

Countries Around the World™

Israel

Program Summary

Meet 11-year-old Dan. He and his family live in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. Join Dan as he looks for a postcard to send to his friend. While he searches, students will learn about Israel's government, currency and national symbols — the Star of David and the menorah. Next, Dan meets his father at the Wailing Wall and introduces students to some Jewish religious traditions as he dons a *tallit* (shawl) and a *kippah* (skullcap) to recite his prayers. Explore the cultural diversity of Israel when Dan and his father shop for coffee in a *souk*, an Arab marketplace. Discover the importance of Jerusalem to both the Jewish and Christian faiths when Dan tours holy sites like the Via Dolorosa and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. After a lunch of falafel, hummus and pita, Dan and his family prepare for the Sabbath by doing some last-minute shopping before the marketplaces close for the day of rest. Finally, as night falls, students will experience firsthand the Jewish customs associated with the Sabbath when Dan and his extended family attend synagogue for evening prayers and return home to have dinner together.

Country Information

- **location:** Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea; bordered by Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip
- **capital:** Jerusalem
- **official languages:** Hebrew, Arabic
- **type of government:** parliamentary democracy
- **total area:** approximately 20,770 sq km
- **climate:** temperate; hot and dry in southern and eastern desert areas
- **terrain:** Negev desert in the South; low coastal plain; central mountains; Jordan Rift Valley
- **natural resources:** includes timber, potash, copper ore, natural gas, phosphate rock, magnesium bromide, clays and sand
- **industries:** includes high-technology projects (including aviation, communications, computer-aided design and manufacturing, medical electronics, fiber optics), wood and paper products, potash and phosphates, food, beverages, tobacco, caustic soda, cement, construction, metals products, chemical products, plastics, diamond cutting, textiles and footwear
- **agricultural products:** includes citrus, vegetables, cotton, beef, poultry and dairy products

Vocabulary

Knesset — The parliament of Israel.

menorah — A ceremonial seven-branched candelabrum symbolizing the seven days of the creation of the world. A nine-branched menorah is used for the celebration of Hanukkah.

shekel — The currency of Israel.

Kotel — The Hebrew name of the Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall.

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kippah — Also “*kippa*” or “*yarmulke*.” A head covering, or skullcap, traditionally worn by Jewish men during religious services or all the time by some Jewish men.

tallit — A prayer shawl with ritually knotted fringe at each of four corners that is worn traditionally by Jewish males, especially at morning prayer.

souk — A traditional market found in many cities of the Arab world. It is usually an outdoor marketplace featuring many separate shops, that sell a wide variety of products.

falafel — Ground, spiced chickpeas that are shaped into balls and fried. It is also the name of a sandwich filled with such a mixture.

hummus — A smooth thick mixture of mashed chickpeas, tahini, oil, lemon juice and garlic.

Sabbath — Also “Shabbat.” A day of rest and worship traditionally observed by Jews from Friday evening to Saturday evening.

mezuzah — A case, containing a prayer on a parchment scroll, that is fixed to a doorpost by some Jewish families as a sign of their faith.

Torah — The Jewish Bible. It is also known as the Old Testament in the Christian Bible.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Tell students that they are about to embark on a video field trip to another country. While they are there, they will see, hear and experience famous places as well as local sites. Have students discuss what they would show if someone from another country was visiting their area. What famous places and local sites would you want him or her to see? What kinds of foods would you want to share? What are some pastimes or activities you would want that person to experience? What would you tell that person about life in your country?
- Provide students with an outline map of the world. Label Israel on the map and the date it was established. Have students select and label five other countries and their dates of establishment. Which country is the “oldest”? Which is the “youngest”? Are there any advantages to being an “old” or “young” country? Disadvantages?
- A person's identity can be based upon many different factors, such as religion or nationality. Lead a discussion on what constitutes identity and how it factors into students' lives. Ask questions, such as: What is identity? What are some things that you identify with? What makes up your identity? If you had to describe who you are as a person, what would you say?

Follow-up Activities

- Jerusalem is an important city for the Islamic, Christian and Jewish faiths. In small groups, have students investigate how Jerusalem relates to these religions. Each group should produce three fact posters, each one for a different religion, with a title, a picture or illustration and a minimum of five facts. Hang the posters up to create a mosaic in the classroom celebrating the different religious traditions associated with Jerusalem. As a starting point for understanding this city of intersecting cultures, read to the class Mark H. Podwall's *Jerusalem Sky: Stars, Crosses and Crescents* (Random House, 2005).
- In Hebrew, the word “Shalom” has a few different meanings: “hello,” “goodbye” and “peace.” In small groups, students can investigate words with multiple meanings in Hebrew or another language. For each word they find, have students perform a skit where they say the word and act out its different meanings while the rest of the class guesses the definitions. Students can then make an informational poster with their word, its meanings and accompanying illustrations for display on a word wall in the classroom.
- Falafel, hummus and pita bread are very popular foods in Israel and the Middle East. Enjoy a Middle Eastern food festival and share foods from this region. For each dish, have students prepare an informational placard telling the name of the food, its ingredients and any interesting facts about the dish.

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- Israel uses a seven-branched menorah flanked by two olive branches as its official emblem that represents some of the country's ideals. Students will have fun creating their own emblems with symbols that represent them in some way. Provide students with materials to make their emblems and instruct them to write captions for their emblems describing what their symbols represent. Display the emblems in the classroom.
- The *souk* is a lively place where people go to shop and meet people. Working in groups, have students pretend that they are merchants planning to set up a stand at a *souk*. Have them find out what types of things are sold at an Israeli *souk*. Students should come up with a name and slogan for their business, what they will sell and a price list featuring prices in both shekels and U.S. dollars. Set up a "mini-*souk*" in the classroom with props in place of goods. Students can take turns role playing as vendors and customers.
- Students will have fun learning about King Solomon and why he is considered to be one of the greatest kings of Israel by investigating the many stories surrounding him. Read a story about King Solomon to the class, such as Blu Greenberg and Linda Tarry's *King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* (Pitsopany Press, 1997), or Dalia Renberg's *King Solomon and the Bee* (HarperCollins Children's Books, 1994). Help students generate an understanding of Solomon by asking questions like: How does Solomon deal with the challenges in the story? What qualities does Solomon exhibit? How does Solomon interact with the other characters? What does this say about him? Then, instruct students write and illustrate original stories about King Solomon, based on their understanding of him and following the general format of the traditional tales. Students can share their stories with the class.
- From fertile coastal plains to the arid Negev Desert in the South, Israel's geography and climate is quite varied! Provide students with an outline map of Israel and use different colors and/or symbols to indicate the geography and climate of Israel's four main regions: the coastal plain, the central hills, the Jordan Rift Valley, and the Negev Desert. Teachers can visit countrystudies.us/israel/35.htm to learn more about these regions.

Suggested Internet Resources

- embassyofisrael.org/kids/index.html
Discover Israel and what it is like to live there! Assembled by the Embassy of Israel in Washington, DC, this children's site provides information on the culture, history, language, politics and geography of Israel.
- www.mfa.gov.il/MFA
This site provides information on the culture, history, people, economy, politics and geography of Israel.
- www.worldalmanacforkids.com/explore/nations/israel.html
This site by the World Almanac for Kids features comprehensive information relating to the nation of Israel.

Suggested Print Resources

- Bowden, Rob. *Jerusalem (Great Cities of the World)*. Gareth Stevens, Milwaukee, WI; 2005.
- Hintz, Martin. *Israel*. Children's Press, Danbury, CT; 2006.
- Sherman, Josepha. *Your Travel Guide to Ancient Israel*. Lerner Publications, Minneapolis, MN; 2003.

Teacher's Guide written by Brian Wales, Curriculum Specialist, Schlessinger Media

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