

The Origins of Zionism: 19th Century - World War I

INTRODUCTION

Overview:

The Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE spelled the end of Jewish national autonomy in Israel. Like other defeated peoples, the Jews were dispersed. But throughout centuries of Diaspora life, both Judaism and Jewish national identity survived. A collective Jewish memory of the Land of Israel was passed from generation to generation through incorporation into Jewish liturgy and customs.

Beginning in the 19th century, longing for the Land of Israel took modern form in Zionism, a political movement aimed at restoring Jewish self-rule in Palestine. It was a time of great political ferment. Anti-Semitic violence in Eastern Europe, the trial of Alfred Dreyfus in France, and the rise of anti-Semitic political parties in Central Europe dashed the hopes of those who had believed that assimilation would lead to the acceptance of Jews in society and full civil rights for them. Many other nationalist movements were emerging and gathering strength during this era, and in this way, Zionism was very much a product of its time and place.

Early Zionist leaders, such as Leon Pinsker, author of *Autoemancipation* (1882), formulated the cornerstones of Zionist ideology: that the Jews were not only a religion but a nation, and that they were an anomaly among the nations of the world in that they did not have their own national territory, but instead lived scattered among other nations and were powerless to control their own destiny. Jews, the Zionists maintained, would only be able to gain control over their own safety, affairs, and future if they had their own national territory.

Beginning in the 1880s, small groups of mostly young people from Eastern Europe started making their way to Palestine, then a territory of the Ottoman Empire, and founded Jewish settlements, which they hoped would serve as a nucleus for later waves of Jewish settlement. In 1897, the Zionist movement became more organized when Theodor Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland. From the beginning, the movement served as an umbrella for many different ideologies and visions of the future. This lesson focuses on the evolution of the mainstream Zionist movement, and students will explore how it was unified by the commitment to creating a Jewish state in Palestine, the location of the ancient Jewish homeland.

Grade Level: High School

Subjects Covered: European/World History, Arts and Communication, Art Connections, Historical Understanding

Goals:

Students will gain an understanding of the origins and early history of Zionism. They will gain insight into why the movement took hold of the imaginations of so many Jews and became a force for change in modern Jewish life.

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- explain the origins of the Jewish connection to the land of Israel;
- understand the environment, events, and important figures surrounding the rise of modern Zionism;
- explain the different facets of early Zionism;
- understand why the movement took hold of the imaginations of so many Jews and became a force for change in modern Jewish life.

Suggested Time Frame: Two 45-minute to one-hour class periods with optional additional time for presentation of extension projects.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Before You Begin:

Teachers should be sure to explore all bookmarked pages of the DVD-ROM used in this lesson. Teachers may also want to consult the additional bookmarks provided as reference material.

Introductory Activity: The Homeland of the Jews

The Jewish people's connection to the land of Israel goes back thousands of years, to the time of the patriarch Abraham.

1. The Torah describes how God commanded Abram (Abraham's original name) to take his family and move to the land of Canaan (the modern land of Israel). Have the class read the *Heritage* document [Abraham Migrates to Canaan](#).
2. The map of the Near East in 1750 BCE will allow students to explore the borders and cities of ancient Canaan and compare them to those of modern Israel..
 - Use the zoom feature and the navigation box to focus on the area called "Canaan."
 - Click on the "Modern View" tab to show students that most of what was once Canaan is now Israel, and note that the city of Jerusalem – and other cities,

such as Hebron, Beersheva, Arad, and Ashkelon – remain where they were thousands of years ago.

3. Abraham’s descendants continued to live in Canaan (later called Israel), but during their history they were often exiled from the land. As a class, read and discuss the following two examples of Jewish diaspora literature that express longing for the Land of Israel:
 - [A Lament For Jerusalem](#): After the Babylonians conquered Judea in 586 BCE, the Judeans were forced into exile in Babylon. This poem – Psalm 137 in the Torah – describes the Judeans’ longing for their holy city of Jerusalem.
 - [My Heart Is In The East](#): During the “Golden Age” of Hebrew literature in Islamic Spain (900s – 1100s CE), Jewish writers began composing poetry in the language of their ancestors. Judah HaLevi’s “My Heart is in the East” expresses the idea that Jews are perpetually in exile, longing for their homeland.

Discuss these poems as a class, using the following questions as a guide:

- In what contexts were each of these pieces written?
- What does each poem tell you about Jewish longing for Zion (another name for Jerusalem)?

Learning Activity 1: The Beginnings of Modern Zionism

In the mid-nineteenth century, several Jewish leaders and rabbis began to preach a return to Zion (another name for Jerusalem) for nationalist, religious, and practical reasons. This trend, coupled with anti-Semitic policies and violence, led to increased support for Zionism among the Jews of Europe.

■ Eastern Europe

1. In 1848, the wave of nationalism that swept across Europe resulted in instances of anti-Semitic violence, leading some Jews to conclude that they would never be fully accepted into non-Jewish society. Read the historical document [Nationalists Attack Jews in Prague](#).
2. The assassination of the Russian czar in 1881 led to pogroms, anti-Jewish laws, and deteriorating economic conditions for the country’s Jews. Russian Jews responded by immigrating to America and supporting Zionist and Socialist ideas. The text in the Explore Topic segment titled [Assassination](#) explains this situation.
3. Young Russian and Eastern European Jews began immigrating to Palestine in the late 1800s. There they worked the land and founded Jewish settlements that would pave the way for future waves of Jewish immigration. View the video [Jewish Settlement](#), stopping when Abba Eban says, “They called themselves Zionists.”

4. Leo Pinsker, a Russian Jew, was one of the founders of the modern Zionist movement. His 1882 essay Auto-Emancipation describes his views on the “Jewish problem” and his support of Zionism. Discuss, using the following questions as a guide:
 - According to Pinsker, what is “the Jewish problem”?
 - What is the solution to this problem?

■ Western Europe

1. France’s trial and conviction of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army captain falsely accused of treason, led to increased anti-Jewish sentiment in Western Europe. Dreyfus was ultimately exonerated and reinstated in the military, but the Affair had a significant impact on the future of a Jewish national homeland. Students will view the Dreyfus Affair video segment. Questions for post-video discussion:
 - What did the Dreyfus Affair reveal about the place of Jews in European society?
 - How do you think the Dreyfus Affair contributed to the longing for a Jewish national homeland?

Learning Activity 2: The Vision of Theodor Herzl

Faced with Dreyfus’s exoneration, some Jews believed that they had defeated the anti-Semites; but others, including Theodor Herzl, concluded that even assimilated, patriotic Jews would never be fully accepted by the non-Jewish majority.

1. A young journalist named Theodor Herzl was deeply affected by the Dreyfus Affair, and came to the conclusion that the Jews would never be completely secure or accepted in a land that was not their own. He therefore set out to create a Jewish state, leading others in the European community who supported the movement known as Zionism. Students view the video segment Zionism.
NOTE: End the segment when Abba Eban says, “Now with Herzl’s inspiration, the Zionist idea became a political movement.”
2. “A Solution to the Jewish Question,” an article written by Herzl in 1896, expresses his Zionist beliefs one year before he attended the first World Zionist Congress and emerged as the leader of the movement. Discuss the article as it appears in the historical document A Call for Jewish Statehood, using the following questions as a guide:
 - What does Herzl imply as the reason why the Jews need a Jewish state?
 - What arguments does Herzl claim his opponents will use against his ideas?
 - What does Herzl mean when he says, “The Maccabeans will rise again”?

Learning Activity 3: Aspects of Early Zionism

The early Zionist movement contained many different streams of political and philosophical thought regarding the future Jewish state. The various groups did not have

equal support among Zionists and some were fairly short-lived; however, ideas from many of these factions are present in the modern state of Israel.

1. Zionism turned the long-standing religious yearning into a political movement, uniting all Jews who sought to establish a Jewish nation. Yet the early Zionists had differing ideas regarding the creation, structure, and international role of the Jewish state, as seen in the [Zionism](#) multimedia presentation. After viewing the presentation, discuss the following:
 - How was the Jewish desire to return to their homeland often expressed?
 - Describe the early Zionist movement. Were the Zionists a cohesive group?

Culminating Activities

1. Have students view each of the seven panels about different streams of Zionism that appear after the multimedia presentation. Then, as a class, discuss the similarities and differences among these types of Zionism, and why some proved more successful than others.

Note: For more information on the early Zionist factions and their ultimate impact on Zionism and Israel, visit the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs “Zionist Philosophy” page at:
<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Centenary+of+Zionism/Zionist+Philosophies.htm>

2. Have each student write an essay about why they do or do not believe the existence of the state of Israel is important for the Jewish people. You may encourage them to review the textual material and *Heritage* segments used in this lesson to help them write their essays.

Extension Activities

1. Have students research and compose an essay about one of the following:
 - How Zionism differed from traditional expressions of Judaism
 - Why Orthodox and/or Reform Jews were initially opposed to Zionism

Background: Zionism was in some ways a radical break with Judaism, in that it suggested that human beings could bring about an end to the Jews’ exile from Israel rather than wait for the arrival of the Messiah. Because of this, it was opposed by many traditionalist Jews, who also disapproved of the Zionists’ promotion of Hebrew (which for centuries had been used mainly for prayer and study of religious texts) as a language for modern literature and everyday life. Most Reform Jewish leaders also opposed Zionism, since it went against their position that Judaism was a religion and not a nation.

Resource:

- Questioning Zionism: Since the beginning of modern Zionism, some Jews have stood in opposition to it. By Daniel Septimus:
http://www.myjewishlearning.com/ideas_belief/LandIsrael/modern_landisrael/QuestioningZionism.htm
2. Students may research the revival of Hebrew as a modern, spoken language; or they may choose to focus specifically on Eliezer Ben Yehuda's role in creating and promoting the modern Hebrew language.

Heritage segments:

- Multimedia presentation, [Literary Renaissance](#)
- Historical document, [I Believed in the Power of the Hebrew Word](#)
- Multimedia presentation, [The Revival of Hebrew](#)

Resources:

- The Revival of Hebrew:
http://www.myjewishlearning.com/culture/Languages/Languages_Hebrew_TO/Languages_HebHis_Jacobs/Languages_HebRebirth_Saenz.htm
- Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and the Revival of Hebrew:
http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/ben_yehuda.html

MATERIALS

Additional Resources:

Zionist Document Gallery
<http://www.zionistarchives.org.il/ZA/SiteE/pGallery.aspx>

"Holy Land": American Encounters With The Land Of Israel In The Century Before Statehood
<http://www.nmajh.org/exhibitions/holyland/index.htm>

The Foundation of Political Parties
<http://www.wzo.org.il/home/movement/found.htm>

Songs We Loved to Hear: From the Collection of the National Sound Archives (Israel)
<http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/music/yom/hsongs.htm>

Zionism and Art
<http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9808/narkiss.html>

Zionist Iconography

<http://www.gwu.edu/gelman/spec/kiiev/expressions/zion.htm>

Images of a State in the Making

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern%20History/Centenary%20of%20Zionism/Images%20of%20a%20State%20in%20the%20Making-%20Introduction>

STANDARDS

From Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL):

World History

Standard 35. Understands patterns of nationalism, state-building, and social reform in Europe and the Americas from 1830 to 1914.

Level IV [Grade 9-12] Benchmarks 4 & 11. (Addressed in all Learning Activities)

(<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=6&standardID=35>)

DVD-ROM BOOKMARKS

Abraham Migrates to Canaan (Video > A People is Born > Canaan > Canaanite Civilization > Explore Topic > Historical Documents > Abraham Migrates to Canaan)

Canaan, 1750 BCE (Atlas > 3100 – 586 BCE > 1750 BCE > Canaan)

A Lament for Jerusalem (Video > The Power of the Word > Babylon > Psalm 137 > Explore Topic > Historical Documents > A Lament for Jerusalem)

My Heart Is in the East (Video > The Crucible of Europe > Islamic Spain > Golden Age > Explore Topic > A Golden Age of Hebrew Poetry > Spacebar > My Heart is in the East > Spacebar > Play poem).

Nationalists Attack Jews in Prague (Video > Roads from the Ghetto > 1848 Revolutions > A New Nationalism > Explore Topic > Historical Documents > Nationalists Attack Jews in Prague)

Assassination (Video > Roads from the Ghetto > Eastern Europe > Assassination > Explore Topic).

Auto-emancipation (Video > Roads from the Ghetto > Eastern Europe > Assassination > Explore Topic > Historical Documents > Everywhere a Guest, Nowhere at Home)

Jewish Settlement (Video > Into the Future > Prewar Palestine > Jewish Settlement > Play)

Dreyfus Affair (Video > Roads from the Ghetto > Western Europe > Dreyfus Affair > Play)

Zionism (Video > Roads from the Ghetto > Shaping a Future > Zionism > Play)

A Call for Jewish Statehood (Video > Roads from the Ghetto > Shaping a Future > Zionism > Explore Topic > Historical Documents > A Call for Jewish Statehood)

Zionism (Video > Roads from the Ghetto > Shaping a Future > Zionism > Explore Topic > Play)

Literary Renaissance (Video > Roads from the Ghetto > Shaping a Future > Literary Renaissance > Explore Topic > Literary Renaissance > Read introduction and play)

I believed in the Power of the Hebrew Word (Video > Roads from the Ghetto > Shaping a Future> Literary Renaissance > Explore Topic > Historical Documents > I Believed in the Power of the Hebrew Word)

The Revival of Hebrew (Video > Into the Future> Prewar Palestine > Jewish Settlement>Explore Topic>The Revival of Hebrew)