

# Lesson Plan - Jewish Surname

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I'm a teacher for history, geography and civics in Leo Baeck Education Center.

I encountered Centropa at the end of 2009, and since then have been using the materials on the website both as educational sources and as sources of inspiration for instructional assignments.

**Educational Institution:** The Leo Baeck Education Center

**Location:** Haifa, Israel

**Title:** Jewish Family Names – From Yehoshua Ben-Nun to David Ben-Gurion

**Summary:** The goal of these lesson plans, which should take about 16 hours of class time + home work, is for each student to produce a short biographical film on the subject of his/her family names. The themes of this unit are Jews Names, Historical Timeline, and the development of names and identities in the Jewish Diaspora.

The teaching unit deals with the history of Jewish family names from biblical times, through the Diaspora in different Jewish ethnic groups and around the world, and to the Hebraization of family names at the establishment of the state of Israel. Thus, the students will:

1. Gain an understanding of the manner in which Jewish surnames evolved.
2. Understand the main eras in Jewish history through these family names (Jews between communal seclusion and integration following the emancipation and the establishment of the modern state in Europe).
3. Understand the meanings of Jewish surnames and their evolvement while maintaining a connection to Judaism and Israeliness.
4. Develop a connection to the Jewish people in Israel and the Diaspora.

**Target Population:**

The unit is suitable for junior-high students (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades) around Bar-Mitzvah age and in compatibility with the History curriculum, which deals with the changes in Jewish communal life, from the Middle Ages to the early modern era.

Length: circa 16 lessons

**List of classroom supplies required**

A computer with the attached presentation is required for teaching. Additionally, the students will explore the Centropa website using the Internet. Moreover, during the lecture 2-3 clips from Centropa will be played, according to the teacher's choice, in order to expose the students to the type of clip they'll be asked to produce.

**Subject-Related Objectives and Skills-Related Objectives**

The students will learn about the evolvement of Jewish family names during the different periods in history. Through these names' stories, they will come to recognize the relations of the Jewish community to the surrounding world and learn of the trade and customs of Jews in the Diaspora.

### **Activity #1 –Zelda’s poem 1.5 Hours**

Zelda’s poem “Each man has a name” will be read in the beginning of the unit, then again at its end. In the first stage, a discussion of the song will take place according to the leading questions, which the students will answer in writing.

#### Each man has a name / Zelda

Each man has a name  
He was given by God  
And his Father and Mother

Each man has a name  
Created by the seasons  
And his everyday blindness

Each man has a name  
Given to him by his stature  
And the way he smiles  
And the fabric he wears

Each man has a name  
Pronounced by the sea  
And given by death.

*\* Translation from Hebrew: Ariel Appel*

Each man has a name  
Given by the mountains  
And by the prisons he bears

Each man has a name  
Bestowed upon him by the stars  
And his neighbors and sires

Each man has a name  
He got from his sins  
And his endless desires

Each man has a name  
By which his enemies call him  
And by which he's called by his Love

Each man has a name  
Spoken in happy days  
Or born of his craft

### **Song analysis:**

The song speaks of the person who relates to himself and to others – to the simple layman and to the arrogant rich one.

The name of a person is given to him by his parents, his haters and by God.

Each person has a unique name given to him in the beginning of his life, during the course of his life, and after that – in death, and that's the name he'll be remembered by.

**Questions for discussion** (the students will be asked to write down the answers in order to compare their understanding of the song before and after the study unit):

- A. Do you sympathize with the song and can see how it relates to you or to other people you know?**
- B. How did the concept of a person's name become so important through the course of history?**

The students will conduct a discussion in small groups regarding their answers to these questions and will be asked to give concrete examples for known names.

Afterwards, we'll conduct a discussion with the entire class on the following question:

The name of the song "Each man has a name" was selected to be the title of the manner of commemoration in Yom HaShoa (Holocaust Commemoration Day), when the victims' names are read aloud. Why was this slogan selected?

### **Homework:**

- A. Collect names from your family members and try to demonstrate through them points from the discussion conducted in class.
- B. From your family tree, write down the first and last names known to you. Try to organize them in categories (names from the Bible, names based on Israeli landscapes, etc)

## **Activity #2 – Names in Israeli Families (1.5 Hours)**

On the blackboard, we'll draw a table with the names the students brought in. In the table we'll separate the first and last names into different groups by category, for example:

Names from the Bible (David, Joseph); names from Israel's landscapes (Gilad, Golan); names signifying the time of birth (Aviv, Hagit, Pesach); names from foreign languages (Shmuelvitz, Abutbul, Polek, Einhorn); Hebraized names (Haran, Sadeh, Keinan, Sharet)...

Each pair of students will be asked to bring a phonebook. From the phonebook, each pair will randomly select a page and will try to fill in the table we constructed. Additionally, the students will be requested to judge the prevalence of certain names and surnames.

During the lesson we'll collect our findings and try to reach certain conclusions such as:

- The multitude of biblical names
- The amount of surnames related to Cohen, Levi and their variations

### Activity #3 - Names in the Diaspora (2 Hours)

In the computer room, the students will be divided into pairs.

The students will be referred to Centropa's website, and we'll present them with the biographical stories there as examples. Each pair will be requested to find all the first and last names in a certain biography they'll be assigned to, and to try to fit those names into a table continuing the table we created in the previous lesson.

This time, in addition to classification of first and last names according to categories, the students will be asked to arrange the names chronologically (names originating in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century).

For example, in the biographical story of Chaia Leah Ditenku, the names in chronological order are:

First names	Last names
Mandela-Pessya	Pinchas
Nachman	Abramovich-Katz
Chava	
Chaya-Leah	
Aharon	
Bella	
Yaakov	Blich
Gisya	Pislaba
Shaia	Izkovich Ditenko
Victor	

Tanya	
Ira	
Katja	

Question – What's interesting about these names?

What can we learn from these names about the history of the Jewish people in this story?

Are there things we can learn about the changes between historical periods? (names indicating separation or integration in relation to the general society, for example?)

#### **Activity #4 -(about 10 lessons)**

#### **Study unit on the topic of Jewish surnames evolvement – from Yehushua Ben-Nun (Biblical period) to David Ben-Gurion (name Hebraization in the state of Israel)**

The teaching unit I developed surveyed the evolvement of Jewish surnames throughout the course of history. From an intimate society where everyone know everyone, thus making it possible to call a name by his private name or by a nickname based on profession, descent or the names of his parents, to a society in which there's a growing interaction with the surrounding crown – resulting in the modern state. The openness to change, as well as legal requirements, have caused changes in the Jewish community characterized in part by changes in private names and in family names.

While teaching using the attached presentation, we'll address the changes between the different historical periods in the Diaspora, as well as changes caused by the different ethnical origins of Jews and the Jewish people around the world.

See attached presentation.

## **Activity #5 – Students Personal Autobiographical Project (homework)**

After the learning stage, we'll have the students watch 2-3 clips from the Centropa website, in order to illustrate how familial history can be depicted using still photos.

The students will be asked to gather familial stories concerning the names in their families, analyze them using the tools we've acquired over the course of the study unit and edit them into a short clip, while integrating the family's story with a story about one historical event in which their family was involved.

Guidelines to editing and evaluating the clip:

### **Independent research:**

1. What is your surname? You can pick either your father's surname or your mother's surname.
2. If your surname has been Hebraized, find out when it happened and what the original name was (and where it originated).
3. Ask family members if they know the meaning and origin of the family's name.
4. Find out what the meaning of your surname is and try to discover its source, place of origin, and the reason for choosing it.
5. Research an historical event in global history or the history of Israel which affected a family member whose name you researched (this can be a story concerning a war, immigration, contact with the surrounding society, etc...).

### **Unit conclusion project:**

1. Watch a number of clips on centropa.org, in order to understand the general concept of a movie depicting a familial history through still photos.
2. Gather at least 10 visuals, including familial photos and photos of places, maps and people telling the story of names in your family: The country of origin, why these names were given, other surnames related to your own family and its name, first names used in your family.
3. Create a clip using software such as “Movie Maker” or “Power Point”, incorporating the family photos you’ve gathered. The goal of the clip will be to express the link between your family’s history and the history of the Jewish people.

The clip will include at least 10 visuals which will depict the history of names in your family, as well as at least one relevant historical event from the history of the world or the history of Israel. The clip will be accompanied by subtitles or recorded narration which will describe the events discussed in it.

### **Guidelines to the evaluation of the clip**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Grade percentage</b>	<b>Grade</b>
10 visuals (images) depicting the story of names in your family	40	
Map	5	
Description of a historical	30	

event related to your family's history		
Commentary in subtitles or recorded voice	20	
Sticking to set schedule and deadlines	5	
<b>Total</b>	100	

**The films will be presented by the students to the class+family members in an 'Oscar' evening.**

**Activity #6 -Zelda's poem (1.5 Hour)**

- I. Re-read Zelda's song "Each Man Has a Name"**
- II. Concluding the unit by re-reading the song, discussing the answers to the questions from the beginning of the unit and more questions for discussion:**  
 Did anything change in the student's reading and understanding of the song as a result of the study unit? Did you find new ideas or meanings in the song?

**Feedback / Remarks**

*Teaching using this unit resulted in a more meaningful and relevant experience of learning history – from the personal angle to the general view.*