



Educator's Guide

The Hebrew Language Revival

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, as Jews flocked to pre-State Palestine, they came from dozens of different countries and spoke as many languages. A visionary by the name of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda believed that the Jews needed both a land and language of their own in order to survive. He dedicated his life (and family) toward the cause of reviving the ancient Hebrew language – a feat never accomplished before or since. Ben-Yehuda was instrumental in ensuring that Hebrew would live and thrive as a modern language, yet the story did not begin or end with him. This video and educator's guide explore all this and more.

Further Reading

1. Lewis Glinert, *The Story of Hebrew*
2. <https://en.hebrew-academy.org.il/>
3. Eytan Halon, "The Israeli Academy Continuing the Unprecedented Revival of the Hebrew Language"
<https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Culture/The-Israeli-academy-continuing-the-unprecedented-revival-of-the-Hebrew-language-542822>
4. Jack Fellman, "Hebrew: Eliezer Ben-Yehuda & the Revival of Hebrew"
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/eliezer-ben-yehuda-and-the-revival-of-hebrew>
5. David B. Green, "1909: First Hebrew High School in Pre-state Israel Is Founded"
<https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/1909-1st-hebrew-high-school-in-pre-state-israel-founded-1.5416785>
6. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-revival-of-hebrew/>

Review - Did the students understand the material?

1. Who is considered to be the father of modern Hebrew?



- a. Theodor Herzl
 - b. Ahad Ha'am
 - c. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda
 - d. Benzion Ben-Yehuda
- 2.** True or false? Hebrew is one of several ancient languages revived in the 20th century.
- 3.** What laid the groundwork for the successful revival of Hebrew?
- 4.** Herzl originally envisioned _____ as the official language of Israel.
- a. French
 - b. Hungarian
 - c. Yiddish
 - d. German
- 5.** While Yiddish was a contender in becoming Israel's main spoken language, why did Hebrew ultimately prevail?

Discussion Questions

- 1.** Eliezer Ben-Yehuda said: "Jews cannot become a living nation - am chai - without returning to their ancestral language - lashon ha'avot [using it] in everyday discourse, from old to young...in all facets of life, at all hours, days and night."
Do you agree with his assessment about the critical nature of the Jews using Hebrew as a tool to become a living nation?
- 2.** In The Story of Hebrew, Glinert states that when Israel (then called Judea) was destroyed by Hadrian in the first century, "by any sociological yardstick, the prospects of native Hebrew's survival were now minimal." Yet, 1,800 years later, the Jewish people resurrected Hebrew as a spoken language. Do you view this sort of achievement as miraculous or do you view it as natural?
- 3.** Why was it SO important for Ben-Yehuda to revive the Hebrew language? Do you think he went too far in his dedication, or was it necessary in order to effect change?



- 4.** Rachel Katznelson writes: “Although Yiddish was a living tongue, the tongue of the people and democracy, Hebrew was the language to express the current of thought that was revolutionary for us.”
In what way was Hebrew revolutionary for the early Zionists?

Reflection Questions

- 1.** Look up the following names of people who contributed to the development of the Hebrew language - Ahad Ha'am, Yechiel Michael Pines, Judah Leib Gordon, Hayim Nahman Bialik, Eliezer Ben Yehuda, Micha Joseph Berdichevsky, Saul Tchernichovksy, Rachel Katznelson, and Aharon Mazie. Which of these people do you find yourself most inspired by and why?
- 2.** Imagine it's the early 20th century. Yiddish is competing with Hebrew as a spoken language. The Mizrachim and Sephardim have an interest in Hebrew instead of Arabic or Ladino. Many ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazim preferred Yiddish, viewing it as a fortress against enlightenment and secularism. Where would you have stood on this debate? Yiddish or Hebrew?
- 3.** It seems so natural for Hebrew to be Israel's official language. Can you imagine if this were not the case? What added character does Israel have because of the Hebrew language?
- 4.** Zionist leader Menachem Ussishkin was candid in his description of Eliezer Ben Yehuda, saying, “The people need a hero, so we've given them one.” Essentially, he was arguing that the revival of modern Hebrew for the Jewish people required much more than Eliezer Ben Yehuda. From watching this video, do you agree with this assessment? Why do people need heroes to galvanize a movement?
- 5.** Do you think the Diaspora community done enough to prioritize the Hebrew language in the Jewish education world? What are suggestions to improve the Hebrew language experience for Jewish students across the world?