

## **My Spirit Yearns for You**

### **Jewish Connections to the Land of Israel**

The Jewish people's connection to the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem (often referred to as Zion) is of biblical and ancient origin, extending back thousands of years. Jerusalem was home to the two Jewish temples, sites of ritual practice and monotheistic worship. Even though the Roman Empire expelled most Jews from the Land of Israel in 70 CE, Jewish people have maintained deep connections to the Land. Through rituals, poetry, and communal practices, Jews around the world and in the United States have safeguarded their affection for this ancestral home. Even Jews who are separated by time, space, language, and culture are connected through the acts of memory and longing to return to the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.

In this lesson, students will learn about the Jewish people's connection with the Land of Israel while reflecting on and describing a relationship that they have to a place of cultural significance. During the lesson, students will work in small groups to analyze poetry, rituals, and statistics, all of which provide different lenses through which to examine the Jewish people's relationship to the Land of Israel.

#### **Essential Questions:**

1. Why do the Jewish people have a connection to the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem?
2. How have Jewish people described and enacted their relationship with the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem?

#### **Learning Objectives:**

1. Students will be able to creatively express their own personal connection to a place of significance through dialogue with classmates and free-form writing.
2. Students will be able to articulate an understanding of the Jewish people's relationship to the Land of Israel after collaboratively analyzing multiple types of sources.

#### **Enduring Understandings:**

1. The Jewish people's relationship to the Land of Israel is ancient and has been maintained for thousands of years, despite exile from this ancestral home.
2. Jewish people around the world and in the United States express their relationship to the Land of Israel through multiple rituals, acts of expression, and collectively shared attitudes and beliefs.

## Materials:

- [My Spirit Yearns for You Slide Deck](#)
- [My Spirit Yearns for You Poetry Handout](#)
- [My Spirit Yearns for You Rituals Handout](#)
- [My Spirit Yearns for You Statistics Handout](#)

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## Lesson Procedures:

### *Reflection and Discussion: Significant Places*

Begin by having students independently reflect on the questions posed on [Slide 2](#):

*What is a place that is significant to a community that you belong to?*

*What makes this place significant?*

Invite students to think as creatively and expansively as they can about “community” and “place.” Encourage students to think of community in broad terms, such as musical, artistic, or hobby subcultures, for instance. Allow students to think broadly about place, as narrowly or expansively as is needed to appropriately match the community they have in mind.

Have students move around the classroom sharing with their classmates. Have them identify commonalities and differences between the place that is significant to them and those of their classmates. Provide time to share out and discuss as a whole class, creating space for students to learn about each other.

Next, transition to [Slide 3](#) and show students the mural on display at the Vilna Shul, the last remaining synagogue on Beacon Hill in Boston, Massachusetts. Explain that the Shul, which now serves as a Jewish cultural center, was established by immigrants from current-day Lithuania yet the sanctuary includes murals of the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron (where Jews believe Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are buried) and the Tomb of Rachel (Jacob’s wife) in Bethlehem. Pose the questions on the slide:

*Why would a synagogue in Boston, MA that was established by Jews from Eastern Europe have murals depicting locations in the Middle East?*

*What do these murals reveal about places Jews consider significant?*

Allow time for students to share their preliminary thoughts before explaining that the rest of class will be dedicated to examining the relationship and connection that Jewish people around the world and in the United States have to the Land of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, both of which are sometimes referred to as Zion.

*Source Analysis: Finding Connections in Poetry, Rituals, and Public Opinion*

Provide background context for students regarding the biblical and ancient origins of Jewish connection to the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem by showing slides 4 through 6, which emphasize the existence and destruction of the two Jewish temples in Jerusalem and the continued presence of Jews in Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, and Tiberius, even after the exile by the Romans.

With this background in mind, have students work in small groups to examine a variety of sources which provide insight into the continued connection to the Land of Israel that Jews have maintained for nearly 2,000 years, even while dispersed around the world. Distribute the *My Spirit Yearns for You Poetry Handout* and have students look at short excerpts from poems written about the Land of Israel and Jerusalem (sometimes using the term Zion) by Jewish poets living around the world and writing across centuries.

After students have read the poetry excerpts, discuss their observations regarding the text-specific questions. Then, show *Slide 7* and have a dialogue around the following question:

*Why does it matter that these poems were written by poets separated by thousands of miles and hundreds of years?*

As students answer, find opportunities to underscore the fact that the Jewish people's connection to the Land of Israel has existed for thousands of years and has continued to exist even as Jews have lived in diaspora since 70 CE. Geographical distance and the passing of time have not limited the connection that Jews have and continue to feel to the Land of Israel.

Next, distribute the *My Spirit Yearns for You Rituals Handout* and have students continue working in small groups, answering the questions specific to each example of a ritual that demonstrates a way in which Jewish people express and represent their connection to Jerusalem. After students have examined the examples, discuss them, using slides 8 through 11 to work through each example.

Next, distribute the [My Spirit Yearns for You Statistics Handout](#) and have students once more answer source-specific questions in small groups, using Pew Research data regarding American Jews' relationship to Israel as the source of analysis and observation. After students have discussed in groups, have a whole class discussion, using slides [12](#) through [15](#) to show the data from the Handout.

Conclude this discussion with the questions posed on [Slide 16](#):

*What new understanding do you have about the Jewish people's connection to the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem?*

*If you had to explain this connection to someone outside of class, what would you emphasize?*

### *Creative Expression: Writing Freely*

Return to students' original reflections on a place that is culturally significant to them. Have them think about a ritual, action, or form of interaction with this place that demonstrates its significance to them and a community to which they belong.

Allow time for students to engage in free-form writing, in response to the prompt on [Slide 17](#):

*Write freely about the place that is culturally significant for a community that you belong to.*

*Describe a ritual, practice, or act that you and others in the community engage in when visiting that place.*

*Describe how it feels to participate in that ritual, practice, or act.*

*Explain how this example of interaction with place binds people together.*