EDUCATOR’S GUIDE
MALTZ MUSEUM OF
JEWISH HERITAGE

Immigration
An American Story

Welcome to the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage. We invite you and your students to learn, experience and share the story of:

- Cleveland History and the Immigrant Experience that shaped our lives and changed the world;
- Jewish Holidays and Traditions that play a dynamic role in the life of a diverse people;
- Local Heroes, past and present, who made their mark in industry, government, education and the arts;
- The Holocaust and the importance of teaching tolerance in today’s world.

It is our aim that your visit here will inspire you and your students with the hope and determination of those who have left their mark upon our city, our country and our world.

TO THE EDUCATOR

Generations of Jewish men and women have made a profound impact on the social, cultural, economic and scientific progress of our region, our country and our world. Grounded in the ancient principles of their faith, their lives represent stories of hope, determination, struggle and achievement—an inspiring American chapter in the nearly 4,000-year history of the Jewish people.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is for use with the following programs:

- Coming to America for Grades K-3
- American Dreamers for Grades 3-6
- Becoming American for Grades 6-12

This curriculum guide is designed as preparation for a visit to the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage. It contains background information, vocabulary terms, resources for students and teachers, and discussion questions/activities to guide classroom learning. If you have questions about this guide or would like further assistance on how to incorporate our exhibitions into your curriculum please call 216.593.0575.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lynda A. Bender
Director of Education and Public Programs

Mark Davidson
Manager of School and Family Programs

Martha Sivertson
Manager of Visitors and Volunteer Services

Joshua A. Feinberg
Writer

Laura Bender Herron
Research Intern

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PRE-VISIT DISCUSSION PROMPTS
Find out what students expect to see and do at the Maltz Museum. These discussion prompts are intended to guide your classroom preparation:

- Why is it important to study history?
- How can learning about the past help us understand ourselves today?
- How do ordinary people participate in and make history?
- Why is it important to learn about other cultures, religions and ethnic groups?
- How can learning about others help us to understand ourselves?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
- Why have immigrants come to America?
- What challenges have they faced?
- How did family and community help them face these challenges?
- What does it mean to be “American”?
- How do people maintain their cultural identity in a new land?
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Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!
The New Colossus, Emma Lazarus, 1883
WHEN DID JEWS FIRST COME TO AMERICA?

The history of Jewish immigration to America reflects a unique cultural experience, but it also parallels the experiences of many other immigrants to this country. Jews came here for many of the same reasons as people of other national and ethnic groups, and they faced many similar challenges once they arrived. The periods of heightened Jewish immigration also correspond generally to the major waves of immigration to the U.S. in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Although Jews did not begin arriving in America in great numbers until the 19th century, the American Jewish community is in fact older than the United States itself. A few pioneering settlers and fur traders had already arrived in North America by the 16th century, and the first Jewish community was established in 1654. In September of that year, 23 Jewish settlers arrived in New Amsterdam from the Dutch colony of Recife, on the South American coast, to make a new home in North America.

When the British conquered New Amsterdam in 1664, they changed the name to New York and granted civil and religious rights to the Jews living there. By the time of the American Revolution, there were small Jewish communities in urban centers up and down the East Coast from Rhode Island, New York, and Philadelphia to Charleston and Savannah. These communities were established primarily by Sephardic Jews—that is, Jews of Spanish and Portuguese heritage.

Jewish immigration to America remained slow throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries, and the Jewish merchants who did make the trip generally settled in the urban communities of the East coast. By 1840, the American Jewish population numbered only about 15,000. The first Jewish resident of Cleveland is believed to have been a Sephardic Jew who moved here from New York in 1835. His name was Daniel Levy Maduro Peixotto. He came to North-east Ohio to take a position at the Willoughby Medical College. But it wasn’t until a few years later that the first bona fide Jewish community was established in Cleveland. A major wave of Jewish immigration from Germany began in the late 1830s, and it had a powerful impact on the Jews of Cleveland and America.

Did Jews participate in the American Revolution?
By the eve of the American Revolution, there were roughly 2,000 Jews living in the colonies and most strongly supported the Revolution. Many laid down their lives for the cause. Francis Salvador of Georgia was the first Jew to give his life for America’s independence, on July 1, 1776.

Were Jews welcome in Early America?
In 1790, President George Washington wrote to the president of the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island “May the children of the stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants, while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid.”
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WHO WERE CLEVELAND'S FIRST JEWISH SETTLERS?

During the 19th century, as many as three million German-speaking Europeans migrated to the United States. Among that group were several hundred thousand Jews. In addition to escaping the after-effects of the Napoleonic Wars and seeking economic opportunities, these immigrants hoped for relief from restrictive laws in their homelands. Many had supported the political revolutions that sprang up across Europe in 1848. When the revolutions failed, thousands fled to America to find the freedoms they sought.

On May 5, 1839, 15 Jewish immigrants left Unsenleben, Bavaria for America. Two years earlier, their townsmen, Simon Thornman, had established a fur-trading business in the town of Cleveland, and they chose to settle there as well. The Ohio and Erie Canal was completed in 1833, permitting early immigrants to arrive by lake-steamer from Buffalo after navigating the Erie Canal from New York City. By the 1850s, railroads offered quicker and more direct routes to Cleveland.) Like other immigrants to America, the Unsenleben Jews were seeking a better life in America. Yet, upon their departure, their rabbi gave them a letter asking them not to forget their faith:

“Friends! You are traveling to a land of freedom where the opportunity will be presented to live without compulsory religious education. Resist the tempting freedom and do not turn away from the religion of our fathers. Do not throw away your holy religion for quickly lost earthly pleasures…”

These immigrants arrived in Cleveland to find a booming mercantile center. With the city’s prime location on Lake Erie at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River, along with the completion of the Ohio Canal in 1832, Cleveland was a natural distribution point for goods heading to the country’s interior. Industry was expanding as well, and the population grew accordingly. As with any immigrant community, Cleveland's newly arrived German Jews immediately tried to fulfill their needs for housing, work, education, mutual support, and religious practice.

One of the community's first orders of business was to purchase land for a Jewish cemetery. In July 1840, Thornman and his neighbors bought an acre of land at the corner of Willott St. (now Fulton St.) and Monroe St. They also founded the Israelitic Society for Worship. By 1850, that congregation had split into Anshe Chesed (now Rodef Shalom Temple) and Tifereth Israel (now The Temple). Local public schools were inadequate in the 1840s, so these synagogues provided secular as well as religious education for the community's young people. A synagogue is sometimes called a schul, which is the Yiddish word for school.

Cleveland’s German-Jewish immigrants found crowded living quarters in the Centre Market area east of the Cuyahoga River, and by 1860 the city’s 1,200 Jewish inhabitants were clustered in the Woodland neighborhood. Many of the Jews who settled in Cleveland were shopkeepers and peddlers, although a few were skilled craftsmen. Peddlers would often carry their wares from door to door or town to town, hoping eventually to save up enough money to open their own shop. A few of these early entrepreneurs prospered in this land of opportunity, building small businesses into retail and industrial giants. Halle’s Department Store, for example, was started by Samuel and Salomon Halle, who had learned the business from their father Moses. Moses emigrated from Germany in 1848.

By 1880, the Cleveland Jewish community numbered about 3,500. They were primarily of German origin and had assimilated to a large degree into the general life of the city. That decade, however, saw the beginning of the next wave of Jewish immigration. Once again, the Jewish community would experience radical changes as a result.

Who was the first Jewish child born in Cleveland?

Simon Thornman married Regina Klein, one of the Unsenleben settlers, in 1840, the first Jewish marriage in Cleveland. Their son, Samuel, born the same year, was the first Jewish child born here.
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**Who were the next wave of Jewish immigrants?**

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**WHO WERE THE NEXT WAVE OF JEWISH IMMIGRANTS?**

Over the next half-century, millions of immigrants arrived in the United States. Almost 600,000 Eastern European immigrants settled in the Cleveland region alone, including about 70,000 Jews who sought freedom from the economic hardships and anti-Semitism they faced in their home countries.

The new immigrants probably seemed strange to their Americanized German cousins—they dressed differently, spoke a different language—Yiddish—and didn’t have much to call their own. Nonetheless, the local community established and expanded a number of social service agencies to serve the needs of the growing community. The Jewish Community Federation was founded in 1903 to coordinate fundraising for Jewish charities. The Jewish Orphan Asylum opened in 1868; in 1941, it became Belfleure Jewish Children’s Bureau. The Aged and Infirm Israelites Home (later renamed for Moses Montefiore) was founded in 1882,
and the Hebrew Orthodox Old Age Home (later renamed Menorah Park) opened in 1906. Mt. Sinai hospital was established in 1902.

The Jews of German descent were strongly influenced by Reform Judaism, which began in Germany during the 19th century. Reform Judaism sought to update the religion and create modes of practice more in line with a modern lifestyle. By contrast, the Eastern European immigrants tended to be aligned with the Orthodox form of Jewish practice, which clung more closely to traditional observance. The synagogues and schools established by the different segments of the community reflected these affiliations. The newer arrivals also retained the use of Yiddish—the traditional language of Eastern European Jews. Yiddish-language newspapers and Yiddish theater productions were very popular.

By the 1870s, young or newly arrived Jews no longer peddled goods, but received their business training as clerks or bookkeepers in the firms of relatives or other Jewish business owners. The community was involved in retail and wholesale dry goods, hides and furs, grocery and clothing establishments, and, to a lesser degree, as commission merchants, shippers and bankers. Others went into the building trades. Still others became interested in manufacturing, especially clothing and textiles. By 1900 Cleveland’s largely Jewish-owned garment industry was among the most important in America, second only to New York.

Garment factories were often grueling places to work—sometimes referred to as “sweatshops.” Although Cleveland’s garment workers actually fared better than some, they still worked long hours for little pay. The widespread exploitation of workers and the absence of labor laws led to the rise of labor unions during this period. Jewish immigrants were often at the forefront of this movement. Cleveland’s main Jewish neighborhood, in the Woodland area, remained crowded and poor. Single-family homes housed three or four families, and they often took in boarders to make extra money. Everyone worked to help support their families. By the early 20th century, however, the city’s growing Jewish community spread to the Glenville and Kinsman areas.

Glenville was a popular destination for the emerging Eastern European Jewish middle class. This densely populated area was home to many Jewish businesses and community organizations. The Jewish community in Kinsman was smaller and primarily working-class. Kinsman became a center for Jewish unions and socialist activity.

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN AMERICAN?**

For most immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the primary goal was to become “American.” This usually meant speaking English, living and dressing like other Americans, and making enough money to support their families and eventually move out of the immigrant neighborhoods. Often, community groups tried to help new arrivals by offering English classes, job training, and advice on how to adapt to American life. Many immigrants were fiercely patriotic about their new country and eventually became naturalized citizens.

There was often tension between the desire to become American and the wish to retain cultural, religious, or ethnic identity. Many Eastern European Jews continued to speak Yiddish and follow the rules of Orthodox Judaism. They held on to the ritual and personal objects they had brought with them from the Old Country. Others disregarded their Jewish heritage altogether for the sake of Americanization; exactly what the Unileben document had warned against! Immigrants today continue to struggle with this challenging dynamic, regardless of where they are from.
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Lower Grades

- If you were moving to a new place and could only bring one small suitcase, how would you decide what to bring and what to leave behind?
- What do you think is the hardest part of moving to a new land? Learning a new language? Eating new foods? Getting used to the weather? Finding a job?
- Imagine you are living in Cleveland 100 years ago. Write a letter to an overseas relative in which you describe a typical day in your life. What does your family do to earn a living? What is like in your neighborhood and your school?

For Upper Grades

- What opportunities did America offer to immigrants in the past? What challenges did they face? What about immigrants coming to America today?
- Do you think it is more important for an immigrant to assimilate as quickly as possible or should he/she try to maintain former traditions and practices? Does the desire to maintain former ways prevent one from fully becoming American?

Marcus Spiegel and his family came to Northeast Ohio from Germany in 1849. In 1861, Spiegel joined the Union forces, fighting as a colonel in the 120th Ohio Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War. In 1864, he was killed in battle. After the war, Marcus’ brother Joseph founded the nationally known Spiegel mail-order catalogue company.

Brothers Charles, Leonard, and Max Ratowczer changed their name to Ratner when they arrived in Cleveland from Poland in the early 1920s. By 1926, the three became partners in the Forest City building materials company. They soon expanded to the real estate market, eventually becoming one of the country’s leading real estate development firms. The family continues to use its wealth and standing to support Jewish charities throughout Northeast Ohio.

Sarah Sher was born in Lithuania. When she was 25, she and her son Hyman came to Cleveland to join her husband Bernard who had arrived two years before. After Hyman died Sarah opened a confectionary shop on Scovill Avenue to support her family.

Born in Poland in 1879, Rose Pastor immigrated to Cleveland with her family in 1890. As a child, she worked in Cleveland’s sweatshops, educating herself when she could find the time. As an adult, she moved to New York and became a well-known writer, labor activist, and anti-war protestor.

CLEVELAND VOICES

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What is a tradition? What are some of the traditions you and your family participate in?

Jewish families arriving from Europe in the 1880s brought things with them from their homeland that represented their cultural traditions. What do you think some of those things were?

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What opportunities did America offer to immigrants in the past? What challenges did they face? What about immigrants coming to America today?

Do you think it is more important for an immigrant to assimilate as quickly as possible or should he/she try to maintain former traditions and practices? Does the desire to maintain former ways prevent one from fully becoming American?
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Lower Grades

- If you were moving to a new place and could only bring one small suitcase, how would you decide what to bring and what to leave behind?
- What do you think is the hardest part of moving to a new land? Learning a new language? Getting used to the weather? Finding a job?
- What is a tradition? What are some of the traditions you and your family participate in?
- What opportunities did America offer to immigrants in the past? What challenges did they face? What about immigrants coming to America today?
- Do you think it is more important for an immigrant to assimilate as quickly as possible or should he/she try to maintain former traditions and practices? Does the desire to maintain former ways prevent one from fully becoming American?

For Upper Grades

- Imagine you are a Jewish peddler in Cleveland in the 1880s. Write an account of your travels. Include places you visited, things you sold, where you slept, what you ate, people you met, your profit and loss, and your feelings about moving from place to place.
- Research how many Jews came to America during the period 1880-1924. In which years did the largest number arrive? What major events happened during those years that might have caused them to leave Europe for America?
- How important do you think institutions such as schools, orphanages, community centers, and religious organizations were in creating Cleveland’s Jewish neighborhoods in the 1880s? Are similar institutions still important in today’s communities?

CLEVELAND VOICES

- Marcus Spiegel and his family came to Northeast Ohio from Germany in 1849. In 1861, Spiegel joined the Union forces, fighting as a colonel in the 120th Ohio Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War. In 1864, he was killed in battle. After the war, Marcus’ brother Joseph founded the nationally known Spiegel mail-order catalogue company.
- Born in Poland in 1879, Rose Pastor immigrated to Cleveland with her family in 1890. As a child, she worked in Cleveland’s sweatshops, educating herself when she could find the time. As an adult, she moved to New York and became a well-known writer, labor activist, and anti-war resistor.
- Brothers Charles, Leonard, and Max Ratowczer changed their name to Ratner when they arrived in Cleveland from Poland in the early 1920s. By 1926, the three became partners in the Forest City building materials company. They soon expanded to the real estate market, eventually becoming one of the country’s leading real estate development firms. The family continues to use its wealth and standing to support Jewish charities throughout Northeast Ohio.
- Sarah Sher was born in Lithuania. When she was 25, she and her son Hyman came to Cleveland to join her husband Bernard who had arrived two years before. After Hyman died Sarah opened a confectionery shop on Scovill Avenue to support her family.
**VOCABULARY**

**Assimilate** To adapt or adjust one’s behaviors to become like those of the surrounding culture.

**Antisemitism** Hatred of Jews.

**Citizen** A person who accepts formal loyalty to a nation or state based on birth or naturalization and is entitled to certain rights based on this allegiance.

**Ethnic, Ethnicity** One’s affiliation with a particular cultural, racial, or religious group.

**Immigration** Moving to or settling in a country or region to which one is not native.

**Jewish** Having to do with Jews or with their culture or religion.

**Orthodox Judaism** A branch of Judaism that strictly observes the traditional laws.

**Reform Judaism** A branch of Judaism that believes the laws of the religion can be modified in accordance with the modern world.

**Schul** The Yiddish word for “school.” It is sometimes used to refer to a synagogue.

**Sephardic** Jews of Spanish and Portuguese descent.

**Sweatshop** A factory where employees work long hours for low pay under poor conditions, especially common in the garment industry.

**Synagogue** A Jewish house of prayer.

**Labor Union** An association of employees (especially within the same field) organized to negotiate with employers for labor rights.

**Yiddish** A language historically spoken by Jews of Central and Eastern Europe, combining German with Hebrew and Slavic influences.

**RESOURCES**

**Books for Teachers**


This comprehensive resource for teaching immigration to students in grades 4-8 includes primary sources, immigrant interviews, suggested activities, and student reproducibles.


Cordasco’s vast compilation includes over 2,500 entries on a wide range of general and specialized immigration topics.


A comprehensive, scholarly history of the Cleveland Jewish community from 1840 up to the end of the 20th century, with an extensive index for easy reference.


Beginning with a description of life in the Old Country, Howe’s wide-ranging historical survey tells the story of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their attempts to maintain Yiddish culture while finding their place in American life.


Check full of black-and-white photographs of the Jewish community of Cleveland from the 19th century to the present, with concise explanatory captions.

**Books for Students**


Freedman uses photos by Jacob Riis and others to provide insights into the home, school, work, and play lives of immigrant kids around the turn of the 20th century. Elementary.


Writings and recollections by American Jews – from the first Jewish immigrants to this country up to the present. It includes mini bios of prominent individuals and families, as well as well captioned black-and-white photos, a timeline of American Jewry, and an introduction by Mandy Patinkin. Upper elementary to high school.


The personal experiences of American immigrants from 50 different countries are vividly captured in this powerful collection of oral histories. High school.


This richly illustrated picture book tells the personal story of one Jewish family’s journey from Poland to the United States in the early 20th century. Early elementary.


Taylor’s classic about a family of sisters on the Lower East Side offers a beautiful portrait of immigrant life and Jewish tradition. Upper elementary and middle school.


Telushkin’s beautifully designed overview of Jewish immigrant life in America is augmented with removable facsimiles of historical documents and photographs. Elementary and middle school.

**WEBSITES**

http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Homepage

http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/immigration_set2.html
“Immigration...The Changing Face of America” (Library of Congress educational resource)

http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/070_immi.html
“Selected Images of Ellis Island and Immigration, ca. 1880-1920” (from the collections of the Library of Congress)

http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/
“The New Americans” (PBS educational page)

http://www.state.gov/g/prm/index.htm
“Immigration: Stories of Yesterday and Today” (from Scholastic)
**VOCABULARY**

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**RESOURCES**

**Books for Teachers**

- **Baicker, Karen. Immigration Then and Now. Scholastic Professional Books, 1997.** This comprehensive resource for teaching immigration to students in grades 4–8 includes primary sources, immigrant interviews, suggested activities, and student reproducibles.
- **Rubinstein, Judah, with Jane A. Avner. Merging Traditions: Jewish Life in Cleveland (Revised Edition). The Kent State University Press, 2004.** Check full of black-and-white photographs of the Jewish community of Cleveland from the 19th century to the present, with concise explanatory captions.

**Books for Students**

- **Freedman, Russell. Immigrant Kids. Puffin, 1995.** Freedman uses photos by Jacob Riis and others to provide insights into the home, school, work, and play lives of immigrant kids around the turn of the 20th century. Elementary.
- **Hooler, Dorothy and Thomas. The Jewish American Family Album. Oxford University Press, 1995.** Writings and recollections by American Jews - from the first Jewish immigrants to this country up to the present. It includes mini bios of prominent individuals and families, as well as well-captioned black-and-white photos, a timeline of American Jewry, and an introduction by Mandy Patinkin. Upper elementary to high school.

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- [http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm](http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Homepage
- [http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/immigration_set2.html](http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/immigration_set2.html) “Immigration...The Changing Face of America” (Library of Congress educational resource)
- [http://www.loc.gov/print/list/070_immi.html](http://www.loc.gov/print/list/070_immi.html) “Selected Images of Ellis Island and Immigration, ca. 1880-1920” (from the collections of the Library of Congress)
- [http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/“The New Americans” (PBS educational page)](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/“The New Americans” (PBS educational page)
- [http://www.state.gov/g/prm/](http://www.state.gov/g/prm/) Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (U.S. Department of State)
The Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage joins an elite group of world-class institutions as a living testament to the courage, conviction, aspirations and achievements of Cleveland’s Jewish community. The stories of individuals and families—past and present—come to life through state-of-the-art exhibitions, interactives and films, oral histories, photographs and artifacts. The Museum includes The Temple-Tifereth Israel Gallery, an internationally-recognized collection of Judaica, and a special exhibition gallery featuring significant exhibitions of national and international acclaim.

The Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage is a partnership between The Maltz Family Foundation, the Jewish Community Federation’s Centennial Initiative and The Temple-Tifereth Israel with research support from the Western Reserve Historical Society.