Many Waves, One People

A gallery walk through Jewish journeys to America, with tears and treasures at every stop.

THE BIG IDEA

The Jewish people is one family with many branches. Our history isn't only a story of leaving: every community built something beautiful where it lived, and made its new home richer.

Students will be able to

- Name at least four waves of Jewish migration to America and place them in rough order.
- Define Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Mizrahi, and give an example of each.
- Explain why Jews left each place, and name what each community built back home and here.
- Connect their own family's story, whatever it is, to the larger Jewish story.

The lesson at a glance

Lesson flow

The parts, in order.

1	Who was Emma Lazarus, really?
2	Two lenses: tears and treasures
3	Gallery walk: all eight stations
4	Right here in our community
5	Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi
6	Discussion
7	Closing and exit ticket
8	Hand out family interview

How the walk works

Students explore in **pairs or trios** and walk the full path, so everyone reads every card.

Your one job: start each group at a different station so there's no traffic jam. On your signal, everyone moves to the next number. After Station 8, go on to Station 1.

1 → 2 → 3 → 4 → 5 → 6 → 7 → 8 ↻

With 8 pairs, start one at each station. With 4 trios, start at 1, 3, 5 and 7.

Before class

- [ ] Print the 9 station cards (tabloid, color) and the entrance sign
- [ ] Blue and yellow sticky notes, plus one more color for share day
- [ ] Copies of the family journey interview
- [ ] Fill in the community card with your town's Jewish history, or plan to build it together in class
- [ ] Run a paper timeline, 1650 to 2025, along one wall
- [ ] Tape up all eight stations with space between them
- [ ] Index cards for the exit ticket

Running the lesson

1 Who was Emma Lazarus, really?

Ask who the "huddled masses" were. Then reveal: Emma's mother's family were Portuguese Sephardi Jews in America since before the 1750s, and her father's were Ashkenazi Jews from Germany.

> *"So was Emma Lazarus Sephardi or Ashkenazi?" Both. Many Jews are.*

2 Two lenses: tears and treasures

Name the habit of telling Jewish history only through suffering, then add two kinds of treasures: the thriving communities Jews built back home, and the life they added to their new homes. Hand out blue and yellow stickies.

> *"In 1928, the historian Salo Baron called this the lachrymose, or tearful, view of Jewish history. Tears are part of our story. They're just not the whole story."*

3 Gallery walk

Pairs or trios walk all eight stations. Start groups at different stations so there's no traffic jam, and have everyone move to the next number on your signal (after 8, go on to 1). At every station they do the same three things: read the card out loud together, the group writes one sticky (blue tear or yellow treasure, aiming for some of each across the walk), and stick the notes on the wall timeline. "Talk about it" is a bonus for groups that finish early.

4 Right here in our community

Read the community card together as a class. Fill it in ahead of time from your congregation's or town's history, or build it together if students know the story. A local historical society or your synagogue's archive is a good place to start.

> *"Which waves can you find in our own community? What treasures did they bring here?"*

5 Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi

Have groups sort the waves into three branches, then fill in the chart on page 3 together. The cards leave these words out on purpose so students do the sorting. Point out the fuzzy edges, and explain the word "Mizrahi."

6 Discussion

> *"If we only had the blue notes, what would we think Jewish history is? What do the yellow notes add?"*

7 Closing and exit ticket

Read Deuteronomy 10:19 together, then ask how Emma Lazarus and the communities on the wall lived it out.

> *"You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."*

Exit ticket: one wave I didn't know about · Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Mizrahi in my own words · "One treasure from today that makes me proud to be part of the Jewish people is…" Hand out the family interview as students leave.

8 Optional follow-up: share day

Students bring back the family interview and add a sticky note for their family to the wall, in a new color. Then go around the circle: one sentence each, starting "My family brought…" A general note is fine, and students can pass.

Good to know

The three big branches

Branches of one family tree, not separate peoples. Many Jews, like Emma Lazarus, come from more than one.

	Ashkenazi	Sephardi	Mizrahi
The word means	From *Ashkenaz*, medieval Hebrew for Germany	From *Sepharad*, Hebrew for Spain	Hebrew for "Eastern"
Families lived	Central and Eastern Europe	Spain and Portugal until the 1490s, then the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, the Netherlands and the Americas	The Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia
Jewish language	Yiddish	Ladino (Judeo-Spanish)	Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Persian and others
Our stations	2, 3, 6	1, 4	5, 7
A taste	Challah, kugel, latkes	Bourekas, date haroset	Kibbe, tahdig, rice on Passover

Station 8 fits all three columns.

ABOUT THE WORD "MIZRAHI"

A modern umbrella term of convenience that came into wide use in Israel in the late 20th century. It groups Jews from across the Middle East and North Africa who were never one people. Syrian and Moroccan Jews are both called Mizrahi, but Aleppo and Casablanca are more than 2,000 miles apart, with different dialects, melodies, foods and customs. Encourage students to name the specific community: Syrian, Iraqi, Moroccan, Yemenite, Persian.

And more: some communities don't fit any column, like Ethiopian Jews (Beta Israel), Yemenite Jews, Indian Jews (Bene Israel and Cochin) and Greek-speaking Romaniote Jews.

Teaching notes

Widen, don't flip

Most of the class comes from Ashkenazi families. Their story is real; it just isn't the whole story.

Ask "Which Jews?"

When a student says "Jewish food" meaning Ashkenazi food, gently ask, "Which Jews?"

Not only America

Many of these same waves also went to Israel. One sentence is enough.

Invite, don't spotlight

Let students from other backgrounds choose whether to share, and never ask one student to speak for a whole community.

Tears and treasures, honestly

Stations 2, 3 and 4 say in one line what happened to those communities in the Holocaust. Answer questions simply and truthfully.

Current events

Stations 5 and 7 touch Syria and Iran. Keep the focus on these families' history and resilience.

Station cheat sheet, Stations 1–4

The tear and the two treasures on each card, at a glance. Use it to prompt groups that get stuck.

1 · The First 23

Recife, Brazil → New Amsterdam (New York)

TEARS
They lived in Recife under Dutch rule. Then Portugal took Recife, and the Inquisition came with it.

BACK HOME
In Spain, Jews wrote poetry and philosophy for centuries. In Recife they built Kahal Zur Israel, the first synagogue in the Americas.

ADDED HERE
In 1790, Moses Seixas wrote to George Washington that America "to bigotry gives no sanction." Washington used his words in a famous letter about religious freedom.

2 · Central European Jews

German lands & Bohemia → Cities and towns across America

TEARS
Laws limited where Jews could live and which jobs they could have. Some laws even limited who could marry. Many families were also poor.

BACK HOME
German Jews led the Jewish Enlightenment and started Reform Judaism. The Nazis mostly destroyed this world in the Holocaust, but a Jewish community lives in Germany again today.

ADDED HERE
Levi Strauss helped invent blue jeans. Albert Kahn designed Detroit's car factories and two Temple Beth El buildings.

3 · Eastern European Jews

Russian Empire, Poland & Romania → New York, Chicago & Detroit

TEARS
Pogroms, which were violent attacks on Jews. Harsh laws, poverty and forced army service made life even harder.

BACK HOME
This region gave us great yeshivas, Hasidism, and Yiddish writers like Sholem Aleichem. Vilna was called "the Jerusalem of Lithuania." Most of this world was destroyed in the Holocaust.

ADDED HERE
Irving Berlin, who came from Russia as a boy, wrote "God Bless America." Yiddish theater helped shape Broadway.

4 · Jews from the Ottoman Empire

Turkey, Greece & Rhodes → New York & Seattle

TEARS
The empire was falling apart and wars broke out. Jews were also being drafted into the army for the first time.

BACK HOME
In Salonica, so many people were Jewish that the port closed on Shabbat. Ladino songs and newspapers thrived for 400 years. In 1943, the Nazis murdered almost all of Salonica's Jews.

ADDED HERE
In Seattle, these families became well-known vendors at Pike Place Market, and their Ladino songs are still sung.

TEACHER GUIDE

Station cheat sheet, Stations 5–8

The tear and the two treasures on each card, at a glance. Use it to prompt groups that get stuck.

5 • Syrian and Middle Eastern Jews

Aleppo & Damascus, Syria → Brooklyn, New York

TEARS
At first for business, when trade routes changed. Later because of violence and harsh rules. In 1947, a riot in Aleppo destroyed Jewish homes and synagogues.

BACK HOME
Jews lived in Aleppo for about 2,000 years. For about 600 years they guarded the Aleppo Codex, one of the oldest Hebrew Bibles.

ADDED HERE
Brooklyn's Syrian community built schools, synagogues and businesses. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld's mother came from it.

6 • Soviet Jews

The Soviet Union → Brooklyn & Oak Park, Michigan

TEARS
Antisemitism, and a government that made it almost impossible to learn Hebrew or practice Judaism. People who asked to leave were often punished. They were called refuseniks.

BACK HOME
Families kept Judaism alive in secret Hebrew classes. Since 1991, Jewish schools and synagogues have reopened.

ADDED HERE
Sergey Brin, who came from Moscow at age 6, co-founded Google.

7 • Iranian (Persian) Jews

Iran (Persia) → Los Angeles & Great Neck, New York

TEARS
After the 1979 revolution, Iran's new government put new limits on Jews, and life became dangerous. A leading Jewish businessman was executed.

BACK HOME
Jews lived in Persian cities like Isfahan, Shiraz and Hamadan for about 2,500 years. A small community still lives in Iran.

ADDED HERE
Younes Nazarian, who came from Tehran in 1980, was an early investor in Qualcomm, the company whose chips are in many smartphones.

8 • Latin American and Israeli Jews

Cuba, Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico & Israel → Miami, New York & Los Angeles

TEARS
Many Cuban Jews left after the 1959 revolution. Later, money troubles and crime pushed others out. Most Israelis came for school or work.

BACK HOME
In 1889, Jewish families founded Moisés Ville in Argentina and became "Jewish gauchos" (cowboys). Its Jewish community is still one of the largest anywhere.

ADDED HERE
Latin American Jews filled Miami synagogues with new life and Spanish songs. Israelis brought modern Hebrew and Israeli culture.

GRADE 7 · MANY WAVES, ONE PEOPLE · TAKE-HOME

Our Family's Jewish Journey

Student name _____ **I talked with** _____

DEAR FAMILIES

Our seventh graders are learning that Jews came to America in many waves, from Spain to Syria to the Soviet Union, and that Jewish families join the Jewish people in many ways. Please spend about 15 minutes with your child on these questions. There are no wrong answers, "we don't know" is a fine answer, and you can skip anything you'd rather not share.

1. Where did our family live before we lived here? Go back as far as you know.

2. How did Judaism come into our family? Some families have always been Jewish, some joined by choice, and many are a mix. What's our story?

3. If our family moved from another country, when, and why did they leave? Which wave might they fit, if any?

4. If our family has been American for a long time, or we don't know where we came from, what's the oldest family story you do know?

5. Do we think of ourselves as Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi, a mix, something else, or have we never thought about it?

6. What is one thing our family does, eats, says or sings that came from someone who came before us?

7. Is there an object, photo or recipe that tells part of our story? If you can, bring a photo of it.

STUDENT REFLECTION

One thing I learned about my family that I didn't know before:

_____

Bring this back for share day, when every family gets a place on our wall of waves.