

Lesson 1: Around the Middle Eastern Jewish World

Aim

For over 2,500 years Jewish communities throughout North Africa, the Middle East, and the Gulf Region thrived — as witnessed by literature, archaeology and art documenting their existence. The vibrant cultural and spiritual traditions of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry helped lay the foundation of Jewish life worldwide¹. The aim of this lesson is to provide students with a geographic snapshot of World Jewry, past and present. They will learn that Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jews migrated to these lands for various reasons and have influenced and been influenced by the culture and politics within these countries.

Objectives

- Students will examine a map of the world and locate world Jewry today.
- Students will explore and label world Jewry in the Middle East and North Africa.
- Students will ‘travel’ through 4 countries in the Middle East and North Africa to understand how *Sephardi* and *Mizrachi* Jews came to exist as groups and will learn cultural and ethnic indicators of these groups.

Materials

- PowerPoint presentation (optional)
- **Appendix A - “Travel Packet”** providing information about 4 Middle Eastern countries (set up prior to learning session). Included is a map, information about the Jews in the region, photos of objects, people, etc. to display in the classroom.
- **Appendix B- Travel Questionnaire** (which will include a map and questionnaire)
- **Appendix C- Tradition Cards**
- Colored pencils or markers

¹ <http://www.jimena.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Brochure.pdf>

Procedures

Introduction: (30 minutes)

1. Write the Main Questions on the board:
 - a. "Who are *Sephardi* and *Mizrahi* Jews?"
 - b. "Where do they come from and what are their traditions?"
2. **PPT SLIDE #2** - Show this slide and discuss the lesson aim and main questions with the students. "Today we are going to learn about where Jews live(d) around the world."
3. **PPT SLIDE #3** - (A map of the world). Show this slide and ask the students: Where do Jews live in the world today? Have students look at the map of the world and name countries they know. Ask students to go to the board and point to the places where they think Jews live.
4. **PPT SLIDE #4**: This slide illustrates a map of the places with the highest Jewish populations around the world since 2011. Discuss with the students where most Jews live today. On the board, the facilitator will write 3 words: **Ashkenaz**, **Sepharad** and **Mizrach**. Explain that these three words describe regions: Europe, Spain, Middle East/North Africa.
 - a. As the students call out different countries, the facilitator can categorize them. For example, if they mention places in Eastern and Central Europe, they can go under **Ashkenaz**, if they mention Spain, they can go under **Sepharad**, if they mention Iraq or Iran they go under **Mizrach**. If they mention Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, the facilitator can say: Is this **Mizrach**? Are these countries east or west of the Land of Israel? For older students this can be a way of introducing the politicized meaning of the term *Mizrachi* and how inaccurate it really is as a word to describe Jews in Arab and Muslim lands.
5. **PPT SLIDE #5**: (Map of the Middle East and North Africa) Today we are going to learn about the Jews in the Middle East and North Africa. Ask the students to identify Middle Eastern countries on the map. Ask: Do you know if any Jews lived in these regions? How do you know?
 - a. Keep this map projected on the board for the class activity.

Body of Lesson:

Exploring Jewish Communities in the Middle East and North Africa

6. As PPT Slide #5 is displayed, tell the students that today they will have an opportunity to “travel” to four Middle Eastern countries and learn about Jewish life in these places.

Inform the students that there are four “Travel Packets” displayed around the room. (Appendix A/Travel Packets should be prepared and set up prior to the lesson). Today we are going to “visit” four of these countries and learn about important people and traditions from these places.

7. Students will use their questionnaire to gather information about each community. At the end of the activity the class will share their findings with one another.
8. Divide the students into groups of four and have them move from station to station. Students complete the questionnaire as they “travel to various countries”.

Conclusion:

Discussion

1. After the “Travel” Activity, students will come back together as a group to review the things that they learned together. Direct the students to the Main Questions posed in the beginning of the session: *Who are Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews? Where do they come from and what are their traditions?*
 - A. Discussion Questions:
 - 1) What community interested you most?
 - 2) What surprised you?
 - 3) Tell us one new tradition you learned about today.
 - 4) Share an interesting historical event.
 - 5) What else would you like to know about Jews indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa?
2. To end the session, instruct students to write/share one question they have about one of the communities they learned about today. After we read the

question in the group, go up to the map in the front of the room and pin your question up on the board.

Extension Activity #1: Communities Today

While this lesson introduced students to how Jews found themselves in the Middle East, the following extension activity provides an opportunity for students to “visit” Jews in Morocco today. Watch the following PBS NewsHour video clip (8 minutes) about Moroccan Jewry today:



Jewish community shrinks in Morocco



Discussion Questions after viewing the video:

- A. What new thing did you learn about the Moroccan Jewish community from this short video?
- B. What are the strengths of today’s Moroccan Jewish community?

Extension Activity #2: Experts on Jews in the Middle East

Do you want to expand this lesson and learn about other countries?

Four countries were selected for the Travel packets. Assign other Middle Eastern countries to students using Tradition Cards in Appendix C. Students can create their version of “Travel Packets”, set up as stations around the room and teach other students about the country they’ve learned about.

You can find more information about the countries in the packets as well as other countries by clicking **Country Profiles** link [here](#) from the JIMENA Website. Information can be found for Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen. Be sure to check out the link at the bottom of each page linking you

to even more information about the country including maps, personal stories, culture and current events.

Resources and External Links:

- 1. Sephardic, Ashkenazic, Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jews: The Jewish world is more ethnically and racially diverse than many people realize**
From <<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/sep-hardic-ashkenazic-mizrahi-jews-jewish-ethnic-diversity/>>
- 2. I'm a Mizrahi Jew. Do I Count as a Person of Color?**
From: <https://forward.com/opinion/318667/im-a-mizrahi-jew-do-i-count-as-a-person-of-color/>
- 3. Ancient Jewish History: Jews of the Middle East and North Africa**
From <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jews-of-the-middle-east>>
- 4. Mizrahi Jews in Israel: Jews from Arab lands are gaining more and more influence in Israeli society.**
From <<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/mizrahim-in-israel/>>
- 5. A Global Perspective on Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry An Introductory Essay**
From <<https://nyupress.org/webchapters/0814797059/chapt1.pdf>>
- 6. Turkish Jewry**
From <http://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/>
- 7. Turkey Virtual Jewish History Tour**
From <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/turkey-virtual-jewish-history-tour>>
- 8. Jews of Iran: A Modern History**
From <<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jews-of-iran-a-modern-history/>>
- 9. Jews in Islamic Countries: Yemen**
From <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jews-of-yemen>>
- 10. First-ever Photos of Yemen's Jews Stunned the Jewish World**
From <<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/MAGAZINE-first-ever-photos-of-yemen-s-jews-stunned-the-jewish-world-1.5465693>>
- 11. Jewish Encyclopedia: YEMEN:**
From <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/15077-yemen>>
- 12. Jews in Islamic Countries: Syria**
From <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jews-of-syria>>
- 13. The Jews of Syria: A Lost Civilization**
From <<http://www.aish.com/jw/s/The-Jews-of-Syria-A-Lost-Civilization.html>>
- 14. The Jews of Aleppo**
From <<https://www.jewishgen.org/sephardic/aleppoje ws.htm>>
- 15. The Jews of Libya**
From <http://www.or-shalom.org.il/files/Jews%20of%20Libya.pdf>
- 16. In Israel, Iraqi Jews Reflect on Baghdad Heritage**
From <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/world/middleeast/in-israel-iraqi-jews-reflect-onbaghdad-heritage.html>
- 17. The Lebanese Jewish Community: Emigration and Diasporic Relations**
From <<http://www.mei.edu/content/lebanese-jewish-community-emigration-and-diasporic-relations>>

18. IN PICTURES: Tunisia's Ancient Jewish Community

From

<<https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/the-jews-of-djerba-1.5426614>>