



Research Topics

STUDENT HANDOUT

Name: _____

Research Topic: *Language: Hebrew and Yiddish*

Do you remember?

In *Mrs. Katz and Tush* by Patricia Polacco, Mrs. Katz used words that are not English, such as "bubeleh," "bubee" and "Tush," referring to the cat's name as a "good Yiddish name." These are Yiddish words.

Mrs. Katz also says "Mavel Tov" when Tush gives birth to a litter of cats. "Mavel Tov" is a Hebrew word.

Background Information:

When Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe arrived in the US in the late 1800s and early 1900s, most were able to speak their home country's language as well as a language called Yiddish. Yiddish was the language of most Jews in Eastern and Central Europe before World War II. Today, it is spoken by descendants of those Jews living in the United States, Israel, and other parts of the world. Although the number of people who can speak Yiddish is decreasing, you can still hear Yiddish words used, even among people who are not Jewish, such as bagel, klutz, and nosh. The term Yiddish comes from the German word for Jewish.

Hebrew is the spoken language of the Jewish people in Israel today. Many Jews in the US and other countries are familiar with the language, too, at different levels of fluency. From the 4th century until the late 19th century, Hebrew was not a spoken language, but was used mainly for religious purposes. Hebrew was made new and strong again during the late 19th and early 20th century. Today, it is called New Hebrew, Israeli Hebrew or Modern Hebrew.

Research Questions:

1. What is Hebrew? *To help you with your research, here are some specific questions:*

What is "aleph-bet?" _____

In what direction is Hebrew written? _____

What does it look like? _____

Where is Hebrew used? _____

What does Hebrew sound like? _____

2. What is Yiddish? *To help you with your research, here are some specific questions:*

The Yiddish language originate mostly from what three other languages?

Where and when did the Yiddish language begin? Where and how did it spread? _____

What alphabet is used to write Yiddish? _____

3. Your presentation should help the class know the meaning of the following Yiddish or Hebrew words from *Mrs. Katz and Tush*:

✓ Bubeleh, as in "scrawny little bubeleh" _____

✓ Tush, as in "all you see is her tush" _____

✓ Shalom, as in "Shalom, my Myron." _____

✓ Mavel Tov and bubee, as in "Mavel Tov, Tush! Four babies – at last, I'm a bubee!" _____

Introduce three more Yiddish words and three more Hebrew words in your presentation, and be prepared to teach us all of these words!

STUDENT HANDOUT

Name:

Research Topic: *US Jewish Immigrant Experience 1880s-1930s*

Do you remember?

In *Mrs. Katz and Tush* by Patricia Polacco, Mrs. Katz tells Larnel about “the old country”:

“I come from Warsaw. That’s in Poland, you know. I came here to work sewing dresses in the garment district for my cousin Moyshe. I didn’t speak one word of English!

“Then how did you talk to people?” ask Larnel.

“I didn’t,” she answered. “A lot, I cried in those days...until I met Myron.”

Background Information

While we do not know how old Mrs. Katz is, she may have been a part of the 3rd major wave of Jewish immigrants who traveled to the US between the 1880s and 1930s. Because many couldn’t speak English when they first arrived in the US, many Jewish immigrants had to work in places that didn’t require knowing English, and the work was very hard. Because of that, many Jewish people started *unions* (organizations of workers formed to protect their rights and to work toward fair pay, benefits, and working conditions).

Research Questions

1. *Type of Jewish Immigrants:* From what countries did the Jewish immigrants come between the 1880s and 1920s? Why did they come to the US?

STUDENT HANDOUT

Name:

Research Topic: Jewish Life Events – Weddings and Funerals

Do you remember?

In *Mrs. Katz and Tush* by Patricia Polacco, Mrs. Katz invites Larnel to a cemetery where Myron is buried:

“Since you are almost family to me, Larnel, “she said one day, “I want you should come with me to say kaddish for my Myron...”

At the cemetery, she read from her book. Then she asked Larnel to put a small rock on top of Mr. Katz’s headstone.

“We do this to remember,” she said softly.

Later in the book, as Mrs. Katz and Larnel set the table for Passover, Mrs. Katz shows Larnel a tablecloth and says, “This was our wedding *chuppa*, our canopy.”

Background Information

Just like other religions, Jews celebrate weddings and mourn people’s deaths. They have objects, prayers and rituals (ways of acting, customs) that are specific to their Jewish religion and culture.

Research Questions

Your research questions are in two sections:

1. Jewish Weddings

What does the Jewish wedding ceremony look like? _____

What happens for a week after the wedding ceremony?_____

What is a "chuppa (also spelled huppah)?" _____

2. Jewish Funeral

What does a Jewish funeral look like? _____

What is kaddish? _____

What is the purpose of the prayer book? _____

What does it mean to put rocks on top of the gravestone (like what Larnel did)?

STUDENT HANDOUT

Name:

Research Topic: Jewish Holiday - Passover (Pesach)

Do you remember?

In *Mrs. Katz and Tush* by Patricia Polacco, Mrs. Katz tells Larnel that she met Myron at her aunt Havelah's Passover seder.

"What good times they were, with lots and lots of family. Now it's just me," she says softly.

Could I have Passover dinner with you?" asked Larnel.

"I thought you would never ask!" she exclaimed as she hugged him close. "Such a seder I'll prepare for you!"

Background Information

Passover is the oldest and one the most important Jewish holidays. In Hebrew, Passover is called "Pesach" (PEH-sock). This holiday begins with a ritual called a seder (SAY-duhr).

Research Questions

1. What is Passover? *To help you with your research, here are some specific questions:*

What is the biblical story behind Passover? _____

When does Passover happen? How long does it last? _____

How do Jewish people prepare for Passover? _____

2. What is a seder? *To help you with your research, here are some specific questions:*

What is a seder plate? _____

What are the different parts of the seder dinner? _____

What is afikomen (ah-fee-KOH-men)? _____

Why is matzoh an important part of Passover? _____

3. How does this connect to *Mrs. Katz and Tush*?

Your presentation should be able to explain why:

- ✓ Mrs. Katz uses linens and china for the meal
- ✓ Mrs. Katz hides one piece of matzoh in the apartment

STUDENT HANDOUT

Name:

Research Topic: Jewish Symbols – Menorah, Star of David, Kipa, and Tallit

Do you remember?

In *Mrs. Katz and Tush* by Patricia Polacco, when Mrs. Katz and Larnel realize that Tush left the apartment through the window, there is a candlestick with many places to put candles on it. In the Jewish culture, this is called a menorah. Later in the story, Mrs. Katz and Larnel are in a bakery, surrounded by many people. Some of the bakers are wearing a tiny covering on their head, called a kipa.

Background Information

The menorah is a very important Jewish symbol. Another important symbol in the Jewish community is the Star of David. There are several pieces of clothing that are important to the Jewish faith, such as a kipa or kippah (also known as a yarmulke in Yiddish, or skullcap) and a tallit.

Research Questions

1. What is a menorah?

What does it look like? _____

How is it used? _____

Why is it an important symbol? _____

2. What is the Star of David?

What does it look like? _____

How is it used? _____

Why is it an important symbol? _____

3. What is a kipa?

What does it look like? _____

How is it used? _____

Why is it an important symbol? _____

4. What is a tallit?

What does it look like? _____

How is it used? _____

Why is it an important symbol? _____

STUDENT HANDOUT

Name:

Research Topic: Jewish Religious Practices – Kashrut (Keeping Kosher)

Do you remember?

In *Mrs. Katz and Tush* by Patricia Polacco, Larnel asks why Mrs. Katz uses different dishes for the seder dinner.

How come you have so many different dishes?" Larnel asked.

"Because some Jews don't eat dairy and meat off of the same dishes," she answered.

Background Information

In the Jewish religion, the Torah (Jewish bible) teaches Jews how to live, such as how to treat others and how to practice justice and equality. It also provides Jews with more specific laws, in this case, how to keep "kosher," based on the laws of Kashrut.

Research Questions

Your research questions are about the Jewish practice of "keeping kosher." To help you with your research, here are some specific questions:

1. What does "kashrut" mean? _____

2. What does it mean to "keep kosher?" _____

3. Why can't dairy and meat be eaten off the same plate? _____

4. What does a kosher home look like? _____

5. How can people tell what food in the grocery store is kosher? _____

6. Give two examples of each type of food that is considered kosher and not kosher:

Kosher

Not Kosher

Seafood:

Birds:

Meat:

7. Who checks to make sure food is kosher? _____
