

Authors of Jewish History

Students research a Jewish community of the Middle East or North Africa and create a book that preserves its history

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GRADE AND COURSE

Grades 6 to 8: World History, Ethnic Studies, or ELA

TIME

About 6 to 8 class periods, plus a sharing day

APPENDICES

A: Research Outline
B: Source and Fact Log
C: Project Rubric
D: Primary Source Analysis

Overview

Every community decides how its history is remembered. Families, museums, archives, and community organizations preserve stories so they can be passed on, and Jewish communities have long retold their history through holidays such as Passover and Purim. In this inquiry project, students become historians and authors. They research a Jewish community of the Middle East or North Africa, evaluate primary and secondary sources, and create a book for a real audience that explains how the community began, how it lived, and what happened to it.

Essential Questions

1. How do people and organizations shape the way history is remembered and told?
2. What can primary sources and personal stories teach us that textbooks cannot?
3. What does it mean to belong to a community, and what happens to a community when its members are forced to leave?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Frame a research question about a Jewish community of the Middle East or North Africa.
2. Distinguish primary from secondary sources and assess their credibility, perspective, and limitations.
3. Corroborate evidence across at least two different sources, including one not published by JIMENA.
4. Explain how the community began, its cultural traditions, and the causes and effects of key changes in its history, placing events in time and place.
5. Communicate findings to an audience outside the classroom in a book or digital product with accurate citations.
6. Explain how individuals and institutions such as museums, archives, and community organizations preserve history.

Standards Alignment

California History-Social Science Analysis Skills, Grades 6 to 8

- Chronological and Spatial Thinking 1 to 3: relate events in time, construct timelines, and use maps to explain migration.
- Research, Evidence, and Point of View 1 to 5: frame questions, distinguish fact from opinion, assess the credibility of primary and secondary sources, and detect points of view.
- Historical Interpretation 1 and 2: place people and events in time and place; distinguish cause and effect.

California History-Social Science Content Connections

- Grade 6, Standard 6.3 (ancient Hebrews) and Grade 7, Standard 7.2 (civilizations of Islam in the Middle Ages), as background for how Jewish communities came to live in the region.

C3 Framework for Social Studies

- D2.His.1.6-8: Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
- D2.His.10.6-8: Detect possible limitations in the historical record based on evidence from different kinds of sources.
- D3.1.6-8: Gather relevant information from multiple sources, using origin, authority, structure, context, and corroboration to guide selection.
- D4.3.6-8: Present arguments and explanations to audiences outside the classroom.

Common Core Literacy in History/Social Studies and Speaking and Listening

- RH.6-8.1, RH.6-8.2, RH.6-8.7: Cite evidence from primary and secondary sources; determine central ideas; integrate visual information.
- WHST.6-8.2, WHST.6-8.7, WHST.6-8.8: Write informative texts; conduct short research projects; gather information from multiple sources, assess credibility, and cite sources.
- SL.6-8.4: Present findings clearly to an audience.

Also supports the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum's emphasis on community histories, primary sources, and student voice.

Key Vocabulary

- **Primary source:** a record created at the time, such as a first person account, photograph, letter, or object.
- **Secondary source:** a later work that interprets the past, such as an article or book.
- **Corroborate:** check one source against another to confirm information.
- **Oral history:** a recorded interview about a person's memories.
- **Diaspora:** a community living outside its ancestral homeland.
- **Mizrahi and Sephardic:** terms for Jews with roots in the Middle East and North Africa (Mizrahi, "Eastern") and Jews descended from those expelled from Spain and Portugal (Sephardic). The terms overlap, and many people prefer a specific identity such as Iraqi or Moroccan Jewish.
- **Dhimmi:** the protected but legally unequal status of Jews and Christians under many Islamic governments.
- **Nongovernmental organization (NGO):** a nonprofit group, independent of government, that works on a public issue.

Teacher Background

Jewish communities lived across the Middle East and North Africa for more than 2,500 years, some since the Babylonian exile of the 6th century BCE. After the Islamic conquests of the 7th century, Jews in most of the region lived as dhimmis: they could practice their religion but paid a special tax and faced legal restrictions. Conditions varied widely by place and period, from eras of cultural flourishing to times of persecution. After Spain expelled its Jews in 1492, many Sephardic Jews settled in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire.

In the 20th century, rising nationalism, the end of colonial rule, World War II, and the conflict over Palestine and the founding of Israel brought violence and discriminatory laws to many communities. Between the 1940s and the 1970s, about 850,000 Jews left or were forced out of Arab countries, most resettling in Israel and others in France, the United States, and elsewhere; counting the emigration from Iran after 1979, the number approaches one million. Today only small communities remain, such as about 2,000 Jews in Morocco and about 9,000 in Iran (2012 census). Students should know that historians continue to study and debate the causes of this migration, and that individual families' experiences differed.

Sources: Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (1979); JIMENA Cultural Heritage pages; Jewish Virtual Library country histories.

Materials

- Computer and projector; student access to computers or the school library
- Book making materials (paper, cardstock, markers, glue, printed images), or a digital tool for e-books, slides, or websites
- Appendix A: Research Outline; Appendix B: Source and Fact Log; Appendix C: Project Rubric; Appendix D: Primary Source Analysis (one each per student)

Content note: Some personal stories and histories describe violence, loss, and forced migration. Preview sources before assigning them, prepare students for difficult content, and give students choices. Some students may have family connections to this history, or to other histories of displacement; invite, but never require, personal sharing.

Procedures

Day 1: Introduction (45 to 50 minutes)

- 1 **Warm up (5 min).** Post the essential questions. Students jot one family or community story they know that has been passed down.
- 2 **Discuss participation (10 min).** Brainstorm what it means to participate in a community, positively and negatively. Draft a class definition.
- 3 **Journal (10 min).** How does a person stand up for a principle or belief? What skills does it take? What are the risks?
- 4 **What is history? (10 min).** Students write a one sentence definition, share, and compare. Ask: Who decides what gets remembered?
- 5 **How history is preserved (10 min).** Look at how institutions keep history alive: [Diarna](#), which maps Jewish heritage sites across the Middle East and North Africa; the [USC Shoah Foundation](#), which records survivors' testimonies; and [JIMENA's Cultural Heritage pages](#), which collect community

histories and personal stories. Ask: What does each choose to preserve, and why? Whose voices are included or missing?

- 6 Exit ticket (5 min).** Answer essential question 1 in two sentences.

Days 2 and 3: Learning to Research (two class periods)

- 7 Launch the project.** Explain that students will research one community and create a book for younger students and the school community. Share the rubric (Appendix C) and examples of strong nonfiction books.
- 8 Tour the sources.** Project the Cultural Heritage pages and walk through the ten communities: Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. Open one country and show its history, traditions, personal stories, and videos. Then show a second source on the same country, such as the Jewish Virtual Library or Diarna.
- 9 Model primary source analysis.** Using one personal story, model the four questions on Appendix D: Sourcing (who created it, when, and why?), Context (what was happening then?), Close reading (what does it say, and what words stand out?), and Corroboration (what do other sources say?). Students practice in pairs.
- 10 Model the Source and Fact Log.** Show how to record a source, judge its credibility, and write numbered facts in your own words (Appendix B).
- 11 Assign communities and research questions.** Assign individuals or small groups to communities. Each student writes a research question (Appendix A). Requirements: at least four sources, including one primary source, one personal story, and one source not published by JIMENA.

Days 4 to 8: Research, Writing, and Design (three to five class periods)

- 12 Research.** Students complete the Source and Fact Log and at least one Primary Source Analysis. *Checkpoint:* teacher reviews logs for credible, corroborated sources.
- 13 Outline.** Students organize facts into chapters (Appendix A). *Checkpoint:* teacher approves outlines before drafting.
- 14 Plan the book.** Every book includes a title page, table of contents, at least three chapters (for example: beginnings, life and traditions, and change and migration), a map or timeline, captioned images with credits, and a bibliography.
- 15 Draft, review, and revise.** Students draft, then exchange books for peer review using the rubric, and revise. Partner with the school librarian for sources and with the technology teacher for digital formats.

Final Day: Sharing and Reflection

- 16 Authors' celebration.** Students read their books to a younger class, display them in the library, or present them at a family event. Each author shares one discovery and one source that surprised them.
- 17 Reflect.** In writing, students answer the essential questions: How did your choices as an author shape how this history will be told? What could your sources not tell you? What role do individuals and institutions play in preserving history?

Assessment

- **Formative:** Day 1 exit ticket; primary source analysis in pairs; teacher checkpoints on the Source and Fact Log and outline; peer review.
- **Summative:** the finished book, scored with the Project Rubric (Appendix C), and the written reflection.

Differentiation

- **English learners:** sentence frames for facts and captions; visual sources and maps; allow sources in students' home languages; pair with a supportive partner.
- **Students with IEPs or 504 plans:** reduce the number of required sources; provide preselected sources and audio or video stories; offer a shorter book or a slide format; chunk deadlines.
- **Advanced learners:** compare two communities, or analyze how two sources tell the same event differently and explain why.

Extension Activities

- **Oral history interview.** Students interview a family or community member about migration or tradition, with permission, and add it as a primary source.
- **Class heritage library.** Combine the books into a library collection or a digital exhibit with a map linking each book to its community.
- **Compare two communities.** Students compare their community with a classmate's: What was similar? What was different? Why?

For Jewish day schools: Connect the project to the commandment to remember and retell, as in the Passover Haggadah ("And you shall tell your child"). Students can include a chapter on the community's prayer customs, holiday traditions, or rabbis and scholars, and share their books at a school holiday program.

Resources and External Links

- [JIMENA: Cultural Heritage, country by country](http://qua.jimena.org/cultural-heritage)
qua.jimena.org/cultural-heritage
- [JIMENA Personal Stories \(example: Morocco; each country page has its own\)](http://qua.jimena.org/cultural-heritage/morocco/personal-stories)
qua.jimena.org/cultural-heritage/morocco/personal-stories
- [Ancient Jewish History: Jews of the Middle East \(Jewish Virtual Library\)](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jews-of-the-middle-east)
www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jews-of-the-middle-east
- [Diarna: Geo-Museum of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Life](http://diarna.org/)
diarna.org/
- [USC Shoah Foundation](http://sfi.usc.edu/)
sfi.usc.edu/
- [Facing History and Ourselves](http://www.facinghistory.org/)
www.facinghistory.org/
- [Reading Like a Historian: History Lessons \(Digital Inquiry Group\)](http://inquirygroup.org/history-lessons)
inquirygroup.org/history-lessons
- [Civic Online Reasoning: evaluating online sources \(Digital Inquiry Group\)](http://cor.inquirygroup.org/)
cor.inquirygroup.org/
- [Getting Started with Primary Sources \(Library of Congress\)](http://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/)
www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/
- [MLA Citations: Overview \(Purdue OWL\)](http://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html)
owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html