

Israel

It's Complicated

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Some activities within this book include an optional, digital component. To access these resources, visit: bhlink.me/Israel, followed by the chapter number. (For example, bhlink.me/israel5 will take you to the digital resources for chapter 5.)

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Introduction:

What IS Israel?

If someone asked you, “What country do you live in?” “How big is it?” “What are its borders and cities?”—all the regular details about it—you could probably summarize it pretty simply, like this: “I live on Elm Street in Springfield, which is in the United States of America.” And that would be that.

But with Israel...it’s complicated. They say that what you see depends on where you stand. And that’s true of Israel for sure. Almost everything about it—its borders, population, even its name—are often described differently by different groups of people.

Design An Israeli Star

Fill the center of the star to the right with words that you associate with Israel. Write the words that you most strongly associate with Israel **larger**, and the other words **smaller**.

- Take a look at the words you chose. How many are positive words? How many are negative?
- What made you choose the words you did?
- Exchange stars with a friend. Which words do you have in common? Which are different?
- How different would the words be if you were making a word cloud for the place you live? What makes Israel different?

What’s in a Name?

1.
The land that we call Israel has had many names over the years. Here are just some of them:

2. Canaan
Back in biblical days, during the time of Abraham and Sarah, the land was called Canaan.

3. The Land of Israel
After conquering Canaan, the Israelites called it the Land of Israel, for Jacob, who was also called Israel.

4. The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel
After King Solomon’s reign, the nation split into two Kingdoms: Judah and Israel.

6. Israel
In 1948, the people of the newly formed, modern state again chose to name the land after their ancestor, Israel.

5. Palestine
Hundreds of years later, the Romans conquered the Jewish nation and renamed it Palestine.

Where Is Israel? How Big Is It?

Israel is located in the Middle East. While it looms large on the world stage, it's small. REALLY small. You might even call it tiny.



0720

By the Numbers:

Including the West Bank, Israel is 8,019 square miles. New Jersey is 8,723 square miles.

Map It: Where's Israel?

- Use a pen or thin marker to fill in the area that is Israel.
- Circle the names of the countries that share a border with Israel.
- Draw waves under the names of the bodies of water that touch Israel.
- What do you notice about Israel's size now that you see it in relation to its neighbors?
- What else do you notice on the map? What do you wonder about?

Just because Israel is small doesn't mean it's unimportant. The land it occupies lay at the crossroads of the ancient world. This has made it strategically important—for trade and for the military—and it was fought over and ruled by one empire after another, including the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, the Islamic Empire, Ottoman Turks, the British, and finally, the current nation of Israel.



The Cloverleaf Map by Heinrich Bünting, 1581.

Map It: Create Your Own

With a friend, answer the following questions:

1. What places do you recognize on this map?
2. What places seem especially important from the map?
3. What city might people of other religious traditions—or with no religious tradition—place in the center of such a map?

In the cloverleaf above, imagine you were creating a map of the world today. What countries or continents would you include? What place would be at the center? Then, share your map with your partner and explain why you made the choices you did.



What Land Does It Include?

Most of us can easily answer these two simple questions:

- What is the name of your neighborhood?
- What country do you live in?

But in Israel, if you ask those two questions about this piece of land...

...it's complicated. The answers will depend on whether you are Jewish or Muslim; Israeli, Palestinian, Syrian, European, or American; religious or secular. Who you are, what your religion is, where you live, what your values are, and what your politics are will affect the answer.

The land marked with the “?” is called different things by different people, such as:

- Judea and Samaria
- the disputed territories
- the occupied territories
- the West Bank

For example, religious Zionists might believe that this piece of land rightfully belongs to the Jewish people and call it Judea and Samaria, because that's what it was named when Jews ruled there. However, Palestinian families that left their homes before 1948 might call the area the Occupied Territories and feel that the land rightfully belongs to them.

The land itself borders the west bank of the Jordan River.

This book uses the names Israel and West Bank.

Gallery of Questions

Write down three questions you have about Israel in the space below. Then, form small groups, and share your questions with your group. As a group, pick the three questions that you find most interesting. Write them on a piece of poster board or large piece of paper and post it to the wall.

My questions about Israel:

Then, go around the room reading each group's questions. Add your own responses to them on sticky notes and stick them to the poster boards. Your responses can include:

- New questions you have that were inspired by the questions on the board
- Ideas for possible answers
- Suggestions for how you can learn more about the issue
- One-word responses that describe how the questions make you feel (happy, angry, worried, proud)

Once everyone has posted their notes, walk around the room and read them. Then, come back and discuss:

1. What questions surprised you?
2. What questions were similar to your own?
3. Were there any questions that you'd like to add to your own list? If so, add them to the box above.
4. How can you find answers to your questions as you use this book and learn about Israel?



Chapter 1:

It's a home for people from all over the world

Have you ever been to a place where most of the people were Jewish? Your religious school or maybe a Hanukkah party? It probably doesn't happen to you that often, because in most places in the world, Jews are in the minority.

In Israel it's different. Israel is the only country in the world where a majority of the citizens are Jewish. Israel is also often called a "melting pot" of cultures—like the United States—because people come there from all over the world. When they move to Israel, they bring their traditions and languages along with them. Yet, Israel is not just for Jews. Israel is also a place that draws people of all religions from all over the world.



What Do You See?

With a partner, look at the pictures of different Israelis on these pages and discuss the following questions:

- What do you notice about the people in the pictures?
- Imagine someone was looking at a picture of you. What might they learn about you based on what you are wearing? What can you tell about the people in the photos based on what they are wearing?
- Clothing gives us clues about people, but can't tell us what they like or dislike, or important to them. Pick one person from the photos. If you had a chance to interview that person, what would you want to know about that person's life?

Write your interview questions here:

The Many Flavors of Your Community

Just like Israeli society is diverse, so is your own Jewish community. Stand in a circle with a group of friends. Imagine you are surrounding a giant salad bowl. One at a time, step into the bowl and sit down. As you do so, share what unique "flavor" you add to the community. You can include the countries your family came from, a unique tradition your family observes, or a special skill or talent you have.

The People Who Come

Jewish people from all around the world are drawn to Israel and many have traveled far and overcome great sacrifice to move there.



American's making Aliyah



Meet Karen

Karen is 15 years old. She was born in Chicago, Illinois and moved to Israel just last month with her family.

“My family believes that even though we loved our life in the United States, Israel is our homeland and it’s where we want to live.”

Karen has lots of friends who speak English on her block, but at school, her classes are in Hebrew. “It is a bit embarrassing; I try to pay attention to what is being said but everything is in Hebrew!” says Karen. “But I’m learning. I think by the end of the year I’ll be able to understand Hebrew as if I grew up here.”

07 By the Numbers:

In 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, over 1 million Russians moved to Israel.



Meet Roman

Roman, 14, was born in Israel. His parents and grandparents were all born in the Soviet Union, and the family moved to Israel in 1985.

At that time, the Soviet Union required anyone who wanted to leave to get government permission. Many who applied were refused; they were called “refuseniks” and considered traitors for wanting to move to Israel.

“My grandparents lost their jobs after they applied. They wanted to live in Israel and be safe. Fortunately, many American Jews worked on their behalf and all the other refuseniks. They sent letters, marched and demonstrated. Finally, those efforts paid off. My grandparents got permission and were able to come here,” says Roman.

“Even though I was born here in Israel, I speak Russian at home and Hebrew with friends. I am proud to be Russian, Jewish and Israeli.”



An Israeli store that caters to Russian speaking customers



Russian and Israeli passports



Meet Esther

Esther's family came to Israel from Ethiopia. "My grandparents say they can trace their Jewish family back hundreds of years," says Esther.

In the 1980s, Israel rescued the Ethiopian Jewish community from the famine and persecution there by bringing them to Israel.

"My grandparents had a difficult journey. They had to walk with hundreds of others through a desert to a meeting place where airplanes took them to Israel. Not everyone survived—about 4,000 people died on the journey," she says. "In Ethiopia, there wasn't much modern technology, and when my grandparents arrived here, they had a big shock. They had to learn how to use a refrigerator and other machines that they didn't have back in Ethiopia," says Esther.

"To me, being Israeli means sharing my Ethiopian culture with my friends."



Ethiopian Immigrants arriving in Israel.

07 By the numbers:

NAME OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF ETHIOPIANS WHO CAME TO ISRAEL	YEAR
Moses	8,000	1984-85
Joshua	500	1985
Solomon	14,325	1991



Meet Marc

Marc moved to Israel from France six months ago.

"My family and I loved our life in France," explains Marc, "But my parents were worried about the recent rise in antisemitism there. They wanted their children to be proud of their Jewish heritage and not have to hide their Jewishness I am happy that we came here," says Marc, 15.

At home, Marc's family speaks French. At school, Marc speaks Hebrew with his friends and teachers.

Marc's dad had a hard time finding work in Israel. He splits his time between France and Israel.

"My dad found it very difficult to learn Hebrew. So, he kept his job in France and now he commutes back and forth. He tries to be in Israel every weekend with our family before he returns to work in Paris on Monday," says Marc.

"I sometimes wish my dad could find work in Israel and just stay here all the time. But there are so many other people just like him who work half time in Europe and half the time in Israel. He loves his job and loves that we live in Israel," says Marc.



Vintage French and Israeli postage stamps.



Greeting new arrivals to Israel at the airport.

Welcoming The New Arrivals

Israel has many programs that help immigrants become comfortable with their new country. For example, often the government gives new immigrants free services their first few years in Israel, including a free one way flight to Israel, financial assistance, free health insurance, and free Hebrew classes called Ulpan. People in Israel also create welcome package for new immigrants, to help make them feel at home.

Welcoming Package

Pick one of the people that you met on pages 14-17 and create a list of what you would include in a care package to welcome them and their family to Israel. Then, draw pictures or make a collage of those items below.



Why did you choose each of the items?

How do you imagine each item would help the family you selected feel welcome?

It's Complicated

Who is a Jew?

Can you imagine if someone asked you to prove who you are? That's the question that Jewish immigrants are asked when they move to Israel: Are you Jewish? And: Can you prove it?

Since the Law of Return only applies to Jews, you must be Jewish—and able to prove that you are Jewish—in order to take advantage of the law.

But what makes someone Jewish?

This is where things get very, very complicated. Judaism is a thousands-year-old religion. Over the centuries, the world-wide Jewish community has developed a wide variety of religious perspectives. For example, some of the movements within North American Judaism—Reconstructionist, Reform, Conservative and Orthodox—all share core Jewish values, but disagree on lots of things, even on what makes someone Jewish. The Reform definition is that anyone born from a Jewish father or Jewish mother and raised Jewish is a Jew. In contrast, the Orthodox definition is that only someone with a Jewish mother is born Jewish. Both traditions accept Jews by choice—people who convert to Judaism.

What does the Jewish State do?

For immigration policy, the Law of Return accepts anyone who has a Jewish parent, grandparent or spouse.

But: You still have to legally prove that your spouse or any of your parents or grandparents are Jewish if you want to make Aliyah, and become a citizen. This leads to complications.

For example, when Jews from Ethiopia immigrated to Israel, they had no documents, no way to prove their Jewish roots. Without proof, the Israeli government would not accept them as Jews and insisted that they convert and become Jews by choice.

While to the government this might have seemed like a practical solution, to many immigrants it was hurtful. Back in their countries of origin they had to fight for their Jewish identity and were even persecuted for it. Now in Israel, where they thought they would be accepted as they as family—their word wasn't trusted!

With a partner, discuss the following:

1. Why do you think the Israeli government has rules about proving Jewishness?
2. If you could change the rules, what would you do?

How could it be better?

Pair up and role play. Have one person play the role of an immigrant, who is hoping to become an Israeli citizen under the law of return. Have the second person play the role of a government official in Israel. Imagine you are conducting the interview to determine whether the immigrant can make aliyah. The person playing the immigrant should decide before you begin what country they are from and what their Jewish connection is.

For this role play, I was a (circle one) immigrant/ government official.

THE QUESTIONS WERE:	THE ANSWERS WERE:



A passport stamp that issues its holder Israeli citizenship based on Law of Return.

Talk About It



What ideas, values or experiences do you think many immigrants to Israel have in common?

1. Compare the different types of immigrant's experiences that you learned about. In what ways were they similar? Different?
2. Which of the stories on page 14-17 did you connect with the most? Why?
3. Why do you think people from around the world choose to immigrate to Israel?