

Beth Chai Curriculum

3/4th Grade: Jews Around the World

Goal: To broaden the students concept of the Jewish people to include Jews from many different cultures. Throughout the year the key questions are: How did Jews get to the particular country? What do all Jews have in common? How do different Jews practice Judaism?

The interplay of the surrounding culture and Judaism will be a key concept. By the end of the year, students should understand that the American progressive Judaism they are familiar with, that is so heavily based upon Ashkenazi culture, and also heavily influenced by contemporary American culture, is only one of many ways people can be Jewish.

Core values:

- Jews having a responsibility to other Jews
- Appreciation for differences

Throughout the year, some history will be included as the students study selected Jewish communities to answer the question of how the Jews got to their various locations. Emphasis will be on some of the most ancient and isolated communities as these are the least well known. Part of the rationale for this is to counteract the unaware assumptions that Ashkenazi Jewish culture is the defining culture of Judaism.

Different customs will also be studied in the context of the Jewish holidays as they occur throughout the year.

- A. Bring in a large world map and small Jewish star stickers. Explain that Jews live and have lived all over the world. See if the children can name places that they know Jews live. Have children place stickers on all the American cities that they mention as well as on other countries that they mention.

When they have exhausted their knowledge, (be aware of when they are starting to guess) tell them that they will be learning about Jews around the world this whole year. Tell them you have some story books to read to them that will give them some clues as to other countries Jews live now or have lived.

- B. Read: *All in My Jewish Family*. Have the children place stickers in the newly mentioned countries.

C-E. Depending on the children's interest, how much time you have and your other goals for the class, do all of the following in your next few lessons. The order is not important- except that you want to teach about Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot before each holiday happens, if possible.

- C. Ask the students where the Jews first lived. They should be able to answer Israel.

Explain that the ancient Jews did live in what is now Israel, but that through lots of different conquests they were dispersed throughout the world. No matter where they were the Jews always dreamed of returning to the land of Israel one day.

Many Jewish communities were unknown to other Jewish communities until modern times. So they will be learning about Jews that that even their parents may not know about.

One of the ways that distant Jewish communities became know to us was when the modern State of Israel was founded in 1948, Jews from many of these distant countries began arriving in Israel.

Read: *On Eagles Wings and other things*, by Connie Colker Steiner. Have students put stickers on countries that are mentioned in the book. One lively way to use this book would be to assign each of the students an identity from the book. Bring in as many props of items mentioned in the book as you can manage. The principal may be able to supply you with some of the Jewish articles mentioned (perhaps even from the country mentioned). Have the students act out the scenes as you read them.

After you have read the book, use some kind of chart to show the similarities and differences between these Jews and ourselves with the question: " What do Jews have in common? In what ways are they different? The similarities will include such things as Torah, Siddurim (prayerbooks), Shofar, Hebrew names.

D. A comprehensive mapping and list of World Jewry.

Make an enlarged copy of the list of World Jewry from the book: *Jewish Communities of the World*. Cut each country and population into strips. Have the students pick a strip out of a bowl or bag, read it and put a star on the correct location on the map. The students may well need help with this task.(You can have the class decide whether they want to include communities with less than 100 members.) Have students tape or glue the strips onto a poster board so you can refer to the population numbers throughout the year. Ask: did you know Jews were in so many places in the world? How many countries do you think this is? Have students count the countries as a class. This would be the perfect time to invite the music teacher in to teach the song, "Wherever you go, there's always someone Jewish", if this hasn't happened yet. If they already know it, it would be a good time for them to sing it again. (this would be a good song for them to sing throughout the year as kind of a theme song - to open, to close - to transition, etc.)

E. Diverse Jewish Tradition for Rosh Ha'Shanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

For each holiday have the children list what they know about how we celebrate the holiday. Using materials from the *Rosh Ha'Shanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot Anthologies* by Philip Goodman, share some of the customs from other communities. You might want to again use a diagram to show similarities and

differences. Or make a list. If at all possible research some special eastern (oriental, sephardic) recipes and bring in for the students to taste, or send home the recipes for them to make at home, or have your room parent make.

For Rosh Ha'Shanah they should know: eat apples and honey, go to services, hear the shofar blown, send Rosh Ha'Shanah cards. They may not know that more traditional Jews begin in the month of Elul to pray more, ask forgiveness, have special services called Slichot, visit the cemetery and observe tashlich (throwing of crumbs into a moving body of water to represent throwing our mistakes (sins) away. These observances come up in the descriptions from other communities, so if you are going to include them, they should know which are pretty universal and which are unique - or shared among the more eastern Jews. It is interesting to note that a sheep's head is used in several communities, as are pomegranates, and a seder Rosh Ha'Shanah. Discuss the symbolism of a sheep's head - (Rosh in Hebrew means head), pomegranates - contain many seeds - often a symbol of plenty.

For Yom Kippur they should know: Ask forgiveness from friends and family, (traditional Jews ask forgiveness from God also) Go to services, hear the shofar blown, think about how to be better in the coming year, adults fast, children may try to give up sweets, or fast for part of the day as they get older. They may not know of the traditional custom of kapparot (sacrifice of a chicken or money), wearing white, not wearing leather, wearing a tallit.

For Sukkot they will know about building a sukkah. They should also be introduced to the lulav (branches of palm, myrtle, willow) and etrog (citron). Perhaps they can make some decorations for our Sukkah that follow a description from another community. I believe paper chains were mentioned.

For Simchat Torah they will probably only know that traditionally Jews celebrate the Torah by dancing around with it. They should be introduced to the knowledge that the Torah is traditionally read through once a year (in some communities in three years) and at Simchat Torah the cycle is begun again, with the last passage (the death of Moses) and the first passage (creation) read. Some congregations try to read a little from each passage. In Ashkenazi custom, the children parade around with flags. Sometimes the flags have apples on top of them.

In Reform congregations it is customary to invite all the new Sunday school children up to the bima, where they receive a miniature Torah. In more traditional congregations the children are invited up to the bima and placed under a tallit (like we do at High Holiday services) while the Torah is being read, or to receive a blessing. Some congregations give out candy to the children during this time, or as they parade.

We are trying to build a Beth Chai Simchat Torah tradition that includes dancing with symbolic Torahs and perhaps other favorite books, also donations to our budding library???

Have the music come in and teach *David Melech Yisrael* and *Heiveinu Shalom Alechem*, and *Hava Nagila*. Both are mentioned in the anthology in Eli Weisel's account of the huge outpouring of Jews during Simchat Torah in Moscow before the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is a time and place and event they should learn about. Perhaps there is a more readable account for children that we can find.

The material in the anthologies is written in an old fashioned style, so the teacher will have to extrapolate the information and tell it in an interesting way. Bringing in books of pictures from the countries featured is one way to make it more real to the children. Also, pictures of synagogues in those countries, and Jewish music from those countries. Many of these accounts are from pre WWII, or before the founding of the state of Israel. There may be very few Jews left in some of these countries. Have the children refer to their chart to try and figure this out. It may be possible with some further research to discover if the Jews have kept these customs after immigrating to Israel.

It is interesting that several of the countries featured such as Afghanistan, and Iraq have been attacked by the United States in recent memory. Perhaps knowing that there are or were Jews in these countries can help to undo some of the demonization of these people that can happen during a time of war.

- F. One of the oldest Jewish communities outside the land of Israel - An in depth look at Ethiopian Jews.

The Ethiopian Jews date their conversion to Judaism back to the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon. Read Blu Greenberg's book on King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Have students find Ethiopia on your map. They should know a little about the present day condition of the Ethiopian Jew still in Ethiopia, as we have had related tzeddakah projects, but little about their life or customs.

Explain a little about the isolation of the Ethiopian Jews. and that they had the Torah, but not the Talmud. So in some ways they were practicing Judaism in a way very close to the Jews in the ancient land of Israel, before rabbinic interpretations changed the practice. They have always spoken and read Hebrew.

Read the book: *Day of Delight: A Jewish Sabbath in Ethiopia*. This story takes place before the famines and mass exodus to Israel. It is another story that it would be good to bring in props and have the children act out. Perhaps they could do all the work type actions at once and then stop for the Sabbath. It would also be a great project for the class to make a model of the synagogue, or for each student to make their own model. Another idea is to make scratch boards with colored crayons under and black crayon over and then scratch through their own illustrations in the style of the artist of the book. They could also try their hand at simple pottery or weaving. (but not blacksmithing!).

Ethiopian embroidery and basketry is probably available in the community. Ask the principal for help in locating some to show the children.

Again, the question, what do we have in common, what is different should be discussed.

A field trip to an Ethiopian restaurant would also be a nice idea. There are several in the area.

After the students have a good idea of the culture and customs, they can be introduced to the difficulties and the history. Use the book: *Falasha No More; An Ethiopian Jewish Child Comes Home*, by Arlene Kushner. This is a long book with a lot of information. It probably makes sense to break it up into bits and discuss it. Pages 1 -13 Discuss how hard it is to leave one's home. Notice the Hebrew names. Discuss the prejudice they faced in Ethiopia, the dangers along the way, the rescue, " Operation Moses", and "Operation Solomon". You might want to discuss with them the fact that the Orthodox, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbinate of Israel at first did not want to recognize the Ethiopian Jews as Jewish. (a common theme - also for the Jews of Cochin, India, etc).

Pgs. 14 -23: First day of school. The students should be able to relate. Why does the boy on the playground doubt Avraham's Jewish identity? (Hint: can Jews ever be racist?, ignorant???)

The flower garden analogy. A favorite. Have the students bring in pictures of themselves, make color photo copies of Ethiopian children that Beth Chai families have sponsored (the principal has some of these, some of the children in the class will also have), and make a class flower garden on a long sheet of mural paper. Be sure to leave room for additions! The faces of the children can be inside a variety of construction paper cut - outs of flowers. This garden can be added to throughout the year as they learn about other communities.

Pgs 24 - 26 On the Playground. Why wouldn't the Ethiopian Jews know about Chanukah? (Not in Torah - happened later). What is Seged? (Need to research this a bit more). What would we say to a Jew who had a priest rather than a rabbi? Can these people still be Jews? How do you think Avraham felt when he was invited to play after school? How do you think this will turn out? Let's see.

Pgs. 29 - 37 Cultural differences. Discuss the difference in attitude toward time. What is the Washington DC attitude toward time? How is this manifested? Do any of them find this difficult? Would they like to be able to slow down once in awhile? Do any of them know Israelis? How do they find them on the politeness/noisiness spectrum? (Judy, this might be a good time for you to share some of your experiences, especially of Israeli brusqueness, expressiveness.)

If the teacher doesn't have direct experience - here are some examples: When I lived

on the kibbutz and worked in the communal kitchen, we used huge big heavy pots - enough to feed 200 people at a time. If I would go to lift a pot by myself the other women who worked in the kitchen would all start shouting at me at the top of their lungs, "NOT ALONE!!, NOT ALONE!!". They would then run over to help. But it was very startling. In the U.S., in a similar situation we would probably say, (not shout): " Wait a minute, let me help you". The Israeli Knesset (Parliament) is famous for its rowdiness. During the years I lived there, several members of the Knesset were routinely removed by the police, kicking and screaming for going beyond the bounds of what was acceptable. Compare/contrast to the Senate. Have any of them watched our legislative session on C-span? You might want to assign as extra credit homework.

Pgs. 37 - 51 Many more cultural differences to discuss. Hospitality. Older and younger sibling mores. They should enjoy discussing that. Who is the younger, who is the older, or if they don't have, how would they like it to be? Crafts - again we may be able to find at least baskets. Touching. What are our families like? Family relations, names. How many in the class have mothers who have kept their surname?

Pgs 52 - 58 Conclusion. Perhaps the students would like to try the Ethiopian handshake. This is a little repetitious if you have gone over the story so far in detail, so you might just want to summarize at this point. The story should in any case be broken up into at least three pieces.

Culminating activity: Field trip to an Ethiopian restaurant.

G. Another Ancient Jewish Community Outside the land of Israel - Yemen

Using the sources from One People, Many Faces the students will learn about the history and culture of the Jews of Yemen.

The Jews of Yemen date their arrival in Yemen from the time of the destruction of the First Temple (Solomon's Temple). They have developed a unique Jewish culture. Over time the prejudices and restrictions grew. They began immigrating to Palestine in 1882 and became "the largest percentage of Jews from a single country to emigrate prior to the establishment of the state of Israel" (Jewish Communities of the World).

The children have already been introduced to "Operation Magic Carpet" about the airlift of Yemenite Jews to Israel between May 1949-Sept. 1950. Now they can hear more details of the trip.

Using lesson plans from the teacher's guide to One People Many Faces, they will get to learn Yemenite Jewish games, crafts (simplified) hear Yemenite music and listen to Yemenite stories.

H. The Iraqi Jewish Community

Jews have lived in what is now called Iraq, but was called Babylon since the Destruction of the Second Temple. Although some Jews returned to the land of Israel, when the region was under Persian control (modern day Iran), many Jews stayed in Babylon and developed a flourishing community. After the Destruction of the Second Temple, many Jewish scholars found their way to Babylon. There they set up many centers of learning and produce the largest part of the Talmud, the Babylonian Talmud.

When discussing the destruction of the Second Temple you might want to trace all the places Jews went at that time on your map. We are not going to spend much time on the Ashkenazi Jews this year, as they will study the eastern European Jews

It might be nice to invite the Rabbi in to discuss the Babylonian Talmud.

They have already learned a few Iraqi holiday customs. What can they learn about the life of the people from these customs?

From Iraqi Jews came many other far flung Jewish communities: India, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. Find these on the map. Compare/contrast holiday and other related customs of these places. Add pictures of Jews from these countries to the flower garden mural.

I. The Jews of Italy

Around the time of Chanukah, you might want to do a little about the Jews of Italy, as there have been Jews in Italy since the time of the Maccabees, as they sent emissaries to Rome, who ended up staying there. Italy was also a destination of Jews fleeing the Inquisition. You can have the music teacher in to teach Ocho Candelikas - a Ladino Chanukkah song, sung I believe throughout the Sephardic Jewish world (Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Sarajevo, etc). One interesting fact about the Italian Jewish community is that the first Jewish woman to have her poetry and prayers published in a Jewish community prayer book was the Italian Jew: Deborah Ascarelli. (I had a descendent of hers in a class as a student once). (Her poems are probably too difficult for the students).

J. The Kiev Kid's Connection

We had an ongoing relationship with the progressive Jewish community in Kiev. We have sent letters to them and they have answered us. Linda Bernstein - Beth Chai member has lived in Kiev and her son celebrated his Bar Mitzvah there - the first Bar Mitzvah in the community in 50 years. I am sure she would be willing to come into the classroom to share the pictures from that and talk a little with the children. It would be nice if they could do another project for that community. Also, add photocopies of their pictures to the flower garden mural.

K. The Jews of India.

Bring in music, make their special haroset out of date syrup and walnuts, and note that this is the same as Iraqi haroset. Find pictures, etc.

L. The Jews of China.

There are several distinct communities - all of them quite interesting. Use the book: *Legends of the Jews of Kaifeng*, by Xu Xin. Several of the stories are very readable, especially the first few about the founding of the community and the one dealing with saving the Torah's from a severe flood (by a man named Noah!). Have the students copy the Chinese characters for the name of the synagogue: The Temple of Purity and Truth.

There is much to discuss. What kept the community together? What led to its demise? What is similar to our situation? (A very tolerant country with no barriers to assimilation).

Bring in pictures of the synagogue. Perhaps make a model. This should be new information for most of the congregation. Perhaps put on some skits based on the stories.

Tie into the community in Shanghai. Notice that help was not really forthcoming.

Then there was the community established by Russians and other Europeans. We have some first hand accounts that are quite vivid. Once again, it might be interesting to make models of the description of life and holidays.

M. The Jews of Latin America.

Use your map and list to identify where larger and smaller communities are. Bring in pictures of synagogues. You might want to discuss the crisis in Argentina that is affecting the Jewish community also and some of the tzedakah projects from here that relate to that. We may be able to get music.

N. The Jews of Australia

A colorful history, " Jews were among the first convicts deported from the United Kingdom in the 18th century. Now has the highest percentage of Holocaust survivors of any Jewish community in the world.