

MIZRAHI HERITAGE MONTH

Celebrating Mizrahi Heritage Month

A guide for schools and communities to honor the history, culture, and stories of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa every November.

WHEN

All of November. The month closes on November 30, the day of remembrance for Jews who left or were expelled from Arab countries and Iran.

WHO IT HONORS

Jews whose families lived for centuries across the Middle East and North Africa, and the nearly one million who were displaced in the twentieth century.

WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

Teachers and administrators in Jewish and public schools, Hillels, synagogues, youth groups, and families.

TIME NEEDED

Anything from a single lesson to a full week of programming. Every activity can stand on its own.

Jewish communities lived across the Middle East and North Africa for more than 2,500 years, from Morocco to Iran and from Yemen to Iraq. In the twentieth century, rising nationalism, antisemitism, and the conflicts surrounding the creation of the State of Israel made life untenable for many of these communities. Nearly one million Jews left or were forced from their homes, often losing their property and citizenship. Most rebuilt their lives in Israel, and many others settled in France, the United States, Canada, and beyond. For decades their story went largely untold.

How Mizrahi Heritage Month began

- **2002.** JIMENA was founded in San Francisco after former Jewish refugees from Libya and Egypt shared their personal stories at a rally at San Francisco State University.
- **2014.** Israel passed a law designating November 30 as an annual national day to commemorate the departure and expulsion of Jews from Arab countries and Iran, and to teach this history in schools.
- **2015.** JIMENA spearheaded Mizrahi Remembrance Month, bringing the stories of former refugees to college campuses across the United States.
- **2016 to today.** JIMENA expanded the effort into Mizrahi Heritage Month, honoring both the history of displacement and the richness of Sephardic and Mizrahi culture. Schools, Hillels, synagogues, and organizations across North America now take part.

Why it matters

In many North American classrooms, the story of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews is a footnote. Yet their descendants make up about half of Israel's Jewish population, and many students in our schools have roots in the region.

Teaching this history enriches every student's understanding of Jewish diversity, Middle Eastern history, and Israeli society, and helps students with family ties to the region see their own story reflected.

Programs that work

Invite a speaker

Nothing replaces a first person account. JIMENA's Speakers Bureau includes former refugees, their children and grandchildren, scholars, and educators, and we can help you choose the right speaker for your audience. You can also invite a parent or grandparent from your own community who was born in the region.

jimena.org/speakers

Explore oral histories

Assign small groups different countries and have them watch testimonies from JIMENA's oral history collection. Students can share and compare what they learned, or write a creative piece in the voice of the person they heard.

jimena.org/oral-history

Watch and discuss a film

The 20 minute version of *The Forgotten Refugees* works well in a single class period. Pair it with the short film *JIMENA Celebrates Mizrahi Heritage* to balance history with celebration.

[Links on the last page](#)

Share food and culture

Invite a community member to lead a cooking demonstration or bring traditional dress, music, and objects from home. Food, clothing, and music are another language for history, and a warm way to welcome families into your school.

Map your roots

Hang a large map of the Middle East and North Africa in a shared space. Invite students to mark where their families came from and add photos or memories. Use Diarna, a digital map of Jewish heritage sites, to show synagogues and neighborhoods in those places.

diarna.org

Interview a family member

Students record a short interview with a parent, grandparent, or neighbor about where their family comes from, what they ate, the languages they spoke, and the holidays they celebrated. Families can share these stories with JIMENA.

jimena.org/share-your-story

A sample week

This plan was first piloted in a Jewish high school. Use the whole week or choose the days that fit your calendar.

DAY	ACTIVITY	WHAT HAPPENS
Monday	Our families' places	Open the week at an assembly or in classrooms. Students who wish to share say their grandparents' names and the places their families came from. This sets an intention for the week and shows the diversity within your own community.
Tuesday	Photo map	Hang a large map of the region in the cafeteria, hallway, or library. Students and families add photographs next to their family's country of origin, giving everyone a visual picture of the region and its people.
Wednesday	The culinary experience	A cooking demonstration, tasting table, or potluck of dishes from across the region, with Mizrahi and Sephardic music playing in the background. Make it hands on for as many students as possible.
Thursday	School assembly	Screen <i>The Forgotten Refugees</i> and invite a speaker to share a personal story. Close with something joyful, such as live music or a henna celebration.
Friday	Reflection	Students share what surprised them and what they want to remember, and bring home an interview question for their families. Jewish schools may close the week with a Mizrahi or Sephardic Shabbat program.

Questions for discussion

- Why do you think the story of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa went untold for so long?
- What did families carry with them when they left, and what did they have to leave behind?
- How do food, music, and language help keep a community's memory alive?
- What can the story of one family teach us that a history book cannot?

Words to know

Mizrahi *Hebrew, "Eastern"*

Jews whose families come from the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia.

Sephardic *from Sepharad, Hebrew for Spain*

Jews descended from the communities of Spain and Portugal, many of whom settled across North Africa and the Ottoman Empire after 1492.

November 30

The day of remembrance for Jews who left or were expelled from Arab countries and Iran.

The Forgotten Refugees

A term for the Jewish refugees from the region, whose story was long overlooked; also the title of an award winning documentary.

Diaspora *Greek, "dispersion"*

Jewish communities living outside the Land of Israel.

Oral history

A recorded interview in which people tell the story of their own lives.

Bringing the month to life

In the public school classroom

- Teach the month as history and culture. Present customs and religious practices as subjects of study, without asking students to take part in them.
- Make family sharing voluntary, and welcome every student's story, whatever their background.
- Connect to world history units on the Middle East, migration, and refugees.
- Follow school allergy and food policies when sharing dishes.

In Jewish schools and communities

- Host a Mizrahi or Sephardic Shabbat dinner or service with melodies and dishes from the region.
- Bring a JIMENA speaker to a school assembly, Hillel event, or synagogue program.
- Use the Sephardi and Mizrahi Education Toolkit to plan inclusion all year, not only in November.
- Display student photo maps and interviews where families will see them.

At home and with family

- Ask an older relative where your family comes from, what they ate, and which languages they spoke.
- Cook a family recipe together and write down the story behind it.
- Watch a JIMENA film or oral history together and talk about it.
- Share your family's story with JIMENA.

Resources

Watch

[The Forgotten Refugees, 20 minute version](#) (JIMENA)
vimeo.com/85087705

[JIMENA Celebrates Mizrahi Heritage](#) (JIMENA)
vimeo.com/772273065

[Gina Bublil-Waldman: Testimony at the United Nations](#) (JIMENA)
youtube.com/watch?v=nW38Sd5zibY

[Becoming a Jewish Refugee: Levana Zamir's Story](#) (JIMENA)
youtube.com/watch?v=uYrLm0hGSs4

[Voices of Jewish Refugees from the Middle East and North Africa](#) (JIMENA)
youtube.com/watch?v=DeaLwib1wns

Explore online

[Diarna: a digital map of Jewish heritage sites](#) Synagogues, schools, and neighborhoods across the region.
diarna.org

["Jews of the Middle East," by Loolwa Khazzoom](#) (My Jewish Learning)
myjewishlearning.com/article/jews-of-the-middle-east

[The Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East](#) A leading research center, for teachers and older students.
ybz.org.il/research-en/the-ben-zvi-institute-for-the-study-of-jewish-communities-in-the-east

From JIMENA

[Book a speaker](#)
jimena.org/speakers

[Lesson plans for educators](#)
jimena.org/resources/for-educators

[Cultural Heritage explainers](#) Printable guides to holidays, customs, languages, and music.
jimena.org/cultural-heritage

[Oral history collection](#)
jimena.org/oral-history

[Videos and podcasts](#)
jimena.org/videos

[Mizrahi Heritage Month](#)
jimena.org/mizrahi-heritage-month

[Sephardi & Mizrahi Education Toolkit](#) (designed mainly for Jewish day schools)
sepharditoolkit.org

[Distinctions, JIMENA's journal](#)
distinctionsjournal.org

[Share your family's story](#)
jimena.org/share-your-story

Need help planning?

JIMENA can help you find a speaker, choose films and oral histories, and plan a program for your school or community. Contact us at info@jimena.org.



About JIMENA

JIMENA, Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, preserves and shares the history, heritage, and living culture of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews. Explore more explainers, oral histories, videos, and teaching resources at jimena.org/cultural-heritage.

A note for educators

This explainer is written to support teaching *about* religion and culture. In public schools, present customs, texts, and prayers as subjects of study, and do not ask students to perform rituals, recite blessings, or take part in religious practice. Share your family's story with JIMENA at jimena.org/share-your-story.

Adapted and updated from *Mizrahi Remembrance Month: Student Curriculum* by educator Adam Eilath, originally published by JIMENA, with new activities, resources, and links. Links checked October 2026; jimena.org links point to JIMENA's new website. © 2026 JIMENA. May be freely shared and printed for educational use.