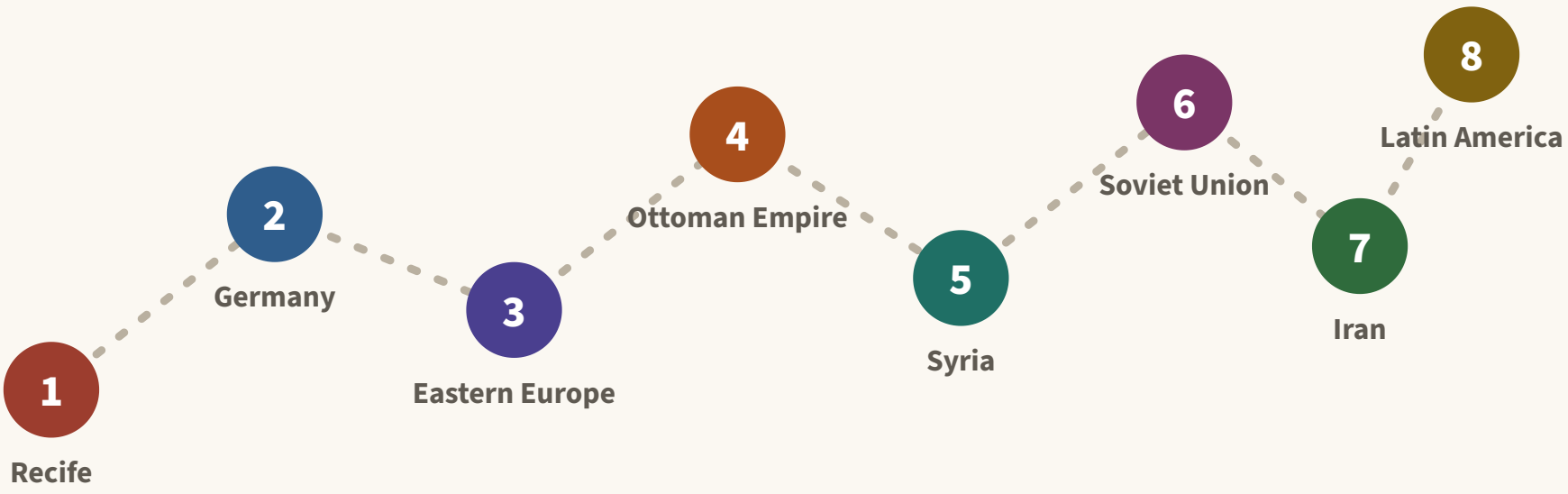
MANY WAVES, ONE PEOPLE

Your journey starts here!

Jews came to America in many waves, from all over the world. Walk all eight stations with your partners, and follow their journeys.



Look through two lenses

Tears

Why did they have to leave? Write it on a **blue** sticky.

Treasures

What did they build back home, and add here? Write it on a **yellow** sticky.

At every station

1. Read the card out loud together.
2. Write one sticky together: a tear or a treasure.
3. Stick your notes on the wall timeline.

Star any card where your family might be part of the wave, or add a ? if you're not sure. Every family has a journey.

STATION 1

1654

The First 23

Say it: Recife (heh-SEE-fee) · Shearith Israel (sheh-ah-REET yis-rah-EL)

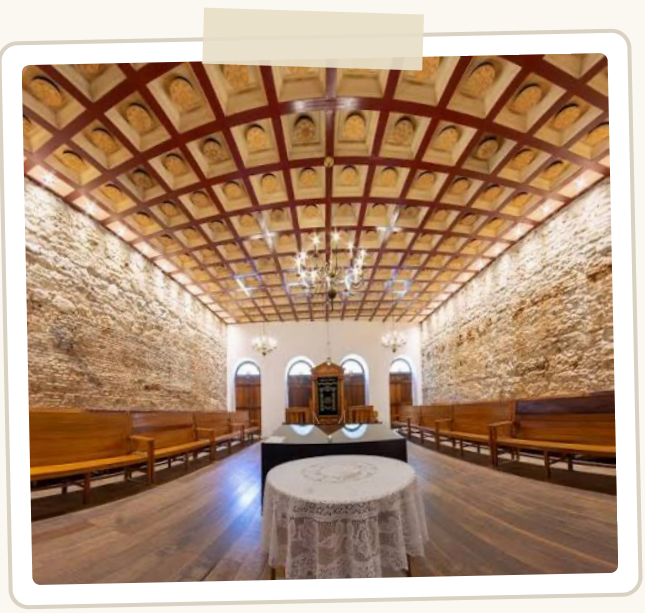
FROM
Recife, Brazil

→

TO
New Amsterdam (New York)

Governor Peter Stuyvesant tried to send them away. His bosses in Holland let them stay.

Who: 23 Jews, including many children. Their families had been forced out of Spain and Portugal in the 1490s.



IN THE PICTURE

Kahal Zur Israel, Recife, Brazil

Built by Jews in the 1630s, it was the first synagogue in the Americas. Today it’s a museum.

Photo: Wilfredor, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

TEARS · WHY THEY LEFT

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

TREASURES

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.

DID YOU KNOW?

Until the late 1700s, every synagogue in America prayed the Spanish and Portuguese way. Emma Lazarus’s family belonged to Shearith Israel.

BONUS · TALK ABOUT IT

These 23 were almost turned away. What do you think helped them stay?

1650 1750 1850 1950 2025

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STATION 2

About 1820–1880

Central European Jews

Say it: Bohemia (boh-HEE-mee-uh) · Beth El (bayt EL)

FROM
German lands & Bohemia → TO **Cities and towns across America**

Many started as peddlers carrying goods on their backs. Later they opened stores.

Who: Jews from the German states, Bohemia and nearby lands in Central Europe.



IN THE PICTURE

Temple Beth El, Detroit, 1903

Designed by Albert Kahn for Michigan's oldest Jewish congregation.

Photo: Detroit Publishing Co., Library of Congress (public domain)

TEARS · WHY THEY LEFT

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

TREASURES

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.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1850, twelve German Jewish families started the Beth El Society in Detroit, Michigan's first Jewish congregation.

BONUS · TALK ABOUT IT

Why might peddling be a good way to start out in a new country? What would be hard about it?

1650 · 1750 · 1850 · 1950 · 2025

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STATION 3

1881–1924

Eastern European Jews

Say it: pogrom (POH-grum) · Vilna (VIL-nuh) · Yiddish (YID-ish)

FROM

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

They packed into neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, Maxwell Street and Hastings Street.

Who: About two million Jews. This is the wave Emma Lazarus wrote for.



IN THE PICTURE

The Lower East Side today

Many of the tenements these families crowded into still stand, with fire escapes above and shops below.

Photo: InSapphoWeTrust, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

TEARS · WHY THEY LEFT

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

TREASURES

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.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1924, Congress passed strict limits on immigration. This wave almost stopped.

BONUS · TALK ABOUT IT

Emma Lazarus’s family had been here for over 100 years. Why do you think she cared about these newcomers?

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STATION 4

About 1900–1924

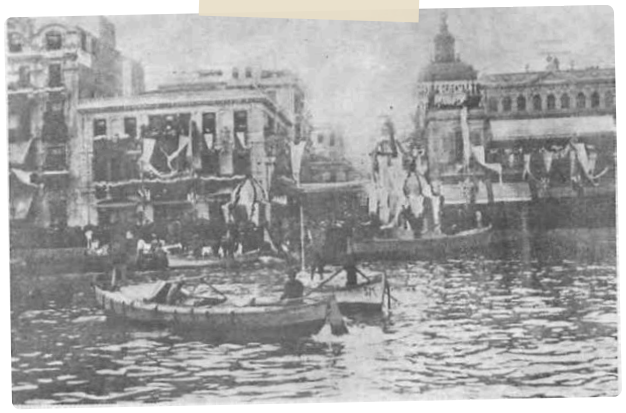
Jews from the Ottoman Empire

Say it: Ottoman (OT-uh-mun) · Ladino (lah-DEE-no) · Salonica (sah-loh-NEE-kah)

FROM
Turkey, Greece & Rhodes → TO **New York & Seattle**

By 1930, Seattle had the second-largest community of these Jews in the country.

Who: Jews whose ancestors were forced out of Spain in 1492 and found safety in the Ottoman Empire.



IN THE PICTURE

The waterfront in Salonica

This busy port had so many Jewish workers that it closed on Shabbat.

Postcard, Salonica, 1908. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

TEARS · WHY THEY LEFT

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

TREASURES

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.

DID YOU KNOW?

Some American Jews didn't believe these newcomers were Jewish, because they didn't speak Yiddish. Officials often listed them as "Turks."

BONUS · TALK ABOUT IT

How would it feel if other Jews didn't believe you were Jewish? What could they have done instead?

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STATION 5

1900s–1990s

Syrian and Middle Eastern Jews

Say it: Aleppo (uh-LEP-oh) · Damascus (duh-MASS-kus) · codex (KOH-dex)

FROM

Aleppo & Damascus, Syria

→

TO

Brooklyn, New York

Their Brooklyn neighborhood got the nickname “Aleppo in Flatbush.”

Who: Jews mainly from Syria. Jews from Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon and other Arab lands came too, especially after 1948.



IN THE PICTURE

The Aleppo Codex

Written about 1,100 years ago and guarded by Aleppo’s Jews for about 600 years.

Image: public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

TEARS · WHY THEY LEFT

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.

TREASURES

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.

DID YOU KNOW?

Syria’s last few thousand Jews were finally allowed to leave in 1992. Most joined their relatives in Brooklyn.

BONUS · TALK ABOUT IT

This community has stayed close for over 100 years. What helps a community stay together after a big move?

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STATION 6

1970s–1990s

Soviet Jews

Say it: refusenik (rih-FYOOZ-nik) · Bukharan (boo-KAR-un)

FROM
The Soviet Union

→

TO
Brooklyn & Oak Park, Michigan

Many settled in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, and Oak Park, near Detroit.

Who: Jews from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and more, plus Bukharan Jews from Central Asia. Roughly 300,000 to 500,000 came to the U.S.

שַׁלַּח אֶת עַמִּי

LET MY PEOPLE GO

THE SLOGAN

“Let My People Go”

Moses’s words to Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1) became the rallying cry of the movement to free Soviet Jews, on signs from Moscow to Washington.

TEARS · WHY THEY LEFT

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.

TREASURES

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.

DID YOU KNOW?

American Jews, including kids your age, marched and rallied with the slogan “Let My People Go.”

BONUS · TALK ABOUT IT

American kids marched for Jews they had never met. What does that say about being one people?

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STATION 7

After 1979

Iranian (Persian) Jews

Say it: Isfahan (is-fah-HAHN) · Shiraz (shee-RAHZ) · Purim (POOR-im)

FROM
Iran (Persia)

→

TO
Los Angeles & Great Neck, New York

About 60,000 to 80,000 Iranian Jews live in the U.S. today.

Who: Jews from Iran. Their community goes back about 2,500 years, to the time of Queen Esther.



IN THE PICTURE

Tomb of Esther and Mordechai, Hamadan, Iran

For centuries, Iranian Jews have come here to pray, especially around Purim.

Photo: Nick Taylor, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

TEARS · WHY THEY LEFT

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

TREASURES

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.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Purim story takes place in Persia, so Iranian Jews have a special connection to it.

BONUS · TALK ABOUT IT

These families kept their language and food in a new home. What would you want to keep if your family moved far away?

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STATION 8

1960s–today

Latin American and Israeli Jews

Say it: Moisés Ville (moy-SESS VEE-zheh) · gaucho (GOW-cho)

FROM

Cuba, Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico & Israel

→

TO

Miami, New York & Los Angeles

In Miami, you often hear Spanish at the JCC.

Who: Jews from Latin American countries, plus Israelis of every background.



IN THE PICTURE

A gaucho in Argentina

Jewish settlers in places like Moisés Ville learned to ride and herd like gauchos.

Photo: “A Gaucho or Cowboy,” lantern slide, c. 1915. The Ohio State University Libraries.

TEARS · WHY THEY LEFT

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

TREASURES

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.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many of these families moved twice. Their grandparents first came to Argentina or Mexico from places like Poland or Syria.

BONUS · TALK ABOUT IT

Some of these families moved two or three times. What travels with a family every time it moves?

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FINAL STOP · WHOLE CLASS

Your community

Right Here in Our Community

Our town: _____

The waves on the wall reached places all over America, including ours. Fill in our story, then read it together.

Example from Detroit: 1850 · Station 2 · Twelve German Jewish families started the Beth El Society, Michigan's first Jewish congregation.

STATION ___

When did the first Jewish families arrive here, and where did they come from?

STATION ___

What was our first synagogue or Jewish organization? Who started it?

STATION ___

Which wave changed our community most? What did those families build?

STATION ___

Who is arriving or joining our community now?

Paste a photo here: an old synagogue, a Jewish neighborhood, or a family photo from our community.

IN THE PICTURE

TALK ABOUT IT

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

ON THE WALL TIMELINE: ADD A DOT FOR EACH DATE ABOVE

1650 1750 1850 1950 2025