

Beth Chai Family School Curriculum

4th Grade – Themes & Source Material: Community

The Theme of “What is Community” will be integrated into the curriculum. Resources include “Jewish Community” by Julie Greenberg and The School Curriculum of the Birmingham Temple, Culture of Eastern European Life

Jewish History
Pale of Settlement -Shtetl Life
Immigration
Union movement
Zionism, early settlement of Israel

Community

The goal in our discussion of community is to encourage the student to think about the concept of community, to identify the various communities in which he/she is involved, and to be able to discuss the benefits that community life offers and the sacrifices it requires. To that end, we engage in classroom discussion of the following questions:

1. **Why do people form communities?** (for physical protection; to avoid isolation; to perpetuate the group; to divide life’s tasks, so that every person does not have to grow food, build a shelter, make clothes, educate the young, etc.; instead jobs are divided functionally, resulting in specialization)
2. **What roles do various individuals play in a community?** (civil leader/governor; religious leader; protector/soldier; teacher; farmer; tradesperson; public facilities engineer; explorer; criminal)
3. **What do people gain by being part of a community?** (protection; culture; education; easier access to food and clothing; friendship; pride)
4. **What do people sacrifice in order to be part of a community?** (freedom to do whatever one likes; must give deference to authority; acceptance of the expectations of the culture; money in the form of taxes or tribute)
5. **What communities is the student a part of?** (humanity; country; state, city and neighborhood; school; religious congregation; family)
6. **What responsibilities do we have within our communities?** (to take an active part; to treat others in the community with respect; to obey laws and to work to change the laws to which we object; to leave the community better than we found it)

Jewish Life in the Pale of Settlement

At the end of the 19th century, the majority of the world's Jewish population lived within the area of Eastern Europe known as the Pale of Settlement. Students learn about the geographic boundaries of the Pale; about the quality of life within it; and the reasons leading up to the period of mass immigration from the Pale. Among the issues discussed are the following:

1. **Why were the Jews required to live in a segregated area within Eastern Europe?** (fear of their potential power led to the desire to segregate them so they could be better monitored and controlled; anti-semitism within the majority population)
2. **What laws defined Jewish life within the Pale?** (Jews were prohibited from owning land and thus did not, as a rule, become farmers. Instead they became tradesmen, scholars, entertainers, etc. Jewish life was defined not only by civil law but by religious authority. Religious law dictated dietary habits, marriage and virtually every major aspect of life.)
3. **What was a shtetl and how did life differ for boys and girls within the culture of the shtetl?** (A shtetl was a typical rural town in the Pale. The inhabitants were generally poor and thus the houses and buildings were very basic. An active marketplace dominated the town. One or more synagogues held places of honor. Because they were small, people generally knew each other in the shtetl. Boys were allowed to pursue their education beyond 6th grade and were expected to follow their father's trade. They often served as apprentices in order to learn a skill or trade. Girls were not allowed to pursue much schooling. They were expected to learn housekeeping skills from their mothers.)
4. **How did Jews and Christians relate to each other within the Pale?** (It varied by town. Sometimes Christians and Jews interacted freely and the Jews were well tolerated. In other areas, Jews became the scapegoat for all economic troubles and were the victim of pogroms. The situation in the Pale deteriorated greatly after the attempted revolution of 1917.)
5. **What was a pogrom and what conditions of late 19th century Russia led to the wave of pogroms?** (A pogrom was an officially-sanctioned raid on Jewish towns. Property was destroyed, buildings burned, and people beaten and killed. The deteriorating economic conditions within Russia in the late 1800s and the growing political instability led to waves of pogroms that grew in frequency and intensity.)
6. **How did the Jews respond to the pogroms?** (Many sought to leave the Pale, triggering a mass exodus of Jews to the West from 1880 – 1920. Some began to lobby for the creation of a Jewish state. This led to the development of the Zionist movement.)

Immigration

Between the period of 1880-1923, approximately 2.5 million Jews emigrated from the Pale of Settlement to other countries, primarily to the United States. We study the conditions under which the majority of our ancestors left the Pale and settled in the U.S.

1. **What was the typical pattern of family emigration?** (The father and/or oldest son(s) would emigrate first, save money and later bring over wives, children, and parents.)
2. **What were the conditions of the typical trip from the Pale to a port city in Western Europe?** (dangerous, required bribery, often had to acquire false travel documents illegally)
3. **What were the conditions of the boat trip from Europe to the United States?** (most traveled in steerage; little to no food, poor quality food and water; horrible sanitation facilities; much sickness)
4. **What were the immigrants' perceptions of America prior to their arrival?** What were their hopes and expectations?

Life in Lower East Side New York

Many Jews made it no farther in America than the lower East Side of New York City. There they found others from their hometowns, familiar language, food, and customs; and support for religious life. They also found crowded, filthy and unhealthy living conditions and equally poor working conditions. We study this period in depth, over a 5-month period. Among the aspects we explore are:

1. Tenement life
2. Sweatshop working conditions, including the health problems they engendered
3. Public education
4. Cultural life, including Yiddish theatre
5. Contrast between this community and the shtetl community

Rise of the Labor Movement

Jews played an active role in the development of the labor movement in the early 20th century. Individuals such as Clara Lemlich, Samuel Gompers, Louis Brandeis provided leadership to the movement. Industries dominated by Jewish immigrants, such

as the garment industry, were among the first to conduct successful widespread strikes. Slowly, conditions of work, for children and adults, began to improve. Because of the prominent role of Jews during this period, we

Early Zionism and Emigration to Palestine

In this unit, we study Theodor Herzl and the First Zionist Congress. We read about the first Aliyah – the small group of Russian Jews who established the earliest kibbutzes. Students learn about the geography and resources of the area that was known then as Palestine. We discuss at length the debate between those religious Jews who felt it was wrong to try to establish a Jewish state and those more secular Jews who asked “if not now, when?” We also learn about Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, his creation of the first modern Hebrew dictionary and his efforts to establish Hebrew as a secular, spoken language.

Curriculum Texts and Resources Used in 4th Grade

Call Me Ruth, by Marilyn Sachs - a work of historical interest, which introduces many of the concepts and events of the period.

Fiddler on the Roof – viewing the movie helps students get a visual image of the shtetl; it demonstrates a variety of cultural traditions and illustrates the traditional roles of boys and girls and of different members of the community; it addresses the relationship between the majority Christian community and the minority Jewish community and depicts a pogrom, leading to mass exodus from the shtetl.

Journey Through Jewish History by Seymour Rossel – We use chapter 15: Jewish Life in Europe, chapter 16: Uptown and Downtown, chapter 18: The Birth of Zionism; and chapter 19: The Jewish Nation Grows

Immigrant Kids by Russell Freedman – has lots of contemporaneous photos and short, age-appropriate chapters

America, The Jewish Experience by Sondra Leiman – chapter 9: Wave After Wave of People, includes material on the Galveston, Texas experiment and a bio of Rose Schneiderman in the Labor Movement section

Heroes of American Jewish History -

A Young Person’s History of Israel by David Bamberger– Part Two: Early Zionism, chapter 5: The Birth of a Dream, chapter 6: One Man Changes History, and chapter 7: To Build a Land

World of Our Fathers by Irving Howe – Although the text isn’t age-appropriate, this book contains excellent contemporaneous photos and is good preparatory material for the

teacher.

Letters from Rifka by Karen Hesse - While we don't read this in its entirety, selections are read as a model for students' own writing of letters, as if they were immigrants from the Pale of Settlement.

Other curriculum materials include the board game, *The Immigrant in Each of Us*; Jewish Holiday Crafts for Little Hands; a teacher-created Jewish Jeopardy game; Chanukah and Purim plays (also teacher-created); the plays *Israel, This is Your Life* and *That's Incredible!*

We also make use of maps, both current and historical, and an audiotape, *The Jewish Immigrant Experience in America*, Songs and Stories by Joe Glazer.