

MEMORIES AND BLESSINGS

Creative Jewish Learning Using Historic Jewish Cemeteries



Jewish Federation
of Greater Philadelphia

jewishphilly.org

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Introduction: Do a Lesson WHERE?!

In a Jewish cemetery, of course!

Greater Philadelphia's historic Jewish cemeteries are under-used Jewish educational treasures. They are places of quiet respect. They are lush and tranquil and they help connect students to the past while making them feel more at ease about the future. Though in today's culture, we often shy away from discussing death with children, these conversations are in fact critical to their development. They can help equip our children with the tools necessary for managing grief when loss inevitably occurs.

Because these sites lack the macabre symbols of death that are often prevalent in non-Jewish burial grounds, not to mention popular culture, their serene beauty provides the perfect venue for non-traumatically introducing children to a cemetery. Visits to a cemetery provide reassuring moments of exploration, helping students to begin to explore their feelings and questions about the end of life. But just as importantly, these opportunities give the next generation access to the important traditions and sacred spaces that for hundreds of years have given their ancestors strength and solace during the most trying of times. While at a cemetery, students will experientially learn about Jewish death, mourning and burial practices.

Discussing death with children now is important preparation for the future. Without these conversations, children's imaginations often run wild, concocting all sorts of fearful scenarios. Providing genuine answers to difficult questions — even when those are only “No one knows for sure” — normalizes death, showing children that just because it may seem mysterious, it does not have to be terrifying. This groundwork goes a long way toward providing comfort when the day comes, as it does for all of us, when they will encounter the death of someone close.

The Philadelphia Jewish community is uniquely blessed with historic cemeteries from colonial times to the present, alongside its vibrant living Jewish community. A trip to the cemetery can prove to be a powerful lesson in belonging to a *kahal kadosh*, a sacred community, and being a part of something bigger than you and your family. It helps children to see themselves as a link on a long chain of Jewish continuity. What's more, a day of caring for historic Jewish cemeteries is an exercise in *mensch*-building. Your students' help is a valuable act of *גמילות חסדים*, *g'meloot chasidim*, acts of loving-kindness. Even our youngest learners can make an impact by gathering trash or cleaning a stone. Jewish cemeteries make Jewish history and tradition come alive. And they re-contextualize Hebrew, encouraging Hebrew students to use the language to unlock the mystery of the lives documented in stones.

For all these reasons and more, we encourage you to take your Jewish learning experiences into the historic Jewish cemeteries of Greater Philadelphia. To help, we've created a number of lesson plans and activity ideas, encompassing a broad spectrum of content matter and methods.

A visit to a Jewish cemetery can also:

- Provide a poignant and powerful experience with the Hebrew language. In a cemetery, none of your students will wonder “Why do I have to learn this?” There, Hebrew has a new context and being able to read Hebrew is a key to understanding the information on the stones.
- Provide a vital outdoor experience. Much research has been done about the nature-deprived and inactive American child. American cemeteries from the mid-19th century on were designed to provide beautiful natural experiences, and there are lots of possibilities for movement and interaction with nature during cemetery visits.
- Provide a multi-generational experience. Children of all ages can do something to help in a cemetery: gather trash, paint a stone and place it on a grave, learn historic facts, translate Hebrew names, or clean a gravestone. Older students and adults can actually be a part of a burial for an indigent member of the community with no family.
- Provide a logistically easy, ongoing service learning project. Historic cemeteries are always there to be visited and cared for. Inclement weather? No problem, you can come another day. A field trip can't get logistically easier than that.

Consider these possible curricular connections:

When studying *Chayay Sarah*

Add to the end-of-life lessons in lifecycle units

As part of a unit on American Jewish History

Or these school calendar days:

During the 10 days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur

MLK Day of Service

Synagogue or organizational Mitzvah Day

Last days of the school year

TO ARRANGE A VISIT TO MT. CARMEL, CONTACT:

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TO ARRANGE A VISIT TO GLADWYNE, CONTACT:

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Acknowledgements

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PART ONE

LESSONS BEFORE THE CEMETERY VISIT

These lessons will help you prepare your students for the visit to the cemetery.

Setting the Stage: Introduction to Death and Judaism — A Visit from Experts

Before the lessons on *K'vod HaMet*, honoring the dead and cemeteries, it will be useful to have a discussion about death in general and Judaism's teaching about it, especially if this has not already been covered as part of a life-cycle unit. To help facilitate the discussion, we also recommend being joined by an expert such as a rabbi or a child psychologist, or both.

You might also consider creating a programmatic piece for parents — similar in content and with the same experts — to discuss strategies for talking to children about death in developmentally appropriate ways. Parents are usually very grateful for guidance on this topic. Rabbi Tsurah August, staff Chaplain at Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia can be a resource for you for this program. Rabbi August can be reached at taugust@jfcsp Philly.org.

Possible Methodology:

1. Invite the students to describe any experiences they have had with the death of someone close to them. This may include pets or relatives, which are both significant losses to a child. Have tissues on hand should these memories bring tears. However, if they start crying, encourage them to keep talking rather than sending them away to wash their faces or compose themselves. This will model respect, gentle caring and concern instead of ostracism. Remember that all the children are looking to you to learn how to handle subjects like this.
 2. After all the children who want to share have done so, point out that lots of people have experienced these same kinds of losses. Shared experience connects us, but it does not make each loss any less important, personal and difficult.
 3. While the students are discussing their experiences, listen closely to details. Some of them may have experienced non-Jewish practices as their first experiences, some may have misinterpreted something they'd seen. These details will be helpful guides later when you are teaching about Jewish burial practices.
 4. Have the rabbi or other expert take over from there. Be sure to leave a lot of time for the children to ask their questions of the rabbi and/or guest expert.
 5. At the close of the discussion, make sure to thank the children and compliment them on the way they're taking on such a serious topic.
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LESSON 1

How Do You Say 'Cemetery' in Hebrew, and Why

Suitable for grades 5 and up, or students who have mastered the *alef-bet*, are reading words, and have some basic familiarity with prayer vocabulary.

Goals and Objectives

After participating in this lesson students will be able to:

- Understand the difference between בית and בית
- Understand that the word בית in Hebrew, often translated as 'House (of)' needn't be an actual building, but can also mean "place of..."
- Recognize the Hebrew root מ-ל-ע and know its several meanings in terms of space/place and time
- Understand that like in English, Hebrew has several words for "cemetery"
- Understand that Hebrew expressions for cemeteries reveal some of what Judaism teaches about death

Methodology

1. Divide the group into small teams, pairs, or individuals, depending on the size of your group.
2. Give the students a fixed amount of time, such as five minutes.
3. Have them come up with as many words for 'cemetery' as they can think of in English.
4. Give a point for each distinct word or phrase they come up with. Some possibilities are: graveyard, churchyard, burial ground, burying ground, necropolis, memorial park, memorial garden, boneyard, potter's field.
5. Reward an extra point for the team with the most.
6. Explain that it's similar in Hebrew; there are many expressions for a cemetery.
7. Pass out Handout 1.
8. Explain that this is both a list of ways to say 'cemetery' in Hebrew, AND a mystery to solve together.
9. Have the students practice reading the different Hebrew expressions aloud to each other.
10. Point out that the students are already familiar many of these words with from *tefillah*/Jewish prayer.
11. Have them translate as many words as they are able.
12. Explain that בית/Bayit is a house or building.
13. Explain that בית means "House of." It attaches to the word that comes after it. *Beit Sefer* is one example that students may already recognize.
14. Explain that בית doesn't have to be a building, it could also mean "place of".
15. Have the students find a word that is new to them. New vocabulary for them will probably be עֲלָמִין, an Aramaic word related to עולם.
16. Discuss the variety of meanings for the word עולם, *Olam*. You might think of it as an immense space — the world or the universe — or an immense amount of time, such as forever, eternity or infinity.
17. Ask the students whether any of the Hebrew names for cemetery were surprising or confusing. Why, for example, would a cemetery be called "a place of life" or a place of *Shalom*?
18. Ask the students what those Hebrew names seem to reveal about how Judaism thinks about death? Students may answer with ideas such as: death is peaceful, there is some kind of life after death, or that there is eternal life after death.

Closing

Have the students write down their questions. You could use 3x5 cards or have them write their questions on sticky notes and place them on a poster board.

After the lesson, forward the questions to the rabbi or whomever in your community would be best to answer those questions.

Share the answers at the next class meeting. You might even want to make a question box and make this a regular closing ritual for your class.

HANDOUT 1

Hebrew Names for Cemetery

בֵּית עוֹלָם

בֵּית שְׁלוֹם

בֵּית חַיִּים

בֵּית קְבָרוֹת

בֵּית עֲלָמִין

1. What one word do they all have in common: _____

2. בֵּית usually means “house of,” but most cemeteries are not buildings. How do you think we might translate the term instead: _____

3. Find the two words that have the same root: _____

LESSON 2

The Jewish Value of Honor/*Kavod*

Suitable for Grades 6 and up. Can be placed anywhere in a lifecycle unit on death. This lesson is based on original concepts by Sally Flaherty.

Goals and Objectives

After participating in this lesson, students will be able to:

- Articulate a personal definition of ‘honor’
- Know that כבוד *Kavod* is the Hebrew word for honor
- Identify המת כבוד *K’vod HaMet* /Honoring the deceased, as a *mitzvah*/value that drives Jewish death and burial customs
- Articulate the Jewish view on the sacredness of cemeteries
- Articulate the behaviors that should accompany being in such a sacred space

Methodology

1. Divide the class into small groups, pairs or individuals.
2. Distribute Handout 2 and ask them to complete the first question.
 - Optional: A concept such as honor rarely comes up in daily conversation and so it might initially be hard for the students to define it. It might help to give some examples of times when we commonly use the word “honor”:
 - o An ‘honor guard’ for the flag seen at start of football games
 - o The Boy Scout oath or promise begins...”On my honor, I will do my best...”
 - o Judges are addressed, “Your Honor”
 - o Many schools have ‘honor codes’ regarding test taking and homework.
3. Ask the students to share their definitions. Work together to come up with a single definition that encompasses everyone’s contributions.
4. Move on to the chart in Handout 2, asking the students to fill it out. If you used some examples during the definition activity, make sure the students come up with their own new ones.
5. Discuss the students’ ideas. Are there any commonalities?
6. Read the paragraph on *K’vod HaMet* aloud to the students, and have them practice reading and saying “*K’vod HaMet*.”
7. Have the students compile a list of ways to perform *K’vod HaMet*, “honor the dead.” Then have them share their lists.
 - Note: If you’ve already studied mourning and burial as part of a lifecycle unit, this may be a review for the students. But viewing it through the lens of *K’vod HaMet* may be new for them.
8. Discuss the students’ *K’vod HaMet* lists. If they have identified an act that is part of Jewish custom of burial and preparation, be sure to point that out using the Hebrew terminology whenever possible. If an idea is outside of Jewish practice, discuss why Judaism might or might not view it as *K’vod HaMet*.
 - Note: Students may include cremation on their lists. Some students might know of family members who have opted for cremation. Be careful not to condemn the practice, but explain that traditionally burning a body was considered an act of defilement, not honor. If any students point out that cremation may be better for the environment, you could take this opportunity to cite that as an interesting example of weighing between two Jewish value concepts: *K’vod HaMet* and *Bal Tashchit*, the Jewish value concept of not destroying needlessly, or not wasting anything. This could be what our sages called an “argument for the sake of heaven,” which they considered a good kind of argument.

9. Read the rest of Handout 2 aloud. Discuss the paragraphs and allow for questions. Don't worry if a question arises that you don't know the answer to. Have the student write the question to be answered later.

10. Ask the students to create a list of behaviors that would be inappropriate for a sacred space such as a cemetery. Collect them into one document and make that document part of the packet you will give out at the cemetery during the visit.

Optional Add On

Invite someone from the *Hevra Kaddisha*/Burial Society to speak to the students.

Closing

Ask the students to write down any questions they have based on today's class activities. After class, but before the next session, forward the questions to the rabbi or whomever in your community would be best to answer those questions. Share the answers at the next class meeting.

Check in with how the students felt about discussing such a big, complicated issue like death. Commend them for their willingness to be open in talking about something that a lot of people find difficult to discuss.

HANDOUT 2

כבוד | Honor

Define "Honor" in your own words: _____

List three different ways that we honor something or someone.

Person or Thing Being Honored:	How We Honor Them/It:

Do the ways we demonstrate honor have any characteristics in common? _____

The mitzvah or Jewish value most associated with death is called **כְבוֹד הַמֵּת** “*kavod ha met*” or in English, “honoring the dead.”

What are some ways that one could show honor to a person who has died? Consider how we honor both the actual physical person and also honor their memory.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Jewish tradition teaches that death is a natural process, and that there is some form of being that continues after death occurs. In Judaism, living people and those who are dead both deserve to be treated with *kavod*, honor. Jewish practice based on this value requires that the body be treated with utmost care until it is buried.

Jewish practice also states that cemeteries should be treated as special places. Judaism frowns upon any activity in a cemetery that would be dishonorable or disrespectful. One should not eat in a cemetery, for example.

What other activities do you think are inappropriate for a sacred setting like a cemetery?

LESSON 3: JUST BEFORE THE VISIT

Goals and Objectives

After participating in this lesson, students will be able to provide the definition of and use correctly some Hebrew terms associated with cemeteries and burial. This will also allow time for you to answer any questions the students may have in advance of the visit.

Methodology

1. Begin the class by reviewing the answers to any of the questions the students asked from the week(s) before.
2. Using any methodology that you normally use to teach Hebrew vocabulary, teach the words on Handout 3's vocabulary list. But because the vocabulary topic is a heavy one, it might be helpful to utilize games more than usual to keep the atmosphere light:
 - Have the students play team charades with the vocabulary words.
 - Have the teams spell out the words using their bodies (works best in a carpeted room). First team to form the word in a readable way wins a point.
3. Discuss the details of the visit to the cemetery.
4. Optional: Show this video (<https://www.today.com/parents/girl-makes-rocks-vandalized-graves-jewish-cemeteries-t109608>), which tells the story of a Florida girl who painted hundreds of stones to put on the graves of vandalized cemeteries. When the vandalized gravestones in Mt. Carmel were repaired, volunteers placed her painted stones on each of the repaired gravestones. Your students may find some if your visit is to Mt. Carmel. Students may even decorate their own stones in advance of your trip.

HANDOUT 3

Cemetery Vocabulary Words

Died, a male dead person	מָת
Died, a female dead person	מָתָה
Grave	קָבֵר
Graves	קְבֻרוֹת
Gravestone	מִצְבֵּה
Here	פֹּה
Buried	נִקְבַּר
Passed away (m)	נִפְטַר
Passed away (f)	נִפְטְרָה

HANDOUT 3

Review vocabulary

Honor

כבוד

Honoring the dead, the *mitzvah* associated with burial

כבוד המת

Cemetery

בית עולם

Cemetery

בית שלום

Cemetery

בית חיים

Cemetery

בית קברות

Cemetery

בית עלמין

PART TWO

LESSONS AND ACTIVITIES AT THE CEMETERY

Methodology

Mix and match the activities listed here to create the best experience for your group. However, asterisked sections are considered essential opportunities.

Historical Background*

Before you enter the cemetery, discuss its background. Feel free to choose to share any or all of the following history:

For Mt. Carmel:

- The need for a Jewish cemetery was one of the first formal steps that formed the Jewish community in Philadelphia in colonial times.
- The northeast Jewish cemeteries were built throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, which was also the height of Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe to America. Therefore, many of the people buried in the cemeteries were not born in the United States and often had little money.
- In the 1800s it became popular to create a green, park-like garden for cemeteries. In Philadelphia, cemeteries were often located near the end of train and trolley lines. To escape the grime of city life and enjoy some time in nature, families would pack lunches and visit their relatives buried in the cemetery.
- The area surrounding Mt. Carmel was a neighborhood where many Jews lived, and neighbors kept an eye on the cemetery. Mt. Carmel was even owned by the florist across the street from it. Over time, those families moved away, and today there is no remaining Jewish neighborhood left in the immediate area.
- While not owners of the cemetery, volunteer burial societies bought large sections of the cemetery in order to provide their members with burial plots. Families also bought family plots. At that time in history, child mortality rates were much higher than today, so there are many stones of young children. Also, in 1918 a flu pandemic spread across the world, infecting one out of five people on the planet.
- The cemeteries of the northeast, and in particular Mt. Carmel, have experienced vandalism over the years. In January 2017, hundreds of stones were found knocked over in one night. The Philadelphia Jewish community came together in response. Before a formal request was even made, about \$250,000 was raised to repair the damage. Over 500 tombstones were righted and reset by experts on historic monument conservation, a new fence was installed, debris was cleared, and the grounds were landscaped and leveled. However, many stones that had toppled over time for other reasons still remain in that condition.

For Har Hasetim Gladwyne Cemetery:

- The need for a Jewish cemetery was one of the first formal steps that formed the Jewish community in Philadelphia in colonial times.
- Har Hasetim (Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery) was established in 1892 or 1893 by burial societies, local *landsmanshaften* (immigrant benevolent associations) who sold burial plots to their members. Non-members also bought plots there, often as families. This time period was also the height of Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe to America. Therefore, many of the people buried in the cemeteries were not born in the United States and often had little money.
- As the system of *landsmanshaften* was superseded by synagogues, funeral homes, and cemeteries that offered perpetual care, burials in the Gladwyne cemetery diminished. There were only occasional burials throughout the 1920s and 30s. The last burial on the site took place in 1945 for Seaman Second Class Benjamin Schurr, in a family plot purchased in 1934.
- At that time in history, child mortality rates were much higher than today, so there are many stones of young children. Also, in 1918 a flu pandemic spread across the world, infecting one out of five people on the planet.

- In the 1800s it became popular to create a green, park-like garden for cemeteries. In Philadelphia, cemeteries were often located near the end of train and trolley lines. To escape the grime of city life and enjoy some time in nature, families would pack lunches and visit their relatives buried in the cemetery.
- The ownership of the Gladwyne site changed, possibly a few times, until it was sold to an independent Chevra Kadisha in 1914. Decades later, heirs of the “owner” of the Chevra Kadisha formed a corporation, Har Hasetim Associates, hoping to sell the land — now worth a considerable amount — to developers for luxury homes. Legal questions about the true ownership of the land, as well as opposition to disinterring those buried there by the Board of Rabbis and others in the community, led to a decades-long legal battle. In the end, the ownership of the cemetery was awarded to a nearby synagogue, Beth David, which is the current owner and steward of the burial ground.
- In 2011, members of the synagogue formed a nonprofit, the Friends of the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery.

KAVANAH'-SETTING

Before you enter the cemetery, gather for Mt. Carmel on the grass by the parking lot, or in Gladwyne Memorial by the storage shed at the entrance after the appeasement. Spread the four different statement posters (Handout 4) widely across the area. Direct the students to gather at the statement that most resonates for them, or that is closest to expressing the reason why they feel they’re participating in this *mitzvah* activity. Then, ask the students to share why they chose the statement that they did. Direct them to keep that *kavanah*/intention in mind as they go about their work.

HANDOUT 4

Quotes and Statements

- From Judaism’s perspective, the self does not disappear at death. Although Judaism is famously ambiguous about the details, we know the eternal soul is real and exists in some way beyond the grave. Judaism holds that this world is the world of doing, and the next stage, “the world to come,” is “where we experience the eternal reality of whatever we’ve become.”
- “Show me your cemeteries and I will show you what kind of people you have.”
—*Benjamin Franklin*
- “To be a Jew is to be a link in the chains of the generations.”
—*Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks*
- “There was great comfort in knowing that I could do something for some one who could not say thank you...that caring for the dead is the highest *mitzvah* one can do. But if one is capable of giving to one who is dead, how much more so should we give to those...still alive.”
—*Debbie Friedman*

CLEANUP DESCRIPTIONS*

For Mt. Carmel and Har Nebo

Important Cleanup Notes

Slanted gravestones are unstable. Do not let students work on or near them. Students should never attempt to pick up a stone and right it themselves; that is a job for professionals with heavy equipment.

Students who are *kohanim* and do not want to enter the cemetery can gather the litter that's all around the fence surrounding the cemetery along Cheltenham and Frankford Avenues.

Cleanup Tasks at Mt. Carmel

Have the students clean the litter and debris from the cemetery. Students who are old enough can also cut down weeds or ivy that might be covering stones, with supervision. Along the fence abutting the park, Japanese knotweed has taken root and needs to be pulled wherever found. In the fall, leaves and black walnuts can be gathered and bagged. Bags can get heavy quickly, so keep track of their weight more than how full they are. Place all bags by the trashcan near the parking lot for municipal pickup later.

For Har Hasetim/Gladwyne Memorial Cemetery

Important Cleanup Notes

Slanted gravestones are unstable. Do not let students work on or near them. Students should never attempt to pick up a stone and right it themselves; that is a job for professionals with heavy equipment.

At the Gladwyne site there is no fence or demarcation of where the cemetery begins, thus there is no way for students and volunteers who are *kohanim* not to enter the cemetery. Please factor that in to your plans for your group.

Cleanup Tasks at Har Hasetim/Gladwyne Memorial Cemetery

Decades of neglect have turned the site into a completely wooded area, covered with wild flora. A prevalent grave style is a "cradle grave." Much of the work is pulling weeds and clearing branches from in and around grave settings. The cemetery covers a lot of acreage, so there's plenty of weeding.

Work is underway to create clearly demarcated trails through the cemetery, so the students — depending on age — might be asked to shovel, haul and spread wood chips, and move logs to create pathway boundaries.

HOW TO READ A JEWISH TOMBSTONE

Reprinted courtesy of Jewishgen.org

Using this guide from JewishGen.org, have the students find interesting tombstones and "translate" what's on them. Make sure they don't "cheat" by looking on the English side of the stone (there's often other information on the English side, anyway, so it won't necessarily help to look at it).

Reading Hebrew Tombstones

Jewish tombstones with Hebrew inscriptions have an added value to genealogists. Because they show the date of death (and sometimes the age or date of birth) and also include the given name of the deceased's father, they permit you to go back one more generation. If any Hebrew characters at all are written on a tombstone, they are most likely to be the person's Hebrew name. A Hebrew name always includes a patronymic, the person's father's given name. This is a unique feature of Jewish tombstones, and a great boon to Jewish genealogy.

Here are a few helpful pointers if you cannot read Hebrew:

- At the top of most Jewish tombstones is the abbreviation ן ך, which stands for *po nikbar* or *po nitman*, meaning "here lies."

- At the end of many Hebrew tombstone inscriptions you will find the abbreviation ת נ צ ב ה, which is an abbreviation of a verse from the Bible, the first book of Samuel, 25:29, “May his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life.”
- The Hebrew word בן, *ben*, means “son of”, as in “Yaakov ben Yitzhak”, meaning “Yaakov the son of Yitzhak.” The Hebrew word בת, *bat*, means “daughter of.” On tombstones, these words will often appear as ב ר, an abbreviation for *ben reb*, meaning “son (or daughter) of the worthy,” followed by the father’s given name. The word *reb* is a simple honorific, it does not mean Rabbi.

Hebrew Alphabet

1	א	aleph
2	ב	bet
3	ג	gimel
4	ד	dalet
5	ה	hay
6	ו	vav
7	ז	zayin
8	ח	khet
9	ט	tet
10	י	yud
20	כ	kaf
30	ל	lamed
40	מ	mem
50	נ	nun
60	ס	samech
70	ע	ayin
80	פ	pay
90	צ	tzade
100	ק	kuf
200	ר	resh
300	ש	shin
400	ת	tav

The Jewish Calendar

Dates are written in Hebrew according to the Jewish calendar. This calendar, which starts its “year one” with the Creation of the World, was probably designed by the patriarch Hillel II in the Fourth Century. He calculated the age of the world by computing the literal ages of biblical characters and other events in the Bible, and came up with a calendar that begins 3760 years before the Christian calendar.

The letters of the Hebrew alphabet each have a numerical value, specified in the chart on the left on the next page. When a Hebrew date is written, you must figure out the numerical value of each letter and then add them up. This is the date according to the Jewish calendar, not the calendar we use in everyday life, known as the Gregorian calendar (also referred to as the Common Era, civil or Christian calendar). In September 2009, for example, the Jewish year was 5769. Given a Hebrew date, you need to do only a little bit of math to change the Hebrew year into a secular year.

Often a Hebrew date after the year 5000 on the Jewish calendar will leave off five thousand. For example, the Hebrew year 5680 will be written as 680 rather than 5680. To compute the civil (Gregorian) year, simply add the number 1240 to the shortened Hebrew year.

Example: If the year is written as תרכג, the letter ת is 400, the letter ר is 200, פ is 80, and ג is 3. $400 + 200 + 80 + 3 = 683$ (The 5000 is usually left off, so the actual year would be 5683). By using our formula, 683 plus 1240 is 1923. That is the civil year.

The Hebrew year begins on Rosh Hashanah, which occurs on the Gregorian calendar in September or October. Therefore, the dates listed for the months of *Tishri*, *Heshvan*, *Kislev* and sometimes *Tevet* must be read as applying to the preceding year of the civil calendar.

CONVERTING CALENDAR DATES:

The complete transposition of a Hebrew date to a Gregorian date uses a very complex formula. It is easiest to simply refer to one of the published or online reference works. Most synagogues and Jewish libraries possess one of these works. Another alternative is to use one of several computer programs, such as JewishGen's online JOS calculator (<http://www.jewishgen.org/jos>). These programs can convert Hebrew to Gregorian dates and vice versa, as well as display calendars and *Yahrzeit* dates for any year.

Days

Hebrew Alphabet

1	א	תשרי	<i>Tishri</i>	Sep/Oct
2	ב	חשוון	<i>Heshvan</i>	Oct/Nov
3	ג	כסלו	<i>Kislev</i>	Nov/Dec
4	ד	טבת	<i>Tevet</i>	Dec/Jan
5	ה	שבט	<i>Shevat</i>	Jan/Feb
6	ו	אדר	<i>Adar</i>	Feb/Mar
7	ז	אדר ב'	<i>Adar II</i>	Mar
8	ח	ניסן	<i>Nisan</i>	Mar/Apr
9	ט	אייר	<i>Iyar</i>	Apr/May
10	י	סיון	<i>Sivan</i>	May/June
11	יא	תמוז	<i>Tamuz</i>	June/July
12	יב	אב	<i>Av</i>	July/Aug
13	יג	אלול	<i>Elul</i>	Aug/Sep
14	יד			
15	טו			
16	טז			
17	יז			
18	יח			
19	יט			
20	כ			
21	כא			
22	כב			
23	כג			
24	כד			
25	כה			
26	כו			
27	כז			
28	כח			
29	כט			
30	ל			

SOME HEBREW PHRASES

In addition to names and dates, here are the common Hebrew words which appear on tombstones:

Here lies	<i>po nikbar</i>	פ'נ
Son of	<i>ben</i>	בן
Daughter of	<i>bat</i>	בת
Title, i.e. "Mr."	<i>reb, rav</i>	ר' רב
Son/Daughter of the honored	<i>ben reb</i>	ב'ר
The Levite	<i>ha-levi</i>	הלוי
The Kohen	<i>ha-kohen</i>	הכהן
The Rabbi	<i>ha-rav</i>	הרב
Dear, Beloved (masc.)	<i>ha-yakar</i>	היקר
Dear, Beloved (fem.)	<i>ha-y'karah</i>	היקרה
Father	<i>av</i>	אב
My father	<i>avi</i>	אבי
Our father	<i>avinu</i>	אבינו
Mother	<i>eem</i>	אם
My mother	<i>eemi</i>	אמי
Our mother	<i>emanu</i>	אמנו
My husband	<i>baali</i>	בעלי
My wife	<i>ishti</i>	אשתי
Brother	<i>akh</i>	אח
My brother	<i>akhi</i>	אחי
Our brother	<i>akhinu</i>	אחינו
Sister	<i>akhot</i>	אחות
Aunt	<i>dodah</i>	דודה
Uncle	<i>dod</i>	דוד
Man	<i>ish</i>	איש
Woman	<i>ishah</i>	אשה
Woman (unmarried)	<i>b'tulah</i>	בתולה
Woman (married) = "Mrs."	<i>marat</i>	מרת
Old (masc., fem.)	<i>zakain, z'kaina</i>	זקן/תקנה
Child (masc., fem.)	<i>yeled, yaldah</i>	ילד/ילדה
Young man/woman	<i>bakhur, bakhurah</i>	בחור/בחורה
Died (masc., fem.)	<i>niftar, nifterah</i>	פטר/נפטרה
Born (masc., fem.)	<i>nolad, noldah</i>	נולד/נולדה
Year, Years	<i>shanah, shanim</i>	שנה, שנים
Day, Days	<i>yom, yamim</i>	יום, ימים
Month	<i>khodesh</i>	חדש
First of the month	<i>rosh khodesh</i>	ראש חדש

HEBREW ABBREVIATIONS ON TOMBSTONES

There are many different Hebrew abbreviations that are found in tombstone inscriptions and Hebrew literature. Abbreviations are usually indicated by a quote mark or an apostrophe. Often, the apostrophe is used to abbreviate a single word, whereas the quote mark indicates an abbreviated phrase. For more information, see “Reading Hebrew *Matzevot* Key Words, Abbreviations, & Acronyms,” compiled by Dr. Ronald D. Doctor.

SYMBOLS ON TOMBSTONES

In addition to the inscription, symbols on the tombstone can be clues.

- Two hands with four fingers each divided into two sets of two fingers is the symbol of a priestly blessing, signifying a Kohen, a descendant of the biblical high priest Aaron.
- A pitcher signifies a Levite. Members of the tribe of Levi were responsible for cleaning the hands of the Temple priest in ancient days.
- A candle or candelabra is often used on the tombstone of a woman and the six-pointed Star of David on that of a man.
- A broken branch or tree stump motif on a tombstone often signifies someone who died young, whose life was cut short.

Scavenger Hunts

Designed for all levels of Hebrew fluency, use whichever version of the three that is right for your group.

Methodology

- For this activity, ask your students to find as many of the items on the handout as possible, all within a total amount of time that is non-negotiable.
- If every group has at least one cellphone among them, have them take pictures to prove they’ve found each item.
- If you are working without cellphone cameras, limit the area that they can search so that they can simply point to where they saw each item.
- Remind them that even though this is a game and will be a lot of fun, this is still a sacred place and there should be no running around or screaming.

HANDOUT 5E: ENGLISH-ONLY VERSION

SCAVENGER HUNT AND GUESS-A-RAMA GAME

To score: 1 point for each correct item, 3 points for each correct guess, 1 point for guessing even if you're wrong, 1 point for each question answered correctly.

- Find five gravestones with the letters ת"נ"צ"ב"ה.

Do they appear in the same position on all the gravestones? _____

Where? _____

Guess: What does your team think these letters mean? _____

- Find a grave that looks like a tree stump.

Guess: What do you think it symbolizes? _____

- Find a grave with the same last name as someone on your team.

Write the full name of the person _____

In English: _____

In Hebrew: _____

- Find three graves with the same symbol on them.

Draw the symbol here:

Guess: What does your team think it symbolizes? _____

- Find five gravestones with the letters פ"ג.

Do they appear in the same position on all the gravestones? _____

Where? _____

Guess: What does your team think it means? _____

- Find the gravestone of someone who served in the military.

Write the full name of the person: _____

Where did s/he serve? _____

- Find a gravestone in a language other than Hebrew or English.

Write three words from the stone: _____

- Find a gravestone that mentions where the person was from.

Write the location: _____

HANDOUT 5H: HEBREW VOCABULARY

SCAVENGER HUNT AND GUESS-A-RAMA GAME

To score: 1 point for each correct item, 3 points for each correct guess, 1 point for guessing even if you're wrong, 1 point for each question answered correctly.

- Find five gravestones with the letters ה"ני"צ"ב"ה.

Do they appear in the same position on all the gravestones? _____

Where? _____

Guess: What does your team think these letters mean? _____

- Find a grave that looks like a tree stump.

Guess: What do you think it symbolizes? _____

- Find a grave with the same last name as someone on your team.

Write the full name of the person

In English: _____

In Hebrew: _____

- Find three graves with the same symbol on them.

Draw the symbol here:

Guess: What does your team think it symbolizes? _____

- Find five gravestones with the letters פ"נ.

Do they appear in the same position on all the gravestones? _____

Where? _____

Guess: What does your team think it means? _____

- Find the מצבה of someone who served in the military.

Write the full name of the person: _____

Where did s/he serve? _____

- Find a מצבה in a language other than Hebrew or English.

Write three words from the מצבה: _____

- Find a מצבה that mentions where the מת was from.

Write the location: _____

HANDOUT 5A: ADVANCED

SCAVENGER HUNT ADVANCED VERSION

If you have cellphones, you can take a picture instead of drawing each element. Adjust the deadline timing for less time if playing with cellphones.

- Find three gravestones belonging to a Levy.

Do they share anything in common? _____

Draw it:

- Find three gravestones belonging to a Cohen.

Do they share anything in common? _____

Draw it:

- Find a gravestone with different information in Hebrew than in English.

What information was different?_____

- Find three gravestones belonging to children.
- Find a gravestone that describes the person in Hebrew.

What words were used to describe them?_____

- Find a gravestone with a mistake in it.

PLACING STONES*

The origin of the popular Jewish custom of placing stones on a tombstone is now lost. Some scholars conjecture that it harkens back to a time when graves were marked only by piles of pebbles, so placing a stone was actually a way of maintaining the grave marker.

Here are some ways you might utilize this custom:

- Show this video (<https://www.today.com/parents/girl-makes-rocks-vandalized-graves-jewish-cemeteries-t109608>), which tells the story of a Florida girl who painted hundreds of stones to put on the graves of vandalized cemeteries. If your trip is to Mt. Carmel, you can have the students find those very same stones.
- The students can decorate a stone themselves with permanent markers.
- Have the students seek out a gravestone of a person who has something in common with them (the surname or first name, or a significant date that might be the student's birthday). They could also pick out a gravestone that appeals to them for other reasons, such as its beauty or its apparent neglect. Encourage the students to spend a little time at the grave thinking about what the person's life may have been like. You can help to direct their thoughts by asking: Did they come from another country and have to start their life over from scratch in a strange country? Based on the dates they lived, what important historic events might they have experienced? Afterwards, ask the students to say the person's name out loud, along with "you're remembered," while placing a stone on the gravestone.

ALEPH-BET HUNT

Good for younger students just learning the Hebrew letters

Required Materials

1. Cellphones or cameras, one per unit playing the game
2. *Alef-bet* sheets if the students need it for reference

Methodology

Participants (in teams, pairs, or individuals) hunt down and take pictures of the whole Hebrew alphabet. The one rule is you may not use the inscription from the same stone twice. You may either set a time limit, or simply decide that whoever completes the whole *alef-bet* first wins.

GRAVESTONE RUBBINGS

Please note before doing this activity: Although gravestone rubbings have been popular in the past, it's a controversial activity. Some worry that there could be damage done to the stones. If you choose this activity, make sure you have an adult overseeing the activity for each stone.

Sometimes doing a rubbing will help bring out the letters or symbols that have become hard to see. Like watching a picture develop, there's something magical about watching the image emerge on the white surface. Rubbings give you a tangible souvenir of the day. If students have any relatives in the cemetery, making a rubbing of the grave could be especially meaningful.

Materials

1. Painters Tape (Blue masking tape)
2. Nonfusible medium interfacing (available at craft and sewing stores or their websites)
3. Fat crayons with the paper wrappings removed (note: It's best to use darker colors.)
4. Scissors

Methodology

Assign 2-4 people to each stone rubbing project, along with one adult.

Note: Tilted gravestones or fragile looking ones should not be selected for this activity. If there is any sign of wobbling once you've started the process, stop immediately.

Carefully cut the interfacing to the correct size, leaving an inch or more margin between the end of the words and the edge of the interfacing.

Tape the interfacing to the stone, having others help hold the interfacing in place.

Start in one corner and rub across and down till the image appears.

Remove ALL the tape from the stone when done.

OTHER ART AND CRAFT EXPERIENCES IN THE CEMETERY

1. Perspective Drawing

Drawing stones is an excellent way to learn about perspective, proportion, and shading in a non-architectural setting. Consider combining a cemetery cleanup day with a *plein air* drawing or painting class.

2. Hebrew Name Plates

For seeing Hebrew typography, cemeteries are one of the easiest and best places, outside of a synagogue or travel abroad.

Materials

1. Cellphones or other cameras
2. Access to a printer
3. Cardboard/matboard/posterboard
4. Glue
5. Modpodge™

Methodology

- Ask the students to spell out their Hebrew names or their family's surname by taking close-ups of a variety of different letter styles in a variety of different stone colors.
- Print the pictures out and have the students cut, arrange and paste on to poster-, mat- or cardboard and arrange them into a name plate.
- Modpodge over the surface. A hook or string can be placed on the back to hang the nametag.

CONCLUDING YOUR CEMETERY EXPERIENCE*

Gather everyone together at the end of the experience for a closing discussion. To keep the conversation moving, prompt the students with the following questions:

1. Was this anyone's first visit to a cemetery?
2. How was this cemetery like what you were expecting, and how was it different?
3. Did anything surprise you?
4. How did it feel being in the cemetery?
5. Would you want to come back and do this again?
6. What did you bring to the cemetery and what will you leave?
7. Do you have any questions?

Suggestions for Final Remarks*

- In Jewish tradition, taking care of the dead is considered an especially meritorious *mitzvah* because the people who are the recipients of your actions can never thank you for what you've done.
- On most of the tombstones in this cemetery, and in Jewish cemeteries around the world, there are inscribed the Hebrew letters: ה "ב" צ" נ" ת, meaning "May his or her soul be bound up in the bonds of life."
 - What do you think this phrase means?
 - What ways can people keep someone who is dead "bound up with life?"
- It points to traditional Judaism's belief that there is some form of being that goes on after death. People who have died are always bound up in the lives of all the people who will come after them, like you. Today you've made the ideals in those five letters really true. By remembering and caring for the people in these graves, you and they are bound together in life. You've done a wonderful *mitzvah*, and you can come back and do it any time you'd like.
- Pass a water bottle and some hand towels around, while explaining that there is a Jewish custom of washing hands after visiting a cemetery.

PART THREE

POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

1. If your students spent time at a particular grave, ask them to write a fictionalized account of that person's life, or one chapter in their life. By researching and including real historical events of the time, their stories will only grow richer and more authentic.
2. Do research on one of the people buried at the cemetery. They can use genealogy sites, public records, or newspaper articles to investigate the life of the person buried there.
3. Have the students create their own tombstone. Set it up by telling them, "You have lived to the ripe old age of 120 and now have passed on. What will your tombstone look like? What elements that you saw at the cemetery will you include in your tombstone? What elements will make it Jewish? What elements will reflect who you are?"
4. Depending on the developmental level of the students, invite guest speakers to come and talk with the class. Speakers may include:
 - Members of the *Chevra Kadisha*
 - A surgeon to speak about the changes in a body from life to death
 - A rabbi about writing a eulogy or to answer students' questions from the trip to the cemetery
 - A funeral director
 - A hospice worker

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Further Sources

Association for Gravestone Studies, 278 Main Street, Suite 207, Greenfield, MA 01301. (413) 772-0836. Produces a quarterly newsletter, *Markers*, and access to a lending library. <http://www.gravestonestudies.org>.

<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/chayei-sarah/chayei-sarah-tweens-cave-machpelah>

Explains the source of many Jewish burial customs, with guiding discussion questions.

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/sarah-midrash-and-aggadah>

Excellent encyclopedia article by Dr. Tamar Kadari chronicling the life of Sarah the matriarch. The article includes links to various midrashic stories about her life, death and burial. As the first Jewish burial, this biblical case sets the bar and the parameters for Jewish burial practices to this day. Compare this story to that of the first Jewish cemetery in Greater Philadelphia.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQxZOpydFKs>

A half hour short film by Ghila Valabrega in which a young photographer comes across an abandoned Jewish cemetery and takes a headstone home. The ghost of the deceased lives in the family's "box" (garage) for years until discovered by other family members. A warm and engaging illustration of the concepts of K'vod HaMet.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DT0aMfFtuw>

TEDMEDTalk by social entrepreneur Michael Hebb about the economic, political and emotional American crisis surrounding end-of-life policies in this country. But even more, the prelude is essentially a secular, philosophical polemic about the power of what is essentially Shabbat dinner.

<https://deathoverdinner-jewishedition.org/>

Reboot has worked with Death Over Dinner to create a Jewish version of the initiative. They offer all that is needed to create a Jewish/Shabbat-style "death dinner." Highly recommended for an adult, parent, or adolescent education project.

<https://www.today.com/parents/girl-makes-rocks-vandalized-graves-jewish-cemeteries-t109608>

Tells the story of a little Florida girl who painted hundreds of stones to put on the graves of vandalized cemeteries. When the vandalized gravestones in Mt. Carmel were repaired volunteers placed her painted stones on each of the repaired stones.