The article refers to the history of the Jews in the former Soviet Union who were unable to practice Judaism openly for most of the 20th century. Now that they are allowed this freedom, interest in Judaism has grown. JOLT, the Jewish Overseas Leadership Training program, addresses this need by sending Jewish teens to a Jewish Ukrainian summer camp to teach Judaism and Jewish values. In this lesson, students will explore the theme of freedom as it relates to knowledge and education. They will focus on the idea that Jews are only truly free to practice their religion when they know how to practice Judaism.

**CONCEPTS AND OBJECTIVES**

- Students will explore the theme of freedom as it relates to knowledge and education.
- Students will learn about Soviet Jewry and consider the challenges that the Jews in the Ukraine and former Soviet Union faced in having to hide their Judaism and in not having ample resources available.

**KEY QUOTES AND QUESTIONS**

“For much of the 20th century, Judaism was illegal in the Ukraine and the rest of the former Soviet Union. Behind locked doors, Soviet Jews gathered secretly to practice their religion.”

What do you think it might have felt like to have to practice Judaism in secret? In what ways might the Jews of the former Soviet Union have practiced Judaism? What specific things do you think they did?

What do you think the Jews of the former Soviet Union were missing by not being able to practice Judaism openly?

“Today, although Jews are free to practice Judaism in the former Soviet Union, they are still enslaved by the ignorance of their own traditions.”

What does “the ignorance of their own traditions” mean?

In what ways is this statement true? In what ways are Jews in the former Soviet Union “ignorant” of Jewish traditions?
How do programs such as JOLT help “free” the Jews of the former Soviet Union?

Do you think there are Jews in America who are ignorant of Jewish traditions? How are such individuals helped?

“They prepared plays, wrote songs, and created posters on everything from gemilut hasadim (acts of loving kindness) to tzedakah.”

If you were responsible for teaching a group of people about Judaism, what would you focus on? What do you think are the most important things to know about being Jewish?

How would you teach these things? Think of one example to share with the class.

**MOTIVATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

1. Present the following hypothetical scenario to your students:

   You are 18 years old, and you cannot read. You graduated from high school, but somehow you managed to pass your classes without having to do any of the work on your own. You always had other people helping you, and aside from a few words that you recognize, you are at a loss.

   Ask the following questions, encouraging students to respond in the first person:
   - What barriers do you encounter when...
     - You are at the market?
     - You are looking for a job?
     - You are searching for an apartment?
     - You are at a restaurant?
   - What other challenges do you face?

   A worksheet to help with this discussion is available at www.babaganewz.com/teachers.

2. Following the initial activity and discussion, read the article and discuss the Key Quotes and Questions.

3. Ask students the following questions:
   - In what ways is being illiterate like being enslaved?
   - Compare the case of the Jews of the former Soviet Union to the case of the person that is illiterate. How does not having education and information put someone at a disadvantage? How does it make him or her a “slave”?
   - What are we asking for in this blessing? Be specific.

   There are three different words for “knowledge” used in this blessing. De’ah refers to basic knowledge, knowing many facts or information. Binah, understanding, is the ability to learn one thing from another. Haskayl, wisdom, refers to the ability to draw proper conclusions. Why are so many words for “knowledge” used? In what ways are they all similar? In what ways are they different?

   Why do we ask God for intelligence?

4. Examine the Jewish texts relating the issue of slavery and freedom with respect to ignorance and knowledge.

   What does Jewish tradition teach us about knowledge and the importance of education?

5. Following the text study, ask your students to examine the title of the article, “Danielle Charlap: ‘Let My People Know!’”

   What does this mean? How is it different from “Let my people go”?

   How do education and knowledge set people free?

6. A literacy test assesses whether a person can read. Ask your students to design a Jewish literacy test, testing whether someone is “literate” in Jewish knowledge.

   **What would be included in such a test?**

   **What do you think are the key elements of being Jewish?**

   **What is the most important information a Jew should know?**

When the students have finished designing their Jewish literacy tests, have them trade with each other and see how well they do.

**JEISH TEXTS**

**Siddur, Weekday Amidah**

*You graciously endow people with intelligence and teach understanding to humans. Grant us knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Praised are You, God, Who graciously grants intelligence.*

**What are we asking for in this blessing? Be specific.**

There are three different words for “knowledge” used in this blessing. De’ah refers to basic knowledge, knowing many facts or information. Binah, understanding, is the ability to learn one thing from another. Haskayl, wisdom, refers to the ability to draw proper conclusions. Why are so many words for “knowledge” used? In what ways are they all similar? In what ways are they different?

**Why do we ask God for intelligence?**

**Pesach Haggadah**

*As for the one who does not know how to ask, you must begin the conversation for that one, as it is said, “You shall tell your child on that day, ‘It is because of this that God did for me when I left Egypt’ (Shemot 13:8).”*

Who is the child “who does not know how to ask”?

**What does it mean to begin a conversation for another person?**

The Haggadah says that you should tell the one who cannot ask that the purpose of the Seder is to remember all that God did when God took the Jews out of Egypt. Why do you think this is what you should tell him or her? What would you tell him or her?

**What does this text suggest about teaching and education? What is our collective responsibility to the one who does not know how to ask?**

**FOLLOW-UP AND ENRICHMENT**

Have your students compile a list of the best strategies to promote Judaism and Jewish literacy. Ask them to design “campaign posters” that would help get people interested and involved. What would be included on their posters? What would be the focus?

**VOCABULARY FOR YOUR STUDENTS**

- דעה knowledge
- הבנה understanding
- חכמה wisdom