

**Objectives:** Students will learn of the variety of Jewish life before the onset of war. Jewish life was not only filled with great traditions and customs, it was also diverse and varied greatly. Students should learn the importance of learning about the ways in which Jews lived, not just how they died.

**Outcome:** Students have a better understanding of the culture, customs, and traditions of Jews, both cultural and religious. Understand the severity of what was lost because they recognize and care about the culture and way of life that preceded it.

### **Pre-lesson reflections:**

Question to pose: What do I currently know about Jewish life? (both the culture and religion)

Question to pose: How much of what I know comes from my formal schooling, and how comes from pop culture?

## **The Lesson:**

**Introduction / Background information on the topic:** used to set up the lesson but also help instructor teach it

- Jews live everywhere, each with their own variations (food, language, customs)
  - Sephardic Jews
    - Come from Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and the Middle East
    - Many Sephardic Jews in the Iberian Peninsula were unified by the Judeo-Spanish Language, Ladino - Ladino has evolved over time as Sephardic Jews immigrated to new lands
  - Mizrahi Jews
    - Come from modern Iraq, Iran, and Yemen
    - Mizrahi culture has had a significant impact on Israeli society, with the spread of yemenite music and silversmiths.
  - Ashkenazi Jews
    - Come from central and eastern Europe, primarily Germany, Russia, and Poland
    - Speak the language of Yiddish
    - Ashkenazim Jews are the most populous ethnic group in North America
- The following are some of the key points that should be emphasized throughout the lesson
- At the start of World War 2, there were approximately 9 million Jews living all throughout Europe
- The majority lived in Eastern Europe, in countries like Poland, Hungary, Romania, and then the Soviet Union (3 million alone lived in Poland).

- These Jews predominantly lived in small communities and were largely traditional
- The Jews living in Western Europe were far more assimilated into western life and culture
- Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Belgium.
- Held all kinds of jobs, which benefited people in all aspects of their lives

### **Whole-group activity:**

- Show the entire classroom these two resources, one reading and one video.
- Reading: “Stolen Youth”, published by Yad Vashem, Chapter 1
  - [https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/pdf-drupal/en/education/stolen\\_youth\\_1.pdf](https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/pdf-drupal/en/education/stolen_youth_1.pdf)
  - This memoir is a collection of five womens’ testimonies who survived the Holocaust. This beginning chapter gives a glimpse into their lives before everything except their lives were taken from them in the Holocaust. Helps contextualize the deep and rich culture, and sense of normalcy that they lost.
- Video: “The Way We Lived”
  - <https://youtu.be/KTX9K9BmjLY>
  - This resource also serves as an introduction to Jewish life before ww11, following many people’s diverse ordinary lives.

### **Concluding the lesson:**

- Ask the students how their knowledge of Jewish life and customs grew or changed because of the lesson
- Ask them to keep what they learned in mind as they continue to learn about Jews in the Holocaust
  - The Holocaust greatly affected the course of nearly all living Jew’s lives at the time, but this event is not what defines them; Jews are the aggregate of all their customs, traditions, and lived experiences, not merely 6 million lives lost.