

Class update - Middles, April 2010

We began our class by talking about where Jews live in the world today. The kids were amazed to realize how Jews make up such a small portion of the entire population and also while there are nearly the same number of Jews in the US and Israel (around 5-6 million), Jews make up a much higher percentage of the population in Israel than in the US. I think they were also surprised to find out that the country with the third highest Jewish population is France (500-600 thousand). We also talked about how Jews have moved all over the world, especially in Europe and about how many Jews ended up settling in Eastern Europe, where many of the students ancestors are from.

Muriel visited our class and showed us photos from "A Vanished World" by Roman Vishniac of Jews in Eastern Europe in the 1930s. We also learned a song in Yiddish about children studying in the cheder. The students sang very well...in both English and Yiddish!

Continuing our discussion of Jews in Eastern Europe, we learned about Shtetl life; how these were tight knit communities made up mostly of Jews where they would speak Yiddish on the streets and in homes and would use Hebrew in synagogue and when studying the Torah and Talmud. The marketplace was the center of the Shtetl where many people made their living selling the wares and where people would come to buy their food. We talked about how most people in the shtetl did not have a much money and made just enough to get by, but that it was important to help others in need within the community.

We finished up the class with the students starting to make their own dioramas of a shtetl. They were so involved, they are not yet complete, so we will continue the work in may.