

The Resilient Haggadah

Topic

Pesach, *Mitzvot* and *Middot*, Art

Grade Level(s)

7th – 12th

Big Ideas

Preserving Jewish art is a way to transmit values from one generation to the next.

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Learn to use art to develop thinking dispositions
2. Sharpen the skills of observation, interpretation, reasoning, elaboration, and collaboration
3. Understand and implement the concept of *Hiddur Mitzvah*
4. Learn to navigate and appreciate the National Library of Israel [website](#) containing millions of books, photos, manuscripts, photos, music, newspapers, recordings, and rare archives

Relevant Vocabulary

פֶּסַח (Pesach)	Passover
הידור מצוה (Hiddur Mitzvah)	Beautifying the commandments by engaging the senses
הספריה הלאומית (HaSifria HaLeumit)	National Library of Israel (NLI)
שְׁמוֹת (Shemot)	The Book of Exodus
חברותא (Havruta)	Learning Partner

Materials / Technology Needed

- [Elaboration Game \(Variation\)—A Thinking Routine from Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education](#)
- [World Jewish Congress](#) Video About the [Sarajevo Haggadah](#)
- PBS Video About the [Sarajevo Haggadah](#)
- Computers or tablets
- Mod Podge or other glue product, shiny decorative paper, brushes, rulers, and/or scissors
- [National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)
- Haggadot (at least one per two learners)
- Posters and Photographs of the Sarajevo Haggadah published in 1975 by Cecil Roth at *HaSifria HaLeumit*
 - Posters (3)
 - [Kain kills Abel, and Noah builds the Ark](#)
 - [Lot flies from Sodome/The Sacrifice of Isaac](#)
 - [Esau in blessed by Isaac/Jacob's Vision on the Heavenly Ladder](#)

The Resilient Haggadah

- Photographs of the Sarajevo Haggadah (23)
 - [Fol. 1v.](#)
 - [Fol. 2](#)
 - [Fol. 3](#)
 - [Fol. 3v](#)
 - [Fol. 4](#)
 - [Fols. 5v-6](#)
 - [Fols. 7v-8](#)
 - [Fols. 9v-10](#)
 - [Fols. 11v-12](#)
 - [Fols. 13v-14](#)
 - [Fols. 15v-16](#)
 - [Fols. 17v-18](#)
 - [Fols. 19v-20](#)
 - [Fol. 21v](#)
 - [Fol. 22](#)
 - [Fols. 23v-24](#)
 - [Fol. 25](#)
 - [Fols. 25v-26](#)
 - [Fol. 27v.](#)
 - [Fols. 29v-30](#)
 - [Fols. 31v](#)
 - [Fol. 32](#)
 - [Fols. 33v-34](#)

Prepare in Advance

1. Learners should be asked to bring a family treasure or heirloom that is particular beautiful (or a picture of the treasure/heirloom) from home. Ask learners to prepare a short story about the object.
2. Prepare copies of Appendix A and Appendix B (one copy of each per student).
3. Watch this [video](#) on How to Make Illuminated Manuscripts.
4. After watching the video above, procure the materials so students can create an illuminated page. Or solicit the help of an art teacher, if there is one in your school.

Background for Teachers

Hiddur mitzvah means beautifying the commandments by engaging the senses. In practice, to enhance a mitzvah one should strive to acquire or create (if possible) the most beautiful ritual objects possible. The concept of *hiddur mitzvah* stems from the verse, “This is my God and I will glorify Him” ([Exodus 15:2](#)). Rabbi Ishmael comments that, since we can’t add to God’s glory, one should strive to elevate God by elevating the beauty of the commandments ([Mechilta de’Rabbi Yishmael, Tractate Shirah 3](#)). The desire to beautify ritual objects led to the creation of many illuminated books during the Middle Ages.

One such book was what is known as The Sarajevo Haggadah, which, through its long journey and survival in many countries, has come to represent resilience and freedom to many people. The Sarajevo Haggadah was created approximately 700 years ago likely in Barcelona, Spain, when a Jew commissioned a hand-painted illuminated Haggadah to gift a bride and a groom from two prominent families. After using the Haggadah in many Pesach celebrations, the family escaped Spain due to the Spanish Inquisition. The

The Resilient Haggadah

Haggadah reappeared in Italy, brought allegedly by a Sephardic Jew. Later, the Haggadah was brought to Bosnia by a rabbi; and one of his descendants, Yosef Koen, sold the Haggadah to the National Museum in Bosnia in 1894. In 1941 the Nazis entered the museum and demanded the Haggadah. The director, aided by a curator, smuggled the Haggadah and hid it in a Muslim village until the end of War World Two, when the Haggadah returned to the museum. In 1992, when bombs started to explode in the city of Sarajevo, the Haggadah was sneaked out again and deposited in a National Bank underground vault. On Pesach 1995, the Bosnian president brought out the Haggadah from an underground vault to show the world that it was safe. Today the Haggadah is kept in the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in a secure place, and it is displayed only on special occasions.

HaSifria HaLeumit

The National Library of Israel was established in 1892. The library changed names and locations several times. However the goal of collecting the cultural treasures of Israel and Jewish heritage remained unmoved. Today the library is in the government complex across from the Knesset and houses more than 5 million books. The library also owns the world's largest Judaica collection and many artifacts and rare and unique manuscripts.

Description of Activities

- 1) Ask learners to share their heirlooms and their stories. At the end, tell learners that today we are going to learn about a special family treasure from 600 years ago. Tell learners the story of the Sarajevo Haggadah (in a dramatic tone). Alternatively, you can show learners the PBS movie. Familiarize learners with the website of *HaSifria HaLeumit* before proceeding to the next activity.
 - a. Divide learners into *havrutot*; each two learners should be equipped with a computer or tablet to work on 2 or 3 items from the list of Posters and Photographs of the Sarajevo Haggadah from the archive of *HaSifria HaLeumit*. Make sure that each pair of learners gets different items to observe. (Ask learners to use the Full Screen command on the link of *HaSifria HaLeumit* to see the posters and photographs better).
 - b. Proceed to explain the Collaboration Game (provide each learner with one copy of Appendix A and one copy of Appendix B).
- 2) Using the concept of *hiddur mitzvah*, each learner designs an illuminated Haggadah page for his/her home to be used at their *sedarim*.

Additional Activities

- 3) Compare and contrast the text of [Fol.3](#) in the Sarajevo Haggadah with the corresponding text in the Haggadah your teacher provided.
- 4) Create a timeline of the journey of the Sarajevo Haggadah.

The Resilient Haggadah

- 5) Design an advertisement piece enticing people to visit the city of Sarajevo to see the Sarajevo Haggadah.
- 6) Encourage learners to write down the questions they still have about the Sarajevo Haggadah. Model: Do you think that the Sarajevo Haggadah survived because of its beauty or despite of it?

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- You are put in charge of renaming the Sarajevo Haggadah. After everything you have learned, what name would you choose and why? (Responses can be typed or recorded.)

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Research the life of Jews in Sarajevo using [World Jewish Travel Official](#) and [Jewish Virtual Library](#)
- The Sarajevo Haggadah is considered an illuminated masterpiece from the Medieval period. How does it compare to a non-illuminated Haggadah?

Appendix A

Facts about the Sarajevo Haggadah:

"The Sarajevo Haggadah comprises 142 leaves of parchment, 16.5 cm x 22.8 cm in size, made of extraordinarily thin, bleached calf skin. The first 34 leaves feature 69 illuminated miniatures showing the Creation of the World, slavery in Egypt, coming out of Egypt under Moses' leadership, and beyond, all the way to the succession of Joshua, son of Nun. The last four miniatures are an exception, in that they are not biblical in character. The next 50 leaves contain the text of the Haggadah, written on both the recto and the verso in Hebrew, in the mediaeval, Spanish-type square script. The last part of the book is a subsequently added poetic/ceremonial appendix containing poems by some of the most famous Hebrew poets from the golden era of Hebrew literature (10th–13th century): Yehudah HaLevi, Yitzhak ben Yehudah ibn Ghiyyath HaLevi, Salomon ibn Gabirol, Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra, and others."

*Mirsad Sijarić, DSc, Acting Director of the
National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

Other interesting facts about the Haggadah:

- The most beautiful parts of the Haggadah are the golden illustrations throughout.
- The illustrations pertaining to the celebration of Pesach are the distribution of charoset and worshipers coming out of the synagogue.
- There is a stain of wine on one of the pages, signaling that the Haggadah was used during the Pesach Seder.
- On another page there are doodles made apparently by a child. Again, support for the fact that this Haggadah was used in a family celebration.
- In the Sarajevo Haggadah there is a coat of arms of the city of Barcelona—a shield with a rose (suggestive of the name Shoshan – rose in Hebrew)—and a wing (suggestive of the name Elazar) in honor of the two prominent families gifted with the Haggadah at their wedding.
- The artist or artists of the Sarajevo Haggadah are unknown.

Appendix B

Elaboration Game (Variation)

From the A Thinking Routine from Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education

In havruta, observe and describe the posters and photographs of the Sarajevo Haggadah in the links. (The links from the virtual collection of *HaSifria HaLeumit* will be distributed to each havruta by the teacher.)

1. The first person (observer) **describes** what he or she sees. *Only describe what you see. Hold off giving your ideas about the art until the last step of the routine.*

The second person (elaborator) **elaborates** on the first person's observations by adding more detail.

2. Havrutot come together in front of a big screen attached to a computer. Each havruta presents its descriptions to the larger group in detail while the corresponding poster or photograph is being screened on the big screen. At the end of this process, all participants are encouraged to **collaborate in interpreting** (interpreters) what they saw and draw conclusions about the character and characteristics of the Sarajevo Haggadah. Assign a learner to record the description, elaborations, and interpretations.

Note taking:

- Consider these questions as you interpret and discuss the art from the Sarajevo Haggadah.
 - What do you see in the artwork?
 - If there are people, who do they represent? What are their expressions?
 - What artistic style is prominent in this Haggadah?
 - What are the motifs depicted in the Sarajevo Haggadah?
 - What colors can you find throughout the piece?
 - What do you think is the impact of the colors chosen?
 - How long do you estimate it would have taken the artist(s) to create the Sarajevo Haggadah?
 - Does the Sarajevo Haggadah tell a story beyond the traditional Haggadah? If yes, what is it?
 - What emotions does the Sarajevo Haggadah elicit?
 - How is our appreciation of the artwork affected when we don't know who the artist is?
 - After learning about the Sarajevo Haggadah, what can we conclude regarding the connection between Medieval and modern times?
 - Add your own questions.