

The Day of the Establishment of the Knesset – Democracy

Lesson Plan for Grade 5

Via dealing with the holiday of the Knesset, the lesson plan makes way for study on the Israeli Legislature and about the concept of democracy and the values it is based upon.

- Birthday of the Knesset – the name 'Knesset' and its sources. To get acquainted with the Knesset institution.
- Democracy – the rule of the people, and its expressions.

1. The Israeli Knesset

1. Introduction – Tu Bishvat is the day of the establishment of the Knesset, the Israeli legislative body.

2. Lexical Analysis:

- What words does the word 'Knesset' remind you of? What is the root of this word?_(The Hebrew root is .ס.נ.כ denoting a gathering, entrance or synagogue)
- What is the connection between these words and the Knesset? (Knesset is a place of gathering, entrance, a way of gathering in order to become a nation)

3. Tractate of Avot:

Tractate of Avot Chapter 1

1, 1 Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly. They [the Men of the Great Assembly] would always say these three things: Be cautious in judgement. Establish many pupils. And make a safety fence around the Torah.

- How many levels has the Torah been transferred from Sinai until the Men of the Great Assembly?
- Who are the successors of the Men of the Great Assembly?



4. The Men of the Great Assembly:

The Great Assembly is the name of the Supreme Institution of the Sages of Israel during the Second Temple period. Generally speaking, it was a gathering of people who convened in the courtyard of the Temple to discuss matters of legislation, fundamental problems of the people and to come to urgent decisions for emergency situations, similar to the Greek People's Assembly. The Great Assembly was headed by Ezra the Scribe, who also served also as the High Priest. Among its members were the last of the prophets in Israel: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, as well as Mordecai the Jew known from the Book of Esther .

(According to Bavli Megillah 17b, at its founding the Great Assembly was comprised of 120 chief sages of Israel)

- In what era was The Great Assembly active?
- Who were the leaders of The Great Assembly?
- How many members participated in The Great Assembly? And what typifies them?
- What were the roles of The Great Assembly?

5. The Israeli Knesset Today:

The Knesset is Israel's house of representatives (the parliament) and it has four main functions: To pass laws – the Knesset has the sole authority to pass laws - to supervise government work, to choose the President of Israel and the state comptroller, and to deliberate over state issues through the Knesset committees and the work of the Knesset plenum.

From the Israeli Government Site

[Http://www.gov.il/FirstGov/TopNav/OfficesAndAuthorities/OAUList/OAUKnesset/](http://www.gov.il/FirstGov/TopNav/OfficesAndAuthorities/OAUList/OAUKnesset/)

- What is the Knesset?
- What are the roles of the Knesset?
- What are the similarities and differences between today's Knesset and The Great Assembly?

6. The Founding of the Knesset

On January 25, 1949, Knesset elections were held for the first time by what was called then the Constituent Assembly. On February 14, 1949, Tu Bishvat, 5709, the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly took place in Jerusalem, at the Jewish Agency building. Most of the elected representatives had arrived to Jerusalem from the coastal plain, and on their way, they stopped at Sha'ar HaGai for a tree planting ceremony. A tree-planting ceremony at various sites in and around Jerusalem has since been part of the tradition of the Knesset's birthday celebrations.



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At the opening ceremony of the meeting of the Constituent Assembly, the President of the Provisional Council of State Prof. Chaim Weizmann said: "With a feeling of awe and reverence I open the Constituent Assembly of the State of Israel, the first Knesset in our day, in the eternal city of Jerusalem ...At this great moment of the history of our people we shall give praise and thanks to the G-d of Israel, with whose kindness we merited to witness the redemption after generations of suffering and afflictions... Members of the Knesset! Congratulations for your first assembly. Remember that the eyes of all the Jewish people lay upon you and that the longing and prayers of past generations accompany your steps. " After these opening remarks, Yosef Sprinzak was elected chairman of the Constituent Assembly.

Two days after the opening session, the Constituent Assembly decided that the State of Israel's legislature would be called the Knesset. The name of the Knesset is the name of the Great Assembly, the supreme institution of Israel's leaders and sages, which convened in Jerusalem after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile in the fifth century BCE. The number of Knesset members was determined by the number of members of the "Great Assembly" - 120.

The Knesset's traditions and methods of action were influenced by the Assembly of Representatives, the elected institution of the Jewish Settlement in The Land Israel during the British Mandate, from which the Knesset also inherited the existing electoral system. In addition, the Knesset adopted a number of procedures from the British Parliament, "the mother of the parliaments".

From the Knesset Site

In the early hours of the morning, the children of Jerusalem were seen walking past with flagpoles, dressed in fancy scout uniforms holding seedlings. The kindergarten children, adorned with wreaths and holding potted plants, crossed the streets and sang "Tu Bishvat arrived, a holiday for trees." At nine o'clock, the organized processions of schoolchildren and youth organizations started out – the youths holding shovels and hoes in one hand, and seedlings in their other hands. At 10 PM, the procession of the planters of the younger generation was greeted by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion ...
(Ha'aretz, fifteenth of Shevat, 5709, 1949)

- Try to imagine the founding ceremony of The Knesset and the planting ceremony.
- Write a report about the event, describe the procedures, what you had seen, what you had heard and what you had felt.



2. An Exercise about Democracy

The meaning of the word democracy is the rule of the people. The principles of democracy are equality among people and that everyone has the right to vote and to be elected, to express his/her view and to try to influence others.

Divide the class into groups and give the groups an identical assignment (to create a wooden statue as high as possible using newspaper sheets (and masking tape).

Give the Groups Different Instructions to Carry Out the Task:

1. Appoint a commander who is to decide on the work management.
2. Each group is to choose a leader to manage its work.
3. Do not give instructions regarding the division of the work.

Discussion of the Exercise

1. Which group outdid the others in this assignment? Is there a connection between the result to the way the work was managed?
2. How did you feel as participants in each one of the groups?
3. How was the work done in a group that did not receive any instructions on the division of labor?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a centralized method, without voting, compared to the method by which everyone participates? (Effectiveness / inefficiency, time spent on arguments, backup of the leader, the feeling of participants' and their motivation to cooperate)
5. How does this exercise reflect reality and how does it differ reality? (To what degree success is important to me, the time limit)

Summary of the Discussion

The participation of all members has advantages and disadvantages. Sometimes it's inefficient and time-consuming. On the other hand, when people cannot influence their fate, they may feel frustrated. Besides personal feelings there is a sense of injustice in that some people are able to influence and others - not. Such a method may leave out good people or good ideas.