

Soviet Jewry - Kit II: Prior to 1980

Contributed by: Enid L. Wurtman's Soviet Jewry Archives on the History of the Zionist Movement from the Soviet Union

Introduction

The background information provided below is meant to introduce young children to the idea that Jewish people in the Soviet Union were not free to express themselves as Jews or to emigrate to a different country. The original lesson plan was written prior to 1980 and can be viewed in the materials.

Objectives

- To develop an understanding of Russian history, as it relates to immigration to America and our ancestors.
- To help students realize that many of them have ancestors who immigrated to America from Russia.
- Create an awareness of the prevalence and effects of Anti-Semitism.

Big Ideas	Jews are responsible for one another (solidarity).
	You can make a difference.
Content	To relate to the historical events that led to freedom for Soviet Jews.
	To explain the Jewish values that led Jewish people around the world to fight for Soviet Jewish rights.
Meaning	To reflect on your obligation to help (Jewish/all) people in need.
	To reflect on the power of a common (Jewish) voice.

Duration: 45 minutes

Materials:

Historical Maps: <https://goo.gl/tHn4uh>

[And Again They Are Beating Us](#) Poem

Background

Background Activity: During the years between 1880-1914, about one third of the Jewish population in Eastern Europe emigrated to the United States. Jews were suffering from repeated Anti-Semitic incidents, and they were afraid. Explain to students that it was probably during this time that their ancestors left for a new beginning. Ask what they think led them to make the decision to leave, and what would probably be the difficulties in coming to that decision.

Procedure

Part I Activity

- **Lesson I Review:** Begin by referring briefly to the previous lesson and asking whether anyone was able to trace their ancestry back to Russia or the former Soviet Union. If so, mark those places on a map. It's also important to mention that borders have changed dramatically since Soviet Jews were refuseniks. For instance, Odessa, a city with a large Jewish population, is now part of Ukraine, which is a country separate from Russia today. Remind students that the time of Soviet Jewish oppression, there were 3 million Jews in Russia. Today, there are about 185,000.
- **Research:** Research the time period using the following guiding questions.
 - <https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/uploads/files/TeachingAmericanHistory/RussianJews.pdf>
 - <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-emigration-in-the-19th-century/>
 - www.pitt.edu/~super7/49011-50001/49901.ppt

Questions:

- Why was anti-semitism so prominent?
- What was the Pale of Settlement
- What language was mostly spoken by Jews at this time/in this area?
- What were pogroms? Who planned them? What usually happened afterward?
- To where did most Jews emigrate during this time?

- What were the importance of the following events: 1905 and failure to overthrow the Czar, 1911 Bellis Trial, 1917 Revolution - Trotsky and Lenin
- How did Zionism become a logical outcome of Jewish life in Russia at this time?

Part II: Case Studies

- Explain to students that after 1967, another huge wave of emigration for Russian Jews began. Hundreds of thousands of Jews left the country between 1967 and the late 1980s. But more often than not, these Jews had to fight - sometimes for years or even decades - for their freedom. One of the most productive forms of support for Soviet Jews was pressure exerted by Jewish communities and human rights organizations around the world.
- Watch: *Freedom 25: A lesson in Human Rights, Never to be Forgotten* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvbZO9VUW00>
 - What were the tactics that activists used to apply pressure?
 - How do these tactics compare to the ways in which we advocate for those who suffer today?
- Read the poem “And Again They are Beating Me.”
 - What does this poem say about the reason Jews are being beaten?
 - Why is the poet both outraged and also not surprised?
 - How do they carry out the beatings?