



KIDSCHOOL

CURRICULUM

GUIDE

2015-2016

Become part of our joyful community.

**Classes are held twice each month
on Sundays from 2:45 to 5:15pm at
15 W. 86th Street in Manhattan.**

Membership in The City Congregation is necessary to enroll your child in KidSchool. You do not need to be a member to enroll in our Preschool. Payment plans, reduced payment, and partial scholarships for tuition are available.

For more information:

**The City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism
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212-213-1002 / info@citycongregation.org**

WELCOME TO KIDSCHOOL

When a group of parents formed The City Congregation's KidSchool, it was to give their then-very-young children a cultural Jewish community. One in which they could grow, and learn, and love their wonderful Jewish heritage. A community where they could understand our holidays and literature from the same secular humanistic perspective as their parents.

A commitment to education has been one of the core values of Jewish culture, practically from the start. From generation to generation we have been passing down the wisdom and teachings of one generation to the next. We are proud to be part of this chain of tradition ourselves.

As Humanistic Jews, we use critical thinking and scientific reasoning to assess inherited truths. We do not automatically accept as authoritative the teachings of the past. While we believe that it is important for our children to become familiar with stories from the Hebrew bible and other ancient texts, we also subject those stories to the same scrutiny that we would apply to any body of knowledge.

At The City Congregation we believe that learning should be substantive and also fun. When there are no expectations, there is little progress. And when there is little enjoyment, there can be little motivation.

At The City Congregation we believe that learning is a life-long enterprise. We send an important message to our children when they see that the adults in the community attend their own classes, often held during KidSchool.

Finally, at The City Congregation we also believe that education takes place not just in formal class settings but in moments of conversation and social encounters and when we come together as a community for celebrations and observances. That's when we make lifelong connections - to people and to joyful feelings of identification with our Jewish heritage.

KIDSCHOOL DAILY SCHEDULE

Kehilla Circle

When we first arrive at KidSchool we meet in Kehilla Circle for a half-hour of singing and occasional storytelling from 3:00-3:30pm. Snack is available before Kehilla Circle at 2:45pm. This is a wonderful time for kids - and parents - to make connections and build an intergenerational community. Adult members without children, or whose children are grown, are most welcome to join us and be part of this spirited gathering.

Classes

Classes run from 3:30-5:15pm. Parents are expected to escort their children to the classroom and to pick them up at the end of the day. While the kids are in school, adult members of the community can attend an educational program that covers a wide range of topics including aspects of Jewish history, current events, and culture. Some sessions are devoted to concerns of parents, but most will be of interest to all the adults in the community regardless of parental status.

Holiday Celebrations

On the KidSchool Sundays when we celebrate Chanukah and Purim, we go directly to the classroom for an abbreviated session. Then we all meet for a holiday program and party. In addition to lots of singing, the programs include fun class presentations and skits. On Chanukah we light the menorah, and on Purim we have a special Megillah reading. Then we have our traditional holiday foods - Pizza! - plus latkes or hamantaschen, depending on the holiday.

FIVE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

1 OUR FAMILY, OUR JEWISH FAMILY

The Jewish family is a complicated network or web of multi-cultural origins and experiences, beliefs, rituals and practices. We want to explore where we fit into this Jewish family as secular cultural Jews.

2 OUR LEGENDS, OUR LORE

We want our children to become familiar with classic stories along with favorite, contemporary stories and to claim this wonderful literature for themselves.

3 OUR CALENDAR, OUR CELEBRATIONS

Jewish culture, like all cultures, marks time and special events according to its own calendar and history. We want the kids to understand the rhythms of the year and the passages of life according to our secular cultural perspective.

4 OUR COMMITMENTS, OUR VALUES

We identify certain key Jewish and humanistic values or ideals that guide our behavior – towards others, the world, and ourselves.

5 OUR CULTURE, OUR HERITAGE

We want to transmit to our children a link to our culture by making connections through our foods, languages, music, dance, art, humor, and drama.

OUR HUMANISTIC JEWISH APPROACH

We want to...

... foster joy in our children's Jewish education and nurture a cultural connection to their Jewish heritage.

... introduce our children to the principles, beliefs and practices of Humanistic Judaism

... develop cultural literacy in Jewish literature, heritage, holidays and history and familiarize our children with different approaches to Judaism

... encourage critical thinking and healthy skepticism in an atmosphere of respectful and open discussion.

... respect the dignity of each student's unique learning style.

... engage children in an exploration of their values and beliefs.

... teach our children to respect the right of all people to be treated with fairness and equality and to recognize a responsibility to speak out against injustice.

KidSchool Curriculum Outline – By Grade

Depending on enrollment, we will have mixed-age classes in the younger years and we may divide an older class into two groups.

Years K-1 (combined class in 2-year cycle)

Overall Themes:

***Our Family – Our Jewish Family – Our Holidays – The Calendar
Introducing the Jewish Family as a subset of the Human Family
Introduce the idea of Myth / Fact***

Main Focus:

Our Beginnings – Family / Place

We are part of a World Family. We are a part of a large Jewish Family. And, in some or many cases, we are also part of a Non-Jewish Family.

Our different family configurations: Jewish parent(s) / Jewish parent(s) and non-Jewish grandparents (cousins) / Jewish parent & non-Jewish parent etc.

Finding out what makes someone a Jew & Jewish by birth, by adoption, by personal choice

Discussing the multiple family formations that include: two parents, one parent, grandparents, adoption, step-siblings, step-grandparents, etc.

Drawing pictures of our families / family trees / how far back can they go?

We will use creative approaches that aren't necessarily linear or "tree-driven"

What do we call the different people in our family?

Names for mother/father grandparents – in Hebrew, Yiddish, other languages

Getting a Jewish name

Are we Jewish by where we come from?

Where our families came from and where they lived

Ashkenazic – Sephardic – Mizrahi (Middle Eastern)

Menorahs from around the world – diff. designs, Polish / Spanish / Israeli

Are we Jewish by appearance?

By skin color? By facial look? By hair? By clothes?

(We are multi-cultural, people of color, etc.)

Book on Jewish Costumes – appearances from Bible – to Medieval – to modern

Are we Jewish by our languages? *The languages of our Jewish family*

Is knowing a Jewish language (e.g. Hebrew – Yiddish – Ladino) required to be a Jew? What about just English?

Learning words for:

Members of the Family – ("Expressions and Greetings")

Basic Expressions – ("Family Names")

Holiday-related terms

Songs: Hamishpacha Sheli (My Family)

Are we Jewish by our shared holidays?

Holidays Through the Year – Celebrations of Our Jewish Family

Focus on Shabbat, Chanukah, Purim, Tu B'shvat

Learning about Jewish Symbols

Learning about foods – challah, apples & honey, hamentashen, haroset

Celebrating Shabbat in the Classroom – with Humanistic blessings

Are we Jewish by our stories?

(examples)

Tamar's Sukkah

Mitzvah Giraffe

Kton Ton's Adventures

The Jalapeno Bagel

It Could Be Worse (goes by several titles, e.g. It's Too Noisy!) – How to manage living in a crowded house

Yettle's Feathers (Joan Rothenberg) – Gossip / Lashon hara

How Yussel caught the Gefilte Fish (Charlotte Herman)

Sammy's First Rosh Hashanah

The Hardest Word (A Yom Kippur Story)

Meshka the Kvetch

Raisel's Riddle-- Erika Silverman

Various Holiday-related books /tales

Are we Jewish by beliefs? Values?

Concepts / Values – taught with the assistance of the Chai Mitzvah Bear

Mishpacha – Family

Chaveyroot - Friendship

Ahavah – Love

Shalom Byeet – Peace in the Home

Haknasat Orchim – Hospitality. Welcoming Guests

Lashon Hara – Not speaking poorly of others

Tzedakah – Charity

Bikkur Holim - Visiting the Sick

Are we Jewish by our music?

Assortment of age-appropriate songs including: Shalom Chaverim, Shabbat Shalom, Hiney May Tov, My hat it has three corners, Dreidl Dreidl, nigun chant

Crafts (samples)

Rosh Hashanah plates with honey cup, Shalom wall hangings, candlesticks, menorahs, stars of David, Seder plates, Elijah cups, Purim Megillahs, Purim masks, challah covers, shoebox Sukkahs, Israeli flags, etc.

Year 2 (combined class with Year 3 in a 2-year cycle)

Overall Themes:

The Stories Our Family Has Been Telling: Ancient Legends & Myths
The Beginnings of Humankind and the World
The Beginnings of our Ancient Jewish Family Stories

Pedagogical Goals:

Learning to distinguish between the idea of Myth and Fact and to understand the purpose of myth is to tell a message or convey a set of values
Learning to distinguish between “in the beginning stories” and explanations of the world that are God-based stories and those that are non-theistic
Learning to be able to critically analyze the Bible stories as works of literature

Main Focus:

Seeking Explanations of the Origins of Things and How things Happen
How every culture wants to explain its origins - (“The Need for Explanations” by Rabbi Peter)
What questions do the children puzzle about? (“Questions” by Rabbi Peter)
Tom Chapin’s “Questions”

How & Why Stories

Sun and the Moon – various stories from folklore that examine their different sizes and how the sun became bigger and the moon smaller
Compare Rabbi Peter’s version of “The Sun and the Moon” with the Chelm version of “Sun and Moon”
How the Snake lost its feet

Story of Beginning of the World - How the World Works

“How the World Works and Where Gods Come From” (Rabbi Peter)
Creation Myths from Around the World
Two Variations of the Bible’s Creation Story and the different messages implicit in each version
“A First-Hand Account Of Creation”, as told by God, Adam, Eve and the Snake and related to Rabbi Peter Schweitzer
“The Oldest Story In The World”, Rabbi Peter Schweitzer’s Retelling and Reinventing the Creation Story

Our Ancestor Abraham contemplates the Sun and Moon

Review of who Abraham / Sarah were – “our ancient ancestors”
Various god-beliefs of the time
What does Abraham decide after observing the skies (See “The Stars, the Sun and the Moon”)
Learn the song “Seasons” (See “Seasons”)

What does Abraham think about his father's idols (Read "Abraham Smashes the Idols" in PRIVAL)

Pre-Hebrew Universal Myths

Noah's Ark

"The Great Flood – Noah's Ark"

To question God's motives and ethics

To think about Noah's actions

Tower of Babel

The origin of languages, deals also with cooperation (See "Tower of Babel", "Bricks Bricks Bricks")

To explore the story of humans presuming to become like gods

To study the origins of language and communication

To learn about the development of the Hebrew alphabet and language

To discuss how multiple languages sets up differences and barriers and how we can overcome these barriers by learning a common language and values for peace for one humanity

The Beginning of the Family Story - Abraham and Sarah Saga

Abraham's birth story, his precocious development, his stand against idolatry

Compare to other heroic birth stories

Journey from Haran to Canaan; birth of Isaac in their old age; binding of Isaac; getting a wife for Isaac, Rebekkah

The Jacob/Esau Stories

Birth of Jacob/Esau, Jacob taking Esau's birthright; Jacob's flight

Jacob's family – Rachel, Leah, 12 sons + Leah

Jacob's return to Canaan and meeting up again with Esau

Concepts/Values

Acharyoot – Responsibility (Adam and Eve – to admit what they did)

Emet – Honesty/Truth (Adam and Eve – to answer questions)

Ometz Lev – Courage (Noah)

Chachma – Wisdom (Abraham – to figure out moon vs. sun / and to challenge idols)

Sekhel – Intelligence (Abraham – to figure out moon vs. sun / and to challenge idols)

Mishpacha – Family

Tikva – Hope

Critical thinking – skepticism – empiricism – examining the evidence

Plus:

Introduction to the Hebrew alphabet and simple Hebrew words

Crafts and projects to go along with the curriculum

Multiple opportunities to have creative expression to retell Biblical stories ourselves with our own variations, twists and turns

Review of holidays throughout the year

Year 3 (combined class with Year 2 in a 2-year cycle)

Overall Themes:

Continuing the Family Story (Joseph, Egypt/Slavery/Moses/Exodus)
Formation of a Community – Rebellion / Leadership
Developing Rules

Main Focus:

Begin with a Recap of Abraham/Sarah – Isaac/Rebekkah – Jacob/Rachel/Leah

Continuing the Family Story: The Joseph Cycle of Stories

Joseph's relationship to his brothers; being sold and brought to Egypt; interpreting Pharaoh's dreams; rising to power; reunion with his brothers and father

The Egypt Saga – Part One

Oppression by Pharaoh; the Birth of Moses and his early years; Moses comes to Midian and makes a family, Moses and the Burning Bush; Moses returns to Egypt and confronts Pharaoh and leads the Hebrews out of Egypt

The Egypt Saga – Part Two

The Escape from Egypt

Rebellion In The Wilderness

Five Complaints

#1 – The Water is Bitter

#2 – We have no food. You only brought us out into the wilderness to kill us.

#3 – Manna is boring. We want meat.

#4 – There is no water to drink and Moses gets angry!

#5 – Uprising led by Korach

The Egypt Saga – Part Three

Giving the Law

Initial Revelation on Mount Sinai

“God Offers the Law to the Nations”

The Ten Commandments – and Other Laws; The Ten Indian Commandments

Rules, Laws And Commandments: How a society organizes itself

613 Commandments – Selections

Making The Golden Calf: The Leader Is Gone – The People Rebel

The Egypt Saga – Part Four

Sending the Spies into Canaan and their report of seeing Giants

Moses passes on the role of leadership to Joshua

The Death of Moses

Concepts/Values

Kehillah – Community; Herut – Freedom

Tzedek – Justice

Neh-eh-mah-noot – Loyalty

Mitzvah – Commandment

L'kee-khat see-koo-neem – Risk-taking

Tikun Olam – Bettering the world

Plus:

Further introduction to the Hebrew alphabet and simple words

Crafts and projects to go along with the curriculum

Review of holidays throughout the year

Year 4 (combined class with Year 5 in a 2-year cycle)

Overall Theme:

Jewish Tools for Cultural Continuity: How has the Jewish People and Jewish culture survived?

Issues of Identity, Self-Image, Strength/Weakness, Relying on Miracles or on our own actions
The Yiddish World: Vocabulary, Expressions, Humor
Classic Jokes and the Art of Jewish Joking

Starting Point

At Passover we sing a song, Had Gadya – One Only Kid, One Only Kid.

... then came the cat that ate the kid

... then came the dog that ate the dog that ate the kid

... then came the ox that drank the water that extinguished the fire that burnt the stick that beat the dog that ate the cat, etc.

Some say this is a metaphor for all the different nations that inhabited Israel – one after the other – Jews, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Rome, Crusaders, Turks – and finally, Jews again.

In many ways, our history is not very happy. Our history has many, many episodes when the Jewish people – or the Hebrews before them – were enslaved, persecuted, or attacked by evil leaders and tyrants or other nations. Familiar examples are:

Enslavement in Egypt under the rule of Pharaoh (Passover)

The Greek-Syrian rule that prohibited freedom of religion (Chanuka)

The Persian threat, led by Haman, to Jewish existence (Purim)

Other examples:

Assyrian and Babylonian conquering of ancient Israel, Roman rule of ancient Israel, the Spanish Inquisition, rule of the Russian Czar and Pogroms, Nazi rule during the Holocaust, antisemitism in the United States – not welcoming the first immigrants when they first arrived

Under these circumstances, it is a wonder that Jews remained Jewish. It would be easy to see how many might abandon Jewish identity and try to blend in with the regular population.

In fact, many did this. But others – our ancestors – held onto our heritage and passed it on to us. How have our ancestors persevered?

By focusing on our values, on our wonderful literature, on adapting to the times.

Different Strategies for Survival

What are some of the possible ways to face these kinds of tyrants?

Our literature offers us ideas – stories – that may give hope. But do these methods work for us?

If not, what do we do instead?

The Weak Can Defeat the Strong

Story of David vs. Goliath

Story of Deborah

Can we really rely on that?

We'll Tear the House Down With Us

The Story of Samson

He was super-powerful. When it was clear he was defeated he pulled down the building with him. Is that a good approach?

We'll Create a Superhero to Defend Us

The Story of the Golem

How would we write a modern-day version of this story?

Is this really possible? If it is a myth, does it give us any comfort?

We'll Trust in Miracles

Elijah Stories

How would we write our own modern-day Elijah stories?

These are also mythical. Why don't they work for us as secular humanist Jews.

How would we tell stories without Elijah in them?

We'll Rely on our Intelligence

Folklore and humor that show wisdom

King Solomon Stories

We may be weak physically, but not mentally. We'll rely on our brains to outsmart the bad tyrants and rulers.

We'll Laugh Our Way Through Our Problems

We'll make fun of ourselves. Fools of Chelm. Shlemiels, etc.

We'll make fun of situations. (Hello Mudda, Hello Fadda)

Jewish humor – Learning and retelling Jewish Jokes

We Won't Be Silent

Abraham challenging God at Sodom and Gomorrah about killing the innocent with the guilty

Tevya – challenging God

Rosie in New York City: Gotcha!, by Carol Matas – Garment strike early 20th C.

Yiddish Expressions, Sayings, Curses

Jews have lived in many cultures – from Poland to Iraq and Israel, from Australia to America. A major cultural experience of many of our families and relatives was that of Eastern Europe. Yiddish was the common language and shared culture.

Life in “Yiddishland” was all-embracing. Yiddishkeit refers to the Jewishness or Eastern European Jews – and was associated with popular culture, folkways, food, humor, klezmer music, everyday interactions. It was a particularly rich culture embraced by secular Jews.

Yiddishland was decimated in the Holocaust. As a viable, living language, it is preserved primarily by the ultra-orthodox Jews. While our grandparents and parents may have spoken the language, it is not being passed down to us as a conversational language. Instead, the language for us has been reduced to single words and phrases, some in translation, often very expressive.

By studying these phrases and words, we can link ourselves to the generations that came before us and we can enrich our Jewish identities.

Year 5 (combined class with Year 4 in a 2-year cycle)

Overall Theme:

The Jewish Journey to America

Tracing the Various Waves of Jewish Immigration

What were the circumstances? What were the common themes?

Early Sephardic Settlement

The first Jews arrived in New Amsterdam in 1654. They came from Recife, Brazil.

How did they get there in the first place? What is the background of the Spanish Inquisition?

What kind of reception did they get when arrived? Where did they end up?

Who were some of the leading Jewish families in the Colonial Period?

Mid-19th Century German-Jewish Immigration

What were the circumstances of their emigration to America?

How did they disperse into the country?

How did peddlers rise to store owners?

Late 19th Century Major Rush of Immigration by Eastern Europe Jews

What was happening in Europe? What were the pogroms? What was a shtetl?

How was the immigration experience of these Jews the same or different from the ones who came before them?

What was life like being crowded on the Lower East Side and in other cities?

Pre-WWII Emigration of German Jews

What was happening in Germany in the 1930s to propel a new wave of Jews to come to America?

Why did some leave them but others did not?

What did you need to do to get out?

How did things get harder, especially after 1938 and Kristallnacht?

What was the Kindertransport?

Holocaust Survivors

Where did Holocaust survivors go after the war? What were their choices?

How did they make new lives for themselves?

Late 20th Century Emigration from the Soviet Union

What was life like for Jews in the Soviet Union?

What was the "Free Soviet Jews" Movement and who were the refuseniks?

What was the debate about where these Jews would end up – Israel or United States?

Modern Immigration Issues

What is the big debate about immigration and illegal immigration in America today?

What is the dream act?

How is the treatment of immigrants a contemporary issue?

Major Projects / Teaching Tools

Creating an on-going time-line to trace the phases of immigration

Developing a Board Game with “if-then” options that simulate the immigration experience.

e.g. Land on one square – get your visa approved – move forward. Land on another square – be required to get more documents – move back a space, etc.

Review a Population Chart that shows the growth of the American Jewish population and where Jews have lived.

Field Trip

Depending on the appropriate venue, the class may go on a field trip to enhance their learning about this material.

Year 6

Overall Themes:

The Jewish Response to Poverty – and the place for Justice (Tzedek) and Charity (Tzedaka)

Prejudice / Antisemitism / The Holocaust

Jewish Response to Poverty

This subject matter is based on a curriculum we have used for many years that was developed by Jewish Fund for Justice.

Included are texts like Maimonides' Ladder, which examples eight levels of giving.

Students are also challenged with a practical exercise on how to manage a household on a limited budget to appreciate the challenges of living in or near poverty.

We will supplement the material with additional primary sources from our literature – from the Bible, Talmud, folklore, and contemporary material - that focus on issues of Justice (Tzedek) and Charity (Tzedaka).

Prejudice/Antisemitism/Holocaust

Larger Context – Discussion on Antisemitism

Placing antisemitism into a larger context of prejudice, racism, homophobia, stereotypes, etc. How has anti-Semitism manifested itself? Not just in Europe or in ancient times, but also in America.

Attitude towards first Jewish settlers in US

Persecution, expulsion, forced conversion, quotas, slurs

The idea of Jews as scapegoat

Historical Experiences of the Persecution of Jews

Egypt / Pharaoh, Persia / Haman, Poland / Pogroms / Cossacks, the Tsar

Idea of *Had Gadya* – then came one after another, but we survived

Some Historical Background to the Holocaust

What took place – but not in graphic detail

Heroes / Roles Models of the Holocaust

Choices / Options / No Options

Seeing the signs and leaving the country (possible German experience)

Sending children out - Kindertransport

Go into hiding

Stay with the family

Resistance / Warsaw Uprising / Concentration Camp Uprising

Righteous Gentile – remain silent or act to save Jews
Survival in the concentration camp

The Aftermath

Making new lives – in America, Israel
Holocaust Memorials

Lessons We May (or May Not) Extract from the Holocaust

“Never Again” – resist back
Israel as refuge
Don’t be Silent
Intervene for those who can’t protect themselves – Darfur
How do we combat prejudice, racism, etc.

Year 7

Overall Themes:

A whirlwind tour of Jewish history from Biblical days to the development of modern Humanistic Judaism

How Jews have asked and answered key questions about life, the world, destiny, freedom over our history

A Focus on Israel – Historical Background, Contemporary Issues, What is Our Connection?

Whirlwind Tour of Jewish History

We use a detailed curriculum that deals with the Period of the Monarchy in Israel, Hellenism, the Middle Ages, the Enlightenment, Yiddish Nationalism, Reconstructionism, the Holocaust. There is a special emphasis on the emergence of modern secular and cultural options for Jewish identity.

It's obviously not a simple task to encapsulate all of Jewish History over the course of a school year, and that's not what we attempt. Rather, we focus on an idea, person, concept or holiday from each historical period and engage that idea in new and exciting ways. When studying the Biblical Period and the idea of myth versus history, students write poems based on great historic debates such as Geocentrism/Heliocentrism and Creationism/Evolution, teasing out what constitutes fact versus assertion. For the Hellenistic period, our classroom turns into the Greek Agora, where a debate is being held between the Greek-smitten Hellenists and Traditional Jews. When studying Sephardic Jewry, students act out and discuss scenes depicting an ostensibly Catholic family of Crypto-Jews living in present-day New Mexico, who trace their lineage back to the Spanish Inquisition. Whenever possible, music and the arts are incorporated to make the learning a visceral experience, such as our dissection of "Tradition" from "Fiddler on the Roof" and our own jazz version of "HaTikvah."

Our goal is always to encourage debate, questioning and an open mind. Were the Maccabees great heroes, dictators themselves, or somewhere in between? Why doesn't the Purim story mention God once, and why is it named for the seemingly insignificant drawing of "lots" to see which day the Jews would be attacked? Why are Sholem Aleichem and Mel Brooks so self-deprecating in their humor, and what kind of anger or rebellion underlies the work of each? How does a conscientious Humanistic Jew view America participating in a humanitarian war, if there is such a thing? Students are never told what to think, nor is there discrediting of other religions or traditional Judaism. There is simply an insistence to question everything, demand accuracy and proof when making an argument, and be willing to explore the world with honesty and humor, as Jews have been doing for thousands of years.

Learning about Israel

Israel is incorporated into the historical curriculum (the origin of the Jewish People, the time of Kings and the Temples, the Diaspora and the Zionist movement) but we also take time to learn about the country as it is today. Lessons range from sports in modern Israel, the army as tech-company generator, archeology, music, the peace process and the road ahead.

Israel as the Starting Point of our Family's Story

Setting in the Fertile Crescent

Basic Geography of the Area

Life in Biblical Times (e.g. diet, clothes)

Major Points/Places of Identification

Jerusalem – Tel Aviv – Haifa, Jordan River, Masada – Dead Sea, Negev, The Galilee, the Kibbutz

How the Jews Departed from Israel and Moved All Over the World

That Jews moved to Babylonia – and spread out in the Middle East

That Jews moved to Western Europe, to Spain, to Holland, to Greece, to Eastern Europe

That Jews moved to America, to Australia, etc.

The Idea of Israel's Centrality vs. Living in "Diaspora"

How Some Jews Continued to Yearn to Return to Israel

How Israel became a part of the liturgy, esp. on Passover: "Next Year in Jerusalem"

How other Jews do not consider that they live in Diaspora and reject the concept

Why Israel continued to be important to some Jews and not to others

The idea of Israel as a refuge – with nowhere else to go. Connection to the Holocaust

The right to return – and gain citizenship – with all its controversy

The Founding of Israel

The Creation of the Modern State as the primary achievement of secular Jews of the 20th Century

The History leading up to 1948 – the British – the rejected idea of a two-state solution

How Israel's formation was greeted by the nations

The Various Wars

Contemporary Israel

How Israel Works Politically – coalition government

Major leaders (e.g. Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin)

Social issues – poverty, Ashkenazim vs. Sephardim

Secular vs. Religious struggle

Issues/Challenges to Bringing Peace / Territories / Settlements / The Wall

Additional Material

The class may also discuss current events or items in the media that concern Jewish culture, people, politics, Israel, just to name a few possible topics.