

Theodor Herzl *Prologue* Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question: Why did it take Herzl time to develop his thinking about the Jewish question?

Materials:

- Herzl Prologue PowerPoint
- *Herzl Part 1: Prologue* Video
- Copies of *Documents A, B, C, D, E and F.*

Plan of Instruction:

The PowerPoint, video and supporting documents reinforce lesson content through purposeful repetition and the gradual addition of new material.

1. Pass out Documents A-F.
2. Mini-lecture with PowerPoint:
 - Slide: Herzl's Early Life. *Herzl was born in 1860 in the city of Pest, today part of Budapest, the capital of Hungary. He had a reform Jewish upbringing and went to a large Moorish style temple that was right next to his home. However, Judaism was not the most important influence on him, and Herzl relates one negative incident in particular about attending a Jewish school as a child (Document B). Herzl's biographer surmises that experiences like this might have caused Herzl to lose interest in things Jewish. Far more important in Herzl's formative years is German culture, which his mother teaches him. German culture is much admired throughout Europe at that time.*
 - Slide: Vienna. *In 1878, a blow descends on Herzl's family. His only sibling, his sister, Pauline, dies from Typhoid Fever. The family, which can't stand the familiar surroundings without her, moves to Vienna. In Vienna, Herzl decides to pursue a writing career. But his parents worry that it's not a stable enough profession and convince him to go to the University of Vienna to study law.*
 - Slide: Introduction to Anti-Semitism. *At university, Herzl joins a fraternity called Albia. He also is a voracious reader. He comes across Prof. Eugen Duhring's 1881 book 'The Jewish Problem as a Problem of Race, Morals and Culture.' It's an anti-Semitic book which defines the Jewish question as a racial question. Duhring sees no worth in the Jewish race at all and argues that all Jewish influence in public affairs should be restricted. Duhring's ideas foreshadow the Nazis. Herzl is shaken by the book and enraged. He writes: "Duhring's teeth should be smashed in." Herzl also*

- writes, “An infamous book... If Duhring, who unites so much undeniable intelligence with so much universality of knowledge, can write like this, what are we to expect from the ignorant masses?” Herzl notices that anti-Semitism is starting to infiltrate into his fraternity. He bravely calls it out when he sees it. But when his fraternity supports a demonstration celebrating Richard Wagner, the notoriously anti-Semitic composer, he quits.
- Slide: A Rising Writer: After graduating University, Herzl enters law practice in 1884. But his legal profession soon takes a back seat to his writing. Enjoying some success, he decides to quit law in 1885 to devote himself fully to a literary career. He tries his hands at plays and articles and his journalistic ability is soon recognized. In 1888, he scores his first dramatic success with a comedic play that is produced in Prague. In 1891, the *Neue Freie Presse*, the most distinguished newspaper in Austro-Hungary, asks him to become their Paris correspondent. During this period Jewish concerns have receded from his mind.
 - Slide: Renewed Interest. Starting in July 1892, Jewish issues start appearing more frequently in his articles and reports from Paris. His renewed interest is related in part to a libel trial involving French anti-Semite and editor of *La Libre Parole* Edouard Drumont, and the killing of a French-Jewish captain in a duel in June 1892 by an anti-Semite, the Marquis de Mores. The incident made news outside of France. Herzl’s interest reawakened, he reads more about anti-Semitism and tries to understand the hostility directed toward the Jews. He starts to think about a solution to the problem of anti-Semitism.
 - Slide: Mass Conversion: In 1893, Herzl comes up with a most surprising conclusion to solve the Jewish question: Conversion to Christianity. (In fact, he decides on this for the Jews of Austria. For the Jews of Germany he recommends Socialism.) But in Austria he imagines a scene where Jewish children will become Christian while the older Jews – the intermediaries as he calls them – will remain faithful to their religion. When he goes to enlist the help of his editor at the *Neue Freie Presse*, Moritz Benedickt, his editor’s reaction makes an impression on him: “Throughout one hundred generations your people has sustained itself as Jews. And you want to become the limit of that process? That is something which you cannot and may not do.” Herzl realizes soon enough his idea is impractical and abandons it. But he continues striving for a solution.
 - Slide: “The New Ghetto”: Herzl gets an idea for a play which he writes between October and November 1894. He titles it “The New Ghetto.” It’s his first play dealing exclusively with the Jewish question. The main character, who resembles Herzl in background and character, starts out as

an assimilated Jew and transforms by the end of the play into a man who fights and dies in a duel for Jewish honor. The play is considered the best of his dramatic works and is important in the way it reflects Herzl's own development. As Herzl's biographer says, "With this play – by far the best of his dramatic creations – Herzl completed his inner return to his people. Until then, with all his emotional involvement in the question, he had stood outside it as the observer. ... Now he was immersed in it and identified with it." The Jewish problem is now at the forefront of Herzl's interests. Though he hasn't yet hit on a solution.

- Slide: A Trial: Herzl is not yet a Zionist but the trial of a French-Jewish captain for treason will soon make him one.

3. Play video: Herzl Part 1: Prologue

Introduce inquiry question: Why did it take Herzl time to develop his thinking about the Jewish question?

4. Whole class discussion:

- How would you describe Herzl's character?
- Anti-Semitism had only touched Herzl tangentially. He was a famous writer, a successful man. Why do you think anti-Semitism and the Jewish Question obsessed him the way it did?
- How do you explain Herzl's willingness to entertain the idea, however briefly, of a mass conversion of Jews to Christianity?
- Herzl himself went through a kind of conversion. Can you describe what that conversion was?

5. Hand out Review Questions (may be used as end of class Quiz).

Document A: “Theodor Herzl”, Alex Bein (1934)

Almost next door to his father’s house rose the liberal-reform temple, a red-brick building in Moorish style, its two towers, almost one hundred and fifty feet in height, lifted with a strange, foreign effect above their surroundings. To this house of worship the little boy went regularly with his father on Sabbath and Holy Days. At home, too, the essentials of the ritual were observed, with particular emphasis on the celebration of two festivals, Hanukkah and Passover, the feast of lights and the feast of the Exodus. One touching ceremony which Theodore learned in childhood remained with him in his adult years; before every important event and decision he sought the blessing of his parents.

Even stronger than these impressions, however, was the influence of his mother. Her education had been German through and through; there was not a day on which she did not dip into German literature, especially the classics. The Jewish world, not alien to her, did not find expression through her; her conscious efforts were all directed toward implanting the German cultural heritage in her children.

Source: “Theodor Herzl”, Alex Bein, Translated from the German by Maurice Samuel, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1941 (First Published 1934), p. 10.

Document B: “Theodor Herzl”, Alex Bein (1934)

Even more significant was a recollection of another kind, which the grown man retained forever out of his childhood.

The early memory has reached us in two versions one is contained in Herzl’s brief autobiographical sketch, written in 1898; the other is recorded by the Hebrew writer Reuben Brainin, as received orally from Herzl himself. When the two versions are fused, we obtain the following:

The story of the Exodus, as he read it in the Bible, had made upon the boy a profound, almost shattering impression. But when the teacher recited the thrilling epic of the liberation from Egypt, his words were cold and dry, his features betrayed not a spark of emotion; it was as if the whole incident were of the most common place character. Thereupon Theodore concluded that it was nothing but a fairy tale, made up for the sole purpose of torturing little boys. The first profound impression was replaced by dislike, the teacher examined Theodore on the details of the Exodus from Egypt, the boy was unable to answer and received, in keeping with the pedagogic technique of the time and place, the prescribed thrashing. Thirty years later, when Herzl was writing his autobiography, the memory of the thrashing was still strong in him. “Today,” he added with bitter irony, “there are scores of teachers who would like to thrash me because I remember the Exodus from Egypt only too well.”

The incident itself, and, still more, the attitude it reveals in the teachers, must have done a great deal to discourage the boy’s interest in things Jewish.

Source: “Theodor Herzl: A Biography”, Alex Bein, Translated from the German by Maurice Samuel, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1941 (First Published 1934), p. 11.

Document C: “Theodor Herzl”, Alex Bein (1934)

In that same crowded year of 1882 there was founded *Der Verein deutscher Studenten in Wien* – a Pan-Germanic anti-Semitic organization. On March 5, 1883, this body arranged a great memorial demonstration in the Sophien Hall in honor of Richard Wagner, recently deceased. The climax of the program was an address by a member of the *Albia*, Herrmann Bahr, in which the speaker spoke approvingly of what he called “Wagnerian anti-Semitism,” and declared himself a convert to the Pan-Germanic anti-Semitic movement. The address was received with a wild outburst of enthusiasm. Thereupon the police intervened and dissolved the society. Bahr was rebuked by the University Senate – and idolized by the *Albia*. Thus the Fraternity had taken a definite turn in a direction which made participation impossible for a self-respecting Jew.

Herzl had not been present at the memorial demonstration. Two days later, on March 7, 1883, he wrote a letter to the governing body of the *Albia*. He had learned from newspaper reports, he wrote, that the Wagner memorial meeting, in which his Fraternity had taken a part, had been transformed into an anti-Semitic demonstration. He had not, since then, seen in the public prints any declaration from the Fraternity dissociating itself from the incident. He could not hope, he went on, that such a declaration of dissociation would result from his letter. His Fraternity had, therefore, identified itself with a movement which he, as a believer in liberty, was bound to condemn, even if he had not been a Jew. “It is pretty clear that, handicapped as I am by my Semitism (the word was not yet known at the time of my entry), I would today refrain from seeking a membership which would, indeed, probably be refused me; it must also be clear to every decent person that under these circumstances I cannot wish to retain my membership.” In this honorable fashion Herzl withdrew from the organization.

Source: “Theodor Herzl: A Biography”, Alex Bein, Translated from the German by Maurice Samuel, *The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1941 (First Published 1934)*, p. 40-41.

Document D: “Diary”, Theodor Herzl (1895)

[Herzl writes in the preface of his diary begun about 1895 of an idea he had two years earlier in 1893.]

I wished to gain access to the Pope (not without first assuring myself of the support of the Austrian church dignitaries) and say to him: Help us against the anti-Semites and I will start a great movement for the free and honorable conversion of Jews to Christianity.

Free and honorable by virtue of the fact that the leaders of this movement – myself in particular – would remain Jews and as such would propagate conversion to the faith of the majority. The conversion was to take place in broad daylight, Sundays at noon, in St. Stephan’s Cathedral, with festive processions and amidst the pealing of bells. Not in shame, as individuals have converted up to now, but with proud gestures. And because the Jewish leaders would remain Jews, escorting people only to the threshold of the church and themselves staying outside, the whole performance was to be elevated by a touch of great candor.

We, the steadfast men, would have constituted the last generation. We would still have adhered to the faith of our fathers. But we would have made Christians of our young sons before they reached the age of independent decision, after which conversion looks like an act of cowardice or careerism.

Source: “*Theodor Herzl: A Biography*”, Alex Bein, Translated from the German by Maurice Samuel, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1941 (First Published 1934), p. 10.

Document E: “Diary”, Theodor Herzl (1894)

[Herzl offering his opinion about a character in *Femme de Claude*, a novel by Alexandre Dumas the Younger]

The good Jew Daniel wants to rediscover the homeland of his race and gather his scattered brothers into it. But a man like Daniel would surely know that the historic homeland of the Jews no longer has any value for them. It is childish to go in search of the geographic location of this homeland. And if the Jews really ‘returned home’ one day, they would discover on the next that they do not belong together. For centuries they have been rooted in diverse nationalisms; they differ from each other, group by group; the only thing they have in common is the pressure which holds them together. All humiliated peoples have Jewish characteristics, and as soon as the pressure is removed they react like liberated men.

Source: “Theodor Herzl: A Biography”, Alex Bein, Translated from the German by Maurice Samuel, *The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1941 (First Published 1934)*, p. 101

Document F: “Theodor Herzl”, Alex Bein (1934)

Between October 21 and November 8, 1894, a period of spiritual intoxication, he completed *The Ghetto*, or, as he later renamed it, *The New Ghetto*. ...

With this play – by far the best of his dramatic creations – Herzl completed his inner return to his people. Until then, with all his emotional involvement in the question, he had stood outside it as the observer, the student, the clarifier, or even the defender. He had provided the world-historic background for the problem, he had diagnosed it and given the prognosis for the future. Now he was immersed in it and identified with it.

He has become its spokesman and attorney, as he is spokesman and attorney for other victims of injustice. It is no accident that the hero of the play is a lawyer by vocation. For the hero is Herzl himself, and the transformation which unfolds in Dr. Jacob Samuel [the play’s main character] is the transformation which is unfolding in Theodor Herzl.

...

Herzl had travelled so much further by this time that he could not have in mind the “reconciliation” which would come by the capitulation of baptism. Indeed, the play emphasizes as a first prerequisite in human relations the element of self-respect. “If you become untrue to yourself,” says the clever mother to the son, in the play, “you mustn’t complain if others become untrue to you.”

Source: “*Theodor Herzl: A Biography*”, Alex Bein, Translated from the German by Maurice Samuel, *The Jewish Publication Society of America*, 1941 (First Published 1934), p. 102-104.

Guiding Questions

Name _____

1. What caused Herzl to start thinking about the Jewish Question?
2. *Close Reading (Document E):*
Given what we know about Herzl, what makes his attitude in this document so surprising?
3. *Close Reading (Document F):*
Explain what the author means when he writes “Herzl completed his inner return to his people.”

In the space below, use information from all four documents to answer the question:
Why did it take Herzl time to develop his thinking about the Jewish question?