



# MIZRAHI REMEMBRANCE MONTH STUDENT CURRICULUM

# About the Author – Adam Eilath

Adam Eilath is a Judaic studies teacher at the Jewish Community High School of the Bay in San Francisco. He holds a BA in Jewish Studies from McGill University and an MA in Jewish Thought and Talmud from Tel Aviv University. Adam also received a certificate in Jewish Education from the Shalom Hartman Institute and a certificate in experiential education from Yeshiva University. Adam has a wealth of experience in the Sephardic community and has worked with the Mimizrach Shemesh Beit Midrash, Alliance Israel Universelle (Kol Israel Haverim) and Diarna. He has conducted research at Beit Hatefusoth (the Museum of the Diaspora) and Yad Ben Zvi in Israel. He is available to speak with any teacher or educator and guide them in the planning of an event around November 30th.



# Mizrahi Remembrance Month: A History

Mizrahi Jewish communities throughout North Africa and the Middle East lived continuously in the region for over 2,500 years until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the combined forces of Arab nationalism, rising Anti-Semitism, and the establishment of the state of Israel created a situation where life for Jews became untenable. Jews living in the region were subjected to severe human rights abuses including economic strangulation, imprisonment, and in some cases ethnic cleansing. Between 1948 and 1967 over 850,000 Jews were displaced from their homes and communities becoming the “Forgotten Refugees” of the region.

For decades, the story of Jewish refugees and their rich heritage went untold. In 2001, JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa was founded, and since then JIMENA has worked tirelessly to gain universal recognition of the nearly one million former Jewish refugees from the Middle East and North Africa.

In 2014, as a result of relentless advocacy on behalf of a coalition of international Mizrahi and Sephardic advocacy organizations, the Israeli Knesset passed a law designating November 30<sup>th</sup> as the National Day of Commemoration for Jews from Arab countries. Israeli schools will spend November 30<sup>th</sup> honoring the heritage and contemporary history of Jews from North Africa and the Middle East. Today, November 30<sup>th</sup> stands as an important benchmark in the beginning of not only recognizing the plight of Jews from Arab countries, but also the the inclusion of their cultural heritage, customs and history in the larger narrative of the Jewish People.

# Celebrating Mizrahi Remembrance Month

In North American Jewish Day Schools the story of Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews is often a footnote in remembering Jewish history. November 30th serves as an opportunity for schools to begin to acknowledge the history, culture, and contributions of Jews from Arab Lands and Iran, whose descendants now make up over half of Israel's Jewish population. The inclusion of this important aspect of Jewish history is vital to any school which seeks to enrich their students' understanding of Jewish diversity, Middle Eastern history and demography, contemporary Israeli society, and is doubly important for any school with students whose roots are in the Middle East and North Africa.

Across the world, Jewish Communities are celebrating the heritage of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa and honoring the adversity they have had to overcome in being displaced from their homes. This handout invites you to partake in the commemoration of Mizrahi heritage by giving you a sample piloted, curriculum that has been proven to engage students and community members, and also facilitate discussions relating to Mizrahi history.

JIMENA could not do this without your support. Thank you in advance for your commitment to inclusive history.

# Effective Programs

- 1 Guest Speakers:** Use JIMENA's rich and compelling speaker's bureau as a resource for providing a first hand account of Jewish life in the Middle East and North Africa. JIMENA can help you select the appropriate speaker for your school's audience. You might also consider asking a grandparent or parent from your community who was born in the Middle East or North Africa to come share their story. Personal voices are effective ways to enhance the learning process for young students.
- 2 Online JIMENA film and resources:** Have students watch the abridged *Forgotten Refugees* film <https://vimeo.com/85087705> and oral histories of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa. Consider a flipped classroom or blended classroom model and assign different groups of students different countries on the JIMENA oral history webpage. <http://www.jimena.org/oral-history-program/>. Have students engage in a creative writing project assuming the role of one of the oral history subjects they examined. Alternatively, have students share out their learning and compare some of the different experiences of Jews in different North African and Middle East Countries.
- 3 Cooking and clothing demonstrations:** Bring a local Mizrahi Jew to lead a cooking demonstration and share costumes during lunch time. Food is another language that can connect students to the culture and history of Jews in the Middle East and North Africa. This is another wonderful opportunity to invite members of your community into the school to share their culture and speak about their history through the language of food.
- 4 Map out your student's backgrounds:** Put a map of the Middle East and North Africa up in a public place in the school. Have students mark the countries their parents and grandparents came from. You might also consider having students place family photographs or memories on the map.

# Sample Curriculum

## **Monday:** *The Reading of Names*

- This activity asks that Mizrahi and Sephardi students recite the names and places of origin of their grandparents from the Middle East and North Africa. It is best for this to be recited in front of a large audience (classroom or school-wide assembly). This is an opportunity to set an intention for the week and recognize the diversity that exists among your educational community.

## **Tuesday:** *Photo Mapping*

- Hang a large map clearly depicting all countries from the Middle East and North Africa in a common area (etc. cafeteria, hallway, library). Invite your Mizrahi and Sephardi students to hang some of their family photographs next to their family's country of origin. This will give all students a clear visual of the region and its people.

## **Wednesday:** *The Culinary Experience*

- Invite students from various Middle East and North African countries to share some of their favorite native foods. This can be done via a cooking demonstration, tasting table, or pot-luck. Enhance this activity by having it be *hands-on* for as many students as possible. Play Mizrahi music in the background for added ambience.

## **Thursday:** *School Assembly*

- Gather students for a school-wide assembly that further explains the significance of Mizrahi Remembrance Month and celebrates Mizrahi culture. This can be done by screening the *Forgotten Refugees* film and inviting a member of the community to share their personal story of displacement. The assembly can conclude with a celebratory performance (etc. a musical act, belly dancers, etc.) or henna party.

# Photos



# Resources

*JIMENA's ten country websites contain Jewish recipes, music, photos, biographies, and historical information for each country in the Middle East and North Africa. Links to each site found here:*

- <http://www.jimena.org/oral-history-program/>

*Forgotten Refugees Curriculum was created by The David Project and Justice for Jews from Arab Countries:*

- <http://www.justiceforjews.com/educationalunit.html>

*Ben Zvi Institute of Hebrew University is premiere institute for the study of Mizrahi and Sephardic communities:*

- <https://www.ybz.org.il>



# Resources

*The Jewish Community Library in San Francisco houses a wealth of literature, film and historical resources that discuss the history of Jews in the Middle East and North Africa. To search their online database please visit:*

- ▣ <http://catalog-comm.bjesf.bywatersolutions.com/>

*Jews of the Middle East- Loolwa Khazoom*

- ▣ <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jews-of-the-middle-east/>

*Piyut Database in English (Piyuttim are, often Sephardic/Mizrahi, liturgical poems)*

- ▣ <http://piyutnorthamerica.org/>

# Resources

*Ben Gurion University's Research Institute for the Study of Zionism and Israel Studies and JIMENA are working collaboratively to preserve and share Mizrahi testimonies and stories. Full length testimonies and abstracts here:*

- ▣ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMyblyypbWg>

*Memizrach Shemesh is an Israeli organizations fostering student, adult and educational leaders towards social justice and civic responsibility through Sephardic and Mizrahi traditions*

- ▣ <http://mizrach.org.il/en/>

*Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs has created an exhibit and materials related to November 30<sup>th</sup> Mizrahi Commemoration Day*

- ▣ <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/VideoLibrary/Pages/Jewish-refugees-from-Arab-lands.aspx>

# Resources



*For more information and support in preparing Sephardic and Mizrahi programming for your classroom, please contact JIMENA's San Francisco Headquarters:*

*JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North  
Africa*

*415-626-5062*

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*[www.jimena.org](http://www.jimena.org)*