifadas are presented with reference to Palestinian suicide attacks against Israeli civilians, but greater emphasis is placed on Palestinian resistance and Israeli military responses, which can produce an uneven account of violence and responsibility.
- The 1947 UN Partition Plan is taught through competing perspectives, but Arab objections concerning territory, demographics, and political rights are developed more fully than Jewish concerns about security, territorial fragmentation, and a non-contiguous state.
- Oslo is presented through contrasting Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, although Israeli opponents are associated mainly with settlers and the political right while Palestinian opponents are characterized mainly as religious movements, simplifying the nationalist and religious motivations present on both sides.
- Students critically compare the two-state solution with one-state, confederal, and status-quo alternatives, but the textbook implies that the two-state solution may no longer be viable, emphasizing settlement expansion and Palestinian territorial fragmentation while giving less attention to Palestinian political fragmentation, rejectionism, terrorism, regional dynamics, and Israeli security concerns as obstacles to its implementation.
- The curriculum may benefit from further, richer, and more nuanced discussions that positively describe Jews, Judaism, and Israel, such as general Jewish contributions to German life throughout medieval and contemporary history and positive relations between Germany and Israel.

Introduction

The way German schools teach about Jews, Judaism, the Holocaust, and Israel carries particular significance in a context in which antisemitism remains a persistent social and educational challenge. Germany faces persistently high levels of antisemitism, according to a report by Germany's Federal Association of Departments for Research and Information on Antisemitism (RIAS). The report documents 2,197 antisemitic incidents in Berlin in 2025, around 13% fewer than in 2024 but still more than twice the annual average recorded between 2018 and 2022. RIAS therefore interprets the post–7 October 2023 rise not as a temporary spike but as a sustained upward shift in the level of antisemitic incidents.[1]

This broader trend is also evident in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), the focus of the present textbook review and Germany's most populous state. In 2025, RIAS documented 1,102 antisemitic incidents in NRW, a 17% increase from 2024. The increase was accompanied by more severe manifestations: antisemitic assaults rose by 78% to 32, while threats increased by 50% to 33, including 16 direct death threats. Israel-related antisemitism remained the dominant manifestation, accounting for 753 incidents—more than two-thirds of the total—while educational institutions were the setting for 140 incidents. RIAS thus describes antisemitism in NRW as becoming normalized at a persistently high level, with increasingly direct and threatening manifestations.[2]

These persistently high levels of antisemitism in Berlin and NRW raises questions about whether the German education system adequately equips teachers and students with tools to criticize and stomp out antisemitism. In their 2021 article "Implementing Antisemitism Studies in German Teacher Education," Gläser, Hentges, and Meier argue that despite the positive development in the revised social science curricula in NRW–explicitly naming contemporary antisemitism for the first time–the curriculum continues to situate antisemitism primarily within "extremism," thereby suggesting that antisemitism belongs mainly to radical political fringes and can obscure its presence in mainstream society and institutions. The authors' central criticism is that German education has traditionally approached antisemitism primarily through "historical dislocation," locating antisemitism in the Middle Ages, and Enlightenment periods, culminating with the advent of National Socialism and the Holocaust. Consequently, students may implicitly encounter antisemitism as something that peaked under Nazism and largely disappeared after 1945. Thus, teachers are left poorly equipped to recognize and respond to its contemporary forms, including conspiracy theories, coded antisemitism, and Israel-related antisemitism. The authors therefore call for antisemitism to become a structural component of teacher training, particularly in social science and political education, rather than an occasional or exclusively historical subject. The article's constructive contribution is its presentation of three pilot models for improving teacher education: an Israel-based summer school, a German-Israeli study group, and institutional cooperation between universities and civil-society organizations. All three seek to move antisemitism education beyond conventional classroom instruction.[3]

A 2023 report reviewing 16 secondary-school history, political education, and social-science textbooks used under the Berlin-Brandenburg curriculum concluded that most of the materials provided inadequate, one-sided, and sometimes tendentious information about Israel.[4] Only two of the examined textbooks, both published by Klett, were recommended by the study's authors. According to the study, the materials frequently failed to meet the curriculum's requirement to present controversial subjects from multiple perspectives. The study found that the Israeli–Palestinian

1 Recherche- und Informationsstelle Antisemitismus Berlin (RIAS Berlin), "Antisemitische Vorfälle in Berlin 2025," Berlin, 2026, https://report-antisemitism.de/documents/2026-05-20_rias-be_Antisemitische-Vorfaelle-Berlin-2025.pdf.

2 Recherche- und Informationsstelle Antisemitismus Nordrhein-Westfalen (RIAS), "Antisemitische Vorfälle in Nordrhein-Westfalen 2025," Düsseldorf, 2026, https://report-antisemitism.de/en/rias-nrw/#presentation.

3 Georg Gläser, Gudrun Hentges, and Marcus Meier, "Implementing antisemitism studies in German teacher education," *Journal of Social Science Education*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2021), pp. 75-101.

4 "Darstellung Israels in Schulbüchern nach dem Rahmenlehrplan Berlin-Brandenburg: Eine Analyse ausgewählter Materialien der Fächer Geschichte, Politik und Gesellschaftswissenschaften – Sekundarstufe I", Amando Antonio Stiftung & Mideast Freedom Forum Berlin, 2023, https://www.mideastfreedomforum.org/fileadmin/editors_de/Broschueren/MFFB_AAS_Schulbuchanalyse_Israelbild__Bln-BB_Sek-I.PDF.
Frederik Schindler, "Israel-Bild in Schulbüchern: 'Befeuert Antisemitismus im Klassenzimmer,'" Welt, June 15, 2023, https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article245842714/Schule-Israel-Darstellung-in-Schulbuechern-befeuert-Antisemitismus-im-Klassenzimmer.html.

conflict was often presented primarily as a religious confrontation between Jews and Muslims, although the authors characterized it mainly as a geopolitical and historical conflict. A recurring "David versus Goliath" framing cast Israel as the overwhelmingly powerful aggressor and the Palestinians as its helpless victims. The textbooks also generally failed to connect Israel's establishment in 1948 with the Holocaust and the preceding history of Jewish persecution, making it more difficult for students to understand the desire for a Jewish place of refuge.

According to the study, the term "Nakba" was generally used without sufficient critical context. The books did not explain that Palestinian displacement was not caused exclusively by expulsion from the newly established Israeli state but also occurred after Arab leaders called on civilians to leave while preparing for war. The displacement of Jews from Arab countries and Iran was also often omitted. More broadly, Israel was portrayed from its establishment onward (with few exceptions) as the aggressor and principal cause of the conflict. The authors argued that this created the impression that wars and displacement in the region would not have occurred without Israel, a narrative they described as counterfactual and conducive to Israel-related antisemitism.

The materials also largely omitted the prolonged history of Palestinian terrorism against Jewish civilians in Israel and abroad. The First and Second Intifadas were presented directly or indirectly as Palestinian wars of liberation for which Israel was implicitly responsible, while suicide attacks were minimized or euphemistically described as part of a struggle for peace or liberation. Attacks on Israeli buses and pedestrian areas and the abduction of civilians were not mentioned. Instead, this period was often illustrated with images of stone-throwing youths confronting Israeli tanks, reinforcing the "David versus Goliath" narrative while leaving out organized attacks involving weapons and explosives.

The study further criticized the visual and textual treatment of Israel and Jews. One textbook presented the security barrier alongside a mosque without explaining that the barrier helped reduce suicide attacks against Israeli civilians. Another associated close Israeli-American relations with the number of Jewish voters in the United States, which the authors considered compatible with conspiracy theories about Jewish influence over American politics. Ultra-Orthodox Jews were portrayed as strictly religious and patriarchal, while comparable issues among Jerusalem's Muslims and Christians or under Hamas were not addressed. The arrangement of images—faceless ultra-Orthodox Jewish men in black clothing contrasted with a smiling Palestinian woman and child—was also described as subtly encouraging negative attitudes toward Jews.

Finally, the study found that Israel was reduced almost entirely to its role in an apparently insoluble regional conflict. The authors recommended presenting a more balanced picture that also addressed Israel's achievements in research, science, technology, and the start-up sector. They similarly observed that Jewish life in Germany was depicted almost exclusively in connection with the Nazi period. Overall, the study warned that the anti-Israel bias in these textbooks could reinforce existing antisemitic attitudes or give previously unprejudiced students a distorted image of Israel.

This current report reviews how selected history and religion textbooks from the NRW curriculum teach about Jews and Judaism. It focuses on four main topics: general information about Jews and Judaism, Jews and Judaism in medieval history, the Holocaust, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Overview of German Jewish History

The first mention of Jews in today's Germany is found in a Roman decree from the year 321 C.E. addressed to the governor in Colonia, modern-day Cologne. From the tenth century C.E. onwards, one can speak with certainty of a continuity of German-Jewish life. The first documents evidencing Jewish life in the area now known as *Ashkenaz* in Hebrew date back to the ninth century C.E. In the tenth and especially the eleventh century C.E., there is documented evidence of numerous Jewish communities, the most important of which were located on the Rhine: Speyer, Worms, and Mainz.

Traces of Jewish life in medieval Germany can still be found in numerous places. These include gravestones, ritual baths, and excavations of synagogues, as well as streets whose names reflect their history–such as *Judengasse* (Jews Lane). But just like the life and work of the Jews, their persecution has also left its mark. Antisemitic imagery can be found on church buildings, for example the depictions of the abominable *Judensau* (Jewish swine) on Regensburg Cathedral or Wittenberg City Church. In addition, some churches contain plaques referring to the fact that they were built on the site of a synagogue that was destroyed after the spread of antisemitic lies about so-called ritual murder or host desecration. The period of the expulsion of Jews from many parts of Europe began at the end of the Middle Ages

and the beginning of the modern era. It was not easy to expel Jews from the patchwork of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Expelled from numerous territories and cities, some Jews headed east and founded new centers of Jewish life in Poland, but others simply moved to smaller neighboring territories. Sephardic Jews (from the Iberian Peninsula) settled mainly in Hamburg. Worms and Frankfurt am Main are two cities less commonly associated with the expulsion of their Jewish communities. However, Frankfurt was the site of the first forced resettlement of Jews: in 1462, all the city's Jews were relocated to the *Judengasse*, which could be closed off from the outside.

The majority of Jews lived in small towns until the middle of the nineteenth century. Excluded from the trades and the farming community, they ran small businesses, became physicians, or engaged in international commerce. It was not until the Enlightenment that it became slowly accepted that Jews should not remain outside the corporative social order, and should instead be entitled to equal rights as citizens as well as equal duties. However, for partial equality, as in the German states, Jews had to pay a price. They lost their communal autonomy, had to give up their language as well as their clothing and traditional names, and ultimately also adapted their religious practices to the Christian majority society. Even under the new law, hostility towards Jews remained present. Initially, it had been directed against traditional Jews who allegedly did not want to assimilate. However, from the middle of the nineteenth century, it was precisely the assimilated Jews who became the target of discrimination, now racially based, and under the new guise of antisemitism. The German Kaiserreich (1871–1918) was thus simultaneously a time of social and economic advancement for German Jews and an era in which a new kind of antisemitism developed. During the First World War (1914–1918) Jews fought for Germany side by side with their Christian neighbors and in the same proportion of the population. During the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) the majority of German Jews belonged to the middle class. They identified strongly with their regions, considering themselves Bavarians, Hessians, or Prussians as well as Germans and Jews. The global economic crisis of 1929, among other factors, contributed to growing political polarization and antisemitism. Following the appointment of Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) as Reich Chancellor on January 30, 1933, the persecution of Jews escalated through discriminatory laws, public humiliation and violence, culminating in the Holocaust.[5] Jews were stripped of their civil rights and relegated to second-class citizenship. Their property and places of worship were confiscated or destroyed, and they were ultimately subjected to systematic mass murder.

In 1950, only around 15,000 Jews were still living in the Federal Republic of Germany. Today, the Jewish community has around 95,000 members.[6] It is assumed that slightly more than that number live in Germany but are not registered as members of any Jewish congregation. The majority immigrated from the former Soviet Union from 1990 onward. [7]

Since the attack of Hamas on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war, cases of hate crimes with an antisemitic motive have doubled in Germany. This is according to the new situation report from the Office for the Protection of the Constitution. The October 7 terror attack, in particular, led to a completely new situation, as can be seen in the figures for politically motivated crime presented at the end of May 2024 by the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) and the Federal Ministry of the Interior. In 2023, the BKA counted 1,927 politically motivated crimes with an antisemitic motive, the vast majority of which were committed after October 7, 2023. A total of 60,000 politically motivated crimes were recorded in 2023—a new record. In the area of so-called hate crimes, the number of cases with an antisemitic motive doubled from the previous year to more than 5,100.

The 2022/23 situation report from the Office for the Protection of the Constitution states that antisemitism is evident in all forms of extremism, albeit in different manifestations. It is important to note that antisemitism has usually been anchored in right-wing extremism. However, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution points out that antisemitism is now often expressed "in public communication less directly, rather than primarily in hints, codes and ciphers and in particular in the case of conspiracy narratives." The reason for this is that right-wing extremist actors in the various scenes are aware "that open hostility towards Jews has little appeal among the majority population" and carries the risk of legal consequences.

5 For more information: "Dossier / 1700 Jahre jüdisches Leben in Deutschland," Deutschlandfunk, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/1700-jahre-juedisches-leben-100.html.

6 For more information: "Jüdische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland," Bundesministerium des Innern, https://www.bmi.bund.de/DE/themen/heimat-integration/gesellschaftlicher-zusammenhalt/staat-und-religion/juedische-gemeinschaft/juedische-gemeinschaft-node.html#:~:text=Einrichtungen%20in%20Deutschland-,Die%20j%C3%BCdische%20Gemeinschaft%20in%20Deutschland%20ist%20heute%20die%20drittgr%C3%B6%C3%9Fte%20in,Deutschen%20Reich%20rund%20560.000%20Mitglieder.

7 Figures can be found at "Geschichte der Jüdinnen und Juden in Deutschland," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, https://www.bpb.de/themen/zeit-kulturgeschichte/juedischesleben/328237/geschichte-der-juedinnen-und-juden-in-deutschland/.

Of central importance in this context are conspiracy narratives that spread low-threshold antisemitic patterns of thought and argumentation. In the context of the coronavirus protest movement, it was possible to observe how dangerous such conspiracy narratives are, as they not only circulated in extremist circles but also "spread to the wider society and had an impact there," according to the situation report: from political alienation to "blatant hostility towards the constitution to open hatred of Jews." According to the report, social media is particularly important for the spread of conspiracy ideologies.

In addition to right-wing extremism, antisemitism is also a central component of Islamist ideologies. Since October 2023, Islamist terrorist organizations such as the so-called Islamic State, Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups have been calling for attacks "in and outside of Israel and especially against Jews worldwide" regardless of the fact that these groups are ideologically different from Hamas. The Office for the Protection of the Constitution refers with concern to "the pull effect of Hamas' terrorist acts" on terrorist organizations with a global agenda.[8]

Overview of the German Education System and Curriculum

The Federal Republic of Germany is a federal system with sixteen states. The German school system is heterogeneous as the individual states hold jurisdiction over education. The states examine school textbooks for compliance with their own state-based curriculum. While Germany lacks a federal ministry of education there is a Standing Conference of Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs, which aims to ensure that the requirements across states are comparable.

It is important to recognize the tripartite structure of the German school system (*the dreigliedrige Schulsystem*). Unlike many other countries with compulsory education, Germany does not allow parents to teach their children at home. In Germany, school attendance is compulsory, justified by the state's duty to educate. Children usually start school at the age of six and attend classes for at least nine years. They first attend primary school for four years. During their fourth year in primary school, a decision is made on how to continue their education. The secondary school system is divided into *Hauptschulen, Realschulen, Gymnasien,* and *Gesamtschulen*. The *Hauptschule* is for students pursuing less academic subjects, the *Realschule* is for intermediary students, and the *Gymnasium* is for academic students. The *Gesamtschule* is a comprehensive school combining all types of education. The *Hauptschule* program ends after Grade 9, with the *Hauptschulabschluss* certificate, and the *Realschule* program ends after Grade 10, with the *Realschulabschluss* certificate. After that, young people can either begin vocational training or continue their academic education. The *Gymnasium* program ends after Grade 12 or Grade 13 with the *Abitur* certificate, which allows students to study at a university.[9]

This study analyzed only the teaching at the *Gymnasien*, since that is the highest academic track and Gymnasium students may move on to university after they finish their final exams (*Abitur*). Thus, it is assumed that the textbooks for the *Gymnasien* adhere to a relatively high standard and that the more years that pupils spend in school (Grades 5–12 or 5–13, depending on the state), the more exposure they will have to the relevant topics.

There are two types of *Gymnasien* in North Rhine-Westphalia, those that offer a nine-year program (G9) and those that offer an eight-year program (G8). The *Gymnasien* that offer the nine-year program offer Grades 5 through 10 at the six-year lower secondary level (trial and intermediate levels), followed by three years of instruction at the upper secondary level (introductory and qualification phases). These schools award the intermediate school-leaving certificate (*Fachoberschulreife*) at the end of Grade 10 and, upon successful promotion, grant students the right to attend the introductory phase of the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* or vocational-college courses that lead to the general higher-education entrance qualification. Pupils who perform particularly well are also eligible to attend the qualification phase of the *gymnasiale Oberstufe*. The *Gymnasien* that have an eight-year program offer Grades 5 through 9 at the five-year lower secondary level (trial and intermediate levels), followed by three years of instruction (introductory and qualification phases) at the upper secondary level.

8 Michael Götschenberg and Holger Schmidt, "Gefahrenpotenzial ist drastisch gestiegen," Tagesschau, May 27, 2025. https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/anstieg-antisemitismus-deutschland-100.html.
and "Lagebild Antisemitismus 2022/23," Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz. https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/allgemein/2024-05-lagebild-antisemitismus.html.

9 For more information, Martina Schüttler-Hansper, "This is how the German school system works," Deutschland.de, Aug. 25, 2025. https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/knowledge/overview-of-the-german-school-system.

After completing Grade 9, students at *Gymnasien* that offer an eight-year program can attend the introductory phase of the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* or take courses offered by vocational colleges that lead to the general higher-education entrance qualification. After successfully completing the introductory phase, students can attend the qualification phase of the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* and earn an intermediate school-leaving certificate (*Fachoberschulreife*).

Students begin the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* at the age of 17. It lasts for three years and begins with a one-year introductory phase (Grade 10 in the eight-year *Gymnasium* program, Grade 11 in the nine-year *Gymnasium* program, and Grade 11 in the comprehensive-school program). This is followed by a two-year qualification phase. The maximum time that students may spend in the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* is four years. In the introductory phase, students are familiarized with the content and methodological requirements of courses offered at the upper *Gymnasium* level. During this phase of their education, they acquire all the content-related and methodological prerequisites necessary to meet the requirements of the qualification phase. At the end of the introductory phase, students are promoted to the qualification phase, during which they prepare for the *Abitur* examination. Upon promotion at the end of the introductory phase, students acquire the intermediate school-leaving certificate in the *Gymnasium* track. The results achieved during the qualification phase are included in the overall assessment for the *Abitur*.

Lessons are organized in basic courses in the introductory phase. During the two years of the qualification phase, students take both basic and advanced courses. In addition, in all years, students can take two-hour specialization courses in German, mathematics, advanced foreign languages, and, if necessary, other subjects. In the qualification phase, two- or three-hour project courses are also offered. School guidance counselors provide advice to individual students regarding compulsory and elective courses.

Main Findings

The German curriculum reviewed in this report provides broad and generally substantive coverage of Jews, Judaism, the Holocaust, and, to a lesser extent, Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Across the materials used in secondary schools (*Gymnasien*) throughout the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), students are frequently exposed to primary sources, competing interpretations, Jewish-authored texts, and inquiry-based assignments that encourage critical thinking and contextual analysis rather than simple memorization.

The curriculum is particularly strong in presenting Judaism as a living and internally diverse tradition, critically rejecting inherited Christian antisemitic doctrines, and providing detailed, source-rich Holocaust education that combines historical, ethical, theological, and commemorative perspectives. The religion textbooks examined—drawn from both the Catholic and Protestant curricula—make an important contribution by presenting Jewish beliefs and thinkers in their own right and by critically addressing supersessionism, Christian responsibility, interfaith relations, and Holocaust theology. At the same time, Israel, Zionism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are marginally covered in the religion textbooks, appearing mainly in isolated theological, ethical, or symbolic contexts. The principal weaknesses identified in the broader curriculum concern selective historical coverage, occasional oversimplification, and, particularly in the treatment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a tendency for multi-perspectivity sometimes to produce false equivalencies or insufficient differentiation between actors, historical contexts, legal status, and forms of violence. The curriculum may benefit from broader and more nuanced positive representations of Jews, Judaism, and Israel, including Jewish contributions to German society, the active role of Jews in German life during the Middle Ages, and positive dimensions of contemporary German-Israeli relations

Jewish Religion, Identity, and Interfaith Relations

Overall, the textbooks provide a substantive and generally respectful portrayal of Judaism, particularly through their attention to contemporary Jewish life, internal diversity, Jewish-authored perspectives, and critical examination of Christian-Jewish relations, while some comparative and contested topics would benefit from greater differentiation and contextualization.

The Catholic and Protestant religion textbooks generally present Judaism as a living, internally diverse tradition and a continued part of German society, rather than primarily as a precursor to Christianity or through the Holocaust. Contemporary Jewish life appears in discussions of religious pluralism, interfaith families, synagogue security, religious practice, and religion in the public sphere. Jewish beliefs and practices also receive broad treatment, including the Torah and Talmud, prayer, Shabbat, circumcision, messianism, Chabad Hasidism, and contemporary debates over medical ethics, abortion, and homosexuality. Jewish sources are frequently incorporated into these discussions: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Lea Fleischmann, for example, present Shabbat through Jewish religious and personal perspectives, while rabbinic sources illustrate how *Halacha* and interpretation are applied to contemporary ethical questions. This contributes to a portrayal of Judaism as a diverse and evolving religious tradition rather than a static body of beliefs and practices.

A particular strength of the curriculum is its critical treatment of Christianity's historical relationship with Judaism. Students examine supersessionism and Christian teachings that contributed to Jewish marginalization and persecution alongside postwar theological developments such as *Nostra Aetate* and the Rhineland Synod, which affirm the continuing Jewish covenant. This is not presented as a simple progression from hostility to reconciliation: material on the Polish bishops addresses rescue, complicity, repentance, and Jedwabne, while the controversy surrounding the Good Friday intercessory prayer introduces Jewish criticism of Christian formulations implying a continuing need for Jewish "enlightenment." Such examples could help students understand Christian-Jewish reconciliation as an ongoing process shaped by historical memory and Jewish responses to Christian theology and language.

The curriculum also makes meaningful use of Jewish voices as interpreters of Jewish belief, history, and experience, including Maimonides, Amos Oz, Hans Jonas, Heschel, Elie Wiesel, Michael Wyschogrod, and Julien Chaim Soussan. The *Dabru Emet* statement allows Jewish scholars themselves to articulate both common ground with Christianity and the distinctiveness of Jewish covenantal identity and attachment to Israel, while Hans Jonas's adaptation of the

Kabbalistic concept of *tsimtsum* introduces a Jewish theological response to the Holocaust. Literature and art further broaden the portrayal of Jewish life: Wiesel's *The Trial of God* presents Jews as interpreters of their own historical suffering and religious questions, while Marc Chagall demonstrates how Jewish identity, biblical tradition, and symbolism inform modern artistic expression.

The breadth of coverage is not always accompanied by equivalent contextualization. Some individual Jewish-authored sources make broad or movement-specific claims without sufficient contrasting perspectives—for example, a liberal Jewish discussion of homosexuality makes claims about ultra-Orthodox yeshivas, the predominance of Liberal and Conservative Judaism, and the rejection of rabbinic prohibitions without fully conveying the contested status of these issues within Judaism. A related issue arises from the Christian comparative framework. Comparison is understandable and often useful in Christian religious education, as when *Shabbat* provides a basis for reflection on Christian Sunday observance, but it can sometimes substitute for explaining Jewish practice on its own terms. Hans Küng's discussion of common prayer, for example, makes assumptions about which Christian and Muslim prayers Jews could accept without presenting a Jewish perspective. More problematically, a lesson juxtaposes Jewish circumcision and Christian infant baptism with a purported Islamic "husband's right to punish his wife," creating questionable equivalencies between formative religious practices and violent behavior.

Jews and Judaism in Medieval History

In the treatment of Jesus's identity, the curriculum consistently emphasizes that Jesus was a Jew whose life and teachings were rooted in first-century Judaism. Students learn that he did not initially set out to found a separate religion and that his mission developed within Jewish religious expectations. At the same time, the curriculum clearly distinguishes Jewish and Christian interpretations of Jesus, explaining that Judaism does not recognize him as Messiah or divine redeemer. The inclusion of Jewish thinkers such as Abraham Geiger, Martin Buber, Schalom Ben-Chorin, David Flusser, Jacob Neusner, and Pinchas Lapide allows students to encounter a range of Jewish assessments of Jesus and encourages dialogue without erasing theological disagreement.

The curriculum also directly addresses Jewish involvement in the crucifixion, rejecting the traditional accusation of collective Jewish guilt. Students learn that crucifixion was a Roman form of execution and that the historical circumstances involved certain Jewish authorities without implicating the Jewish people as a whole. Gospel passages referring to "the Jews" are contextualized as products of internal Jewish disputes and later Christian interpretation, and students are asked to examine how decontextualized readings of the New Testament, Passion traditions, art, and theology contributed to the "Christ-killer" accusation and subsequent antisemitism. This treatment is historically and theologically significant because it confronts a major source of Christian antisemitism while showing how scriptural interpretation can shape later prejudice.

The coverage of Jews during the Crusades is more uneven. Students learn about Jewish integration into medieval European urban life, communal autonomy, official protection, and the violent persecution, plunder, forced baptisms, and massacres inflicted on Jewish communities during the First Crusade, particularly in the Rhineland. Religious accusations and economic motives are both identified as contributing factors, and a contemporary Jewish chronicle and historical images provide useful primary-source engagement. However, the treatment remains relatively brief and does not fully explore the broader scale of antisemitic violence connected to the First Crusade. Some formulations are also imprecise: describing relations between Jews and Christians as "relatively unproblematic" risks oversimplifying a more complex reality, while the reference to Jews living in "Palestine" around 1200 BCE is anachronistic. The narrative also gives considerable attention to Jerusalem without explicitly stating that Jews themselves inhabited the city during the Crusader period.

The treatment of Jews under Islamic rule is more deliberately contested and encourages students to question idealized narratives. On the one hand, students learn that Jews participated in intellectual, economic, and administrative life under Muslim rule, including translation activity during the Abbasid period and communal life in al-Andalus. Some materials describe Córdoba as a setting of relative coexistence in which Jews and Christians maintained religious communities and legal institutions under Muslim sovereignty. At the same time, other sources explicitly challenge the romanticized Convivencia narrative, stressing that Jews and Christians lived as protected but unequal *dhimmīs*, subject to taxation, legal restrictions, and social inferiority. The juxtaposition of these interpretations is a strength:

rather than presenting either an uncomplicated “golden age” or a uniformly oppressive picture, students are asked to compare evidence and assess competing historical interpretations.

The Holocaust

The curriculum provides substantial historical context for National Socialism and antisemitism, teaching that National Socialism emerged from nationalism, racism, antisemitism, anti-liberalism, anti-communism, and the *Führerprinzip* (leadership principle), while radicalizing earlier political and intellectual currents. Students learn how propaganda, political violence, mass mobilization, and the racially exclusive concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (people’s community) contributed to the rise and consolidation of the regime, and they critically examine Nazi social and economic policies rather than accepting the image of an economic “miracle.” Antisemitism is presented as a central ideological component of National Socialism, with attention to its roots in Christian antisemitism, racial theory, Social Darwinism, nationalism, and conspiracy thinking. The curriculum explains how these ideas were translated into exclusion, discriminatory legislation, racial laws, propaganda, and escalating persecution. Primary sources such as Hitler’s speeches and Victor Klemperer’s diaries allow students to examine ideology, language, and lived experience directly, while competing historiographical interpretations of National Socialism encourage critical evaluation rather than a single explanatory model.

The treatment of genocide and the Final Solution is detailed and emphasizes the systematic, bureaucratic, and institutional nature of the Holocaust. Students learn how discrimination and segregation escalated into deportation, forced labor, mass shootings, extermination camps, and the murder of approximately six million Jews. The genocide is situated within the broader Nazi war of annihilation, while the curriculum makes clear that mass murder depended on ideological commitment, bureaucratic coordination, institutional cooperation, and individual participation. Students engage with Nazi documents, speeches, diaries, perpetrator testimonies, survivor accounts, photographs, eyewitness reports, and postwar interrogations, enabling them to compare victim, perpetrator, and bystander perspectives and to analyze euphemistic language used to conceal mass murder. The section is particularly strong in its use of primary sources and in encouraging students to distinguish between evidence, testimony, and later historical interpretation.

In its discussion of resistance to Nazi rule, the curriculum avoids portraying resistance as either widespread or uniform. Students learn that opposition came from communist, social democratic, liberal, conservative, religious, military, youth, and civilian actors, while also recognizing that Hitler retained broad public support and that resistance to him remained limited. Jewish resistance receives specific attention and is presented as extending far beyond armed revolt: hiding, rescue, underground organization, participation in Allied armies and partisan movements, and uprisings in the Warsaw Ghetto, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Auschwitz-Birkenau are all included. The rescue of more than 7,000 Danish Jews further demonstrates how coordinated civic action could counter persecution. By asking students to classify forms of resistance and consider motives, risks, and objectives, the curriculum challenges the misconception of Jewish passivity and promotes a more nuanced understanding of Holocaust history.

The section on post-Holocaust reckoning and remembrance presents Germany’s confrontation with its Nazi past as gradual, contested, and unfinished. Students examine the Nuremberg and Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, debates over collective responsibility and statutes of limitations, and the development of memorials, museums, commemorative ceremonies, and Holocaust Remembrance Day. Remembrance is presented not only as commemoration of victims but also as a democratic and civic responsibility connected to confronting antisemitism. At the same time, students are exposed to controversies over memorial culture, including questions of ritualization, commercialization, social media, and the role of memorial sites. The extensive use of political speeches, journalism, philosophical writing, survivor testimony, literature, and public debates encourages students to treat memory culture itself as a subject for critical examination rather than as a fixed consensus.

From the perspective of Holocaust theology and theodicy, religious education treats Auschwitz as a challenge to inherited understandings of God, divine goodness, omnipotence, and Jewish-Christian relations. Students examine how the *Shoah* disrupted traditional theological language and engage with Jewish thinkers who respond differently to the problem of evil. Elie Wiesel represents a form of religious protest that continues to address God while refusing to justify Auschwitz; Hans Jonas responds by rethinking divine omnipotence and arguing that God’s self-limitation places greater responsibility on humanity; and the *Shekhinah* is presented as a divine presence that suffers alongside

humanity rather than preventing suffering. These lessons do not seek to resolve theodicy but instead invite students to grapple with unresolved theological and ethical questions and connect them to remembrance, responsibility, and Jewish-Christian relations. This adds a philosophical and religious dimension to Holocaust education that complements the historical treatment elsewhere in the curriculum.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The curriculum approaches the Israeli-Palestinian conflict primarily through multi-perspectivity, presenting competing historical memories, national identities, territorial claims, security concerns, and political aspirations. Students compare Israeli and Palestinian narratives, analyze historical and visual sources, and distinguish perspectives from factual claims, supporting critical engagement with a contested subject. At the same time, this two-sided framework sometimes produces false equivalencies or uneven contextualization by placing actors, forms of violence, or historical circumstances that differ materially within symmetrical structures.

The historical narrative traces Jewish connections to the land from antiquity and presents modern Zionism partly as a response to European antisemitism and nationalism, alongside Arab presence, Palestinian and Arab nationalism, the Balfour Declaration, Jewish immigration, partition, the 1948 war and Palestinian displacement, the wars of 1967 and 1973, and the Intifadas. This provides meaningful historical context for both national movements, although complex developments are sometimes compressed and the recurring pairing of Israeli and Palestinian memories—such as War of Independence/Nakba and Six-Day War/Naksa—can blur the distinction between acknowledging competing narratives and treating them as equally sufficient explanations of historical causation.

This problem is particularly visible in the treatment of the 1948 War of Independence and the Intifadas. In the treatment of 1948, the textbook presents both the Israeli War of Independence and Palestinian Nakba narratives and acknowledges the invasion of Israel by five Arab states, but develops Palestinian displacement and its consequences more fully than the Arab rejection of partition and invasion as factors shaping the conflict. It simultaneously omits the parallel displacement of Jews from Arab and Muslim countries. A similar imbalance appears in discussion of the First Intifada, which is framed primarily as a largely civilian uprising against an occupation, generating international sympathy, with less attention to Palestinian violence and Israeli security perspectives. The Second Intifada receives more explicit treatment of Palestinian violence, including suicide attacks against Israeli civilians. However, its causal framing emphasizes Palestinian frustration with the failed peace process and initially peaceful demonstrations before acknowledging attacks and suicide bombings against Israeli civilians; Hamas is also not explicitly identified as a terrorist organization. Israeli responses to violence are described through massive force, collective punishment, and targeted killings. In these cases, multi-perspectivity succeeds in exposing students to competing experiences and narratives but is less consistent in providing the historical context needed to evaluate their respective claims, actions, and responsibilities.

Lessons organized around competing claims and mutual threats show a similar tension. Asking students to distinguish historical, legal, national, and religious claims encourages perspective-taking, but the examples sometimes narrow the religious dimensions of the conflict to ideological actors. Palestinian religious claims are illustrated primarily through the Islamist conception of Palestine as a waqf associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, while Jewish religious claims are associated mainly with national-religious settlers and the biblical Land of Israel. This can underrepresent the broader religious-historical attachments to the land and Jerusalem within both societies. Another lesson places an Israeli soldier and an armed Hamas fighter together as examples of “mutual threats” without explicitly identifying Hamas as a terrorist organization, potentially flattening differences between a state military and a non-state armed organization.

The presentation of the 1947 UN Partition Plan similarly demonstrates both the value and limits of multi-perspectivity. Students compare interpretations and demographic, economic, and territorial considerations, but Arab objections receive more concrete explanation through concerns about land, demographics, political rights, and dispossession. Jewish perspectives focus more on international legitimacy and the consequences of Arab rejection, without comparable discussion of Jewish concerns about territorial fragmentation, security vulnerabilities, or accepting a non-contiguous state. The exercise therefore offers multiple perspectives but does not develop students’ internal reasoning equally.

Media literacy and visual interpretation are important pedagogical components. Students examine how photographs, omissions, stereotypes, and framing influence perceptions of perpetrators, victims, guilt, and innocence, while assignments ask them to reconstruct arguments, compare interpretations, analyze primary sources, and distinguish facts from political narratives. The Catholic and Protestant religion textbooks extend this approach into ethical discussions of peace, justice, violence, and reconciliation. A Protestant textbook uses an armed Israeli woman in a flowering garden to explore tensions between peace and militarization, while a Catholic textbook uses Banksy's Peace Dove on the separation barrier to discuss peace.

Regarding the treatment of peace processes and possible resolutions, the curriculum focuses primarily on the Oslo Accords. Students learn about Israeli-PLO mutual recognition, Palestinian renunciation of terrorism and self-government, unresolved final-status issues, Palestinian suicide bombings, the Hebron massacre, Rabin's assassination, Israeli security measures, and opposition on both sides. Contrasting Israeli and Palestinian interviews present Oslo as both a diplomatic achievement and a process that failed to end occupation and settlement expansion. However, Israeli opponents are characterized mainly as settlers and right-wing politicians, while Palestinian opponents are framed mainly as religious movements, underplaying religious and nationalist and religious motivations respectively. More generally, settlements and occupation receive greater attention than Palestinian rejectionism, political fragmentation, terrorism, regional actors, and Israeli security calculations.

This uneven treatment is especially apparent in reference to Israeli settlements. Students learn about economic, national-religious, and Haredi settlers and about the effects of settlements, infrastructure, and roads on Palestinian territorial continuity and movement. However, settlements are framed primarily as an Israeli-created obstacle to Palestinian statehood, with less attention to Israeli legal and security arguments, Palestinian violence relating to settlement areas, or competing views of territorial compromise. Although an Israeli legal position is promised, it is not substantively developed, while the claim that settlement policy violates international law is presented directly.

Finally, students compare two-state, one-state, confederal, and status-quo models through questions of security, sovereignty, identity, borders, demographics, and resources. This inquiry-based approach requires students to weigh competing arrangements and acknowledges Israeli concerns about preserving both Israel's Jewish character and democratic system. Yet settlements again feature prominently in explaining difficulties facing a two-state solution, while Palestinian political fragmentation, rejectionist movements, regional dynamics, and Israeli security concerns receive less sustained attention.

Overall, the curriculum combines substantive historical content and critical-thinking exercises with a strong commitment to multi-perspectivity. However, with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the textbooks take this approach too far in their attempt to create symmetrical presentation of the conflict, lacking thorough and nuanced engagement with differing political agencies, historical responsibility, security contexts, and distinct forms of violence.

Methodology

This textbook study is based on a corpus of twelve school textbooks used in the German state NRW at secondary schools (*Gymnasien*) in the province. The state of NRW was chosen for analysis because it has the largest population in Germany. During the 2023-24 academic year, about 500,000 students attended approximately 624 Gymnasien in NRW.[10] As of June 2023, the total population of the state was over 18.1 million.[11] Pupils enter the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* (upper secondary school) at the age of 17. During the investigation period, about 500,000 students attended approximately 624 Gymnasien in NRW.[12]

Since major issues in world politics, such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, are addressed most extensively in the *gymnasiale Oberstufe*, the study focuses on the final three years of schooling—Grades 10–12 under G8 and Grades 11–13 under G9—leading to the *Abitur*. A further reason for focusing on these years is the greater analytical complexity of teaching at this level across subjects, including religious studies or philosophy. A review of all 19 NRW curricula in relevant subjects (Religious Studies/Education [Jewish, Islam, Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant], Literature, Geography, Philosophy, Social Studies [*Sozialwissenschafte*] and Economics [*Wirtschaft*]) at state schools indicated that the relevant textbooks for the purposes of this report are taught in the *Oberstufe* phase (Grades 11-12/13).

The report is divided into chapters, containing examples that were gleaned from the reviewed History and Religion textbooks (of both the Protestant and Catholic denominations). The first chapter concerns general information about Jews and Judaism, containing examples that discuss Jewish presence in the German-Christian landscape, interfaith and rejection of supersessionism, Jewish beliefs, rituals and sacred texts, and Judaism in art. The second chapter is devoted to Jews and Judaism in medieval history, broaching examples that reference Jesus's identity, the Jews' involvement in his crucifixion, and Jews in the Crusades and under Islamic rule. The third chapter covers examples teaching about the Holocaust, particularly under the themes of national socialism and antisemitism, genocide and the Final Solution, resistance to Nazi rule, post-Holocaust reckoning and remembrance, and Holocaust theology and theodicy. Each chapter begins with a summary of what is taught in the examples, followed by the examples (ordered by sub-chapter); they are composed of a reference, analysis, and translation of selected segments (images of textbook pages are not reproduced in this report due to copyright considerations).

IMPACT-se's research goal is to provide an accurate and comprehensive assessment of a national system's school curriculum, by analyzing a large quantity of textbooks using international standards based on UNESCO and UN declarations as well as other international recommendations and documents on education for peace and tolerance. During the research process, the textbooks are read thoroughly and individual examples are selected on the basis of relevance to research and criteria. The examples are then analyzed, without interpretation or paraphrasis, by trained experts and linguists, in terms of both their content and their didactic significance.[13] Finally, the examples are generalized to establish the examples' significance in the overall narrative, determining the curriculum's adherence (or lack thereof) to international standards of peace and tolerance education.

Textbook research is a highly effective means to understand how the "Self" and the "Other" in a given society are conceptualized through educational materials. Two established approaches to qualitative textbook analysis are generally employed: *content* analysis, which examines the text itself, i.e. what it says in plain terms; and *discourse* analysis, which examines the language, narrative and context of the text, while paying close attention to omissions, contradictions and assumptions embedded in the text. This latter method provides insight into coded or implicit messaging.

10 For more information see "Landesbetrieb IT.NRW," Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen. https://www.it.nrw/schulen-in-nrw; "Gymnasium", Bildungsportal NRW, Ministerium fur Schile und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. https://www.schulministerium.nrw/gymnasium.

11 For more information see Satistik. NRW. https://www.it.nrw/statistik/eckdaten/bevoelkerung-nach-gemeinden-315.

12 For more information see "Landesbetrieb IT.NRW," Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen. https://www.it.nrw/schulen-in-nrw; "Gymnasium", Bildungsportal NRW, Ministerium fur Schile und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. https://www.schulministerium.nrw/gymnasium.

13 The majority of examples featured in this report include translations of noteworthy passages, particularly where specific phrases or longer excerpts are quoted. A small number of examples are deliberately presented without translations where the analysis concerns the broader contribution of the content rather than its specific wording or terminology.

Elements of historical, political and religious background are also considered when they are deemed to provide further context. IMPACT-se research uses both methods simultaneously and in a complementary manner, thus allowing to reliably uncover the significance of the text and how it may be perceived by the intended reader, i.e. the student, and minimize the observer bias on the part of the researcher.

The diverse nature of textual analysis necessitates clearly defined scope and parameters. As such, the methods of textual analysis mentioned above are employed with a focus on pre-defined topics and themes. To assess compliance with international educational standards, textbooks are approached with attention to the conceptualization of the "Self" and the "Other" in environments of conflict, and messages involving violence and incitement to violence; hate and intolerance; and peace and peaceful conflict resolution. These issues may be identified with the help of research questions, which serve as suggested leads and prompts for the researcher in exploring the context, aspects, significance and potential ramifications of a specific content example.[14] Also explored are issues that arise from the source material itself, such as culture- or nation-specific issues. For example, the identity of the "Other" differs from one society to another, and in many cases, there are multiple groups of people labeled as such; the "Other" may be ethnic, religious, racial, national, socio-economic, gender, sexual, or any combination of the above. As such, each corpus of textbooks requires a unique set of criteria for identifying and collating content examples.

To ensure accuracy, research is conducted while taking into account known limitations and constraints. Since the contents of school curricula are created by multiple individuals and inconsistencies may occur even within a single textbook, the sample of textbooks to be researched is generally aimed to be as large as possible, encompassing multiple school grades and subjects. Favoring larger samples also allows for a more accurate analysis of discourse and narrative that can only be perceived on a macro level, to pinpoint gaps and oversights, reach meaningful conclusions and facilitate actionable recommendations. Textbooks are selected for research after a preliminary study, on the basis of their verified use within the national education system and their assessed potential for relevance to pre-defined research topics.

In its assessment of educational materials, IMPACT-se employs UNESCO and other UN declarations, as well as international recommendations and documents on education for peace and tolerance. The use of internationally recognized standards allows for an objective, empirical and fair analysis of a wide range of educational materials from diverse societies, mitigating political, national or religious biases on the part of the researcher and preventing prejudice towards any particular group of people. The use of these standards for evaluating educational content has been endorsed by bodies of the European Union, among others.[15] These standards are as follows:

1. **RESPECT:** The curriculum should promote tolerance, understanding and respect toward the "Other," his or her culture, achievements, values and way of life.[16]
2. **INDIVIDUAL OTHER:** The curriculum should foster personal attachment toward the "Other" as an individual, his or her desire to be familiar, loved and appreciated.[17]
3. **NO HATE:** The curriculum should be free of wording, imagery and ideologies likely to create prejudices, misconceptions, stereotypes, misunderstandings, mistrust, racial hatred, religious bigotry and national hatred, as well as any other form of hatred or contempt for other groups or peoples.[18]

14 Arnon Groiss, "Researching Schoolbooks of Societies in Conflict: Suggested Study Questions," 2013. https://www.impact-se.org/research-questions-2/; also see suggested frameworks for the application of research questions in identifying violence and intolerance in textbook research:
Georg Eckert Institute, "Inception Report for a Study on Palestinian Textbooks," 12 April 2019, pp. 20–21, deposited in UK Parliament Libraries 16 June 2020, ref. no. DEP2020-0322. https://depositedpapers.parliament.uk/depositedpaper/2282265/files

15 European Parliament, Resolution with Observations Forming an Integral Part of the Decisions on Discharge in Respect of the Implementation of the General Budget of the European Union for the Financial Year 2022, Section III – Commission and Executive Agencies (2023/2129(DEC)), 11 April 2024, item no. 198. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0228_EN.pdf

16 As defined in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance Proclaimed and signed by Member States of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Articles 1, 4.2. See also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples (1965), Principles I, III. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

17 The goal of education for peace is the development of universally recognized values in an individual, regardless of different socio-cultural contexts. See Ibid., Article 6. See also, on exchanges between youth, the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principles IV, V.

18 Based on Ibid., Articles III.6, IV.7 and VII.39; and on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eighth session, Paris, November 1995, Article 18.2.

4. **NO INCITEMENT:** The curriculum should be free of language, content, and imagery that disseminate ideas or theories which justify or promote acts and expressions of violence, incitement to violence, hostility, harm and hatred toward other national, ethnic, racial or religious groups.[19]
5. **PEACEMAKING:** The curriculum should develop capabilities for non-violent conflict resolution and promote peace.[20]
6. **UNBIASED INFORMATION:** Educational materials (textbooks, workbooks, teachers' guides, maps, illustrations, aids) should be up-to-date, accurate, complete, balanced and unprejudiced, and use equal standards to promote mutual knowledge and understanding between different peoples.[21]
7. **GENDER IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION:** The curriculum should foster equality, mutual respect, and should aim for equal representation between individuals regardless of their gender identity. It should also refrain from language, content, and imagery that depicts limiting and/or exclusionary gender roles.[22]
8. **SEXUAL ORIENTATION:** The curriculum should be free of language, content, and imagery that promulgates violence or discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.[23]
9. **SOUND PROSPERITY and COOPERATION:** The curriculum should educate for sound and sustainable economic conduct and preservation of the environment for future generations. It should encourage regional and local cooperation to that effect.[24]

The abovementioned standards are applied by the researcher in conjunction with specific guidelines for textbook development promoted by UNESCO itself. These include the following:

1. Treating textbooks as a tool for facilitating teaching and learning processes that foster peace, equality and mutual understanding;[25]
2. The integration of human rights principles and pedagogical processes that teach peaceful conflict resolution, non-discrimination and other practices and attitudes for "learning to live together";[26] Incorporation of content that is free from harmful gender, religious and other stereotypes,[27] or generalizations that may oversimplify the representation of other groups or set one group against the other,[28] with the recognition that hate speech can be particularly dangerous in conflict situations, as it fuels violence and atrocity crimes.[29] Instead, educational

19 As defined in Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2106 (XX) on December 21, 1965. See also Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI) on December 16, 1966.

20 Based on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eighth session, Paris, November 1995, Article 9; and on the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Article 5.

21 Based on UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, November 19, 1974, Article V.14.

22 The preamble to the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, notes the Convention on the Elimination of Any Form of Discrimination against Women and emphasizes respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to gender.

23 Based on Resolutions 32/2 (adopted June 30, 2016) and 17/19 (adopted July 14, 2011) of the UN Human Rights Council, and numerous UN General Assembly resolutions expressing concern and condemnation of laws and practices around the world which target individuals based on their gender identity and/or sexual orientation for discrimination, violence, and even extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions—all of which contradict the most basic principles of the UN and have no place in education.

24 Based on UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, November 19, 1974, Articles III.6, and IV.7. On the imperative for developing "systematic and rational tolerance teaching methods that will address the cultural, social, economic, political and religious sources of intolerance," see the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Article 4.2. On education for international cooperation, see also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principle II.

25 *Textbooks and Learning Resources: Guidelines for Developers and Users* (Paris: UNESCO, 2014), p. 12 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000226135_eng

26 *A Comprehensive Strategy for Textbooks and Learning Materials* (Paris: UNESCO, 2005), p. 11 https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/UNESCO-Comprehensive_Strategy_for_Textbooks_2005.pdf

27 Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, *Textbooks for Sustainable Development: A Guide to Embedding* (New Delhi: UNESCO, 2017), p. 29. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259932

28 *Making Textbook Content Inclusive: A Focus on Religion, Gender, and Culture* (Paris: UNESCO, 2017), p. 13 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247337

29 *Addressing Hate Speech through Education: A Guide for Policy-makers* (Paris: UNESCO, 2023), pp. 13, 14 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384872

materials should actively aim to challenge and eradicate underlying prejudices and stereotypes and contribute to overcoming their consequences,[30] and confront essentialist, generalizing ascriptions to entire populations;[31]

3. Adherence to factual information on other groups in a manner that facilitates understanding, providing neutral information about controversies,[32] alerting students to and "prebunking" conspiracy theories,[33] and rejecting denial or distortion of proven historical facts;[34]
4. Avoiding a dominant narrative voice associated with one particular ethno-racial or national structure, but critically question dominant narratives by means of counter-narratives and present the perspectives of different groups on current affairs and historical controversies;[35]
5. The promotion of peace, with attention to the emotive level of words, attitudes to different groups of people and nations, identifying and countering hate speech, and managing conflict through dialogue,[36]
6. The promotion of peace-*building*, that is, a broader concept of "positive peace" that is an expression of the fundamental dignity of and respect for life;[37]
7. Recognition of past violence and crimes, both local and global, such as the Holocaust, and discussion of the dynamics of identity-based hate that caused them;[38]
8. The use of tools such as literature to foster tolerance and empathy, helping students to see the world from the perspective of other people and to experience how others feel;[39]
9. The incorporation of real-life examples in science and mathematics to promote sustainable development, discarding impertinent political, violent, or conflict-oriented messaging,[40] and employing STEM subjects to build bridges between communities and transcend frontiers;[41]
11. Combating sexism and unequal gender representation in textbooks;[42]
12. Appropriateness to age, developmental needs and the mental wellbeing of students.[43]

30 *Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development* (UNESCO: Paris, 2023), p. 11 https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-education-peace-and-human-rights-international-understanding-cooperation-fundamental?hub=87862

31 *Unmasking Racism: Guidelines for Educational Materials* (UNESCO: Paris, 2024), p. 27

32 *Making Textbook Content Inclusive: A Focus on Religion, Gender, and Culture* (Paris: UNESCO, 2017), pp. 15–16 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247337

33 *Addressing Hate Speech through Education: A Guide for Policy-makers* (Paris: UNESCO, 2023), pp. 32–33 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384872

34 *Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development* (UNESCO: Paris, 2023), p. 9 https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-education-peace-and-human-rights-international-understanding-cooperation-fundamental?hub=87862

35 *Unmasking Racism: Guidelines for Educational Materials* (UNESCO: Paris, 2024), pp. 53, 61

36 Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, *Textbooks for Sustainable Development: A Guide to Embedding* (New Delhi: UNESCO, 2017), p. 166 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259932

37 *Textbooks and Learning Resources: A Framework for Policy Development* (Paris: UNESCO, 2014), p. 21 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232222

38 *Addressing Hate Speech through Education: A Guide for Policy-ma*kers (Paris: UNESCO, 2023), pp. 33–34, 42, 45, 46 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384872

39 Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, *Textbooks for Sustainable Development: A Guide to Embedding* (New Delhi: UNESCO, 2017), p. 175 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259932

40 Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, *Textbooks for Sustainable Development: A Guide to Embedding* (New Delhi: UNESCO, 2017), pp. 37–42, 67–100 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259932

41 *Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development* (UNESCO: Paris, 2023), p. 9 https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-education-peace-and-human-rights-international-understanding-cooperation-fundamental?hub=87862

42 Carole Brugeilles and Sylvie Cromer, *Promoting Gender Equality through Textbooks: A Methodological Guide* (Paris: UNESCO, 2009) https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000158897_eng

43 *Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development* (UNESCO: Paris, 2023), pp. 8, 10, 11 https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-education-peace-and-human-rights-international-understanding-cooperation-fundamental?hub=87862

In addition to UNESCO recommendations, IMPACT-se takes the following two criteria into consideration when assessing educational materials' compliance with international standards:

1. Educational material should respect international law, relevant resolutions, previous agreements and obligations. This may include, for example, the principle of a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
2. Educational material should be void of antisemitic content, which is to be evaluated on the basis of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism.[44] While UNESCO has not adopted this nor any other single definition of antisemitism,[45] it has recommended teaching about contemporary (post-1945) manifestations of antisemitism,[46] with specific examples including Holocaust denial and the characterization of Western support for the State of Israel in that context,[47] asking Jews to disavow their connection with Israel,[48] and criticism of Israel in cases where it is informed by antisemitic assumptions and beliefs that are simply applied to Zionism, Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[49] UNESCO has also recommended teaching about the Jewish Holocaust,[50] local Jewish heritage,[51] the diversity of Jewish beliefs, commonalities with other communities, and positive contributions of Jewish individuals, as well as using a multi-perspective approach to teaching about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[52]

44 International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), Non-Legally Binding Working Definition of Antisemitism
https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism
Endorsed by the European Commission, Council, and Parliament as a "useful tool, in particular for education and training purposes for teachers, NGOs, state authorities and the media"
European Commission, "Definition of antisemitism", 2021;
https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combatting-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/combating-antisemitism/definition-antisemitism_en
European Parliament, Resolution on combating anti-Semitism (2017/2692(RSP)), 1 June 2017
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0243_EN.html
Council of the European Union, "Fight against antisemitism: Council declaration," 6 December 2018
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/12/06/fight-against-antisemitism-council-declaration/

45 *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (OSCE/ODIHR: Warsaw, 2018), p. 13
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000263702

46 *Strategies to Counter Antisemitism: A Handbook for Educators* (Paris: UNESCO, 2025), pp. 14–15
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000396116

47 *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (OSCE/ODIHR: Warsaw, 2018), p. 22
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000263702

48 *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (OSCE/ODIHR: Warsaw, 2018), p. 81
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000263702

49 *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (OSCE/ODIHR: Warsaw, 2018), p. 24
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000263702

50 *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: A Guide for Policy-makers* (Paris: UNESCO, 2023), pp. 14, 33, 34, 46
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000263702

51 *Strategies to Counter Antisemitism: A Handbook for Educators* (Paris: UNESCO, 2025), pp. 21–23
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000396116

52 *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (OSCE/ODIHR: Warsaw, 2018), p. 41
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000263702

Jewish Religion, Identity, and Interfaith Relations

The textbooks generally present Judaism as a living, internally diverse religious tradition and a continued part of German society, rather than primarily as a historical precursor to Christianity or through the Holocaust. Contemporary Jewish communities appear in discussions of German identity, religious pluralism, interfaith families, synagogue security, and debates over religious practice.[53] Judaism also appears within broader discussions of religion and the state, where Jewish remembrance is situated alongside other religious institutions and expressions in the public sphere. For example, a chapter on religion and the state uses visual materials depicting churches, mosques, petitions of kings to the pope, Muslim prayer, a meeting between the Grand Imam of al-Azhar and the Pope, and Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,[54] presenting Jewish remembrance alongside other major religious institutions and interactions in the public sphere. This approach could help students encounter Jews as participants in contemporary German social and religious life, although Jewish life is also frequently discussed through the challenges faced by a small minority community.

A particular strength is the critical treatment of Christianity's historical relationship with Judaism. Students examine supersessionism and other Christian teachings that contributed to the marginalization and persecution of Jews, but these are contrasted with the substantial transformation of Christian theology represented by *Nostra Aetate*, the Rhineland Synod, and other postwar developments affirming the continuing Jewish covenant. Importantly, the relationship is not reduced to a straightforward progression from past hostility to modern reconciliation. The Polish bishops' discussion of rescue, complicity, repentance, and Jedwabne presents Christian-Jewish history as morally and historically complex, while the controversy over the Good Friday intercessory prayer shows how tensions can persist even after explicit antisemitic doctrines have been rejected. Jewish voices criticize formulations that continue to imply a need for Jewish "enlightenment," and the lesson presents these objections as legitimate concerns within contemporary Catholic-Jewish relations. This could help students understand that reconciliation is not simply a matter of doctrinal reform, but an ongoing process in which historical memory and the way Christian language is experienced by Jews remain important.

The treatment of Jewish beliefs and practices is similarly broad and generally emphasizes diversity, interpretation, and the continuing application of tradition to contemporary life. Students encounter the Hebrew Bible (Torah), *Talmud*, prayers (such as the *Shema*),[55] Sabbath, circumcision, creation, manifestations of God, revelation, salvation, messianic beliefs, *Chabad* Hasidism, and contemporary Jewish ethical discussions on issues such as medical ethics, and—notable for being discussed analytically in Christian religious education textbooks—homosexuality and abortion. Several examples effectively use Jewish sources themselves: Heschel and Lea Fleischmann present Shabbat as a lived practice connected with freedom and memory; an Orthodox rabbi explains Jewish messianic beliefs; and discussions of abortion and medical ethics illustrate the interaction between Halacha, rabbinic interpretation, individual circumstances, and contemporary knowledge. These examples could contribute to an understanding of Judaism as neither monolithic nor static, but as a tradition containing different movements, authorities, interpretations, and responses to modern ethical questions.

At the same time, the breadth of coverage is not always matched by sufficient nuance and contextualization. Some individual sources make broad claims about Judaism without providing students with the knowledge needed to assess them. For example, a liberal Jewish discussion makes uncontextualized claims about homosexuality within ultra-Orthodox yeshivas, the predominance of Liberal and Conservative Jews among synagogue-affiliated Jews, and the

53 See for instance *Sensus Religion, Vom Glaubenssinn und Sinn des Glaubens – Unterrichtswerk für die Oberstufe* (Cornelsen), Grades 11–13 (Oberstufe) 2021, Auflage 1, Druck 6 / Kösel, Catholic, pp. 38-39.

54 See *Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), Oberstufe, grades 11–13, 2020, Druck A5, 2025, Catholic, pp. 438-439.

55 See *Religionsbuch* (Cornelsen), Grades 11–13 (Oberstufe), 2021, Auflage 1, Druck 4, Protestant, p. 170.

rejection of rabbinic prohibitions, without adequately conveying how controversial these questions are within Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Judaism, or the significance of departing from established rabbinic law. Additional context or contrasting Jewish perspectives could enable students to distinguish one Jewish position from Judaism more broadly.

A related limitation arises from the Christian comparative framework through which Judaism is sometimes presented. Comparison is understandable and often pedagogically useful in Catholic and Protestant religious education, and some examples use it constructively: Jewish understandings of Shabbat, for instance, become a basis for reflecting on Christian Sunday observance. Yet comparison can also substitute for explaining Jewish practice on its own terms. One treatment initially secularizes Shabbat into a general exercise in intentional rest before explaining it partly through comparison with Christianity, while Hans Küng's discussion of common prayer makes assumptions about which Christian and Muslim prayers Jews could participate in without providing a Jewish perspective on those religious boundaries. The circumcision lesson provides multiple perspectives and clearly communicates the central covenantal significance of *brit milah*, but its broader comparison places formative Jewish and Christian rituals alongside a purported Islamic "husband's right to punish his wife," creating a questionable equivalence between identity-forming religious practices and violent behavior that does not hold an equivalent formative status in Islam. Thus, the comparative method is strongest when it first establishes each tradition's own understanding before asking students to identify similarities and differences.

The curriculum nevertheless makes meaningful use of Jewish voices as interpreters of Judaism, rather than relying exclusively on Christian descriptions. Students encounter figures including Maimonides,[56] Amos Oz,[57] Hans Jonas, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Elie Wiesel, Michael Wyschogrod, and Julien Chaim Soussan—treating Jewish voices as primary contributors to broader lessons on religion. The curriculum also introduces *Dabru Emet*, a statement that allows Jewish scholars themselves to articulate both common ground with Christianity and the distinctiveness of Jewish covenantal identity and attachment to Israel. The inclusion of Orthodox, liberal, philosophical, rabbinic, and literary perspectives contributes to the portrayal of internal Jewish diversity. Among the theological concepts introduced is Hans Jonas's adaptation of the Kabbalistic idea of *tsimtsum* (literally "contraction"), offering an explanation for why God could not intervene in the Holocaust rather than suggesting a lack of divine will.[58]

Literature and visual art broaden the representation of Judaism beyond doctrine and religious practice into Jewish cultural production. Elie Wiesel's The Trial of God allows students to encounter a Jewish author using drama to interpret persecution and grapple with faith, suffering, and divine justice, presenting Jews not merely as victims of historical violence but as creators and interpreters of their own experience. Marc Chagall's work similarly demonstrates how Jewish identity, biblical tradition, and religious symbolism can shape modern artistic expression. Together with the theological and contemporary examples, these materials produce a generally substantive and respectful portrayal of Judaism.

Jewish Presence in the German-Christian Landscape

Example 1.
***Religionsbuch (Cornelsen),* Grades 11–13 (*Oberstufe*), 2021, *Auflage* 1, Druck 4, Protestant, pp. 12, 14.**

The chapter on world religions includes general information on Judaism. It presents a data table noting that Jews consist of two percent of the world's believers (as of 2007), and that Jews are currently not represented in a survey sample of the demographics of contemporary Germany. The absence of Jews from the data does not mean there are no Jews in Germany, but rather that their numbers are statistically negligible within the sample size of 1,000 people. Nonetheless, the textbook portrays Jews in Germany as both demographically invisible and structurally marginalized, with the figure of 0% of surveyed people symbolically highlighting the long-term effects of the Holocaust and the erasure of a once-vibrant Jewish presence. Notably, another textbook estimates the membership of Jewish religious communities in Germany at approximately 100,000 people as of 2013, representing 0.1% of the population.[59]

56 See *Philosophieren in der Oberstufe*, Einführungsstufe, Grade 11, 2014, Druck A5/ Schöning, 2018, pp. 62, 165–166.

57 See *Am Anfang war das Wort* (Cornelsen), Religion gymnasiale Oberstufe, Grades 11–13 (Oberstufe), 2017, Auflage 1, Druck 1 / Patmos, Catholic, p. 195.

58 See *Religionsbuch* (Cornelsen), Grades 11–13 (Oberstufe), 2021, Auflage 1, Druck 4, Protestant, pp. 165–166.

59 *Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase), 2016, Auflage 1, Protestant school textbook, p. 53.

The caption accompanying the data table adds a layer of critical insight, noting that Jewish life in Germany remains fragile: "there are very few officially recognized synagogues that do not require regular police protection," and "assaults occur not infrequently against Jewish people." Even core practices like circumcision have been challenged in court as bodily harm. Judaism is thus depicted not only as numerically small but as structurally vulnerable and often contested, suggesting that Jewish religious identity in Germany today experience both social and legal complications. Notably, the challenges for religious communities living in a "secular state" like Germany focuses on Jews, but also notes Muslims. Apart from these two religions, no other religion is mentioned as experiencing complications, despite the existence of Hindus, Buddhists, and others.

> *[…] For Jews, too, life in Germany often comes with complications regarding official recognition: There are very few officially recognized synagogues that do not require regular police protection and assaults occur not infrequently against Jewish people as well as Muslims. The religious practice of circumcision, which holds central significance in Judaism, has at times been defined in German courts as bodily injury.*

Example 2.
***Religionsbuch (Cornelsen),* Grades 11–13 (*Oberstufe*), 2021, *Auflage* 1, Druck 4, Protestant, p. 50.**

Judaism is portrayed as an integral and indisputable part of German identity and history. In this section, which deals with the question of whether Islam belongs in Germany, students are given two narratives that grapple with this question. In the first, former President Christian Wulff declares unequivocally: "Judaism undoubtedly belongs to Germany. That is our Christian-Jewish history." Wulff's position acknowledges this historical connection, but also calls for a broader conceptualization, noting that "Islam also now belongs in Germany."

> *Does Islam belong to Germany?*
> **Christian Wulff (1959)*
> *[…]*
> *Judaism undoubtedly belongs to Germany. That is our Christian-Jewish history. But Islam also now belongs to Germany.*

Example 3.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, p. 293.**

The textbook portrays Judaism as a lived tradition interwoven with contemporary, pluralistic family life in Germany, especially in interfaith marriages. Through the stories of Laura and Beatrice—two women originally from Christian backgrounds who are now married to Jewish men—the text normalizes Jewish religious practices and highlights the complexities of navigating multiple religious identities in a single household. Jewish life is shown not as rigid or foreign, but as something that can be integrated into daily life, even by those who were not raised in the tradition. Beatrice, for instance, "takes charge of the kitchen for Jewish holidays and welcomes her husband's family as guests," indicating a respectful adoption of Jewish customs. Yet the text also acknowledges challenges, such as her family's initial opposition to circumcision, and her daughter's confusion over Christian rituals like the Advent wreath. This complexity is not presented as conflict but as part of the evolving nature of religious identity and practice.

The inclusion of the "Patchwork Religions" information box and related assignments encourages students to see Judaism not as a static or isolated faith, but as part of a broader religious landscape shaped by dialogue, adaptation, and personal meaning-making. By describing syncretism as the combination of "individual religious elements and rituals" outside their original contexts, the text invites students to consider the implications of blending traditions — including Jewish ones — and to reflect on questions of authenticity, continuity, and choice. The assignments push students to think critically about religious truth claims and compare fictional and real-life examples of blended faiths, including Laura and Beatrice's examples.

Is Twice Better? – Interreligious Families
Both Laura and Beatrice were originally Christians and are married to Jewish men. Below, they describe their family lives:
[…]
She herself first had to "immerse" herself in Judaism. But for several years now, she's taken charge of the kitchen for Jewish holidays and welcomes her husband's family as guests.
[…]
Info – "Patchwork" Religions
The term "patchwork religion" describes a religious worldview in which different traditional elements — also called syncretisms — are combined in a personal mix. Individual religious elements and rituals are taken out of their original contexts and adapted for everyday life.

Example 4.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, p. 66.**

Judaism is portrayed in this text as an essential and respected partner in the broader framework of interreligious dialogue, which aims to foster understanding and mutual respect among faiths. The lesson underlines "the aim of dialogue is neither missionizing nor the blending of religions. Rather, the goal is mutual understanding, building trust, respect, and understanding, and overcoming ignorance, prejudice, and fear." The lesson is accompanied by an illustration which visually reflects this idea by placing the synagogue dome prominently among other sacred buildings—suggesting that Judaism, alongside Christianity, Islam, and Eastern traditions, is a full participant in the conversation between religions. The inclusion of Judaism affirms its living presence in the contemporary urban and social landscape, especially in projects like the "City Map of Religions," where young people are encouraged to "get to know one another, engage in conversation, overcome prejudices, and discover common ground." This initiative emphasizes that Jewish communities are not remnants of the past but active contributors to a pluralistic society seeking peace and cooperation.

Moreover, the section titled "Info–Interreligious Dialogue" defines this term, outlining three levels of dialogue— practical, cognitive, and spiritual—where Judaism is implicitly included as a tradition worthy of study, shared experience, and empathetic understanding. The practical level includes everyday life and collaboration, as demonstrated by the "City Map of Religions" project. The cognitive level, for instance, encourages theological exchange by seeking similarities, common ground, and differences in religious teachings. This challenges long-standing Christian supersessionist views by placing Judaism on equal footing in theological discourse. At the spiritual level, Jewish practices such as prayer and meditation are also implicitly respected as valid avenues to encounter God, inviting others to approach Judaism with empathy and respect. By highlighting this non-hierarchical, cooperative engagement, the project and the text together promote an inclusive vision in which Judaism is both respected as a faith tradition and valued as a living culture contributing to societal harmony.

What connects us?
"More tolerance toward those of other faiths" — The project "City Map of Religions"
[…]
The project, funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, promotes interreligious dialogue. It ensures that young people from different religious backgrounds get to know one another, engage in conversation, overcome prejudices, and discover common ground. […]
The aim of dialogue is neither missionizing nor the blending of religions. Rather, the goal is mutual understanding, building trust, respect, and understanding, and overcoming ignorance, prejudice, and fear.

Interfaith and Rejection of Supersessionism

Example 5.
***Leben gestalten Qualifikationsphase* (Klett), *Katholischer Religionsunterricht,* Grades 12–13 *(Qualifikationsphase Oberstufe)*, 2022, *Auflage 1/ Auer,* Catholic, pp. 234, 239.**

The textbook teaches students how the Catholic Church shifted its attitude towards non-Christians, including Jews. In one text from 1442, the quoted church document claims that those outside the Catholic Church "not only no pagans … but also no Jews … can share in eternal life," and that "only those who remain in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church" benefit from its sacraments. Here, Judaism is presented as outside the salvation of the Church — effectively excluded from the path to salvation unless integrated into Catholic unity. This is a traditional *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* ("no salvation outside the Church") position that asserts a boundary between Christianity (specifically Catholicism) and Judaism (and other religions).

In the subsequent text, the famous *Nostra Aetate* ("In Our Time") 1965 declaration is quoted, in which the attitude to non-Christians shifts dramatically. Notably, *Nostra Aetate* was the first time the Catholic Church acknowledged and apologized for the role the Church played in perpetuating antisemitism throughout the ages. In the textbook, *Nostra Aetate* is described as rejecting that sweeping exclusion. The text demonstrates the Catholic Church's affirmation that elements of truth can be found in differing religious teachings. In this way, Judaism moves from being formally excluded to being recognized as possessing authentic elements of truth and holiness. The assignment invites students to see how Jewish thinkers accept and respond to that shift, by composing reflective texts (such as To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven) that engage the Christian-Jewish relationship on more equal footing.

> *"The [Catholic] Church firmly believes, professes, and proclaims that no one who remains outside the Catholic Church—not only pagans*, but also Jews or heretics and schismatics—can share in eternal life; […]*
> *Nostra Aetate – A Landmark Turning Point*
> *"[…] The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions.*

Example 6.
***Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), *Oberstufe,* Grades 11–13, 2020, *Druck* A5, 2025, Catholic, p. 326.**

A chapter titled "Are There Two Peoples of God?" teaches about Judaism partly through a critical examination of how Christianity has historically understood Jews and the Jewish covenant. "Substitution Theory" is described as a theological model in which early Christians interpreted the destruction of the Second Temple as divine punishment for the Jewish rejection of Jesus, leading to the transfer of "God's biblical promises… to the 'new covenant' and the 'new people.'" Jews could therefore "only gain salvation through baptism." Rather than presenting this teaching as an established Christian position, the textbook places it historically and contrasts it with twentieth-century theological developments, particularly Pope John Paul II's affirmation of the "unrevoked Old Covenant." Students are thus exposed both to a historical source of Christian antisemitism and to the significant transformation in modern Christian understandings of Judaism. This comparison could help students understand that religious attitudes toward other faiths have changed historically and can be critically reassessed from within a religious tradition itself. Nonetheless, the accompanying description of the Arch of Titus problematically characterizes the Romans' victory as one over "a defiant people infected by religious fanaticism," without distancing the textbook from this derogatory characterization.

The surrounding material further invites students to examine why Christian theological disagreement with Judaism historically developed into hostility toward Jews. Quoting German artist Elisabeth Endres, the textbook describes Jewish resistance to conversion as having created a Christian "credibility gap" that helps explain the "intensity and brutality" of attempts to force Jewish conversion. The accompanying visual allegory of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* similarly illustrates how supersessionism was communicated culturally: the Church appears triumphant, while the Synagogue is blindfolded, weakened, and dishonored. By combining theological explanation, historical reflection, and visual material, the lesson could encourage students to recognize antisemitism not simply as individual prejudice but as historically

embedded in Christian ideas and representations. Its contrast with modern Christian teaching may also contribute to an understanding of Judaism as an enduring religious tradition whose legitimacy does not depend on conversion to Christianity.

> *Are There Two Peoples of God?*
> *The Substitution Theory*
> *The deportation of the Jews from Jerusalem in 70 CE: The Arch of Titus in Rome glorifies the destruction of the Temple and the seizure of sacred artifacts — depicted here with the Menorah — as a victory of the Roman Empire over a defiant people infected by religious fanaticism. At the same time, early Christian authors interpreted the same event as God's punishment for the rejection of Jesus' message and belief in his resurrection (cf. Mk 12:1–12; Mt 27:25). Accordingly, God's biblical promises were transferred to the "new covenant" and the "new people." Jews could only gain salvation through baptism. Since the 20th century, new theological models have emerged in place of this substitution theory (Latin substituere = to replace), which are based on the "fact" of the "unrevoked Old Covenant" (John Paul II).*
> *[…]*
> *Their refusal had to be, for Christians, what we would today call a credibility gap, a crack in trustworthiness. Only this explains the intensity and brutality with which Christians have forced Jewish conversion through the centuries."*

Example 7.
***Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), *Oberstufe,* Grades 11–13, 2020, *Druck* A5, 2025, Catholic, pp. 326–327.**

Following the lesson "Are There Two Peoples of God?" which demonstrates how the Church gradually distanced itself from supersessionism, students encounter the Church's affirmation of the "permanent election" of the Jewish people in the Second Vatican Council declaration *Nostra Aetate* (1965) and its reflection in the "Pastoral Letter of the Polish Bishops" (1990). The bishops emphasize Christianity's deep roots in Judaism: Jesus, Mary, the apostles, and the foundations of the Church all stem from the Jewish people. The Jewish covenant is consequently presented as continuing rather than superseded, while the Jewish people are attributed an enduring religious significance. For students in Christian Religious Education, this could provide an important counterpoint to the supersessionist teachings examined earlier in the lesson, demonstrating how Christian understandings of Judaism have undergone substantial theological change, presenting Judaism as a continuing tradition in its own right. The Polish bishops extend this reflection into the historical realm by confronting Christian complicity in the Holocaust. They emphasized that from the earliest centuries of their history, "Poland has had a special bond with the Jewish people," becoming a "second homeland" for many Jews. However, the accompanying claim that the majority of Jews worldwide today "originate" from the territory of the former and present Polish republic is overly broad and potentially misleading, obscuring the diverse geographical histories of world Jewry, including substantial Sephardi and Mizrahi populations with roots across the Middle East, North Africa, Iberia, and the wider Mediterranean. While celebrating the bravery of many Poles who rescued Jews during the Holocaust—recognized at Yad Vashem as "Righteous Among the Nations"— the bishops also mourn those among the Catholic faithful who were indifferent "to this unspeakable tragedy," and particularly those who "in any way contributed to the death of Jews." "They remain a reproach to our conscience," the letter states, insisting that inaction and indifference also demand repentance. By urging Christians to ask "our Jewish brothers and sisters for forgiveness," students learn how the Church took collective moral responsibility not just for theological errors, but for ethical failures during one of history's greatest atrocities. This is a notable act of self-examination within religious education, acknowledging that Christianity's historical antisemitism carried real, deadly consequences.

The lesson also mentions the massacre of Jews in Jedwabne by local Catholic Poles in 1941. It describes the debate prompted by Jan T. Gross' *Neighbors* and raises the question of whether a specifically Christian form of antisemitism, distinct from Nazi ideology, contributed to such violence and whether elements of this antisemitism persist. The observation that the memorial erected in 2001 remained "rejected by many Poles" further demonstrates that historical reckoning itself can remain contested. Taken together, these materials present the Christian-Jewish relationship as complex and historically evolving rather than reducing it to a single narrative of either hostility or reconciliation. This is particularly valuable in a Christian religious textbook: students encounter Christianity's Jewish foundations and modern affirmation of Judaism alongside Christian antisemitism, persecution, rescue, complicity, repentance, and contested memory.

[…]

The election was not merely an extraordinary privilege, but also a profound obligation to believe in and remain faithful to the one God — even to the point of bearing witness through suffering and, not infrequently, death. God entrusted this people with the special mission of uniting all in true faith in the one God and in the expectation of the Messiah, the Redeemer. […]

Poland has had a special bond with the Jewish people, going back to the earliest centuries of our history. Poland became a second homeland for many Jews. The majority of Jews living in the world today originate from the territory of the former and present Polish republic. Tragically, this land also became the graveyard of millions of Jews in our century. Not by our will and not by our hand. […]

Many Poles saved Jews during the last war. Hundreds, if not thousands, paid for this assistance with their own lives and those of their families. Behind every Jew who was rescued stood an entire chain of hearts — people of good will and helping hands.

[…]

Despite these numerous heroic examples of help from Christian Poles, there were also Poles who remained indifferent to this unspeakable tragedy. We particularly grieve those among the Catholics who in any way contributed to the death of Jews. They remain a reproach to our conscience — also in a social and historical sense.

[…]

The memorial, erected in 2001, is still rejected by many Poles to this day.

Example 8.
***Sensus Religion, Vom Glaubenssinn und Sinn des Glaubens – Unterrichtswerk für die Oberstufe* (Cornelsen), Grades 11–13, (*Oberstufe*) 2021, *Auflage* 1, Druck 6 / *Kösel*, Catholic, pp. 191–192.**

The excerpt provides a platform for Jewish perspectives on Christian language that is perceived as implying Jewish religious deficiency. The text presents these critiques as legitimate and theologically grounded. It features the perspectives of Rabbis Henry G. Brandt and Walter Homolka, who explicitly challenge formulations suggesting a need for Jewish "enlightenment," warning that such language is "arrogant, overbearing, dangerous, and invites violence and exclusion," and emphasizing instead that "we all need enlightenment… Jews and Christians… in the same boat." This framing highlights for students how even unintended implications of missionary language may be experienced as disparaging and harmful to Jewish self-understanding and interfaith relations.

The controversy surrounding the Good Friday intercessory prayer makes this tension particularly concrete. The Jewish response describes its reformulation as an "unfriendly act" that placed Catholic-Jewish relations under their greatest strain in decades and warns that achievements in Jewish-Catholic reconciliation remain fragile. Erich Zenger similarly argues that Jews "rightly" perceive prayers for their enlightenment as a devaluation of Judaism, contrasting such formulations with Nostra Aetate and its rejection of disparagement, discrimination, and antisemitism. By presenting this disagreement rather than simply describing the Church's postwar reconciliation with Judaism as a completed process, the textbook introduces students to the continuing complexity of Christian-Jewish relations. It could encourage them to consider how historical experiences of Christian antisemitism affect the way contemporary Jewish communities understand Christian language and practices, and how theological traditions may continue to require critical examination even after explicit antisemitic teachings have been rejected. The example therefore complements the textbook's treatment of Nostra Aetate: reconciliation is presented not simply as a doctrinal change, but as an ongoing process in which Jewish perspectives on Christian teaching are themselves given legitimacy. […]

Even if one has no intention of deriving from it a mission to the Jews, it will nevertheless largely be understood in this way: and if not, then as a disparagement of Jewish self-understanding that supposedly lacks something after all! Otherwise, the Jews would not need any special 'enlightenment' at all! In the worst case, such an attitude is arrogant, overbearing, dangerous, and invites violence and exclusion. If one is going to pray for 'enlightenment', one may not exclude oneself from that prayer — for we all need enlightenment. There we sit — Jews and Christians — in the same boat."

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

[…]
Jews must experience it as derisive when, precisely around Good Friday and Easter, the Catholic Church once again prays for the enlightenment of the Jews so that we may recognize Jesus as savior. [...] The relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community stand, because of the unfriendly act of the reformulation of the Good Friday intercessory prayer, suddenly under a strain such as they have not experienced for decades. [...] What has been laboriously achieved in Jewish-Catholic relations is not yet secure, and we notice almost every day that it is endangered."
[…]
Jews rightly see in this prayer introduction a devaluation of their religion, which nevertheless stands in a unique relationship to Christianity. [...] Jews protest rightly when Christians, who emphasize the unique relationship between Judaism and Christianity, still describe the Jews as 'blinded' because of their 'No' to Jesus and thereby designate Judaism as inferior in relation to Christianity." 'Nostra Aetate' recalls the unique bond that spiritually links the people of the New Testament with the stock of Abraham, rejects every attitude of disparagement or discrimination against Jews, and clearly distances itself from every form of antisemitism."

Example 9.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13, (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*) 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, p. 297.**

The text by Christian theologian Hans Küng uses the question of whether Jews, Christians, and Muslims can pray together to explore both common ground and religious difference. Küng emphasizes their shared belief in one God and argues that members of the three Abrahamic religions "should pray together more often," while also identifying boundaries that shared prayer should not cross. This could encourage students to understand that interfaith dialogue does not require eliminating substantive religious differences. However, the text becomes problematic when Küng speaks on behalf of Jews about which Christian or Muslim prayers they could accept. His suggestion that "most Jews" would have little difficulty with the Lord's Prayer risks oversimplifying Jewish religious restrictions concerning participation in Christian worship and presents a Christian interpretation of Jewish boundaries without a corresponding Jewish perspective.

The accompanying assignment asks students to write a common prayer for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Although intended to encourage interfaith understanding, the task requires students to determine which religious formulations would be acceptable across three distinct traditions, despite the theological boundaries emphasized by the source and without necessarily possessing sufficient knowledge to make such judgments. A task comparing what each tradition might or might not accept in shared prayer could more effectively encourage respect for both religious commonalities and differences without constructing an artificial common form of worship.

Can We Pray Together?
If one realizes that Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship the same one God, the question of whether one may pray together is, in principle, easy to answer: People of different religions—especially believers of the three Abrahamic religions—should pray together more often.
[…] the boundaries of such a shared prayer must also be made clear […]
— Hans Küng (b. 1928), theologian

Example 10.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13, (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*) 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, pp. 164–165.**

In the lesson "What does Christianity owe to Judaism?" students learn that Judaism is not a marginal or outdated religious tradition in relation to Christianity, but rather its theological and historical foundation. The section titled "The God of the Jews and the Christians" emphasizes that Jesus, his disciples, and the early Christian movement were entirely Jewish, and that Christianity emerged from within Judaism. Students are thus taught that Judaism is not merely a predecessor to Christianity, but a living tradition with shared sacred texts and a shared God. At the same time, the text acknowledges the Church's long history of denying or suppressing Judaism, making students aware that Chris-

tian identity has often been constructed in opposition to Jews. Importantly, the passage situates Judaism as a unique case—not merely a foreign religion, but one that stands between ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, urging students to treat the Jewish-Christian relationship as something distinct and deserving of reflection.

In the section defining the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, students are introduced to four models that show how Christians have understood Judaism across history. The text critiques the Substitution Theory, which claims that the Church replaced the Jewish people in God's covenant, noting that it has long underpinned Christian theology. The four models allow students to explore different approaches to salvation, including the idea of dual paths of salvation, challenging traditional supersessionist thinking. Through this framework, students are taught to move beyond simplistic replacement narratives and toward more respectful and historically honest interpretations of Christian–Jewish relations.

The "Rhineland Synod Resolution of 1980" is presented as a pivotal modern attempt to repair Christian-Jewish relations, explicitly linking theology to historical accountability for the Holocaust. The resolution recognizes Judaism as having its own, valid path to salvation and acknowledges the Church's "shared responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust." Students learn that contemporary Christianity must reckon with its complicity in antisemitism and its theological foundations. Significantly, the resolution affirms that "the belief in the enduring election of the Jewish people" remains part of Christian faith, and it rejects the mission to convert Jews, calling instead for Jews and Christians to be witnesses of God before the world and to one another. This portrayal of Judaism is one of theological dignity, historical endurance, and mutual covenant, and it urges students to see Jewish-Christian dialogue as essential to both faith and ethics.

The assignments further reinforce this learning by encouraging students to think critically about theology, history, and ethics. For example, they are asked to explore whether Substitution Theory contributed to Nazi antisemitism, linking medieval and Reformation-era theology to modern political atrocities. They are also asked to respond to objections based on New Testament verses, helping them confront and rethink exclusivist interpretations of Christianity. Overall, students are taught that honoring Judaism means recognizing it as both intertwined with Christianity and independent in its covenant with God – a view that challenges historic prejudices and lays the foundation for interfaith cooperation.

> *The God of the Jews and the Christians*
> *[...]*
> *In this resolution, the Rhineland Church first sets out the reasons that led it to redefine its relationship with the Jewish people:*
> - *Acknowledgment of shared responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust*
> - *"New biblical insights into the enduring salvation-historical significance of Israel"*
> - *Recognition of "the continued existence of the Jewish people, their return to the Promised Land, and the establishment of the State of Israel as a sign of God's faithfulness to His people"*
> - *"The willingness of Jews to meet with Christians, to learn together, and to work together despite the Holocaust"*
>
> *In the follow-up declaration, fundamental commonalities are affirmed:*
> *"The Scriptures are a shared foundation for faith and practice for both Jews and Christians."*
> *"The belief in the enduring election of the Jewish people as God's people."*

Jewish Beliefs, Rituals, and Sacred Texts

Example 11.
***Religionsbuch* (Cornelsen), Grades 11–13, (*Oberstufe*) 2021, *Auflage* 1, Druck 4, Protestant, p. 96.**

The passage "Not an Everyday Matter: Ancient Texts, Ancient Languages" portrays Judaism primarily through its historical and linguistic relationship with sacred scripture. It emphasizes that the Old Testament, the foundational text for Judaism, was written in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic, underscoring the ancient linguistic and cultural roots of the Jewish people. The mention of these languages highlights the Jewish origins of the biblical texts, distinguishing them from the later Greek writings of the New Testament. Moreover, by noting that scholars reconstructed the biblical text from ancient sources and manuscripts, the text implicitly acknowledges the Jewish commitment to textual preservation and transmission across millennia, a central aspect of Jewish tradition. This framing positions Judaism not only as the historical cradle of biblical scripture, but also as a living contributor to the academic and religious understanding of the Bible through its ancient languages and traditions. The passage is accompanied by two images of Bible verses in Hebrew (one handwritten on papyrus and the other printed), demonstrating the continuity of the modern Hebrew script with its ancient counterpart.

> *Not an Everyday Matter: Ancient Texts, Ancient Languages*
> *The Bible contains texts that were collected and edited approximately between the first millennium and 150 BCE (Old Testament), and between approximately 50 and 120 CE (New Testament). The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic, which is closely related to Hebrew; the New Testament was written in Greek. Scholars have reconstructed the biblical text from ancient textual discoveries and manuscripts. Today, these scholarly editions serve as the basis for modern Bible translations.*

Example 12.
***Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), *Oberstufe,* Grades 11–13, 2020, Druck A5, 2025, Catholic, pp. 401–402.**

The lesson on "Homosexual Couples in Judaism" uses homosexuality to present Judaism as a contemporary religion in which traditional texts and religious law continue to be debated in response to modern ethical and social questions. Through a 2014 text by German Rabbi Walter Homolka, students encounter a liberal Jewish perspective that invokes the Jewish tradition of *kavod habriyot* ("human dignity") in support of greater acceptance of homosexuality. This is a useful subject for illustrating internal Jewish debate, particularly among Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews. The example could therefore help students understand Judaism as internally diverse and recognize that its religious interpretation continues to engage with contemporary questions of sexuality and identity.

> *Sanctification of the Natural – Homosexual Couples in Judaism*
> *Today, ten to fifteen percent of Orthodox Jews continue to distance themselves from homosexuality and consider it non-existent within Torah-faithful Judaism. However, this view is contradicted by data from the anonymous counseling center Jerusalem Open House, which provides clear evidence that homosexuality is also a clearly recognizable phenomenon in the ultra-Orthodox world of yeshiva students.*
> *Nowadays, Liberal and Conservative Jews — who represent the vast majority of synagogue-affiliated Jews — reject rabbinic prohibitions in the oral tradition and refer instead to kavod habriyot, the dignity of the human being, through which rabbinic authority can, according to the Talmud, be overridden.*

Example 13.
***Religionsbuch* (Cornelsen), Grades 11–13, (*Oberstufe*) 2021, *Auflage* 1, Druck 4, Protestant, pp. 52-53.**

The textbook uses circumcision—particularly *Brit Milah* in Judaism—as a case study for examining how religious obligations interact with parental rights, bodily integrity, and individual autonomy in a liberal society. The lesson presents legal, biblical, medical, and religious perspectives, allowing students to encounter competing ways of evaluating the same practice rather than receiving a single judgment. Importantly, a specifically Jewish communal perspective explains circumcision as a central sign of the covenant between God and Israel, while medical concerns about pain are also included. This multi-perspectivity could encourage students to understand that debates over circumcision involve a genuine conflict between different conceptions of rights, religious obligation, and communal belonging.

The lesson opens with an accompanying cartoon, presenting a layer of cultural commentary. The title of the cartoon is a play on words: "*Kleiner Unterschied*" (small difference) usually refers to the difference between male and female. Here, it refers to the difference between circumcised and uncircumcised, with "*(K)ein kleiner Unterschied*" meaning "(Not) a small difference." The cartoon starts with a complaint from a nonreligious—but likely Christian—figure: "For the bishops, you're no longer a Catholic if you stop paying church tax." In response, the Jewish figure remarks, "There you go—that's what circumcisions are good for." The Catholic Church's system of Kirchensteuer (church tax) is presented as a bureaucratic definition of faith, while the Jewish figure suggests that circumcision offers a more permanent and unmistakable sign of religious identity. The exchange satirizes the idea of institutional versus embodied religious identity, suggesting that circumcision offers a more permanent and recognizable marker of belonging than bureaucratic affiliation. While meant humorously, the cartoon simplifies a sacred ritual into a punchline and may leave a stronger impression than the nuanced text.

This comparative framing is less successful. Circumcision in Judaism and Islam is placed alongside Christian infant baptism and "the husband's right to punish his wife" in Islam as examples through which students consider the relationship between religious tradition, parental rights, physical integrity, and self-determination. While the textbook does not itself characterize these practices negatively, their juxtaposition risks creating a misleading equivalence between very different religious and ethical questions. More specifically, it places formative Jewish and Christian rituals—circumcision and baptism—alongside violent behavior that is not necessarily condoned as a religious practice within Islam, nor does such violence occupy an equivalent formative role in Muslim religious identity. Presenting a purported Islamic "husband's right to punish his wife" as a parallel example could therefore imply that violence against women holds a comparable religious status to *Brit Milah* in Judaism or baptism in Christianity, potentially giving students a distorted understanding of Islam.

Still, the treatment of Judaism carries subtle biases that reflect a secular-liberal framing of religion more broadly. The legal and medical sections emphasize harm and autonomy, with phrases like "violates the child's welfare" and "severe pain," while the biblical and community perspectives are presented more as cultural expressions than as legitimate ethical positions. Nonetheless, the medical perspective of a rabbi physician is also given, which underlines the health benefits of circumcision. The inclusion of a Pauline critique from Romans: "a person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly... but inwardly" – introduces a Christian theological lens to this essentially Jewish practice.

> *God's Will – A Conflict with Human Rights?*
> *(Not) a Small Difference*
> *[English Translation of Cartoon:]*
> *[Left figure, non-religious but probably Christian]:*
> *"For the bishops, you're no longer a Catholic if you stop paying church tax."*
> *[Right figure, ostensibly Jewish, with beard and hat]:*
> *"There you go — that's what circumcisions are good for."*
> *In this chapter, religion and religions were explored from different perspectives, in their various expressions, and in their significance for individuals and society[…]. Examples include:*
> - *The ritual of circumcision during infancy or childhood (Judaism and Islam)*
> - *The husband's right to punish his wife (Islam)*
> - *The baptism of underage children (Christianity)*

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

What is the relationship between religious tradition, the (educational) rights of parents, and the individual right to physical integrity and self-determination?

[…]

Legal Perspective

According to a ruling by a Cologne court (May 2012), the religiously motivated circumcision of a (Muslim) child violates the child's welfare and constitutes simple bodily harm.

[…]

Biblical Perspective

[…]

"A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code."

(Romans 2:28f.)

Medical Perspective

Professor Dr. Zernikow, head of the German Center for Pediatric Pain Management, notes that circumcision is associated with severe pain, which can increase pain sensitivity during later procedures. […]

Perspective of the religious community: Even though, from a biblical perspective, there are other constitutive "signs of the covenant" marking membership in Israel (e.g., the Sabbath), circumcision is regarded as so central that the Central Council of Jews in Germany states that anyone who does not have his son circumcised, or who has the circumcision performed at a later time, places himself outside the covenant between God and Israel. In Islam, circumcision is not commanded in the Qur'an, but is part of the binding tradition (Hadith).

Example 14.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13, (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*) 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, pp. 126–127.**

The lesson presents the Sabbath (*Shabbat*) as a distinctive Jewish practice through which students can consider religious understandings of freedom, time, and rest. Importantly, Judaism is presented through two Jewish voices: Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel describes *Shabbat* as a means of escaping the "tyranny of things of space" by sanctifying time, while German-Israeli author Lea Fleischmann connects its observance to the Exodus from slavery and describes Shabbat as a weekly release from work, deadlines, and everyday worries. The combination of theological reflection and personal experience could help students understand *Shabbat* not simply as a set of religious restrictions, but as a meaningful lived practice associated with freedom, memory, and spiritual renewal.

The subsequent Christian perspective uses this Jewish understanding of Shabbat as a point of comparison with the Christian Sunday. Theologian Ulf Grüner contrasts genuine freedom with merely having "free time" and adopts Heschel's language of "sanctifying time," while students are asked whether Shabbat could provide inspiration for Christian observance of Sunday. This comparative approach treats Judaism positively and could encourage Christian students to appreciate Jewish religious practice as a source of reflection on their own tradition.

Can One Celebrate Freedom?

"The significance of the Sabbath is to celebrate time, not space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; […]

— Abraham J. Heschel (1907–1972), Rabbi

On Shabbat, Worry Is Powerless

[…]

On Shabbat, the memory of the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, the step from slavery into freedom, becomes manifest. On the seventh day, the soul should not be trapped by the daily worries and obligations of work, nor be driven by deadlines. […]

*— *Lea Fleischmann (1947), German-Israeli author*

[…]

We needed freedom — but all we had was free time. […]

We want to sanctify time — not things, not space, not places.

[...]

Ulf Grüner (1964), theologian and journalist*

Example 15.
***Am Anfang war das Wort* (Cornelsen), Religion *gymnasiale Oberstufe*, Grades 11–13, (*Oberstufe*) 2017, *Auflage* 1, *Druck* 1 / *Patmos*, Catholic, pp. 88–89, 516.**

A discussion about *Shabbat* uses the concept primarily as a secularized model of intentional rest rather than introducing students to the Jewish religious practice itself. Readers are encouraged to spend an hour each week doing nothing as an antidote to the pressures of modern life, while a subsequent comparison contrasts the Jewish *Shabbat* as the "end and highlight" of the week with the Christian Sunday as the day of Jesus' resurrection and a new beginning. This could make the underlying idea of weekly rest accessible to students, but it also means that a Jewish concept is initially encountered largely through a modern and Christian comparative framework rather than through Jewish practice or Jewish perspectives.

The glossary provides greater Jewish context, explaining Shabbat through the creation narrative and its significance as a recurring religious day of rest. Its reference to the shutdown of public transportation in Israel is also noteworthy as a rare presentation of Israel through an ordinary aspect of contemporary Jewish life rather than through conflict or politics. However, the entry continues to explain aspects of *Shabbat* through Christianity, including Jesus' interpretation of Sabbath observance. This reflects a broader tendency in the Christian religious textbooks to present Jewish concepts partly through a Christian theological lens. While such comparisons are understandable in Christian religious education, they can become problematic when they substitute for presenting Jewish practices on their own terms and from Jewish perspectives.

> Shabbat *[...]*
> *I suggest that from today on, you take at least one hour per week to simply sit and do nothing.*
> *[…]*
> *4. Unlike the Christian Sunday, which marks the beginning of the week,* Shabbat *is the end and highlight of a week. The celebration of Sunday, by contrast, is of later origin: it is the day of Jesus' resurrection, symbolizing a new beginning and—being the day after Shabbat—the first day of the week. […]*
> *Shabbat [from Glossary]*
> *[…] Just as God "rests" from His work of creation, so too should human beings rest.*

Example 16.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13, (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*) 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, pp. 60–61.**

The text introduces students to a Jewish emphasis on the value and preservation of life, using a Jewish-authored source from the Central Council of Jews in Germany. It explains that "life has the highest value," that the physical world should be affirmed, and that human beings have a responsibility to preserve life and ensure the continuation of humanity. The use of a Jewish communal source is valuable, allowing Judaism to be presented through a Jewish perspective and emphasizing an ethical principle that could provide a basis for comparison with other religious approaches to life and death.

However, the broader framing risks presenting Judaism as primarily this-worldly in contrast to religions with developed beliefs about the afterlife. Judaism does include beliefs and traditions concerning the afterlife, although these are diverse and generally less systematically defined than in Christianity. The quoted passage itself discusses the sanctity and preservation of earthly life rather than denying or addressing an afterlife. It would therefore be more accurate to present this source as illustrating one important Jewish emphasis rather than as representing a specifically Jewish alternative to belief in an afterlife. This distinction could allow students to appreciate Judaism's strong affirmation of earthly life without receiving an overly simplified account of Jewish eschatological beliefs.

> *The Jewish religion assumes that life has the highest value and that the physical world is to be affirmed in every respect. The task assigned to humans is to live, to have children, and to ensure the preservation of humanity. Human beings are created by God to live, and therefore everything must be done to preserve human life.*
> *— Central Council of Jews in Germany*

Example 17.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13, (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*) 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, p. 105.**

This text from a German religion textbook portrays Judaism with respect and emotional resonance, using a Jewish legend to illustrate a universal message about the enduring power of prayer regardless of place, ritual, or even precise knowledge. The story traces five generations of a rabbinic family, each progressively further removed from the original sacred place and traditional prayer — and yet, "God heard him" every time. This repetition underscores a view of Jewish faith that emphasizes continuity through storytelling, memory, and spiritual sincerity over formal ritual or physical location. The legend highlights how, even without traditional practices or knowledge, transmission of meaning and identity through narrative remains sacred. By presenting this Jewish example first in a section meant to explore "what prayer is," the textbook suggests that Judaism provides a foundational, rich model for reflecting on prayer's essence. The assignments further support this by encouraging students to extend the Jewish legend creatively, to examine the role of place and tradition in prayer, and to relate it to their own spiritual context, reinforcing the idea that Jewish tradition offers universal lessons about inner faith, memory, and divine accessibility.

A somewhat missed opportunity here is the absence of reference to the obvious parallel of the Jewish mitzvah *Vehigadta Levincha* (You shall tell your son, EX. 13:8). Referencing this concept through a key verse in the Passover Seder would have underlined the significance of passing knowledge down through generations.

> *Prayer*
> *A rabbi passed through a village, went into the forest and there, at the foot of a tree, he prayed. And God heard him. […] The great-great-grandson, finally, knew neither the tree, nor the forest, nor the village, nor the old prayer. But he still knew the old story and told it to his children. And God heard him.*

Example 18.
***Leben gestalten Einführungsphase* (Klett), Grade 11, *Auflage* 1, 2020, *Auer*, Catholic, pp. 62–63.**

In this lesson on "Jewish Conceptions of Salvation," Judaism is portrayed as a historical and spiritually aspirational tradition, centered on the themes of redemption, moral transformation, and the hope for a better world. The unit highlights the diversity within Jewish eschatological thought, both in biblical sources and modern expressions. The opening sentence sets the tone: "In Judaism, from the Old Testament to today, there is a wide range of different visions of an eschatological time of salvation." This frames Judaism not as static or monolithic, but as a tradition with enduring hopes and dynamic interpretations of "salvation" across generations.

The lesson opens with an image of Netta Barzilai, winner of the 2018 Eurovision Song Contest, which serves as a symbolic anchor to connect modern Israeli identity with ancient Jewish themes. Her declaration "Next time in Jerusalem!" is used as a springboard into deeper religious and cultural meanings of Jerusalem, a reference to the religious belief in the coming of the Messiah, and the building of the Third Temple in Jerusalem. Featuring a text by Rabbi Aron Moss, the Jews' journey from Egypt to Jerusalem, from slavery to freedom in the "Promised Land," is interpreted as both a physical and spiritual journey, with the latter still ongoing. This interpretation universalizes the concept of redemption, transforming a political statement into a spiritual aspiration. Still, the lesson does not ignore the political weight of the statement, as one task asks students to reflect on "the fact that Jerusalem, as the capital of Israel, is politically controversial and not recognized by many states." This demonstrates the textbook's attempt to balance religious symbolism with contemporary political complexity.

> *Jewish Conceptions of Salvation*
> *In Judaism, from the Old Testament to today, there is a wide range of different visions of an eschatological time of salvation.*
> *Assignments*
> *[...]*
> *2. In May 2018, the Israeli singer Netta (M1) won the Eurovision Song Contest in Lisbon, Portugal. In her acceptance speech she said, among other things:*
> *"I love my country. Next time in Jerusalem!"*
> *Explain what Netta meant by this statement. Take into account M2 and the fact that Jerusalem's status as Israel's capital is politically controversial and not recognized by many states.*

Example 19.
***Leben gestalten Qualifikationsphase* (Klett), *Katholischer Religionsunterricht,* Grades 12-13, (*Qualifikationsphase Oberstufe*), 2022, *Auflage* 1/ Auer, Catholic, pp. 240–245.**

The lesson "Exploring Diversity in Judaism and Islam" teaches about the diversity of traditions— theological, interpretive, and experiential—that the two religions developed to understand divine revelation and to respond to key existential and spiritual questions. Focusing on the Jewish aspect, the lesson presents students with various translated texts.

The lesson features two sections from the Hebrew Bible which concern how God was revealed to the prophets Moses (Exodus 3:5-15) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-16). The lesson further presents an excerpt explaining how Moses received the Torah at Mount Sinai, and about the Talmud, the Oral Torah, emphasizing its importance in shaping "the covenant between God and the Jewish people," being continually interpreted and taught to each generation. In another excerpt, students are faced with a rabbinic debate from the Talmud (about the Oven of Akhnai), thus experiencing a firsthand witness of rabbinic discussions from the first six centuries concerning religious and civil law, illustrating the rabbinic understanding of the nature of revelation in the Torah; this point is further illustrated with an image of a present-day clay oven in the Moroccan desert. The assignments deepen students' engagement with the central theme of the lesson by encouraging textual analysis, historical contextualization, and real-world exploration. The first two tasks focus on close reading and interpretation of biblical and rabbinic texts, helping students understand how revelation is portrayed differently across time and authors, including the evolving concept of the "Oral Torah" and rabbinic authority.

Another understanding of diversity in interpreting divine revelation is illustrated in the text "God and the People of Israel" by German Jewish philosopher of religion Michael Wyschogrod, in which he presents the Jewish theological concept of the Jewish people themselves being the dwelling place of Hashem (God). He contrasts this view with Christian doctrine, stating that Hashem's dwelling in Israel is not an incarnation as in Christianity. Students are prompted to reflect on the implications of Wyschogrod's view across faiths.

Notably, students are tasked to research "which Jewish communities existed in your city or region before the Nazi persecution and extermination of Jews," recognizing the Holocaust as a watershed moment in the religious history of the Jewish community in Germany.

> *[…] The Talmud preserves the tradition of the so-called "Oral Torah." This tradition has accompanied and shaped the covenant between God and the Jewish people since the revelation of the so-called "Written Torah" (the Five Books of Moses) at Mount Sinai, and it must be continually updated and taught for every generation.*
> *[…]*
> *b) Research which Jewish communities existed in your city or region before the Nazi persecution and extermination of Jews, and what the biographies of individual community members were.*

Example 20.
***Kursbuch Religion* (Westermann), Grades 11-13, (*Sekundarstufe* II), 2021, *Druck* A4, 2024/ *Calwer*, Protestant school textbook, p. 312.**

This excerpt from a German religion textbook approaches Judaism through a respectful and explanatory lens, presenting key beliefs as articulated by Orthodox Rabbi Julien Chaim Soussan. The text offers students a general theological overview grounded in Jewish tradition, beginning with the soul's journey and ending with the concept of judgment and resurrection at the time of the Messiah. While presenting these beliefs, the textbook emphasizes that there are diverse interpretations within Judaism, such as debates about the physical resurrection and messianic expectations. The Messiah is described as a human descendant of King David who also has no miraculous or magical powers, according to Maimonides, a prominent Jewish rabbi and thinker. In contrast to the divine characteristics attributed to Jesus Christ as the Christian Messiah, this portrayal demystifies Jewish eschatology for a non-Jewish readership while remaining anchored in traditional Jewish sources. The text is accompanied by a photograph of the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives, reflecting the will of many religious Jews to be buried there—being closest to the expected location of the Third Temple from which the Messiah is believed to appear.

Importantly, the textbook also encourages interfaith comparison and personal engagement. The assignments ask students not only to represent Jewish eschatology visually and narratively, but also to compare the Jewish view with the Christian view, reinforcing interreligious literacy. Additionally, by prompting students to consider why many Jews wish to be buried on the Mount of Olives and to compose a speech on how a person can stand in judgment, the tasks invite reflection on both religious practice and ethics. The inclusion of an Orthodox rabbi as the main voice further lends authenticity and positions Jewish belief as a living tradition.

> *What is a Messiah?*
> *[…]*
> *For Orthodox Judaism it is certain that the Messiah, who descends from King David, is simply a human being who possesses no miracle-working or magical powers.*
> *[…]*
> *At the end of time, when the Messiah (Mashiach) comes, these souls will rise again, because they have a 'share in the world to come.'*
> *[…]*
> *The most important aspect, however, is that there will no longer be an evil inclination (yetzer hara), with the result that there can no longer be hatred, envy, or war.*
> *[…]*
> *— Julien Chaim Soussan (b. 1968), Orthodox Rabbi in Frankfurt*
> *[…]*
> *2. Compare the Jewish view with the Christian view.*

Example 21.
***Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann*), Oberstufe,* Grades 11-13, 2020, *Druck* A5, 2025, Catholic, pp. 422-423.**

The textbook portrays Judaism as upholding a nuanced and pragmatic approach to ethical questions regarding unborn life. While abortion is generally rejected, the text emphasizes that this is based on viewing the unborn as potential life that deserves protection. However, the reasoning behind this stance is not monolithic. It includes arguments such as abortion constituting bodily harm to the mother or even being comparable to "theft" or "destruction of seed." Still, the text notes that most rabbinic authorities permit abortion under specific conditions, acknowledging exceptions within the broader prohibition and illustrating a flexibility in Jewish law that is sensitive to context and individual circumstances.

This flexibility is also demonstrated in another text on assisted reproduction and preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), showcasing how Jewish ethics apply the principle that what serves life also serves the human being; the tradition draws on Scripture (e.g., Exodus 21 and Leviticus 18) and rabbinic interpretation to form ethical judgments. The text stresses that saving a life (*pikuach nefesh*) overrides most commandments, and thus technologies like PGD can be permitted, provided they prevent suffering and are not misused for cosmetic purposes. Importantly, Jewish law also emphasizes individualized assessment, requiring consultation with rabbinic authorities before acting.

A text box on Jewish ethics also appears in the lesson, explaining that Jewish moral reasoning is based on Halacha, a flexible legal tradition, "continually interpreted in light of human knowledge and the latest scientific developments," interpreted by rabbinic experts who integrate Torah values with contemporary scientific knowledge. This reinforces the lesson's emphasis on Judaism's case-based, evolving approach to ethical questions about life and medical issues. The section further discusses "poskim," the rabbinic decision-makers, "who have academic training (e.g., in medicine, physics, chemistry, etc.) and deep knowledge of the Talmud."

The assignments reinforce the pedagogical aim of encouraging students to grapple with the plurality and complexity of Jewish ethical thought. Tasks such as summarizing rabbinic positions on abortion, applying the life-serving principle to modern biomedical cases, and comparing Jewish and Christian perspectives guide learners to appreciate how Jewish law operates at the intersection of tradition, interpretation, and evolving scientific knowledge.

> *The Dignity of the Unborn in Judaism*
> *The Unborn Life*
> *The unanimous opinion of rabbis regarding abortion is that it is fundamentally rejected and that the unborn is to be protected as potential life. The reasons for this rejection are varied; […] It may also be considered comparable to the willful destruction of seed or to theft […] Nevertheless, the vast majority of decisors' permit a pregnancy to be terminated under certain conditions [...].*
> *Halacha is based on the Torah and its timeless, eternal values. Nonetheless, it is continually interpreted in light of human knowledge and the latest scientific developments.*
> *[…] However, there are specific rabbinic decision-makers called Poskim, who have academic training (e.g., in medicine, physics, chemistry, etc.) and deep knowledge of the Talmud (a central Jewish text that explains the laws of the Torah).*

Example 22.
***Am Anfang war das Wort* (Cornelsen), Religion *gymnasiale Oberstufe*, Grades 11–13 (Oberstufe), 2017, *Auflage* 1, *Druck* 1 / *Patmos*, Catholic, pp. 119–121.**

The text about Chabad offers students a perspective on key Jewish values such as joy (*simcha*), forgiveness, and humility. The text begins by introducing Chabad (also called Lubavitch) as a Hasidic movement within Orthodox Judaism, founded in the late eighteenth century by Rabbi Schneur Salman of Liadi. It notes that Chabad has a global presence in about seventy countries and around 200,000 followers. A defining feature of Chabad religious life is the importance of joy, which is not only an emotional state but a spiritual principle that shapes religious behavior and interaction.

This broader context is then illustrated through a personal story about Reb Suscha of Anipoli, a Chabad rabbi who is seen dancing in the street at a wedding procession with unrestrained joy. After undergoing ritual immersion in the *mikva* (a bath used in Judaism to achieve ritual purity), he achieves full emotional and spiritual clarity, represented by the radiant face of the deceased sage. His final comment connects the act of joy with forgiveness, saying that all one can achieve through honor, generosity, and ritual can also be achieved through joy.

Students learn from this text that the Chabad movement blends mystical belief, ethical practice, and emotional depth, and that these beliefs imbue concepts such as forgiveness, joy, and spirituality with further meanings. The inclusion of a text about Chabad in a Christian religious textbook contributes to the presentation of the diverse religious streams within contemporary Judaism.

> *Chabad, Forgiveness*
> *[…]*
> *Keyword: guilt and forgiveness from a Jewish perspective.*
> *[…]*
> *In their religious life, Simcha, the Hebrew word for 'joy,' has central importance.*
> *[…]*
> *What you did was not complete forgiveness. Follow me, and I will show you what forgiveness really means.*
> *[…]*
> *He instructed me to immerse myself three times, and each time to declare and feel that I had forgiven his son.*
> *[…]*
> *As I came out of the mikvah, I saw that Reb Yitzhak's face shone so brightly that I could not bear its radiance.*

Example 23.
***Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), *Oberstufe*, Grades 11–13, 2020, *Druck* A5, 2025, Catholic, pp. 328–329..**

The text about the *Dabru Emet* declaration presents Judaism as an independent yet dialogical faith that shares historical and theological connections with Christianity while maintaining its distinct identity. The declaration, authored by a group of Jewish scholars, explicitly calls for Jews "to acknowledge the Christian efforts to honor Judaism," signaling a notable shift toward mutual recognition and dialogue. The text highlights shared elements of the two religions—such as the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the authority of the Bible—but insists that theological differences should be respected rather than resolved.

The statement also underscores the importance of Israel as a religious and historical reality, noting that "the re-establishment of a Jewish state in the Promised Land is the most significant event since the Holocaust" and urging Christians to respect the Jewish connection to the land. Judaism is thus portrayed as a tradition that affirms its own covenantal path while engaging in dialogue from a place of dignity and historical consciousness. By asserting that "Christians recognize that Israel was promised—and given—to the Jews as the physical center of the covenant between them and God," the passage exposes students to the theological legitimacy of Jewish nationhood within a shared biblical framework. Furthermore, it highlights one of the main theological distinctions between Judaism and Christianity: in Judaism, Israel is a physical place, whereas, in Christianity it is a spiritual concept.

The surrounding assignments reinforce this portrayal by framing *Dabru Emet* as a model for respectful dialogue and theological literacy. The inclusion of Pope John Paul II's visit to the Western Wall, alongside *Dabru Emet*, further situates Judaism within a framework of reconciliation and interfaith respect. Together, the text and exercises invite students to reflect on the Jewish-Christian relationship as one of coexistence through difference—emphasizing dignity, historical awareness, and the rejection of religious dominance.

> Dabru Emet
>
> *As a group of Jewish scholars from various streams—speaking only for ourselves—it is our conviction that it is time for Jews to acknowledge the Christian efforts to honor Judaism. [...]*
>
> *Christians can respect the Jewish people's claim to the land of Israel. For Jews, the re-establishment of a Jewish state in the Promised Land is the most significant event since the Holocaust. As members of a biblically rooted religion, Christians recognize that Israel was promised—and given—to the Jews as the physical center of the covenant between them and God. Many Christians support the State of Israel for deeply rooted reasons that are more than just political.*

Judaism in the Arts

Example 24.
***Am Anfang war das Wort (Cornelsen),* Religion *gymnasiale Oberstufe,* Grades 11–13 *(Oberstufe*), 2017, *Auflage* 1, *Druck* 1 / *Patmos,* Catholic, pp. 263–265.**

In a lesson examining how the Bible contributes to discussions about the nature, identity, and perception of God, students encounter several original texts, including works by Jewish authors. One is an excerpt from Elie Wiesel's 1979 play The Trial of God (*Der Prozess von Schamgorod*), which explores from a Jewish perspective how belief in God can be reconciled with the suffering of the innocent. Set during the 1649 Chmielnicki pogroms, the play depicts Jews staging a Purim play in which God is placed on trial for the suffering inflicted upon his people. The characters challenge God for His apparent silence, and the play ultimately provides no simple resolution, leaving questions about faith, suffering, and divine justice unresolved.

As an example of Jewish artistic and literary expression, Wiesel's play broadens the portrayal of Judaism in the curriculum beyond religious doctrine and historical events. Students encounter a Jewish author using drama to interpret Jewish historical trauma and explore questions of faith, justice, and the relationship between humanity and God. Judaism is presented as a tradition in which faith can coexist with lament, anger, protest, and questioning, while Jews appear not merely as victims of persecution but as creators and interpreters of their own experience. The inclusion of such a work could therefore contribute to students' understanding of Jewish cultural production as a means of engaging both specifically Jewish experiences and broader human questions of suffering and belief.

Example 25.
***Am Anfang war das Wort (Cornelsen),* Religion *gymnasiale Oberstufe,* Grades 11–13 *(Oberstufe*), 2017, *Auflage* 1, *Druck* 1 / *Patmos,* Catholic, p. 426.**

In a chapter on art and religion, students learn about the famous artist Marc Chagall (1887–1985). From this text, students learn that Marc Chagall was a spiritual artist whose Jewish identity and biblical heritage were inseparable from his artistic expression. They discover that Chagall's life journey, from his early rejection at the St. Petersburg Academy to his emigration from Nazi-occupied Europe, shaped his creative vision, but it was his connection to Judaism that formed the core of his work. As the text states, "Without his Judaism, Chagall's art would be inconceivable." The Bible is

described as “the deepest foundation of his work,” and his use of color, especially blue, is linked to religious symbolism, representing the heavens and the mystery of the invisible God. Students come to understand that Chagall’s art is not only a product of personal experience but also a visual interpretation of Jewish faith and tradition, making him unique among the great artists of the twentieth century.

> *Art Island*
> *End or Fulfillment? – Marc Chagall*
> *[…]*
> *Among the great painters of the twentieth century, Chagall was the only one who repeatedly drew inspiration from Judaism and acknowledged his origins in his work.*
> *[…]*
> *Without his Judaism, Chagall’s art is inconceivable.*
> *[…]*
> *The artist himself found in the Bible the deepest foundation of his work.*
> *[…]*
> *Wholeness in art as in life sprang for him from this biblical source.*

Jews and Judaism in Medieval History

The German curriculum consistently presents Jesus as a historical Jew whose life, teachings, and mission were firmly rooted within first-century Judaism. Students learn that Jesus did not seek to establish a new religion but understood his mission within the renewal of Israel and the fulfillment of Jewish hopes. At the same time, the textbooks clearly distinguish between Jewish and Christian understandings of Jesus, explaining that Judaism does not recognize him as the Messiah or divine redeemer while presenting Jewish perspectives that regard him as a significant Jewish teacher, reformer, or moral figure. Students engage with Jewish thinkers including Abraham Geiger, Martin Buber, Schalom Ben-Chorin, David Flusser, Jacob Neusner, Pinchas Lapide, and contemporary rabbis, whose writings illustrate both the common heritage and enduring theological differences between Judaism and Christianity. Artistic depictions, including works by Marc Chagall and Emmanuel Levy, further reinforce Jesus's Jewish identity while encouraging dialogue rather than theological convergence.

Additionally, the curriculum explicitly rejects the traditional accusation that the Jewish people were collectively responsible for Jesus's crucifixion. Students learn that the crucifixion was a Roman legal execution carried out within a complex political context involving certain Jewish authorities but not the Jewish people as a whole. Several lessons examine how Gospel passages referring to "the Jews" were later interpreted outside their historical setting to justify antisemitism, emphasizing instead that these texts reflect internal Jewish disputes within first-century Judaism. The textbooks encourage students to critically analyze biblical passages, medieval art, Passion music, and later theological interpretations, demonstrating how misreadings of the New Testament contributed to the "Christ-killer" accusation while highlighting modern Christian efforts to correct these interpretations and reject collective Jewish guilt.

The historical narrative surrounding the Crusades focuses heavily on Jerusalem, but mentions of Jews and their experiences are limited. In this vein, the main weakness of the *Zeiten und Menschen* history textbook is that Jews are mostly discussed in the context of the persecution of European Jewish communities during the First Crusade. The textbook acknowledges that Jerusalem "remains a point of intersection for the three major world religions: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism."[60] As historical background, the textbook traces the development of Jewish communities in Europe, noting that Jews had lived in "Palestine" since around 1200 BCE, although this designation is anachronistic, as the region was not known by that name during that period. Students learn that medieval Jews were integrated into urban society through commerce and communal self-government before becoming targets of crusading violence in 1096. The textbook also mentions that the rights of Jews, as of Christians, were curtailed by Muslim rulers during the eleventh century CE, and that the Crusades shaped the lives and interactions of Jews, Muslims, and Christians. However, there is no explicit recognition of the fact that Jews inhabited Jerusalem in the time of the Crusades.[61] The textbook nevertheless acknowledges that Jews were by no means widely accepted despite the official protection they received. At the same time, its characterization of relations between Jews and the Christian populations as "relatively unproblematic" perhaps simplifies a more nuanced historical reality. The textbooks describe the massacres, plunder, and forced baptisms carried out by Crusaders in the Rhineland, explain how religious accusations and economic motives reinforced antisemitic violence, and examine the mixed role of Church and secular authorities, who formally protected Jews while also imposing discriminatory restrictions. The topic is illustrated through a contemporary Jewish chronicle, historical images, and source-based activities, but the treatment remains brief, relying largely on the example of the Rhineland massacres without exploring the wider scope of antisemitic violence associated with the First Crusade.

Jews are also discussed in the context of the Islamic world. The chapter on the Islamic world has among its goals the description of forms of the legal status of Jews as a religious minority and the practice of coexistence between Jews and Christians in the medieval Christian world.[62] The chapter teaches that Jews in the Abbasid period (at the end of the

60 *Zeiten und Menschen* (Geschichte) (Westermann), Oberstufe Einführungsphase Nordrhein-Westfalen, Schöningh Westermann, 2018, p. 147.

61 Ibid., p. 148.

62 Ibid., p. 169.

eighth century) contributed to maintaining the intellectual heritage of the Hellenistic world by translating works by ancient Greek authors.[63] The chapter on the Islamic world uses the example of the Caliphate of Córdoba (912–929) in the Iberian Peninsula (Al-Andalus) to teach how Jews, Christians, and Muslims benefited alike, suggesting that al-Andalus may serve as an exemplary model of tolerant coexistence. Students are instructed to critically engage with source texts that describe how the Jews, after suffering under the Christian Visigoths, enjoyed greater freedom of religion under the Berbers, retaining their synagogues, provided they accepted Islamic rule. One source describes how Muslim rule created a society where Jews lived peacefully together with Christians and Muslims, noting that the Jews, like the Christians, participated in the government, maintained their courts, but had to pay land and personal taxes, while exempting them from military service.[64] The text "Al-Andalus—A Golden Dream" by Romance philologist Georg Bossong, while avoiding any mention of Jews, challenges the reconstruction of al-Andalus as an exemplar of multiculturalism free from tensions, framing its reality rather in terms of overcoming old Christian-Muslim divisions in the shadow of the overwhelming superiority of Islamic rule.[65] The excerpt from the text by historian Francisco Garcia Fitz challenges the popular notion of *Convivencia* in al-Andalus, presenting it as a myth that overstates interreligious harmony by emphasizing that Jews and Christians, while able to preserve their religious identity and communal autonomy as *dhimmīs*, held an unequal legal and social status characterized by various restrictions.

Jesus's Identity

Example 26.
***Kursbuch Religion* (Westermann), Grades 11–13 (*Sekundarstufe* II), 2021, *Druck* A4, 2024/ *Calwer*, Protestant school textbook, pp. 122–123.**

This textbook presents Judaism as the essential historical and religious context for understanding Jesus's life and message. By stating that "Jesus was a Jew from Galilee" and that his activity "must be placed within this context," the text emphasizes that Jesus's identity and mission are inseparable from the Jewish world of the first century. It situates Galilee as a predominantly Jewish region where Greco-Roman influence was limited, thus highlighting the Jewish framework in which Jesus's thought and practice developed. His aim is described as "the renewal of Israel," not the foundation of a new religion. The text further reinforces continuity with Judaism by explaining that Jesus's teachings—such as the Lord's Prayer—draw on Jewish religious traditions and the covenantal understanding of God's closeness and mercy. This approach counters longstanding tendencies to obscure or diminish Jesus's Jewish roots. The accompanying visual— a portrait by Rembrandt of Jesus—further reinforces this perspective, depicting Jesus with historically grounded Semitic features based on a Jewish model who lived in Amsterdam, thereby avoiding Eurocentric misrepresentation.

At the same time, the text shows how Jesus's interpretation of Judaism became the source of later differentiation. His symbolic acts, such as the gathering of twelve disciples representing "the full number of the tribes of Israel," express a reform within Judaism rather than a departure from it. The reference to Jesus's followers viewing him as "God's Anointed One, who would free the Jewish people from Roman foreign rule," connects his mission to Jewish messianic expectations. However, the account of his death—stating that the "Jewish High Council decided to hand him over to the Romans in order to avert the danger of punitive action" against the Jews—marks the historical and theological tension that later contributed to separation between Jews and Christians. Here too, direct responsibility for his death is not placed on the Jewish Sanhedrin, but on the Romans.

> *Life and Message of Jesus*
> *[…]*
> *Jesus was a Jew from Galilee […]*
> *At the time of Jesus, it was therefore a predominantly Jewish region, although the influence of Greco-Roman culture was limited. Jesus' appearance must be placed within this context. […]*
> *Rather, the renewal of Israel stood at the center of his ministry. […]*

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

63 Ibid., p. 176.
64 Ibid., pp. 182-183.
65 Ibid., pp. 183-184.

> *The order of the Kingdom of God was illustrated through symbolic actions: Jesus' communal meals were symbolic realizations of the banquet in the Kingdom of God, while the circle of the Twelve symbolized the full number of the tribes of Israel. […]*
> *His followers saw in him God's Anointed One, who would free the Jewish people from Roman foreign rule.[…]*
>
> *Accordingly, when he entered Jerusalem, the Gospels portray him as being welcomed as the future King of Israel who would restore the rule of David (Mark 11:10). It was presumably this politically explosive background that led the Jewish High Council to decide to hand Jesus over to the Romans in order to avert the danger of punitive action against their own people (cf. John 11:49–51).*

Example 27.
***Religionsbuch* (Cornelsen), Grades 11–13 (*Oberstufe*), 2021, *Auflage* 1, *Druck* A4, Protestant, pp. 214–215**

In a chapter about Jesus' presentation in other religions, the textbook presents modern Jewish engagement with Jesus while maintaining a clear distinction between his historical Jewish identity and his religious status within Judaism. It begins by emphasizing that "Jesus was a Jew" and notes that Christians long neglected his Jewish identity before rediscovering it partly in response to growing Jewish scholarly and cultural interest in Jesus from the nineteenth century onward. At the same time, the text clearly states that Jews do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah and that his life is not mentioned in Jewish scripture. The textbook describes Jewish scholars and artists as having, in a sense, "reclaimed" Jesus into Judaism by approaching him as a "brother in faith and important teacher." This formulation usefully emphasizes Jesus's historical Jewish context, but risks overstating the extent of his incorporation into Judaism. Modern Jewish interest in the historical Jesus does not necessarily entail accepting Jesus or his teachings as part of Jewish religious tradition, and the perspectives presented here should therefore be understood as particular modern Jewish interpretations rather than as a general Jewish religious position.

The thinkers presented in the lesson illustrate this particular strand of Jewish engagement with Jesus. The nineteenth-century Reform rabbi Abraham Geiger situated Jesus within the Jewish and Pharisaic environment of his time rather than treating him primarily as the founder of a religion detached from Judaism. Later Jewish thinkers developed different interpretations: Martin Buber described Jesus in terms of religious kinship, while Schalom Ben-Chorin called him a "central figure of Jewish history" and a "prototype who embodies the Jewish fate of suffering." These perspectives could help students understand both Jesus's historical embeddedness within Judaism and the ways some modern Jewish intellectuals have interpreted him from within Jewish historical experience. However, greater contextualization of the particular religious and intellectual backgrounds of these figures would make clearer that such positive Jewish reassessments of Jesus do not represent a uniform Jewish position. The lesson itself maintains an important theological boundary by emphasizing that Judaism does not recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

The textbook complements these texts with Marc Chagall's Exodus (1966), presented as "A Jewish Image of Jesus." The painting depicts the crucified Jesus amid scenes of Jewish suffering and persecution, allowing the Christian image of the crucifixion to be reinterpreted through Jewish historical experience. This corresponds particularly well with Ben-Chorin's description of Jesus as a figure embodying Jewish suffering. Rather than simply presenting Jesus through Christian understandings of crucifixion and salvation, the material allows students to encounter ways in which Jewish artists and thinkers have appropriated his historical Jewish identity for their own cultural and interpretive purposes. The accompanying assignments ask students to identify similarities and differences between Jewish and Christian understandings of Jesus, interpret Chagall's painting, and compare perceptions of Jesus in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These tasks could encourage interreligious understanding while preserving the substantive theological differences between the traditions.

> *Who is Jesus for Us Today?*
> *Jesus was Jewish. Christians ignored this for a long time and only rediscovered it after European Jews in the 19th century increasingly engaged with Jesus. Jews do not see him as the Messiah, nor is his life mentioned in their sacred texts. But as a brother in faith and important teacher, he was rediscovered by many Jewish religious scholars and artists — meaning was newly assigned to him, and he was "reclaimed" to some extent into Judaism. […]*
> *[…]*
> *Jewish religious philosopher and publicist Schalom Ben-Chorin (1913–1999) [...] described Jesus as a "central figure of Jewish history," a "prototype who embodies the Jewish fate of suffering."*

Example 28.
***Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), *Oberstufe*, Grades 11–13, 2020, *Druck* A5, 2025, Catholic, pp. 268–270.**

This section from the religion textbook, discussing Jesus's relation to Judaism, portrays Judaism as both the historical and theological foundation of Christianity while also recognizing its enduring, independent integrity. The introductory passage emphasizes that the understanding of Jesus as a devout Jew—one who "lived and died as a devout Jew"—was only "rediscovered in the second half of the twentieth century." This acknowledgment implies that Christianity had long distanced itself from its Jewish roots, obscuring the "enduring rootedness of Christianity in Judaism." Judaism is therefore presented not as a primitive or superseded religion, but as the essential soil from which Christianity emerged. Moreover, the passage candidly confronts the moral dimension of Christian–Jewish history, admitting "a long record of Christian guilt," particularly the Church's silence during the Shoah. This moral self-reflection casts Judaism not as the "other" but as a community against which Christian history must measure its conscience and seek reconciliation.

In the following section, invoking the Jewish perspective on Jesus as a human, the lesson presents Marc Chagall's painting *White Crucifixion* (1938), which features Jesus as a Jewish martyr surrounded by images of pogroms and violent attacks on Jewish communities, invoking the persecution and suffering of Jews in Nazi Germany in the 1930s. In the activities, students are asked to discuss the extent to which this depiction of Jesus might be offensive for Christians or Jews, and to reflect on how it corresponds to the idea that Jesus unites Christians and Jews.

In the subsequent excerpt, quoting David Flusser's *A Law-Observant Jew*, Judaism is portrayed as a living, ethically rigorous faith whose theological integrity Jesus himself fully shared. Flusser insists, "Jesus was a Jew, lived according to the Jewish faith, and died for it," explicitly rejecting centuries of Christian depictions of Jesus as breaking with Judaism. Judaism appears here as intellectually and morally vibrant. Jesus's message is not presented as a rejection but as a fulfillment of "Jewish hopes," and his critique of his peers is "in no way different from their own self-criticism." By stressing that "his God is the God of Israel," the text restores Judaism as the theological home of Jesus, undermining the centuries-old narrative of Christian superiority or replacement.

Taken together, the two texts offer a re-centering of Judaism in both historical and theological terms. Christianity's universality, the textbook suggests, was possible only through its separation from Jewish law, but that separation is depicted as an unfortunate historical necessity rather than divine intention.

> *That Jesus of Nazareth, like his earliest followers, lived and died as a devout Jew was only gradually rediscovered in the second half of the twentieth century. Christianity's enduring rootedness in Judaism had long been obscured by the tense relationship between the two religions.*
>
> *Beginning with the conflict-ridden separation of Christian communities from Judaism, through centuries of structural discrimination against Jews in Christian-majority societies, and culminating in the silence of the overwhelming majority of Christians in the face of the systematic extermination of European Jewry — the Shoah — under Nazi rule, the history of Christianity and Judaism is one marked by a long record of Christian guilt.*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *Jesus must be understood within the Jewish religious movements of his time. He preached and did nothing that would necessarily provoke resistance or hatred from the Pharisees. His criticism of them differs in no way from their own self-criticism. If he regarded himself as the Messiah, then it was in fulfillment of Jewish hopes, and could not in itself explain any essential tension between him and Judaism.*

Example 29.
***Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), *Oberstufe*, Grades 11–13, 2020, *Druck* A5, 2025, Catholic, p. 270.**

The textbook excerpt presents a Jewish engagement with Jesus through the perspective of the Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner, framing the discussion as an imagined dialogue between Neusner and Jesus. Rather than portraying Judaism as a superseded tradition, the text highlights a principled theological divergence. In this dialogue, Neusner acknowledges the completeness of Jesus's teaching—"What has he left out?… Nothing"—yet identifies the core point of disagreement: "What has he added?… Himself." This formulation underscores the central issue that, from a Jewish perspective, Jesus introduces his own authority alongside that of the Torah. The distinction is further clarified through

the contrast between the biblical command, "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy," and Jesus's call, "If you wish to be perfect… follow me," emphasizing differing understandings of religious obligation.

By presenting this exchange as a thoughtful internal reflection rather than a polemic, the material frames the Jewish disagreement as reasoned and theologically grounded. It enables students to understand the divergence between Judaism and Christianity as rooted in substantive doctrinal differences, fostering a nuanced and respectful engagement with both traditions.

> *He: 'What has he left out?'*
> *I: 'Nothing.'*
> *He: 'What has he added?'*
> *I: 'Himself.'"*
> *"I am deeply convinced that there is a difference between the command, 'Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy,' and the word of Jesus, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, come and follow me.'*

Example 30.
***Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), *Oberstufe*, Grades 11–13, 2020, *Druck* A5, 2025, Catholic, p. 271.**

Judaism is presented using the symbolic framework of "Three Jews" from different eras seated at a table. The figures, Moses, a tattooed Jewish man immersed in David Flusser's work, and the poet Hermann Kesten, are not presented as abstract religious symbols, but as historical individuals, emotionally and intellectually present. Their gathering suggests a dialogue between Jewish law, personal memory, and cultural production. The text emphasizes that these figures "could not have met in the same time period," underscoring a layered historical consciousness. The tattooed Star of David on the torso of the modern Jesus figure subtly invokes both identity and suffering, inviting readers to consider the lived Jewish experience in modern European history. Accompanying the text is a modern illustration of the 1979 drawing by Michael Mathias Prechtl showing the German Jewish author Hermann Kesten sitting in a café between Jesus and Moses.

Moreover, the textbook directly confronts the historical Christian tendency to distance Jesus from Judaism. The painting and its interpretation are said to depict "the impossible suppression of Jesus' Jewish identity," which the text links to the "indifference with which the German, Austrian, and European world abandoned the Jews to their fate." This language avoids polemic but maintains a critical tone, pointing to a broader European failure of solidarity. By naming both Jewish "fate" and the Christian histories that intersect with it—including complicity in the marginalization and persecution of Jews — the textbook invites a reexamination of the Christian-Jewish relationship.

> *Three Jews*
> *Here sit three Jews together, who could have encountered one another in this way: the stern old man with the tablets of the Law is Moses; opposite him sits the other great teacher with naked upper body and tattooed Star of David, absorbed in the biography of him written by David Flusser; the third man at the table of honor is the poet Hermann Kesten.*
> *[…] It is a work in which Judaism and Christianity encounter one another, German history and Christian history, Jewish fate, and ultimately the impossible suppression of Jesus' Jewishness, which is an essential reason for the indifference with which the German, Austrian, and European world abandoned the Jews to their fate."*

Example 31.
***Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), *Oberstufe*, Grades 11–13, 2020, *Druck* A5, 2025, Catholic, pp. 271–272.**

In a chapter examining the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, students learn about different theological framings of the two religions. In the first text, by Jewish theologian, Holocaust survivor, and former Israeli diplomat Pinchas Lapide, Judaism is contrasted with Christianity: Judaism is a "What-religion," namely, it focuses on redemption itself and the Kingdom of Heaven, while Christianity is a "Who-religion," i.e., focusing on the figure of the "redeemer," namely Jesus who is the "King-Savior." Lapide also acknowledges Christianity's origins in Judaism by claiming Chris-

tians should be thankful to Jews—both for their "faithfulness to Jesus," which produced Paul and the early Church, and for their "relative unfaithfulness," which indirectly opened the path for Gentile inclusion.

Conversely, students are introduced to Martin Buber's distinction between two "modes of faith:" relational trust ("I trust someone"), associated with early Judaism and its communal relationship with God, and intellectual recognition ("I acknowledge something as true"), reflected in Christianity's conviction regarding the resurrection of Jesus. Together, the texts present a nuanced and dialogical portrayal of Judaism within a Christian learning context, depicting it as historically foundational, spiritually autonomous, and intellectually distinct, yet not opposed to Christianity, thereby offering students a more constructive framework for understanding religious differences beyond a simple narrative clash.

> *"Who-" and "What-Religion"*
> *Christianity is a Who-religion, Judaism is a What-religion. Or, if you prefer, Judaism is a religion of redemption, Christianity a religion of the Redeemer. For Christians, the Redeemer, the King, is central — and so is the Kingdom.*
> *[…]*
> *So, you should thank us both for the faithfulness that found its expression in Paul and the early Church — and for our relative unfaithfulness, which allowed you to become Christians.*
> *— Pinchas Lapide, 1976*

Example 32.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, pp. 294–295.**

The textbook presents a nuanced portrayal of Judaism by affirming the Jewish identity of Jesus and highlighting the shared origins of Christianity and Judaism. The statement that "Jesus and his early followers were Jews" anchors Christianity firmly in its Jewish roots, reminding students that without Jesus "there would be no Christianity." The Gospel depiction of Jesus as a rabbi, son of David, and prophet acknowledges his Jewish identity. However, the text also clearly marks the divergence between the two religions: "The majority of the Jewish people had a different idea of the Messiah than Jesus represented," emphasizing that Jews did not associate the term "Mashiach" with the Christian notion of a divine savior. This distinction allows students to understand that Jesus's messianic claims did not align with Jewish expectations and that Judaism never accepted Jesus as the Redeemer, viewing the world instead as "unredeemed."

The assignments encourage critical engagement with this divergence. Students are prompted to analyze Emmanuel Levy's 1942 painting "Jew (Jesus the Jew)," an image that portrays Jesus as an explicitly Jewish victim, wearing a modern black suit and hat, a *tallit* and *tefillin*, crucified with a sign reading "*Jude*." This visual invites reflection on antisemitic persecution and the consequences of depicting Jews as Christ-killers. By asking students to research Jewish beliefs and practices, the lesson fosters historical awareness, steering learners away from simplistic or accusatory narratives. The text thus uses the figure of Jesus to explore Jewish-Christian dialogue, while validating the Jewish position as coherent, continuous, and theologically distinct.

> *Jesus and his early followers were Jews. Thus, the origin of Christianity lies in Judaism. Without Jesus, there would be no Christianity. […]*
> *Today's Judaism does not see Jesus as the divine redeemer. From a Jewish perspective, the world remains unredeemed.*

Example 33.
***Leben gestalten Qualifikationsphase* (Klett), *Katholischer Religionsunterricht,* Grades 12–13 (*Qualifikationsphase Oberstufe*), 2022, *Auflage* 1/ *Auer,* Catholic, pp. 104–105.**

This textbook section portrays Jews and Judaism through an interplay of theological divergence, historical confrontation, and modern reconciliation. The framing questions— "What does Jesus being Jewish mean for Christianity? What does Jesus mean for Judaism?"—sets the tone for a layered exploration.

The lesson presents contrasting views about the place Jesus occupies within Judaism. A respectful perspective is offered in the excerpt "Brother Jesus," where Schalom Ben-Chorin, a German Jewish thinker who was "especially committed to Jewish-Christian dialogue," describes Jesus not as a divine figure, but as "my Jewish brother." While acknowledging Jesus as a faithful Jew and moral exemplar, Ben-Chorin also marks a clear boundary: "The faith of Jesus unites us... but faith in Jesus separates us." Conversely, the subsequent short excerpt "Jesus in Judaism" offers a common Jewish perspective, presented by Rabbi Jonas Sievers, according to which Jesus has no special religious significance in Judaism and never will. The third text, "Between Jerusalem and Rome," quoting the 2017 shared declaration of European and American Rabbis, represents a somewhat middle-ground approach, according to which Christianity's unbridgeable separation from Judaism and the theological differences between the two religions should not stand in the way of peaceful cooperation between "children of Noah," i.e., Jews and Christians. As a follow up activity, students are required to analyze and reconcile these different texts.

This reconciliatory approach is further promoted in the lesson through two images. The first is a drawing by Friedrich Herlin (1466) depicting Jesus's circumcision. The second is an icon from the Emmaus Nicopolis archeological site (in Israel), depicting Jesus and his foster father Joseph wrapped in the *tallit* and holding a Torah scroll. In the assignments, students are tasked with considering these images with verses from the New Testament (Luke 2:21-24 and Matthew 1:18-25), emphasizing Jesus's Jewishness through his circumcision, wearing the *tallit*, and also his messianic role as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. This helps to reinforce the Jewish foundations of Christianity and open pathways to further Jewish-Christian dialogue.

> *The Jew Jesus*
> *What does Jesus being Jewish mean for Christianity? What does Jesus mean for Judaism?*
> *[...]*
> *Jesus is for me the eternal brother, not just the incarnate human being, but my Jewish brother. […] The faith of Jesus unites us… but faith in Jesus separates us […]*
> *Jesus in Judaism?*
> *What significance does Jesus have in Judaism? The short answer from the rabbi [Jonas Sievers] is right at the start: "None! [...] Jesus has no special religious significance in Judaism and never will." […]*
> *However, the doctrinal differences and our inability truly to understand the meaning and mysteries of the other's faith do not stand in the way of our peaceful cooperation to improve our shared world and the lives of the Children of Noah.*

Involvement in Jesus's Crucifixion

Example 34.
***Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), *Oberstufe*, Grades 11–13, 2020, *Druck* A5, 2025, Catholic, pp. 240–241.**

This textbook portrays Judaism within the context of Jesus' crucifixion in a careful and corrective manner, seeking to dismantle centuries of antisemitic misinterpretation of the Passion narrative. While acknowledging that "influential Sadducean members of the Sanhedrin" were involved in Jesus's arrest and handover, the author is clear in distinguishing between Jewish leaders and the broader Jewish people, emphasizing that "a formal verdict by the Sanhedrin can be ruled out" due to Roman jurisdiction. Furthermore, the text critically reflects on the Gospels themselves, noting that "the Gospels tend to relieve the Roman Pilate of responsibility... and to shift responsibility onto the Jewish side." This admission underscores a central issue in Christian-Jewish relations: the misattribution of collective guilt, which the text works to correct.

By insisting that "It was not a Jewish authority, but rather the Roman governor Pontius Pilate who sentenced Jesus of Nazareth to death and had him executed," and clarifying that "the trial of Jesus was a Roman legal proceeding," the text reorients historical responsibility away from the Jewish collective and toward the Roman political system. This reframing serves both a theological and ethical function: it acknowledges the complexity of the historical situation and refutes the notion of Jewish culpability, which has fueled antisemitism for centuries. The reference to Jesus' critique of religious institutions is handled sensitively; rather than condemning Judaism, it presents his conflict with the temple authorities as part of a broader religious and political tension. Thus, the text promotes a view of Judaism that is historically grounded, theologically respectful, and explicitly divorced from collective blame for Jesus's death.

The accompanying artwork (Grünewald's crucifixion of Jesus from the Isenheim Altarpiece) depicts an emaciated and sagging Jesus upon the cross with individuals surrounding him expressing grief. The art also depicts John the Baptist pointing toward him, thus emphasizing Jesus's suffering and pain, and his followers shown as committed to him, rather than blaming the Jews for his death.

> *Why Did Jesus Have to Die?*
> *Why was Jesus executed, who was involved, and who bears responsibility?*
> *A formal verdict by the Sanhedrin can be ruled out, since it was not authorized to issue such a judgment during the time of Roman occupation. Whether there was a hearing of Jesus as part of an official session of the entire Sanhedrin is disputed. However, it cannot be denied that "influential Sadducean" members of the Sanhedrin had Jesus arrested by the High Priest Caiaphas and, after a hearing, delivered him to Pilate the same night. [...] The Gospels tend to relieve the Roman Pilate of responsibility — already visible in Mark's Passion narrative — and to shift responsibility onto the Jewish side.*
> *[…]*
> *The trial of Jesus was a Roman legal proceeding. It was not a Jewish authority, but rather the Roman governor Pontius Pilate who sentenced Jesus of Nazareth to death and had him executed. The death sentence was issued in the name of the "Imperium Romanum," not in the name of the Jewish people. […] It was not the Jewish people who put Jesus to death. Jesus became a victim of the high priests, who handed him over, and of the Roman governor Pilate, who sentenced him and had him executed. […] It was therefore the "rulers of this world" who crucified the "Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8), not the Jewish people.*

Example 35.
***Kursbuch Religion* (Westermann), Grades 11–13 (*Sekundarstufe* II), 2021, *Druck* A4, 2024/ *Calwer*, Protestant school textbook, p. 133.**

A lesson on Christian theology and ethics titled "What Would Jesus Have Said Today?" states that "The Jewish people bear no guilt for the death of Jesus" and that "antisemitism is a perversion of human civilization and culture." The lesson clearly disavows the attribution of collective guilt to Jews and hatred of them. This message appears alongside other values, including respect for humanity, loving one's neighbor (a traditional Jewish commandment), reconciliation, and opposition to xenophobia.

> *The Jewish people bear no guilt for the death of Jesus. Antisemitism is a perversion of human civilization and culture.*
> *[…]*
> *Love of one's neighbor is not platonic and not a matter of feeling. It means a duty to act for the one who is in need, even for the enemy. It breaks through national, cultural, and religious boundaries; it applies to all human beings regardless of class, race, gender, or nation.*

Example 36.
***Religionsbuch* (Cornelsen), Grades 11–13 (*Oberstufe*), 2021, *Auflage* 1, *Druck* 4, Protestant, pp. 100–101.**

The textbook presents a historically grounded approach to teaching the fraught relationship between Jesus and "the Jews" in the New Testament, particularly in light of Germany's legacy of antisemitism. By situating biblical interpretation within the framework of hermeneutics, the lesson makes a pedagogical effort to encourage critical reading and contextual understanding of sacred texts. The excerpt opens with an acknowledgment of the importance of the "reciprocal influence of text and reader," emphasizing that interpretation is shaped not only by the text itself but also by the cultural, historical, and moral lens of the reader—especially in a post-Holocaust German context. This signals a clear educational goal: to prevent antisemitic readings by demonstrating how verses such as Mark 12:38–40 and John 8:44 have historically been weaponized, notably in publications like *Der Stürmer*.

Indeed, the lesson presents a caricature published in *Der Stürmer* in 1934 that portrayed the Pharisees as the enemies of Jesus and referenced these verses, which warn against the [Jewish] "Scribes" and their corrupt ways, for which they will receive "the greater condemnation," and in which Jesus calls his Jewish interlocutors sons of "the devil." To balance these defamatory sayings and place them in proper context, the lesson assigns students to reconstruct the historical context of these verses based on an interpretive framework. The textbook explains that these polemical phrases must

be understood as "internal Jewish disputes." This framing is crucial; by stressing that Jesus, his disciples, and early Christian leaders like Paul were themselves Jews, the text counters the longstanding misreading of these verses as external or ethnic attacks. The lesson draws parallels between Jesus and the Hebrew prophets, showing that his criticism was part of a tradition of intra-communal rebuke rather than ethnic condemnation. This is further reinforced by stating that such criticism was primarily directed at the religious elite, not the Jewish people as a whole.

Importantly, the text highlights how theological polemics later evolved into broader antisemitic accusations as the early Church began to define itself in opposition to the synagogue. The section notes how these dynamics escalated particularly after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, when religious, cultural, and political boundaries hardened. In doing so, the textbook demonstrates how biblical texts were later co-opted to serve antisemitic ideologies, as illustrated by the Nazi-era cartoon from *Der Stürmer*. By directly linking these ancient verses to modern-era misuse, the curriculum helps students understand that interpretation is not neutral and that without context, sacred texts can be dangerously distorted.

Notably, the text provides a model for how religious education can confront problematic texts without discarding them, by embedding them in historical reality, theological nuance, and ethical reflection. This aligns well with the broader goals of hermeneutics as taught in the lesson: understanding that meaning is not fixed in the text alone, but arises in the dialogue between ancient words and contemporary moral insight.

> *Interpretation Example: Jesus and "the Jews"*
> *The following example shows how important it is to consider the reciprocal influence of text and reader, in light of the historical context of Jewish persecution and antisemitism in Germany.*
> *M9 – Jesus' Criticism of the Scribes and "the Jews"*
> *Mark 12:38ff*
> *38 As he taught, he said: "Watch out for the scribes […]*
> *40 They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."*
> *John 8:44*
> *"You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. […]*
> *Such statements must be understood as internal Jewish disputes. Jesus himself and all his early followers were Jews.*

Example 37.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, pp. 36–37.**

The section "The Bible as Inspiration for Music" shows how biblical texts have inspired sacred music but also exposes how these same scriptures were historically misused to justify hostility toward Jews. Students learn that Gospel verses, especially the line "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25), were long interpreted as blaming the Jewish people collectively for the death of Jesus. The textbook explicitly notes that this verse from Matthew was used as a pretext "to label the entire Jewish people as Christ-killers." Yet, Johann Sebastian Bach's musical interpretation of the passage offers a striking counterpoint. Rather than reinforcing accusation and guilt, Bach transforms the verse into a redemptive meditation on divine grace. The text explains that Bach's setting (from a minor to a major scale and emphasizing the line fourteen times) shows that he internalizes the statement, interpreting himself as the subject bearing the responsibility for "His blood." Thus, students are taught to see Bach not as perpetuating antisemitism but as reinterpreting scripture to emphasize reconciliation, not blame.

Through this framing, students are invited to grapple with how music can both reflect and reinterpret theology—sometimes correcting historical wrongs. They are prompted to analyze how "anti-Judaism" was embedded in traditional Christian interpretations during the Middle Ages and how modern reflection after Auschwitz demands more responsible and theologically sound readings of the text. This aligns with an assignment challenging students to explain why Bach should not be claimed to support antisemitic readings of Matthew 27:25. In doing so, the curriculum fosters critical theological literacy and historical responsibility regarding Christian-Jewish relations.

The second section on the African American spiritual "When Israel was in Egypt's Land," demonstrates how the Jewish Exodus story, a foundational biblical narrative, was adapted into Gospel music to express the longing for liberation and divine justice. Students learn how the Jewish historical experience of oppression and deliverance inspired other persecuted groups, particularly enslaved Africans and their descendants in the U.S., to find spiritual strength and hope. The song's refrain, "Let my people go!" connects Moses's call for Jewish freedom with the struggle against slavery and injustice, showing how biblical stories transcend boundaries and serve as sources of resilience. This highlights the enduring relevance of Jewish history in shaping broader human rights and liberation-theology narratives

> *In every performance of the St. Matthew Passion or St. John Passion after Auschwitz, the question arises of how to appropriately deal with the inaudible anti-Judaism of the Gospel accounts, which historically served as a pretext to label the entire Jewish people as "Christ-killers."*
> *[…]*
> *For Bach himself, as a believing Lutheran, this phrase 'His blood be on us and on our children' refers to himself. [...] Therefore, this gruesome sentence acquires in Bach a dimension of salvation history.*

Jews in the Crusades and under Islamic Rule

Example 38.
***Zeiten und Menschen* (Geschichte) (Westermann), *Oberstufe Einführungsphase Nordrhein-Westfalen, Schöningh Westermann*, 2018, p. 152.**

The chapter on the Crusades contains valuable sections that describe the experience of European Jews during that period. As background to the formation of the European Jewish diaspora, the chapter acknowledges Jewish presence in the region of Jerusalem "since around 1200 BCE." It further explains that repeated Jewish revolts against Roman rule culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple in 70 CE, after which "many Jews were subsequently expelled from their homeland," and later describes the reestablishment and growth of Jewish communities in Western and Central Europe during the Middle Ages. Despite the value of this introductory section, there are several historical oversimplifications: Jewish presence in the Land of Israel continued after 70 CE, the large-scale dispersion resulted from multiple phases rather than a single expulsion, and the revolts were driven by a range of political, religious, and economic factors, not solely by the Roman imperial cult. However, a glaring historical inaccuracy concerns the use of the term "Palestine" to denote the original name of the region until the beginning of Roman rule. This appellation is anachronistic because it applies a later geographical designation to a period when the area was not known by that name as a political entity; during the First Temple period it was the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, while under Roman rule it was the province of Judaea until it was renamed Syria Palaestina only after the Bar Kokhba Revolt in 135 CE.[66]

> *Originally, Jews had lived in Palestine since around 1200 BCE. After the Jewish state became part of the Roman Empire in the first century BCE, repeated uprisings occurred in Palestine. These revolts were fueled primarily by the Roman demand that Jews also recognize the emperor as a god—something incompatible with the Jewish belief in the one God, Yahweh. As a consequence of these uprisings, at the end of the so-called Jewish War in 70 CE, the city of Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed by the Romans. Many Jews were subsequently expelled from their homeland, and Jewish communities formed throughout nearly the entire Roman Empire. During the period of the Migration of Peoples and the decline of the Roman Empire, Jewish communities disappeared from the northern parts of the former empire. With the emergence of new Germanic kingdoms—particularly the Frankish Empire—Jewish communities were once again established in Western Europe. In the High Middle Ages, Jewish communities developed throughout Central Europe.*

66 For a similar anachronistic reference on "Palestine" in the context of Jesus's life, see *Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), Oberstufe, Grades 11–-13, 2020, Druck A5, 2025, Catholic, pp. 230, 247.

Example 39.
***Zeiten und Menschen* (Geschichte) (Westermann), *Oberstufe Einführungsphase Nordrhein-Westfalen, Schöningh Westermann*, 2018, pp. 152–153.**

The textbook portrays Jewish life before the First Crusade as characterized by relatively peaceful coexistence with the Christian majority, economic integration, and a high degree of communal autonomy.[67] It explains that "throughout much of the Middle Ages, relations between Jews and the Christian population were relatively unproblematic," linking this to the important role Jews played in long-distance trade, finance, and the supply of essential goods. The text further emphasizes the internal organization of Jewish communities, describing family life and the synagogue as the foundations of Jewish religious and communal identity, while noting that Jewish communities could govern many of their own affairs through their own laws and rabbinic leadership. It also highlights their distinctive legal status as subjects under the protection of local rulers or the emperor (*Kammerknechte*), explaining that this both differentiated them from other urban residents and made them politically valuable to rulers. Finally, it notes the demographic growth of Jewish communities in the medieval Empire while acknowledging that, despite official protection, Jews "were by no means widely accepted" and that hostility "occasionally led to outbreaks of violence." While the account is broadly accurate, the statement that relations were "relatively unproblematic" may simplify a more nuanced historical reality, especially given the chapter's disclaimer that hostility and violence persisted.

> *Jews and the Christian Environment in the Middle Ages*
>
> *Throughout much of the Middle Ages, relations between Jews and the Christian population were relatively unproblematic. […] Despite the protection they received from the authorities, Jews were by no means widely accepted, which occasionally led to outbreaks of violence against them […].*
>
> *Jewish communities had a rich and diverse communal life. It was shaped by the family, in which the values and customs of Judaism were practiced and passed on. The religious center of devout Jewish life was the synagogue.*
>
> *Within their quarter, Jews were able to organize their lives largely autonomously. They could establish their own laws and settle their internal disputes among themselves. In cases of more serious offenses or disputes with Christians, however, Jews, like all other inhabitants of the town, remained subject to municipal jurisdiction. The rabbis, as the highest judges, often also assumed the role of the "Judenmeister," who represented the Jewish community before the town lord or the town council.*

Example 40.
***Zeiten und Menschen* (Geschichte) (Westermann), *Oberstufe Einführungsphase Nordrhein-Westfalen, Schöningh Westermann*, 2018, pp. 153–154.**

In the following excerpt, the textbook presents the First Crusade as a turning point in the history of Jewish-Christian relations, explaining how Jewish communities became targets of persecution in the Rhineland massacres of 1096 despite their earlier integration into medieval society. It begins by describing Jews as a distinct minority because of both their privileged legal status under imperial protection as well as their own religious identity, stating that "Jews regarded themselves as the chosen people and, for this reason, limited contact with their surrounding environment," with the result that they were increasingly perceived as outsiders. Notably, this framing risks overstating Jewish self-segregation, whereas separation also resulted from external legal, social, and religious constraints.

The text then explains that the First Crusade transformed these tensions into widespread violence, describing the massacres of Jewish communities as "a veritable catastrophe." It recounts how crusading forces, influenced by the Pope's call to combat the enemies of Christ, attacked Jewish communities in the Rhineland and beyond, noting that "in Mainz, Cologne, and Worms, nearly all Jews lost their lives," while others survived only through forced baptism. The section further teaches that antisemitic hostility combined religious accusations with economic motives, explaining how "the respected expert in financial matters was transformed into the unscrupulous usurer" and how the image of Jews as the "killers of Christ" reinforced persecution. It also examines the contradictory role of Church and secular

67 The fact that Jews, besides Muslims and Christians of other denominations had less power and fewer rights than the Catholic majority during the Crusades, but nevertheless enjoyed some freedom of religion, is also discussed in *Zeiten und Menschen* (Geschichte) (Westermann), Oberstufe Einführungsphase Nordrhein-Westfalen, Schöningh Westermann, 2018, p. 164.

authorities: although popes and rulers formally protected Jews, they simultaneously imposed restrictive measures—such as the Fourth Lateran Council's requirement that Jews wear identifying marks—or treated protection as a source of revenue. The section concludes by framing medieval antisemitic persecution as systematic rather than spontaneous, arguing that Jews had become an enemy image that served a scapegoat function within Christian society. The accompanying tasks reinforce these themes by asking students to explain how the Crusades changed the status and perception of Jewish communities in Europe.

Accompanying the text is the 1875 woodcut *Pogrom* against *Jews during the First Crusade*, and an illustration of a medieval Jew wearing the typical cone-shaped "Jewish Hat."

> *The Jews in the Age of the Crusades*
>
> *The close connection between the Jews and the emperor and the Empire already made them a distinct group within the emerging urban society. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Jews regarded themselves as the chosen people and, for this reason, limited contact with their surrounding environment. Thus, although they were connected to their Christian surroundings in many ways, they nevertheless remained perceived as outsiders, who were repeatedly viewed with suspicion.*
>
> *A veritable catastrophe occurred amid the heated religious atmosphere of the First Crusade. The Pope's appeal to first combat the enemies of Christ in one's own land was applied to the Jews, and the assembled crusading forces carried out a bloodbath among Jewish communities. In addition to religious prejudice, financial motives—such as the need to finance the Crusade—certainly also played a role. On their march eastward, the crusaders plundered Jewish communities in the Rhineland and Lorraine and eventually attacked Jewish communities in Regensburg and Prague. In Mainz, Cologne, and Worms, nearly all Jews lost their lives. In Speyer, Trier, Regensburg, and Prague, there were likewise victims among the Jewish population. Jews could often escape death only through forced baptism. The attacks and threats that continued during subsequent Crusades could sometimes be mitigated only through the intervention of ecclesiastical and secular authorities.*
>
> *[...]*
>
> *In connection with the Crusading movement, all prejudices against the Jews were revived—both those relating to their religious beliefs and, in particular, those relating to their economic position. The respected expert in financial matters was transformed into the unscrupulous usurer who exploited Christians mercilessly. The fact that many Christians were thereby freed from debts they had incurred through loans from Jews was not merely a by-product of the persecutions of Jews. The belief that the Jews, as the "killers of Christ," continued to seek to bring misfortune upon Christians further intensified the hostile image of the Jewish minority among broad sections of society.*

Example 41.
***Zeiten und Menschen* (Geschichte) (Westermann), *Oberstufe Einführungsphase Nordrhein-Westfalen, Schöningh Westermann*, 2018, p. 151.**

The History textbook also teaches that the Crusades had severe consequences not only for Muslims in the Holy Land but also for Jewish communities in Europe. It introduces the antisemitic violence through a quotation from the Jewish chronicler Solomon bar Simson, in which Crusaders declare, "We shall first take our revenge on them and destroy them," before explaining that Jews, as a religious minority, "came under pressure not only in Jerusalem but also in Europe," and describing the attack on the Jewish community of Worms, where Crusaders "plundered the Jewish quarter and killed many inhabitants."

> *3. The Crusades Reach the Home Front: The Example of the Jews*
>
> *"Well then, we have set out on the long journey to the Holy Sepulcher in order to take revenge on the Muslims. Yet it is the Jews who live among us, whose fathers unjustly crucified Christ. We shall first take our revenge on them and destroy them."*
>
> *This is how the Jewish chronicler Solomon bar Simson described the events that took place in Worms am Rhine in May 1096. What had happened?*
>
> *The newly aroused religious fervor and the subsequent military conflicts placed Jews as a religious minority under pressure not only in Jerusalem but also in Europe. On their way to the Holy Land, Crusaders in this case attacked the Jewish community of Worms, plundered the Jewish quarter, and killed many of its inhabitants.*

Example 42.
***Zeiten und Menschen* (Geschichte) (Westermann), *Oberstufe Einführungsphase Nordrhein-Westfalen, Schöningh Westermann*, 2018, pp. 184–185.**

The following example reflects a balanced narrative that challenges the "Myth of Tolerance" associated with the perception of interfaith and coexistence during the Caliphate of Córdoba (912-929) in the Iberian Peninsula (Al-Andalus). This is an excerpt from a text by historian Francisco Garcia Fitz, in which he presents a revisionist interpretation of the Jewish experience in al-Andalus, challenging the popular notion of *Convivencia* (coexistence) as an era of interreligious harmony. The excerpt argues that the widely held image of medieval Muslim Spain as "an almost ideal multicultural and multi-religious society" is "a myth" that "does not correspond to the historical reality." Instead, it teaches that while Jews and Christians were able to preserve their religious identities and enjoyed a degree of communal autonomy as *dhimmīs*, this status was fundamentally unequal. According to the text, Jews were protected minorities, yet their "political, social, and economic status... was characterized by exclusion and inferiority." The excerpt emphasizes legal and social restrictions, including exclusion from senior military and administrative positions, the payment of special taxes, restrictions on public religious expression, distinctive clothing requirements, and limitations on social status, such as prohibitions on bearing arms or riding horses. While briefly recognizing "cultural exchanges and influences" and "peaceful economic relations," the excerpt concludes that Muslim-Christian-Jewish relations in al-Andalus "can scarcely be described as tolerant" and that coexistence was "not at all based on equality and full acceptance of differences." The accompanying tasks reinforce this interpretive framework by asking students to identify the author's central thesis and list the historical arguments and evidence supporting it, encouraging engagement with the evidence rather than simple memorization.

> *M3 Myth of Tolerance*
> *[...] The widespread perception is that such an almost ideal multicultural and multi-religious society emerged in medieval Spain, where the three cultures—the Christian, the Muslim, and the Jewish—lived together in relative harmony. [...] However, this notion of a society of three distinct cultures that respected one another is a myth, or at least a cliché, that does not correspond to the historical reality.*
> *[...]*
> *Nevertheless, the political, social, and economic status of Christians and Jews in al-Andalus was characterized by exclusion and inferiority.*
> *[...]*
> *From all this, it can be concluded that relations between Christians, Muslims, and Jews as a whole can scarcely be described as tolerant—at least not in the sense in which we understand the concept today. There were undoubtedly cultural exchanges and influences, as well as peaceful economic relations, but the relationships were not at all based on equality and full acceptance of differences.*

The Holocaust

Students learn that National Socialism emerged in the aftermath of the First World War as an ideology built upon nationalism, racism, antisemitism, the *Führerprinzip* (leadership principle), anti-communism, and anti-liberalism, while drawing on earlier intellectual and political traditions that were radicalized by the Nazis. The curriculum explains how propaganda, political violence, mass mobilization, and the vision of a racially exclusive *Volksgemeinschaft* ("national community") enabled the rise and consolidation of the Nazi regime, while examining the regime's social and economic policies, arguing that apparent prosperity primarily served rearmament and preparations for war rather than genuine economic success. Students also compare major historiographical interpretations of National Socialism—including fascism, totalitarianism, and modernization theories—encouraging them to evaluate critically competing explanations for the origins and character of the Nazi regime.[68]

National Socialism is taught as an ideology fundamentally rooted in racial antisemitism, portraying hostility toward Jews not as a secondary feature but as one of the central driving forces of the Nazi regime. Students learn how earlier Christian antisemitic traditions evolved into modern racial antisemitism, which combined pseudoscientific racial theories, nationalism, Social Darwinism, and conspiracy theories into a worldview that identified Jews as an existential threat to Germany. The textbooks explain how this ideology translated into discriminatory legislation, propaganda, racial laws, and escalating persecution, while demonstrating how language and euphemisms normalized exclusion and violence. Students also examine the extent of societal participation and complicity, as well as differing historical interpretations of perpetrators' motivations. Through a broad range of primary sources—including Hitler's speeches, Victor Klemperer's diaries, religious texts, and contemporary documents—the curriculum encourages critical source analysis, integrates historical and theological perspectives, and provides a historically contextualized account of the ideological origins of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust is taught as the culmination of Nazi racial ideology and as a systematically organized genocide carried out through coordinated political, administrative, and military institutions. Students learn how persecution escalated from discrimination and segregation to deportation, forced labor, mass shootings, extermination camps, and the implementation of the "Final Solution," while situating the murder of approximately six million Jews within the broader Nazi war of annihilation. The textbooks emphasize that genocide resulted not only from ideological hatred but also from bureaucratic planning, institutional cooperation, and individual participation. Through an extensive collection of primary sources—including official Nazi documents, speeches, diaries, perpetrator testimonies, survivor accounts, eyewitness reports, photographs (such as one depicting a pile of shoes that belonged to victims of the Majdanek extermination camp),[69] and postwar interrogations—students critically examine the perspectives of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, evaluate the use of euphemistic language to conceal mass murder, and distinguish between historical evidence and later interpretations. The treatment is comprehensive, historically accurate, and consistently promotes multi-perspectivity, source criticism, and critical engagement with historical evidence.

Resistance to National Socialism is presented as diverse in its motivations, forms, and participants, while emphasizing that it remained limited because the Nazi regime retained broad public support. Students learn about political, religious, military, youth, and civilian resistance through figures and groups such as the White Rose, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Georg Elser, Claus von Stauffenberg, the Kreisau Circle, the Red Orchestra, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Edelweiss Pirates, and the Swing Youth.[70] Concerning the resistance against the persecution of Jews, students learn that the rescue of more than 7,000 Danish Jews resulted from coordinated action by ordinary citizens, fishermen, students, public institutions, and members of the Danish resistance, made possible by advance warning of planned deportations, and that these rescuers are commemorated by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. Jewish resistance is likewise presented as multifaceted, extending well beyond armed revolt to include hiding, rescue efforts, underground activity, participation in Allied armies and partisan units, and uprisings in the Warsaw Ghetto, Treblinka, Sobibor, and

68 *Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Stuttgart, 2024, pp. 140–149, 160–162.

69 Ibid. p. 194.

70 *Buchners Geschichte Oberstufe*, Ausgabe Nordrhein-Westfalen, Qualifikationsphase, C.C. Buchner, Auflage 1 Druck 2015, pp. 266–273; *Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Stuttgart, 2024, pp. 198–201.

Auschwitz-Birkenau. Through source-based activities, students classify different forms of resistance and are encouraged to recognize the diversity of Jewish responses to persecution, challenging the misconception that Jews went passively to their deaths.

Germany's postwar engagement with the Holocaust is presented as an evolving and sometimes contested process rather than a completed historical achievement. Students learn that confronting the Nazi past involved criminal prosecution through the Nuremberg and Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, debates over collective responsibility and statutes of limitations, and the gradual development of a democratic culture of remembrance expressed through memorials, museums, commemorative ceremonies, and Holocaust Remembrance Day. The textbooks emphasize that remembrance serves not only to commemorate victims but also to strengthen democratic values, confront antisemitism, and encourage civic responsibility. At the same time, they expose students to debates over the purposes, methods, and possible limitations of remembrance culture, including discussions of memorial sites, the role of social media, and concerns about ritualization or commercialization of memory. Drawing extensively on primary sources—including political speeches, newspaper articles, philosophical essays, survivor testimonies, literary texts, and public debates—the curriculum encourages students to engage critically with controversial issues surrounding justice, reconciliation, historical responsibility, and collective memory.

From the religious education perspective, the German curriculum presents the Holocaust as a profound theological challenge that reshapes traditional understandings of God, faith, and Jewish-Christian relations. In this religion textbook, students study a chapter titled "Why Did God Not Prevent Auschwitz?" One of the chapter's aims is to teach students to "interpret the Shoah (Holocaust) as a profound disruption of traditional ways of speaking about God," "outline examples of how biblical texts have been misused to incite hostility against Jews," and "describe various aspects of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity (in both history and the present)." Students are also expected to explain key elements and practices of Judaism and how the history of Nazi Germany "still influences the relationship between Jews and Christians today," as well as to describe different Christians responses to the Nazi regime.[71] In this context, students examine the Holocaust through the lens of Holocaust theology and theodicy, exploring how Auschwitz disrupted conventional beliefs about God's goodness and omnipotence and prompted diverse theological responses. Jewish perspectives are represented through thinkers such as Elie Wiesel, who portrays faith as an unresolved protest by questioning God while continuing to engage with him, and Hans Jonas, who argues that Auschwitz requires rethinking divine omnipotence by suggesting that God voluntarily relinquished the ability to intervene in human history, thereby placing greater moral responsibility on humanity. Students are also introduced to the Kabbalistic concept of the *Shekhinah*, presented as God's presence that suffers alongside humanity rather than preventing suffering.

National Socialism and Antisemitism

Example 43.

***Buchners Geschichte Oberstufe, Ausgabe Nordrhein-Westfalen, Qualifikationsphase,* C.C. Buchner, *Auflage* 1 Druck 2015, pp. 274–275.**

A chapter on Nazi ideology teaches how National Socialism combined radical racial nationalism with authoritarian rule, presenting the Third Reich as both a continuation and a transformation of earlier German nationalism. It explains how concepts such as the Volksgemeinschaft, "Blood and Soil," and Lebensraum justified the exclusion, persecution, and extermination of those deemed outside the racial community, while tracing ideological continuities with the German Empire alongside important political discontinuities. The section further emphasizes the central role of language in sustaining the regime, explaining that Nazi propaganda relied on simple, repetitive, emotionally charged language, dichotomies such as "Aryans" versus "Jews," semantic manipulation, and euphemisms such as "Final Solution" and "special treatment" to normalize exclusion, conceal mass murder, and shape public perception. At the same time, it notes that these linguistic strategies were not entirely novel, drawing on pre-existing nationalist and racial vocabulary, and highlights that resistance groups and dissident intellectuals challenged Nazi discourse by appealing to Enlightenment, Christian, and democratic values. The accompanying tasks encourage students to identify the mechanisms of Nazi language policy and apply this analytical framework to Hitler's speeches.[72]

71 *Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase), 2016, Auflage 1, Protestant school textbook, pp. 150–151.

72 *Buchners Geschichte Oberstufe, Ausgabe Nordrhein-Westfalen, Qualifikationsphase*, C.C. Buchner, Auflage 1 Druck 2015, pp. 274-275.

Example 44.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen,* Stuttgart, 2024, pp. 120–121.**

1920 until the end of World War II in 1945, the key events of the Holocaust are not clearly featured. The timeline does include the Nuremberg Laws (September 1935), *Kristallnacht* (9 November 1938), Ordinance on the Exclusion of Jews from German Economic Life (November 1938), and the premiere of the antisemitic propaganda film *Jud Süß* (September 1940). However, one would reasonably expect to find entries such as: Beginning of the mass shootings of Jews by the *Einsatzgruppen* following the invasion of the Soviet Union (June 1941); Wannsee Conference, coordinating the implementation of the "Final Solution" (20 January 1942); Beginning of Operation Reinhard and the establishment of the extermination camps (Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka), or more generally, systematic deportation and mass murder of European Jews (1942); and Liberation of Auschwitz (27 January, 1945). While the textbook seems to reference these key milestones elsewhere in the body of the chapter, as a standalone chronology of the Nazi period, the timeline under-emphasizes the central historical development of 1941–1945: the shift from persecution and discrimination to the systematic, industrialized genocide of European Jewry. A student relying on this timeline alone would not easily identify when the Holocaust began or understand its chronological progression.

> [Relevant references to persecution of Jews:]
> *September 1935 – Nuremberg Laws*
> *9 November 1938 – The November 1938 Pogrom (also known as Kristallnacht)*
> *November 1938 – Ordinance on the Exclusion of Jews from German Economic Life*
> *September 1940 – The world premiere of Veit Harlan's antisemitic film* Jud Süß *at the Venice Film Festival*

Example 45.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen,* Stuttgart, 2024, pp. 186–187.**

The following example describes the cumulative radicalization of antisemitic policy and the varying degrees of German societal complicity, presenting antisemitism as a systematic and escalating component of Nazi policy before the Second World War. It explains that although antisemitism played "only a subordinate role" in the NSDAP's election campaigns during the late Weimar Republic, it intensified rapidly after 1933 through a combination of discriminatory legislation and what the textbook calls "practical antisemitism"—violent boycotts and assaults that systematically excluded the Jewish population from public life. Students are introduced to the progressive legal and social marginalization of Jews through a chronological overview of key measures, including the boycott of Jewish businesses (1933), the dismissal of Jewish civil servants, the Nuremberg Laws prohibiting relationships between Jews and "Aryans," occupational exclusion, and the Kristallnacht pogrom, during which "Jewish businesses were attacked, synagogues were destroyed, and thousands of Jews were threatened, injured, and imprisoned in concentration camps." The second part points to the distinction between support for exclusion and discomfort with overt violence, asking whether Nazi persecution rested on an "anti-Jewish consensus." It argues that antisemitic measures were "accepted by broad segments of the German population," emphasizing both material incentives—particularly the opportunities created by the "Aryanization" of Jewish businesses—and social pressures that discouraged solidarity with Jews. At the same time, it introduces nuance by noting that while the goal of excluding Jews from German society "was widely accepted," the violent methods employed during the November 1938 pogrom "were generally viewed with disapproval."

> *Antisemitic Laws and Measures up to 1939*
> *Antisemitism played only a subordinate role in the NSDAP's election campaigns during the late Weimar Republic. This changed dramatically once the National Socialists came to power. Through a combination of antisemitic legislation and "practical antisemitism"—that is, violent assaults and boycott campaigns—they systematically excluded the Jewish population from public life. [...]*
> - *9 November 1938: November Pogrom (also known as Kristallnacht). Following the assassination of the German embassy official Ernst vom Rath in Paris by the Polish Jew Herschel Grynszpan, during a nationwide operation, Jewish businesses were attacked, synagogues were destroyed, and thousands of Jews were threatened, injured and imprisoned in concentration camps.*

> *The German People and Anti-Jewish Policy: An "Anti-Jewish Consensus"?*

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

[...]
What is certain is that the antisemitic measures introduced by the Nazi government during the 1930s were accepted by broad segments of the German population. [...]
The methods, namely the violent destruction of synagogues and businesses and the physical assaults on Jews, were generally viewed with disapproval.

Example 46.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen,* Stuttgart, 2024, pp. 140–141.**

The textbook presents antisemitism as a foundational component of Nazi ideology that emerged from the fusion of nineteenth-century racial thought, nationalism, and preexisting antisemitic prejudice. It explains that medieval religious antisemitism "evolved in the nineteenth century into a racial doctrine of antisemitism, supported by pseudoscientific theories," after which "Jews were now regarded as a race rather than merely a religious community." The text traces this development to earlier antisemitic discourse in Imperial Germany, highlighting Heinrich von Treitschke's slogan, "The Jews are our misfortune!" and explains that Jews were falsely portrayed as "internal enemies of the Reich" seeking to undermine German society. It further shows how the Nazis built upon these stereotypes by combining them with anti-communism, claiming that "the Jews" were simultaneously responsible for both Western capitalism and a "Jewish-Bolshevik world conspiracy." By embedding antisemitism within broader discussions of Social Darwinism, *Lebensraum*, the *Führerprinzip*, and the appeal of authoritarian leadership, the textbook portrays antisemitism not as an isolated prejudice but as an integral ideological pillar that justified racial hierarchy, exclusion, and expansionist ambitions.

Constitutive Elements of Nazi Ideology: Nationalism, Racism, Antisemitism, and the Führer Cult
The NSDAP's success during the final phase of the Weimar Republic rested upon massive nationalist agitation against the "Dictate of Versailles," against reparations, and in favor of a violent revision of the Treaty of 1919. It succeeded in winning broad sections of the population through promises of national greatness in a "Third Reich" and the restoration of German power in Europe and the world.
The racist element of Nazi ideology appeared to reinforce this nationalism. Germans, as members of the "Aryan race," were portrayed as engaged in a struggle for survival against non-Aryans. The racially defined concept of the Volk justified expansion into the "living space in the East" (Lebensraum im Osten). These ideas were based on Social Darwinism, which had become popular during the nineteenth century. In this framework, Charles Darwin's biological theories of evolution were illegitimately transferred to social and political conflicts, portraying nations as engaged in a "struggle for existence."
Antisemitism was closely intertwined with this racist ideology. The religiously motivated anti-Judaism that had already resulted in pogroms and the ghettoization of Jews during the Middle Ages evolved in the nineteenth century into a racial doctrine of antisemitism, supported by pseudoscientific theories. Jews were now regarded as a race rather than merely a religious community. Such antisemitism had become increasingly popular during the German Empire, after the conservative Prussian historian Heinrich von Treitschke publicly discussed the "Jewish question" in 1879 and emphatically declared: "The Jews are our misfortune!" Without any factual basis, Jews were accused of being "internal enemies of the Reich" seeking to undermine the Germanic-Christian culture of the young German Empire.
National Socialism adopted these prejudices and stereotypes and expanded them with anti-communist ideas, claiming that "the Jews" were simultaneously behind Western capitalism and a "Jewish-Bolshevik world conspiracy."

Example 47.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen,* Stuttgart, 2024, pp. 162–163.**

The excerpt presents antisemitism as a central component of Nazi racial policy by showing how ideological beliefs about racial purity were translated into state policy, persecution, and ultimately mass murder. It explains that the Nazis sought to create a racially homogeneous nation through the preservation of "German blood," while identifying Jews as one of several groups classified as harmful to the Volksgemeinschaft (people's community). Jews are explicitly included among the population groups that the regime sought to isolate and eliminate, alongside Sinti and Roma, people with disabilities, and others deemed "enemies of society." The text describes the progressive radicalization of antisemitic measures, from the 1935 Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, which prohibited sexual relations between "Aryans" and Jews as "racial defilement" (*Rassenschande*), to the Second World War, when Jews were

portrayed as "subhumans" (*Untermenschen*) and "parasites," and their complete destruction was presented as necessary for securing Lebensraum and ensuring the survival of the German people. The excerpt also situates antisemitism within the broader machinery of Nazi repression by discussing concentration camps, compulsory sterilization, Aktion T4, and forced labor, illustrating how racial ideology shaped both domestic and wartime policies.

> *[…]*
> *Only through the creation and preservation of the purity of "German blood", it was argued, could the rebirth of the German nation be achieved.*
> *[…]*
> *These camps also came to be used for the imprisonment of so-called "enemies of society" (Gemeinschaftsfremde), who were excluded from the national community (Volksgemeinschaft). The 1935 Blood Protection Law prohibited sexual relations between "Aryans" and Jews, which the Nazi regime denounced as racial defilement (Rassenschande).*
> *[…]*
> *The Second World War and the war of extermination (Vernichtungskrieg) against the Slavic and Jewish "races" revealed the murderous dimensions of the Nazi racial theory in their full extent. Slavs and Jews were portrayed as "subhumans" (Untermenschen) and "parasites."*

Example 48.
***Buchners Geschichte Oberstufe, Ausgabe Nordrhein-Westfalen, Qualifikationsphase,* C.C. Buchner, Auflage 1, Druck 2015, pp. 263–264.**

The following excerpt from the chapter on the Holocaust introduces students to competing scholarly explanations for the motivations of Nazi perpetrators, encouraging them to examine why ordinary individuals participated in genocide. It presents Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's argument that the Holocaust was enabled by widespread, deeply rooted antisemitism, claiming that "Hitler and the National Socialists therefore did nothing other than release and activate the existing and accumulated antisemitism." This interpretation is contrasted with Claus Arndt's view that the primary motivation was not antisemitism but "their ethical and moral incapacity to act in accordance with human values," together with unquestioning obedience to orders. A third perspective, by Christopher Browning, emphasizes a more multifaceted explanation, highlighting ideological indoctrination, peer pressure, conformity, and the gradual normalization of violence, while noting that participation was not always entirely voluntary. The accompanying tasks ask students to compare these explanatory approaches and assess their plausibility, encouraging engagement with historiographical debates rather than a single interpretation.

> *M3 "Ordinary Men"?*
> *The texts below present an argument between two American historians, one arguing that the operations of the Nazis under Hitler were a release mechanism for pent-up antisemitism, whereas the second historian argues that it was an inability to comply with moral and human values. While this debate can present valuable insights, the first argument of Goldhagen is highly radical and aims to justify the actions of the Nazis as a release mechanism. It is a poor example which can create a wrong understanding; it leaves room for incorrect interpretation of historical events.*
> *a) The American political scientist Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (1996) on the main cause of the murder of the Jews: The unshakeable belief in the existence of a "Jewish question" more or less inevitably led to the assumption that the only "solution" consisted in "eliminating" everything "Jewish" in Germany: excluding it and removing it. […] If ordinary Germans had not shared the eliminatory ideals of their leadership, they would have opposed the steadily intensifying assault on their Jewish fellow citizens and compatriots with at least as much resistance and refusal as they did the attacks by their government against the churches or the so-called euthanasia program. […] Hitler and the National Socialists therefore did nothing other than release and activate the existing and accumulated antisemitism.*
> *b) The jurist Claus Arndt, who in the 1960s participated in investigations into implicated police units, wrote in a letter to Goldhagen published in 1998: However, I must express considerable doubts about the correctness of your thesis that the murders committed by police officers in Poland and elsewhere […] were motivated by antisemitism. While fully acknowledging the abhorrence of antisemitism, I consider this identification of causes to be a trivialization of the perpetrators' motivation. Unfortunately, their motivation was far worse: it consisted in their ethical and moral incapacity to act in accordance with human values. Their motto was: "An order is an order." It was the refusal and total inability to act according to human and moral principles. This was demonstrated not least by the fact that those involved behaved in this way not only toward Jews, but toward every group of people affected by the orders given to them. The same police officers carried out the destruction and murder, for example, of the Polish intelligentsia, and acted toward the women and children of that group with the same cruelty, callousness, and brutality as they did toward Jews.*

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

c) Using the example of Reserve Police Battalion 101, which shot approximately 1,200 Jews during an operation in Poland in 1942 (and killed around 38,000 Jews in total), the American historian Christopher R. Browning examines the motives of the men who carried it out.

Example 49.

***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen,* Stuttgart, 2024, p. 190.**

A primary source used to teach about the systemic disenfranchisement of Jews is a diary entry by Victor Klemperer, a German Jew (1881–1960)—professor of Romance Languages at the Technical University of Dresden from 1920 to 1935. Owing to a mixed marriage, he was not sent to a concentration or extermination camp and survived the Second World War in various designated Jewish houses. His diaries are regarded as an important document of the Nazi era. Klemperer's diary entry provides a firsthand account of the progressive exclusion of Jews from every aspect of daily life under Nazi rule by listing thirty-one discriminatory regulations affecting movement, work, food, property, culture, and social participation. The cumulative effect conveys how persecution extended far beyond legal discrimination, culminating in the constant threat of violence. Klemperer concludes that all these restrictions are nothing compared with the constant danger of house searches, mistreatment, imprisonment, concentration camps, and violent death. As a primary source, the excerpt enables students to understand antisemitism through the lived experience of an individual victim rather than through retrospective description, illustrating how systematic legal and administrative measures isolated and dehumanized German Jews before their physical extermination. The source is historically highly reliable, as Klemperer's diaries are among the best-documented contemporary testimonies of Jewish life under the Nazi regime.

Example 50.

***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, p. 160.**

In a lesson titled "How did Jewish persecution come about?" Judaism is portrayed as the victim of centuries-long religious hatred and humiliation rooted in Christian antisemitic imagery and theology. The textbook describes the *Judensau* relief, a sculpture on the Wittenberg Town Church, as a grotesque and deeply offensive depiction that mocks Jewish faith and scholarship. The text highlights that the relief itself shows a sow (female pig) being suckled at by two human figures, and that the famous German Protestant Reformationist Martin Luther himself explained the scene in vulgar, demeaning terms: "Behind the sow stands a rabbi, who lifts her right leg… and peers intently underneath her tail into the Talmud." By quoting Luther's description, the textbook exposes how religious imagery and theological writings were used to dehumanize Jews and ridicule their sacred texts. In doing so, the text makes clear that this was not merely a product of medieval ignorance, but a deliberate act of blasphemy against Judaism and its beliefs.

The textbook teaches students that Jewish persecution was historically constructed through a toxic blend of religious distortion, public humiliation, and theological exclusion. It explains that Luther's commentary and the relief "strongly suggest that any theological dialogue with the Jews, and the recognition of their independent tradition, were thereby excluded." This shows how antisemitic imagery moved beyond insult to ideological justification for exclusion and persecution. The closing note about the installation of a memorial plaque in 1988, "to point to the historical consequences of hatred of Jews: the Shoah," connects medieval antisemitism directly to the Holocaust, showing students that such hatred has a long and devastating legacy. By juxtaposing Luther's words with modern remembrance, the text invites critical reflection: what began as theological mockery in stone became the foundation for centuries of systemic violence against Jews.

How did Jewish persecution come about?

"Judensau" Relief, 1440, Wittenberg Town Church

[…]

The connection of this repulsive depiction with an animal regarded as impure by Jews (Lev. 11:7; Deut. 14:8) and the reference to a Hebrew name of God must have had an absolutely blasphemous character for Jews. Luther's commentary and the relief related to it strongly suggest that any theological dialogue with the Jews, and the recognition of their independent tradition, were thereby excluded.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the November Pogroms, on 11 November 1988, the parish of the town church in Wittenberg placed beneath the relief a bronze memorial plaque by the sculptor Wieland Schmied in the pavement, in order to point to the historical consequences of hatred of Jews: the Shoah.

Example 51.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, p. 161.**

In this excerpt, Judaism is portrayed through the lens of historical Christian theology that was often hostile and demeaning. The textbook presents Augustine, one of the most influential figures in Church history, as a central example of how early Christian thought contributed to the persecution of Jews. While Augustine attempts to distinguish between the "true" Israel (those who follow Christ) and "Israel according to the flesh" (the Jews), he argues that Jews are willfully blind and cursed, and he accuses them of falsely claiming to be God's chosen people: "You are so blind that you claim to be God's people where you are not." The text makes clear that Augustine's legacy includes not only doctrinal influence but also the legitimization of Christian antisemitism noting that he "resorts to abusive rhetoric," calling Jews a "pus-dripping horde" and describing them with grotesque metaphors.

Students learn that Jewish persecution was not merely a result of social prejudice but was embedded in the theological tradition of the Christian West. By including visual references like the "Synagoga" figure, shown being blinded by the devil, and connecting them to written doctrine, the text shows how theology shaped public imagery and attitudes. The assignments guide students to confront these legacies critically. For example, they are asked to evaluate whether Augustine's interpretation is theologically sound, and to take a position on symbolic acts of remembrance, such as blindfolding the "Ekklesia" statue on November 9, the anniversary of Kristallnacht. These tasks teach students not only to understand the historical roots of Christian antisemitism but also to consider how religious communities today should reckon with that past.

> *Augustine, Against the Jews*
> *[…]*
> *In these and similar prophecies, Augustine says: "Say: 'We are the ones,' where there is no doubt. But you are so blind that you claim to be God's people where you are not, and you do not recognize yourselves where you are."*
> *Despite his attempt to use measured and appropriate language, Augustine also resorts to abusive rhetoric. He calls Jews "stirred-up filth," a "pus-dripping horde," […]*

Example 52.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, pp. 158–159.**

A chapter about antisemitism contains a lesson presenting a clearly critical and reflective approach to the question of antisemitic elements in the Gospels, while also exposing students to the complexity and historical weight of the language involved. Overall, the lesson does not simply transmit content, but asks students to engage analytically with both text and image, making the proper contextualization and problematization of potentially antisemitic elements a central part of the learning process. The lesson explicitly challenges traditional accusations by stating that "a Jewish trial against Jesus of Nazareth contradicts historical probability," and explains such claims as rooted in the "interests of early Christianity." At the same time, it carefully reframes the Johannine use of "the Jews," emphasizing that it is "not only a designation for a specific people," but rather a theological category representing those who oppose Jesus within a "dualistic opposition between… belief and unbelief, light and darkness." The lesson repeatedly uses the term "the Jews," alongside references such as "their intentions of murder," presented as part of the source material. Educators must therefore make sure that students are able to place it in its historical and theological context. This highlights the importance of guiding students to critically interpret such language rather than accepting it at face value.

The visual and pedagogical elements reinforce this emphasis on critical thinking, though they require careful contextualization. The image captioned "Jews crucify the Jew Jesus of Nazareth," especially with the anachronistic yellow Jewish hat, reflects later medieval Christian imagery rather than historical reality. One task explicitly asks students to examine which theological developments led to such a depiction, encouraging them to recognize how interpretations of Gospel texts contributed to later antisemitic traditions. Similarly, the prompt "Who is actually responsible for the death of Jesus?" invites students to question inherited narratives.

Are the Gospels anti-Jewish?

The Trial of Jesus

All Gospels connect the Passion narrative with massive accusations of guilt against "the" Jews. The accusations intensify the later a Gospel was written. Subsequent Christian generations could not escape their suggestive power, and even today theologians still maintain that Jesus was condemned to death as a result of an interplay of Jewish legal authorities with the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate.

Critical research now explains this thesis from the interests of early Christianity: one wanted to distance oneself from the Jews at their expense in order not to burden the Roman state, into which one was just growing, too heavily. As a conclusion, it may be stated: A Jewish trial against Jesus of Nazareth contradicts historical probability.

[...]

Their claim to descent from Abraham fails because of the reality of their unbelief, indeed their murderous intentions. The extremely sharp polemic of the Gospel of John against "the Jews" thus fundamentally belongs within the dualistic opposition between the "ruler of this world" (12:31) [the devil] and the Logos sent by God [Jesus Christ], who has triumphed over the cosmos (16:33) [the world hostile to God]!

[...]

Who is actually responsible for the death of Jesus?

Example 53.
***Kursbuch Religion* (Westermann), Grades 11–13 (*Sekundarstufe* II), 2021, *Druck* A4, 2024/ Calwer, Protestant school textbook, pp. 272–273.**

In a lesson about distinguishing worldviews from religions, students learn about antisemitism as a conspiratorial worldview. Quoting an educational consultant of the Anne Frank Foundation, the lesson emphasizes how antisemitism detaches Jews from real-world actions and instead uses them as symbols for broader societal anxieties. Jews are portrayed as the targets of a distorted worldview that offers simplified models and blames them for "unpleasant feelings, threats, experiences of dependency and powerlessness" as well as "social suffering" and complex social changes. The text portrays antisemitism as a framework of misplaced blame, noting that the antisemite directs their anger about the shortcomings of civilization against the Jews. Rather than responding to actual Jewish behavior, antisemitism becomes a psychological and ideological mechanism that falsely positions Jews as responsible for societal ills. Furthermore, the accusation that Jews "exploit the history of these crimes for their own gain" and the assertion that they are "distinct from the national community" illustrate how Jews are rendered alien within society, reinforcing exclusion.

The second section, "The Invented Jew of Antisemitism," further deconstructs this logic by showing how antisemitism persists even in the absence of Jewish people. Religious scholar and antisemitism commissioner of the state of Baden-Württemberg Michael Blume recounts encounters and conversations he had in Iraq, where figures as diverse as President Erdoğan or former ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi are labeled Jewish in order to maintain the antisemitic narrative. He stresses that "when antisemites have no Jews, they invent some," illustrating the persistence of antisemitism as a self-sustaining ideology. Notably, he states that "there is no longer any Jewish life in Iraq," acknowledging that "140,000 Jewish men and women" were driven out after the founding of the State of Israel. Based on his experience in Iraq, Blume concludes that antisemitism has not disappeared. The portrayal of Judaism here is not grounded in religious or cultural reality but in how it is falsely constructed by others. Thus, the textbook frames Judaism as a community repeatedly misrepresented by hostile worldviews, and antisemitism as a dangerous, enduring myth detached from factual Jewish existence.

Accompanying the text is an illustration of a sticker from the 1920s, saying: "Jews are Germany's misfortune." A seemingly non-Jewish man kicks an Orthodox Jew in the chest with full force, toward the area outside Germany. The scene is depicted in front of the outline of the German Reich, colored red.

Antisemitism as a World-Conspiracy Theory

At the same time, Jews are accused of exploiting the history of these crimes for their own gain. They are portrayed as a homogeneous group, distinct from the national community, to which they allegedly do not belong.

[…]

The Invented Jew of Antisemitism

[…] When antisemites have no Jews, they invent some. Then they claim that all sorts of other people are Jews. There is no longer any Jewish life in Iraq—Jews were driven out. 140,000 Jewish men and women left after the founding of the state of Israel—almost no one knows that—but antisemitism hasn't disappeared.

Genocide and the Final Solution

Before discussing the Final Solution, the chapter on "Mass Murder and the Holocaust" provides definitions to key terms, including "Holocaust" and the "Shoah" (other entries include are 'Asocials,' Euthanasia, Action T4, Extermination Camps, and Reinhard Heydrich). The chapter begins with a short discussion on the so-called "euthanasia" program, which was rooted in the pseudoscientific doctrines of racial hygiene and hereditary health that classified various groups—including people with disabilities, Sinti and Roma, Slavic peoples, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, and those labeled "asocial"—as "inferior" and "unworthy of life." It explains how discriminatory legislation introduced forced sterilization and abortions before the regime initiated the systematic killing of psychiatric patients and disabled individuals through the "Aktion T4" program, in which approximately 70,000 people were murdered with carbon monoxide gas. Although public protests led to the program's official suspension in 1941, the textbook notes that the killings continued in secret until the end of the war through starvation and lethal injections, emphasizing that these methods and practices served as a precursor to the industrialized mass murder later carried out in the extermination camps.[73]

The chapter further explains that Nazi occupation policies varied across Europe but were fundamentally shaped by racial ideology, strategic objectives, and differing approaches to governance. It explains that in Eastern Europe the war was waged as a struggle for Lebensraum, accompanied by forced Germanization, mass expulsions, forced labor, the persecution and murder of Polish elites, and the segregation and killing of Jews through ghettos, executions, and the activities of the Einsatzgruppen under the RSHA. It further describes similar policies of expulsion and ethnic restructuring in other occupied territories, including Slovenia and Alsace-Lorraine, while noting that starvation was deliberately accepted as a consequence of German occupation in parts of Southern and Eastern Europe. By contrast, the textbook explains that German authorities generally pursued cooperation with existing elites in Western and Northern Europe, either maintaining local administrations or installing puppet governments, often with the support of fascist collaborators in countries such as Belgium, France, Norway, and Hungary.[74]

Example 54.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen,* Stuttgart, 2024, p. 186.**

In a chapter dedicated to the Holocaust, the following section presents the Holocaust not only as the murder of approximately six million Jews but also as the destruction of Jewish civilization in Germany, emphasizing that it entailed "the eradication of Jewish culture, history, and identity in Germany and Europe." It seeks to challenge Nazi stereotypes by stressing the deep integration of Jews into German society before 1933, arguing that "their centuries-long and significant contribution to German history is rarely acknowledged" and that antisemites resented the Jews' remarkable success in integrating into German society. To support this argument, the text highlights Jewish achievements in commerce, industry, publishing, education, and science, noting that although Jews constituted only about one percent of the population, they were successful bankers, industrialists, and merchants, and that "nearly one-third of all German Nobel Prize winners before 1933 were of Jewish descent." It further underscores that German Jews largely identified with the German nation, pointing out that many considered themselves fully German, represented a range of political views, and that approximately 100,000 served as soldiers or officers in the First World War.

> *Jewish Life in Germany*
> *The genocide of the Jews involved not only the physical destruction of approximately six million people, but also the eradication of Jewish culture, history and identity in Germany and Europe.*
> *[...] Their centuries-long and significant contribution to German history is scarcely acknowledged. [...] nearly one-third of all German Nobel Prize winners before 1933 were of Jewish descent. At the beginning of the twentieth century, most of them regarded themselves fully as Germans.*

73 *Buchners Geschichte Oberstufe*, Ausgabe Nordrhein-Westfalen, Qualifikationsphase, C.C. Buchner, Auflage 1, Druck 2015, p. 258.

74 Ibid., pp. 258–259.

Example 55.
***Buchners Geschichte Oberstufe, Ausgabe Nordrhein-Westfalen, Qualifikationsphase,* C.C. Buchner, Auflage 1, *Druck* 2015, pp. 259–261.**

The textbook presents the Holocaust as a centrally planned and progressively implemented campaign of genocide, tracing its evolution from early deportation schemes, including the Madagascar Plan, to the systematic extermination of European Jewry under the "Final Solution," a plan that "from its inception its objective was genocide." It introduces key perpetrators such as Adolf Eichmann, explains the role of the RSHA, the *Einsatzgruppen*, and the Wannsee Conference, and describes the transition from mass shootings to industrialized killing in extermination camps. Students learn about the establishment and operation of Auschwitz and the Operation Reinhard camps (Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka), the use of gas vans and Zyklon B, deportations from across Europe, forced labor, death marches, and the broader victim groups targeted by Nazi racial policy. The text also provides quantitative estimates of victims, stating that at least 5.29 million, and most likely slightly more than six million, Jews from across Europe fell victim to the Holocaust. It also addresses the persecution of Sinti and Roma and other civilian populations affected by the Nazi war of annihilation.

The account emphasizes that the genocide developed over time and that historians disagree about when exactly the decision to exterminate European Jewry was made. It also notes that the Einsatzgruppen and numerous state institutions participated in the killings, and that the extermination camps represented the culmination of an already ongoing process of mass murder. The discussion of the Wannsee Conference presents it as coordinating the "practical implementation" of a genocide already underway rather than as the moment when the decision to murder "more than eleven million European Jews" was first made. The lesson provides detailed quantitative context for the scale of the Holocaust, noting that more than six million Jews were murdered, including at least 1.5 million Jewish children under the age of 14. It also gives figures for individual killing centers, including an estimated 870,000–925,000 victims at Treblinka, while acknowledging the uncertain estimates for other victim groups, including the Sinti and Roma, as well as the tens of thousands of Slavic civilians murdered during the war of annihilation in Eastern Europe.

> *[…] A program for a "Final Solution" gradually took shape, yet from its inception its objective was genocide.*
> *[…]*
> *On January 20, 1942, senior civil servants, SS officers, and state secretaries from the Ministries of the Interior, Justice, and Foreign Affairs met under the chairmanship of Heydrich at a villa on the Wannsee lake in Berlin to coordinate the practical implementation of the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question", which was already underway. According to the minutes of the conference—subsequently known as the "Wannsee Conference", after its venue,—more than eleven million European Jews should be murdered. […]*
> *The deportation trains from all parts of Europe had already been arriving in Auschwitz since mid-1942; from the summer of 1943 onward, nearly all trains were directed there (see M4). In addition to the mass murder carried out in the gas chambers using the cyanide-based preparation Zyklon B, prisoners were subjected to forced labor, torture, medical experiments, and inhumane living conditions. Nearly one million Jewish victims are documented for Auschwitz. Between 870,000 and 925,000 people were murdered in Treblinka between July 1942 and August 1943; approximately 435,000 between March and December 1942 in Belzec; around 160,000 to 200,000 in Sobibor between April and June 1942 and from October 1942 to October 1943; 152,000 in Kulmhof (Chelmno); between 80,000 and 110,000 in Lublin-Majdanek; and an estimated 65,000 in Maly Trostinez.*
> *From 1944 onward, as the Eastern Front advanced and the camps in the East were evacuated on Himmler's orders, countless concentration camp inmates died during the brutal "death marches" to the West—succumbing to hunger, cold, or being shot by SS guards. In total, at least 5.29 million—and most likely slightly over six million—Jews from across Europe fell victim to the Holocaust, including at least 1.5 million Jewish children under the age of 14. The number of murdered Sinti and Roma is difficult to determine. Estimates range from 120,000 to between 200,000 and 500,000 victims, who were killed by Einsatzgruppen behind the front lines in Eastern Europe and in the camps. In Auschwitz alone, approximately 23,000 Sinti and Roma from eleven countries were murdered. In addition, the war of annihilation in the East claimed the lives of tens of thousands of members of Slavic population groups—above all Poles and Russians—as well as Sorbs in Lusatia, Masurians in East Prussia, and Kashubians in West Prussia.*

Example 56.
***Buchners Geschichte Oberstufe, Ausgabe Nordrhein-Westfalen, Qualifikationsphase,* C.C. Buchner, Auflage 1, *Druck* 2015, p. 262.**

The chapter on the Holocaust also teaches about the severe pogroms that broke out in Lithuania against the Jewish population, and the involvement of Lithuanians in the systematic purge of Lithuanian Jews. The lesson uses a report by SS colonel Karl Jäger as a primary source, which mentions the functionaries in the Panevėžys area in whose actions Lithuanians participated alongside Germans soldiers. By the end of 1941, more than 194,000 Jews had been shot.

Karl Jäger's report matter-of-factly declares that "There are no more Jews in Lithuania, except for working Jews," before describing extermination as "primarily an organizational matter," detailing the logistics of gathering victims, excavating pits, transporting groups of 500 to execution sites, and even recommending the sterilization of surviving "Jewish forced laborers" and the killing of pregnant Jewish women. Rather than merely presenting the document, the accompanying tasks encourage historical source criticism by asking students to examine the significance of the category "Jewish forced laborers" and to analyze "the language used here to discuss about mass murder," directing attention to the bureaucratic euphemisms and dehumanizing terminology employed by the perpetrators. Overall, the presentation draws on an important documentary source on the Holocaust by bullets in Lithuania and effectively illustrates how genocide was planned, administered, and rationalized through administrative language rather than emotional rhetoric.

> *M1 "There are no more Jews in Lithuania"*
> *The head of Einsatzkommando (EK) 3, SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger, summarized in a report dated 1 December 1941 to the Security Police headquarters the operations of his unit in Lithuania from July to November 1941:*
> *I can state today that the goal of solving the Jewish problem for Lithuania has been achieved by EK 3. There are no more Jews in Lithuania, except for working Jews, including their families. [...] I also intended to eliminate these working Jews including their families, but this brought me sharp opposition from the civil administration (the Reich Commissioner) and the Wehrmacht, resulting in the prohibition: These Jews and their families are not to be shot! The execution of such actions is primarily an organizational matter. The decision to make each district systematically free of Jews required thorough preparation of each individual action and reconnaissance of the prevailing conditions in the respective district. The Jews had to be gathered at one or several locations. Based on their number, the site for the necessary pits had to be selected and excavated. The marching route from the assembly point to the pits averaged 4 to 5 kilometers. The Jews were transported to the execution site in detachments of 500, at intervals of at least 2 kilometers. [...] Only through skillful use of time was it possible to carry out up to five actions in one week, while at the same time managing the [...] workload in such a way that no disruption occurred within the area of responsibility. [...] I am of the opinion that the sterilization of the male working Jews should begin immediately in order to prevent reproduction. If, nevertheless, a Jewish woman becomes pregnant, she is to be liquidated [...].*
> *Tasks*
> 1. *Explain the internal disputes concerning the Jewish forced laborers that the author alludes to.*
> 2. *Analyze the language used here to discuss about mass murder.*

Example 57.
***Buchners Geschichte Oberstufe, Ausgabe Nordrhein-Westfalen, Qualifikationsphase,* C.C. Buchner, Auflage 1, *Druck* 2015, pp. 262–263.**

The textbook teaches about the Holocaust through Heinrich Himmler's 1943 Posen Speech, using a primary source to illustrate how the Nazi leadership justified and normalized genocide within the SS while deliberately concealing it from the wider public. The speech explicitly acknowledges the ongoing extermination of the Jews—"The Jewish people are being exterminated"—and presents it as both a moral obligation and a source of collective achievement, with Himmler claiming that "we had the moral right, we had the duty to our people, to kill this people" and describing the genocide as "a page of our history that was never written and can never be written as a page of glory." By highlighting the dehumanization of Jews as a "bacillus," the emphasis on secrecy, and the regulation of confiscated Jewish property, the source demonstrates how genocide was framed internally as a necessary and disciplined undertaking. The accompanying tasks reinforce this focus by asking students to analyze Himmler's conception of humanity and morality and to examine the speech as a "key document" for understanding the "Final Solution" and the Holocaust.

The selected excerpts effectively illustrate core elements of Nazi ideology, including racial dehumanization, the portrayal of mass murder as a duty, and the perpetrators' attempts to reconcile genocide with a self-image of moral integrity. By directing students to analyze both the language and historical importance of the speech, the textbook encourages critical engagement with the ideological justifications that underpinned the Holocaust rather than presenting them uncritically.

On 4 October 1943, Heinrich Himmler (see p. 231) delivered the following speech at the SS Group Leaders' Conference in Posen:
I would like to mention before you, in complete openness, a very difficult chapter. Among ourselves it should be stated quite openly once, and yet we shall never speak about it in public. Just as little as we ever spoke about having carried out our ordered duty on 30 June 1934 and shooting comrades who had failed, so too have we never spoken about this and never shall. It was a matter of tact, of something self-evident to us, that we never discussed it among ourselves. Everyone shuddered, and yet everyone knew that they would do it again the next time if it were ordered and necessary. [...]
I am referring now to the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish people. It is one of those things that are easily said: "The Jewish people are being exterminated," every Party member says, "quite clear, it is in our program: elimination of the Jews, extermination, we are carrying it out." And then they all come along, those decent eighty million Germans, and every one of them has his decent Jew. Of course, the others are swine, but this one is a splendid Jew. [...]
None of those who speak this way has seen it, none has gone through it. Most of you know what it means when one hundred corpses lie together, when five hundred lie there, or when one thousand lie there. To have endured this, and at the same time—apart from exceptions caused by human weakness—to have remained decent, that has made us hard. This is a page of our history that was never written and can never be written as a page of glory. For we know how difficult our situation would be today if, in every city, amid the bombing raids, the burdens, and the privations of war, we still had the Jews as secret saboteurs, agitators, and instigators […]
The wealth they possessed has been taken from them. I issued a strict order, carried out by SS Obergruppenführer Pohl, that these riches were, naturally, to be handed over completely to the Reich. We took nothing for ourselves. Anyone who violated this order would be punished according to a directive I issued from the beginning: whoever took even a single mark would face death. [...]
We had the moral right, we had the duty to our people, to kill this people that wanted to kill us. But we had no right to enrich ourselves by so much as a fur coat, a watch, a mark, a cigarette, or anything else. We do not want, in eradicating a bacillus, to become infected by that bacillus and die from it. I will never tolerate even the smallest focus of corruption. [...]
Altogether, we can say that we carried out this most difficult task out of love for our people. And we have suffered no damage within ourselves, in our souls, or in our character.
[...] By and large our conduct was good. Some things still need improvement within our own ranks. It is for this reason that I make this appeal to the commanders and group leaders. I would like to give this chapter the title: "Ourselves."
Tasks
1. *Analyze Himmler's view of humanity and the moral ideas expressed in the speech.*
2. *Examine the extent to which the speech can be regarded as a "key document" for understanding the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" and the Holocaust.*

Example 58.
***Buchners Geschichte Oberstufe, Ausgabe Nordrhein-Westfalen, Qualifikationsphase,* C.C. Buchner, Auflage 1, *Druck* 2015, pp. 264–265.**

The textbook teaches about the Holocaust through a combination of survivor testimony and contemporary visual evidence, focusing on the arrival and selection process at Auschwitz-Birkenau from the perspective of a Hungarian Jewish survivor. Eva Fahidi's account conveys both the physical and psychological experience of deportation, emphasizing the deception employed by the SS and the sudden destruction of families. She recalls how prisoners were reassured that they would soon be reunited, only to realize later how suddenly she was left alone, having lost her parents, sister, and other relatives. The accompanying explanation of the "Jewish Ramp" contextualizes her testimony by describing the selection process, noting that approximately 450,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz within three months, that those deemed fit for work were assigned to forced labor, while the vast majority of arrivals were sent immediately to the gas chambers. The accompanying tasks require students to compare the testimony with the photograph, identify what the image omits about the selection process, and discuss both the original purpose of the SS photographs and their significance today for survivors and Holocaust remembrance. The presentation combines personal testimony with historical documentation to illustrate both the mechanics of extermination and the victims'

experiences. It provides contextual information regarding the Hungarian deportations and the operation of the selection process. The use of the Auschwitz Album provides students with an opportunity to critically evaluate the relationship between visual evidence and eyewitness testimony. Particularly valuable is the third task, which encourages students to consider both the original function of the photographs as products of the SS and their later role as documentary evidence and instruments of remembrance, fostering critical reflection on how historical sources can acquire new meanings beyond the intentions of their creators.

Example 59.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, p. 177.**

A section discussing the dimensions of destruction during World War II situates the Holocaust within the broader context of Nazi crimes during the Second World War while explicitly identifying it as a genocide directed against European Jewry. The section first surveys the large-scale use of forced labor, emphasizing that millions of people from occupied territories were exploited under conditions determined by Nazi racial hierarchy, noting that "there was a major difference between being subjected to forced labor as a Jew, or as a Pole, a Russian, or a French prisoner of war." It argues that forced labor enabled Germany to sustain both its armaments industry and wartime economy and states that this system "was a crime in the view of the entire German population." The text then broadens its perspective to the war of annihilation in Eastern Europe, describing the disregard for civilian lives, the enormous Soviet death toll, and the Siege of Leningrad, before turning specifically to genocide. Here it states that "approximately six million people were murdered in the Holocaust—the National Socialist genocide of European Jews" and also acknowledges the Porajmos, estimating that approximately 200,000–300,000 Sinti and Roma were murdered.

> *May 1945: The Scale of the Genocide.*
> *[...]. There was a major difference between being subjected to forced labor as a Jew, or as a Pole, a Russian, or a French prisoner of war. [...]. Forced labor was a crime in the view of the entire German population. [...]*
> *Genocide: Approximately six million people were murdered in the Holocaust—the National Socialist genocide of European Jews.*

Example 60.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, p. 184.**

In a secondary source students are exposed to historian Christopher Browning's interpretation of Reserve Police Battalion 101, arguing that the Holocaust was carried out not only by fanatical Nazis but also by "perfectly ordinary men" who nevertheless retained moral agency. Browning stresses that "these reserve policemen had choices, and most of them committed terrible crimes," emphasizing that responsibility ultimately rests with individuals rather than being excused by circumstances alone. At the same time, he encourages students to reflect on the broader social conditions that can enable mass violence, arguing that "there are many societies in the world burdened by racist traditions and trapped in a siege mentality because of war or the threat of war," where deference to authority and group conformity can normalize participation in atrocities. He concludes with a universal moral question: "If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become murderers under such circumstances, then for which group of people could a similar development be ruled out?" The accompanying table grounds this interpretation in historical evidence by documenting massacres committed by Battalion 101, listing a minimum of 38,000 Jews shot across locations such as Józefów, Łomazy, Majdanek, and Poniatowa. Together, the source and table teach students to examine the Holocaust through both historical evidence and moral reflection, highlighting individual responsibility, the dangers of conformity, and the conditions under which ordinary people can become perpetrators of genocide.

> *D5 – Christopher Browning: Deeply Disturbing Implications*
> *Christopher Robert Browning (b. 1944) is an American historian.*
> *The main lesson to be drawn from the history of Reserve Police Battalion 101 is one of profound unease. This story of perfectly ordinary men is not the story of all men or all human beings. These reserve policemen had choices, and most of them committed terrible crimes.*
> *[...]*

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

> *There are many societies in the world burdened by racist traditions and trapped in a siege mentality because of war or the threat of war. Everywhere, society educates its members to respect and obey authority, and the society could scarcely function without this form of conditioning. [...] If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become murderers under such circumstances, then for which group of people could a similar development be ruled out?*

Example 61.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, p. 189.**

In teaching about the events leading to the consolidation of the "Final Solution," students are exposed to an excerpt from Hitler's speech in January 1939 in which he specifically declared the extermination of the Jewish race in Europe. The speech exposes Nazi antisemitism directly through Hitler's own words, presenting Jews as a global conspiratorial force allegedly responsible for provoking another world war. Hitler frames this as a prophecy, declaring that if "international finance Jewry" caused war, the result would be "the extermination of the Jewish race in Europe." As a primary source, the speech allows students to examine the ideological foundations of genocidal antisemitism before the Holocaust reached its full scale, revealing how extermination was publicly threatened while being justified through conspiracy theories and racial hatred. The document is historically authentic and is widely regarded by historians as one of the clearest public statements foreshadowing the Holocaust.

> *The Road to the "Final Solution"*
> *Q3 – Hitler in 1939: "The Extermination of the Jewish Race"*
> *[...]*
> *Today I once again wish to be a prophet: if international finance Jewry within and beyond Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the world, and thus the victory of Jewry, but rather the extermination of the Jewish race in Europe.*

Example 62.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, p. 189.**

The excerpt teaches students about the Nazi extermination camps as the central instrument of the Holocaust and emphasizes their unique function within the Nazi system of persecution. It distinguishes clearly between concentration camps and extermination camps, explaining that while concentration camps "were not an invention of the Nazis," extermination camps were "a historically unique phenomenon" whose "sole purpose was to kill the people transported there by train." Students learn about the geographical concentration of these camps in the occupied eastern territories, particularly Poland, and are introduced to major extermination camps. The text explains that camps operated differently: some combined concentration and extermination functions and carried out selections between prisoners deemed fit for labor and those designated for immediate murder, whereas others, such as Sobibor, functioned exclusively as killing centers. It also outlines the principal methods of murder, including mass shootings, gasoline-engine exhaust in gas chambers at Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka, and the use of Zyklon B at Auschwitz, while concluding with the scale of the Holocaust by noting that of the approximately six million victims murdered during the Holocaust, "more than one million were killed at Auschwitz." The section is accompanied by an image of Anne Frank, with a caption mentioning her famous diary and her death in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945.

> *The Nazi Extermination Camps*
> *[...]While "concentration camps" were not an invention of the Nazis, extermination camps were a historically unique phenomenon. Their sole purpose was to kill the people transported there by train.*
> *[...] Of the approximately six million victims murdered during the Holocaust, more than one million were killed at Auschwitz.*

Example 63.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, pp. 188–189.**

The chapter on the Holocaust presents Auschwitz both as the central site of the Holocaust and as a symbol in postwar memory. It first presents Auschwitz as the largest and most important complex of Nazi persecution, explaining its three-part structure: Auschwitz I as the principal concentration camp, initially established for Polish political prisoners, many of whom were persecuted and killed there; Auschwitz II (Birkenau) as the concentration and extermination camp with the gas chambers; and Auschwitz III (Monowitz) as an industrial forced-labor complex operated by IG Farben. Students learn in detail about the deportation process, the arrival of victims after days and sometimes weeks in cattle cars, the selection process, and the deception used before murder, as victims entered the gas chambers under the pretense that they were going to take a shower before being killed with Zyklon B.

The text further emphasizes that survival in Auschwitz was not limited to escaping the gas chambers, as many prisoners died from disease, starvation, and forced labor. It also introduces Primo Levi as a survivor whose autobiographical writings provide a personal perspective on the Holocaust. The second part shifts from the history of Auschwitz itself to the politics of remembrance. It argues that Auschwitz became the postwar symbol of the Holocaust because it represented an "industrialized, bureaucratically organized genocide," but also cautions that this symbolism can obscure important aspects of the Holocaust. The textbook notes that famous images of Auschwitz emphasize the "anonymous, serial character of the extermination," making it appear as though the genocide occurred outside public view. It therefore reminds students that more than one-third of those murdered in the Holocaust were killed in mass shootings, such as the massacre at Babi Yar, and stresses that the Holocaust "did not take place outside the public eye," since mass shootings were witnessed by numerous soldiers and the families of SS personnel living near the camps "were well aware of what was taking place" nearby. By combining the functioning of Auschwitz with a critical discussion of Holocaust memory, the excerpt encourages students to understand both the mechanics of genocide and the ways it has been remembered and sometimes misunderstood.

> *Nor did the Holocaust take place outside the public eye. Alongside the public mass shootings, which were carried out and witnessed by numerous soldiers, the activities in the extermination camps were likewise not concealed. Near the extermination camps were settlements where, alongside the local population, the families of the camp SS personnel lived. They were well aware of what was taking place in the extermination camp only a few kilometers away.*

Example 64.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, p. 189.**

The excerpt teaches students that responsibility for the Holocaust extended beyond the Nazi leadership by directly addressing the long-standing postwar claim that ordinary Germans "knew nothing." It argues that, despite censorship and propaganda, "an attentive contemporary observer could have become informed" through multiple channels, including returning soldiers who described mass shootings, reports in the German press on mass deportations and efforts to make areas "free of Jews" (*judenfrei*), and broadcasts by the BBC, in which Thomas Mann discussed the use of gas vans as early as 1942. The text culminates in the categorical conclusion that more recent research leaves no doubt that the German population could have been—and indeed was—well informed about the genocide during the war, citing diaries and other contemporary sources as evidence. Rather than portraying ignorance as genuine, it argues that as Nazi crimes became increasingly apparent and Germany's defeat more likely, many Germans retreated into "claimed ignorance" (*Ahnungslosigkeit*), hoping to avoid association with the crimes. In doing so, the textbook shifts the focus from the mechanics of antisemitic persecution to the issue of societal awareness and complicity, encouraging students to consider the moral responsibility not only of perpetrators but also of bystanders and those who chose not to confront the evidence available to them.

> *"We Knew Nothing About It..."?!? The German Population and Knowledge of the Holocaust*
> *Despite Nazi propaganda and the coordination (Gleichschaltung) of the media, an attentive contemporary observer could have become informed about the events in Poland and the Soviet Union at a very early stage. [...]*
> *However, the more horrifying the dimensions of the Nazi crimes became and the more clearly Germany's defeat loomed, the more the population retreated into "claimed ignorance" (Ahnungslosigkeit), hoping not to be associated with the crimes.*

Example 65.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, p. 191.**

Another important primary source for teaching about the plans for the "Final Solution" is Goebbels's diary entry from 27 March 1942, in which he described aspects of the plan for "a comprehensive extermination campaign against Europe's Jews." Goebbels's diary records the implementation of the Final Solution from the perspective of one of its principal architects, describing not only mass murder in detached bureaucratic language while simultaneously justifying it ideologically, but also the importance of maintaining a veil of secrecy around it. He states that "60 percent must be liquidated," portrays the extermination of Jews as a deserved punishment, and characterizes the conflict as "a struggle to the death between the Aryan race and the Jewish bacillus." As a primary source, the text demonstrates how Nazi leaders normalized genocide through administrative language, dehumanization, and racial propaganda, allowing students to analyze both the mechanics and ideological rationalizations of mass murder. Although written for a private diary rather than public propaganda, it is considered a highly valuable historical source because it reflects Goebbels's contemporaneous understanding and endorsement of Nazi extermination policy.

> *Q4 – Goebbels and the Plans for the "Final Solution"*
> *On 27 March 1942, Goebbels described in his diary the plan for a comprehensive extermination campaign against Europe's Jews:*
> *The Jews are now being deported eastward from the General Government, beginning in the Lublin district […] here will not be much left of the Jews themselves. Broadly speaking, one can say that 60 percent must be liquidated.*
> *[…] If we did not defend ourselves against the Jews, they would destroy us. It is a struggle to the death between the Aryan race and the Jewish bacillus.*

Example 66.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, p. 191.**

The lesson about the Holocaust also presents primary source excerpts from the interrogation of Otto Moll (who headed the Sonderkommando responsible for corpse cremation at Auschwitz) by the Allies in 1945, during which the Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss was also present. The interrogation exposes how perpetrators described and attempted to justify their roles in the operation of Auschwitz after the war. While Höss plainly states that Moll "was responsible for everything, including leading the people into the gas chambers and then removing the bodies," Moll repeatedly minimizes his responsibility, insisting that he merely carried out his work properly and was not responsible for "the physical ending of their lives." He also portrays himself as a humane supervisor, claiming that he "never mistreated any of the prisoners" and that they "respected" him because he worked alongside them. Both men further present themselves as constrained by an unquestionable chain of command: Moll claims that he repeatedly asked "why these things had to be done" and was told that "the orders were absolute and nothing could be changed," while asserting that "none of us was truly in our right mind anymore." As a primary source, the testimony allows students to examine not only the operation of Auschwitz but also the postwar strategies of self-exculpation employed by perpetrators—minimizing personal agency, emphasizing obedience to orders, and portraying themselves as reluctant participants despite their direct involvement in mass murder. Although both men had strong incentives to reduce their culpability, the interrogation remains historically valuable because their claims can be critically evaluated against one another and against the extensive documentary and testimonial evidence concerning Auschwitz.

> *Question: For which operations in the facility was he [Moll] specifically responsible?*
> *Höss: He was responsible for everything, including leading the people into the gas chambers and then removing the bodies in order to burn them.*
> *[...]*
> *Moll: [...] I never mistreated any prisoner. I was successful in directing the prisoners' work only because I worked alongside them with my own hands. The prisoners respected me because I always behaved toward them like a model soldier, and that is why I was assigned all the difficult tasks that arose. [...]*
> *I asked several times why these things had to be done, why they could not simply stop […] but that the orders were absolute and nothing could be changed. He suffered from this work just as we all did, and none of us was truly in our right mind anymore. [...]*
> *I was not responsible for the physical ending of their lives.*

Example 67.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, pp. 192–193.**

Another primary source on the horrors of Auschwitz is the memoir of the Italian Jewish survivor Shlomo Venezia (1923–2012), who was deported to the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp in 1944. There he was assigned to the Sonderkommando under the command of Otto Moll, the so-called "Angel of Death." Shlomo Venezia's memoir functions as a firsthand survivor testimony describing the brutality and dehumanization experienced by Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz. Students learn about the sadistic behavior of SS officer Otto Moll, the forced labor imposed on the Sonderkommando, the physical abuse of prisoners, and the psychological collapse of the victims, illustrated through the execution of a prisoner who had become unable to move or respond. The account also conveys the atmosphere of terror in the camp from the perspective of someone who directly witnessed these events, making the human consequences of Nazi antisemitism immediate and personal rather than abstract. As a survivor memoir written by an eyewitness, the source is considered historically reliable and is consistent with extensive historical evidence regarding the operation of Auschwitz and the treatment of Jewish prisoners.

Example 68.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, p. 193.**

Another primary source is the diary of Friedrich Kellner, a German judicial official critical of the Nazi regime, from which excerpts are presented. Friedrich Kellner's diaries function as a contemporary record of what a regime-critical German civilian knew about Nazi crimes against Jews during the war. Through entries spanning 1941–1945, students learn that information about the euthanasia program, mass shootings of Jews, plans to eliminate European Jewry, and the conditions in concentration camps circulated within Germany through soldiers, eyewitnesses, and radio broadcasts. The diary also presents a clear moral condemnation of these crimes while warning that the persecution of Jews set a precedent for the persecution of other vulnerable groups, thereby illustrating both awareness and opposition from within German society. As a contemporaneous diary written during the events themselves, the source is historically reliable and aligns closely with current scholarship on civilian knowledge of the Holocaust.

Example 69.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, pp. 228–232.**

The textbook contains a lesson on Stalag 326, a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp for Soviet prisoners of war, using the memorial site to teach about Nazi persecution, historical remembrance, and civic responsibility. Students learn about the camp's establishment, the inhumane treatment of Soviet prisoners of war under Nazi racial ideology, and the postwar transformation of the site into a memorial dedicated to education and reconciliation. The lesson is reinforced through an eyewitness report describing the camp's conditions after liberation, Peter Weiss's literary reflection on the victims of Nazi persecution, and scholarly discussions by Cornelia Gießler and Habbo Knoch on the educational role and evolving challenges of memorial sites. Although the lesson focuses primarily on Soviet prisoners of war and the broader culture of remembrance rather than specifically on the Holocaust or antisemitism, its historical presentation is accurate and reflects established scholarship on Nazi crimes and German memorial culture.

Resistance

Example 70.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, p. 206.**

The textbook uses primary sources to present Holocaust rescue as a form of resistance by focusing on the Danish rescue of the Jewish population and the actions of non-Jewish individuals recognized as Righteous Among the Nations. Students learn that although Denmark initially offered little resistance to the German occupation, the announcement of plans to deport Danish Jews in 1943 prompted a nationwide rescue effort. The lesson explains how advance warning from German diplomat Georg Duckwitz enabled Danish citizens to organize the hiding of Jews in homes and farms before transporting them by fishing boats to neutral Sweden, ultimately saving more than 7,000 people. The narrative emphasizes that this rescue succeeded through broad cooperation across society, involving ordinary families, fishermen, students, and public institutions, while introducing Yad Vashem's recognition of non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. It is further reinforced through the testimony of Danish resistance leader Aage Bertelsen, who recalls that the rescuers possessed almost none of the practical resources or expertise needed for such an operation but were united by a determination to assist those being persecuted.

Example 71.
***Buchners Geschichte Oberstufe, Ausgabe Nordrhein-Westfalen, Qualifikationsphase,* C.C. Buchner, *Auflage* 1, Druck 2015, p. 270.**

In a short section on Jewish resistance, the textbook chapter teaches that Jewish victims were not merely passive targets of Nazi persecution but resisted in a wide variety of ways, ranging from hiding and rescue efforts to armed struggle. It highlights clandestine assistance to other Jews, participation in Allied armies and partisan units, and armed resistance in ghettos and extermination camps, presenting the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as "the most striking proof of Jewish resistance." The account explains that the remaining 55,000–60,000 inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto formed the Jewish Combat Organization and fought "bitter house-to-house battles against vastly superior German forces," while also describing the uprisings in Treblinka, Sobibór, and the Sonderkommando revolt at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The accompanying tasks reinforce this broad understanding by asking students to classify the different forms of resistance according to their methods and objectives and to develop a continuum "from nonconformist behavior to active resistance," encouraging students to appreciate the diversity of Jewish responses to persecution rather than reducing resistance solely to armed revolt. As such, the textbook adopts an agency-centered approach that broadens students' understanding of Holocaust resistance while avoiding the misconception that Jews went passively to their deaths.

> *Jewish Resistance*
> *Jews also resisted the actions of their persecutors in various ways. Throughout Europe, Jews hid with non-Jewish helpers or on their own initiative (the most well-known example being Anne Frank), and they helped others—especially Jewish children—escape from the Nazis. Beyond this, there were armed uprisings in ghettos and camps, and more than 1.5 million Jews participated in the fight against the Nazi regime, either in Allied armies or as partisans. Jews were active in the underground in Belgium and France, served in units of the* Résistance*, joined the partisans under Josip Broz Tito, and tens of thousands fought in Jewish partisan units in the forests of Belarus and Ukraine. The most striking proof of Jewish resistance was the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The Nazis had forced hundreds of thousands of Jews into a small, sealed-off district of Warsaw under inhumane conditions. After more than 240,000 Jews had been deported from Warsaw to Treblinka in 1942, the remaining 55,000 to 60,000 ghetto inhabitants formed the "Jewish Combat Organization." In April 1943, they organized an armed uprising. For approximately four weeks, under their 23-year-old leader Mordechai Anielewicz, they fought bitter house-to-house battles against vastly superior German forces. Although the uprising was ultimately crushed, it had a powerful symbolic impact and served as an example of resistance. After the Warsaw uprising, revolts also occurred in extermination camps such as Treblinka and Sobibor. During the uprising in Sobibor, some prisoners succeeded in escaping. In Auschwitz-Birkenau, prisoners of the "Sonderkommando"—forced to work in the crematoria of Birkenau, where they had to burn the bodies of those who had been gassed—also organized a revolt. In October 1944, they managed to destroy one of the crematoria using explosives.*

Post-Holocaust Reckoning and Remembrance

Example 72.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, pp. 210–212.**

Students learn about the Nuremberg Trials and Germany's postwar confrontation with the Holocaust through a series of primary sources that they are required to analyze, including newspaper editorials, parliamentary speeches, political posters, and contemporary debates. A 1946 Die Zeit editorial presents the Nuremberg verdicts as a triumph of justice that exposed the full extent of Nazi crimes and laid the foundations for a democratic Germany, while a U.S. Military Government poster reinforces the message that Nazi war criminals were guilty. A 1963 *Die Zeit* article by Gerhard Kluge argues against ending the prosecution of Nazi perpetrators, emphasizing the scale of the crimes judged in the Auschwitz Trials and criticizing calls to "let the matter rest." Students then examine contrasting Bundestag speeches by Ernst Benda and Thomas Dehler from the 1965 debate on abolishing the statute of limitations for Nazi crimes, presenting them with differing arguments about national honor, remembrance, legal responsibility, and the rule of law. Finally, excerpts from historians Manfred Kittel and Norbert Frei interpret the long-term significance of the Nuremberg and Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, arguing that they discredited Nazi ideology, educated German society about the Holocaust, and initiated a broader process of public self-examination regarding responsibility for Nazi crimes. The use of these diverse primary and secondary sources allows students to engage directly with authentic postwar debates

while reinforcing the historical consensus on the Holocaust. Rather than presenting only a retrospective narrative, the lesson demonstrates how German society wrestled with justice, memory, and accountability in the decades following the Holocaust.

Example 73.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, pp 214–218.**

The textbook contains a lesson on how postwar Germany confronted—or failed to confront—the legacy of the Holocaust and National Socialism, presenting *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("coming to terms with the past") as a gradual and contested process rather than an immediate outcome of Germany's defeat. The lesson begins by examining the mixed reactions of German society to Allied denazification and re-education efforts. It explains that many Germans rejected the idea of collective responsibility, often citing their own wartime suffering or calling for a *Schlussstrich* ("drawing a line under the past"), while others accepted moral responsibility for Nazi crimes. It further describes the changing public debate during the 1950s and 1960s, emphasizing that the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials became a turning point that renewed public interest in how the Nazi regime had emerged, how the Holocaust had been carried out, and what lessons should be drawn from it. The lesson also contrasts West and East Germany, explaining that while the Federal Republic gradually developed a more critical engagement with the Holocaust, the GDR incorporated antifascism into its founding ideology, commemorated Nazi crimes, including the extermination of the Jews, but largely avoided questioning its own political narrative. Throughout, the Holocaust is presented not only as a historical event but also as a continuing challenge for democratic memory, civic responsibility, and public education.

The lesson reinforces this narrative through a series of primary and secondary historical sources that require students to engage directly with competing postwar perspectives. Students examine the 1945 Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt by the Evangelical Church, which acknowledges the Church's moral failure and calls for repentance, renewal, peace, and reconciliation. They then analyze Theodor W. Adorno's 1966 essay "Education After Auschwitz," which argues that preventing another Auschwitz should become the central aim of education by exposing the social and psychological mechanisms that make mass violence possible. Additional sources present contrasting interpretations of Germany's confrontation with the past, including a student protest in Göttingen demanding that Germans "learn from the past," a reflective 1968 essay by journalist Horst Krüger, who argues that the Nazi era was gradually ceasing to be a lived concern for his generation, and two historical interpretations by Manfred Kittel and Norbert Frei. Kittel portrays the Federal Republic as having consistently incorporated lessons from the Nazi past into its democratic reconstruction, constitutional order, institutions, relations with Israel, and broader political culture, whereas Frei emphasizes the tensions between moral reckoning and political integration, arguing that postwar policies of amnesty, reintegration of former Nazi officials, and campaigns against alleged "collective guilt" delayed a more thorough confrontation with Nazi crimes before giving way to a deeper engagement during the 1960s. By juxtaposing official declarations, philosophical reflections, journalistic commentary, photographs of postwar protests, and contrasting historical interpretations, students are encouraged to understand Holocaust memory as an evolving historical and political process shaped by debate rather than a single uncontested narrative.

Example 74.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, pp 220–226.**

The textbook dedicates a lesson to examining the transformation of Holocaust remembrance in West Germany from the late 1970s onward, presenting it as a shift from confronting the Nazi past to institutionalizing a culture of remembrance. The lesson explains that the 1979 television mini-series Holocaust marked a turning point by bringing the persecution and murder of European Jews into the public sphere through the story of the Jewish Weiss family, stimulating widespread public debate about Germany's responsibility and the need to confront the past. It traces how remembrance subsequently expanded beyond the classroom into public life through memorial sites, museums, films, documentaries, commemorative ceremonies, and official memorial days. Students learn about the establishment of new memorials, the creation of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, the designation of 27 January as Germany's official Holocaust Remembrance Day, and the later adoption of the same date by the United Nations as International Holocaust Memorial Day. The lesson also situates Holocaust remembrance within broader debates about historical memory, democratic values, human rights, and the prevention of racism, xenophobia, and genocide, presenting remembrance as an evolving national and transnational civic responsibility rather than solely an account of past events.

The lesson increasingly relies on primary sources to demonstrate how German memory culture has developed and been debated. Students engage with an excerpt by media scholar Jürgen Wilke, who explains the exceptional public impact of the television series Holocaust and its role in embedding the term "Holocaust" in German public discourse. They then read an excerpt from President Richard von Weizsäcker's landmark 1985 speech, which argues that later generations inherit responsibility to remember, warns against forgetting the crimes of National Socialism, and links remembrance to reconciliation, democracy, and lasting peace. This is complemented by President Roman Herzog's 1996 Holocaust Remembrance Day address, which distinguishes between inherited guilt and inherited responsibility, emphasizing that remembrance should preserve historical lessons and strengthen democratic values. The lesson also introduces a critical perspective through social psychologist Harald Welzer, who argues that Holocaust remembrance risks becoming ritualized and detached from meaningful historical understanding if it relies on repetitive moral messages instead of critical engagement. A further perspective is provided by Josef Schuster, who questions whether Holocaust Remembrance Day has become sufficiently anchored in German public life, using examples of conflicting public events while reaffirming the importance of commemorating the victims. Finally, students read excerpts from speeches by Israeli President Shimon Peres, who presents the Shoah as a universal moral warning while emphasizing the immense cultural and intellectual contributions of European Jewry, and by Markus Mersault, who argues that genuine remembrance requires confronting the social and ideological causes of antisemitism rather than reducing commemoration to empty rituals or abstract moral appeals. Together, these texts expose students to a range of interpretations concerning remembrance, historical responsibility, public commemoration, and the continuing relevance of the Holocaust in democratic society.

Example 75.
***Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024, pp 196–197.**

The textbook contains a lesson about Holocaust remembrance in the age of social media, examining how contemporary forms of online self-representation can shape attitudes toward the Holocaust and, by extension, awareness of antisemitism. Rather than focusing on the historical development of antisemitism, the lesson explores the appropriateness of Holocaust selfies and related hashtags, asking students what these reveal about young people's historical understanding and engagement with sites such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, Dachau, and the Berlin Holocaust Memorial. It presents examples of hashtags that combine references to Holocaust memorials with terms associated with leisure, tourism, and entertainment, alongside a journalistic critique arguing that such practices trivialize the Holocaust by reducing it to a form of adventure tourism. The lesson then broadens the discussion through survey data showing that most young people consider Holocaust remembrance important, while many also feel pressured to express socially expected emotions when discussing the Holocaust. This perspective is complemented by social psychologist Harald Welzer's argument that historical education should foster independent interpretation and critical reflection rather than prescribe particular emotional responses. The accompanying activities reinforce this inquiry-based approach by asking students to analyze the meaning conveyed by selfies and hashtags, assess whether they constitute appropriate historical sources, and critically evaluate competing interpretations of contemporary Holocaust remembrance. In doing so, the lesson encourages students to reflect on how digital media influences public memory and the continued significance of Holocaust remembrance in confronting antisemitism today.

Example 76.
***Leben gestalten Qualifikationsphase* (Klett), *Katholischer Religionsunterricht*, Grades 12–13 (*Qualifikationsphase Oberstufe*), 2022, *Auflage* 1/ *Auer,* Catholic, p. 84.**

This textbook section presents Judaism and the Holocaust through the personal story of Eva Mozes Kor, framing her Jewish identity around suffering, survival, and moral resilience. The text begins with stark clarity: "Eva Mozes Kor was ten years old when she and her Jewish family were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp." It situates her experience within the context of Nazi brutality, noting the murder of her family in the gas chambers and her and her sister Miriam's selection for "cruel medical experiments" by the infamous Nazi SS physician Josef Mengele. This portrayal emphasizes Jewish victimhood during the Holocaust while also giving agency to Kor's later moral and psychological journey.

The text portrays Jews as agents of moral reckoning in the post-Holocaust world. Eva's decision to forgive the Auschwitz accountant and SS man Oskar Gröning is depicted as a powerful act of liberation: "She did not forgive the Nazi perpetrators because they deserved it, but because she deserved it." This reframes the role of the Jewish survivor—not

as a passive victim, but as someone capable of reclaiming dignity and exercising moral power. Her statement that "forgiving… does not mean forgetting" challenges simplistic narratives of reconciliation and highlights a form of Jewish empowerment that is rooted in agency rather than vengeance.

The lesson's questions further underscore this moral complexity by prompting students to describe in their words the conflict of values that exists between Eva Mozes Kor and other concentration camp survivors and interpret the relationship between perpetrator and victim. These tasks encourage learners to move beyond binary judgments and reflect on internal Jewish debates about memory, justice, and healing. The image of Eva and her sister Miriam during the liberation of Auschwitz serves as a visual anchor for this exploration.

> *Eva Mozes Kor (1934–2019)*
> *Eva Mozes Kor was ten years old when she and her Jewish family were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. While her parents and two older sisters were sent to the gas chambers, SS doctor Josef Mengele (1911–1979) selected her and her twin sister Miriam for cruel medical experiments.*
> *[…]*
> *No Longer Being a Victim*
> *She did not forgive the Nazi perpetrators because they deserved it, but because she deserved it. […] Forgiving, she said, does not mean forgetting; it is a form of power against which the perpetrators are defenseless.*

Example 77.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, Auflage 1, Protestant school textbook, p. 147.**

This religion textbook page presents Israel and Jews through a lens of reconciliation, diversity, and human connection, rooted in the legacy of Germany's Nazi past. Through the example of Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ASF), the text frames volunteer work in Israel as a moral response to historical guilt. The placement of Israel within this mission underscores the ongoing moral responsibility of young Germans to engage in remembrance and healing. The work with Shoah survivors and people with disabilities is presented not just as aid, but as part of a broader commitment to human dignity and peace — what the text calls "peace services." The emphasis on listening, dialogue, and cooperation signals an ethical, even spiritual, transformation that volunteers undergo by encountering the Jewish experience firsthand.

Jan Thorben Wilkens's testimonial further humanizes Israel, portraying it positively as a "contradictory country" filled with diverse individuals, including Jews from all over the world, Arab Christians and Muslims, and people from the Philippines and India. This multiculturalism challenges simplistic or monolithic images of Israel, instead positioning it as a space for cross-cultural understanding. Importantly, Wilkens reflects on the reciprocal nature of dialogue, wondering how his presence may have "reduced prejudices or anxieties about visiting Germany or meeting Germans." This suggests that Germany's historical burden can be addressed not only through remembrance, but through relational healing. The assignments, which ask students to evaluate whether ASF's work qualifies as "peace services" and to investigate Christian motivations, anchor the topic in ethics and religious responsibility. Overall, the portrayal of Jews and Israel here is empathetic, historically conscious, and rooted in interfaith and intercultural engagement.

> *[…]*
> *Jan Thorben Wilkens (born 1992) volunteered with ASF in Israel. He worked with children and youth with disabilities and with survivors of the Shoah.*
> *One year in such an interesting and contradictory country — Israel. What an experience! I can hardly say what moved me the most. Every day was something special. There were always challenges to overcome, but also beautiful moments to enjoy. One thing stood out above all: contact with the most diverse kinds of people.*
> *[…]*
> *I often wondered what thoughts I might have prompted in others when I told them about my life. Maybe I was able to spark curiosity. Maybe I helped reduce prejudices or anxieties about visiting Germany or meeting Germans.*
> *[…]*
> *3. Discuss whether the volunteer services of Action Reconciliation are truly "peace services."*

Holocaust Theology and Theodicy

Example 78.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, Auflage 1, Protestant school textbook, p. 152.**

From this text, students learn that the Holocaust (Shoah) presents a challenge to belief in a good and praiseworthy God. The lesson presents a conversation from on online forum, reflecting how the Holocaust reshapes religious questions, particularly theodicy—the question of how a just God could allow evil and suffering. One forum participant quotes theologian Dorothee Sölle, who asks: "How one is supposed to praise the God who rules everything so wonderfully after Auschwitz – that I really don't know..." This stark statement illustrates how Auschwitz became a theological turning point, casting doubt on traditional understandings of God's goodness and power. Students are encouraged not only to explore different theodicy responses but also to understand the existential and emotional weight the Holocaust places on faith. They must grapple with whether praise of God is even possible in the shadow of such suffering, acknowledging that for many, "Where is God in all the suffering we encounter every day?" is not just a rhetorical question but a lived spiritual crisis.

> *[…]*
> *Where is God in all the suffering we encounter every day? Apparently, these are questions theologians ask as well. The theologian Dorothee Sölle (1939–2003) once said: "How one is supposed to praise the God who rules everything so wonderfully after Auschwitz—that I really don't know…."*

Example 79.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, Auflage 1, Protestant school textbook, pp. 162–163.**

In the lesson "How do Jews think about God after Auschwitz?" students encounter three theological responses that portray Judaism as a tradition willing to confront the enormity of suffering. Theologian Dorothee Sölle, though not Jewish herself, introduces students to a Kabbalistic perspective, which sees God not as distant and omnipotent, but as suffering alongside humanity through the *Shekhinah*, God's presence. Her perspective teaches students that Jewish theology after the Holocaust often sees divinity present in the depths of suffering, rather than in its prevention. Judaism is thus portrayed as a faith that interprets catastrophe not as divine absence but as a call to human responsibility.

Elie Wiesel's reflection brings a personal and philosophical voice to the question. As a Holocaust survivor and Jewish thinker, Wiesel does not reject God outright, but he does place him on trial. The portrayal of Judaism here is one of spiritual protest: it dares to accuse God while still praying to Him. Wiesel writes, "Nothing justifies Auschwitz. If the Lord Himself gave me an answer, I would reject it. Treblinka has killed all answers." This statement teaches students that Jewish theology after the Holocaust is marked by unresolved grief, unanswerable questions, and a sense of betrayal, but also by endurance and lament.

Hans Jonas presents a philosophical reimagining of God's nature, portraying Judaism as a tradition unafraid to rethink divine power in light of Auschwitz. Jonas argues that God is not all-powerful and that after Auschwitz, we must reject the idea of a God who could have intervened but did not.

Through this lens, students learn that Jewish theology can evolve in response to catastrophe, and that moral responsibility shifts to human beings when God withdraws His intervention. The accompanying assignments challenge students to wrestle with theology as an active, moral, and human enterprise.

> *How do Jews think about God after Auschwitz?*
> *[…]*
> *No, absolutely not. Nothing justifies Auschwitz. If the Lord Himself gave me an answer, I would reject it. Treblinka has killed all answers. The realm of barbed wire will forever remain a huge question mark.*
> *[…] After Auschwitz, we can say with greater determination than ever before that an omnipotent deity would either not be all-good or would be totally incomprehensible. […] Not because he did not will to, but because he could not, did he not intervene.*

Example 80.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, Auflage 1, Protestant school textbook, pp. 168–169.**

In this conclusion to the unit "Why Did God Not Prevent Auschwitz?" students are guided to synthesize theological, historical, and moral insights by engaging directly with Holocaust remembrance. The Holocaust Memorial in Miami Beach is not only described in physical terms but introduced as a space of "Love and Anguish," a title that encapsulates the emotional and spiritual complexity the unit has explored. The central statue, *The Sculpture of Love and Anguish*, depicts a towering bronze arm reaching desperately toward the sky, its surface covered with the anguished figures of emaciated men, women, and children clinging to one another in pain and despair. The assignments prompt students to interpret this sculpture in light of the religious and philosophical questions raised throughout the chapter. By asking students to write a theological opening speech for the memorial, the lesson explicitly connects Christian theological reflection with public memory, teaching that belief in God after the Holocaust must not be isolated from historical responsibility or human empathy.

The Holocaust is not treated merely as a historical event but as a profound rupture that shapes Jewish-Christian relations and religious thought. The final tasks invite students to explore not only how Jews have memorialized the Holocaust (e.g., through the temporary tattoo project in Israeli schools), but also how Christians must now respond with remembrance, humility, and reparation. The emphasis on comparing memorials, analyzing the Jewish-Christian relationship, and reflecting on the philosopher Adorno's claim that "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric" signals that the Holocaust challenges not just theology, but also art, ethics, and education itself. Ultimately, students learn that grappling with Auschwitz is not about resolving the problem of theodicy but about honoring memory and responsibility.

> *Why Did God Not Prevent Auschwitz?*
> *The Holocaust Memorial in Miami Beach*
> *[…]*
> - *Show which aspects make the Jewish-Christian relationship unique.*
>
> *Skills*
> *[...]*
> - *Regarding Holocaust remembrance: Israeli schools use temporary tattoo numbers resembling those from concentration camps to memorialize victims. Learn more about this initiative (e.g., via the article at jetzt.sueddeutsche.de) and discuss its pros and cons.*
>
> *Application*
> - *The philosopher Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969) wrote in 1949: "To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric." Research the controversial discourse surrounding this statement and take a personal position.*

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The curriculum approaches the Israeli-Palestinian conflict primarily through multi-perspectivity, presenting it as a dispute shaped by competing historical memories, national identities, territorial claims, security concerns, and political aspirations. Students are repeatedly encouraged to compare Israeli and Palestinian narratives, analyze images and historical sources, distinguish between perspectives and factual claims, and consider how collective memory influences interpretations of events. This approach provides useful opportunities for critical thinking and avoids presenting either national narrative as inherently authoritative. At the same time, the effort to maintain a balanced two-sided framework sometimes produces false equivalences or uneven contextualization, particularly where materially different actors, forms of violence, or historical circumstances are placed within parallel narrative structures.

The historical treatment provides students with a chronological foundation for understanding the emergence and development of the conflict. Jewish historical connections to the land are traced from antiquity through exile and the preservation of the memory of a historical homeland, while modern Zionism is explicitly situated partly as a response to European antisemitism and nationalism. Arab presence and the emergence of Palestinian and Arab nationalism are also discussed, alongside the Balfour Declaration, Jewish immigration, the UN Partition Plan, the 1948 war, Palestinian displacement, the wars of 1967 and 1973, and the Intifadas. This provides more historical context for Zionism and Jewish connections to the land than accounts that begin principally with Palestinian displacement or Israeli occupation. Nevertheless, some complex developments are compressed into a streamlined chronology, and the curriculum's preference for paired narratives—such as War of Independence/Nakba and Six-Day War/Naksa—can blur the distinction between acknowledging competing collective memories and treating those memories as equally sufficient explanations of historical causation. Notably, the paired narrative preference does not apply to the topic of displacement and refugeehood, as the examined textbooks seem to omit references to the displacement of Jews from Arab countries and their subsequent refuge in Israel.

This tendency is particularly apparent in the treatment of 1948 and the Intifadas. The textbook does explain that five Arab states attacked the newly proclaimed State of Israel in 1948, describes the resulting displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinians, and acknowledges the formative Israeli experience of existential threat. Its discussion of the Intifadas, however, places greater emphasis on Palestinian resistance and Israeli military power. The First Intifada is characterized primarily as a civilian uprising that generated international sympathy, while Hamas is introduced as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood that adopted armed struggle without being explicitly identified as a terrorist organization. The Second Intifada is explained partly through Palestinian frustration with the failed peace process and initially peaceful demonstrations before acknowledging attacks against Israeli civilians and specifically mentioning suicide bombings. Israeli responses, meanwhile, are characterized by massive force, collective punishment, and targeted killings. The information presented is not devoid of Palestinian violence or Israeli security concerns, but the symmetrical juxtaposition of violence and civilian casualties can obscure distinctions between deliberate attacks against civilians by armed organizations and military actions by a state, including differences in purpose, method, and legal status.

A similar issue appears in lessons explicitly organized around competing claims and mutual threats. Students are told that the conflict should be approached as competing claims rather than simply as a contest between a correct and incorrect side, and assignments require them to distinguish historical, legal, national, and religious arguments. This is pedagogically useful in encouraging students to reconstruct perspectives before evaluating them. Yet religious attachments are represented selectively: Palestinian religious claims are illustrated primarily through the maximalist conception of Palestine as an Islamic waqf associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, while Jewish religious claims are concentrated around national-religious settlers and settlement in the biblical Land of Israel. Although the textbook itself acknowledges that nationalist claims predominate among Palestinians and that many Israeli Jews are secular, its concrete examples can give students an overly narrow picture of religious attachment by associating it primarily with ideologically defined groups rather than showing how religious and historical connections to Jerusalem and the land extend across broader segments of both societies. Another lesson intensifies the symmetrical framing by placing an Israeli soldier and an armed Hamas fighter together under the category of "mutual threats" without explicitly identifying Hamas as a terrorist organization, potentially flattening differences between a state military and a non-state armed organization even while encouraging students to understand how each population experiences insecurity.

The treatment of the 1947 UN Partition Plan demonstrates both the strengths and limitations of the curriculum's multi-perspectival method. Students encounter several interpretations, analyze a map and demographic and economic considerations, and are asked to evaluate whether Arab rejection of partition was a mistake and what criteria should guide future solutions. Yet the perspectives are not equally developed. Arab objections are concretely explained through concerns over fertile land, economic viability, demographic realities, political rights, and perceived dispossession, whereas the Jewish case is represented mainly through the international legitimacy conferred by partition and the argument that Arab acceptance might have prevented subsequent conflict. The materials do not comparably explore what Jewish leaders believed they were conceding or risking through partition, including territorial fragmentation, security vulnerabilities, and acceptance of a geographically non-contiguous state. Thus, a lesson structured around multiple perspectives provides a detailed internal rationale for one side's objections without providing an equivalent examination of the material and security considerations of the other.

The curriculum also makes media literacy and visual interpretation important components of studying the conflict. Students analyze photographs for stereotypes, omissions, emotional effects, and deliberate attempts to shape perception, and are explicitly taught that political images can steer viewers toward particular understandings of perpetrators, victims, guilt, and innocence. This provides students with tools for questioning visual representations rather than treating them as neutral evidence. More broadly, students are frequently asked to reconstruct arguments from different perspectives, compare historical interpretations, analyze visual and textual primary sources, and distinguish between historical facts and political narratives. The Catholic and Protestant religious textbooks extend this approach into ethical reflection on peace, justice, violence, and reconciliation. Israel, Zionism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict appear less frequently than in the history and political-education materials, reflecting the religious textbooks' greater emphasis on ethical and theological questions. Where the conflict does appear, it is approached primarily through artistic and symbolic representations: a Protestant textbook uses an image of an Israeli woman with a rifle in a flowering garden to explore the tension between peace and militarization, while a Catholic textbook presents Banksy's Peace Dove on the separation barrier in Bethlehem within a discussion of peace. These examples encourage students to interpret the moral tension between violence and aspirations for peace, but provide limited historical or political context and tend to represent Israel and the conflict through imagery associated with soldiers, militarization, the separation barrier, and threatened peace.

The treatment of peace processes and possible resolutions gives particular attention to Oslo. Students learn about mutual Israeli-PLO recognition, Palestinian renunciation of terrorism, Palestinian self-government, unresolved final-status questions, Palestinian suicide bombings, the Hebron massacre, Rabin's assassination, Israeli security measures, and political opposition on both sides. The curriculum therefore does not portray the failure of Oslo as resulting solely from Israeli actions, and contrasting Israeli and Palestinian interviews expose students to markedly different assessments of whether Oslo represented a diplomatic achievement or a process that facilitated continuing occupation and settlement expansion. Nevertheless, some explanatory categories are uneven: Israeli opposition is characterized mainly through settlers and right-wing politicians, while Palestinian opposition is described primarily through religiously motivated movements, underplaying the coexistence of religious and nationalist motivations on both sides. The broader treatment also gives considerably greater attention to settlements and occupation than to Palestinian rejectionism, political fragmentation, terrorism, regional actors, and the security calculations influencing Israeli attitudes toward territorial concessions.

This imbalance becomes clearer in the dedicated treatment of Israeli settlements, which provides useful information about the different motivations of settlers and the consequences of settlements for Palestinian movement and territorial continuity. Students learn that settlers include economic as well as national-religious and Haredi populations, and the curriculum discusses infrastructure, roads, legal arrangements, territorial fragmentation, and competing proposals for the future of settlements. However, the lesson largely establishes settlements as a problem created by Israeli policy and asks how they obstruct Palestinian statehood, while giving considerably less attention to Israeli legal arguments, security rationales, Palestinian strategies, and violence relating to settlement areas, or disputes over territorial compromise. Even though a heading promises to expound upon the Israeli legal position, that position is not substantively developed, whereas the claim that settlement policy violates international law is stated directly. The result is a treatment containing considerable factual detail and some internal Israeli diversity but a narrower range of perspectives than the curriculum's general commitment to multi-perspectivity would suggest.

Finally, students consider solutions to the conflict including two states, one state, confederation, and continuation of the status quo, assessing these models according to security, sovereignty, identity, borders, demographics, and resources. This inquiry-based approach has pedagogical value because students must evaluate competing arrangements rather than simply reproduce a prescribed solution. The discussion recognizes Israeli concerns that a bi-national state could undermine either Israel's Jewish character or its democratic system and acknowledges extremist actors on both sides as obstacles to compromise. Yet settlements again occupy a prominent position in explaining the declining viability of two states, while Palestinian political fragmentation, rejectionist movements, regional dynamics, and Israeli security concerns receive comparatively less sustained attention. Overall, the curriculum therefore combines substantial historical information and meaningful critical-thinking exercises with a strong commitment to symmetrical, multi-perspectival framing. While this can help students understand competing identities and narratives, it can also become a limitation when balance between perspectives substitutes for differentiating historical responsibility, political agency, security contexts, or distinct forms of violence.

Historical Narratives, Identity, and Competing Claims

Example 81.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, pp. 514–518.**

The lesson presents the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as a chronological sequence of key events interpreted through competing narratives, emphasizing how Israelis and Palestinians understand the same events differently. The 1948 war is presented as both Israel's "War of Independence" and the Palestinian "Nakba ('catastrophe')," showing how "the […] war entered regional historical consciousness… under two different names." Similarly, the 1967 war is described as a "preventive war" from Israel's perspective and as "Israeli aggression" from the Arab perspective, while the Intifadas are presented as resistance movements but also as sources of violence, including attacks "against the civilian population in Israel." The lesson therefore presents identity, memory, and perception as important to understanding the conflict.

This multi-perspectivity is accompanied by substantial factual context, including territorial changes, refugee movements, military developments, and diplomacy. The text notes that "around 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled," while explaining how the war surrounding Israel's founding contributed to a "persistent perception of threat." It also connects Israel becoming "an occupying power" after 1967 with subsequent developments such as "land for peace" and the Palestinian uprisings. The accompanying tasks reinforce this approach: one introduces Israel's "never again victims" premise and the Palestinian stance of "resistance" as explanatory frameworks, while the final task, "Who threatens whom?" asks students to evaluate competing perceptions of threat.

However, the effort to present competing perspectives sometimes creates false equivalences by placing different forms of violence and responsibility within a largely symmetrical framework. This is particularly evident in the Intifadas. The First Intifada is characterized primarily as a largely civilian uprising that gained international sympathy, while Hamas is introduced as an organization founded by the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood that adopted armed struggle and sought the liberation of all historical Palestine, without explicitly identifying it as a terrorist organization. The Second Intifada is initially contextualized in terms of Palestinian frustration with the failed peace process and initially peaceful protests before acknowledging armed attacks against Israeli civilians, including suicide bombings; Israeli actions, meanwhile, are described in terms of massive force, collective punishment, and targeted killings. This juxtaposition risks obscuring distinctions between deliberate attacks on civilians by Palestinian armed groups and Israeli military operations, including differences in objectives, methods, and status under international law. More broadly, pairings such as War of Independence/Nakba and Six-Day War/Naksa effectively expose students to conflicting historical memories but can imply that competing narratives constitute equivalent explanations of events rather than perspectives that should themselves be critically evaluated against historical evidence.

> *A 1948: War of Independence or Nakba ("Catastrophe")*
> *The […] war entered regional historical consciousness—like all other Arab–Israeli wars—under two different names: as the War of Independence among Israelis, and as the Nakba (Arabic for "catastrophe") among Arabs. The outcomes of this first Arab–Israeli war fundamentally reshaped the map of the Middle East and continue to define the contours of the territorial conflict as well as the parameters of a possible peace settlement to this day. […]*

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

Open warfare broke out in May 1948 following the withdrawal of the British Mandatory power and the proclamation of the State of Israel. An alliance of five states (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria) attacked the newly founded state […]. In the course of the military confrontations, Israeli forces captured the territory that has since been widely recognized internationally as Israel's state territory within the Green Line. Jordan captured the West Bank, which it annexed in 1950. Egyptian troops occupied the Gaza Strip […], while Syria made territorial gains along the Golan front.

In 1949, Israel and its neighboring states concluded bilateral armistice agreements under UN mediation, which in principle confirmed the military outcome. […] The Arab defeat had repercussions for the entire region. On the one hand, it turned Israel into a de facto actor in the Middle East, though one not recognized by its surroundings. On the other hand, the expulsion and flight of a large part of the Palestinian population residing in Israeli state territory created a core issue of conflict that has remained unresolved to this day.

According to UN figures, around 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled, while […] approximately 150,000 Palestinians remained in Israel. They and their descendants today constitute the minority of Arab Israelis, accounting for around 20 percent of the total population. The presence of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees not only in Israel's neighboring states […] also contributed significantly to giving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict an all-Arab […] dimension.

[…] For Israel, the War of Independence developed into a founding myth—often depicted through the image of David versus Goliath—which functioned above all as a founding trauma: the persistent perception of threat from a numerically superior array of enemies who sought to destroy the emerging state and deny it any legitimacy.

B 1967: Six-Day War or Naksa ("Setback")

In the spring of 1967, Egyptian President Nasser deployed troops to the Sinai and closed the Gulf of Aqaba—Israel's only access to the Red Sea—to Israeli shipping. For the Israeli government, this constituted a casus belli. Despite the preceding tensions and the general atmosphere of impending war, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan were taken by surprise when Israel launched an attack on 5 June. Within a few days, the Israeli army captured the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula, the Syrian Golan Heights, and the West Bank including East Jerusalem.

From Israel's perspective, which perceived itself as threatened by a hostile regional environment, the war was a preventive war […]. The rapid victory over the Arab armies also gave rise to the myth of invincibility, which continues to resonate to this day. For the Arab world, by contrast, the war appeared as Israeli aggression and as a Naksa ("setback") […].

In any case, this war marked a major turning point in regional history: Israel became an occupying power—not only in the Sinai, but also on the Golan Heights and over the Palestinian population in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Already in 1967, Israel annexed East Jerusalem and reaffirmed this claim with the 1980 Jerusalem Law, which declared Jerusalem to be the "complete and united capital of Israel." In 1981, the Golan Heights were also annexed by law.

Although the United States and the United Nations succeeded in brokering a ceasefire, their efforts to achieve a regional settlement based on UN Security Council Resolution 242, adopted in 1967, were unsuccessful. This resolution remains one of the central reference points for conflict resolution to this day. It introduced for the first time the principle of "land for peace," calling on Israel to withdraw its troops from the occupied territories, while at the same time demanding that all states respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every state in the region, as well as their right to live in peace within secure and recognized borders.

C 1973: Yom Kippur War or October/Ramadan War

Among Arab states, the perception grew that Israel was unwilling to withdraw from the territories it had occupied for years despite international appeals and condemnations—particularly as Israel began establishing Jewish settlements in these areas. […]

In a completely unexpected move, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on Yom Kippur in 1973 (the Day of Atonement, the most important Jewish holy day, on which public life comes to a standstill). Because Israeli intelligence had misjudged the intentions of its opponents and the Israeli army was entirely unprepared, the Arab forces initially achieved considerable successes. Egyptian troops managed to breach the fortifications along the Suez Canal […] that had been considered impassable in Israel, while Syrian forces advanced to just short of Tiberias.

Only once American resupply deliveries began did Israeli forces regain military superiority, making a ceasefire imposed by the United States necessary to prevent a further demoralizing defeat of the Arab armies. Nevertheless, the Arab initial successes shattered the myth of Israel's invincibility.

In fact, the war initiated the first peace process in the Middle East. In 1974, under American mediation, Egyptian–Israeli and Syrian–Israeli disengagement agreements were concluded. As part of these agreements, Syria and Egypt each regained portions of the territory occupied by Israel in 1967 […]. In March 1979, the Israeli–Egyptian peace treaty was signed—the first and, for the following fifteen years, the only peace treaty between Israel and an Arab state.

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

D The First Intifada (1987–1991) and the Second Intifada (2000–2005)

In December, the Palestinian population in the occupied territories took matters into its own hands and began a largely civilian and locally organized uprising against the Israeli occupation. While the spectacular terrorist attacks of the 1970s—most notably the Munich Olympic attack in 1972 […]—had placed the Palestinian issue on the international agenda but at the same time delegitimized it, the First Intifada generated considerably greater international sympathy for the Palestinian struggle against the occupation.

In particular, in view of Israel's military superiority, Palestinians now successfully claimed the David narrative for themselves. The PLO in exile […] responded by assuming leadership of the uprising and, at the end of 1988, proclaimed a Palestinian state while in exile in Algeria. By explicitly referring to UN Resolutions 181 and 242 (from 1947 and 1967 respectively), they effectively accepted a state in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967.

The First Intifada also prompted the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood to found Hamas and to take up armed struggle against Israel. In contrast to the PLO, Hamas at that time pursued the goal of the "liberation" of the entirety of historical Palestine. […]

The cause of the Second, or so-called al-Aqsa Intifada was […] the accumulated frustration within the Palestinian population over a peace process [editor's note: the Oslo peace process of 1995 and the failure of Camp David in 2000] that had brought neither an end to the occupation nor any tangible economic peace dividend. […] Within a few months, what had initially been peaceful mass protests—at least in part in response to Israel's use of force—developed into an armed struggle by militant Palestinian groups: not only against military installations and settlements in the occupied territories, but also against the civilian population in Israel.

The Israeli leadership in turn responded with massive use of force, collective punishments, and the targeted killing of leaders of the uprising. […] By January 2005 alone […] approximately 950 Israelis and more than 3,200 Palestinians had been killed—on both sides predominantly civilians.

The Second Intifada brought about two significant turning points. First, the dictum that there was "no partner for peace" on the Palestinian side—reinforced by suicide attacks against Israeli civilians—came to be shared even by large parts of the Israeli left and the peace movement. Second, Palestinian citizens of Israel […] became involved in the confrontations. […] Many now expressed solidarity with the uprising in the occupied territories and were increasingly perceived by the majority society as a fifth column.

Example 82.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, pp. 502–504.**

In the opening section of the chapter introducing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the conflict is taught as a case study in media literacy and plural perspectives, in which the central learning goal is not mastering the historical or political substance, but developing the competence to critically deconstruct how the conflict is visually and narratively constructed. The opening explicitly foregrounds media influence: media mediation plays a central role and suggests clear-cut narratives about perpetrators, victims, the guilty, and the innocent, and immediately relativize these narratives by stressing that the visual representations used in the media "scarcely do justice to the complexity of the conflict." This establishes a meta-perspective in which the conflict is taught less through substantive content and more through critical distance toward representations. The lesson presents images, the selection of which reinforces this approach by juxtaposing highly diverse and potentially contradictory scenes—militants (Members of the Qassam Brigades), victims (treat a woman after a rocket attack), normal life (Palestinians shopping in Ramallah), and liberal urban culture (LGBT party in Tel Aviv). This curated diversity visually enacts the claim that both societies are heterogeneous, while also implicitly balancing perspectives by alternating between Israeli and Palestinian subjects. However, the conflict itself is thus mediated through snapshots that emphasize plurality and simultaneity rather than causal explanation, encouraging students to see the conflict as complex but fragmented.

The assignments and methodology further institutionalize this approach by focusing on promoting analytical skills and reflexivity. Students are asked to "analyze and evaluate images" and to discuss whether they "differentiate the perception… or… contain stereotypes," explicitly positioning them as critics of representation. The methodology guide reinforces this by emphasizing that images are "often used deliberately to evoke certain emotions… and to steer perspectives," and by systematically directing attention to omissions, intention, and subjectivity. Even the "Active Politics" task, which asks students to find their own images and generate questions, frames understanding as an open-ended inquiry shaped by media consumption, rather than a structured body of knowledge.

> *[…]*
> *In fact, however, the visual representations scarcely do justice to the complexity of the conflict and the highly heterogeneous societies in Israel and Palestine, and thus distort the reality on the ground.*
> *[…]*
> *Assignments:*
> *Analyze and evaluate images A–H using the method guide on page 504.*
> *a) First discuss in pairs: To what extent do these images differentiate the perception of the conflict and the actors involved, or to what extent do they contain stereotypes?*
> *[…]*
> *Analyzing and Evaluating Images*
> *We repeatedly encounter images in connection with political events and news. They are often used deliberately to evoke certain emotions in viewers and to steer perspectives. The critical analysis and deconstruction of images is therefore an important skill that informed citizens should acquire. […]*

Example 83.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, p. 505.**

In an introductory section on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the lesson presents the conflict as a historically grounded dispute over competing claims to land, emphasizing that these claims are rooted in collective memory and identity. The introductory text explicitly frames the conflict as one that "can only be understood in its full complexity through its historical background," highlighting that both sides "derive their own claims to the land from history" and that such narratives "shape the identities of the conflict actors." This positions the conflict not simply as a contemporary political struggle but as a long-term contest over legitimacy, rooted in differing interpretations of the past. The focus on "evaluat[ing] the claims to the 'Holy Land'" signals that students are expected to engage with these competing narratives critically, rather than accepting a single authoritative account.

The accompanying cartoon reinforces this framing by visually depicting two figures—representing the opposing sides—locked in a struggle over a single piece of land, both seemingly emerging from and bound to it, illustrating how inseparable identity and territory are in the conflict. The caption, "We have always been here," encapsulates the core argument of both sides: each claims historical precedence and legitimacy. This visual simplification complements the text's emphasis on competing historical narratives, making the abstract idea of contested claims more tangible. The assignments task students with analyzing the cartoon, and "formulating possible claims of the conflict actors," encouraging them to reconstruct the arguments of both sides based on the image.

> *13.1.2 Prehistory of the Conflict up to 1947: Who lays claims to the "Holy Land"?*
> *On the topic: The present-day Israeli–Palestinian conflict can only be understood in its full complexity through its historical background. In doing so, the actors in the conflict refer to events and traditions from the distant past, which serve as collective memories used to derive their own claims to the land, from history. Moreover, these memories and narratives shape the identities of the conflict actors. This chapter aims to familiarize students with the historical background and the arguments, as well as to evaluate the claims to the "Holy Land."*
> *M2 Cartoon: The significance of the land in the Middle East conflict*
> *"We have always been here"*

Example 84.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, pp. 505–507.**

In the following excerpt, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is taught as a historically layered conflict of competing claims, presented through a linear narrative that integrates both Jewish and Arab connections to the land. While broadly balanced, the account simplifies complex processes (e.g., continuity of populations, internal diversity, and differing political positions) and compresses them into a streamlined chronology.

The text emphasizes long-term continuity by tracing developments from 2000 BCE through antiquity, empire, diaspora, and modern nationalism, thereby presenting the conflict as the outcome of cumulative historical processes rather than recent events. Jewish claims are foregrounded through references to ancient statehood, exile, and continuity of memory—e.g., Jews "maintain their traditions and memory of their historical homeland" even after dispersion—while

Arab presence is framed through later settlement and cultural transformation. As the narrative puts it, "Although Jews had lived in the Holy Land before the Arabs, the latter maintained a continuous presence there continuously for a longer period." This structure attempts to balance claims by acknowledging both historical depth and demographic continuity, but it also implicitly organizes the narrative around a sequence in which Jewish antiquity precedes Arab permanence, which may shape how legitimacy is perceived.

At the same time, the text introduces modern political conflict through the rise of nationalism and international diplomacy, presenting Zionism as a response to antisemitism and situating Arab resistance within emerging nationalism. The text first explains that Zionism is rooted in the Jewish longing for their homeland of Israel (associated with Mount Zion in Jerusalem). It then explains how Zionism arose "as a response to antisemitism… and European nationalism," while also discussing land purchases during the period following the Balfour Declaration led to many Arab farmers being left "without work or homes." The conclusion reinforces a sense of irreconcilable positions, as the UN partition plan is accepted by the Jewish leadership but rejected by the Arab leadership, underscoring a narrative of divergence. This tension is further reinforced by the population table, which shows that even during the major waves of Jewish immigration, the Arab population remained significantly larger (e.g., 542,000 Arabs vs. 61,000 Jews in 1920; 957,000 vs. 411,000 in 1938). When read alongside the Zionist slogan of "a land without a people for a people without a land," the data implicitly undermine the notion of a "land without a people" by demonstrating the substantial and growing presence of an Arab society in Palestine.

> *[…]*
> *Jews dispersed across the world continue to maintain their traditions and memory of their historical homeland. The region was named "Palestine" by the Roman occupiers in 135 CE.*
> *[…]*
> *637/638 CE: […] Although Jews had lived in the Holy Land before the Arabs, the latter maintained a continuous presence there for a longer period.*
> *[…]*
> *Political Zionism and Jewish Immigration*
> *With Theodor Herzl (Der Judenstaat, ed. 1896), political Zionism emerges as a response to antisemitism—which dates back to the Middle Ages—and to European nationalism. […]*
> *For Herzl, the solution was the establishment of an independent Jewish state in the "land of the fathers." The originally secular-national idea was combined with a religious component, increasing its effectiveness. The guiding slogan of Zionism was: "A land without a people for a people without a land."*
> *[…]*
> *1915: The British government promised the Arabs support for a state of their own (McMahon Correspondence).*
> *1917: The British Foreign Secretary Balfour promises the Jews support for establishing a "national home" (Balfour Declaration). As a result of the land purchases, many Arab farmers were left without work or homes. Bloody clashes repeatedly occurred between Jews and Arabs. The beginnings of Arab nationalism in the region emerged in opposition to Turkish nationalism in the Ottoman Empire and, later, to the Zionist settlers. At this time, a specifically Palestinian nationalism was only beginning to emerge.*
> *1922: Great Britain received the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine, incorporating the core provisions of the Balfour Declaration.*
> *1937: The Peel Commission regarded partition of the country and the creation of a Jewish and an Arab state as the only way to counter the growing unrest and clashes. Fewer and fewer people on either side believed in the possibility of peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs in a single state. The British government later abandoned the Peel Plan.*
> *After 1939: The Holocaust enormously increased the pressure for immigration to Palestine.*
> *1947: The United Nations General Assembly adopts a plan for the creation of two states (Israel and Palestine). The Jewish side accepts the plan; the Arab side rejects it.*
> *[…]*
> *[Glossary:]*
> *Zionism*
> *The term derives from Mount Zion in Jerusalem. It expresses the longing of Jews to return to the land from which they were expelled following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.*

Example 85.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, pp. 508–509.**

The lesson explicitly frames the Israeli–Palestinian conflict through a symmetrical confrontation of competing claims, stating that it "is not a matter of right versus wrong, but claim versus claim," thereby setting up an analytical rather than normative approach. These claims are substantiated by presenting the religious significance of the land from both perspectives, but it does so in a way that structures and simplifies the role of religion. On the Palestinian side, the text first notes that religious claims are not dominant—"only about one-third articulate a distinctly religiously grounded claim… nationalist justifications prevail"—yet the detailed explanation focuses almost entirely on a religiously absolutist position, describing Palestine as a waqf that "may thus only be governed by Muslims," and explicitly linking this worldview to "the Muslim Brotherhood… [and] Hamas." This creates an imbalance: although religion is introduced as secondary, the concrete example is a maximalist Islamist interpretation, while more moderate or mainstream religious attachments (e.g., to Jerusalem or Al-Aqsa as part of broader identity) are not equally elaborated. On the Jewish side, the text emphasizes that "fewer than half of Jews describe themselves as religious" and that religious claims are "overrepresented among national-religious settlers," then illustrates these claims through ideas of "return to their biblical homeland," sacred sites such as the Western Wall, and settlement across the "biblical Land of Israel." Here too, the religious-national dimension is anchored in a specific group—settlers—rather than presented as part of a wider spectrum of Jewish identity. In both cases, the text narrows complex, widely shared religious-historical attachments into more clearly bounded, ideologically defined actors, which risks underrepresenting how deeply embedded these narratives are across broader populations.

The rest of the lesson is designed to move beyond this simplification by equipping students with tools to reconstruct the complexity themselves. The assignments require students to formulate arguments from both perspectives and to distinguish between historical, legal, and religious claims, encouraging them to recognize that the positions outlined are only partial representations. The analytical framework is particularly important in this context, as it guides students to situate these religious claims within a broader structure of conflict—alongside territorial disputes, political power, identity formation, and differing levels of conflict intensity. By breaking the conflict into categories such as causes, levels, and types, the framework helps students see that religion is not confined to the actors highlighted but intersects with wider national and political dynamics. Thus, while the juxtaposition of the Arab-Islamic and Jewish views presents somewhat selective and simplified examples of religious claims, the overall pedagogical design encourages students to expand beyond them and understand the conflict as a multi-dimensional system of overlapping and shared narratives.

> *The Religious Significance of the Territory for the Conflict Actors*
>
> *The Arab-Palestinian Perspective*
>
> *The Arab-Palestinian population in Israel and Palestine is predominantly Sunni Islam. However, only about one-third articulate a distinctly religiously grounded claim to the land; instead, nationalist justifications prevail among Palestinians. Nevertheless, Muslims also maintain a religious connection to the land. According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven from Jerusalem. At this site on the Haram al-Sharif (Jewish: Temple Mount) stands today the Dome of the Rock with its golden dome. The neighbouring Al-Aqsa Mosque is regarded—after Mecca and Medina—as the third most important mosque in Islam (referred to in the Qur'an as the "farther sanctuary"), and Jerusalem was the original direction of prayer.*
>
> *Because of its proximity to Al-Aqsa, the idea emerged in the 1930s that Palestine as a whole constitutes a religious endowment (waqf) and is therefore inalienable Muslim property. From the perspective of this religious-Palestinian nationalism, the land may thus only be governed by Muslims, and any non-Muslim rule must be ended. A Palestinian state governed by Islamic law is to be established on this territory. This worldview is closely linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and is reflected today in movements such as Hamas.*
>
> *The Jewish-Israeli Perspective*
>
> *Judaism understands itself as both a people and a religious community; however, in contemporary Israel, fewer than half of Jews describe themselves as religious. Accordingly, the claim to the land is not religiously justified by all Jews, nor is the conflict universally understood as a religious one. The religious dimension is particularly pronounced and overrepresented among national-religious settlers. From their religious-Zionist perspective, the establishment of the State of Israel represents the first step in God's plan, in which the Jewish people return to their biblical homeland.*

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

> *At the centre of this aspiration stands Jerusalem as the capital of the kingdom and the site of the Second Temple. At the Western Wall (often misleadingly referred to in German as the "Wailing Wall"), a remnant of the Second Temple, Jews pray today. The land is marked by numerous additional biblical sites of remembrance (e.g., the Tomb of Abraham in Hebron), enabling adherents of religious Zionism to advance their redemption by settling throughout the biblical Land of Israel, founding settlements, and exercising governance.*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *We take note that two peoples lay claim to the same land. In the conflict over Israel/Palestine, it is not a matter of right versus wrong, but claim versus claim. […] The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is an expression of the competing claims of two peoples.*

Example 86.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, pp. 510–512.**

The lesson introduces the Israeli–Palestinian conflict through the lens of the 1947 UN Partition Plan as a foundational but contested attempt at conflict resolution, framing it from the outset as both historically significant and analytically debatable. Beyond providing a basic general overview of the Partition Plan and its reception, the lesson questions whether the Two-State Solution has been a utopian idea and prompts readers with the guiding question "Is partition really the right approach to resolving the conflict?" While the lesson labels the Arab rejection of the plan as "incomprehensible and hardly understandable to many observers" from today's perspective, the lesson tasks students to engage with four different perspectives on the issue, which focus on the Palestinian reasons for rejecting and on providing neutral arguments for the partition. As such, the top-left perspective stresses that "the best and most fertile land [...] is allocated to the Jewish state," portraying the plan as materially unjust and economically harmful to Arabs. The bottom-left perspective reinforces this by framing Zionism as "an unlawful appropriation" that denied "the original population its right to a nation-state." These two perspectives strongly foreground Palestinian loss and grievance. By contrast, the top-right perspective presents the plan in neutral, legalistic terms as a basis for "international legal legitimacy" for both Israel and a future Palestinian state, while the bottom-right perspective argues that the conflict "could have been avoided" had Arabs accepted the plan, implying a missed opportunity. Notably, however, none of the four perspectives explicitly articulate what the Jewish/Israeli side stood to lose or risk under the plan—such as territorial fragmentation, security vulnerabilities, or the acceptance of a non-contiguous state—nor do they present a detailed internal Jewish debate. This creates an imbalance: while Arab disadvantages and objections are concretely described, Jewish perspectives are either abstract (legal legitimacy) or counterfactual (missed peace), rather than being materially or critically examined.

The pedagogical design reinforces this by combining interpretation of visual and material evidence (map and resource distribution), engagement with contrasting texts, and evaluative tasks that require students to take positions. The referenced map of the partition plan visually underscores disparities between population and territory, complementing the textual claim that Jews constituted only a minority while receiving a majority of land (56%), thereby inviting critical reflection on fairness. At the same time, the assignments push students beyond description into judgment, asking directly: "was the rejection of the plan by the Arab side a mistake?" and to derive "criteria" for future solutions.

> *13.1.3 The UN Partition Plan of 1947: Partition = Solution?!*
>
> *On the topic:*
>
> *The two-state solution is considered desirable by many observers and political decision-makers in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. At an early stage of the conflict, the UN General Assembly adopted in 1947 such a plan, which provided for two states with a two-thirds majority. However, this plan was rejected by the Arab states and the Arab population in Palestine—something that, from today's perspective, appears incomprehensible and hardly understandable to many observers. Is partition really the right approach to resolving the conflict?*
>
> *[...]*
>
> *[Top left]*
>
> *The Jewish state comes into possession of the entire citrus-growing areas, which constitute Palestine's most important export commodity: the best and most fertile land […] is allocated to the Jewish state. Arabs, as a primarily agriculturally oriented population, lose their main means of subsistence; […] The proposed Arab state could exist only in dependence on the Jewish state and on international assistance.*

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

Hollstein, Walter: Kein Frieden um Israel. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1972, pp. 157 f.

[Top right]

Although only partially implemented, the UN resolution […] is still regarded as the central founding document of two states, that is, as the basis of international legal legitimacy both for the State of Israel and for the Palestinian claim to an independent state.

Timm, Angelika: 100 Documents from 100 Years. Partition Plans, Regulatory Options and Peace Initiatives in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict (1917–2017). Berlin: Aphorism A Verlag, 2017, p. 108.

[Bottom left]

The entire Arab world rejected the partition plan […] because it called into question the Palestinians' right to the whole land and entailed an immeasurable loss of rights, property, as well as political and social institutions. Arabs regarded Jewish claims to Palestine as an unlawful appropriation […], which denied the original population its right to a nation-state […].

Watzal, Ludwig: Friedensfeinde. Der Konflikt zwischen Israel und Palästina in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1998, pp. 23 f.

[Bottom right]

The Palestine conflict could have been avoided had the Arabs accepted the UN Partition Plan of 29 November 1947 (Resolution 181); as a result, there might "today possibly be two flourishing countries in the Middle East, enjoying good-neighbourly relations."

Neue Zürcher Zeitung: "The Palestine Conflict and the History of the UN Partition Plan of 1947." In: www.nzz.ch, 6 February 2007.

Example 87.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, p. 513.**

The lesson teaches the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as a dynamic interplay between present violence and historical causation, structured around the idea of mutual perceptions of threat. The introductory text emphasizes that key events since 1947 have shaped the conflict territorially, emotionally, and strategically, leading to a situation in which "both sides [feel] threatened by the other." This conceptual framing is operationalized through the juxtaposition of two images: "control of the Israeli military in the West Bank" and a "fighter of the armed wing of Hamas," both grouped under "Mutual threats and violence." The section presents the interpretive lens through which these images are to be read, stating that "the triggers were current events, but events from decades ago also play a central role." This directs students to understand both images not as isolated snapshots, but as outcomes of a longer historical chain of conflict, in which present actions are embedded in accumulated grievances, memories, and prior escalations. The assignments reinforce this by asking students to connect current violence and past events and to identify how mutual perception of threat is visually expressed, thereby encouraging a historically contextualized reading of contemporary scenes.

At the same time, this pedagogical structure introduces a significant limitation: by consistently framing the conflict in terms of reciprocity—culminating in the question "who threatens whom?"—the lesson risks implying a symmetry between actors that differ in important ways. The side-by-side presentation of an Israeli soldier and a Hamas fighter, without explicitly describing him as a terrorist, under a shared conceptual category of "mutual threats" can blur distinctions between a state military that operates within (even if not always in compliance with) international legal frameworks, and a non-state armed group that employs tactics widely defined as terrorism. While the intention is to foster critical thinking and perspective-taking, the lack of explicit differentiation may lead students to interpret both forms of violence as comparable expressions of threat. Thus, although the lesson effectively teaches students to analyze narratives, perceptions, and images, it also tends to flatten asymmetries in power, legal status, and modes of violence, reflecting a broader bias toward a symmetrical "two sides" model of the conflict that can obscure key structural differences.

13.1.4 Conflict Analysis – Key Events in the Middle East Conflict up to the Present: Who Threatens Whom?

[…] They have led to both sides feeling threatened by the other. There is deep mistrust. […]

M12 Mutual threats and violence in the Middle East conflict.

[Left image:] A. Control of the Israeli military in the West Bank, near the settlement of Ariel, 2019

[Right image:] B. Fighter of the armed wing of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, 2020.

[…] The triggers were current events, but events from decades ago also play a central role.

Example 88.
***Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11–13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook, p. 137.**

The text portrays Israel in a subtly complex and morally ambivalent light within the broader context of the section titled "Can We Create Peace and Justice?" which strongly emphasizes pacifism and critiques militarization. The excerpt from Daniel Josefsohn features a photograph titled "*FLEUROP*," showing a rifle in a blooming garden — a visual juxtaposition of life and death – during "A Summer in Moshav Herut;" the person wielding the rifle, who is not shown, is Josefsohn's Israeli niece, Adi. As he further notes, "Today, six years later, it still feels as if it was just recently taken, and I ask myself what a ceasefire is really worth if it benefits only one side." This comment implicitly frames Israel's military posture as potentially one-sided despite the photograph's peaceful setting.

The title "*FLEUROP*," the name of an international flower delivery service, ironically contrasts the image of a rifle in a blooming garden, symbolizing the tension between peace and militarization. It evokes both the artificiality of commercialized peace and the dissonance between European ideals of harmony and the lived realities of conflict in Israel.

Stating that "Operation Cast Lead" (2008-2009) or the events of the Arab Spring were not foreseeable when the photo was taken underscores the illusion of normalcy and peace at the moment captured — a blooming garden, a young woman finishing her service — while hinting at the unpredictable eruption of violence and geopolitical upheaval that would soon follow. It suggests that beneath the surface of everyday life in Israel, there is a constant proximity to conflict, and that what appears peaceful can quickly shift into war — reinforcing the broader theme of the fragility and elusiveness of true peace.

> *Can We Create Peace and Justice?*
> *A Summer in Moshav Herut.*
> *[…]. When I took the photo of her with her rifle in the blooming garden, neither the military operation "Cast Lead" nor the events of the Arab Spring were foreseeable for any of us. I called the picture FLEUROP. Today, six years later, it still feels as if it was just recently taken, and I ask myself what a ceasefire is really worth if it benefits only one side.*
> *— *Daniel Josefsohn (1961), Photographer*
> *[...]*
> *2. Interpret the photo by Josefsohn. Take your own photo that also addresses the contrast between killing and life.*

Example 89.
***Leben gestalten Einführungsphase* (Klett), Grade 11, *Auflage* 1, 2020, *Auer*, Catholic, p. 33.**

A lesson on the symbolism of the biblical "Deluge Narrative" focuses on the peace dove and presents a graffiti attributed to the famous modern artist Banksy, titled "Peace Dove in Bethlehem," depicted as appearing on "the wall between Israel and Palestine." The peace dove is depicted wearing a protective vest with crosshairs on its chest. This may be intended to show how peace, symbolized by the dove, is a concept under imminent danger and threat. For German readers, the wall may also evoke associations with the Berlin Wall and its negative historical connotations.

> *Banksy (attributed), Peace Dove in Bethlehem, 2007.*
> *[…] Graffiti on the wall between Israel and Palestine*

Peace Processes, Settlements, and Competing Visions for Resolution

Example 90.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, pp. 519–520.**

The lesson teaches the Oslo process primarily as a moment of historical mutual recognition and missed opportunity, emphasizing diplomacy, compromise, and the collapse of hopes for peace. The introductory text frames the early 1990s as a rare period in which the conflict was considered ripe for resolution, stressing that "both sides—the Israeli and the Palestinian—made concessions." The text reinforces this narrative visually and symbolically through the famous 1993 White House handshake between Rabin and Arafat, described as "a historic handshake between two long-standing enemies." The accompanying quotation from Rabin—"enough blood and tears have been shed"—presents the Oslo

process as an attempt to move beyond decades of violence through negotiation and recognition. The introductory tasks further encourage students to interpret Oslo not only as a diplomatic process but also as a powerful symbol, asking them to connect the hope for peace embodied in the image with today's reality and to assess the extent to which the peace process can be regarded as a failure. This approach teaches the conflict through the lens of political symbolism, leadership decisions, and the fragility of reconciliation.

The subsequent text deepens this perspective by presenting the mutual recognition letters between Arafat and Rabin as foundational documents of coexistence. The textbook places particular emphasis on the unprecedented nature of the PLO's recognition of Israel and renunciation of violence. Rabin's response is notably shorter and more restrained, limited to recognizing the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and agreeing to negotiations. The juxtaposition subtly teaches students that Oslo was built on reciprocal but asymmetrical concessions: the Palestinians formally recognized Israel and renounced terrorism, while Israel recognized the PLO as a negotiating partner. This framing is broadly historically accurate, though simplified, and it presents Oslo as a serious but ultimately unsuccessful attempt at conflict resolution grounded in compromise, diplomacy, and mutual legitimacy rather than military force.

> *[...] Both sides—the Israeli and the Palestinian—made concessions and signed several agreements, collectively referred to as the "Oslo Peace Process."*
> *[...] A historic handshake between two long standing enemies that, according to Rabin, was meant to bring an end to violence. "We fought against the Palestinians. Now we say to you, clearly and openly: enough blood and tears have been shed."*

Example 91.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, pp. 520–523.**

The text teaches the Israeli–Palestinian conflict through the framework of the rise, compromise, and collapse of the Oslo peace process, presenting the 1990s as a moment when reconciliation seemed genuinely possible but ultimately failed because of unresolved core disputes, extremist violence, and political opposition on both sides. The narrative begins optimistically: after the First Intifada and changing international conditions, Israeli and Palestinian leaders entered negotiations, leading to the principle of Land for Peace, under which both sides declared themselves willing to make concessions. The text portrays Oslo as historically transformative, emphasizing the symbolic importance of the Rabin–Arafat handshake and the Nobel Peace Prize. At the same time, students are taught that the process contained structural weaknesses from the beginning because "many important issues were left out of the negotiations," especially "the future of the Jewish settlements and the Palestinian refugees, as well as the border between the two states and the status of Jerusalem."

The chapter also presents the collapse of Oslo as driven by internal opposition and cycles of violence: Palestinian suicide bombings and the Hebron massacre by Baruch Goldstein are both presented as turning points that undermined trust. Israeli measures such as curfews, roadblocks and checkpoints, and the sealing off the Palestinian territories are contextualized as responses to attacks, while the assassination of Rabin by the ultra-right Israeli Yigal Amir is depicted as a decisive blow to the peace camp. Netanyahu is presented critically as a politician who agitated against Rabin's peace policy and later opposed an independent Palestinian state, though the text also explains his electoral success through Israeli security fears after suicide bombings. One simplification in the presentation is the somewhat dichotomous framing of opposition to Oslo: Israeli opponents are described mainly as "settlers and right-wing politicians," while Palestinian opponents are characterized as "religiously motivated movements," which underplays the extent to which both nationalist and religious motivations existed on both sides.

The following section teaches that the Oslo process created a Palestinian political structure with essential features of statehood, including elections, institutions, police forces, and diplomacy, but that this autonomy remained in many ways restricted. The division of the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C, illustrated in the accompanying map, is presented as producing a fragmented and unequal territorial reality in which Israel retained extensive control over security, infrastructure, borders, and most of the land (59 percent of the West Bank). The text is broadly historically accurate, though simplified, and tends to frame the post-Oslo territorial system primarily through its limitations on Palestinian development and continuity.

M17 The Course and Failure of the Oslo Peace Process

[...]

However, the Oslo Agreement had a catch: many important issues were left out of the negotiations by both partners. So-called final-status talks were only planned for several years later. [...] They concerned the future of the Jewish settlements and the Palestinian refugees, as well as the border between the two states and the status of Jerusalem.

There were opponents of the peace negotiations both in Israel and in the Palestinian territories. On the Israeli side, settlers and right-wing politicians protested. They could not imagine granting the Palestinians their own state. On the Palestinian side, it was often religiously motivated movements that were unwilling to recognize an Israeli state.

[...]

Example 92.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, pp. 524–525.**

The lesson teaches the Oslo process through a deliberately dual-perspective and dialogue-oriented framework, presenting both Palestinian and Israeli interpretations of why the peace process failed and what lessons should be learned for future negotiations. The Palestinian interview with Suleiman Abu Dayyeh portrays Oslo primarily as a process that enabled Israel "under the guise of an illusory peace process" to deepen "its settlement policy as well as its continued seizure and expropriation of land," while maintaining "full control over the territories occupied in 1967 as a de facto occupying power." In this framing, Oslo failed because it lacked clear guarantees for Palestinian statehood, enforcement mechanisms, and international oversight. The Israeli interview with Nimrod Goren presents a markedly different interpretation, arguing that "the accords constituted a positive development, even in historical retrospect," whose "core achievement was the mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO." Together, the texts teach students that the same process can be remembered either as a mechanism of continued occupation or as a historic diplomatic breakthrough that transformed regional relations and enabled normalization.

At the same time, the framing contains some notable asymmetries and idealized assumptions. Nationalist motivations are discussed far more explicitly on the Palestinian side, through references to "national rights," "historical homeland," and "self-determination," whereas the Israeli side is framed more through diplomacy, normalization, and security concerns. Religious motivations are almost entirely absent in both interviews, even though religion played an important role among major opponents of Oslo on both sides, particularly among Israeli religious-nationalist settlers and Islamist Palestinian movements. References to violence are also somewhat uneven: the Israeli interview explicitly mentions "terrorism" and extremists undermining the process, while the Palestinian interview focuses more on structural domination, settlements, and occupation without discussing Palestinian violence in comparable detail. Both interviews share a somewhat idealistic tone, emphasizing dialogue, moderation, civil society, "mutual respect," and peace-oriented leadership as solutions.

An Interview with Suleiman Abu Dayyeh

What do Palestinian society and political decision-makers think today about the Oslo process?

The majority of Palestinian society regards the Oslo process as a failure. This majority believes that the ambiguity of the Oslo agreements enabled the Israeli side—under the guise of an illusory peace process—to obtain the justification, the means, and above all the time to massively intensify its settlement policy as well as its continued seizure and expropriation of land. Most Palestinians believe that, following Oslo, Israel severely restricted their living space and freedom of movement and has continued to maintain full control over the territories occupied in 1967 as a de facto occupying power.

For this reason, Palestinians believe that the Oslo process will not lead them to the desired freedom, independence, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Political decision-makers are largely powerless and, for reasons of self-preservation and the maintenance of their power positions and privileges, are unable to abandon Oslo. Doing so would call into question the existence of the Palestinian Authority and their own positions. The majority of political parties and factions within the PLO, as well as the opposition movements Hamas and Islamic Jihad, also reject Oslo.

What lessons can be drawn from the Oslo process for future negotiations?

First and foremost, the final objective of the process must be clearly and unambiguously defined from the outset, namely that the negotiation process will culminate in the establishment of a Palestinian state. The complete withdrawal of the Israeli occupation army to the future agreed borders between the two states must be clearly articulated. A realistic timeframe for the implementation of the agreement must be explicitly determined and should not exceed five years. A monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with the agreements—combined with a graduated catalogue of measures in the event of violations—must be developed.

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

The circle of mediating states and organizations should be expanded to include Arab states, the EU, the UN, Russia, and China, alongside the establishment of clear guarantees to ensure that all parties fulfill their obligations.

How can opponents of a negotiated solution and their acts of violence be dealt with?

A successful approach to dealing with opponents can only be achieved by promoting and strengthening moderate forces on both sides that are willing to engage in dialogue and pursue peace. A culture of dialogue must be fostered at all levels, based on equality and mutual respect. Upholding the principle of justice and recognizing the national rights of Palestinians in their historical homeland—as well as their guaranteed right to independence, freedom, and self-determination—would undermine the arguments of the opponents and socially isolate them.

Suleiman Abu Dayyeh served for many years as head of the Jerusalem office of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

B Interview with Nimrod Goren

What do Israeli society and political decision-makers think today about the Oslo process?

The Oslo Accords themselves are often mistakenly described in Israel as a failed peace agreement. In fact, the accords constituted a positive development, even in historical retrospect. Their core achievement was the mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO—a historic step that made the beginning of a peace process possible and changed realities for the better.

The Israeli–Palestinian bilateral negotiations of the 1990s ultimately failed, and this is how they are perceived by the Israeli public today. However, the regional and international effects of the Oslo process are often overlooked in Israel, despite their considerable positive significance. The breakthrough with the PLO enabled Israel to sign a peace treaty with Jordan, establish official relations with a number of Muslim and Arab countries, and significantly improve its international standing. The seeds of Israeli–Arab normalization were sown during the Oslo process.

What lessons can be drawn from the Oslo process for future negotiations?

The Oslo process demonstrated that deeply entrenched rivals such as Israel and the PLO—who had fought one another for decades and denied each other any form of legitimacy—can ultimately reach mutual diplomatic recognition. This offers hope for other conflicts, as it shows that political realities are dynamic and can change.

The process also underscored the importance of non-governmental organizations in conflict resolution efforts, particularly those that, during the 1990s and beyond, worked to build connections between Israeli and Palestinian societies. It further became clear how significant a role regional and international actors can play in advancing bilateral negotiations.

The idea of postponing discussion of core issues until the final phase of negotiations proved to be misguided, as it gave extremists time to undermine the process through terrorism and the creation of facts on the ground. In addition, the prospects of a leadership change—one that could bring to power a leader opposed to the process, as occurred in Israel in 1996—were not adequately anticipated.

How can opponents of a negotiated solution and their acts of violence be addressed?

Dealing with opponents will remain a major challenge in any future Israeli–Palestinian peace process. It requires courageous, peace-oriented leadership capable of communicating effective messages and mobilizing public support. Making a future peace process as inclusive as possible could also help to reduce resistance, as could investing already now in civil society organizations that work to strengthen public support for peace and to foster positive interactions between large numbers of Israelis and Palestinians.

Nimrod Goren is President and Founder of Mitvim – The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies and a Teaching Fellow in Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Example 93.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, pp. 526–530.**

This segment largely demonstrates a single-framework, Israel-centered approach to the settlement issue, even though it occasionally introduces nuance and internal differentiation among Israelis. The chapter is structured almost entirely around Israeli settlement policy—its motivations, legality, consequences, and political influence—while Palestinian agency appears mainly in reaction to these policies. The opening framing already defines the issue primarily through Israeli actions, and the central question becomes whether settlements make "a Palestinian state impossible," inviting students to consider whether the construction of new settlements in the West Bank endangers the two-state solution.

The lesson presents general information about the settlements and the reality they create for Palestinians. The analysis focuses on Israeli governments, Israeli settlers, Israeli infrastructure, Israeli security measures, Israeli domestic politics, and Israeli legal or territorial practices, stating that "settlement policy violates international law." The chapter further emphasizes the negative effects of settlements on Palestinians through discussions of settler roads "fragmenting the West Bank and forcing them to take longer detours," the application of different legal systems to settlers and Palestinians, and the political influence of settlers despite their relatively small share of the Israeli population. Palestinian

perspectives are presented mostly as the consequences of Israeli actions, such as fragmentation, restrictions on freedom of movement, and loss of land and water. Even the discussion of compromise centers on whether Israel would relinquish settlements and how much influence settlers exert over Israeli policy. This is reinforced in the tasks section, where the settlements are seen as nothing other than an obstacle to resolving the conflict; in one question, students are tasked with representing the position of either the Israeli Prime Minister or the Palestinian President, based on the given options, which include Land swap, annexation, abandonment of the settlements, settlers remaining as residents of Palestine, or developing their own proposal. Even from an Israeli perspective, maintaining the settlements in their current state or, moreover, expanding them is not considered a viable option unless they are officially annexed to Israel.

At the same time, the text is not entirely monolithic. It does include internal Israeli diversity, distinguishing between economic settlers, national-religious settlers, and Haredim, thereby avoiding the simplistic notion that all settlers are ideologically motivated. It also presents two contrasting news reports—one critical and one more defensive—which introduces limited pluralism regarding settlement expansion. However, the broader narrative still remains overwhelmingly one-directional: there is little discussion of Palestinian political strategies regarding settlements, Palestinian rejection of certain territorial compromises, Palestinian violence connected to settlement areas, or Israeli security rationales beyond brief mentions of "protecting Israel proper" and guaranteeing settler security. The legal framing is also presented almost exclusively from the international-law critique ("settlement policy violates international law"), while the heading "Israeli legal position regarding the settlements" is not actually substantially elaborated. As a result, students are primarily taught to understand the settlement issue as a problem generated by Israeli policy rather than as a multidimensional dispute involving competing historical, legal, ideological, and security claims.

> *13.1.6 The Settlement Question: Do the Settlements Make a Palestinian State Impossible?*
> *[...]*
> *To what extent is a (two-state) solution to the conflict endangered by settlement construction?*
> *[...]*
> *Israeli legal position regarding the settlements in the West Bank*
> *[...]*
> *However, settlement policy violates international law. [...]*
> *M23 Differentiation: Settlements and Settlers*
> *[...]*
> *Settlers motivated by economic reasons*
> *Many settlers live in settlements for economic reasons, as housing there is more affordable than in Israel (also due to government tax incentives), land plots are larger, and infrastructure is exceptionally well developed. They do not base their presence on ideological or religious claims to the land; often, they may even lack awareness that they are living not in Israel proper, but in territories considered occupied under international law. Strategically, the settlements around Jerusalem primarily serve to separate Arab cities such as Ramallah and Bethlehem from Jerusalem, in order to reinforce the claim to all of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel through the creation of irreversible "facts on the ground." Har Homa is a settlement in East Jerusalem with approximately 40,000 inhabitants. The majority of residents live there for non-religious, primarily economic reasons.*
> *[...]*
> *D [...]*
> *The special settler roads in the West Bank are intended to provide residents of the settlements with rapid and secure access to Israel proper and to the metropolitan areas of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. While they reduce the risk of attacks for settlers, they function as barriers for Palestinians, fragmenting the West Bank and forcing them to take longer detours. In addition, these roads further highlight the differing legal statuses: Israeli civil law applies to settlers, whereas Palestinians are subject to Israeli military law.*

Example 94.
***Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11–13, *Auflage* 2, *Druck 2023*, pp. 531–533.**

In a lesson on the "Possibilities and Obstacles for a Solution" for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the conflict is presented primarily as a debate over competing future political arrangements, emphasizing both the growing difficulties of implementing a two-state solution and the lack of a clearly viable alternative. Students are introduced to four possible outcomes: two states, one state, a confederation ("Two States, One Homeland,") and the continuation of the status quo.

The two-state solution is presented as the traditional international consensus, but as one increasingly threatened by realities on the ground, particularly because "the expansion of Israeli settlements and the territorial separation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip" raise doubts about whether "a contiguous and economically viable Palestinian state may no longer be feasible." The one-state model is discussed largely through demographic and political concerns, especially Israeli fears that the resulting state would be "either no longer Jewish or no longer democratic," while the confederal model is described positively as the option that most closely reflects the actual interconnectedness of the two peoples and their inhabited and claimed territories. At the same time, the text suggests that the most realistic short-term outcome is not a negotiated solution but rather the continuation of the status quo, characterized by "the continuation of the occupation, and the further expansion of settlements."

The accompanying perspectives reinforce the idea that the future of the two-state solution is uncertain: one position argues that continued international adherence to it "is no longer justifiable," while the other maintains that it remains possible if sufficient political will exists. The tasks encourage students to evaluate all options through categories such as security, sovereignty, identity, borders, and resources, and ultimately to formulate their own solution, making the chapter less about learning a single preferred answer and more about understanding why conflict resolution remains so difficult. At the same time, the discussion places considerable emphasis on settlements as the principal obstacle to a two-state solution, while devoting comparatively less attention to other barriers such as Palestinian political fragmentation, regional dynamics, security concerns, or ideological opposition on both sides.



13.1.7 Possibilities and Obstacles for a Solution:
One State – Two States – Status Quo?
On the topic:
Since the Peel Commission of 1937 and the UN Partition Resolution of 1947 […], the two-state solution has generally been considered the preferred way to regulate the conflict in a lasting and sustainable way. This is also the position of the international community and of German foreign policy. However, many observers now consider the two-state solution as no longer feasible. [...] Moreover: is a resolution of the conflict foreseeable at all?
A
The two-state solution is regarded within the international community as the option most likely to ensure a viable and lasting peace, provided it is achieved through negotiations between the parties to the conflict. A two-state solution entails the creation and recognition of a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel. In the past, Israeli (centre-left) parties often viewed this option sceptically or rejected it, frequently citing security concerns and the perceived absence of a reliable Palestinian negotiating partner. In any negotiations, both sides would need to agree on which sovereign rights the Palestinian state should possess, where its borders would run, and how the question of Jerusalem should be resolved—particularly whether it could serve as the capital of both states or only one.
Due to the expansion of Israeli settlements and the territorial separation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, there are concerns that a contiguous and economically viable Palestinian state may no longer be feasible. For this reason, land swaps have been discussed in the past as a possible means of implementing the two-state solution. Politically right-wing forces in Israel fundamentally reject the establishment of a Palestinian state, as they seek to retain the West Bank as part of Israel.
B
Another option under discussion is the one-state solution in the form of a binational state. According to this idea, Israelis and Palestinians would live within a shared territory as citizens of a common state, enjoying equal individual and collective civil rights. Because demographic developments would likely result in the emerging state being either no longer Jewish or no longer democratic, this option is rejected by the majority of Israelis. The political right in Israel, therefore, often advocates the partial annexation of large parts of the West Bank—excluding the major Palestinian cities—in order to preserve a Jewish majority. One variant of the binational state is the federal model, in which the territory would, for example, be divided into 30 cantons, 20 of them with a Jewish majority. Under this arrangement, Israeli law could apply throughout the West Bank, Palestinians would receive full civil rights, and Jewish/Israeli dominance would nonetheless be maintained. Security control would remain with Israel. However, since this would entail the dissolution of the Palestinian Authority and the abandonment of the idea of an independent Palestinian state, this option receives little support, given the deep-rooted nature of the nation-state idea in Palestinian identity.
[...]

(See the continuation of the example on the following page)

D

However, the most likely scenario for the near future is considered to be the continuation of the so-called status quo—that is, maintaining the current situation with Territorial Areas A, B, and C, the continuation of the occupation, and the further expansion of settlements. At present, there is little willingness on either side to engage in negotiations, and pressure from the international community is also limited. For both governments, a negotiated solution would have entailed excessively high political costs because it would have required permanent acceptance of the negotiated outcome and thus abandoning maximalist demands within their own societies. Opponents of a negotiated settlement would have to be continuously monitored. This applies both to Fatah in relation to Hamas's demands and, for example, to the considerable influence of national-religious settlers in Israel, who are regularly needed for governing coalitions. Extremist and violent actors on both sides therefore impede all prospects for a solution.

M27 Two Positions: What Is the Future of the Two-State Solution?

A

Since both Israeli and Palestinian civil society continue to search for alternative paths, the international community's continued adherence to the two-state solution is no longer justifiable.

[...]

B

Is the Two-State Solution Dead?

[...]

Conclusion

The findings of this review point to a mostly constructive approach to teaching Jews, Judaism, and Jewish history in the secondary-school textbooks examined in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). Across History and Religious Education, Jewish subjects are not confined to persecution or the Holocaust: Judaism is presented as a living religious tradition, Jewish communities are situated within contemporary German society, and students encounter Jewish beliefs, practices, cultural contributions, historical experiences, and debates within Jewish thought. The textbooks are particularly effective where they combine historical contextualization with direct engagement with sources and asks students to examine how interpretations develop and change. Primary sources, Jewish-authored texts, visual materials, historical documents, testimony, and competing scholarly interpretations are repeatedly incorporated into assignments that require comparison, source criticism, perspective-taking, and independent argumentation. These features are important not simply for acquiring information about Jews and Judaism, but for developing the historical and media literacy needed to recognize stereotypes, question inherited narratives, and distinguish evidence from interpretation.

This approach broadly corresponds with education standards of RESPECT and the INDIVIDUAL OTHER, which emphasize understanding the culture, beliefs, values, and ways of life of other groups and presenting the 'Other' as individuals rather than only as members of collective categories. The reviewed textbooks contribute to these objectives by presenting Judaism in religious, intellectual, cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and by incorporating Jewish thinkers and authors into discussions of religion and ethics. Students encounter Jews not only as historical victims but as religious practitioners, theologians, writers, artists, members of contemporary German communities, and participants in debates about faith and society. This is particularly important in the German context, where education about Jews centers overwhelmingly on the Holocaust could otherwise leave students with an image of Jewish existence defined primarily by persecution and victimhood. The textbooks' attention to contemporary Jewish life and Jewish intellectual and religious agency provides a broader basis for understanding Jews and Judaism.

The inclusion of content in religious education and history textbooks adds considerable value to this treatment. The Catholic and Protestant religious textbooks provide perspectives that history textbooks alone could not easily offer: they examine Judaism as a religious tradition, introduce Jewish theological reasoning, and critically confront elements of the Christian theological heritage that contributed to antisemitism. Particularly significant is their contextualization of the development of Christian attitudes toward Jews through scripture, theology, religious literature, and liturgy, followed by modern Christian statements such as Nostra Aetate, which explicitly rejects supersessionism and antisemitism. The textbooks similarly reject collective Jewish responsibility for Jesus's death by placing Jesus and his followers within their first-century Jewish context, distinguishing disputes with particular Jewish authorities from the responsibility of the Jewish people, and recognizing crucifixion as a Roman execution. These lessons therefore encourage students studying Christianity to examine critically how their own religious tradition has historically represented the religious Other.

In several respects, the textbooks' treatment of Jews and Judaism within Christian history can serve as an exemplar of how sensitive historical and theological subjects may be addressed. The textbooks present Judaism as an independent, continuing, and internally diverse tradition, incorporating Jewish voices and perspectives into discussions of religious practice, contemporary ethical questions, theology, and cultural expression. Within Christian-Jewish relations, they establish Jesus' Jewish identity while critically examining the development of Christian antisemitism, rejecting collective guilt for the crucifixion, and presenting subsequent Christian efforts to reassess supersessionist traditions. Importantly, reconciliation is not portrayed as complete or uncomplicated: Jewish responses to Christian language and theology, including the controversy surrounding the Good Friday prayer, demonstrate that historical memory continues to shape contemporary relations. This approach is particularly relevant to the standards of RESPECT and the INDIVIDUAL OTHER, as students encounter Judaism not merely as a historical predecessor to Christianity or Jews primarily as victims of persecution, but as a living tradition presented through diverse Jewish beliefs, practices, voices, and experiences. At the same time, some comparative and contested topics would benefit from greater contextualization to ensure that particular Jewish perspectives are not presented as representative of Judaism as a whole.

The treatment of Jews in other areas of medieval history is more limited. Coverage of the Crusades correctly addresses the persecution, massacres, forced baptisms, and plunder of Jewish communities and productively incorporates a contemporary Jewish chronicle, but it remains relatively brief, does not fully convey the broader scope of antisemitic violence associated with the First Crusade, and includes some historical imprecision. Furthermore, the textbooks place greater emphasis on the persecution of Jews than on Jewish life and practice, focusing more on how Jews suffered and died than on how they lived. Similarly, the discussion of Jews under Islamic rule (mainly in the Iberian Peninsula) provides useful information on Jewish intellectual and communal life and avoids presenting an uncomplicated narrative of harmonious *Convivencia*. Students encounter both periods of coexistence and cultural interaction, as well as the unequal legal and social position of Jews and Christians as *dhimmīs* and are asked to assess competing interpretations of al-Andalus. Although both subjects would benefit from greater breadth and historical detail, their treatment is mostly constructive: Jewish experiences are contextualized, simplified historical narratives are questioned, and students are encouraged to assess evidence rather than simply reproduce a predetermined interpretation.

The textbooks' treatment of the Holocaust stands out and can, in several respects, serve as an exemplar for Holocaust education. Historical materials trace the development of antisemitism from earlier Christian antisemitic traditions through modern racial theories, nationalism, Social Darwinism, and conspiracy thinking, before examining its translation into Nazi propaganda, discriminatory legislation, racial laws, exclusion, and escalating persecution. The Holocaust is not presented simply as an inevitable consequence of Hitler's antisemitism: students examine the bureaucratic, institutional, military, and individual participation required to implement mass murder and encounter evidence produced by victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Jewish agency is maintained through attention to resistance in its many forms, including hiding, rescue, underground activity, participation in Allied armies and partisan movements, and uprisings in ghettos and extermination camps.

The treatment continues beyond the genocide itself. Germany's postwar reckoning is presented as an evolving and contested process involving the Nuremberg and Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, debates over responsibility and statutes of limitations, and the development of memorials and remembrance culture. Religious Education adds another dimension by asking what Auschwitz means for religious belief itself. Jewish responses associated with figures Elie Wiesel and Hans Jonas, and the Jewish concepts of *tsimtsum* and the *Shekhinah*, introduce students to Holocaust theology and theodicy and connect questions about divine goodness and omnipotence with human freedom and moral responsibility. Taken together, the historical and religious materials demonstrate the particular value of teaching the Holocaust through complementary disciplinary perspectives: History explains the ideology, institutions, actors, chronology, and consequences of genocide, while Religious Education explores its implications for theology, Jewish-Christian relations, ethics, and human responsibility.

These approaches also largely correspond with IMPACT-se's standard of UNBIASED INFORMATION, which calls for educational materials to provide accurate, balanced, and contextualized information and to encourage understanding of different perspectives. The NRW textbooks frequently put this principle into practice through primary-source analysis and multi-perspectivity. Importantly, multi-perspectivity works best in these textbooks when it functions as a method of inquiry rather than an assumption that every historical controversy consists of two equivalent positions. The contrasting interpretations of Jewish life under Islamic rule, examination of different forms of resistance, and debates surrounding Germany's postwar remembrance demonstrate how students can encounter competing perspectives while still assessing them against historical evidence and context.

There nevertheless remain areas for improvement. Some medieval coverage is brief or historically imprecise, and comparative Religious Education occasionally places different phenomena within a common framework. This is particularly apparent in the juxtaposition of Jewish circumcision, Christian infant baptism, and a purported Islamic right of a husband to punish his wife as examples of controversial religious practices. Comparison can promote understanding when the relevant historical, theological, or ethical differences are made clear, but poorly constructed comparisons can instead generate false equivalences and misconceptions about the traditions being studied. Such shortcomings are relatively localized within the broader treatment of Judaism, medieval Jewish history, and the Holocaust.

The more significant challenge concerns Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The history and political education materials provide students with considerable relevant knowledge: Jewish historical connections to the land are recognized, Zionism is contextualized partly through European antisemitism and nationalism, and Palestinian and Arab nationalism, partition, the wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973, Palestinian displacement, the Intifadas, Oslo, settlements, and

competing proposals for resolving the conflict are addressed. Students are also encouraged to analyze media framing, distinguish facts from political narratives, and reconstruct competing Israeli and Palestinian perspectives. Israel, Zionism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict feature less prominently in the Catholic and Protestant religion textbooks, which focus more extensively on Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations.

The conflict material also demonstrates the limitations of multi-perspectivity when symmetry substitutes for differentiation. Presenting competing Israeli and Palestinian narratives is educationally valuable, but competing narratives do not necessarily represent equivalent actors, actions, motivations, or historical circumstances. A lesson that places an Israeli soldier and an armed Hamas fighter together as manifestations of "mutual threats," without explicitly identifying Hamas as a terrorist organization, risks obscuring differences between a state military and a non-state armed group that deliberately targets civilians. Similarly, religious claims are at times represented primarily through Hamas on the Palestinian side and national-religious settlers on the Jewish side, creating a parallel between actors of fundamentally different kinds while also narrowing the broader range of religious and historical attachments found within both populations. From the perspective of UNBIASED INFORMATION, balance should therefore mean applying consistent evidentiary and analytical standards rather than constructing formal equivalence between unlike phenomena. Unevenness also appears in the amount and type of context provided to competing positions. Arab objections to the 1947 UN Partition Plan are explained through concrete demographic, territorial, and political considerations, while Jewish concerns about security, territorial fragmentation, and accepting a non-contiguous state receive less development. Settlements are examined extensively in terms of their effects on Palestinian territorial continuity, but Israeli legal arguments and security considerations receive less attention. Oslo is presented from both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, yet opposition is simplified into predominantly right-wing and settler opposition on the Israeli side and religious opposition on the Palestinian side, underplaying the interaction of nationalism and religion within both societies.

The discussion of possible solutions demonstrates both the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. Students compare two-state, one-state, confederal, and status quo models according to questions of sovereignty, security, identity, borders, demographics, and resources, requiring them to evaluate alternatives rather than reproduce a predetermined answer. Yet the materials imply that the two-state solution may no longer be viable, largely through their emphasis on settlement expansion and Palestinian territorial fragmentation, while giving less sustained consideration to Palestinian political division, rejectionist movements, terrorism, regional factors, and Israeli security concerns as obstacles to reaching and implementing such an agreement. A fuller treatment of these factors would not require the textbooks to endorse any particular solution; rather, it would allow students to evaluate the prospects using a more complete range of relevant considerations.

The policy implication is therefore not that NRW should retreat from multi-perspectivity, but that it should apply it more rigorously and consistently. The textbooks themselves demonstrate elsewhere what effective multi-perspectivity can achieve: students can encounter competing narratives while still distinguishing evidence from interpretation, recognizing historical context, and evaluating claims according to common standards. The same principle should guide future revisions of Israel-related material. Clearer terminology regarding terrorism and political violence, greater differentiation between different types of actors, fuller presentation of Israeli as well as Palestinian security and political concerns, and more even treatment of the factors that have obstructed peace would strengthen rather than weaken the textbooks' commitment to critical thinking.

List of Textbooks

1. *Am Anfang war das Wort* (Cornelsen), Religion *gymnasiale Oberstufe*, Grades 11-13 (*Oberstufe*), 2017, *Auflage* 1, *Druck* 1 / Patmos, Catholic.
2. *Buchners Geschichte Oberstufe, Ausgabe Nordrhein-Westfalen, Qualifikationsphase*, C.C. Buchner, *Auflage* 1 Druck 2015.
3. *Geschichte und Geschehen* (Klett), *Oberstufe, Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Stuttgart, 2024.
4. *Kursbuch Religion* (Westermann), Grades 11-13 (*Sekundarstufe* II), 2021, *Druck* A4, 2024/ Calwer, Protestant school textbook.
5. *Leben gestalten Qualifikationsphase* (Klett), *Katholischer Religionsunterricht*, Grades 12-13 (*Qualifikationsphase Oberstufe*), 2022, *Auflage* 1/ *Auer*, Catholic.
6. *Leben gestalten Einführungsphase* (Klett), Grade 11, *Auflage* 1, 2020, *Auer*, Catholic.
7. *Moment mal! Evangelische Religion* (Klett), Grades 11-13 (*Einführungs- und Qualifikationsphase*), 2016, *Auflage* 1, Protestant school textbook.
8. *Politik & Co. Sek. II* (Buchner) – Rheinland-Pfalz, Grades 11-13, *Auflage*, 2. Druck 2023.
9. *Religionsbuch* (Cornelsen), Grades 11-13 (*Oberstufe*), 2021, *Auflage* 1, *Druck* 4, Protestant.
10. *Sensus Religion, Vom Glaubenssinn und Sinn des Glaubens – Unterrichtswerk für die Oberstufe* (Cornelsen), Grades 11-13 (*Oberstufe*) 2021, *Auflage* 1, *Druck* 6 / Kösel, Catholic.
11. *Vernünftig glauben, Arbeitsbuch für den katholischen Religionsunterricht* (Westermann), *Oberstufe*, Grades 11-13, 2020, *Druck* A5, 2025, Catholic.
12. *Zeiten und Menschen* (Geschichte) (Westermann), *Oberstufe Einführungsphase Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Schöningh Westermann, 2018.



The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education

W www.impact-se.org | **E** info@impact-se.org

IMPACT-se Library
Seymour Fox School of Education
Mt. Scopus Campus Hebrew University of Jerusalem

ISRAEL
T+972-3-793-3880
A Amot Atrium Tower
2 Jabotinsky Street, 18th Floor,
Ramat Gan 5250501, Israel

UK
T +44-2038-078323
A C/O FKGB, 2nd Floor
201 Haverstock Hill
London NW3 4QG, UK

MONITOR IMPACT
T +971-2207-6776
A Al Bateen Tower C6
Bainunah, ADIB Building,
Street 34, Abu Dhabi, UAE