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Arthur Szyk and the Art of the Haggadah Curriculum Resource Guide



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About this Resource

This curriculum resource guide is designed to help teachers of students in grades 7—12 to explore themes of Passover and social activism through the work of Arthur Szyk. Complete with background information for teachers about Szyk and his illuminated Haggadah, the resource also offers detailed questions for visual analysis of illustrations from the Haggadah, as well as suggestions for activities to connect contemporary life with Passover themes of oppression and redemption.

Introduction to Arthur Szyk and the Art of the Haggadah

Through May 26, 2014

The haggadah—the text used during the ritual Passover meal, the seder—is the most published Jewish book in the history of printing; over 5,000 versions of the haggadah have been printed since the invention of the printing press at the end of the fifteenth century. Each version offers a unique presentation and interpretation of the Passover story that often reflects the time and community for which it was published.

About Arthur Szyk

In the 1930s, artist and political cartoonist Arthur Szyk (1894–1951, pronounced "Shick") began work on his illustrated Haggadah. Equally engaged with art and history, Szyk's Haggadah draws striking parallels between the ancient Passover narrative and the contemporary developments in Nazi Germany. Szyk was born and raised in Łódź, Poland to an upper class family, allowing him to pursue his artistic interest and talent by studying in Paris and then Kraków in the 1910s. From the beginning of his career, Szyk produced work deeply engaged in the shifting politics at home and across Europe as anti-Semitism and Adolf Hitler's power continued to catch hold. Attracted to the art of Medieval illuminated manuscripts and the powerful ability to disseminate knowledge through printed materials, Szyk worked primarily as a political cartoonist and book illustrator, illuminating such stories as the Book of Esther (*Le livre d'Esther*, 1925) and a collection of fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen (*Andersen's Fairy Tales*, 1945), in addition to the Haggadah (1940).

Szyk's most well known works are the political cartoons that he published throughout the years of World War II in such popular periodicals as *Time*, *Collier's*, *The New York Times*, and *Chicago Sun*. A tireless crusader against the growing Axis nations of Germany, Italy, and Japan, Szyk created a number of propagandist cartoons depicting Axis leaders as grotesque caricatures of greed and filth. One such cartoon shows American workers in the war effort preparing for battle as a snake adorned with swastikas wraps itself around the pillars of freedom.

This same criticality made its way into the illustrations produced to tell the story of Passover in Szyk's illuminated Haggadah. *The Szyk Haggadah* is remarkable for the seamlessness in which

the artist correlates the threats of a rising Nazi power with the Jews' plight in Egypt. Recognizing the story as one of both religious and social significance, Szyk used this opportunity to warn his audience of the dangers of inactivity and apathy in the current moment of tyranny. The characters that perform the Jewish rituals in Szyk's book are represented as contemporary Eastern European Jews as a device to engage his audience through recognition and familiarity. Though the overall style of the book mimics traditional medieval illuminated manuscripts, Szyk made overt reference to later Renaissance and Baroque artworks as well.

During Szyk's lifetime, the Queen of England, the White House, and numerous private homes received and praised his work as exceptional. His Haggadah was always his passion, allowing him to express his views as a Polish Jew and activist in a single comprehensive declaration. The exhibition at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, on view through May 26, 2014, is the first presentation of all forty-eight original paintings for the Haggadah to be shown in over sixty years.

To book a tour of *Arthur Szyk and the Art of the Haggadah*, email <u>tours@thecjm.org</u> or call 415.655.7856.

Suggested Activities and Discussions

Passover Focus

Goal: While students may bring a strong background in Passover and the Haggadah, this exercise will bring alive some of the larger themes of the Haggadah in order to frame the subsequent conversations.

Prior to the subsequent activities, use the texts below to review the following with your students:

- What is a Passover seder?
- What is a haggadah?
- What are some of the themes of the Passover holiday?

The Passover Seder

Passover is one of the most celebrated and participatory Jewish holidays. Each spring, Jews sit down to the Passover seder, a ritual feast and celebration of food, song, and prayer commemorating the liberation of the ancient Israelites from Egyptian servitude. While the Passover story and rituals have remained consistent over generations, seders are often augmented by family traditions. Seder participants are commanded to "relive" the journey from slavery into freedom. They do so by singing, eating symbolic foods, reclining in their chairs as befits a free people, asking questions—most notably, "Why is this night different from all other nights?"—and reciting together the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The evening also inspires discussions on the themes raised by the story—renewal and rebirth, freedom from oppression, and social justice and activism—which continue to require our attention and action.

The Passover Haggadah

The texts of the Passover seder are assembled in a book called the Haggadah. *Haggadah* comes from the Hebrew root meaning "to tell." The Haggadah tells the story of the Exodus from Egypt and explains some of the practices and symbols of the holiday. The Haggadah also sets out the order of the seder—fifteen steps in all—and includes prayers, commentary, and songs.

Passover is a living tradition; groups and individuals throughout history have created new interpretations of Passover, adding contemporary relevance and meaning to the ancient ritual. While Haggadot (plural for Haggadah) include much of the same primary text, each version offers a unique presentation of the Passover story through illustrations and commentaries that are often based on political, societal, and religious ideologies of the time and community for which it was published.

The Passover Story

After many years of living peacefully in Egypt, the Israelite population had become plentiful, and a newly enthroned Pharaoh began to fear their increasing power. To undermine their growing strength, Pharaoh oppressed and enslaved the Israelites, forcing them to build cities and idolatrous monuments in his honor. Despite their enslavement, the Israelites continued to grow in number, prompting Pharaoh to issue an order: kill all newborn Israelite sons.

Rather than surrender to this brutal order, one Israelite mother decided to hide her baby, Moses, in a basket on the banks of the Nile River. Pharaoh's daughter discovered Moses and raised him in the palace as an Egyptian. Growing up, Moses became aware of his Israelite background and began to stand up to the Egyptians' cruel treatment of his people. Moses asked Pharaoh to "let my people go," but Pharaoh refused. In retribution, God inflicted nine harsh plagues upon the Egyptians. After each plague, Pharaoh relentlessly refused to let the Israelites go. Finally, God sent the tenth plague: the killing of the first-born son in every Egyptian home.

To protect the Israelites from this plague, God commanded them to smear the blood of a sacrificed lamb on their doorposts so that the Angel of Death would know to "pass over" their homes, hence the name of the holiday. With Pharaoh's army in pursuit, the Israelites fled to the Red Sea where the waters parted, allowing them to cross safely. The waters quickly came together again, drowning Pharaoh's soldiers. Before the Israelites fled Egypt, God commanded them to quickly eat a meal of roast meat, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread. This first Passover meal, eaten in haste by the Israelites as they fled Egypt, is the basis of the matzah, bitter herb, and roasted shank bone found on the seder table during Passover.

The story of Passover is found in the Bible in the Book of Exodus.

Exploring Themes from the Haggadah

Share the following quotes with your students and discuss:

"V'hiqadita l'vincha" (And you shall tell your child)

- Why do you think this is an obligation? What purpose does it serve?
- In what ways does a haggadah or Passover seder contain ways to fulfill this obligation?

"Bechol Dor Vador Chayav Adam Lirot et Atzmo K'ilu Hu Yatza Mimitzrayim" (In every generation, we should feel as if we ourselves had left Egypt)

- How does the Passover seder give us opportunities to make personal connections to slavery?
- What other things might we do to help feel that we personally left Egypt?
- Why do you think this is important?

"Vehi she'amda, la'avotainu velanu. Shelo echad bilvad, amad aleinu lechaloteinu. Ela sheb'chol dor vador omdim aleinu lechaloteinu " (And this [God's blessings] is what kept our fathers and what keeps us surviving. For not just one enemy has stood against us to wipe us out. But in every generation there have been those who have stood against us to wipe us out. . . .)

- Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
- Who or what might be the "enemies" of this generation?
- What, in your opinion, has enabled survival over the generations?

Exploring Haggadot

Provide a wide range of haggadot, from various time periods, denominations, and aesthetic approaches. (See list of suggestions in the Additional Resources section of this curriculum.) Or, ask your students to bring in a haggadah from home. Ask students to select a haggadah and explore the following questions:

- What year was it published? What do you know about was going on in the world at that time?
- Who might be the intended audience for this haggadah?
- Which way does the haggadah open (from left to right or right to left?) What does that tell you about its intended audience?
- Why do you think whatever is going on in the world might make its way into the haggadah?
- Look for iconic sections of the seder (ex: The Four Questions, The Four Sons/Children, or The Ten Plagues).
 - How is this section treated artistically? What does the author/editor do with the text? Is anything added to the traditional liturgy?
- What do you like about the haggadah you are reviewing? What do you not like?
- If you were to compose your own haggadah, what might it contain? What might the illustrations be like? Would you include a particular theme or point of view? Would it contain only traditional text? Would it contain any contemporary additions? If so, what? Why?

Ask students to find a partner, and compare their answers.

As a class, discuss the following:

How were the haggadot different?

How did they reflect a particular place and time? Why do you think the events of the day might have influenced the content of a haggadah? How do these relate to the themes of Passover?

What elements of our day would you put in a Haggadah?

A Close Look at The Szyk Haggadah

Ma Nishtana: Illuminating the Passover Story

Goal: To introduce illuminated manuscripts and call upon students' prior knowledge of the Passover story in order to gain insights on how illumination can serve to expand upon the holiday liturgy.

Invite students to take a careful look at the "Ma Nishtana" page of The Szyk Haggadah. Ask them to look carefully and notice the details, using the following questions:



What do you notice about the images?

Who might the central figures be? How would you describe them? What could they be doing?

Take a look at the smaller images surrounding the central figures. What story do they tell?

What animals do you see? What associations do you have with these animals? You may want to share that it is believed that Szyk's spotted snake was originally spotted with swastikas. How might this change your interpretation of this animal?

See if you can find the initial Hebrew letter *mem*. How does Szyk illuminate the mem?

Share information about the tradition of illuminated manuscripts:

The term "illuminated" comes from the Latin word for 'lit up' or 'enlightened' and refers to the use of bright colors and gold to embellish initial letters or to portray entire scenes. Sometimes the initial letters were purely decorative, but often they work with the text to mark important passages, or to enhance or comment on the meaning of the text. The earliest examples are from the seventh and eighth century, and were biblical.

bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/TourIntroGen.asp

What do we know about this text?

Share that this is the text of The Four Questions, and review the content of The Four Questions.

(See full translation below.)

How do the images relate to the text? How do they work together?

How might the images comment on the meaning of the text? Where do they diverge? Why might they diverge?

Szyk included biblical characters in the Haggadah that are not mentioned in the text. Why do you think Szyk included them?

Szyk often imbedded social or political commentary into his illustrations for the Haggadah. What do you see here that could be commentary?

"Ma Nishtana" (The Four Questions), Translated:

The Four Questions are a central part of the seder, which is designed to be participatory. Recited or sung early in the ceremony, usually by the youngest child at the table, they set the framework for telling the Exodus story.

The Four Questions are introduced with this:

"Why is this night different from all other nights?"

They continue with the following:

On all other nights we eat leavened products and matzah, and on this night only matzah.

On all other nights we eat all vegetables, and on this night only bitter herbs.

On all other nights, we don't dip our food even once, and on this night we dip twice.

On all other nights we eat sitting or reclining, and on this night we only recline.

The Bread of Affliction: Zionism, Biblical Stories, Jewish Heroism

Goal: To learn how Szyk's symbolic illumination was a reflection of his beliefs in Jewish activism

Take a close look at the plate entitled "The Bread of Affliction."

Divide class into three groups, asking one group to look at the top image (man and tiger), one at the central image, and one at the bottom image. Have each group answer the following

questions:

What might be going on in this image?

What figures or symbols do you recognize? Who might they be? What might they represent?

What questions do you have about this image?

Have students read the translation of this page ("Ha Lachma Anya" or The Bread of Affliction). What might be the connections between text and image?

Share visual analyses of the three groups with the entire class. Discuss how these three parts of the image might work together. Discuss why Szyk might have selected these characters and scenes.

Additional information to share if necessary:



The top image presents an image of an unknown Jewish warrior fighting with a tiger. Szyk was interested in including images of Jewish heroes and warriors in his Haggadah. Why do you think he chose to do this?

The central scene presents us with an image of Abraham, three angels, and Sarah. How might this relate to Passover? To this text?

Szyk imbedded images that hint at advocacy for a Zionism, or the establishment of a Jewish State in Israel. See if you can make a connection with the bottom images and the early pioneers in Israel.

"Ha Lachma Anya" (The Bread of Affliction), Translated:

This is the bread of affliction, which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are needy come and celebrate the Passover. At present we are here; next year may we be in the land of Israel. At present we are slaves; next year may we be free.

The Four Sons: Szyk and 1930s Politics

Goal: To learn how Szyk imbedded political commentary specific to his time into his illustrations for the Haggadah.

Share the following information with your students:

In this image, Szyk illustrates the archetypical Four Sons—(counterclockwise from the top right) the Wise son, the Wicked son, the son who "Doesn't Know to Ask," and the Simple son. (See below for a translation of this text from the haggadah.)

Then ask:

How does he portray each son? Why do you think he chose this particular character to represent this "son?"

What can we learn about Szyk's time and place from looking at these "sons?"

Scholars of Szyk's work note that the wicked son bears resemblance to Adolf Hitler. Do you agree? Why might Szyk have selected this depiction?



Compare this image to other interpretations of the Four Sons. A good place to start is *A Different Night: A Family Participation Haggadah*. How have other artists interpreted The Four Sons (now often called "The Four Children") over time?

How would you depict them for our time? How might the depictions reflect their surroundings?

The Four Sons (The Four Children), Translated:

The Torah speaks of four types of children: one is wise, one is wicked, one is simple, and one does not know how to ask.

The Wise One asks: "What is the meaning of the laws and traditions God has commanded?" You should teach him all the traditions of Passover, even to the last detail.

The Wicked One asks: "What does this ritual mean to you?" By using the expression "to you" he excludes himself from his people and denies God. Shake his arrogance and say to him: "It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt. . ." "For me" and not for him—for had he been in Egypt, he would not have been freed.

The Simple One asks: "What is all this?" You should tell him: "It was with a mighty hand that the Lord took us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

As for the One Who Does Not Know How To Ask, you should open the discussion for him, as it is written: "And you shall explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did.'

In Every Generation: Connection Throughout History

Goal: Consider how *The Szyk Haggadah* (and haggadot in general) might connect the generations.

Share with your students the translation of the blue text on this plate. (See below.)

What do you notice about the image as a whole? What general components stand out?

Now, take a careful look at the specific symbols and imagery Szyk chose to include. What looks familiar? Can you find anything that might relate to the "enemies" from past generations? See if you can make a list and research some of these symbols.

What might the snake represent? How would your interpretation change if the snake's spots contained swastikas, as we saw in the "Ma Nishtana" image?

How would you interpret the man and tablets of the Ten Commandments at the top of the page in light of the text?

How would you interpret the overall message of this image?

What imagery would you add to this pile of symbols to represent other enemies, perhaps those of our current times?



"Vehi She'amda" (God's Promise), Translated:

"Vehi she'amda, la'avotainu velanu. Shelo echad bilvad, amad aleinu lechaloteinu. Ela sheb'chol dor vador omdim aleinu lechaloteinu " (And this (God's blessings) is what kept our fathers and what keeps us surviving. For not just one enemy has stood against us to wipe us out. But in every generation there have been those who have stood against us to wipe us out. . . .)

Passover and Contemporary Life

Goal: To make connections between Szyk's integration of current day events into his Haggadah and the students' own understanding of the relationship between Passover and the present day.

Discussion

Reflect with your students on the following:

How does the Passover story connect to you? To our place and time? To other world events in our time? Other events in history?

The Passover liturgy tells us "Hashata hacha, I'shanah habaah b'ara d'Yisrael. Hashata avdei, I'shanah habaah b'nei chorin" (Today we are here; next year may we be in the land of Israel. Today we are slaves; next year may we be free.) How, in your opinion, are we slaves today? To what might we be slaves?

Suggested Activities:

A Personalized Haggadah

Share with your students that we observed that many haggadot contain images (and some may have included additional texts) that reflect the place and time of their creation. If you were going to create your own haggadah, what would it look like? How would it reflect our place and time? What are symbols of freedom or oppression you would include in your seder? What would you add, create, or do to make participants feel like they personally came out of Egypt? How might your haggadah speak to combating enemies of the present day?

Have students choose a part of the haggadah to work with and create a new tradition, interpretation, or illustration that addresses one of these questions. Encourage them to think creatively—this could be a song, a performance, a new food, or a new ritual.

Have students present this new haggadah idea to the class. Combine ideas to create a personalized haggadah for the class.

Tech extension: ask students to upload their new content to haggadot.com. Haggadot.com is an online, crowdsourced haggadah that allows users to contribute and use content to build their own online haggadah. It even has classroom and group haggadah capabilities. After you add your unique content, they may build out the rest of your haggadah using the other content on the site. Have fun!

Passover Political Cartoons

Share with students that Arthur Szyk is well-known for his political cartoons and other propaganda-style work. Some of the techniques of political cartooning made their way into his Passover Haggadah. Ask students to take a look at the hallmarks of political cartooning listed below. Which ones did you notice in the images of the Haggadah? Why do you think he made these artistic choices?

Now ask them to look at one of Szyk's political cartoons. How does it differ from the imagery in the Haggadah? How is it similar? Which of the techniques below does he use? What is the impact?

Political Cartoon/Propaganda Persuasive Techniques:

From the Library of Congress, "It's No Laughing Matter"

Symbolism: Identify the symbols used in the image. What bigger concept or idea do they stand for?

Exaggeration: What characteristics (facial, clothing, etc.) seem exaggerated? What point is the artist making through these exaggerations?

Labeling: What is labeled and why? Does it help the reader better understand the image?

Analogy: What is the illustrator comparing? How does this comparison help the reader understand the illustrator's point?

Irony: What is ironic about the image and what does it emphasize?

Ask students to get creative, channel their inner Arthur Szyk, and develop an illustration for a Passover haggadah that has current-day resonance, using the techniques of political cartoons. Remind them to consider objectives, message, and intended audience in order to select the most effective techniques for their cartoon. Use paper, colored pencils, and markers to create the cartoon, then share out to the class, asking them to analyze the message and impact.

Additional Resources

A Sampling of Haggadot (by year published), courtesy of Nechama Tamler

Foer, Jonathan Safran and Englander, Nathan. *New American Haggadah* Little Brown and Company: New York, 2012.

Silber, David and Furst, Rachel. *A Passover Haggadah: Go Forth and Learn* The Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia, 2011.

Zion, Noam and Zion Mishael. A Night To Remember: A Haggadah of Contemporary Voices Jerusalem: 2007.

Cohen, Tamara. The Journey Continues: The Ma'ayan Passover Haggadah AGW Lithographers, New York: 2000.

Levitt, Joy and Strassfeld, Michael. *A Night of Questions A Passover Haggadah* The Reconstructionist Press: Elkins Park, PA, 2000.

Shire, Michael. The Illuminated Haggadah: Featuring Medieval Illuminations from the Haggadah Collection of the British Library Stewart, Tabor and Chang: New York, 1998.

Nemhauser, Ellen and Seldin, Ruth. *In Every Generation: A Passover Haggadah for the Westchester Women's Seders* American Jewish Committee and YM-YWHA of Westchester, 1996.

Twerski, Abraham J. *From Bondage To Freedom: The Passover Haggadah* Shaar Press: Brooklyn, New York, 1995.

Bergner, Yosl and Shnur, Zalman. *Hagada Shel Pesach/Haggadah of Passover* Moden: Israel, 1995.

Wiesel, Elie and Podwal, Mark. A Passover Haggadah Touchstone Press: New York, 1993.

Broner, E.M. and Nimrod, Naomi. *The Women's Haggadah* Harper Collins: New York, 1993.

Wortman, David and Podwal, Mark. *The Exodus Haggadah From Tyranny to Freedom* UJA: New York, 1990.

Khayyim, Dov ben. *The Passover Haggadah* Rakhamim Publications: Oakland, CA, 1983.

Rabinowitz, Rachel Anne *Passover Haggadah The Feast of Freedom* The Rabbincal Assembly 1982

Stern, Chaim. Gates of Freedom New Star Press: Bedford, New York, 1981.

Scharfstein, Ben Ami. Passover Haggadah Shilo Publishing: New York, 1959.

De Sola Pool, David and De Sola Pool, Tamar. *The Haggadah of Passover* Jewish Welfare Board: New York, 1943.

Raskin, Saul. Haggadah For Passover Bloch Publishing Company: New York, 1941 & 1968.

Maxell House Passover Haggadah (this edition is from 1994. First edition 1932. Latest edition, 2011. maxwellhousehaggadahproject.tumblr.com/

Heidenheim, Wolf. *The Roedelheim Haggadah*, Weintraub, Munish: Israel, 1832 facsimile edition.

<u>Information on Arthur Szyk</u>

The Arthur Szyk Society: Online information, images, and resources szyk.org/

The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk, an online exhibition by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum <u>ushmm.org/exhibition/szyk/</u>

Resources on Political Cartoons

It's No Laughing Matter: Library of Congress Lesson about Political Cartoons loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/activities/political-cartoon/

Resources on Illuminated Manuscripts

British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/TourIntroGen.asp

Getty Museum Lessons on Illuminated Manuscripts getty.edu/education/for teachers/curricula/manuscripts/background1.html

Visual Aids



The Four Questions [The Haggadah]

Lodz, 1935

Watercolor and gouache on paper Sheet size: 11 x 9.6875 inches Image Size: 6.625 x 5.6875 inches

11



The Bread of Affliction [The Haggadah]

Lodz, 1935

Watercolor and gouache on paper Sheet size: 11 x 9.625 inches Image Size: 6.8125 x 5.625 inches

#9



Szyk's "Four Sons" [The Haggadah]

Lodz, 1934

Watercolor and gouache on paper Sheet size: 11.875 x 9.625 inches Image Size: 6.25 x 4.687 inches

God's Promise [The Haggadah]

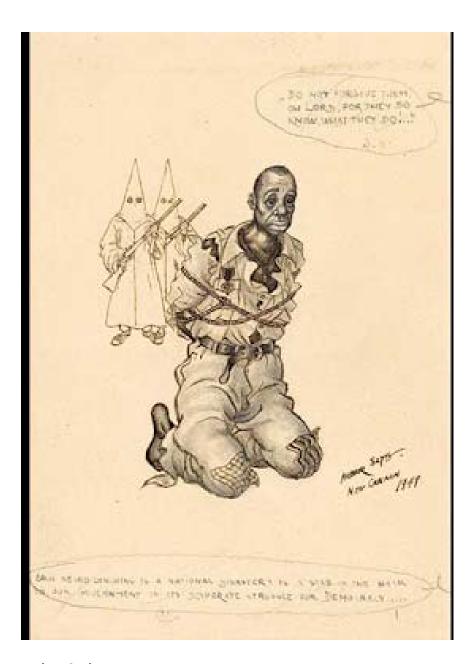
Lodz, 1935

Watercolor and gouache on paper Sheet size: 11 x 9.625 inches Image Size: 6.625 x 5.625 inches

#17



Arthur Szyk A Madman's Dream (Der Untermensch) New York, 1940



Arthur Szyk Do Not Forgive Them, Oh Lord, For They Do Know, What They Do! New Canaan, 1949

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