

WORKSHOPS FOR ISRAELI AND POLISH YOUTH

"JOURNEY TO THE SHTETL WITH I.B. SINGER"

"GRODZKA GATE – NN THEATRE CENTRE", LUBLIN 2010.

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Shtetl means in Yiddish a town. It is defined as a multicultural place, where Jews were a big part of population. This unique socio-cultural formation existed in Central and Eastern Europe from the sixteenth century to World War II.

The concept of this workshop is based on showing "shtetl culture" as the common heritage of Jews and Poles. Participants will focus on coexistence of representatives of many nationalities: Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Germans, ... in their common small homeland. The diversity of the world of shtetl, even today, can become an inspiration and a model for a modern multicultural society.

Participants of the workshop will travel to shtetls in Lublin Region, learn about people living there, topography and various aspects of everyday life. A guide during this journey will be Isaac Bashevis Singer - a Jewish writer, Nobel Prize winner, who was often describing the life of shtetls.

After the workshops, participants will be able to:

- explain what a shtetl is,
- summarize the biography of Isaac Bashevis Singer,
- describe the appearance of a shtetl and characterize its inhabitants,
- describe the content of the Singer's story "How Szlemiel was travelling to Warsaw",
- name the titles of some stories by Singer and characterize them,
- describe archival photographs,
- name several shtetls in Lublin Region and indicate them on the map.

Workshop time: 100 min.

Target group: students of secondary schools in Poland and Israel.

Number of participants: 30 people.

Number of working groups: 5.

References:

1. Summaries of I.B. Singer's stories.
2. I.B. Singer "How Shlemiel was travelling to Warsaw".
3. Archival photographs from the pre-war towns in Lublin Region.
4. Map of Lublin Region with marked shtetls.

Needed materials:

- self-adhesive labels (20-40 pieces),
- pens and markers (30 pieces),
- 1 large sheet of paper with a map of Lublin Region with marked shtetls,
- 1 large sheet of paper,
- glue,
- 5 envelopes,
- 30 A5 papers.

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Workshop

Introduction to the workshop (5 min.)

The moderator greets participants and informs, that they would make a symbolic journey through the shtetls in Lublin Region. They would learn about people living in shtetl, topography, and various aspects of everyday life.

1. Exercise – “Write your name” (10 min.)

Needed materials: self-adhesive labels (20-40 pieces).

Participants sit in a circle. Each person receives a self-adhesive label and writes his/her name in their own language. The Poles ask the Israelis, how to write their names in Hebrew and write the names of Israelis in Polish. As a result, each participant has a label with his/her name written in two languages. All participants stand in a circle and read their names loud.

2. Exercise – “A journey through time with I.B. Singer” – map of shtetls in Lublin Region (5 min.)

Needed materials: map of Lublin Region with marked shtetls [annex 2.1], the definition of a shtetl [annex 2.2].

The moderator shows the map of Lublin Region with different places, that before were considered shtetl, marked on it [annex 2.1]. He asks the participants, whether they know, what a shtetl is. The moderator, together with the participants, explain the definition of a shtetl [annex 2.2].

Then, the moderator asks the participants to imagine, that they were moving in time to the period before World War II and peer into the world of shtetl, where Jews and Poles lived together for several hundred years. The guide in this world would be a Jewish writer of Polish origin – Isaac Bashevis Singer, whose work describe the world of shtetls.

3. Exercise – “Singer – who is this?” – MACAO game (10 min.)

Needed materials: 90 playing cards in five colors [annex 3.1].

The moderator informs the participants, that Isaac Bashevis Singer was a Jewish writer, associated with the Lublin Region and a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. To view basic information about Singer, participants will play the MACAU game.

Participants sit in a circle. The moderator holds 90 playing cards in five colors. On each card there is one information about the life of Singer [annex 3.1]. Each participant gets three cards. Then, walking around the room, needs to exchange the cards with other participants in such a way, that at the end of the game everyone would have three cards with the same information. During the exchange, participants should read aloud the information written on the card, that is to be exchanged. The ones, who would collect the set of 3 cards with the same information, sit in the circle.

All 10 sentences are read aloud in the end of the exercise.

4. Exercise – “Stroll in a shtetl” – photos and a plan of a shtetl (20 min.)

Needed materials: fragments of Singer's short stories [annex 4.1], pictures of shtetls [annex 4.2.A-E], a large paper (map of a shtetl).

Participants are divided into five mixed (Israeli-Polish) groups.

NOTE: You can use the division due to the color cards from the previous exercises – each participant needs to collect a set of 3 cards in one color (there are 5 colors). If the proportion of Israelis and Poles would be unequal in any of the groups, the moderator should mix them.

Each group gets an envelope containing:

- a fragment of Singer's short story, which contains a brief description of a shtetl [annex 4.1],
- 5 photos of various shtetls in Lublin Region [annex 4.2. A-E].

Each group reads a piece of text. Participants in groups try to describe/explain the contents of the images. One person from each group points on a big map the shtetls, that the group has seen in the pictures.

A scheme map of a shtetl is created in a big piece of paper – each group marks some elements, typical for a shtetl and/or photos from the annex 4.2. For example: group 1 draws the spatial arrangement of streets, other groups mark temples, offices, houses, etc.

The purpose of this exercise is to recreate the visual topography of a shtetl, basing on archival photographs, Singer's texts and imagination.

5. Exercise – “Find someone who ...” – photos (20 min.)

Needed materials: a set of photos [annex 5.1.A].

When the participants already know, how a shtetl looked like, they learn, who were the people living there. The participants are divided into 2 groups. Each group gets a set of 20 pictures [annex 5.1.A and annex 5.2.A]. Each participant gets a task [annex 5.1.B for group 1, annex 5.2.B for group 2] to find among the pictures a photo of a specific person.

When everyone would find a proper photo, all the participants sit in a circle, show their photos and describe people in them. There are descriptions of people shown in the pictures in annex 5.3 (for moderator's use).

6. Exercise – “Characters of Singer's short stories” – KALAMBURY (15 min.)

Needed materials: a list of titles of Singer's stories, [annex 6.1. A-E].

The moderator divides participants into 5 groups. Each group gets a list of 20 titles of Singer's short stories (with the names of shtetls, where the story took place). Each group has two titles marked on its list and (on the reverse side of the page) a brief summary of these two stories [annex 6.1. A-E].

Each group chooses one of the selected titles and tries to represent the title of the story in a pantomimical way. Groups have several minutes to prepare their scenes. Then each group presents the selected title and everyone else guesses, what title is shown. The person, who has guessed the correct name, points on a big map of shtetls the name of the town, where the story was taking place.

All the groups, basing on the summaries of the stories, tell the story content on the forum.

NOTE: Exercise may be repeated.

7. Exercise – “The story of the shtetl, or where Shlemiel came to?” (15 min.)

Needed materials: A5 cards and pens (30 units), story of Shlemiel [annex 7.1.A], questions about the fate of Shlemiel [annex 7.2], ending of the story of Shlemiel [annex 7.1.B].

Participants sit in a circle. Everyone gets a clean sheet of paper and a pen. The moderator begins to tell the story of Shlemiel, finishing in the point, when Shlemiel decides to leave Chełm [annex 7.1.A]. From that moment the story needs to be told by the workshop participants.

The moderator asks six questions concerning the fate of Szlemiel [annex 7.2]. After each question, participants write on their cards short answer and fold the paper, so that no one could see their answers, and give it to the person sitting on the right side. Then the operator reads the next question, the participants write their answers, fold a card and pass it farther. After six questions everyone opens their papers and reads the new endings of Shlemiel's story. At the end, the moderator tells the original ending of Singer's story [annex 7.1.B] and its motto: *The whole world is one big Chełm*.

8. Discussion – “Why would we need a shtetl today?” (5 min.)

The moderator summarizes the workshops, moderates the discussion and asks the questions:

- Was the world of shtetl described by Singer a real one, or just a fantasy?
- Whether the shtetl culture can be regarded as common heritage of Jews and Poles?
- Whether the diversity of the shtetl-world can become an inspiration and a model, even today, to build a modern multicultural society?

Summary of the workshop

The moderator thanks for participation in the workshops, lists the most important facts about shtetls and Singer, and asks participants to keep in memory one chosen character from Singer's stories.