

Yom Ha'atzma'ut Programming Ideas

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Dear Educators,

As May approaches, many of us are thinking ahead to the modern secular Israeli holidays – Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzma'ut (Israeli Memorial Day and Independence Day). For some in Reconstructionist communities, these days mark an important moment of Jewish history that we celebrate each year; for some, these days are a time to acknowledge the tension of conflicting national narratives; for some in our communities, these are days to wrestle with Jewish sovereignty and the Nakba. And for some in our communities, these days are a time for all of these ethical postures. As a movement, we treasure the plurality present in our communities and believe ourselves to be stronger by having space for a variety of perspectives.

This year Yom Hazikaron/Yom Ha'atzma'ut falls on May 13-14, 2024. With the prospect of ongoing military action in Israel/Gaza, we know that this day may feel more challenging than usual. In that spirit, we have put together a collection of resources for you to explore as you make decisions for your students and school community. This document is a list of ideas for the many directions one could use to approach this day. The storybooks suggested have recommended ages, and the activities can be structured or adapted to fit with various age groups. Because of the diversity of our communities, we know that not every idea and resource listed here will work for everyone, but our hope is that everyone will find something that works for their community.

If you would like to read Reconstructing Judaism's most recent statements on the current situation in Israel/Gaza, [please check out our website](#).

If you have any questions or want to have a further conversation, please reach out to Rabbi Lily Solochek (LSolochek@ReconstructingJudaism.org).

Starting with a Goal

As you prepare for Yom Ha'atzma'ut this year, here are some questions you could ask to get started:

- ❖ What are our **goals** and **objectives** for this program? How does this program fit into the larger curricular arc of the year? How does this program fit with the larger community conversations taking place right now?
- ❖ Here are some potential goals to choose from:
 - Building a personal and spiritual connection to the Land of Israel
 - Learning about Israeli culture
 - Creating Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzma'ut experiences that mirror how the State of Israel memorializes and celebrates
 - Understanding the tension of two national narratives (Israeli and Palestinian)
 - Learning from Israelis and/or Palestinians in our community
 - Exploring Palestinian narratives
 - Learning about efforts towards peace
- ❖ Who will be participating? Is this program just for **students**, open to **families**, open to the wider synagogue **community**? Is this program connected to or in response to synagogue or community-wide programming happening on this day?

Potential Programming Ideas

Now that you have a goal and audience, here are some ideas for programming. Please note, this guide is meant to be just that: a guide to help you ideate, frame and create an educational experience that works for your students. Not every idea listed below will resonate for everyone, our goal is that everyone will be able to find something that works for your community.

Building a personal and spiritual connection to the Land of Israel

- ❖ **Explore prayers** that talk about the Land of Israel. Invite students to share their own reflections on these prayers: do they resonate with students? What does it mean to feel connected to a place? What places do students feel connected to and why? What feels most challenging about these prayers? Some potential prayers to explore:
 - **The prayers for rain & dew**, which connect to the rainy season in Israel. In the Gevurot of the Amidah (pg.95 in Kol Haneshama: Shabbat Vehagim), and during the **Amidah for Pesach and Shemini Atzeret** (pg. 324-5 in Kol Neshama: Shabbat Vehagim).
 - **Prayer for Traveling to Israel** (pg. 693 in Kol Haneshama: Shabbat Vehagim).
 - **Agricultural holidays** (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot) which are based on the harvest times of Israel. How does celebrating these holidays connect us as Jews around the world to the Land of Israel?

- ❖ **Putting it on the map.** Select a few Tanakh or Talmudic stories and have students map the journeys or locations on a map to help them connect the historical narratives of the Jewish People with the world around them. This could include exploring the difference of nomadic and settled moments in Jewish history, times of Jewish sovereignty in the Land, or what it means to connect to

physical places.

- ❖ **Reflective writing and/or art.** Invite students to express their own relationship with the Land of Israel through writing and/or visual or performance art. Some potential prompts:
 - Where do I feel connected to myself, my family, my history, Judaism?
 - What do I know about Israel? What have I heard about Israel from family, friends, teachers, or others?
 - I think a Jewish country should (have, do, be, etc.)
 - What do I think or feel about Israel?

- ❖ **Creating Prayers.** Invite students to create their own prayers in connection with Israel. These could be prayers for peace, for the people who live there, for the future, or anything else that feels important to them.

Learning about Israeli culture

- ❖ **Israeli music.** Select a few Israeli songs and play them for students, providing translations. What messages are in the songs? Jewish? Spiritual? Political? Social? How does this artist convey their experience or hopes for Israel?

- ❖ **Israeli poetry, visual or performance art.** What messages do you find here? What can we learn about Israeli history, culture, experience, dreams, etc.? You could also have students create their own poetry, or artwork in response to the poetry they read and display them together. Some Israeli poets to explore:
 - Yehuda Amichai
 - Rahel Bluwstein
 - Dalia Ravikovitch

- ❖ **Food and recipes.** Israel is sometimes called a “shakshuka”, a mixture of many cultures of immigrants from around the world. Choose a few Israeli recipes and have students explore their Jewish cultures of origin. How can food be a window into Israel?

- ❖ **Books highlighting Israeli history and culture for kids:**
 - Engineer Arielle and the Israel Independence Day Surprise, by Deborah Bodin Cohen (Recommended age: 4-5 years old.)
 - First Rain, by Charlotte Herman (Recommended age: 5-6 years old.)
 - A Concert in the Sand, by Tami Shem-Tov (Recommended age: 6-7 years old.)
 - The Language of Angels, by Richard Michelson (Recommended age: 7-8 years old.)
 - Check out your synagogue’s library for more!

Creating Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha’atzma’ut experiences that mirror how the State of Israel memorializes and celebrates

- ❖ **Understanding the calendar.** Look at the calendar of the modern holidays of this month: Yom Hashoah is followed by seven days (Shiva for the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust), followed by Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha’atzma’ut. Invite students to reflect on how these holidays are connected (or not) and what it means to have modern Jewish/Israeli holidays in addition to Biblical and ancient holidays.

- ❖ **Play the memorial siren.** Show students videos of traffic, school, work, and people, all stopping and participating in a moment of silence together. Can you imagine how this might feel for those participating? What messages are embedded in this ritual?

- ❖ **Read Israel's Declaration of Independence.** What feels most important in this document? What feels most challenging? Invite students to write their own ideas of what a Jewish state should do/be/act/etc.

Understanding the tension of two national narratives (Israeli and Palestinian)

- ❖ **Read stories** that center the tension. Some suggestions:
 - [Daniel and Ismail](#), by Juan Pablo Iglesias Yacher (Recommended age: 3-6 years old).
 - [Sitti's Secrets](#), by Naomi Shihab Nye (Recommended age: 5-8 years old)
 - [The Boy and the Wall](#), by Amahl Bishara (Recommended age: (9+ years old).
- ❖ [Reframing Israel curriculum](#). Sorted by age group and topic, this curriculum gives students a variety of perspectives to explore.
- ❖ **Explore** [Learning Each Other's Historical Narrative: Palestinians and Israelis](#).
- ❖ **Read excerpts** from *Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel-Palestine*, (edited by Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-On, and Eyal Naveh, 2012)

Learning from Israelis and/or Palestinians in our community

- ❖ **Invite Israelis and/or Palestinians** from your community to share their stories. Choose a topic to invite your guests to reflect on, and remember, Israelis and Palestinians have lives and stories beyond the conflict.

- ❖ Guests could share family stories, recipes, music, or personal history. They could reflect on living in America and finding diaspora community here.
- ❖ Older students could interview guests, could make a video sharing what they learned and (with permission) clips of the guests' stories.

Exploring Palestinian narratives

- ❖ **Read Books** that center Palestinian narratives and stories.
 - Tunjur, Tunjur, Tunjur: A Palestinian Folktale (Recommended age: 4-8 years old)
 - Baba, What Does My Name Mean?, by Rifk Ebeid (Recommended age: 5-12 years old).
 - We Are Palestinian: A Celebration of Culture and Tradition, by Reem Kassis and Noha Eilouti (Recommended age: 6-10 years old)
 - Sitti's Olive Oil, by N. Salem (Recommended age: 7+ years old)
- ❖ **Read Palestinian poetry.** Explore the perspectives of Palestinian poetry. Encourage students to create their own poetry or art to reflect on their learning. Some poets you might explore:
 - Mahmoud Darwish
 - Lena Khalaf Tuffaha
 - Mosab Abu Toha
- ❖ **Reframing Israel curriculum.** Sorted by age group and topic, this curriculum gives students a variety of perspectives to explore.

Learning about efforts towards peace

- ❖ Read books that center peace and coexistence
 - [Yaffa and Fatima, Shalom, Salaam](#), by Fawzia Gilani-Williams
(Recommended age: 4-9 years old)
 - [Snow in Jerusalem](#), by Deborah da Costa (Recommended age: 4-8 years old)

- ❖ Learn about organizations committed towards peace and building Jewish-Palestinian coexistence. Some examples include:
 - [Shalom Achshav](#)
 - [Yad B'yad Schools](#)
 - [A Land for All](#)
 - [Parents Circle – Families Forum](#)
 - [Women Wage Peace](#)
 - [Standing Together](#)

- ❖ Invite an organization to speak about their work in peace efforts. As we always note, the views and opinions of these organizations may not completely align with Reconstructing Judaism. We encourage you to choose an organization that you feel your students could benefit from learning from and about.