

## Teacher's Discussion Guide to Accompany *Denial*

### OVERVIEW OF FILM

*Denial* recounts Deborah E. Lipstadt's legal battle for historical truth against British author David Irving who sued her and her publisher Penguin Books in an English court for libel after she declared him a Holocaust denier in her 1993 book *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. In cases of libel in the English court system, the burden of proof is on the defendant; therefore, it was up to Lipstadt and her legal team to prove the essential truth that the Holocaust occurred. The film chronicles the defense team's efforts to build its case, including a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau; the events of the bench trial; and the landmark decision of Justice Charles Gray as recounted in Lipstadt's books *History on Trial: My Day in Court with David Irving* (2005) and *Denial: Holocaust History on Trial* (2016).



### TEACHER'S DISCUSSION GUIDE

*Denial* provides an opportunity for students to learn about the Holocaust, Holocaust denial, antisemitism, and an important court battle that essentially put historical truth on trial. The film can be viewed and discussed with students in classes such as world history, ethics, psychology, legal theory, or as part of a unit on World War II or Holocaust Studies.

Several of the topics in *Denial* need context in order to fully understand the events of the trial. The first part of this Teacher's Discussion Guide provides recommended resources from the [Echoes and Reflections Teacher's Resource Guide](#) and [IWitness](#) to help teachers set the stage prior to viewing the film; the second part suggests topics for students to discuss after having watched the film. These two sections are followed by ideas for extension activities and additional resources that teachers can share with students.

Materials outlined in this resource address Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12 and National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies.

## Part I: Prior to Watching the Film

1. One of the terms used throughout the film is “antisemitism.” Ask students what they understand this word to mean. Display the definition of [antisemitism](#) and read and discuss together.

2. Review the role that antisemitism played in the Holocaust and explain that antisemitism did not begin in the 1930s or end at the conclusion of World War II. This will be important for students to understand as they view the film.

3. Assess students’ knowledge of the Holocaust and review materials needed to provide them with the necessary context to understand the events described in *Denial*. Suggested topics and materials:

- [Holocaust definitions](#)
- [Timeline 1933-1945](#)
- [The “Final Solution”](#)

4. Introduce students to the topic of Holocaust denial using the material available on the Emory University website: [Holocaust Denial on Trial](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions about Holocaust Denial](#) on the Echoes and Reflections website.

5. Introduce students to key individuals they will meet in the film:

**Deborah Lipstadt:** Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies and director of the Institute for Jewish Studies at Emory University. She is also the author of several books about the Holocaust and Holocaust denial.

**David Irving:** English Holocaust denier and author of military and political history of World War II with a focus on Nazi Germany. ([Consider watching the following clip from \*Denial\*: “Classroom”](#))

**Anthony Julius:** British solicitor advocate and academic. He also works to raise awareness about antisemitism around the world.

**Richard Rampton:** Leading British libel lawyer who has argued many high-profile cases. ([Consider watching the following clip from \*Denial\*: “Warning”](#))

**Robert Jan van Pelt:** Holocaust historian who traveled with Lipstadt and Rampton to the Auschwitz camp ruins. He prepared a 700-page report for the trial and was called as an expert witness.

**Fred Leuchter:** An American execution worker hired by German Holocaust denier Ernst Zündel to test the Auschwitz camp brickwork for evidence of poison gas.

6. Provide students with the questions below to help guide them as they watch *Denial*:

- What is each side’s argument in this case?
- What is the defense team’s strategy?
- How is the topic of antisemitism addressed during the film?
- What primary sources does the defense team use to support its case?
- What are some of the big questions that this case explores (e.g., the limits of free speech)?

## **Part II: After Watching the Film (or the Available Clips)**

1. After students have viewed the film, have a general discussion about their impressions of the movie, the acting, cinematography, whether they would recommend the film to others, etc.

2. Follow with a discussion using the questions below. This could be a large-group discussion or small groups of students could discuss one or two questions and then share their group's thoughts with the class.

- As the defense team identified how they would present its case, several decisions were made with which Deborah Lipstadt did not initially agree, including not having her testify and not having survivors testify at the trial. What was the thinking behind these decisions? What do you think the team meant when they announced, "There is no strategy; we will box him in with the truth"? ([Consider watching the following clip from \*Denial\*: "Survivors"](#))
- What role did antisemitism play in this case? Do you think antisemitism was David Irving's motivation for denying the Holocaust and on what have you based your answer?
- What was your reaction to Justice Gray asking if someone can be honestly antisemitic or honestly hold antisemitic views and whether someone can be accused of lying if they believe what they are saying?
- Many secondary and primary sources were identified throughout the film (e.g., maps, blueprints, drawings by survivors, reports). How were these sources used by each side? How was it revealed that Irving manipulated primary sources?
- What was the purpose of the defense team visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau prior to the trial? What stood out for you as you watched the group go to various sites at the camp?
- Lipstadt, while a strong believer in free speech, also stresses that not all opinions are equal. Consider your own thoughts about "free speech," and how, if at all, this case has caused you to think about whether deliberate falsification of facts should be protected by free speech. Do you agree or disagree with Lipstadt's premise that "not all opinions are equal"? Why or why not? ([Consider watching the following clip from \*Denial\*: "Facts"](#))
- There are a number of different groups represented in the film, think about the role of each to ensure that the historical record of an event is accurate: historians, the legal profession, the press, survivors.
- Lipstadt did not title her book "The Holocaust on Trial," she titled it "History on Trial." What message was she trying to send by titling the book this way? How might Irving attempting to deny the Holocaust be a cautionary tale for other genocides?

### ***Part III: Extension Activities and Additional Resources***

1. Have students visit the [IWitness Watch Page](#) to view clips of survivor testimony about genocide denial, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and other topics.
2. One of the topics raised in *Denial* is the danger of antisemitism to civil society. Use materials available in [Supplementary Content: Contemporary Antisemitism](#) to help students understand that antisemitism did not end with the Holocaust and remains prevalent today. These materials also introduce students to young activists around the world who are speaking out against antisemitism and bigotry.
3. In many European countries and in Israel, Holocaust denial is against the law. In the United States, the First Amendment guarantees the right of free speech, regardless of political content. Have students consider their position on whether, in light of viewing *Denial*, they think denying the Holocaust should be against the law or not and conduct a debate or prepare a written argument that supports their position, using valid reasoning and relevant evidence.
4. Additional resources on the topic of Holocaust denial can be accessed at the following websites:

[US Holocaust Memorial Museum - Denial](#)

[Antisemitism Today - US Holocaust Memorial Museum Short Film](#)

[IHRA Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion](#)

[Holocaust Denial on Trial](#)

[American Jewish Committee](#)

[The Nizkor Project](#)

[Project Aladdin](#)

[Simon Wiesenthal Center](#)

[Southern Poverty Law Center](#)

[Yad Vashem](#)