



## USC Shoah Foundation **WHY WE HATE: Tribalism Activity (Us vs. Them)**

### Overview

In this activity students examine the individual and societal costs and benefits of tribalism (us versus them affiliations) and conduct an inquiry that helps them understand the role that social media plays in fueling tribalism. Through video and text, students learn that tribalism can take many forms and that individuals' tribal affiliations can change over time. They then use secondary source materials to investigate the impact of social media tools and tactics on tribalism. Finally, they create a collage to communicate ideas about how differences within their school community can be bridged. As an extension, students can explore the role that tribalism played during the Holocaust and its impact on individuals through eyewitness testimonies.

### Target Audience

Grades 6-8 Social Studies; Grades 9-12 History, Psychology, Sociology

### Activity Duration

Two 45-minute class periods

### Key Learning Objectives

Students will:

- describe how individuals affiliate with specific groups.
- explain the impacts of tribalism on individuals and society.
- analyze video and text for evidence of tribalism and associated behaviors and beliefs.
- evaluate the role that social media tools and tactics play in fueling tribalism.
- communicate with others to explore how tribal differences can be bridged.

### Enduring Understandings

- Throughout history, tribalism – dividing people into “us vs. them” categories – has contributed to fear and hate.
- Tribalism is fueled by competition and the desire to be part of something bigger than ourselves.
- Social media algorithms and campaigns fuel tribalism.
- We have a lot of control over the categories we use to define ourselves and these categories tend to be flexible.



## Essential Questions

- Why do humans divide people into "us vs. them" categories?
- What psychological forces are at the root of tribalism?
- What tools and tactics are used to promote tribalism?
- Can we overcome an "us vs. them" mentality and, if so, how?

## Materials

- Identity Chart Activity Sheet (one per student)
- Social Media & Tribalism Inquiry Project Activity Sheet (one per student)
- Tribalism & the Holocaust Activity Sheet (one per student, if doing Extend activity)
- Internet and computer access

## Background Information/Links

### Tribalism

A tribe is defined as "a social division in a traditional society consisting of families or communities linked by social, economic, religious, or blood ties, with a common culture and dialect, typically having a recognized leader." When we hear the word tribe, we may think of Native Americans, but in modern usage the term can also refer to people who share common ideas and allegiances. Tribalism is defined as "behavior and attitudes that stem from strong loyalty to one's own tribe or social group." Tribalism has societal and individual benefits as well as costs. In terms of benefits, tribalism gives us a sense of belonging and trust. In our ancestral past, we needed communities we could utterly rely on in order to survive. Group affiliation can bring cohesion to communities and inspire individuals to act on behalf of others. Psychologically, humans find comfort and security from feeling that we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

Tribalism can have very negative consequences when it is used to exclude individuals or groups or to take away their rights, status, and/or independence. These negative aspects of tribalism are often fueled by competition and the perception of a common threat. They promote fear, anxiety, and prejudice, all of which make us more susceptible to fake news, propaganda, and conflict.

Tribalism can take many forms in our modern society. One prominent example of tribalism is individuals' strong affiliations with sports teams. These affiliations are often built on regional identities and promoted through the use of symbols. We frequently see deep bonding between fans of a particular team who identify strongly with each other and against fans of opposing teams. Another example of tribalism is political affiliation. The moral aspects of individuals' political beliefs can make this form of

tribalism even more powerful than in sports. We tend to believe that our group is acting out of love and good intent while our political foes are acting out of hate and a desire to harm us. While political tribalism has been evident throughout history, today we are witnessing increased polarization due to a lack of trust and civil discourse across parties.

Today, social media makes it easier than ever for individuals to connect with other members of their tribes and ignore or deny information that threatens their worldview. Social media algorithms are designed to drive engagement and, as a result, prioritize content that touches on negative primal emotions. These algorithms bypass institutions that were designed to manage our base tendencies and urges.

The good news is that the negative aspects of tribalism are not irreversible. We actually have a great deal of control over how we categorize different groups, and the categories tend to be quite flexible. One historical example of this flexibility is the shifting of alliances among nations between World War I and World War II. We also see examples of individuals, such as Frank Meeink, who have radically changed their tribal affiliations. Meeink, a former neo-Nazi skinhead, now regularly gives lectures on the importance of tolerance and stopping hate.

### The Rohingya Refugee Crisis

The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic group of about 1.1 million people who have lived for centuries in Myanmar, a mainly Buddhist country. They have been denied citizenship in their own country since 1982 and live in poverty.

In August of 2019, the Myanmar military, local police, and Buddhist community members began violently driving Rohingya from their homes – destroying and looting villages, killing men, women, and children, and raping women. The reason given for the violence was retaliation for a series of attacks the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) carried out on police outposts.

According to Rohingya refugees, there had been a buildup of religious persecution, in particular against Muslim teachers, for several months before ARSA even carried out their attacks. The military then directly ordered Rohingya people to leave the country, after they murdered their relatives and destroyed their homes and businesses. One interviewee described watching his sons being shot in the back as they ran.

Towards the end of 2017, USC Shoah Foundation Finci-Viterbi Executive Director Stephen Smith visited a Bangladesh refugee camp to collect testimony from Rohingya refugees. “Many of the people I interviewed describe being directly ordered by the military to leave the country, after family members

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were killed and homes destroyed,” Smith said. “They made clear to them that the Rohingya are not citizens of Myanmar and have no right to be there.”

The United Nations has dubbed the Rohingya refugee crisis a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing,” which is defined as “the mass expulsion or killing of members of an unwanted ethnic or religious group in a society.”

### Inquiry Learning

Inquiry learning is an approach in which students generate their own research questions and then use primary and/or secondary sources to find answers to their questions. Before they begin their research, students consider knowledge they already have and create a hypothesis about what they think the answer to their question might be. They revisit their hypothesis as they work, revising it as needed as they analyze additional information and deepen their understanding. Once they have completed their research and synthesized their learning, they present their findings and reflect on what they’ve learned. They also consider what they have left to learn about their inquiry topic.

In this activity, students will develop their own questions about the role that social media plays in fueling tribalism. While conducting their inquiry, students should be encouraged to:

- keep their inquiry question and hypothesis in mind as they review and analyze information
- discuss their ideas with other students in their group or class to gain additional perspectives
- generate additional questions they have as they work and uncover new information

### *Sources:*

- <https://www.discovery.com/shows/why-we-hate>
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>
- <https://sfi.usc.edu/news/2018/08/22861-voices-rohingya>

## Procedure

### Ask

- Write the definition of a tribe on the board or a piece of flip chart paper (“a group of persons having a common character, occupation, or interest”). Ask a student to read the definition aloud and ensure that all students understand the definition. Call on volunteers to provide examples of different types of tribes.
- Project a copy of the Identity Chart from the handout or draw a version of the chart on the board or a piece of flip chart paper. Ask students to suggest famous people, historical figures, or literary characters with whom they are familiar. Choose one you think will work well for the activity; then work with the full class to complete the chart by identifying the different groups to which the person belongs based on the definition of tribe.
- Conduct a discussion that bridges the definition of tribe with the list of groups posted for the suggested individual. Then, have students brainstorm a list of tribal groups to which they belong (e.g., they are in the same age group, attend the same school, are in a particular class or grade, live in the same community and country, are members of the same species).
- Distribute the Identity Chart handout and direct students to complete it for themselves. If you believe it will help make students feel safer and be more honest, indicate that they will not share their charts.
- Next, introduce the definition of tribalism by posting it on the board or a piece of flip chart paper (“the behavior and attitudes that stem from strong loyalty to one's own tribe or social group”). Explain that tribalism often leads people to identify with an in group (“us”) and against an out group (“them”).
- Ask students to review their own charts and circle any groups that they believe fit this “us versus them” paradigm. If desired, direct students to form pairs to share their charts. Note: Prior to this step, you may wish to refer back to the model Identity Chart created by the whole group and have students identify groups that fit this “us versus them” paradigm.
- Facilitate a whole class discussion in which you ask students to consider and discuss the benefits and costs of tribal affiliation/loyalty to a group. Then, ask students to provide examples of times when the societal costs of affiliation were greater than the benefits. Examples might include violence at sporting events or the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville that culminated in violence and a death.



## Analyze

- Introduce Part 1 of the video by explaining that tribalism can take many forms. Promote active viewing by asking students to take note of the different forms of tribalism they witness in the video, as well as the individual and societal costs and benefits of tribalism.
- Ask students to summarize the types of tribalism and the benefits and costs of tribalism by creating short tweet-like messages (using 40 or fewer characters).
- Encourage students to share their tweets and, as needed, summarize the key takeaways (examples of tribalism include sports teams; benefits include a sense of belonging while costs include hatred and even violence).
- Work with the whole class to develop a list of factors that lead to tribalism, especially at their age.
- If time permits, to introduce students to role that social media plays in fueling tribalism, share background information on the Rohingya genocide, and distribute the article [A Genocide Incited on Facebook, With Posts from Myanmar's Military](#). (Students can access the article online or you can distribute printed copies.) Have students read and discuss the article in small groups. Ask whether students are surprised to learn that a social media site has been used in this way and why or why not.
- Distribute the Inquiry Project handout and introduce the project: to investigate the role that social media plays in fueling tribalism.

## Apply

- Explain that students will learn more about tools and tactics that fuel tribalism by reviewing secondary source materials.
- Organize students into small groups and assign one or more of the following sources to each group:
  - [Flaws in the Algo: How Social Media Fuel Political Extremism](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/side-effects/201802/flaws-in-the-algo-how-social-media-fuel-political-extremism) (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/side-effects/201802/flaws-in-the-algo-how-social-media-fuel-political-extremism>) — (synopsis of research study)
  - [How Everyday Social Media Users Become Real-World Extremists](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/25/world/asia/facebook-extremism.html) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/25/world/asia/facebook-extremism.html>) — (article)
  - [Social Media's Re-engineering Effect, From Myanmar to Germany](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/07/technology/personaltech/social-media-effect-myanmar-germany.html) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/07/technology/personaltech/social-media-effect-myanmar-germany.html>) — (article)
  - [The Psychology of Tribalism](http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/09/the-psychology-of-tribalism.html) (<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/09/the-psychology-of-tribalism.html>) — (video)



- Encourage students to use the Inquiry Project handout to organize their ideas as they discuss their source(s).
- Invite a representative from each group to report on whether they proved or disproved their hypothesis and why.

### Act

- Explain that, while tribalism can have individual and societal costs, our allegiance to particular tribes can change and sometimes this change has individual and societal benefits.
- Introduce Part 2 of the video and promote active viewing by asking students to watch for what led Frank Meeink to shift his tribal allegiances.
- Challenge the class to generate a list of the factors that led Meeink to become radicalized and join the neo-Nazi skinhead movement. Then, generate a list of factors that led him to rethink his views and change his personal narrative (Meeink changed his mind when confronted with unexpected kindness; he now uses his experience to promote tolerance).
- Explain that students will create a bridge-building collage to work against hate and help build connections in the school community.
- Assign each student a partner and ask each pair to answer the following questions in writing: “What differences do we want to bridge in our school community? How can we accomplish this goal?”
- Once they have written their answers, allow time for students to design cards that illustrate their answers to the questions. Challenge the class to come up with a way to create an art project that incorporates these illustrations. This can be a collage, a graffiti wall, a bulletin board, or a mural. Give students ample time to create the art project.
- If possible, display the art project in the classroom or in a hallway in the school. Schedule a gallery walk for students to view the collage and reflect on and/or respond to each other’s ideas.

### Extend

- Explain that students will conduct an inquiry project to consider how the concept of tribalism can be applied to the impact on Jewish people’s lives before and during the Holocaust.
- Assign students to small groups and distribute the Tribalism & the Holocaust handout. Explain that each group will watch and discuss one of the following video segments containing eyewitness testimonies from the Holocaust:
  - [USC Shoah Foundation Volume 01: Rise of Nazism and Racism](#)

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- [USC Shoah Foundation Volume 02: Nazi Occupation and Persecution](#) (1<sup>st</sup> Half: Leo Berkenwald through Renee Scott)
- [USC Shoah Foundation Volume 02: Nazi Occupation and Persecution](#) (2<sup>nd</sup> Half: Sol Messinger through Julia Lentini)
- Promote active viewing by encouraging students to use the handout to take notes while they watch.
- After student groups have finished watching the video, ask them to share key takeaways. Then invite a representative from each student group to share its findings.
- Ask students to comment on whether the concept and role of tribalism changed from the period leading up to the war and the period during the war and Holocaust. Challenge students to support their answers with specific details.
- Ask students to consider how the concept of tribalism during the Holocaust is similar to or different from the examples of modern tribalism they learned about earlier in the lesson. Again, challenge students to support their answers with specific examples.

## Connections

Connection to student lives	Connection to contemporary events	Connection to the future
Students who are able to recognize tribalism and its individual and societal costs are better able to respond appropriately. In their personal lives, students can raise awareness about tribalism when and where they see it negatively impacting themselves and others.	Students can connect their learning to contemporary events through their research and will be able to make more informed choices about how they categorize themselves and others.	As events around the world unfold in the future, students can recognize the causes and effects of tribalism (e.g., polarization in U.S. politics) and help to draw attention to the examples and potential costs through their discussions or actions.



## National Standards

### College, Career, & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards

- D2.Civ.7.9-12 Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with other.
- D2.Civ.10.9-12 Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interest and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.
- D2.Civ.14.9-12 Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.
- D2.His.1.9-12 Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.
- D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.
- D3.1.9-12. Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.
- D4.6.9-12 Use disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses to understand the characteristics and causes of local, regional, and global problems, instances of such problems in multiple contexts, and challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address these problems over time and place.
- D4.7.9-12 Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy, identification, and complex causal reasoning.

### Common Core State Standards/ELA Anchor Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

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- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

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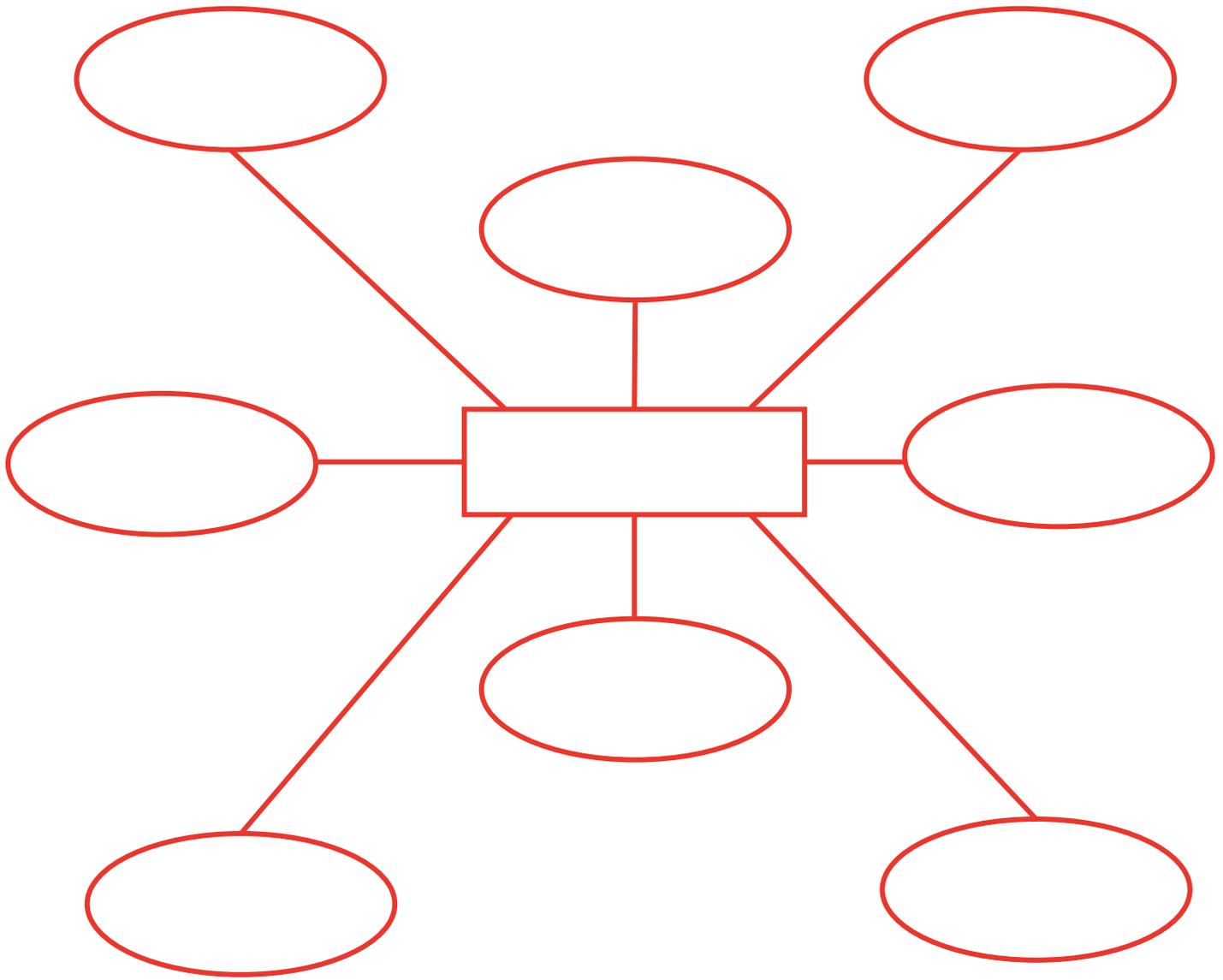


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## Identity Chart

**Directions:** Write the name of a famous person, historical figure, or literary character in the rectangle below. In each of the ovals, write the name of a tribe (“a group of persons having a common character, occupation, or interest”) to which that individual belongs.





## Social Media & Tribalism Inquiry Project

**Inquiry questions:** What role does social media play in promoting tribalism?

Your working hypothesis:

While reading or viewing secondary source materials, make notes regarding:

- evidence that supports your hypothesis.
- evidence that disproves your hypothesis.
- details that describe how specific tools and tactics promote tribalism.
- any new questions or pertinent facts.

After reviewing source materials, answer these questions:

- What role does social media play in how you think about members of your own groups?
- What role does social media play in how you think about members of other groups?
- How might someone in the general public become aware of the role social media plays in promoting tribalism?
- How can you help inform others about tools and tactics, including social media and its algorithms, that fuel tribalism?

Be sure to answer any other questions you have listed in your notes.

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## Tribalism & the Holocaust

**Directions:** As you watch the video, take notes on how the Jewish survivors and/or their relatives thought of themselves and the tribes to which they belonged and how others viewed and categorized them.

Survivor Name	How did the survivor view/categorize himself/herself?	How did others view/categorize the survivor?

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