

A PROJECT WITNESS MICROSHORT STORIES LESSON PLAN

THE SULTAN WHO SAID NO

*He signed the decree against his own Jewish subjects.
Then did everything in his power to undermine it.*

GRADES 11–12

EPISODE SUMMARY

About This Film



The 1941 Feast of the Throne, as depicted in the microshort. The Sultan seats the chief rabbi at his right; Vichy officials watch from across the table.

After France fell to Nazi Germany in June 1940, the Vichy regime extended its antisemitic legislation to French North Africa. In Morocco, governed as a French Protectorate, real authority lay with the Résident général, General Charles Noguès. But the Sultan's seal was constitutionally required to give French legislation the force of Moroccan law. On October 31, 1940, Sultan Mohammed V — thirty-one years old, in office since 1927 — affixed his Great Seal to the Moroccan application of the Vichy *Statut des Juifs*.

The legislation imposed quotas on Jewish participation in the professions, restrictions on property, census obligations, and — in some cities, particularly Fez — the forced relocation of Jews from European neighborhoods back into the mellahs, causing severe overcrowding and disease. Morocco's Jewish community of roughly 250,000 was subjected to real persecution under these Vichy measures.

However, no documented deportations of Moroccan Jews from Morocco 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 performed in front of Vichy officials. 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.

TIME 45 min core / 90 min with extensions	MATERIALS Device to play video; printed discussion questions (optional).	CONTENT ADVISORY Low intensity. Names real persecution; no violence on screen. The heaviest moments are conceptual: a royal seal that hovers over wax before it presses, the disappearing decree, the hand on the rabbi's shoulder, the empty platform that stays empty.
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TEACHER NOTE

Mohammed V's protection was real but not absolute. Students should understand that meaningful allyship can coexist with incomplete resistance. The historical record is genuinely complicated, and that complexity is the lesson.

DRIVING QUESTION

What is meaningful resistance when refusal is not survivable?

Mohammed V signed the decree. Mohammed V undermined what he signed. The same hand did both things, within a system he could not overthrow. The question this lesson sits with is whether what he did counts as resistance, what it would mean if it did, and what we owe to a story whose most famous line is collective memory rather than secured transcript.

LESSON OBJECTIVES · GRADES 11–12

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. **Evaluate** the rhetorical and historical tension created when the Dahir's Islamic royal preamble (*Louange à Dieu seul!*) precedes its antisemitic provisions on the same page.
2. **Compare** Mohammed V's response to other documented national responses under Nazi pressure — Denmark, Bulgaria, Vichy France itself, Italy under Mussolini — identifying what range of choices was available and what determined them.
3. **Construct** a 350–450-word analytical essay on the relationship between historical accuracy and collective memory, using the Mohammed V quote (“*There are no Jews in Morocco...*”) as the central case.

STEP 1 OF 4

Watch



Sultan Mohammed V, archival portrait c. 1950. Source: archival, public domain.

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 for centuries before Vichy. Vichy laws forced some Jews back into mellahs from European neighborhoods.

Dahir

A royal decree of the Sultan of Morocco. Vichy laws required the Sultan's dahir to take effect in Morocco; the Dahir of 31 October 1940 extended the antisemitic *Statut des Juifs* to Moroccan jurisdiction.

Righteous Among the Nations

Yad Vashem's title recognizing non-Jews who, at personal risk, saved Jews during the Holocaust. Mohammed V has not received this designation; the criteria do not easily accommodate heads of state acting through symbolic and administrative leverage.

Operation Torch

The Allied amphibious landings in French North Africa, November 1942. The landings effectively ended Vichy authority in Morocco; antisemitic legislation was not formally repealed until 1943.

Anticipation

THINK ABOUT IT

The Dahir's opening invokes God; its provisions strip a people. The Sultan's most famous defense of those people may itself be partly mythologized. What does it mean when a story's most significant moral claim cannot be fully verified? Come prepared to defend your interpretation after viewing.

View the Microshort — 90 Seconds

Show the film in full without interruption. Students should not write during the film.

The goal is full, attentive viewing.

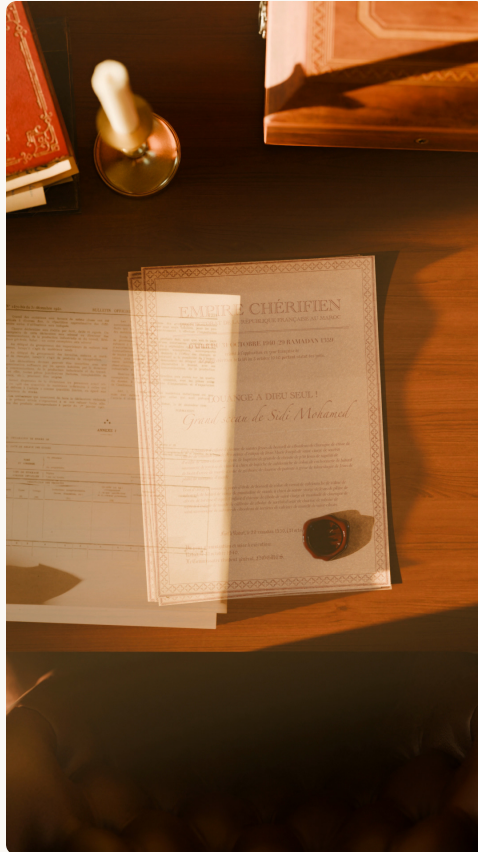
Watch: projectwitness.org/videos/microshort-ep4-the-sultan



Scan with any phone camera, or paste the link above into a browser.

STEP 2 OF 4

Analyze



The signed Vichy decree disappears beneath a stack of papers — the film's visual shorthand for the documented administrative resistance.

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. Pay close attention to the structure of Beat 5: "They faced real hardship under Vichy... *But* no Moroccan Jew was deported..."
3. Compare Mohammed V's response to other national responses during the Holocaust — Denmark's rescue of its Jewish citizens in 1943, Bulgaria's contradictory record (resisting deportation in old borders while enforcing it in newly acquired territories), Italy's late-war ambivalence. What does this comparison reveal about the range of choices 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? How should historians treat such material?
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?

TEACHER NOTE

Teacher note: If students do not surface the concept of symbolic power organically in the Step 2 discussion, introduce it here as a frame for what the film just performed.

STEP 3 OF 4

Create



The 1941 Feast of the Throne. A single brass candelabra in the foreground implies the entire hall.

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, 350–450 words) that addresses the following:

P R O M P T

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 (including the Dahir, the Feast of the Throne, and the documented outcome of zero deportations from Morocco), and arrive at a conclusion that speaks to the contemporary relevance of this question.

STEP 4 OF 4

Reflect



The same mother and daughter whose home was searched in Beat 2, now unharmed at the threshold of their home, in warm late-afternoon light. The film's closing image before the end card.

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.”

— As remembered by those he protected · Mohammed V, c. 1940–1941

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Going Deeper

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:

- Susan Gilson Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge, 2013).
- Michel Abitbol, *Les Juifs d'Afrique du Nord sous Vichy* (Riveneuve, 2008).
- Robert Satloff, *Among the Righteous* (PublicAffairs, 2006).
- Richard Hurowitz, *In the Garden of the Righteous* (Harper, 2023).
- Yad Vashem's public criteria for Righteous Among the Nations — and the discussion of 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 this debate teach us about how history is written?

APPENDIX

Standards Alignment

FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS (GRADES 11-12)
Common Core ELA	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.1.9-12, 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.1112.R.2.1, ELA.1112.R.3.2, ELA.1112.C.1.3; SS.912.W.7.6
Texas TEKS	ELAR 11.6(A), 11.8(A); WH.15(A–D)
California HSS	11.7
CASEL SEL	All five competencies

This lesson supports the Holocaust education mandates of more than 25 U.S. states. It addresses New York DASA goals around allyship, interfaith solidarity, and using one's position to protect others.

PRIMARY SOURCE CITATION

The Dahir of 31 October 1940

Dahir du 31 octobre 1940 (29 ramadan 1359) relatif à l'application en zone française de l'Empire chérifien de la loi du 3 octobre 1940 portant statut des juifs.

Sealed by Sultan Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef, 31 October 1940. Countersigned for promulgation by Charles Noguès. Published in *Bulletin officiel de l'Empire chérifien*, N° 1463, 8 novembre 1940, pages 1054–1056.

Full PDF: archive.gazettes.africa