“Can You Hear Me Now?”

**OBJECTIVES**
- Students will explore how they perceive their own school by trying to look at themselves through the eyes of another.
- Students will identify the essential values and components of the school and community worthy of highlighting to others.
- Students will compose a list of what animal they would like to send to represent their class.
- Students will study the text of birkat habayit, the blessing for a home.

**VOCABULARY**
- ambassador
- to represent
- similar
- different
- culture

**ACTIVITY: PLUSH AMBASSADORS**

This lesson requires preparation and coordination with your local Jewish federation and Partnership 2000 office. Seek their help in identifying one or more schools in your Israeli partner community. Make contact with a teacher or administrator in the Israeli educational institution and set up the particulars of this project.

1. Contact your local Jewish federation and/or Partnership 2000 office. Begin to plan the lesson two or three weeks before teaching it in the classroom. This activity will also require a small budget, so speak with your administrator so you can purchase the necessary items.

2. On the day you plan to initiate the project, begin the lesson by reading the article on pages 17–19 of Babaganewz with your students. Assign each blurb to a different student who may want to assume a voice for the reading. Discuss the Quotes & Questions above.

3. Explain that just as the students from Cleveland who appear in the magazine were ambassadors sent to Israel to represent their communities, your class will also be sending an ambassador to Israel to represent your class, school, and community—and to learn about the Israeli class, school, and community to which it will be sent. The class ambassador will be a stuffed animal of some sort. Brainstorm with the class what animal you can send to be your ambassador. Encourage students to think of what can represent something unique or special about your class or community. For example, you may want to send an animal that is your school’s mascot, a plush state bird wearing a school T-shirt or kippah, or a puppet or animal that represents a theme or a text important to your class.

   **How do you think our ambassador will be perceived by the Israeli school?**
   **What does our choice say about us?**

4. Once you have chosen your ambassador, decide as a class:
   a. what should accompany the ambassador on its journey to Israel?
   b. what should the ambassador bring back from Israel after its journey?

   To determine what the ambassador should bring to Israel, have students think about:
   **What is special about our class and community?**
   **For what are we known? What can the ambassador bring to represent our class appropriately?**
What would you like to learn about our partner school? What should we include in our initial package to help us learn what we would like to know?

What can we include to thank our partners for hosting our ambassador? How can the “thank you” express appreciation of the value of hakhnasat orhim?

Study the text to birkat habayit cited below. Ask students how this blessing could be incorporated into the package.

What makes the “blessing” relevant to a classroom? How might it be an appropriate gift for a host class? Are there other texts that might make more appropriate “thank yous”? [Instruct students to peruse the various sources about hakhnasat orhim found on pages 15 and 16 of this guide and decide which, if any, sources would better express an appreciation for the Israeli school’s hosting the ambassador.]

Assign pairs or groups of students to work on the various elements that will be part of the package. Have the class refine and approve the work that the individual groups complete.

Ideas include:

- a letter of introduction
- a class gift for the host class such as a class-made birkat habayit plaque (See the Jewish Texts section below.)
- a travel journal with the first entry completed by the class
- photos of the students and the school or synagogue
- a brochure of important Jewish or general sites in town
- a backpack or bag to keep all souvenirs collected from the host class
- a passport (See the worksheet available to print from www.babaganewz.com/teachers.)
- gifts for students in the host class, such as postcards, bookmarks, books, pencils, etc.
- a local or school newspaper or magazine or a synagogue bulletin
- a local map
- an audio recording of the class singing a song, tefillah, anthem, and/or sending messages of greeting
- a disposable camera for the Israeli school to use to take photos of the class and return to your students (or a request that they send digital photos)
- a pen-pal list from students interested in connecting with students from the Israeli school
- profiles of the students in your class
- old copies of BABAGANEWZ!

To determine what the ambassador should bring back from Israel, review the list of what is being sent there and ask students to think about what items or information they would like reciprocated.

How can we convey those desires?

5. Assemble the items in the package, and send the ambassador on its way. Post successes you have with this lesson on the message boards at www.babaganewz.com/teachers. If you have memorabilia or photos that you would like to share from this activity, send them to teachersguide@babaganewz.com, and we will post your contributions on our web site.

JEWISH TEXTS

BIRKAT HABAYIT

No distress should come through this gate.
No trouble should burden this dwelling space.
Confusion should never find its way through this door.
This division should know divisiveness no more.
Blessing and peace shall reside in this place.

This “blessing” appears in many Jewish homes and has become a popular form of Judaic art. It is written in modern Hebrew and is of relatively recent authorship. It is referred to as a “blessing,” even though it does not contain traditional prayer language, such as the opening “yehi ratzon.”

What values does this text express? What hopes or wishes does it convey?

Why do you think that this text has become a popular subject of contemporary Jewish art?

Do you think that this an appropriate “blessing” to offer a host? Why or why not?