

Forgotten Refugees: Jewish Refugees from Arab Lands

Students meet Jewish refugees from Libya, Egypt, Iraq, and Morocco through their own testimonies, analyze why nearly a million Jews left their homes, and create collages that help turn forgotten refugees into remembered ones

GRADE AND SETTING

Grades 6 to 8: public, independent, and Jewish schools; adaptable for grades 9 to 12

TIME

Two 45 minute class periods

APPENDICES

A: Then and Now
B: Testimony Listening Notes
C: Rabbi Ezra Dangoor (optional)

Overview

Jews lived in the lands of the Middle East and North Africa for more than 2,000 years, long before the rise of Islam. Between the 1940s and the 1970s, roughly 850,000 Jews left or were forced out of Arab countries and Iran, driven by anti-Jewish violence, discriminatory laws, the loss of citizenship and property, and the upheavals that followed the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Most found refuge in Israel; others rebuilt their lives in France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, and elsewhere. Today, the communities they left behind have almost entirely disappeared. In this lesson, students learn what makes a person a refugee, analyze population data and the causes of Jewish flight country by country, listen to the testimonies of refugees from four countries, and create a collage that tells one refugee's story. Written by Galia Avidar.

Essential Questions

1. What is a refugee?
2. Who are the Jewish refugees from Arab lands, and why did they leave?
3. Why have these refugees been called "forgotten," and what can we do with the memories of their experiences?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Define the term refugee and explain why Jews from Arab lands fit that definition.
2. Analyze population data showing the decline of Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa after 1948.
3. Identify the push and pull factors that led Jews to leave specific countries.
4. Listen closely to a refugee's testimony and record evidence about life before, during, and after flight.
5. Express a refugee's story through a collage that combines words and images.

Curriculum Connections

- **Social Studies (C3 Framework):** D2.His.14.6-8 (explain multiple causes and effects of events); D2.His.4.6-8 (factors that shaped people's perspectives); D2.Geo.8.6-8 (patterns of migration).
- **English Language Arts (Common Core):** RH.6-8.7 (integrate information from charts and data with other sources); SL.6.1 through SL.8.1 (collaborative discussion).
- **Visual Arts:** collage as a form of storytelling.
- **Jewish Studies (Jewish settings):** "You know the soul of the stranger" (Exodus 23:9); Sephardic and Mizrahi history; Israel's ingathering of exiles.

Key Vocabulary

- **Refugee:** a person forced to flee their country because of persecution, war, or violence, who cannot safely return.
- **Expulsion:** forcing a group of people to leave a country.
- **Denaturalization:** taking away a person's citizenship.
- **Push and pull factors:** the forces that drive people away from a place, and the forces that draw them to a new one.
- **Aliyah:** immigration of Jews to the Land of Israel (literally "going up").
- **Ma'abara** (plural **ma'abarot**): a transit camp in Israel where many new immigrants lived in the early 1950s.
- **Mizrahi and Sephardic:** describing Jews whose families come from the Middle East and North Africa, or trace their roots to Spain and Portugal; the terms often overlap.

Teacher Background

In 1948, about 850,000 Jews lived in the Arab world, with the largest communities in Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, Tunisia, and Egypt. Their histories varied, and so did the reasons they left. In Iraq, the 1941 Farhud pogrom killed about 180 Jews; in 1950 and 1951, after a law allowed Jews to emigrate only if they gave up their citizenship, about 120,000 were airlifted to Israel, and their property was frozen. In Libya, pogroms in 1945 and 1948 led most of the community to leave by 1951. In Aden and Yemen, riots in 1947 preceded Operation Magic Carpet, which brought about 49,000 Jews to Israel in 1949 and 1950. In Egypt, thousands were expelled or pressured to leave after the 1956 Suez War. In Syria, Jews faced riots in 1947 and were largely barred from leaving until 1992. Most of Algeria's Jews, who had been French citizens since 1870, left for France when Algeria became independent in 1962. Morocco's community, the largest, left in waves through the 1950s and 1960s, and a small community remains today. In Iran, about 80,000 Jews lived in the country before the 1979 revolution, and fewer than 10,000 remain.

Most of these refugees settled in Israel, where many first lived in crowded transit camps. During the same period, around 700,000 Palestinian Arabs were displaced in the 1948 war, and their story is widely known; the story of Jewish refugees from Arab lands is far less familiar, which is why they are often called "forgotten." In 2014, Israel established November 30 as a national day to commemorate the departure and expulsion of Jews from Arab countries and Iran. Encourage students to understand each community's history on its own terms and to see these refugees as individuals with names, homes, and stories.

Sources: Jewish Virtual Library, "Fact Sheet: Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries"; JIMENA Cultural Heritage country profiles; USA for UNHCR, "What Is a Refugee?"

Note to teacher: Preview the testimonies in Appendix B. The speakers describe both warm memories and frightening experiences of violence and flight; the content is appropriate for middle school, but let

students know in advance. Some students may have family histories of displacement from many parts of the world; invite, but never require, them to share. Appendix C, a teaching by Rabbi Ezra Dangoor, is optional and suited to Jewish settings or older students.

Materials

- Projector and speakers; devices for small groups
- Collage supplies: magazines, newspapers, printed images, construction paper, glue sticks, scissors, markers
- Handouts:
 - [Appendix A: Then and Now](#) (one per student)
 - [Appendix B: Testimony Listening Notes](#) (one per student)
 - [Appendix C: Rabbi Ezra Dangoor](#) (optional)

The four testimonies

- [Gina Waldman, Libya](#) (8 min)
- [Mark Levy, Egypt](#) (6.5 min)
- [Daniel Khazzom, Iraq](#) (5 min)
- [Jacques Dahan, Morocco](#) (6 min)

Procedures

Day 1. Introduction: What Is a Refugee? (15 minutes)

- 1 **Main questions (2 min).** Write the essential questions on the board.
- 2 **One suitcase (6 min).** Ask students to imagine they must leave home tonight and can take only one small suitcase. What would they pack? What would they have to leave behind? Volunteers share. Ask: How would you feel? Where would you go?
- 3 **Define refugee (7 min).** Share the definition from USA for UNHCR: a person forced to flee their country because of persecution, war, or violence. Ask: Who are the refugees you hear about today? Explain that this lesson is about a group of refugees whose story is rarely told.

Day 1. Body of the Lesson: Then and Now (30 minutes)

- 4 **Read the data (12 min).** Hand out Appendix A. In pairs, students study the population table and answer Part 1. Which communities were largest in 1948? What happened in the ten years that followed? What do the numbers for today tell us?
- 5 **Country cards (12 min).** Each pair reads two country cards in Part 2 and sorts the reasons Jews left into push factors and pull factors.
- 6 **Discuss (6 min).** Were the reasons the same in every country? Why might these refugees be called "forgotten"? Explain that next class students will hear refugees tell their own stories.

Day 2. Testimonies (20 minutes)

- 7 **Listen (15 min).** Divide the class into four groups, one for each testimony in Appendix B. Groups watch their testimony and complete the listening notes: life before, why and how the speaker left, what they carried, where they went, and what they want us to remember.
- 8 **Share (5 min).** Each group shares the single most important detail from its testimony.

Day 2. Conclusion: From Forgotten to Remembered (25 minutes)

- 9 Create (18 min).** Each student creates a collage that tells the story of the refugee they heard, combining images with key words and phrases from their listening notes. Explain that a collage assembles many pieces into a new whole, just as a refugee's life is assembled from many places and memories.
- 10 Gallery and reflect (7 min).** Display the collages. Discuss: What images and words did you choose, and why? What did you learn that surprised you? With whom will you share these stories so they are remembered?

For Jewish settings or older students: Read Appendix C, a teaching by Rabbi Ezra Dangoor of Baghdad on "you know the soul of the stranger." Ask: What should people who once suffered do when they see others suffering today?

Assessment

- **Formative:** Appendix A data analysis and push and pull sort, Appendix B listening notes, and discussion.
- **Summative:** the collage and a two sentence artist statement. A strong collage accurately reflects the testimony, includes at least three specific details (places, objects, events), and shows both the life the refugee left and the journey.

Differentiation

- **Students who need support:** assign one country card; provide sentence frames ("Jews left ___ because ___."); turn on captions for the testimonies.
- **English learners:** preteach vocabulary with images; allow labels in the home language on collages.
- **Advanced learners:** compare two countries' histories in depth, or research the Jewish community of a country not covered in Appendix A, such as Lebanon or Iran.

Extension Activities

- **Record a story.** Students interview a family or community member whose family came from the Middle East or North Africa, using the Student Interview Guide in JIMENA's [Oral Histories](#) lesson.
- **Explore more testimonies.** Students choose another testimony from [JIMENA's Oral History collection](#) and compare it with the one they heard in class.
- **November 30.** Students plan a school observance for the day commemorating Jews who left or were expelled from Arab countries and Iran, displaying their collages.
- **Go deeper.** Older students can work through the [Forgotten Refugees unit](#) from Justice for Jews from Arab Countries.

Resources and External Links

- [What Is a Refugee? \(USA for UNHCR\)](http://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/)
www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/
- [Fact Sheet: Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries \(Jewish Virtual Library\)](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-refugees-from-arab-countries)
www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-refugees-from-arab-countries
- [JIMENA Cultural Heritage, country by country](http://qua.jimena.org/cultural-heritage)
qua.jimena.org/cultural-heritage
- [JIMENA Oral History: All Stories, by country](http://qua.jimena.org/oral-history/stories)
qua.jimena.org/oral-history/stories
- [Oral Histories \(JIMENA lesson\)](#)

qua.jimena.org/resources/for-educators/lesson-plans/oral-histories

- [The Forgotten Refugees unit \(Justice for Jews from Arab Countries\)](http://justiceforjews.com/educational-resources/)
justiceforjews.com/educational-resources/
- [The Forgotten Exodus podcast \(American Jewish Committee\)](http://www.ajc.org/forgotten-exodus)
www.ajc.org/forgotten-exodus
- [Jewish History \(Sephardi & Mizrahi Education Toolkit\)](http://www.sepharditoolkit.org/recommendation/jewish-history/)
www.sepharditoolkit.org/recommendation/jewish-history/
- [Sephardi & Mizrahi Education Toolkit \(JIMENA\)](http://www.sepharditoolkit.org/)
www.sepharditoolkit.org/