

Using Stories to Connect with Jewish History

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Type of School: Reform Congregational School, United States

Course: This will be a freestanding elective course

Primary category: Family history project

Grade Level: Grades 8-10

Total Required Time: This lesson requires 4 fifty minute lessons; some homework required.

Summary

This lesson asks students to research family history and to create a project that tells the story of his/her family origins. Using the Centropa films about Max Uri and Jozsef Faludi students examine issues regarding Jewish identity and cheder (Jewish religious school) and students compare specific issues in the films with their own lives today. Then, the lesson employs Centropa-inspired techniques to ask students to create their own short films about their personal family history.

Background Lesson Information

Context for Lesson: This lesson is designed to be a freestanding “mini-course” during which students in grades 8-10 can choose to take the class as part of our high school electives.

Enduring Understanding: Researching a personal family history is an excellent way to understand Jewish identity.

Goals/Objectives:

- a. Knowledge: Students will learn about a branch of their family and how that branch came to the U.S. If the student does not have a family branch that is originally Jewish, he/she will choose one family member on whom to focus. Students will then articulate (via their film) what the connection to these ancestors means to them today.
- b. Skills acquired: include interpretation of primary source documents and photographs, actively understanding their own connection with their family history, how to prepare a cohesive presentation, and how to edit content in order to convey the most important facts.
- c. Feelings: Students will leave the mini-course with a deeper understanding of his/her personal history.

Centropa resources needed: Films: **Max Uri** and **JoszeF Faludi**. Other primary sources will include personal photographs from each student.

Other resources needed:

- Student photographs
- Computer equipment and software to make video.
- Access to Internet

Background/Skills/Knowledge Required:

- Basic use of computers
- Basic understanding of video-making software

The Lesson

Note from teacher: Due to the nature of supplementary Jewish education, we are working with the constraints of limited class time and the fact that it is practically *impossible* to assign homework. To that end, I envision this lesson/set of lessons as either a short-term “elective” course, which is administered once a week for a set number of weeks or as a possible project to be completed in conjunction with the confirmation program (which requires the consent and “buy-in” of our clergy). Additionally, I envision needing to “trick” the student into *wanting* to do the project in order to complete a finished product.

Pedagogy: films, discussion, research, working with primary source material such as photographs, working independently with computer software, and presentations of finished products.

Session One: Setting Up the Project

Motivating the Students:

- The class views two Centropa stories, Max Uri and Jozsef Faludi.
- After watching Max Uri film, ask the following:
 - What do you think a “kosher” hotel is?
 - Why is it significant that Max’s family visited a kosher hotel? Think of 3 reasons why you think that Max and Frieda returned to Vienna after the war.
- After Watching the Jozsef Faludi film, ask the following:
 - Jozsef mentions in the film that most Jews whom he encounters in his region were religious (or Orthodox Jews) and that this world was one in which Jews naturally looked out for one another. Do you think that this is the case in our society today?
 - If someone was traveling, do you think they could just call up a Jewish family and automatically get housing for the night? (What are some examples of where we DO do this- youth group conventions, Maccabbi games?).

- This film shows how Jozsef's society that existed before WWII basically crumbled apart in the years following the war. Can YOU think of anything that could contribute to such a thing happening in our society?

Session 2: Family Photos/Research

For this class session students will come to class prepared with AT LEAST 5 family photographs that pertain to the branch of the family whose story they will tell in their project. These photos preferably will be indicative of family history PRIOR to arriving in U.S. NOTE: Students MUST be able to identify as many individuals and as many settings as possible in the photos used.

- a Students will arrange their photographs in front of them on the table, quickly go around the room and present photos.
- b. If this activity does not take the entire class period, go to computer lab and assist students in finding background information about the places represented in the photos. Ask students to find out basic information about the Jewish community of that place (try to find at least 5 facts). They can find maps as well.

Session 3: Continue Creating the Project: Using their photographs as illustrations, each student will write a narrative about his or her family history, accompanied by photographs and maps, music and general history about places in the photo. Try to include at least three facts about each photo.

Session 4: Complete the Projects: Students will create a digital presentation that includes the narrative, the photos and music, maps, useful background information (NOT JUST "FILLER"). This can be achieved with moviemaking software such as movie maker, iMovie, or any other program. PowerPoint or Keynote can also be used if necessary. The goal of this project is NOT to display technical prowess; technology is only a tool here to engage students in the process of learning about their personal history.

Concluding Activity: Final stage of the project will involve showing each presentation to an invited audience. (for example, our school has an "evening of the arts" at the end of the year, during which we could have a separate screening of the projects OR we can limit invitees to grade-level parents and do it on a smaller scale

Reflection

At this date I am unable to reflect upon the lesson because although I proposed to offer this class, unfortunately my school has not yet scheduled it as an elective. I am hoping to do it at a later date.