

Letters from Israel

Lesson plan for family/congregational education

This lesson plan is part of a larger Go & Learn lesson entitled “A Young American Jew in Israel, 1947-1948,” which can be found at

<http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/apr08/>.

This lesson is ideally suited to a program to which parents and/or grandparents are invited. Pick and choose from as many of the activities as you think will work for the time available.

1. Begin by asking participants what they know about the creation of the State of Israel. What dates and events are important? Who populated the land of Israel at the time and what was the demographic distribution of population? What was the role of the British Mandate, the Balfour Declaration, and lastly, the U.N. Partition vote on November 29, 1947 in the founding of the State? What was the result of the Partition Plan (e.g. war, Arab refugees, British pull-out, declaration of State with different borders than the Partition Plan)? You may want to consider the role that the Holocaust played in shaping the founding of Israel as well as the politics surrounding the displacement of Arab refugees (estimated by Israeli historian Benny Morris to be between 600,000-760,000). You may want to consult the following websites for more information:

For information about the British Mandate:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Mandate_of_Palestine

For information about the Balfour Declaration of 1917:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balfour_Declaration_of_1917

For information about the U.N. Partition Plan:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1947_UN_Partition_Plan

For the complete text of the U.N resolution approving partition:

<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/un/res181.htm>

http://www.knesset.gov.il/holidays/eng/29nov_e.htm

To listen to a radio broadcast of the U.N. vote and celebration in Tel Aviv (note that Porath was in Jerusalem), you can connect a speaker to a laptop and use the following web site:

<http://www.isracast.com/article.aspx?ID=266>

2. Share the two letters (Nov. 30, 1947 and Nov. 29, 1948) written by Zipporah Porath with your students. (Download the letters from <http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/apr08/>.) You can have them read the letters aloud, or for a more dramatic effect, tape someone (preferably a young person, 18-22 years old) in advance reading them with emotion – an aspiring actor, perhaps. Play the recording, interrupting only to explain that the second letter is written one year later.

3. Discuss with the students what they think it would be like to be away from home during a time of war.
 - What would they be feeling, and how would their parents feel?
 - How would they feel if they were in the safer location and their parents in the war-torn area?
 - Would their feelings change depending on what war it was? Would it make a difference that it was Israel's War of Independence? Why or why not?
 - Discuss the decisions that Zippy made. How do they imagine they would have responded? Would they have stayed in Israel? Would they have joined the Haganah? Or would they have chosen a different path? Why or why not? If they returned home, how might they feel? If they stayed, why, and what would be their concerns?

4. Begin a letter writing activity. There are a variety of ways to do this:
 - a) Have the participants in your program write a letter to Zippy, as if she were a member of their own family. What are their concerns,

hopes, thoughts? Do they have questions for her about information that is not covered in her letters?

- b) If parents are present, you can have the young people write to their parents, and have the parents respond to the letter. Both groups should include what worries them, what they are proud of, and what they think the other should be doing.
- c) You may choose to reverse the above activity and have parents write from the point of view of the student who was away for the year, and the students write from the perspective of the parents. This will allow students to think about what Zippy's family may have been thinking, since we only have her side of the correspondence.

After they've written their letters, ask parents and students to share their letters in small groups (6-10 people.) What common themes run through these letters? How do they think that their families would change after this experience? What would their relationship to Israel be like after this year was over?

5. If you have students with Israeli parents or grandparents, invite them to participate in this program. There may be people in your community who lived through or fought in Israel's War of Independence or one of Israel's other wars. Invite them to speak to the group about their experiences.
6. Conclude with a conversation, preferably in small groups with both parents and children, reflecting on their feelings about Israel today.
 - As a young woman, Zippy had many hopes and dreams for the new State of Israel. What are your hopes and dreams for Israel today?
 - Zippy was an American Jew who joined her fate with the State of Israel and made her life there. What are some of the different ways American Jews relate to Israel today? What is your relationship with Israel?

- In her Nov. 29, 1948 letter, Zippy tells her parents that she has decided to stay in Israel and that “this is now my HOME.” What does “home” mean to you? Do you think of Israel as “home”? Why or why not? How do you think we should relate to the other people who think of the same land as “home”?
- What are we celebrating when we celebrate Yom Ha’atzmaut? Are there aspects of Israel that you do not celebrate?

After discussing these questions, you may choose to wrap up the program by having the participants write their own letters about their vision for Israel in the next 60 years.