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TOPIC (S)	ISRAEL 101: A camper's guide to experiencing Israel
SUMMARY	Over the course of the summer, this program can help camp integrate an understanding of Israel into a Jewish camper's life who has never before been exposed to an Israel education, or a camper who is looking to deepen their already-existing connection with Israel.
GOALS:	By the end of the summer, Jewish campers should ideally feel grounded in an understanding for not just what Israel is, but how Israel fits into their identity. While non-Jewish campers may not feel a personal identity with Israel in the same way, they should nonetheless come away with a new cultural understanding for their Jewish peers.
AUDIENCE:	6-12 would be a target age, but could easily be adapted for an older audience of campers (or even CITs)
TIMING:	Ideally can be implemented throughout the summer

Before the explanation of how this program can be run, a brief introduction: why would a program like this be important?

The unfortunate reality of American Jewry is that many Jewish children grow up without a strong connection to Israel, or even without a connection at all. Jewish day schools and Hebrew schools are often the only outlet where children can get any sort of Israel education, and not all parents have the ability to send their children to such places. Even if some of the educational responsibility falls on the parents, they cannot be expected to sufficiently teach their children about Israel if they went through the same insufficient attempt at Israel education when they were growing up.

That's where camp can step in. Camp possesses the unique ability to foster a fun, active and dynamic atmosphere while still being highly pivotal in children's personal identity and character development. This guide can help direct some of that energy to plant the seeds in the campers for a Jewish identity that sees Israel as a distinct feature.

SESSION TIMELINE

Below is a general timeline as to how the summer can flow in an 8-week camp schedule. This can be subject to change based on camp schedule, staffing, etc.

WEEK 1: Introducing Israel

In this program, the beginning of camp should be dedicated to not much more than an Israel introduction. Campers may not be familiar with Israel or its cultural importance yet, so bringing the concept to the forefront should be priority number one.

Activities to incorporate throughout the week include:

- Israeli flag making (arts & crafts)
- Learning the tune of Hatikvah (Music)

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- Creating the Israeli map shape with bodies (Co-Op games)
- Sharing stories about camper/staff Israeli family (circle time)
- A camp-wide trivia game with prizes at the end of the week (camp assembly)
- If applicable, get to know the Israeli staff!
 - Learn the towns they were born in/grew up in
 - Compare similarities and differences in childhoods

BY THE END OF THE WEEK: Campers should have a basic understanding of what Israel is, its Judiac significance, and should be capable of identifying basic imagery such as the Israeli flag.

WEEKS 2-3: Current Israeli culture

Now that campers have a conceptual understanding of Israel in their mind, the next couple weeks should instill a better picture of what Israel is like. Familiarizing campers with basic Israeli cultural staples will help the campers solidify an image of Israel in their mind.

Activities to incorporate throughout the weeks include:

- Making Falafel, Hummus, etc (cooking)
- Israeli folk dancing (dancing)
- Wearing Maccabi Tel Aviv/Haifa jerseys in sport games (sports)
- Learning Krav Maga basics (karate/martial arts)
- Bunk-by-bunk presentations of new “Israeli” skills learned—making new food, learned dance to Israeli song, Krav Maga presentation, etc (camp assembly)
- If applicable, earning new games from the Israeli staff!
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 - CLACK!

BY THE END OF THE WEEKS: Campers should come out of these weeks with a clearer image of Israel in their mind. After spending time familiarizing everyone with Israeli culture and normalizing the differences between their culture and ours, Israel shouldn’t feel too foreign anymore.

WEEKS 4-6: Israeli history

At this point, questions about Israel’s history may even come up naturally from campers. Where did Israel come from? Why do our roots run so deeply through Israel? How did Israel come to be what it is today? Since these questions are so multifaceted, they can be answered through a number of different engaging ways, whether it be religiously or historically. Important to remember that, while these activities should be fun, they serve as an avenue to teach campers about the activity’s topic.

Activities to incorporate throughout the weeks include:

- Acting out scenes from Tanach that happened in Israel—Abraham and Sarah’s journey to Israel, Jacob’s ladder dream, etc (drama)

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- Week-long “find the dead sea scrolls” activity where campers piece together a puzzle of different “clues” they find on the waterfront or in the woods (bunk period activity)
- Camp-wide reenactment of the 1948 UN independence declaration with bunk-assigned countries, rehearsals, etc (camp assembly)
- If applicable, learn from Israeli staff about what they learned about their country when they were camper age!
 - What’s the history of Israeli staff’s hometowns? How far back do their family’s roots go in the region?
 - This is one of many great opportunities to take advice from Israeli staff; what do *they* think the campers should learn about from Israeli history?

BY THE END OF THE WEEKS: Campers should feel like they’ve added a new layer to their identity. Now underlying their mental picture of Israel with stories and narratives from Israel’s past, the campers should now have an appreciation for Israel’s depth and deep cultural roots.

WEEKS 7-8: Making Israel a part of you

As camp winds down for the summer, these will be the weeks that campers remember most. Given this, these weeks will be essential in driving home the connection with Israel that these campers have been chasing all summer. These weeks can be a little bit more amorphous and personal based on the campers’ interests and desires that they’ve shown throughout camp. More on that below.

Activities to incorporate throughout the weeks include:

- Beginning to learn Hebrew words/phrases, (more advanced campers may be able to learn a song)
- Revisiting activities that campers have expressed interest in doing again
 - This is a good time to not only capitalize on what resonated with campers the most throughout the summer, but take note of any activities that were particularly successful and popular to continue in more summers to come!
- If applicable, incorporate Israeli staff in as much as possible to make sure the Israeli staff presence is felt by the campers
 - Campers will remember great relationships they had with the staff more than most things. Coming away from camp remembering the great relationships they had with Israelis at camp can lead to an even wider positive identity with Israel and open up a camper’s mind to want to explore their Israel identity even more.

BY THE END OF CAMP: Hopefully, our campers don’t just understand what Israel is, but feel it fit into their identity. This summer has been about creating exciting, positive and fun environments where campers can learn about Israel and come away knowing that they are the children of Israel. If campers come away with that, then camp has accomplished something much needed in the world today: giving Jewish children a connection to Israel.



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NOTE ABOUT MY BACKGROUND:

I come from JJC's Camp Grossman in Dover, MA. Camp Grossman is a pluralistic day camp with campers from all different religious and cultural backgrounds, with some campers who aren't Jewish at all. That said, this program intentionally doesn't provide too much guidance on how to present the educational curriculum to the campers, because different camps will inevitably have different standards and needs for their campers. A pluralistic day camp will have different curricular standards and processes from a religious Zionist sleepaway camp, and the program with its activities are intentionally left somewhat nonspecific so they can be adopted in different complexities for each camp's individual needs.