**Title:** Herzl, Zola, and Dreyfus

**Location:** Europe – Western

**Short description**

A drawing of Alfred Dreyfus, Émile Zola, and Theodor Herzl.

**Detailed description**

​​​​​​​This is a drawing from the Musée d’art et d’histoire du Judaïsme (Museum of Jewish Art and History) in Paris. The drawing shows two figures seated on a sofa: on the right, Alfred Dreyfus and on the left, Émile Zola. Standing to the right of the sofa is Theodor Herzl who is holding a notepad.

This is an imaginary illustration, since it is unlikely that these three figures were ever together in the same room. However, the drawing shows the strong connection between the lives of these characters.

Alfred Dreyfus was a French-Jewish- officer who was wrongly accused of spying and treason. Following his conviction, Dreyfus was deported to Devil’s Island for life imprisonment. The Dreyfus Affair divided the French public; many supported Dreyfus’ conviction, while others fought to prove his innocence. Among Dreyfus’ supporters was the famous French writer Émile Zola. The Dreyfus Affair was an influential event for Theodor Herzl, and many believe it inspired him found modern political Zionism.

Herzl was Paris correspondent for the Austrian newspaper *Neue* *Freie* *Presse* at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. He believed in Dreyfus’ innocence and was witness to the anti-Semitic protests against Dreyfus and the Jews of France during the trial. In June 1895 he wrote in his diary:

In Paris, as I have said, I achieved a freer attitude toward anti-Semitism...Above all, I recognized the emptiness and futility of trying to “combat” anti-Semitism.

Many believe that the Dreyfus Affair was the turning point that led Herzl to believe that the Jews must leave Europe and create their own state. The Austrian-Jewish writer Stefan Zweig wrote in his book *The World of Yesterday*:

In Paris, Herzl had had an experience which convulsed his soul, one of those hours that change an entire existence… At the moment of Dreyfus's degradation the thought of the eternal exile of his people entered his breast like the thrust of a dagger… If we suffer because of our homelessness, then let us build our own homeland!

**Would You Like to Know More?**

**The Dreyfus Affair** <previous doc>

**Theodor** **Herzl** – Theodor (Binyamin Ze’ev) Herzl (1860–1904) was the visionary behind modern Zionism. Zionism was a political movement with the goal of re-establishing a Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael. Herzl, born in Budapest, was a journalist and playwright. He was very affected by the events surrounding the trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus in France in 1894, which he covered as a journalist. Witnessing the anti-Semitism around the Dreyfus affair, which included a mob yelling “Death to the Jews,” Herzl became convinced of the need for a Jewish state. In 1896 Herzl wrote *The Jewish State* (*Der* *Judenstaat*), and the following year he convened the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, with the aim to begin creating a modern, secular Jewish state. Herzl proposed that Jews around the world raised money for the Jewish State. The delegates of the First Zionist Congress adopted the Basel Program and declared that: “Zionism seeks to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured under public law.” The World Zionist Organization was formed as the political arm of the Jewish people, and Herzl was elected its first president. Herzl convened six Zionist congresses between 1897 and 1903. At the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903, Herzl proposed the Uganda Plan which stated that a temporary Jewish State would be created in Uganda for Jews in immediate danger. Although Herzl stated that the Uganda Plan would not replace the goal of creating a state in the Land of Israel, the idea was very controversial and nearly split the Zionist movement. After Herzl’s death, his Uganda Plan was officially rejected at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905. Herzl died in 1904 in Vienna where he was buried. In 1949 he was reinterred on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

**Emile Zola** – Emile Zola (1840–1902) was a French author and journalist. Zola became famous in the Jewish world when he came to the defence of the French Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus in what is known as the Dreyfus Affair. In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus was falsely accused of treason, court-martialled, convicted, and sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil’s Island in French Guiana. The arrest and subsequent trial were steeped in anti-Semitism and included the suppression of evidence and a cover-up. Journalists, such as Theodor Herzl and Emile Zola, were outraged by the Dreyfus Affair. On January 13 1898, Zola risked his career by publishing an open letter on the front page of the French newspaper *L’Aurore* entitled “*J’accuse*” (I Accuse). In his letter, Zola accused the military leaders of distorting justice and protecting the real spy and appealed to the French president for justice. In a subsequent series of articles Zola proved that Dreyfus was innocent. Since Zola was a well-known and respected figure in France, his letter became a turning point in the Dreyfus Affair. He was, nonetheless, tried for criminal libel and sentenced to a year’s imprisonment. Zola fled France to avoid imprisonment and lived briefly in England. In June 1899, Zola returned to France, and Dreyfus was pardoned and set free, although not exonerated until 1906. Zola died in France in 1902 under suspicious circumstances. In January 1998, French President Jacques Chirac held a ceremony marking the 100th anniversary of the publication of “*J’accuse*.” Chirac said that the French people should never forget the courage of a great writer who risked his career and his life in order to tell the truth.

**Teaching Suggestions**

​​​**​**​**​​​​**Teachers of **Jewish** **Studies** or **Jewish** **History** could use this picture in various lessons. It could be shown in lessons dealing with the Dreyfus Affair, together with other resources provided on this page, or in lessons about the Zionist movement and Theodor Herzl. The picture is especially relevant to discussions about the anti-Semitic atmosphere in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century which inspired Herzl to establish the Zionist movement.

**Discussion Points**

**Observation**

* ​Who are the three figures in the picture?​

**Reading Between the Lines**

* What is the connection between Émile Zola and Alfred Dreyfus, who are both seated on the sofa?
* ​What is the connection between Alfred Dreyfus and Theodor Herzl, who is standing beside the sofa?

**Connections**

* This is probably an imaginary drawing as it is unlikely that the three ever met.
* Why do you think the artist chose to draw these three figures together?
* At the time of the Dreyfus Affair Theodor Herzl wrote:
* “In Paris, as I have said, I achieved a freer attitude toward anti-Semitism ... Above all, I recognized the emptiness and futility of trying to 'combat' anti-Semitism.”
* Explain Herzl’s words. What was his solution to anti-Semitism?
* It is said that the Dreyfus Affair was one of Herzl’s motivations for founding the Zionist movement.
* How do you think that this affair influenced Herzl?
* ​Imagine a conversation between the three figures in this picture.

**Target audience:** Junior High, High School, Informal Education, Higher Education

**NLI Links**

[The Dreyfus Affair](http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/collections/PersonalWebs/Dreyfus/Pages/default.aspx)

[Emile Zola, 1901](http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/digitallibrary/pages/viewer.aspx?docid=EDU_XML_ENGSP217&presentorid=EDU_XML_ENG&searchurl=http%3A%2F%2Fweb.nli.org.il%2Fsites%2Fnlis%2Fen%2Feducation%2Fpages%2Fresults.aspx%23%3Fquery%3Dlsr16%2Cexact%2CPrimary+Source%26query%3Dany%2Ccontains%2Cdreyfus%26indx%3D9%26institution%3DNNL%26vid%3DEDU_XML_ENG%26loc%3Dlocal%2Cscope%3A(EDU_XML_ENG)%26sortField%3Dlso04%26bulkSize%3D8)  
[Herzl Shana Tova Postcard, 1960s](http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/digitallibrary/pages/viewer.aspx?docid=EDU_XML_ENG700334860&presentorid=EDU_XML_ENG&searchurl=http%3A%2F%2Fweb.nli.org.il%2Fsites%2Fnlis%2Fen%2Feducation%2Fpages%2Fresults.aspx%23%3Fquery%3Dlsr16%2Cexact%2CPrimary+Source%26query%3Dany%2Ccontains%2Cdreyfus%26indx%3D9%26institution%3DNNL%26vid%3DEDU_XML_ENG%26loc%3Dlocal%2Cscope%3A(EDU_XML_ENG)%26sortField%3Dlso04%26bulkSize%3D8)