

A PROJECT WITNESS MICROSHORT STORIES LESSON PLAN

THE SULTAN WHO SAID NO

"There are no Jews in Morocco, only Moroccan subjects." A sultan uses symbolic power and administrative delay to shield his Jewish citizens from the worst outcomes of Vichy persecution.

GRADES 7-8 | 9-10 | 11-12

EPISODE SUMMARY

About This Film

After France fell in June 1940, the Vichy regime extended its antisemitic legislation to French North Africa. In Morocco, governed as a French Protectorate, power was exercised through the Resident-General (Charles Nogues), with the Sultan's formal seal required for implementation. On October 31, 1940, Sultan Mohammed V affixed his seal to the Moroccan application of Vichy's anti-Jewish statutes.

The legislation imposed discriminatory quotas, property restrictions, and — in some cities, particularly Fez — forced relocations of Jews from European neighborhoods into mellahs (traditional Jewish quarters), causing overcrowding and hardship. Labor and internment camps also operated in Vichy North Africa. Morocco's Jewish community of roughly 250,000 was subjected to real persecution under these Vichy measures.

However, no documented deportations of Moroccan Jews to Nazi extermination camps took place. Mohammed V is widely remembered for symbolic acts of solidarity: he reportedly told Jewish leaders that the decrees changed nothing and they remained his subjects, and at the November 1941 Feast of the Throne he invited rabbis and Jewish notables as guests of honor — a public signal of protection. The famous line "There are no Jews in Morocco, only Moroccan subjects" has become central to Moroccan collective memory, though scholars note it is not secured to a contemporaneous transcript. Mohammed V has not been recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. The historical record shows a leader with limited but meaningful power who used symbolic leverage and administrative delay to protect his Jewish subjects from the worst outcomes — even as real discrimination and hardship occurred.

TEACHER NOTE

This episode offers an important opportunity to discuss historical nuance. Mohammed V's protection was real but not absolute. Students should understand that allyship exists on a spectrum — that meaningful protection can coexist with incomplete resistance. The historical record is genuinely complicated, and that complexity is the lesson.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Curriculum Standards

FRAMEWORK	GRADES 7–8	GRADES 9–10	GRADES 11–12
Common Core ELA	RI.7.1, RI.7.2, RI.7.6, W.7.2, SL.7.1	RI.9–10.1, RI.9–10.4, RI.9–10.6, W.9–10.1, SL.9–10.1	RI.11–12.1, RI.11–12.5, RI.11–12.6, W.11–12.1, W.11–12.2, SL.11–12.1
C3 Social Studies	D2.His.1.6–8, D2.His.3.6–8, D2.His.14.6–8	D2.His.1.9–12, D2.His.3.9–12, D2.His.14.9–12, D2.His.16.9–12	D2.His.1.9–12, D2.His.3.9–12, D2.His.14.9–12, D2.His.16.9–12, D4.1.9–12
Florida B.E.S.T.	ELA.7.R.2.1, ELA.7.R.3.2, ELA.7.C.1.3	ELA.910.R.2.1, ELA.910.R.3.2, ELA.910.C.1.3; SS.912.W.7.6	ELA.1112.R.2.1, ELA.1112.R.3.2, ELA.1112.C.1.3; SS.912.W.7.6
Texas TEKS	ELAR 7.6(A), 7.8(A), 7.10(A)	ELAR 9.6(A), 9.8(A); WH.15(A–D)	ELAR 11.6(A), 11.8(A); WH.15(A–D)
California HSS	7.10	10.8.1–10.8.6	11.7
CASEL SEL	Self-awareness, Social awareness	Self-awareness, Social awareness, Responsible decision- making	All five competencies
DASA (NY)	Allyship, interfaith solidarity, using position to protect others		

TIME

45 min core / 90 min with
extensions

MATERIALS

Device to play video; printed
discussion questions
(optional)

CONTENT ADVISORY

None required.

STEP 1 OF 4

Watch

Use the pre-viewing activities below — differentiated by grade band — to build context, activate prior knowledge, and frame student thinking before the film begins. Then show the 90-second microshort.

GRADES 7–8**Vocabulary Preview**

Vichy Regime The French government that collaborated with Nazi Germany after France fell in 1940, enacting antisemitic laws that applied both in France and in French-controlled territories abroad.

Protectorate A territory controlled by a stronger foreign power that nominally retains its own government; Morocco was a French Protectorate, meaning France governed through Moroccan institutions including the Sultan's court.

Anti-Jewish Statutes Laws that stripped Jewish people of rights, jobs, and property — used by the Vichy government to systematically persecute Jews in France and its territories.

Allyship Using one's own position, voice, or power to support and protect a group facing discrimination or danger.

Mellah The traditional Jewish quarter of a Moroccan city, where Jewish families lived in established communities; Vichy laws forced some Jews back into mellahs from European neighborhoods.

Anticipation Question**THINK ABOUT IT**

Can a leader protect people even when they don't have full power to stop what's happening? What does it mean to "do what you can" when you can't do everything? Write two or three sentences before we watch.

GRADES 9–10

Historical Context

When France fell to Nazi Germany in June 1940, a collaborationist French government — known as the Vichy regime — took power and immediately began enacting antisemitic legislation. That legislation did not stop at France's borders: it was extended to France's colonial territories, including Morocco. Morocco was governed as a French Protectorate, which meant that the French Resident-General held real power, but the Sultan's formal seal was required to enact laws under Moroccan authority. Sultan Mohammed V occupied a unique position — he had limited but real leverage. His seal legitimized Vichy laws in the eyes of his subjects; his symbolic gestures carried weight both locally and internationally. When the Vichy anti-Jewish statutes arrived in Morocco, the Sultan was confronted with a stark question: how much resistance was possible from within a compromised position?

PREDICTION PROMPT

The film is titled *The Sultan Who Said No*. But history shows he also signed the anti-Jewish statutes. What might it mean to say "no" while also complying? Is this a contradiction or something more complex?

GRADES 11–12

Primary Source: The Dahir of October 31, 1940

[Excerpt from Vichy anti-Jewish statutes as applied to Morocco, Dahir of October 31, 1940, imposing quotas, property restrictions, and exclusions from public life on Moroccan Jews — signed under the Sultan's seal.]

— Dahir of October 31, 1940, Moroccan application of Vichy anti-Jewish legislation

Compare with the widely attributed statement from Mohammed V: *"There are no Jews in Morocco, only Moroccan subjects."* Note that this quote, which defines Mohammed V's legacy of solidarity, is not secured to a contemporaneous transcript.

FRAMING QUESTION

The most powerful moment in Mohammed V's story — the quote that defines his legacy — may be partly mythologized. It is not secured to a contemporaneous source. What does it mean when a story's most significant moral claim cannot be fully verified? How do we evaluate acts of solidarity when the historical record is complicated by collective memory? Come prepared to defend your interpretation after viewing.

VIEW THE MICROSHORT — 90 SECONDS

Show the film in full without interruption. Students should have their pre-viewing notes visible but should not be writing during the film. The goal is full, attentive viewing.

STEP 2 OF 4

Analyze

These discussion and analysis activities develop close reading and media literacy skills. Use small groups or whole-class discussion formats as appropriate.

GRADES 7–8

Comprehension Questions

1. Who was Mohammed V? What was his role in Morocco during World War II?
2. What was happening in Morocco during the war? What did Vichy rule mean for Jewish Moroccans?
3. How did Mohammed V try to protect the Jewish community? What specific actions did he take?
4. Did his protection work completely? What still happened to Moroccan Jews under Vichy rule?

Visual Storytelling

5. The film uses a Mediterranean color palette — warm amber tones and cobalt blues. How does this visual style reflect the setting? How does it feel different from other episodes set in Europe?
6. What images stood out to you? Why do you think the filmmakers chose those specific images?
7. How did the sound design contribute to your sense of time and place?
8. The film is only 90 seconds. Did it feel complete? What choices did the filmmaker make to convey a complicated story in so little time?

Text-Dependent Analysis

1. The film presents Mohammed V as a protector, but it also acknowledges the anti-Jewish statutes. How does the narration handle this tension? What phrase or moment best captures the complexity?
2. Identify one filmmaking choice — color palette, narration style, pacing, or sound — and explain how it contributes to the film's argument about Mohammed V's significance.
3. The logline uses the phrase "symbolic power." What is symbolic power? How is it different from legal or military power? Is it less real?

Historical Sourcing

4. How do we verify what Mohammed V actually said or did? What kinds of sources would historians need to confirm the famous quote attributed to him?
5. Mohammed V has not been recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. What criteria does Yad Vashem use? Why might his actions not meet that standard?
6. What questions does the film leave unanswered that you would want to investigate further?

Rhetorical Analysis

1. How does the film navigate between celebrating allyship and acknowledging its limits? Does the 90-second format allow enough room for nuance? What is gained or lost by the compression?
2. The narration must simultaneously honor Mohammed V's symbolic resistance and acknowledge that real persecution occurred. Analyze how the script manages this double obligation. What rhetorical strategies does it use?
3. Compare Mohammed V's response to other national responses during the Holocaust — Denmark's rescue of its Jewish citizens, Bulgaria's contradictory record of resisting deportation while enforcing discrimination domestically. What does this comparison reveal about the range of responses available to leaders under occupation?

Historiographic Questions

4. The "no Jews in Morocco" quote functions as a founding myth of Moroccan-Jewish solidarity. What role do such myths play in collective memory? Is a myth that promotes solidarity valuable even if historically unverifiable?
5. How does Moroccan national identity — built partly around the story of Mohammed V's protection — shape how Moroccan historians write about this period? How might that differ from Israeli or European historiography of the same events?
6. Robert Satloff's *Among the Righteous* argues that the Arab world's wartime record with respect to Jews is more complex — and includes more acts of rescue — than is widely acknowledged. How does Mohammed V's story fit into that larger argument? What are the risks of either over-claiming or under-claiming his role?

STEP 3 OF 4

Create

Students respond to the film through structured creative writing. Each grade band offers a focused prompt. Allow 20–25 minutes for the core activity, or assign as homework for a longer response.

GRADES 7–8**Letter Writing**

Imagine you are a Jewish child living in the mellah of Rabat in 1941. You hear that the Sultan invited Jewish leaders to the Feast of the Throne — a public ceremony, attended by thousands, where Mohammed V seated rabbis and Jewish notables as guests of honor. Write a short letter to a family member describing what this news means to you and your community. Your letter should include:

- What life has been like since the new laws were announced
- What you felt when you heard about the Sultan's gesture
- What you hope — and what you are still afraid of

Write 1–2 paragraphs. Try to capture both the hope and the uncertainty of that moment.

GRADES 9–10**Argumentative Paragraph (MEAL Format)**

Mohammed V both signed the Vichy anti-Jewish statutes and took symbolic actions to protect the Jewish community of Morocco — including publicly hosting Jewish leaders at the Feast of the Throne and reportedly telling them that the decrees changed nothing. Write one well-developed argumentative paragraph using the MEAL structure (Main claim, Evidence, Analysis, Link back to claim) that answers the following question:

PROMPT

Should Mohammed V be recognized as Righteous Among the Nations, given that he both signed the anti-Jewish statutes and took symbolic actions to protect Jews?
Make a claim and support it with evidence from the film and historical context.

Your paragraph should be 150–200 words. Underline your main claim sentence. Circle your evidence.

GRADES 11–12

Analytical Essay: Symbolic Allyship and Material Protection

The concept of allyship has become central to contemporary social justice discourse. Using Mohammed V's story as a case study, write an analytical essay (2–3 paragraphs) that addresses the following:

PROMPT

Analyze the difference between symbolic allyship and material protection. Mohammed V used the tools available to him: symbolism, administrative delay, and public gestures of solidarity. Real discrimination still occurred under his nominal authority. When is symbolic resistance meaningful? When is it insufficient? What does this historical example teach us about the nature of allyship — in his time and in our own?

Your essay should make a clear argumentative claim, use specific evidence from the historical record, and arrive at a conclusion that speaks to the contemporary relevance of this question. 350–450 words.

STEP 4 OF 4

Reflect

These closing activities help students consolidate their thinking, make personal connections, and carry the lesson's meaning beyond the classroom. Allow 8–12 minutes.

GRADES 7–8**One-Sentence Takeaway**

Write the single most important thing you are taking away from this lesson in one complete sentence. Then answer: Can someone be a hero even if they couldn't solve the whole problem? What does it mean to do the right thing when your power is limited?

EXIT PROMPT

Complete both parts on a notecard or in your journal:

1. The most important thing I'm taking from this story is: ____
2. Can someone be a hero even if they couldn't solve the whole problem? My answer is: ____

GRADES 9–10**Sentence Frame Reflection**

Complete the following sentence frame as a written reflection. You may write as many sentences as you need to complete each thought — the frame is a starting point, not a limit. Be specific. The strongest reflections name something particular they learned, not just general impressions.

"This story complicated my understanding of allyship because _____. I used to think being an ally meant _____. Now I realize it can also mean _____."

Share your reflection with a partner. Where do your reflections overlap? Where do they diverge? What might explain the difference?

GRADES 11–12

Open-Ended Reflection on Myth, Memory, and Justice

Mohammed V operated within a system he could not overthrow — French colonial rule and Vichy authority. He used the tools available to him: symbolism, delay, public gestures. History has mythologized some of these acts. The quote that defines his legacy — "There are no Jews in Morocco, only Moroccan subjects" — may not be traceable to a contemporaneous transcript.

Write a sustained reflection (one page) on the following question:

REFLECTION PROMPT

Does the mythologization of Mohammed V's actions serve justice or distort it? What is more important — what actually happened, or the story a community tells about what happened? If a myth promotes solidarity and dignity, does its historical imprecision matter? And what does the answer to that question ask of us, as people who engage with history now?

There is no single right answer. The goal is to think rigorously and honestly about the relationship between historical truth and moral memory.

"There are no Jews in Morocco, only Moroccan subjects."

— Attributed to Sultan Mohammed V of Morocco, c. 1940–1941

GOING DEEPER

Extension Activities

These activities are designed for students who want to go further — in research, in creative production, or in interdisciplinary analysis. They are suitable for homework, independent projects, or honors-level coursework.

GRADES 7–8

Research Project: Comparing Acts of Protection

Mohammed V was not the only leader or community who protected Jews during the Holocaust. Research one other example — such as the Danish rescue of Jews in 1943, the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in France, or Bulgarian citizens who resisted deportation orders. Your research should include:

- Who was protected, and by whom
- What methods were used to protect them
- What the outcome was
- What risks the protectors took

Create a comparison poster or slide that places your example alongside Mohammed V's story. What do these cases have in common? What is different? What does each tell us about the different forms protection can take?

GRADES 9–10

Research Essay: The Sephardic and Mizrahi Experience

The Sephardic Jewish experience during the Holocaust is less widely taught than the Ashkenazi experience. Research one Sephardic or Mizrahi community affected by the Holocaust or WWII-era persecution. Options include:

- The Jews of Salonika (Thessaloniki), Greece — the largest Sephardic community in Europe, nearly destroyed
- The Jews of Rhodes (Dodecanese Islands), deported to Auschwitz in 1944
- The Jews of Libya under Italian and German occupation
- The Jews of Iraq, who faced the Farhud pogrom of 1941

Write a 1-page summary of what happened and why this story is less well-known than the Ashkenazi Holocaust narrative. What does its relative absence from mainstream Holocaust education tell us about which histories get remembered?

GRADES 11–12

Historiographic Essay: The Scholarly Debate on Mohammed V

Historians do not agree on how to interpret Mohammed V's wartime role. Key scholars and sources include:

- Susan Gilson Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco* — contextualizes Mohammed V within Moroccan colonial politics
- Michel Abitbol — research on the Vichy legislation as applied to North African Jewish communities
- Robert Satloff, *Among the Righteous* — argues for greater recognition of Arab-world protection of Jews during the Holocaust
- Yad Vashem's criteria for Righteous Among the Nations — and why Mohammed V has not been recognized

Write a 2-page historiographic essay examining how different scholars interpret the same evidence about Mohammed V. What accounts for the disagreements? What does each scholar emphasize, and what do they minimize? What does this debate teach us about how history is written — and about whose interests shape the narratives we inherit?

APPENDIX

Full Standards Alignment

Common Core State Standards — ELA

CODE	STANDARD DESCRIPTION
RI.7.1 / RI.9-10.1 / RI.11-12.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what a text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
RI.7.2	Determine two or more central ideas in an informational text and analyze their development; provide a summary distinct from personal opinions.
RI.9-10.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of word choices on meaning and tone.
RI.7.6 / RI.9-10.6 / RI.11-12.6	Determine an author's point of view or purpose and analyze how the author uses rhetoric, style, and content to advance that purpose.
RI.11-12.5	Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in an exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.
W.7.2 / W.11-12.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
W.9-10.1 / W.11-12.1	Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
SL.7.1 / SL.9-10.1 / SL.11-12.1	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

C3 Framework for Social Studies

CODE	STANDARD DESCRIPTION
D2.His.1.6-8 / 9-12	Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
D2.His.3.6-8 / 9-12	Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.
D2.His.14.6-8 / 9-12	Explain multiple causes and effects of events and developments in the past.
D2.His.16.9-12	Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.
D4.1.9-12	Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.
D4.6.9-12	Use disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses to understand the characteristics and causes of local, regional, and global problems, and to examine possible solutions.

APPENDIX

State Framework Alignments

Florida B.E.S.T. Standards

CODE	DESCRIPTION
ELA.7.R.2.1	Explain how individual text sections and particular sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of a text contribute to the development of ideas.
ELA.7.R.3.2 / ELA.910.R.3.2 / ELA.1112.R.3.2	Paraphrase content from grade-level texts; compare and contrast stated or implied purposes of different authors writing on the same topic.
ELA.7.C.1.3 / ELA.910.C.1.3 / ELA.1112.C.1.3	Write to make a claim supporting a perspective with logical reasons and relevant evidence from multiple sources.
SS.912.W.7.6	Describe the causes and effects of the Holocaust, including examining the roles of perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and upstanders.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

CODE	DESCRIPTION
ELAR 7.6(A) / 9.6(A) / 11.6(A)	Analyze the author's purpose and the structures used to accomplish that purpose.
ELAR 7.8(A) / 9.8(A) / 11.8(A)	Analyze the author's use of diction, syntax, and structure and the effect of these choices on meaning.
ELAR 7.10(A)	Listen actively and ask questions to understand information and make connections to topics of study.
WH.15(A–D)	World History: Describe the rise and goals of totalitarian regimes and analyze the impact of WWII on Jewish populations and other persecuted groups.

California History–Social Science Framework

CODE	DESCRIPTION
7.10	Analyze the interactions of peoples of Africa, Europe, and the Americas; builds context for North African societies and colonial dynamics.
10.8.1–10.8.6	Analyze the rise of Nazism, the Holocaust, and the roles of perpetrators, bystanders, and resisters during World War II.
11.7	Analyze the American perspective on World War II — including the Holocaust — and the post-war human rights movement.

CASEL Social and Emotional Learning Competencies

This lesson directly engages all five CASEL core competencies. **Self-awareness:** students reflect on their own values and what they would do under constraint. **Social awareness:** students consider the perspectives of Mohammed V, his Jewish subjects, and the Vichy-occupied world around them. **Responsible decision-making:** students analyze the ethics of acting within a compromised system. **Relationship skills:** collaborative discussion and debate activities build constructive dialogue across different perspectives. **Self-management:** extended writing tasks require students to regulate their thinking and manage sustained argument.

State Holocaust Education Mandates

More than 25 states have enacted laws or regulations requiring Holocaust and genocide education in public schools, including Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Texas, and California. This lesson plan supports compliance with those mandates by providing age-appropriate primary-source analysis, structured discussion, and writing tasks that address the Holocaust's causes, course, and consequences — including the role of individuals and non-German governments in shaping outcomes for Jewish communities. The episode's focus on Vichy North Africa and the role of Sultan Mohammed V offers a distinctive non-European case study that broadens students' understanding of the Holocaust's geographic reach and the variety of responses to Nazi pressure.

DASA — DIGNITY FOR ALL STUDENTS ACT (NEW YORK STATE)

This lesson plan directly supports the goals of New York State's Dignity for All Students Act by engaging students in anti-bias education through the study of historical allyship, interfaith solidarity, and the use of one's position to protect others. The lesson asks students to examine how discrimination operates within colonial and occupying systems — and how individuals in constrained positions can still choose acts of solidarity and symbolic resistance. The activities are designed to develop students' capacity for empathy, nuanced moral reasoning, and critical engagement with historical complexity: core competencies for building inclusive school and community environments. Teachers are encouraged to connect Mohammed V's story to students' own understandings of what it means to be an ally — and to the DASA values of dignity, respect, and responsibility toward all members of a community.