



**The Spanish Inquisition
& The Life of the Crypto Jew
(around 13th century – 16th century)**

Lesson prepared by:
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HAR HASHEM SCHOOL LESSON PLAN

Grade Level: grade 6

Date of lesson: November 16, 2003

Teacher: Suzanne Sobczak

Topic: The Spanish Inquisition and the life of the Crypto Jew (around 13th-16th century)

Enduring Understanding(s) on which this lesson will focus (taken from curriculum):

1. JEWISH STORIES AND HEROES TEACH US ABOUT HOW OTHERS USE THE SPARK OF THE DIVINE IN OURSELVES AND IN OTHERS.
2. HISTORICAL JEWISH COMMUNITIES WORKED TO KEEP JUDAISM ALIVE.
3. JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF THE PAST HAVE MADE CHOICES ABOUT HOW THEY LIVED JEWISHLY.
4. WE ARE CONNECTED TO JEWS ALL OVER THE WORLD



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Essential Question(s) that will lead to this understanding (also taken from curriculum):

1. WHO WERE THE PERSONALITIES IN JEWISH HISTORY WHO IMPACTED JEWISH LIFE AND WHAT WERE THEIR STORIES?
2. HOW HAVE THE IMPORTANT MEMBERS OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE PAST TAKE A GIFT THEY POSSESS AND USED IT TO BENEFIT JEWISH LIFE?
3. WHAT INFORMED CHOICES DID THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF THE PAST CHOOSE TO LIVE JEWISH LIVES?
4. HOW HAS LEARNING KEPT JUDAISM ALIVE THROUGHOUT HISTORY?
5. HOW DID JEWISH COMMUNITIES DEVELOP ALL OVER THE WORLD AND HOW ARE THEY CONNECTED TO JEWISH COMMUNITIES TODAY?

Evidence of Understanding (How will you assess that students have “gotten” the understanding?)

Through discussions which highlight the vocabulary terms reflective of this time period (i.e.: crypto jew, conversion, marrano...) and through our varied in class activities evidence of students' understanding will be gleaned as they articulate the choices Jews made during the Spanish Inquisition. They will also identify how these choices affected the future of Judaism.



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New Vocabulary/Terms (That students will be able to identify by the end of the lesson.)

- Sefhardic
- Sefhardim
- Crypto Jew
- Conversio
- Marrano
- Dona Gracia
- Ladino



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Side One

ACTIVITY PLAN

Set Induction (How will you get the students' attention or hook them into the learning)

1. In an unconventional manner our class will begin with the students attempting to solve a variety of 'Cryptograms'. Manchester, Richard. *The Original Pencil Pastimes Book of Word Games.* (Bristol Park Books, 1980) Pages 172-193. Cryptograms are secret messages in which one letter has been substituted throughout for another letter. To break the code, you have to figure out what each letter in the message really stands for.
2. From this point we will begin to decipher the meaning of the word crypto and how it connects to the term Crypto Jew.
3. We will follow this by examining actual Spanish Inquisition transcripts that detail the behavior of 'Judaizing' as observed by servants and neighbors. These small windows into this time period were gotten from a book by: Gitlitz, David M. & Davidson, Linda Kay. *A Drizzle of Honey: The Lives and Recipes of Spain's Secret Jews.* (St. Martin's Press, 1999)
4. We chose to follow these readings by reproducing one of the Shabbat 'cold' salads from the above mentioned book. The recipe we duplicated, Juana Nunez's Lettuce and Radish Salad, page 31.
5. While eating this salad we will observe a brief 'lighthearted' look at the Spanish Inquisition by a British comedy troupe called, Monty Python. With an emphasis on understanding that the real Inquisition was no laughing matter.



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6. After another brief discussion of the Crypto Jews we will turn to a discussion of the choices that conversos made and we will examine some of the other choices Jews made at this time. We will read, Wise, Ira. Dona Gracia Mendes Nasi: An Instant Lesson. (Torah Aura Publications, 2002)
7. Students will be asked to read this 'lesson' with short discussions following each 'headline'.
8. The note to this class will be two fold. [1-the written expulsion law of Spain didn't get rewritten and changed until 1968] [2-some of the Jews who left Spain came to 'New Mexico' and today we are finding stories of Crypto Jews right in our own backyard]

Learning Experiences (How will you facilitate the students' learning?) Keep in mind:

- organization
- set up
- supplies
- the time each activity will take
- different learning styles
- different levels of questioning

The following is a schedule for the above activities within a framework of two hours:

- 20 minutes for the cryptogram activity
- 20 minutes for the readings from, A Drizzle of Honey.
- 20 minutes to read and recreate recipe.
- 20 minutes to eat, watch Monty Python skit, & discuss the reality of the Spanish Inquisition.



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- 20 minutes to read and discuss Dona Gracia
- 20 minutes for wrap up/last notes.

Questions for Discussion (if applicable)

1. *Knowledge*
2. *Comprehension*
3. *Application*
4. *Analysis*
5. *Synthesis*
6. *Evaluation*

How did the Spanish Inquisition impact Judaism? How did the publicized 'Judaizing' paraphernalia actually help perpetuate Judaism? How did the Jews of this time face the challenge of maintaining their Jewish identity? How might you define these choices in relationship to the idea of the spark of the divine? How can this historical period help us connect to all Jews all over the world?



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Conclusion (How will you check for the evidence of understanding)

Before leaving class students will respond to the following question: If they had been present during the time of the Inquisition what choices would they have made? Would you leave like Dona Gracia, or stay and convert while still practicing Judaism like the Crypto Jews?

Supplies:

(If you need supplies that are not already in your classroom, please copy the needed items onto the supply request form.)

The above mentioned resources: Puzzle book pages, A Drizzle of Honey recipe book, Video (from Video Station) on Monty Python, & the Instant Lesson from Torah Aura. As well as the ingredients for the salad.



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Side Two

Example of a Parent Letter

Shalom,

...There we command this our edict to be issued, whereby we command all Jews and Jewesses, of whatever age they may be, that live, reside, and dwell in our said kingdoms and dominions, as well natives as those who are not, who in any manner or for any cause may have come to dwell therein, that by the end of the month of July next, of the present year, 1492, they depart from all our said kingdoms and dominions...

-- From the edict for the expulsion of the Jews, March 30, 1492

After the brief period that represented the 'Golden Age of Spanish Jewry' a very dark and ominous existence reigned over Spain for many years. As the northern Iberian Christian kingdoms gradually conquered the Peninsula from the Muslims, pushing the frontier farther south each year, more and more of Iberia's Jews found themselves living under Christian control. From the 12th to the 14th century, while the issue of the eventual dominance of the Peninsula remained in doubt, in most Iberian cities Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived side by side in a tenuous and complex coexistence that historians generally refer to a *convivencia*. (convenience) But toward the end of the 14th century in Spain this tradition fell apart. Legislation began to restrict the rights of Jews,



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requiring them to wear identifying badges, and forced them to relocate their homes. They were given an edict in 1492 that if they did not agree to convert to Catholicism they would be expelled from Spain. If they chose not to leave or convert they would be killed. Some Jews left and other Jews chose to remain and convert. Yet they still practiced many Jewish rituals and observances in secret. These Jews had many names: Crypto Jews (secret Jews), Conversio (converted Jew), Anusim (forced convert), and Marrano. Marrano was a derogatory name used by both Inquisitors and Jews who did not trust the convert. Marrano literally meant swine. The edict that was enforced by the Spanish Inquisition had a long arm of influence that reached beyond the borders of Spain into Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Turkey. Yet even in such a dark period as this there existed heroes. The Jews that secretly kept their traditions alive and passed on their history were heroes. And there were the brave members of the Jewish community who stood up to the Inquisitors. One such person was a woman named Dona Gracia Mendes Nasi who is likened to a Jewish version of Harriet Tubman. She got out of Portugal and helped many other Jews escape. As a last note we also learned that some of the expelled Jews came to New Mexico. In recent years there has been a rise of information around the existence of Crypto Jews from New Mexico. The foremost historian, researcher, and writer on this subject is Dr. Stanley Hordes. It is interesting to learn about the choices these Jews made and even more interesting to learn of their existence in our own backyard [New Mexico].

B'Shalom,



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Ways to further this discussion:

Discuss with your family the choices you think you would have made if you were given an edict to leave or convert. Take into consideration the difficulties of travel at that time in history. Search the net for information on Crypto Jews, there is a lot of websites. One point of interest: Diana Bryer is a contemporary New Mexican artist whose paintings portray 15th century 'Crypto-Jews' from New Mexico at: <http://www.dianabryer.com/>



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Projects

Aside from the recipe listed below all project resources can be gleaned from the lesson plan or from the resource bibliography which follows. (In the hard copy version of this lesson plan some xeroxed examples are included.)

Juana Nunez's Lettuce and Radish Salad

(Serves 4-6)

Salad

- ❑ 1-2 ounces watercress
- ❑ ½ head green lettuce
- ❑ 2 cups torn-up other greens, such as a combination of radicchio, red lettuce, romaine, endive, or fennel
- ❑ 1 tbsp chopped fresh mint
- ❑ 3-4 radishes, sliced
- ❑ 1-2 ounces grated hard cheese, such as Romano or Manchego
- ❑ 1-2 tsp coarsely ground sea salt



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Dressing

- 1-2 tsp balsamic, cider, or red wine vinegar
- 3 tbsp olive oil

1. Remove the stems from the watercress. Chop the leaves into bite-size pieces.
2. Tear the lettuce into bite-size pieces. Toss all the greens together in a large bowl.
3. Top with the radishes and cheese.
4. Sprinkle with the salt.
5. Make the dressing. Pour vinegar into a jar; add the olive oil. Cover and shake vigorously.
6. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss well before serving, or pass a cruet at the table.



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Resource Bibliography

- Alexy, Trudi. *The Mezuzah in the Madonna's Foot: Marranos and Other Secret Jews.*
(HarperSanFrancisco, 1994)
- Gitlitz, David M. & Davidson, Linda Kay. *A Drizzle of Honey: The Lives and Recipes of Spain's Secret Jews.* (St. Martin's Press, 1999)
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(UAHC Press, 2002)
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- Trepp, Leo. *A History of the Jewish Experience.* (Behrman House, Inc. 2001)
- Wise, Ira J. *Dona Gracia Mendes Nasi: An instant Lesson.* (Torah Aura Publications, 2002)