

AN EDUCATIONAL GUIDE ON UKRANIAN JEWISH LIFE

This guide was prepared with middle school students in mind but can be adapted for younger or older age groups. Please feel free to use and/or edit the corresponding slide presentation.



BRIEF CONTEXT

To get a sense of what your students may already know/not know about the conflict, you might write some relevant terms on the board and ask them to write or share what they know about them: USSR, NATO, Russia, Putin, Zelensky, Ukraine, Cold War, Sanctions, Moscow, Kyiv

Russia has sent tanks and airforce into Ukraine. Ukraine, which was part of the Russian empire for centuries, became independent when the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) broke up in 1991.

Russia's President has said he is acting to protect civilians in separatist regions from Ukraine's military.

Ukraine's President has said that Russia's intent is to destroy Ukraine because of its increasingly close ties with the West.

The current conflict has the potential to result in massive casualties, especially if Ukraine's capital city of Kyiv is attacked. The United States and other countries are considering increasing financial sanctions against Russia to pressure them to stop the attacks.

UKRAINIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

You can get a sense of what your students might already know about Jewish history in the Ukraine by putting some images associated with this part of the world and see what connections they can make on their own (see slide).

Ukraine was once home to more than 2 million Yiddish-speaking Jews. Two defining aspects of Jewish culture - the Hasidic movement and Yiddish literature - have its roots in Ukrainian Jewish history. But, Ukraine's Jewish population suffered terribly during the pogroms of the late 19th century, leading to massive Jewish emigration, mainly to the United States. The pogroms also sparked the development of the Zionist movement, which ultimately produced great leaders such as Zeev Jabotinsky, Golda Meir, Natan Sharansky - all born in Ukraine. During the Holocaust, as many as one million Ukrainian Jews were murdered in mass shootings, including the massacre at Babi Yar.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, most Jews left Ukraine. Today, of the approximately 45 million people in the Ukraine, there are approximately 100,000 Jews, including the President of the country, Volodymyr Zelensky. Every year, more than 20,000 Jews from all over the world participate in a pilgrimage to visit the grave of Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav in Uman. There are large Jewish community centers, Chabad houses, synagogues, Hillels, youth groups and Jewish schools in Ukraine. Jewish life in Ukraine is now flourishing, in what had previously been one of the greatest centers of world Jewish life. The Jewish communities in Ukraine are in a crisis situation and some of them have already moved to temporary campsites in other parts of the country. Jewish communities in neighboring countries (Moldovia, Poland) and the State of Israel are anticipating the need to absorb thousands of Israelis and Jews fleeing the war zones in Ukraine.

SUPPORT FOR UKRANIAN JEWRY

Jewish communities all over the world are sending emergency funds and supplies to support the Jewish community in Ukraine. Some communities and individuals are also taking political action to encourage an end to the conflict. Many will express their solidarity and concern through prayers, speeches, and social media posts.

UnitEd is an Israeli organization that works with Jewish schools all over the world - Canada, US, UK, Europe, Latin America, Australia, and South Africa. UnitEd is inviting students in Jewish schools world-wide to show their support to Jewish children who are living in Ukraine during this difficult time. We have created a collaborative [googleslides presentation](#) for you to share a message that will be seen by other Jewish students all over the world, but most importantly those in Ukraine.

Please create a class slide that lists your school's name, country, and city. If possible, add a class photo! On your slide, share your letters, images, prayers, or handmade drawings. Feel free to use more than one slide. We have included an example page just for inspiration.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*There are many ways to show support or solidarity in times of crisis - financial donations, supplies, prayers, letter-writing, social media posts, etc. What other kinds of support can you think of? Have you ever participated in any of these kinds of actions in the past? Which kinds of support feel most impactful or authentic to you?

*Have you ever felt scared or been in an emergency situation? What helped you feel supported during those times?

*If you lived in Ukraine, do you think you would want to stay in the country despite the threats of war? Or, would you want to emigrate to Israel or another Jewish community?

*Do you know if your family has roots in this area of the world? If you know that your great grandparents lived in this area, does it change the way you feel about the situation - why or why not?

*Which affected your feelings about the current situation more - learning about the past or the present Jewish life in Ukraine?

*Discuss one or more of these traditional texts and how it relates to this crisis:

לא ישא גוי אל גוי חרב ולא ילמדו עוד
מלחמה

Lo yisa goy el goy
cherev lo yil' medu od
milchamah.

Nation shall not lift sword
against nation,
neither shall they
learn war anymore.

Isaiah 2

כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה

Kol yisrael areivim
zeh bazeh.

All of Israel is responsible
one for another.

Shevuot 39a

עושה שלום במרומיו הוא יעשה שלום עלינו
ועל כל ישראל ויאמרו אמן

Oseh shalom bimromav
Hu ya'aseh shalomaleynu
Ve'al kol yisrael
Ve'imru Amen

He who makes peace in his
high places
He shall make peace upon us
And upon all of Israel
And say Amen

Siddur