

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

IN YIDDISH
WITH ENGLISH SUPERTITLES

פֿידלער אויפֿן דאָך

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Background

Fiddler on the Roof has been a lens through which countless audiences have viewed the modern Jewish experience. From the original stories of Sholem Aleichem to the stage production and the film, Fiddler has given viewers a chance to explore the most universal of human experiences through the unique particularism of Ashkenazi Jewry in the form of Tevye and his daughters. As Fiddler on the Roof continues to transform, learners have the chance to experience it anew, and to consider its messages through the eyes of today.

When the 2020 production of Fiddler on the Roof in Yiddish became a smash hit, The Jewish Education Project produced materials for educators to use in a variety of settings with learners before and after seeing the production. While the show paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2022, it is back in New York once again. Now, in a world that has experienced a global pandemic, an unprecedented rise in antisemitism, and countless challenges, we are excited to offer new materials in addition to those that already existed. Just as Fiddler on the Roof remains timeless and timely, we hope that educators will be able to use these materials to bring its lessons **To Life** with their learners.

Discussion Topics + Activities

In the book, *The Worlds of Sholem Aleichem* [Jeremy Dauber], it is noted that *Fiddler on the Roof* has appeal around the world. [Fiddler] “became a free-floating symbol, an Everylens for talking about universal challenges to tradition.” To many in the Jewish community, this may seem strange – Fiddler is such a Jewish story! But when viewed through a lens of universalism, the challenges of intergenerational changes, shifting priorities, and the complexities of family life are part of the communal story of humanity. What is particularly Jewish about *Fiddler on the Roof*? What is particularly 1905, the year that the story takes place? And what are the timeless elements that can speak to anyone, at any time?

Did you know that one of the places that *Fiddler on the Roof* is the most popular is in Japan? [Learn more about this phenomenon here](#). For many Japanese fans of *Fiddler*, the show may be the only lens they have through which to view the Jewish world. What is the story of the Jewish people that you would want someone to know in order to understand Jewish life today?

Activity: Pick a story (or a movie/TV show) that’s not necessarily “Jewish” but that has universal themes – how can it be seen through a Jewish lens? What Jewish values, questions, or struggles can you find in contemporary entertainment?

Activity: In *Fiddler on the Roof*, antisemitism, the hatred of Jews, is shown by an attack on the community known as a pogrom, and ultimately by the expulsion of the Jews from their homes in Anatevka. Today, antisemitism is once again a problem for many Jews in the United States and around the world, but like the Jews in *Fiddler on the Roof*, we remain proud and joyful in our Judaism. Often in *Fiddler*, singing and dancing are used to express Jewish joy. Think about how you can tap into Jewish joy today – what steps can you take to share it with the world?

Yiddish

While Yiddish would have been the language spoken by Tevye and his daughters, most Jews today do not speak Yiddish. We're used to hearing musicals in English, or maybe in Hebrew, or in many other languages that we learn in school or speak at home. But before the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Yiddish Theater Folksbiene began performing *Fiddler on the Roof* [or *Fidler Afn Dakh*] in Yiddish – a smashing success! In 2022, the show is back again, and audiences of non-Yiddish speakers are loving it.

Fiddler on the Roof isn't the only way that Yiddish is being used today. From Yiddish podcasts, to Yiddish Farm, the Yidstock music festival, and Yiddish lessons on Duolingo, there has been a revitalization of a language that was thought to be dying out in the years after the Holocaust. What do you think the appeal is of Yiddish today? Why would Jews care about speaking it? What about non-Jews? What do you think is the value of doing a production of *Fiddler on the Roof* in Yiddish in 2022?

Activity: Take a Yiddish lesson on Duolingo

Activity: What is the language of your Judaism today? If you had to make a dictionary of “insider speak” what would go into it? Would the words or expressions be religious? Social? Create a vocabulary list for your Jewish space.



Anatevka

One of the major world events of 2022 is the war between Russia and Ukraine. Fiddler on the Roof takes place in Ukraine, with the village of Anatevka being a representation of a shtetl within what was known as the Pale of Settlement. This region comprised all of modern Belarus, Lithuania and Moldova, most of Ukraine, and parts of Poland, Latvia, and Russia. In 1897, almost 5 million Jews lived in this region, and millions of Jews today are descended from families who lived in the Pale. Ukraine has been the setting of many Jewish stories and moments throughout history. When thinking about the war in Ukraine, do you think about it with a Jewish connection? What does it mean to view global events through a Jewish lens?

The setting of Fiddler on the Roof, Anatevka, was originally a made-up shtetl, based on many small villages of the time period. **But today, a version of Anatevka exists as a displaced person's camp.** Why do you think this camp was named after the fictional town of Anatevka?

Activity: **Listen to the song Anatevka**, which is sung towards the end of Fiddler on the Roof, when the Jews of Anatevka are being forced to leave their home [**lyrics**]. Think about what makes a place a home for you. Use found objects to create a representation of your Jewish home, wherever it is. How can you take it with you as you move throughout your life?

The Jewish Story

Fiddler on the Roof in particular, and Yiddish in general, can be seen as Ashkenazi Jewish cultural touchstones. After all, Yiddish was the primary spoken language of Ashkenazi Jews for over 1,000 years, and Sholem Aleichem was a celebrated Yiddish writer. But today in the United States, we live in a diverse Jewish world, with Jews of many backgrounds including Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Jews of Color. What are the stories of these Jewish communities that we need to tell, alongside the story of Ashkenazi Jewry?

Activity: Try learning a few words in Ladino – Just like Ashkenazi Jews spoke Yiddish, many Sephardic Jews traditionally spoke their own language known as Ladino. **This game app can help you learn it for yourself.**

Activity: Choose an exhibit from ANU: The Museum of the Jewish People to learn more about different experiences throughout the Jewish world.



For additional resources on
antisemitism, go to
The Jewish Educator Portal.
educator.jewishedproject.org