

Lesson 10: Sephardic Storyteller

Aim

Folktales, stories that are passed on from generation to generation, carry messages and meanings of moral significance that transcend time. Author and librarian, Sharon Elswit states in the Jewish Book Council's *The ProsenPeople* blogpost, "The Story Will Out: Why Folktales Still Matter," folklore helps to "forge a connection between the generations, pass on the values of a community, teach lessons, and help us make sense of ourselves and understand the world around us." This lesson will provide students with the opportunity to hear Sephardi and Mizrahi folktales and learn Jewish values that are passed on by these stories.

Objectives

- Students will read Sephardic folktales and analyze their messages and meanings.
- Students will examine Jewish values that are shared in these stories.
- Students will learn the characteristics of folktales and apply them to Jewish folktales.
- Students will understand the role stories and storytelling play in the preservation of culture.

Materials

- Computer and projector
- PowerPoint Presentation - Lesson 10 PPT - Jewish Stories and Jewish Values
- Appendix A – Jewish Values Chart
- Appendix B – Folktale Characteristics Chart
- Appendix C – The Bird of Happiness, Iraqi Folktale

NOTE TO TEACHER

This lesson introduces **four folktales**.

The **first three folktales** are taken from “Folktales of the Jews Volume 3: Tales from Arab Lands” edited and with commentary by Dan Ben-Amos and Dov Noy, consulting editor. Ben-Amos explains that the folktale is known as one of the most “democratic” forms of cultural preservation because these stories essentially have no “authors” and belong to everyone.

The stories in this lesson come mostly from Arab countries where Jews lived until 1948 after which some communities fled persecution. These stories were never written down until Professor Dov Noy initiated the [Israel Folktale Archive](#) that sought to preserve the individual cultures of the Jewish communities who had immigrated to Israel after its inception. Today, the archive is situated at the University of Haifa.

You can choose to **READ ONE OR ALL THE STORIES** before **READING** the main story in **Appendix C**.

The main story is a great example of a folktale, containing many of the identifying folktale characteristics listed in **Appendix B**.

The audio recording of the storyteller narrating the tale will surely delight children and adults alike! We encourage you to play the recording while the students read along in **Appendix C**. Enjoy!

Procedures

Introduction

1. **Communi-story:** Today we are going to start with a game called “Communi-story”. Students will sit in a circle and the teacher can explain the rules: We are going to create an improvised “story” in our group. Each person will contribute one sentence to the story. The only rules are that you must connect your sentence with the sentences that comes before yours (including characters, events etc) and the story must “come to a conclusion” by the end of the circle.

This is a fun, funny way to begin the session which is aimed at understanding the power of storytelling and the deep meanings behind the stories we are told, and we tell. After the short game, the teacher can lead a discussion based on the questions below.

Discussion Questions:

- How was creating a story together as a community? What worked and what didn't? Was this story similar to a folktale or "bedtime" story? Why or why not?
- Do you remember family stories that your parents or grandparents told you? What were they like?
- What did these stories teach you? Why were they passed down?
- What values do these stories teach us? (Possible answers might be- to be a good person, to preserve our Jewish tradition, to help others)
- What are Jewish values?

AS AN ALTERNATIVE INTRODUCTION YOU CAN DO THE FOLLOWING

1. **WRITE** the Main Questions on the board:
 - A. What do Sephardic and *Mizrachi* folktales teach us about the Jews who come from Sephardic, Middle Eastern and North African Jewish backgrounds?
 - B. What Jewish values are being carried on and transmitted to generations to come?
2. **PPT SLIDES #2 – REVIEW** Jewish Values on SLIDE
 - A. **ASK:**
 - Have you heard of any of these terms before?
 - Which values do you recognize?
 - Where did you learn about them?
 - Who taught you about them?
 - B. **GENERATE A LIST** with class made up of student responses.
 - From what sources and places do students learn Jewish Values?
 - C. **SAY:**
 - Today we will look at ways Jewish values have been passed down from generation to generation.
 - The Torah and Jewish texts are ways we pass on these values. Another method is **storytelling**, using **folktales**.

Body of Lesson

4. HAND OUT:

- Appendix A – Jewish Values Chart
- Appendix B – Folktale Characteristics Chart
- Appendix C – The Bird of Happiness, Iraqi Folktale

5. PPT SLIDE# 3 – READ SLIDE OUT LOUD

EXPLAIN:

What are Folktales?

- Stories that are passed down **orally** over generations.
- They are typically about “**common folk**” the communities that lived at the time the tale was created.
- They try to teach a lesson about right and wrong, which is called a **moral**.
- In Hebrew a Jewish value is called a *Middah*.
- Learning Jewish Values is called *Mussar*.

6. PPT SLIDE #4 – INSTRUCT STUDENTS TO LOOK AT Appendix B – Folktale Characteristics Chart

A. SAY:

“The slide on the screen is the same as the worksheet you have in front of you with the title “Folktale Characteristics”

7. PPT SLIDE #5 – SUMMARIZE the 6 characteristics of folktales on the slide

A. **REVIEW** the worksheet/slide together

B. **TELL** the class that they will shortly be using this worksheet to help them analyze folktales.

8. PPT SLIDES #6-8 – These slides contain a summary of folktales from Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. The 4th story (PPT SLIDE #9) is a 10 min story that includes a narration and text. You may choose to review one or all short stories on the PPT slide before moving to the story in Appendix C. (Or you can jump to the main story, #4, see Note to Teacher above)

- A. When reading each story, have students check off the folktale characteristics that were depicted in each story.
- B. **READ ALOUD** 1-3 stories (depending on class time and student comprehension) and **ASK**:
1. What can we learn about the Jewish community from this story?
 2. What Jewish values are emphasized in this story?
 3. What folktale characteristics can be found in this story?
9. **PPT SLIDE #9 - The Bird of Happiness**, Iraqi folktale
- A. **STUDENTS TURN** to Appendix C.
- B. CLICK [HERE](#) for website to hear Miriam Kanani tell the story!
- **Jewish Folktales Retold** (audio recordings of Jewish Folktales)
From <https://folktales.thecjm.org/folktales/>
- C. **STUDENTS LISTEN** to the audio recording while **CLASS READS** along silently.
- D. The story is approximately 10 minutes long.

Conclusion

10. After listening to the Bird of Happiness folktale, students work Individually or in pairs, and respond to the questions listed in Appendix B in more detail. Students may include a drawing that depicts the images that stood out for them in the story.
11. Students share their responses with their peers.

Extension Activities

12. Folktales for Kids - In pairs or groups, students write a folktale for a younger child. The folktale should convey a Jewish value they want to pass on to the next generation. Provide students with books to use as examples.

Using Folk Tales to Teach Life Lessons and Jewish Values

From <https://pjlibrary.org/beyond-books/pjblog/july-2014/using-folk-tales-to-teach-life-lessons-and-jewish>

13. Universal and Particular- Research secular and Jewish folktales to find the similarities and differences between the two. Make connections between texts (for example, are there cultures that share similar lessons? Can we better understand a particular culture by looking at multiple folktales?)

Resources and External Links

For background on this topic, you can visit the websites below:

Telling Tales

From <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/70398/telling-tales-2>

Play's The Thing: Storytelling Games

From <http://www.eldrbarry.net/roos/books/stgam.htm>

Israeli Folktale Archive Preserves Folklore of Jews from Many Countries

From <https://www.jta.org/2005/09/27/archive/israeli-folktale-archive-preserves-folklore-of-jews-from-many-countries>

Using Folk Tales to Teach Life Lessons and Jewish Values

From <https://pjlibrary.org/beyond-books/pjblog/july-2014/using-folk-tales-to-teach-life-lessons-and-jewish>

Jewish Folktales (lesson plan)

From <https://www.jewishlearningmatters.com/Lesson2-Jewish-Folktales-1558.aspx>

Folktales of the Jews

From <http://www.worldcat.org/title/folktales-of-the-jews/oclc/68786698>

Tales for the Seventh Day: A Collection of Sabbath Stories Hardcover – September 1, 2000
by [Nina Jaffe \(Author\)](#), [Kelly Striblin](#)

Lists of Jewish Values

From www.jewishlens.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Look-here-for-sample-lists-of-Jewish-values.pdf

Jewish Folktales Retold (audio recordings of Jewish Folktales)

From <https://folktales.thecjm.org/folktales/>

Folktales Folktale Writer's Workshop with Alma Flor Ada and Rafe Martin (grades 1–8):

Two acclaimed folktale writers offer their expert tips, challenges, and guidelines to help students write their own folktales. The authors also give students guidelines on revising their writing, and provide general comments, suggestions, and ideas about writing folktales.

From http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mff/folktalewshop_index.htm