

SAMPLE UNIT PLAN
Jews in Public Life
Developed by Sylvia F. Abrams

Documents:

Letter, from kindergarten class at Benesch School, February 25, 1965

Letters to the Editor, January 18, 1964; March 7, 1966; April 24, 1966; September 18, 1966; April 7, 1968; December 2, 1968

Newspaper article, regarding protest against quotas on Jewish students and correspondence between Benesch and President Lowell of Harvard, June 17, 1922,

Newspaper article, *Harvard Law Record*, protest of prejudice in Choate Club

Obituary, from *Cleveland Press*

Speech, Remarks by Alfred A. Benesch on Receiving the Eisenman Award , December 4, 1955

Transcript, Harvard College, 1900

Grade Level: Middle School, High School

Time Allocation: 2-3 sessions

A. OBJECTIVES

The students will

1. Identify the roles of Alfred Benesch as a lawyer, public servant, elected official, and active member of the Jewish community.
2. Analyze published letters for their persuasive style.
3. Compare the issues that Alfred Benesch fought for with those that motivate today's elected officials.
4. Evaluate the effect of Alfred Benesch's commitment to Jewish values on his actions as a lawyer and elected official.

B. EXAMINING THE DOCUMENTS: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How did Alfred Benesch's attendance at Harvard form his views about equal access to higher education?
2. What evidence can you find that public letter writing was an effective way to influence others?

3. How did Alfred Benesch's commitment to Jewish values influence what he fought for as a lawyer and public official?

C. SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. To introduce Alfred Benesch, distribute the letter from kindergarten students at Benesch School. Find out if the Alfred A. Benesch School is still in existence by looking for its website. Why would a school have been named after Alfred Benesch?

a. Distribute copies of Alfred Benesch's obituary from the Cleveland Press. Ascertain that students can define the term obituary.

b. Have students list the various achievements mentioned in the obituary. Students may wish to prioritize which achievement they want to investigate from Mr. Benesch's long life.

2. Depending upon grade level of group, ask students to obtain a current college transcript from a sibling or parent. If not appropriate to the school's population, then distribute a current college transcript from an area college or university and Alfred Benesch's Harvard transcripts.

3. Divide the students into groups of three. Have one student serve as recorder in each group. Compare the following: basis for admission to college; subjects studied in each year of college; how students obtained credit for high school study; and evidence of study of advanced courses.

4. Alfred Benesch was a well-known writer of letters that became public. Distribute the *New York Times* front page article about Benesch's correspondence with Lawrence Lowell, the President of Harvard.

a. Why would these letters have become public? What role can letter writing have in influencing public opinion on an issue? Why do you think that Alfred Benesch cared about quotas for Jewish students?

b. Have students read letters to the editor in the local paper for a week either in print or online. Keep a record of the topics written about. Are the letter writers identified by more than their names? If so, list their community roles.

5. Have the class read "Remarks by Alfred A. Benesch on Receiving the Eisenman Award, Dec. 4, 1955." List examples of Mr. Benesch's idealism from this speech.

D. EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. Learn how an obituary is written. Compare writing an obituary for a local newspaper with one in the *New York Times*.

2. Investigate college life at Harvard in the late 1890s. Find out how many Jewish students were on campus. Compare the cost of attending Harvard in 1900 with the cost of attending today.
3. Read additional letters to the editor written by Alfred Benesch. What kinds of topics did he write about? Advanced students may want to read “Jewish Quotas at Harvard” in *The Jewish Americans* by Beth S. Wenger (New York: Doubleday, 2007). Compose a letter to the editor of a local publication and send it for publication.
4. Alfred Benesch’s law firm is still in existence. Research Beneschlaw.com to find out about Mr. Benesch’s legal legacy.