

Theodor Herzl *The Zionist Congress* Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question: What were Herzl's reasons for establishing the Zionist Congress?

Materials:

- The Zionist Congress PowerPoint
- *The Zionist Congress* Video
- Copies of *Documents A-I*

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-I.
2. Mini-lecture with PowerPoint:
 - Slide: Baron Moritz de Hirsch: *The idea for a Jewish State doesn't come to Herzl at the start of the Dreyfus Affair. But it makes him certain that a major political step is needed. He starts by writing to Baron Moritz de Hirsch in May 1895: "Honored Sir: When may I have the privilege of visiting you? ... I want to discuss with you a Jewish political plan the effects of which will perhaps extend to days when you and I are no longer here." Baron de Hirsch is one of the richest men of his day. Like the Rothschilds he is a financier and philanthropist who has taken an interest in Jewish matters. In 1891, he founded the Jewish Colonization Society which transferred Russian Jews facing persecution to Argentina to become farmers on land the Baron purchased. Herzl meets with the Baron and tries to convince him that the direction he's taking is the wrong one. Something more is needed, a mass movement. Herzl doesn't succeed in winning the Baron over.*
 - Slide: An Idea Is Born: *Herzl starts a diary on June 2, 1895. In his first entry he says that a tremendous idea is taking shape in his mind. The idea is still vague and he's not sure what form it will take – maybe it will make for a romantic novel if nothing else, he writes. The title: The Promised Land. Herzl then sends off another letter to Baron de Hirsch still hoping to convince the Baron despite the initial failed meeting. But Hirsch does not sign on.*
 - Slide: The Developing Idea: *Herzl sits at his desk and pours out a flood of ideas in note form. This goes on for weeks and amounts to some 50,000 words – about 200 printed pages. Still hoping to enlist wealthy Jews he*

- titles it: "Address to the Rothschilds." But he decides against going to the Rothschilds after being warned that they would not be sympathetic.*
- Slide: Max Nordau: *Herzl instead meets with Max Nordau, a writer with a worldwide reputation. Like Herzl Nordau began as an assimilated Jew and was driven back to his people by antisemitism. Herzl quickly wins him over and Nordau recommends Herzl to Israel Zangwill, another famous Jewish writer living in England. Both will help Herzl immeasurably.*
 - Slide: The Jewish State: *Herzl decides to take his ideas public. He reworks his 'Address to the Rothschilds' and gives it a new title: 'Der Judenstaat – The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question.' It's published on February 14, 1896. The reaction is mixed. Herzl is ridiculed in the German press, particularly in Jewish-owned assimilationist papers. Herzl's own newspaper which argues that antisemitism is a temporary phenomenon, completely ignores it. Even Zionists react with suspicion, having never heard of Herzl. But some are deeply moved by Herzl's work and seek Herzl out.*
 - Slide: Zionist Student Groups: *The Zionist students in Vienna urge him to take over the Zionist movement and convene a Zionist Congress. When Herzl wrote 'The Jewish State' he had not been aware that Zionist societies already existed, scattered all over Russia and eastern Europe, or that two years before, in 1894, the same Zionist students that wanted him to lead them, had begun calling for a Zionist Congress to organize these geographically isolated groups. Herzl, though at first hesitant, was prepared by July 1896 to lead the movement.*
 - Slide: William Hechler: *Herzl also wins an important Christian ally – the Reverend William Hechler, chaplain to the British embassy in Vienna. Hechler is a Christian Zionist who believes Messianic times are upon them and that the Jews' return to their Land is a part of prophecy. Hechler is excited on reading The Jewish State, and on March 10, 1896, comes unannounced to Herzl's door. Herzl is astonished by Hechler's ideas but Hechler is well-connected. He has tutored the children of a German prince and knows the Kaiser himself. Hechler will open doors to Herzl, leading to meetings with high officials including the Kaiser.*
 - Slide: Toward a Zionist Congress: *Herzl warms to the Congress idea. Says his biographer Alex Bein: "Such a Conference would be a sort of review of the forces at his disposal and an indication of the readiness of the people to accept the migration. There, also, the Zionists of all countries would assemble for united action." Herzl recognizes that a Congress will not only show the world in a dramatic way the desire of the Jews for a land of their own, but create a political center for the Jewish people. A*

Congress, essentially a parliament-in-exile, which meets regularly on an ongoing basis, would be able to create Jewish policy and represent the Jewish people to the world.

- Slide: Preparation for Congress: *Herzl works on preparations for months at a frenetic pace. One participant says: “The Congress was made by Herzl alone; it was his money and his labor which brought it into being.”*
- Slide: The Congress Convenes. *On August 29, 1897, the Congress is held in Basle, Switzerland. The results exceed Herzl’s expectations. Jewish delegates come from all over the world. The event receives plenty of press. The Congress brings Zionist aims out into the open and creates a representative body for the Jewish people: “Through this Congress we are creating for the Jewish people an agency which it has not possessed until now, but which it urgently needs for its very existence. Our cause is too great to be left to the ambition and the caprice of individuals. It must be elevated to an impersonal plane if it is to be successful.”*
- Slide: A State in the Abstract: *After the Congress, on Sept. 3, 1897, Herzl confides to his diary: “If I were to sum up the Congress in a word – which I shall take care not to publish – it would be this: At Basel I founded the Jewish State.” He explains a few sentences later why he says this: “The essence of a state lies in the will of the people for a State ... A territory is merely the concrete basis; the State itself, when it possesses a territory, still remains something abstract. At Basel, accordingly, I have created the abstraction.”*

3. Play video: The Zionist Congress

Introduce inquiry question: What were Herzl’s reasons for establishing a Zionist Congress?

4. Whole class discussion:

- What did Herzl hope to accomplish with a Zionist Congress?
- What other methods could he have pursued to achieve his goals?
- Why did Herzl try first to interest wealthy Jews before appealing straight to the Jewish public?
- Why do you think wealthy Jews like Baron Hirsch and Rothschild were not interested despite their interest in settling Jews outside Europe?
- Why was a Zionist Congress a necessary step in laying the foundation for a Jewish State?

5. Hand out speech assignment.

**Document A: “Diary Entry”,
Theodor Herzl (June 2, 1895)**

I have been pounding away for some time at a work of tremendous magnitude. I don't know even now if I will be able to carry it through. It bears the aspects of a mighty dream. For days and weeks it has saturated me to the limits of my consciousness; it goes with me everywhere, hovers behind my ordinary talk, peers at me over the shoulders of my funny little journalistic work, overwhelms and intoxicates me.

What will come of it is still too early to say. However, I have had experience enough to tell me that even as a dream it is remarkable and should be written down – if not as a memorial for mankind, then for my own pleasure and meditation in years to come. Or perhaps as something between these two possibilities – that is, as something for literature. If no action comes out of this romancing, a Romance at least will come out of this activity.

Title: *The Promised Land*.

Source: “*The Diaries of Theodor Herzl*,” *Theodor Herzl, Translated and Edited by Marvin Lowenthal, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1962 (First Published 1956)*. p. 3.

**Document B: “Letter to Baron de Hirsch”,
Theodor Herzl (June 3, 1895)**

You are the great money-Jew; I am the Jew of the spirit. Hence the difference in our means and approach. Please note that you could not have heard of my experiments, for I have just made the first of them with you – and on you. I am on my way.

Naturally you responded to me with gentle irony. I expected as much. I told you so in my preamble. This is how new ideas are received. In addition, you lacked the patience even to hear me out. Nevertheless, I will speak what is on my mind. You will then recall that Pentecost morning, for despite all your irony I believe that you are an open-minded man, accessible to new ideas, and that you have tried to do much for the Jews – in your own fashion. ...

You cut me short with your polite derision. I am still likely to be disconcerted in conversation. I still lack the aplomb which will come with time and which I shall need in order to break down opposition, shatter indifference, console distress, inspire a craven, demoralized people, and traffic with the masters of the earth.

I spoke of an army, and you interrupted me just as I began to mention the (moral) training necessary for its march. I permitted the interruption. I had already drafted the outline, though, of what was to follow. The entire plan. I know everything required for it. Money, money, and more money; means of transportation, provisions for a vast multitude (not, it is understood, merely food and water as in the simple days of Moses), maintenance of discipline, organization of departments, emigration treaties with the heads of certain states, transit treaties with other states, formal guarantees from all of them, and the construction of new and splendid dwelling-places.

Beforehand, a prodigious propaganda: -- the popularization of the idea through newspapers, books, pamphlets, travel lectures, pictures, songs. Everything directed from one center with purposive and far-sighted vision. Finally, I would have had to tell you what flag I would unfurl and how. And then you would have asked in mockery, “A flag, what is that? A stick with a cloth rag?” No, a flag, sir, is more than

that. With a flag you can lead men where you will – even into the Promised Land.

Men live and die for a flag; it is indeed the only thing for which they are willing to die in masses, provided one educates them to it.

Believe me, the policy of an entire people – especially one that is scattered all over the world – can only be made out of imponderables that float high in the thin air. Do you know out of what the German Empire sprang? Out of reveries, songs, fantasies, and black-red-and-gold ribbons – and in short order. Bismarck merely had to shake the tree which the visionaries had planted.

What, you do not understand an imponderable? What then is a religion? Consider, if you will, what the Jews have withstood throughout two thousand years for the sake of a vision. Visions alone grip the souls of men. And whoever does not know how to deal in visions may be an excellent, worthy, practical-minded person, and even a benefactor in a big way; but he will never be a leader of men and no trace of him will remain.

Source: "The Diaries of Theodor Herzl," Theodor Herzl, Translated and Edited by Marvin Lowenthal, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1962 (First Published 1956). p. 21-22.

**Document C: “Diary”,
Theodor Herzl (Nov. 17, 1895)**

Talked with Nordau.

His was the second case of understanding me in a flash. The first was [*Neue Freie Presse* Editor Moritz] Benedikt. But Nordau seized the matter as an adherent; Benedikt, for the time being, as an opponent.

Nordau will, I believe, go with me through thick and thin. He was my easiest conquest, and so far perhaps the most valuable. He would make a good president of our Academy or Minister of Education.

He recommended me to the Maccabean Club of London, which I first heard of through him. It is plainly the ideal instrument for my needs: artists, writers, Jewish intellectuals of all types comprise its membership. The name of the club itself tells enough. Colonel [Albert E.] Goldsmid is said to be a member – also [Frederick] Mocatta, who has been mentioned to me several times.

Nordau is giving me an introduction to Israel Zangwill, who is a Maccabean and a writer.

Source: “The Diaries of Theodor Herzl,” Theodor Herzl, Translated and Edited by Marvin Lowenthal, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1962 (First Published 1956). p. 73.

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

Particularly warm was the response of the Zionists of Vienna, and among these the most enthusiastic were the Zionist students. This city, which had been the battleground of the Austrian national forces, had long since witnessed the rise of the Zionist movement. In 1882, when Herzl was still a member of the *Albia*, a number of students, stung to action by Duhring’s book, had founded the first student Zionist body, *Kadimah* – “Eastward.” ... In 1893 the Zionist student circles of Vienna and similar bodies in Berlin corresponded on the question of calling a general Zionist Congress. Nathan Birnbaum, who had coined the word “Zionism,” had been the initiator. Since 1894 the idea of a Congress had spread with the increase in the number of Zionist societies. The founding of the Viennese colonization group *Admat Yeshurun* – later the Zion Society – was followed by the founding of similar groups in Czernowitz, Graz and elsewhere. Before long the scattered societies had formed a federation. On these circles of the student Zionist youth Herzl’s appeal had an intoxicating effect. Here was strength, purpose, direction. A great struggle beckoned.

The students did everything that lay in their power to encourage Herzl along the path of leadership. Student deputations waited on him with invitations to their festive evenings, where great ovations were prepared for him. Schnirer and Kokesch, co-founders of the *Kadimah* and now members of the Zion Society, delivered to him, early in April 1896, a resolution of these bodies expressing their confidence in his work. They further persuaded the Federation of Austrian Societies for the Colonization of Palestine to circulate a memorandum of a similar character among all their sympathizers in German and Austrian academic circles, and within the next few months thousands of signatures were added and presented to Herzl. The signatories expressed their gratitude to him for the publication of his plan, which had given clear expression to the feelings of the Jewish people, and placed themselves at his disposal for the realization of the idea.

Source: “Herzl: A Biography”, Alex Bein, *The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1941, p. 185-186.*

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

The amount of work he did during the months preceding the Congress was utterly fantastic. A participant in the preliminary conference reported later: “We took counsel, we laid our plans, formulated our resolutions, and returned to our regular occupations. But the Congress was made by Herzl alone, it was his money and his labor which brought it into being.” The man of the pen was suddenly revealed as a first-class man of action. He worked without surcease, he encouraged, admonished, pleaded, persuaded, threatened and fought. He wrote to every country calling for the election of representatives to the Congress. He refused to be disheartened by the fact that the *Hoveve Zion* in England and France would have nothing to do with the Congress, and that sections of the Russian *Hoveve Zion* worked against it. New attacks were launched against him, he became the target of an unceasing campaign of ridicule, accusations, rumors of all sorts. He listened, and he caught the sound of a gathering force; the movement was progressing in Bulgaria, in Romania and even in Russia, where the government censorship made open participation in his plans impossible. He had become nothing but work and will. He had written, once, that he was doing the work only because it was streaming out of him from within. Now he scribbled down: “The greatest happiness is to be that which one is.”

Source: “Herzl: A Biography”, Alex Bein, *The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1941, p. 224.*

Document F: “Opening Address at the First Zionist Congress”, Theodor Herzl (August 29, 1897)

There are many important things for us to do in these three days. We want to lay the foundations of the edifice which will someday house the Jewish nation. This cause is so great that we should speak of it only in the simplest terms.

That is why enlightenment and reassurance shall go forth from this Congress. Let people everywhere find out what Zionism, which has been represented as a kind of chiliastic horror, really is: a moral, lawful, humanitarian movement directed toward the age-old goal of our people’s longing. ...

Through this Congress we are creating for the Jewish people an agency which it has not possessed until now, but which it urgently needs for its very existence. Our cause is too great to be left to the ambition and the caprice of individuals. It must be elevated to an impersonal plane if it is to be successful. And our Congress shall live forever, not only until we are redeemed from our age-old sufferings, but even more so afterwards. Today we are on the hospitable soil of this free city – where shall we be next year?

But no matter where we may be and how long we may have to labor until our work is completed, let our Congress be earnest and high-minded, a source of welfare to the unhappy, of defiance to none, of honor to all Jewry, and worthy of a past whose renown, though already far distant in time, is eternal.

Vocabulary

Chiliastic: From the Greek *chilioi*; a thousand. “Chiliastic horror” refers to the dread of the fearful events which it was believed would precede the End of Days.

Source: *Zionist Writings, Essays and Addresses: Theodor Herzl, Vol. 1*, Herzl Press, New York, 1973, p. 132-138.

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

Then Herzl rose and, calm, completely self-possessed, erect, walked over to the tribune, the focus of attention. “It was extraordinary! What had happened? This was not the Dr. Herzl I had seen hitherto, and with whom I was in discussion as recently as last night. Before us rose a marvelous and exalted figure, kingly in bearing and stature, with deep eyes in which could be read quiet majesty and unuttered sorrow. It is no longer the elegant Dr. Herzl of Vienna; it is a royal scion of the House of David, risen from among the dead, clothed in legend and fantasy and beauty. And in truth, was it not a miracle which we beheld? And then wild applause broke out; for fifteen minutes the delegates clapped, shouted and waved their handkerchiefs. The dream of two thousand years was on the point of realization; it was as if the Messiah, son of David, confronted us; and I was seized by an overpowering desire, in the midst of this storm of joy, to cry out, loudly, for all to hear: ‘*Yehi hamelech!*’ Hail to the King!”

Source: “*Herzl: A Biography*”, Alex Bein, *The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1941, p. 231-232.*

**Document H: “The Results of the Congress”,
Theodor Herzl (Sept. 10, 1897)**

The Congress was successful beyond all expectations; that is the main thing which makes everything else fade into insignificance. ...

The one point which had been informally recognized as the basis of our movement – the creation of a home safeguarded under public law for those Jews who are unable or unwilling to assimilate elsewhere – has now been given solemn sanction by the Congress. We have submitted this principle to the judgment of the world as the expression of our national will and now patiently await its verdict. Is there any doubt how people who have not completely hardened into lovelessness will judge such a modest and just request? Without whimpering we have shown the suffering of the Jews to the entire world and at the same time have proposed to remedy this situation by our own efforts and in the interest of all. Are we completely caught up in our folly if we assume that such frank language is bound to arouse the sympathy of all decent people?

Prior to the Congress our movement, so to speak, had remained in the ghetto; there, to be sure, it gave rise to its share of misunderstandings and struggles. Now it has entered the public arena and engages public opinion around the globe. Many hundreds of newspapers wrote of it during the past week. There are still some blind spots where there is puzzled silence, but even this will soon change. Once the bells start ringing, all the bells will have to peal.

Source: *Zionist Writings, Essays and Addresses: Theodor Herzl, Vol. 1, Herzl Press, New York, 1973, p. 139-143.*

**Document I: “*Diary Entry*”, Theodor Herzl
(Sept. 3, 1897)**

If I were to sum up the Congress in a word – which I shall take care not to publish – it would be this: At Basel I founded the Jewish State.

If I said this out loud today I would be greeted by universal laughter. In five years perhaps, and certainly in fifty years, everyone will perceive it. The essence of a state lies in the will of the people for a State, yes, even in the will of one powerful enough individual – *l’Etat, c’est moi*: Louis XIV. A territory is merely the concrete basis; the State itself, when it possesses a territory, still remains something abstract. ...

At Basel, accordingly, I have created the abstraction which, as such, is imperceptible to the great majority.

Source: “The Diaries of Theodor Herzl,” Theodor Herzl, Translated and Edited by Marvin Lowenthal, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1962 (First Published 1956). p. 224.

Write a Speech

Name _____

Imagine you are a delegate at the Zionist Congress. Write a speech in favor of a Jewish State. Give reasons why you think a Jewish state is important.