

Beth Chai Family School Curriculum **Israel – 5th grade**

Goal: to help build a feeling of connection to Israel.

Enduring Understandings:

1. The Israeli Jews are part of our Jewish Family. (one way to foster this is to speak of our Israeli cousins when you refer to Israelis)
2. The non-Jewish population of Israel is part of our Human Family.
3. Israel is not just a place of conflict, but has many aspects of which we as Jews can be appropriately proud.
4. We can all think about peace and hope that Israel will be at peace someday.

Introduce the topic of Israel as a main topic of the year. Do a chart, asking the students what they already know about Israel and what they would like to learn about Israel. Have a blank piece of paper for what they will learn. Let them know of the many other things they will learn this year. In planning lessons, be sure to include what they want to know. At the end of each unit add to what they have learned chart.

Geography

This unit should cover major geographical areas such as bodies of water: Mediterranean Sea, Lake Kinneret, the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, different climatic zones: the Negev, the Chula Valley, the Galilee, the coastal plain, and major cities, such as Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Bersheva, Haifa.

Bring in a map of Israel. Have students place stickers on the map of Israel where they have relatives, or friends or have visited. Children with no direct connection to Israel will be able to pick out a picture of a place in Israel and stick it on the map as their special place.

Each student should pick an area to research in class. The teacher should provide the framing questions such as: How big is this area?, What are the unique features of this area? What historic events have happened in this area? What was the most interesting thing to you about this area? The teacher should also bring in a variety of age appropriate sources for the research. Students should be encouraged to use more than one source and to note any differences or discrepancies between sources.

Students should take notes, write up notes into a few paragraphs for a report and do some kind of project to illustrate an aspect of their area. These projects could be maps, drawings, photo collage, a sample of a song about the region (Yerushalayim Shel Zahav) an example of a food grown or eaten in the region -(dates for the Negev) or anything else that will illustrate something of interest.

If anyone picks the Dead Sea, here is a nice project (or the teacher can do this): Mix water and salt to the concentration found in the Dead Sea and fill a basin or bucket to

create their own Dead Sea. Have students experiment to see which things float in the salty water and but sinkt in plain water. The principal can provide pictures and procedures.

Projects and reports should be shared with the class. The class should have a few scribes to take notes on the reports, which will then be included in some kind of visual organizer such as a map of Israel, Jewish star, etc. Let the students know that they will be expected to remember this material for a future task. This could be a quiz, a game show type quiz, Rebeca Rydel, our Hebrew teacher may be able to borrow a map of Israel twister game, or a Go Fish map, or maybe more meaningful, have them plan a tour of Israel for themselves or a chosen group of people (a group of elementary school children, a group of high school students, a group of seniors, etc.) and justify their answers.

This unit should take at least three weeks. In the first week, introduce the topic, do the map activity and have students pick an area and begin to research. The students should continue their research and begin their presentation projects in the second week.

Depending on how fast they work and on the difficulty of their projects, they may need another week to finish, but by the third or fourth week they should share their projects with the rest of the class, the information should be organized and the teacher should give a quiz or game show type quiz, or have them plan a tour to check for retention. Be sure to add to the chart on what they have learned.

Kibbutz Way of Life (5th)

a) The students have been given some basic information about the structure of the Kibbutz in the previous year. Now they will have a chance to learn more about the founding principles of the kibbutz way of life. Be sure to discuss the dignity of manual labor, the economic structure of shared income and the idea of “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need”. Pictures and songs from the era should be brought in to round out the presentation. (The principal can provide) Arrange with the music teacher to teach a couple of songs from the pioneer days such as Arta Aleinu, Eretz zavat Chalav, and Atzy Hzetime Omdim.

b) The students will be divided into small groups, which will be their “kibbutz”. They will then engage in a simulation of early kibbutz decisions such as: what language to speak in public, Hebrew? Yiddish? English?, should the children sleep in children’s houses or with their parents?, should the economy be based solely on agriculture or include industry?, should everyone get the same items from the little store, such as a comb and hairbrush or should these items also be “according to need”, i.e. does the bald man get a comb? The students will then present “their kibbutz” to the rest of the class.

b) Invite the principal into the class to discuss what living on a kibbutz in the 70’s was like and what her kibbutz was like on subsequent visits. Is it still officially a kibbutz? Why or why not?

c) Add to what we have learned chart

Movers and Shakers (5th)

Have students work in either individual or small groups in class to research some of the many personalities that have shaped Israeli history, culture and modern day events, including, but not limited to: Theodore Hertzl, Ahad Ha'Am, Eliezer Ben Yehudah, A.D. Gordon, Rachel, Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan, Menachem Begin, Naomi Shemer, Ofrah Hazah, Shulamit Aloni, Yizchak Rabin, Amos Oz, Yehudah Amichai, Barak, Sharon, etc.

Students should be given some framing questions such as: When and where was this person born? What was their major contribution to Israel? Who or what influenced them in their life? Where did they live in Israel? Is there any significance to their name? Are they still alive? Why did you pick this person, what was particularly interesting to you?

Students should report back to the class about their research, using any of the suggested models from the first unit, plus dramatizations of the person or important events in the person's life.

Israel Today and Current Events (5th)

A typical day in the life of an Israeli of their age. Prepare a list of questions and answers. The teacher can divide the class into teams. Each team has a chance to answer the questions and earn points. The team with the most points wins. Prizes can be Israeli snacks or Israeli candy. (The teacher should supply consolation prizes also, or good effort prizes)

Israeli Technological Inventions

This is easy to find on the internet. It can also be organized as a game.

Writing to Children in Israel

The principal can arrange for letters and postcards to be sent to children in Israel who attend the Reform movement's school in Jerusalem. This project should be done after the students have some basic knowledge, but with enough time left in the year so that we have a chance of getting a reply. They should write as much of it in Hebrew as possible, with help from the Hebrew teacher. They should at least be able to write Shalom and their names in Hebrew.

Israeli Games: Kar/Ham, Mi Shelosh, Echad, Shntaim, shalosh, machanaim. At their break time throughout the year, they should be introduced to Israeli games. This will help build a connection to children there age and to demonstrate some commonality.

Current Events

Throughout the year both the teacher and students should be bringing in articles about the current situation in Israel. The students will need help to read critically and understand that there are many charged issues with many points of view. An initial lesson in discerning point of view should be taught, using an example from the students' knowledge base, such as the "discovery" of America from the native Americans point of view. Key questions: Who is writing this article? Where is it published? Who is the expected audience? What are the author's biases? What are the clues? What seems to be left out? What are the author's assumptions?

The teacher should make sure to bring into class a variety of viewpoints from different sources. If possible articles describing the same event from different sources should be shared. Have the students compare and contrast the reporting from The Washington Post, The Washington Jewish Week, The New York Times, Ha' Aretz, The Jerusalem Post (both of these available on -line in English translation), American for Peace Now, an Orthodox source, and an Arab source or two, perhaps Palestinian and Jordanian or Egyptian (should also be available on line in translation).

The teacher will need to model respect for a wide variety of points of view. It is important to remember that reasonable people can disagree about issues, while still having some important values in common. Not all of our families are Zionists, but some most definitely are. The educational objective is as always to facilitate the student's ability to think for themselves. And to foster a feeling of connection with Israel. It is

important to remember that we can argue with those we love, such as our parents, or our country. It is also important to make the distinction between the government of Israel and the people of Israel. (This should not be too hard given the many criticisms most of our families feel about past U.S. government(s)). Sending controversial questions that arise in class home for further discussion and then reports back to the class can be a way of including this wide variety of viewpoint. (Be sure to phrase the question in the most unbiased way possible. Feel free to consult with the principal when in doubt).

Peace Is...Poem

We want to model that pursuing peace is a central Jewish value. This is a poem from an Israeli collection. By participating in this project, we can challenge our students to be thinking about peace and its benefits.

Students will add on to the short poem:

Peace is/ a sea/ whose waves / will carry us far. Every student will get a chance to write a verse that is in the same form, i.e. peace is.... an *x*, that will..... These should be written up on a big poster . Describe what an analogy is and then have a grab bag of other nouns to stimulate their thinking. They can also choose their own noun.. Ask something like, if peace was a :.....glass of water, a tree, a cat, what would it do? and then help them get it into the form of : peace is/ a glass of water, that will..... quench our thirst or help us live. Or?

The People of Israel

The teacher should bring in a wide variety of picture books of Israel. Using the pictures and captions in the book, have the students see how many different kinds of people live in Israel. Then have them research the different groups, either individually or in small groups, with a project or report back to the class. The teacher should bring in music, food and any other cultural items to make this unit more tangible.

Israeli government.

Bring in the Declaration of Independence.

Read it and discuss. Are these principals being carried out today in Israel? Compare and contrast to the American Declaration of Independence. What are the goals and values expressed in each. How are they manifest in each country? Are any of the goals in either country not being met? Have they changed over time?

Bring in a model of the Kenesset as it is currently in terms of political parties. Divide the students into a variety of parties, keeping similar proportions. You will need to explain proportional representation. Give each of them an information sheet about their political party. Announce that a vote will be taken on a current issue (check Israeli newspapers so you can actually be current). Hold a mock debate and vote. Discuss pros and cons of a proportional representation parliament vs. winner take all congress.

End of the year project:

Have the students create a project that shows what they have learned this year about Israel. They should include some kind of before and after: i.e. before this year what I knew about Israel was... know I know..... or before this year, what I thought about Israel was, and now, or before this year, what I felt about Israel was, now....or even all three of these aspects of understanding. The project could be a collage, a play, a chart, etc. You may want to have the tour plan be the final project, incorporating many of the units (such as a visit to a kibbutz and a Bedouin site, the Keneset,) etc.

Holidays should be presented and celebrated as they are in Israel in the classroom when ever possible.

For example,:

Bring in Pomegranates for Rosh Hashanah

Talk about what secular Jews in Israel do for Yom Kippur and what the Orthodox Jews do, including wearing white

Explain the connection of the rain coming right after Sukkot and how so many Israeli Jews do build Sukkot on their balconies, students should make decorations for the congregational Sukkot in class. This can be paper chains with what they are grateful for written in the inside of each chain before they are put together.

Simchat Torah – similar to Yom Kippur

Chaunukah – the torch race from Moadim, week off from school, hikes, dreidels that say nes gadol haya po, “ a great miracle happened here”, you can have them make paper lanterns with the letters nun, gimmel, hay, peh on them for an art project. This is directly from the kibbutz where I lived. Or, I may be able to order thin copper sheets for this project.

Tu B'Shevat: find some pictures of the almond actually blooming at this time of year,.

Explain that school children plant trees. (if you want, I have some interesting commentary of this custom, how it began, why it does not always work)

Purim – Children in the street in costume – banging plastic hammers over folks' heads.

The Education Director is happy to supply plastic hammers for this class at our congregational Purim party IF they come in costume

Passover – a week of spring break – no bread or hamezt to be found in Jewish stores – secular Jews buying pita from Arab bakeries – might want to bring in some matzah made in Israel and some pita!

Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'Atzma'ut. Day of remembrance and Independence Day.

Have a moment of silence while they stand. Have a picnic with lots of games.