

Beth Chai Curriculum

6th Grade: American Jewish History

Goals in Teaching Jewish History

1. To foster a sense of connection to the Jewish People.
2. To foster a sense of appropriate pride in the accomplishments of the Jewish people.
3. To understand the contribution that Jewish values have made to Jewish survival. Jews throughout our history.
4. To foster a sense of empathy for oppressed people, for minorities and for immigrants.

Overall themes should include anti-Semitism, assimilation and the contribution of Jews to American society.

Essential questions:

Are all Jews alike?

How did Judaism evolve in America?

What was different about the American - Jewish experience and the European Jewish experience?

Lesson One. The First Jews in America - New Amsterdam.

Ask: When did the first Jews arrive in America? Give them a clue that it was 351 year ago. Tell them that the group was from Brazil. Ask why there were Jews in Brazil. Write the words, “ The Spanish Inquisition” on the board. See if any of them know anything about it. If not fill them in briefly. Write 1492 on the board. Ask if they know anything that happened in 1492. Explain briefly about the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Then begin to read out loud to them the Cardinal’s Snuff box. You will quickly get to a choice. Have them discuss and vote on a choice. This will lead into discussions about why some Jews chose to flee, some to hide, some to convert. Please respect all opinions, but do ask why at least some Jews thought it was important to remain Jewish. Follow at least one adventure to the end. Consult a globe or map to give context to the choices. You will probably have time to start over and make different choices. Let lots of different students have input into the choices. If one group or one student is dominating, intervene, “ I am going to go with x’s, choice this time”. Or Let’s see what happens if we take y’s suggestion. Hopefully, at least one student will want to take the book home and try a different route and then report back the next week.

- a. Why were there Jews in Brazil? Why did they need to leave? What was the Inquisition?
- b. Read the do -it yourself adventure the Cardinal’s Snuff Box and give some historic background.

Lesson Two

Return to the reception and eventual outcome of the Jews of New Amsterdam. Divide class into pairs or small groups to research each of the key players - the Jewish refugees, Peter Stuyvesant, the Jews of Amsterdam and the Dutch West India Company. Each group should report back to the class on their findings so they can piece together the whole story.

Group 1. The refugees.

Their questions: Why did these Jews need to come to New Amsterdam? What happened to them along the way? How were they received? What did they do to try and make things better? What were their occupations? How many names of these original settlers can you find? Which parts of their names are Jewish and which part Spanish? What are some of the other names of Jewish settlers in New Amsterdam, who may have come a bit later?

Refer them to the "Heeding the Call" packet in its entirety, This Land of Liberty - page 5, the first paragraph on page 6, the bottom paragraph on page 7, continuing on page 8, and page 11 (for their last question), in Let Freedom Ring, pgs 11-14, and pgs. 12, 18 and 22 in The Jews of Amsterdam.

Group 2: Peter Stuyvesant and the New Amsterdam Council.

Their Questions; How did Peter Stuyvesant greet the refugees? What did he want to do with them? List all the limits that you can find that Peter Stuyvesant and the New Amsterdam Council put on the Jews over the years. Refer them to Heeding the Call, This Land of Liberty, pgs 6-7, the small handout entitled: Primary Sources, and The Jews of New Amsterdam, pgs. 16,18-19. (Let them have this before group 1, as group 1 has more sources.)

Group 3. The Jews of Amsterdam:

Their questions; What did the Jews of Amsterdam, Holland do to help the Jews of New Amsterdam? What were their main three points in advocating for the Jews to be allowed to stay? What arguments did they use for advocating for the rights of the Jews in New Amsterdam?

Refer them to: the small handout with the picture of a ship on it, Let Freedom Ring, page 13, Heeding the Call pg. 15

Group 4. The Dutch West Indies Co.:

What did the Dutch West Indies Co. decide about the fate of the Jewish refugees in New Amsterdam? When did this message arrive in New Amsterdam? What did the Dutch West Indies Co. write to Peter Stuyvesant and the Council about rights of the Jews? Why did they do this?

Refer them to: Let Freedom Ring, pg. 13, Heeding the Call, pgs. 18 –19, This Land of Liberty, pgs. 6-7.

Once the majority of the groups are ready, give the others a little help to finish up.

Have each group share their questions and answers. When everyone is done, fill in any essential missing data if necessary.

Lesson Three.

Have the students write out a skit that depicts the major events of the first Jewish Settlement in America. I think they can continue to work in their groups for the most part, but they will need some narration and a narrator to tie it all together. Help them as a class put together a time-line and an outline of the events. Help them to sketch out some scenes, i.e. the refugees decide to leave Recife, they are shipwrecked, they arrive in New Amsterdam. Their possessions are auctioned off, Peter Stuyvesant writes his letter to the Dutch West Indies Co., The Jews of Amsterdam write their letter to the Dutch West Indies Co., The Dutch West Indies Co. writes to Peter Stuyvesant, He capitulates, the various Jews bring other objections to limits on their rights, the Council rejects them, finally the Dutch West Indies Co. writes again. ending with citizenship in three short years? Or? What else do they want to include? The building of the synagogue? Once they have a time line and scenes sketched out, they can divide back into groups to work on the dialogue. Encourage them to use real words from their documents whenever possible.

Lesson Four: The oldest Synagogue still standing

- Collect all the pictures you can of the Touro synagogue. Have students identify unique elements. Why would there be a trapdoor built into a synagogue?

Lesson Five: Jews in the colonies

Topic: Jewish influence on early American life: the Liberty Bell, Hebrew, Shabbat observances and Thanksgiving.

Enduring Understanding for this lesson: Not only was America a place of opportunities for Jews, but Jewish values and practices via the Puritans' reading of the Hebrew Scripture influenced early American life. Some of these influences can still be felt today.

Essential questions: Where can the students themselves find Jewish influences on early American life? How do they feel about these influences? Do they feel a sense of pride knowing that (for instance) the inscription on the Liberty bell comes from the Torah? Is there such a thing as appropriate pride about one's heritage? What is the difference between appropriate pride and chauvinism? (Have they seen the movie, " My Big Fat Greek Wedding"? Discuss the father's assertion that all words come from the Greek, including kimono) is this an example of taking cultural pride a bit far? Do they know Jews who have the same tendency? Is this course heading in that direction? Or not?

Evidence of Understanding:

The students will create a visual display illustrating the connection between either the inscription on the Liberty Bell and Torah, or the connection between Sukkot and Thanksgiving. They will explain their display to the class.

Learning Activities:

Bring in copies of Leviticus 25:10 (inscription on the Liberty Bell and Exodus 23:16 description of Sukkot). Divide class into pairs. Give each pair one of the quotations. Pairs with the Leviticus quote should be asked, “Where else is this quotation found?”, and pairs with the Exodus quote should be asked, what American holiday does this remind you of? They should be told that they can check their answers or find out the answer by looking in one of the first few chapters of the textbook, “Let Freedom Ring” (the answers are right on the first page of chapter two).

Once they have found the answer (they should check with the teacher quietly) they should be given the assignment to produce a visual display on poster board, illustrating the connection between Torah and early American life.

If some groups finish sooner than others, have them research other influences such as Shabbat observances and Hebrew. Most of this is on the same page in “Let Freedom Ring”, and also covered a bit in “This Land of Liberty”, chapter two.

Have each pair share their poster with the class. Discuss the different ways of interpreting the information and weave in some of the essential questions. Ask about other influences. Can they think of Hebrew names that were popular during early American history? (Abigail Adams??).

This will probably take the first hour, but if it doesn't here is a small supplementary lesson for any time you need a bit more. Be sure to keep the pace of the class fairly “hopping”, i.e. when 2/3 of the class is done, give only a minute or two to the rest to finish up, or just share what they have so far in any given assignment.

Supplementary Lesson: Hebrew school - then and now

Enduring Understanding: *By comparing and contrasting similar situations of the past and present, we gain a deeper view of both. This examination can give us perspective on both the past and the present, and lead us to examine our choices in the present.*

Essential questions:

What are the qualifications to be a Hebrew school teacher in this document? Which qualifications would still be necessary today in America? What would be different? (notice gender, marital status) Do we require our Hebrew teachers to teach for needy students for free? What is the trait that they would find the most different? (sober??? As opposed to fun? This would have been true through the first half of the 20th century). Which style do they prefer? Why do they think our criteria have changed to include enthusiastic, engaging and fun as qualities a Hebrew teacher needs? (competition with mass media? Entertainment possibilities? Changing values???)

Evidence of Understanding:

Students will be able to answer the essential questions in a class discussion.

Learning activity:

Pass out the Primary Source Material from “Let Freedom Ring” Teacher’s Guide” a letter with job description. Have students read the document. Lead a discussion asking the essential questions. Be sure to call on a variety of students. If there are a few students who do not readily participate, ask them directly, or if they agree or disagree with a previous comment. Model that you expect full participation from everyone.

Alternative Activity, or Time permitting:

Have students either individually or as a class, or in small groups, write an advertisement for a Hebrew teacher today. Discuss differences. (Do they need to specify gender? Marital status?, etc.)

Lesson Six. Jews during the American Revolution

- Which side or sides did the Jews in America favor? Why? Which American Jew made the most contribution to the war effort?
- Read and discuss page 45 in This Land of Liberty: All Men Are Created Equal.

Lesson Seven: Central European Immigration – 1830’s – Pioneer Jews

Enduring Understandings:

People have often attempted to find a better life for themselves by moving to a new land.

The economic opportunities, religious tolerance and civil liberties available in America has made it a welcome destination for Jews.

As a religious minority, it is essential for Jewish survival for Jews to establish communal organizations.

Essential questions:

Where did the Jews come from during this period of time?

Why did they feel the need to immigrate? What difficulties in Europe did they share with non- Jews? What difficulties were specific to Jews?

Who was generally more able to come to a new country first? Why?

What do you think it is like to go to a new country where you do not know the language or culture?

Evidence of Understanding:

Students will present skits showing some of the typical reasons for leaving Europe, what life was like in America, and contributions to society through the personification of various historical figures or groups. In a later class, students will relate what they have learned to the stories of their own and their classmates family stories.

Students Will Know:

- The Industrial Revolution in Europe created hardships for many people as many crafts became obsolete.
- Jews also faced these difficulties, along with persistent anti-Semitism.
- Anti-Semitism included: loss of civil rights, violence, being barred from many trades and professions, heavy taxation, being prevented from settling in certain areas, and difficulties in being allowed to marry.
- Although many of the Jews that immigrated at this time stayed in the big Eastern cities, others went west and south.
- Wherever they were, Jews established communal organizations such as synagogues, burial societies, benevolent societies, religious schools.
- Jews made major contributions to American society primarily in the area of commerce during this period.
- The economic opportunities, religious tolerance and civil liberties available in America made it a welcome destination for Jews of Central Europe, beginning in the early 1800's.

Learning activities:

Divide class into pairs. Their assignment is to research one of the following people or groups and create an interview with that person or group that they will perform for the class. Each interviewer should be sure to ask the following questions:

Why did you or your family come to America? (You may have to extrapolate from the available data, i.e. if the person came from Germany right after 1819, it could have been due to the anti- Jewish riots)

What was your early life like in American (very good to quote from original sources, if available)

What are some of the accomplishments you are most proud of ?

Teacher should circulate around, helping as needed. Students will need to read more than just about their particular person to be able to answer the questions, so should be referred to the first few pages of Unit 3.

While each pair presents their skit the other students should be taking some notes and ranking each historical person or group on a 1-10 scale in terms of importance of contribution, importance to American history, importance to Jewish history, should we even be studying this person? At the end of the presentations tally the results to find a group result of most valuable contribution, most important to American history, most important to Jewish history, least important to study.

The people or groups:

- Isaac Lesser (pgs. 54 – 56, Unit 3: Central Europeans come to America, ch.7, becoming Americans, also American Jewish Desk Reference)
- Rebeca Gratz (pg. 54 as above, p.44 This Land of Liberty, American Jewish Desk Reference, pgs. 5, 6)

- Hannah Austrian and the Mont Zion Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society(And Prairie Dogs weren't Kosher)
- Levi Strauss (pg. 64, Unit 3, as above)
- Nathan Stauss (p.34 Let Freedom Ring)
- A founding member of B'nai Brith (p.57, Unit 3 as above)

If possible have someone come to the door as a Jewish peddler. "Peddling became the most important Jewish business in America. By 1850 about 10,000 Jewish peddlers were at work". Have actor talk about the life of a peddler, the advantages (little start up capital), the disadvantages, (can't keep kosher, or Shabbat, hard life). The peddler eventually becoming the dry goods store owner and then department store owner.

Lesson 8. Pictorial Timeline – Throughout the year, or about midway through, have the students make a pictorial timeline. They can then add to it as the year progresses. You will need to bring in the pictures from the texts. **Enduring Understandings** that should be brought out in discussion:

Jews have lived in the United States for centuries, participating in many of the American experiences.

Jews have made contributions to American history.

They (the students) and their ancestors are part of American history.

Jewish life has evolved in relation to the opportunities and challenges of American society.

Students should know: (by mid –year)

The date of the first Jewish settlement in America

That the first Jews to settle in America were Sephardim

That Jews were also part of the westward expansion

The names and contributions of some of the following;

Asser Levy, Rebecca Gratz, Haym Solomon, Ernestine Rose, Cesar Kaskel, August Bondi, Judah Philip Benjamin, Isaac Leeser, Isaac Meyer Wise, Emma Lazarus, Lillian Wald, Clara Lemlich, Rose Schneiderman.

Have students look up and mark pages where they want you to make copies or have them write something if there is no picture.

Lesson 9. Jews in the Civil War

- Ask the students which side they think Jews in America were on. Then have them research the answer.
- Hold a debate on the issue using actual quotes from the time.

Lesson 10. The Eastern European Immigration

Most of our students have studied this period in depth in the 4th grade so they just need a review. We will use materials from the BJE and they will participate in the experiential education program sponsored by the BJE that is a simulation of the various immigrant experiences. Class needs to pick which time period they would like to be in.

Lesson 11. The development of the various movements of Judaism: Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist and the formation of the Orthodox Union.

This might be a good time to organize some field trips to other congregations. Room parents can help with the logistics. All of the other movements will be different from what we practice at Beth Chai. This would be a good time to invite the Rabbi or Principal in to discuss Humanist Judaism also.

Lesson 12. Contributions of Jews to American culture.

- Jewish entertainers and comedians from Marx Brothers & Catskills era to Adam Sandler. [A good source is The Haunted Smile. Bring in clips from a variety of films & TV.]
- Jewish creation of Hollywood. Lesson on assimilation: write lists of Jewish birth names & stage names and see if students can match them.
- Jewish musicians: from Al Jolson & Leonard Bernstein to Bob Dylan to the Beastie Boys. Play songs, ask if written by a Jew or non-Jew (e.g. White Christmas). Jews as ‘midwives to birth of rock & roll’ e.g. Alan Freed.
- Jewish scientists: Use comic stories from Two Fisted Science [Richard Feynman: physicist] and Dignifying Science [Rosalind Franklin: discoverer of DNA]. Students can dramatize the stories.

Lesson 13. Jews and the Civil Rights Movement

- Freedom Riders; involvement of Rabbis. Involvement of non affiliated, secular Jews (Melanie K. Kantrowitz article)
- Mississippi Freedom Summer; murders of Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman.
- Abraham Joshua Heschel's work with Dr. ML King & others.
- School Martin Luther King Day observance: (we do something different every year) Here is one possible lesson plan. Jewish values and MLK Day;
- Materials needed for day:
 - Letter from principal*
 - Grab bag of Jewish values*
 - Worksheets for each student*
 - Pencils or pens
 - Glue sticks, scissors, felt pens
 - Poster with foundation stones, pillars and roof drawn in*

* - principal will provide, the rest of the materials are available on the library cart in the hallway – get before going to class – have class help you carry stuff

Class receives a letter from the Education Director. Teacher reads it out loud:

Dear 6th graders,

Every year when it is Martin Luther King Day, some grown up asks me why we pay any attention to this day in our Jewish Sunday school. "What does this have to do with being Jewish?", they usually ask. I would like you to help me answer this question. Your teacher will explain how. Be prepared to share what you have learned at the end of the day with the rest of the school, including the adults.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Rain Zohav, Education Director Beth Chai Family School

Teacher shows students the grab bag of Jewish values. Tell them that each student is to pick out a value and see if you can relate it to Martin Luther King, the civil rights movement and especially King's vision of creating a community based on respect for all and fair treatment for all. He called this "the beloved community". If the value they pick does not seem to have any relevance to this issue, check with the teacher and if she agrees with you pick another value.

Hand out worksheets and go over them. Principal will provide. These are the questions on the worksheet:

1. What is this passage talking about?

2. Does it have a name of the phrase that can sum up the value being discussed? If yes, what is that name or phrase? If not, how would you sum it up?
3. Do you know the phrase in Hebrew? If yes, what is it? If not, ask Wendy or Rebeca.
4. Does this value lead to the vision of Martin Luther King? How?
5. Do you think of this value as a foundational value of our Jewish tradition, a pillar of our Jewish tradition, or an overarching idea of our tradition? Explain your answer.
6. Who or what is the source for your quote? (your classmates have answers to some of these sources) If there is a person cited, Who were they? When did they live? How are they regarded? If it is a written source such as the Torah or the Talmud, explain that also.

They may need a little clarification.

Tell students to answer the questions on their worksheet. They need to be prepared to share their answers with the class. Some of them will also have short information sheets on various Jewish sages (wise men) or prophets. Some of them will have quotes from these prophets. Tell them: If you have an information sheet, hold onto it until someone else in the class asks for the information. Then share what is on your sheet. If you have a question like “Who is this guy?” with your value, it is up to you to find the person in class with the information.

Once everyone is done with their worksheets, each student will share their value and what they thought about it. It is up to them to decide if it should become part of the **JEWISH VALUES FOR BUILDING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY** poster or not. It is also up to each of them to decide where to place your value – is it a foundational stone, a pillar, or an overarching idea that should go on the roof? They can ask the class for advice and discussion about their value. They should also share the source of their value, if it is attributed. The teacher can add more about the various sages and prophets.

All students will have a chance to glue their value in place on the chart.

Once all the relevant values are posted, the teacher should summarize the information. We as a class think the Jewish values of : Tikkun Olam, Tzibur, Shalom, etc. can provide a structure for building a community based on respect, fairness and peace. Ask who would like to present this to the larger community.

Time permitting, make sure each value is written up in Hebrew and transliteration, not only English. You can ask Rebeca, our Hebrew teacher to help with that part, during Hebrew.

If all of this goes quickly, lead a discussion about what their lives look like today in terms of diversity and fairness.

- Are there students from all races at their school? What percentage of what? Are there students with physical challenges such as wheel chair bound, or blind at their schools? Are there differences between public and private schools? Why might that be? Are there any, many African- American teachers at their school? African- American principals? What race or ethnicity are the cafeteria workers, janitors? Are these people treated with respect?
- What about in the neighborhoods they live in? What is the racial makeup? Have they ever heard of equal housing testing? (Recently in Capitol heights, law students tested apartments for discrimination and found that the exact same apartments were presented as available, some even with the first month of rent free to white couples or singles, but African- American couples or singles with the exact same type of references were told the apartments were taken – even when the white couple applied after the African -American one, This is illegal, but prevalent)
- Are they aware of any other ways African-Americans are still discriminated against? Have they heard the phrase driving while black? Do their parents speak of any issues at work? Where do their parents work? Is there still work to do?? How can they help?