



A-Ba-Ni-Bi

Topic

Hebrew, "A-Ba-Ni-Bi" — The popular Israeli song

Grade Level

3rd – 8th

Objectives

Students will

- Learn the Hebrew song "A-Ba-Ni-Bi"
- Listen to and learn about Israel's entries into the Eurovision contest
- Practice speaking in שְׂפַת הַבֵּית (S'fat HaBet)

Prepare in Advance

- Review the [Blendspace](#) and decide which videos you will share with your students.
- Copy lyrics.
- Learn line dance if you choose.

Background for the Teacher

"A-Ba-Ni-Bi"

The classic Hebrew song ,א-ב-נ-י-בִי, or **A-Ba-Ni-Bi**, debuted at Eurovision, a song contest among member countries of the European Broadcasting Union, in 1978. Written by Ehud Manor, composed by Nurit Hirsh, and sung by Izhar Cohen and Alpha Beta, "A-Ba-Ni-Bi" won Eurovision that year, the first time an Israeli entry had done so since the contest began in 1956. The title of the song, and its premise, comes from the words אָנִי אוֹהֵב אוֹתָךְ (*ani ohev otach*), translated as "I love you," spoken in "S'fat HaBet," or the "bet language." The *bet* language is a children's language game which adds extra syllables, starting with the letter "bet," to each word (more on this below). The song's lyrics explain that adults should relate to love in a different way than children, that "love is a beautiful word" and not something meant for the world of secrets.

The lyricist and composer of "A-Ba-Ni-Bi," Manor and Hirsh, wrote several of Israel's entries into Eurovision. This song was a departure from their previous style as it has more of a disco feel, as would many song entrants in the years following. "A-Ba-Ni-Bi" is often on lists of Eurovision favorites and was performed during the 2006 Eurovision semifinals as part of a medley.

Historically, Eurovision was broadcast live throughout its viewing area across Europe, and in areas of North Africa and Asia. On the evening of the 1978 broadcast, many non-participating Arab countries stopped their broadcast when it was apparent that Israel would win. The Jordanian television station, for example, replaced the transmission with pictures of flowers and announced the second-place finisher, Belgium, as having won the contest.



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Children's Language Games

The most prominent children's language game in the United States is likely Pig-Latin in which the first letter of a word is removed and appended to the end adding the syllable "ay." Thus, the term Pig-Latin becomes "ig-pay atin-lay." If the word begins with a vowel, the word remains intact, but the syllable "ay" is still appended to the end.

Ubbi-Dubbi is a different variation on a language game, popularized by the 1970s television show, *Zoom*. In *Ubbi-Dubbi*, the syllable "ub" is placed before every vowel sound in a word. For example, "hello" becomes "hubellubo" and "good morning" becomes "gubood mubornubing."

S'fat HaBet, referred to in "A-Ba-Ni-Bi," works in a similar way, except that the additions come after the vowel sound. In *S'fat HaBet*, each syllable is followed by the letter "bet" and the same vowel sound as in the syllable previous. In Hebrew, "ani" becomes "a-ba-ni-bi." If it were to be used in English, "hello" would become "he-be-llo-bo."

There are many other such language games around the world. Here are a few:

- *Jeringonza* ("Gibberish") — Spanish. In this game you double every vowel sound and add a "p" in the middle. "Hello" becomes "hepellopo." In some versions "f" is used instead of "p."
- *Lingua do Pê* ("P-Language") — Portuguese. This is the same as the Spanish game described above.
- *Alfabeto Farfallino* ("Little Butterfly Alphabet") — Italian. This is like its Spanish and Portuguese cousins, except that an "f" is used instead of a "p." It gets its name from the word *farfalla*, meaning "butterfly," in honor of all of the "f"s added to words.
- *Löffelsprache* ("Spoon Language") — German. As with other language games, vowels are duplicated in *Löffelsprache* as well. In this game the syllable "lew," "lef" or "lev," depending on the surrounding letters, is added in the middle.

Ways to Use this Resource

- Teach the song.
- Teach the dance.
- Have students read the Hebrew lyrics.
 - This is good elementary reading practice as a break from prayer words.
 - Ask students to look for words or roots they already know.
- Have students watch various versions (available on Blendspace [here](#)) and decide which one they like the most.
 - You might have them listen without watching as decades-old costumes might change their judgement.
 - You might challenge them to figure out which came first (Cohen, Paley, Barzilai).



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- Challenge students to speak in *S'fat HaBet*.
 - They might do this with Hebrew words they know well such as אנני פה, *ani po* — *abanibi pobo*, or שלום, *shalom* — *shabalobom*.
 - They might try to speak this language as they go through their camp or school day.
 - You might give announcements in this language or ask the camp or school director to do so.
- Encourage students to speak or develop other private languages
 - Have a contest for most creative language.
 - Have a contest for which group or class can speak for the longest time without forgetting or making a mistake.
 - If students make up their own language, have other groups try to break the code.
- Watch the three other Israeli Eurovision winners and have the students vote for which one they like best; have them explain the reasoning behind their choice.
- Read the lyrics in English and have students try to guess when they were written. What do the lyrics say about Israeli society at that time?
- Hold a Eurovision-style contest with each class — or cabin or unit — performing an Israeli song or original Hebrew song; as with Eurovision, half of the votes come from the judges and half from the participating countries with the caveat that you can't vote for yourself.
- Watch the misheard lyrics video found on the Blendspace and have students compose misheard lyrics to another Hebrew song; choose wisely (prayers are discouraged).



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| A-BA-NI-BI | א-ב-ני-בי |
|--|---|
| [chorus x2] I love (A-ba-ni-bi o-bo-he-bev) I love you (A-ba-ni-bi o-bo-he-bev o-bo-ta-bach) | א-ב-ני-בי או-בו-ה-בב א-ב-ני-בי או-בו-ה-בב או-בו-ת-בך. |
| When we were children, We loved in deepest secret To whom were we "nice"? Only to uncles and aunts. | כשהיינו ילדים, אהבנו בסודי סודות אל מי היינו נחמדים? רק לדודים ולדודות. |
| And the poor girls suffered, the sweet ones only were hit. And what we truly felt, we whispered only in "B-language" | והבנות המסכנות סבלו, המתוקות הן רק מכות קיבלו. ואת מה שהרגשנו באמת, לחשנו רק בשפת ה"בית" |
| [chorus x2] | א-ב-ני-בי... |
| Love, it is a beautiful word A beautiful prayer, a language Love, it is good to me It is always increasing And we will speak the language of love. | אהבה, היא מילה יפה, היא תפילה יפה, היא שפה. אהבה, היא אלי טובה, היא תמיד תתגבר ובשפת אהבה נדבר. |
| [chorus x2] | א-ב-ני-בי... |
| I dream, and three words appear And what is the world? Three words And this is what I feel now Truly just as then — in "B-language" | אני חולם וקם שלוש מילים. ומהו העולם? — שלוש מילים. וזה מה שאני מרגיש כעת, ממש כמו אז בשפת ה"בית". |
| [chorus x3] | א-ב-ני-בי... |