

Henrietta Szold Time Capsule: Sparking Change in The World

Biography

Henrietta Szold was born in Baltimore, Maryland on December 21, 1860 to Rabbi Benjamin and Sophia Szold. She began her career as a teacher, and her compassion for the less fortunate was apparent from early on when she opened a night school for Russian Jewish immigrants. At the same time, she pursued an academic career as an editor at the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) and as the first woman to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). In 1898 she was the only woman elected to serve on the executive committee of the Federation of American Zionists.

Szold was devoted to Zionism. During her first visit to Israel in 1909, she witnessed inadequate health and sanitary conditions and decided to devote her life to promoting the health, education, and welfare of the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish population in Israel). Accordingly, in 1912, she founded Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America. Hadassah's first project was the inauguration of an American-style visiting nurse service. The organization funded hospitals, a medical school, dental facilities, infant welfare stations, soup kitchens, and other services for the Jewish and Arab inhabitants of Palestine.

In 1932, Szold immigrated to Israel. In addition to her work with Hadassah, she was appointed director of Youth Aliya (Aliyat HaNoar) and was responsible for the absorption of children and youth who had escaped to Israel from Nazi-occupied Europe. Due to the incredible role she played in these children's lives, she was named the "Mother of Youth Aliya."

Szold was a valuable member of the Jewish National Council (Va'ad Leumi) in Israel and, through this leadership position, managed to vastly improve social services. In addition, she co-founded Ichud, a political party in favor of a binational solution and Arab–Jewish unity.

Henrietta Szold died in 1945 at the age of 85 at Hadassah Hospital on Mt. Scopus. Despite having no family or children of her own, her funeral was attended by thousands of mourners, and she was subsequently memorialized in various ways. An illegal immigrant ship that sailed from Greece to Israel with 500 immigrants, including 180 babies, children, and youth who had survived the Holocaust, was named after her in 1946; a number of streets throughout Israel were named after her; and Kibbutz Kfar Szold was established in her honor. In addition, Mother's Day (or Family Day as it is now known) is held in Israel on the 30th of Shevat—the Hebrew anniversary of her death. Henrietta Szold's legacy continues today with the wonderful services that the Hadassah Medical Center provides to thousands of patients every year.



Framing

In this time capsule, students will learn about Henrietta Szold as a model for sparking change in the world while getting a glimpse into the pressing issues in Jewish and Israeli history that Szold addressed. They will also discuss contemporary issues that demand attention today and think about how they can bring about change in their environment. Students will practice skills such as problem solving, thinking creatively, asking questions, and reflecting.

Scope

This learning experience can be run in one sitting or split over two separate class periods (60-90 minutes in total):

- Activity #1 (Note to Self): 5 minutes
- Activity #2 (Video) + Activity #3 (Matching Activity): 15-20 minutes
- Activity #4 (Creative Activity): 20-30 minutes
- Activity #5 (The Legacy of Henrietta Szold): 10-15 minutes

Preparing the Time Capsule

Materials:

- Small paper notes, pens
- Large paper, markers, and other art supplies for creating posters

Printing:

- Print multiple copies of [Matching Activity](#) (one set per pair/small group of students), preferably in color and on thick paper or cardboard.
- Print a copy of this [worksheet](#) for each student
- Print a copy of [“The Death of Henrietta Szold,” The Palestine Post, February 14, 1945](#)

Activity #1: Note to Self

As an opening activity for this time capsule, lead a class discussion in which students identify issues in need of solutions in their surroundings and create a class list, or have each student write 1–3 issues. There is no need to come up with solutions at this point.

Activity #2: [Video](#)

The video introduces Szold through her social initiatives and helps students reflect on what needs changing in their environment.

Activity #3: Matching Activity

Students receive a set of cards that present various issues and their solutions. Some of these are issues that Szold identified and worked to remedy; others are issues that faced Israeli society for which innovative solutions were found. Students should match each issue with its solution.

Discussion questions

- What do you think Szold's motivation was for creating change?
- How do you connect to Szold's initiatives?
- What changes would you like to implement in our society today?

Activity #4: Creative Activity

Using this [worksheet](#), students create posters showing an issue they see in their own society today and offer solutions. They should also incorporate some ideas for realizing these solutions and brainstorm the resources they might need. Introduce local problems and recommend practical solutions to enable the students to feel that the activity is grounded in their experience. Remind students that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, but, like Szold, each student has the potential to effect change.

Students present their posters. This could be in the format of a gallery walk with students commenting on one another's posters by writing on post-its.

Questions to guide the students' presentations:

- Why did you choose this issue?
- What ideas did you have for tackling and solving this issue?
- What helped you come up with this solution?
- What resources are needed to realize this solution?

Activity #5: The Legacy of Henrietta Szold

- Read the tribute [“The Death of Henrietta Szold,” The Palestine Post, February 14, 1945](#) and look back at the list created in the opening activity. Think about how to approach these issues now that we have learned about Henrietta Szold.
- Students pick one thing from Henrietta Szold's legacy that they have learned and can take with them.
- Students write their own tribute or obituary for Henrietta Szold. They should think about the aspects of her life that were most important and impactful.