

LESSON 6: HEBREW WORDS IN JEWISH LANGUAGES

Lesson Overview

Theme/Topic/Big Ideas: Hebrew words are integrated into a variety of Jewish languages and used by Jews across geographic divides.

Summary: Through a variety of games, students will activate their own knowledge of Hebrew, then connect it to examples of use of Hebrew by Jews worldwide and throughout history. Finally, students will come up with new ways to add Hebrew into their lives.

*Note to Educators: we recognize that students will have varying Hebrew levels. Please adapt as needed to meet your students' needs.

Essential Question(s)

- How are Jewish people connected linguistically across time and place?
- How am I connected to Jewish languages?

Objective:

In this lesson, students will:

- Learn that Jews around the world have continued to use Hebrew for prayer and study and have pronounced Hebrew in diverse ways
- Understand that in most places, Jews have used hundreds of Hebrew words within their spoken language, from Judeo-Arabic to Judeo-Italian to Jewish Malayalam
- Recognize that they, too, use Hebrew words in their everyday language, (Jewish) English

Time: 55 minutes

[Handouts and Visuals Link](#)

Materials and setup

- Paper and pens/pencils
- Printouts of Hebrew phrase cards and "fun fact" cards
- Internet access to the Jewish English Lexicon online and devices for the students to use to access it

Background Information for Educators:

<https://www.jewishlanguages.org/jewish-english>

Process: Introduction/Set Induction: Hebrew Simon Says (10 min)

Stand in front of the students and provide verbal instructions using the construct “Shimon omer” (Simon says). Follow this with a variety of Hebrew commands using infinitive verbs (inspired by [Hebrew Through Movement](#)), acting them out as you say them so students can easily understand. You may want to put out some props to make this more interesting, and feel free to adapt according to your comfort with Hebrew. Suggestions:

- *Shimon omer, Lakoom* (stand up)
- *Shimon omer, Yadayim al ha-rosh* (hands on your head)
- *Shimon omer, Yadayim al ha-oznayim* (hands on your ears)
- *Shimon omer, Yadayim al ha-beten* (hands on your belly)
- *Shimon omer, Larootz* (run – in place!)
- *Shimon omer, Lakachat et ha-sefer* (pick up/take the book)
- *Shimon omer, Lashevet* (sit down)
- *Shimon omer, L’hagid “shalom”* (say hello/goodbye)

Reflect: How is this use of Hebrew similar to other times you’ve used Hebrew? How is it different? In what other ways do you use Hebrew?

CONNECT: Hebrew Hunt! (5-15 min)

[Handout Link](#)

Where is Hebrew in your life? Do you use it? If you think the answer is “no,” think again. What words do you use to refer to Jewish holidays? What language do you use in the synagogue or in religious school?

Note to teachers: For students with more advanced Hebrew, such as in a day school setting, you may choose to adjust this activity, focus on the Hebrew Hunt Skits activity (see below), or skip it.

As a class, make a big list (on the board or on chart paper) of all of the places you can “find” Hebrew in your life (including popular music, video games, TV, and books), and which Hebrew words you use regularly.

For example:

At religious school:

- We call our teacher *Morah* [Debbie] / the assistants are called *madrichim* / our program is called *Limud* / etc.
- We say *sheket b'vakasha* when it is time to be quiet

At home:

- We say *Shabbat shalom* on Friday nights and Saturdays
- We say *chametz* to refer to the foods restricted during Passover
- We say *todah* to thank our Israeli neighbors
- We have a *mezuzah* on our door frame

In synagogue:

- We pray in Hebrew
- The *tefilah* is led and the Torah and *haftarah* are read from the *bimah*
- We say *yasher koach* or *hazak u-barukh* after someone reads from the Torah
- We wish a newly married couple or a bar/bat mitzvah *mazal tov*

For students with more Hebrew experience, consider an extension of this activity, Hebrew Hunt Flash Skits: Divide students into small groups, ask them to select 3-4 Hebrew words or phrases they use regularly when speaking English. Have each group incorporate those words into a brief skit and perform it for the class.

The words you are using are known as "loanwords," words "lent" from one language to another, in this case, from Hebrew to English.

Jews all over the world use loanwords from Hebrew within their regular language. How did those loanwords come about? In ancient times, Jews in the Land of Israel spoke Hebrew as their primary spoken language. And they also have spoken Hebrew in Israel (earlier, Palestine) for the last 150 years – because of Eliezer Ben Yehudah and others who worked to revive Hebrew as a spoken language. For the centuries in between, Jews used Hebrew primarily for prayer and study. Because of these uses of Hebrew, individual Hebrew words made their way into everyday language. [Here you might want to mention the Word Sleuths activity from Lesson 3, where the word "Omer" (or other Hebrew words if you used materials for other holidays) were found in all examples.]

CONNECT: Hebrew Hunt! (5-15 min)

Jews in various countries used many of the same words from our sacred texts: the Tanakh, the siddur, the Mishnah, etc., but they pronounced them differently:

Use the Sabbath Greetings Around the World image to share an שבת example using the word

- Yemen: shabóth (th is like the first sound of “think”)
- Iran: shabót
- Eastern Europe: shábes
- Turkey: shabádh (dh is like the first sound of “this”)
- Morocco: shabát

Optional Video: The History of the Revival of Spoken Hebrew (10:58)

Learn more about the complex reasons and methods for reviving Hebrew. Watch and reflect with students.

[The History & Revival of the Hebrew Language | History of Israel Explained | Unpacked](#)

EXPLORE: Hebrew Use in English and Beyond (25 min total)

English:

What did we notice about how and when we use Hebrew loanwords? Note that we use them when referring to prayer, ritual, and holidays (usually in these cases we don't have an English word for the same thing, as in *kiddush* and *chametz*). But we also use Hebrew loanwords in other contexts where English does have an alternative (like *todah* and *mazel tov*, which could be “thank you” and “congratulations”). Jews around the world do this as well to highlight their Jewish identity, to convey an “insider” term, or even as a euphemism (an alternative to a word considered inappropriate). Let's look at some of the ways we use Hebrew loanwords, then how Jews who speak other languages use them.

Print and cut 2 sets of cards: Hebrew loanwords in English and Hebrew loanwords from around the world.

In small groups or as a class: Pass out the Hebrew loanwords in English phrase and sentence cards below.

EXPLORE: Hebrew Use in English and Beyond (25 min total)

Handout Link

In small groups or as a class:

Pass out the phrase and sentence cards below without the green headings (those are for the teacher). Have the students sort the sentences into two piles: one for words that are specific to Jewish observance, and the other for other words that are not specific to Jewish observance.

Jewish Observance	Other Uses
Shabbat shalom!	<i>Yasher koach!</i> You did a great job in the school play!
We don't eat <i>chametz</i> during <i>Pesach</i> . At the <i>seder</i> , we read from the <i>haggadah</i> .	At camp, we eat with our <i>madrichim</i> in the <i>chadar ochel</i> .
After we say <i>kiddush</i> , we drink the wine and then we make <i>Ha-motzi</i> and eat the <i>challah</i> .	She's pregnant? <i>B'sha'a tova!</i>
Please put your <i>siddurim</i> on the shelf before you leave.	We call our teacher <i>Morah Debbie</i> .

Review the two piles as a class, noting the categories and that our Hebrew loanwords can function as a way to express a particular religious idea or practice AND as a way to add a bit of Jewish flavor to conversation that otherwise would not be specifically Jewish.

Now we're going to categorize a few more uses of Hebrew, this time in other languages. Pass out the Hebrew loanwords from around the world cards. Using the cards, have students conduct the same exercise, categorizing the uses of Hebrew from around the world into piles: Jewish observance and other uses.

Note to teachers: Some vocabulary used in these cards (e.g. connotation, euphemism, geniza, liturgy, loanwords) may be new for some students. Define words as needed, or encourage students to ask about or look up words that are unfamiliar. Note that the Judeo-Yazdi formula comes from "B'shem Hashem na'aseh unatsliach."

Hebrew Use in English and Beyond, continued.

Share out to the class.

Answer key:

Jewish observance:

- Fasting in Ladino
- Spanish siddur

Other uses:

- Jewish Malayalam
- Toilet euphemism
- Benadamlik
- Storytelling in Judeo-Yazdi

We're now going to do some research to learn more about how Hebrew shows up in Jewish English.

Research More Loanwords (10 min)

Divide the class into pairs. Have each pair use the online [Jewish English Lexicon](#) to research additional Hebrew words that some English-speaking Jews integrate into their English conversation. (If the students are navigating to the link themselves, have them go to jel.jewish-languages.org, and under ADVANCED SEARCH, click language of origin, Textual Hebrew.) Have each pair research 4 words: 2 that are familiar and 2 that are new. Click "Next" at the bottom to see more words, or change the "use" (tab at the top) to see a different list of words (but make sure "Textual Hebrew" is checked under "Select Origins"). Note that many of these loanwords are used primarily by traditionally observant Jewish communities. Write down each word, the definition, and an example sentence to use in the next activity.

CREATE (and Reflect/Conclude): Building our Hebrew Loanword Vocabulary (10 min)

We learned that Jews use Hebrew words within their English conversation. What new words did you learn today? Select pairs to share out from their research. OR, have pairs perform a short skit to teach their new word to the class.

As a class, make a plan for 2–3 new words/phrases you'll use next time you meet, and how you plan to do this. (For example, from now on, we'll greet visitors to our class by saying *baruch ha'ba*, and you'll ask to use the *makom* when you need to use the bathroom!)