



## Stories of Avraham and Sarah

Submitted by: Shirly Pugatzky

This project is the first unit of three in the Beit Sefer Chadash one-year curriculum on the theme, "Ancestor Tales and their Setting." Several sample lessons are given.

Subject Area: Torah

Multi-lesson unit

Objective: To make the stories of Abraham and Sarah vivid, meaningful and memorable.

Age group: First and second grades.

**OUTDOOR LESSON:** INTRODUCTION TO THE ABRAHAM CYCLE. "On a journey with Avram and Sarai." The children are part of Avram's clan as it travels from north to south into Canaan and eventually on to Egypt. Text: First part of *Lech Lecha*.

Mental preparation of class: Teacher should be dressed as much as possible in traditional Middle Eastern clothing. Tell a little who Avram and Sarai are. Have children repeat the names, in Hebrew, a few times to get comfortable with them. Read the beginning of the story, dramatically, from any good translation of BeReshit, and tell something about the rest of Avram's journey. Encourage discussion, calling on the imaginative ability of young children. This is a "Let's pretend" lesson: "Now Avram and Sarai are taking us on a journey."

Physical preparation of class: Each child receives a walking stick, a "staff," actually a short, heavy tree branch. Each child could have had a kefia. We made them later in the year, but they would have been nice to have had for this lesson. [KEFIA: Take a large square of inexpensive white cloth; children put their own repeated design around edge with colored markers; bind the kefia around the head with three pieces of white yarn twisted together. Having one or two aides/parents to help makes this go more quickly.]

The journey: Leave the building! Since this was a lesson for beginning the school year, the weather was pleasant. Keep up the "Let's pretend" style. We're really walking along a stream, across a desert...listen to the sound of your feet...listen to the wind blowing. Sticks and rocks can be used as percussion instruments, marking the rhythm of walking. Sometimes walk silently. Make several stops along the way for a little story telling, a little food, to appreciate the shade of a tree. Take only food that would actually have been available along the way---figs, dates, nuts.

Since the autumn is also the season of pomegranates, on returning to the classroom children have pomegranate seeds to eat (prepared in advance). This is an opportunity to introduce the blessing over tree fruit, perhaps developing the idea of the blessing being much newer than the time of our ancestors. Time concepts are hard for this age, so just giving the idea of "a long time ago" should be enough.



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**A VARIANT OF OUTDOOR LESSON: CULMINATING ACTIVITY FOR ABRAHAM CYCLE.** "On a journey with Avram and Sarai." This lesson is inspired by the success of this year's introductory walk. Although it has been designed, there was no opportunity to use it this year.

Mental preparation of class: All classroom lessons about Abraham and Sarah have been completed---in this case, about 7 hours of learning. Remind children of the first story, how Avram had been led to start his journey---and now "Avram and Sarai will take us with them."

Physical preparation: As above. Teacher and aides are part of the group, so they, too, should have a staff and a kefiya. Maintain the mode of pretending.

The journey: Walk to as natural an area as possible. Near the JCC, this would be the creek to the north of the building. This journey would take a bit over an hour, because so much is now known about Avraham and Sarah that there is much more to do than described in the first lesson plan. All the stops in the Introductory variant can be used. In addition, there can be stops for altar building, for planting seeds or saplings, for creating words of thanks that Avraham and Sarah might have said. Spots along the creek can be marked in advance as Haran, Hevron, Beer Sheva, Egypt. Return from Egypt and "settle down" with the rest of the clan. Any appropriate songs learned during the unit can be sung at some point. Take out food and create a blessing for it. In addition to dried fruits, the food might be flatbread. [FLATBREAD: Under the guidance of a parent, the children learned to cook flatbread on a wok overturned above a bed of coals, in imitation of the metal shape desert dwellers still cook flatbread on today.] Back in the classroom, children sit in a circle, share thoughts about the experience, prayers that they would like to make.

**INDOOR LESSONS:** "Diving into the Stories." Four stages are used in teaching a selection of stories from the Avraham cycle. 1) Presenting key words. Write in large letters on a board names of persons and places and other vocabulary (e.g., *brit*) that are important to the days's story. Use Roman letters and Hebrew letters. Say the words often. Tell something about each word, ask the children to repeat them till the words are easy for them. Ask questions to check understanding. 2) Reading the story aloud. Slowly and dramatically read the story, stopping for questions and comments from the children, explaining as needed. 3) Discussion and questions connecting story to children's lives and interests. 4) Expressive work by children on a theme arising from the story. Sometimes



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children want to add words to a painting or other art, but need help with the writing. Again, an extra adult in the classroom is valuable in reducing waiting time.

A SAMPLE LESSON: The Covenant between the Pieces. 1) The one really significant new word is *brit*. Refer to the rainbow story if the children know it. Take your time getting this across. 2) This is a very dramatic, even shocking story, and quite mysterious. G-d passes between the pieces like a flame. It is as if G-d is signing G-d's name with lightning. Despite the animals being cut in half, the children really liked the story. It took part of a second class meeting to finish the story, satisfy all questions and have a clear picture of what is happening. 3) Once the children have all the facts in mind, challenge them with questions about the scene. What could each creature symbolize? What was their importance in Avraham's life, what did/do people get from these animals? (tent, clothes, meat, cheese, milk, cord, tools, beds, shofar, other instruments...). What bird/animal represents the people that is coming into existence? What animal is connected with ritual items we use today? (ram: shofar, wool for tallit, tzitzit) Do you think Avraham will remember the covenant? Why? Possible to open a discussion about the power of the natural world. 4) Children make paintings of the birds and animals and their gifts to us. Have plenty of materials on hand so that children can create without frustration.