

The Toby Nussbaum Jewish Heritage-NY2016 Writing Contest

Ahavat Ger: Welcoming The Stranger

SUBJECT: In honor of **Jewish Heritage-NY2016**, the annual observance of **Jewish Heritage Week (May 8-15, 2016)**, and the national celebration of Jewish American History Month in May, the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, in cooperation with the New York City Department of Education, is sponsoring **The Toby Nussbaum Jewish Heritage-NY2016 Writing Contest*** for New York City Public School students on this year's theme, *Ahavat Ger: Welcoming the Stranger*

BACKGROUND: The Hebrew expression *ahavat ger* means welcoming the stranger. Judaism, along with other religions, teaches us to behave compassionately towards strangers, to empathize with foreigners and to include them in every aspect of society. *Ahavat ger* relates to the United States' history as a nation of immigrants, as evidenced by the following quotes:

I had always hoped that this country would become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind to whatever nation they might belong.

-President George Washington, 1788

*Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*

-Jewish-American Poet Emma Lazarus, 1883

The contribution of immigrants can be seen in every aspect of our national life. We see it in religion, in politics, in business, in the arts, in education, even in athletics and in entertainment. There is no part of our nation that has not been touched by our immigrant background.

-President John F. Kennedy, 1958

My fellow Americans, we are and always will be a nation of immigrants. We were strangers once, too. And whether our forebears were strangers who crossed the Atlantic, or the Pacific, or the Rio Grande, we are here only because this country welcomed them in, and taught them that to be an American is about something more than what we look like, or what our last names are, or how we worship. What makes us Americans is our shared commitment to an ideal — that all of us are created equal, and all of us have the chance to make of our lives what we will.

-President Barack Obama, 2014

CONTEST: Students are asked to relate the concept of *ahavat ger* and the quotes above to their personal history as immigrants, the children/grandchildren of immigrants or descendants of immigrants, as well as the immigrant experiences of Jews and other ethnic groups, past and present, in New York and America. Students may refer to the background piece, *Jewish Life in New York City* (see next page), classroom material on the subject, authorized web sites and examples in their lives in school, at home and in the community.

PROCEDURES: Entrants are asked to write an essay (250-300 words) or a poem (minimum of 20 lines). Entries should be written in ink or typed, with a copy retained by the entrant. The attached cover page **must** be completed in full and stapled to the entry. The contest is open to students in grades 4-12. First, second and third place winners will be selected in three categories: grades 4-5, grades 6-8 and grades 9-12.

All entries should be submitted to Marcy Fishman, JCRC-NY, 225 West 34th Street, Suite 1607, New York, NY 10122. All entries are property of the JCRC-NY. Please email fishmanm@jrcrcny.org or call 212-983-4800, x142 with any questions.

AWARDS: In each category: **First Place:** \$500.00 **Second Place:** \$300.00 **Third Place:** \$150.00

CEREMONY: Winners will receive their awards at a ceremony hosted by NYC Deputy Mayor Richard Buery at City Hall on Monday, June 6, 2016.

DEADLINE: Entries must be received by Monday, May 2, 2016.

**The Jewish Heritage-NY Writing Contest was launched more than 30 years ago in New York City's Public Schools. In 2008, Toby Nussbaum's husband Bernard and family dedicated this project in her memory. Toby, JCRC-NY Vice President and Member of the Board of Directors for many years, was a compassionate, accomplished woman who truly represented the best of New York and its Jewish community.*

JEWISH LIFE IN NEW YORK CITY

Jews have been migrating to these shores from all over the world for more than three hundred and fifty years. They have come from dozens of different countries, but they share a common heritage as Jews. Because of that bond, each generation has helped the next acclimate to a new way of life.

The first Jews arrived in 1654 from Brazil and were granted permission to stay in New Amsterdam in 1655. (They were the descendants of Jews who had been expelled from Portugal in 1492 and settled in Holland before going to Brazil.) More Jews followed throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from Holland, the West Indies, Poland, Germany, Spain and Portugal. Thousands of German Jews arrived in the early and mid-eighteenth century, but by far the largest wave of Jewish immigration began in the 1880's.

Events in Eastern Europe - pogroms (organized riots and massacres against the Jews) and other restrictive measures - precipitated the migration of millions of Eastern European Jews to this country between 1880 and 1925. As the twentieth century began, these Ashkenazic Jews were joined by Sephardic Jews from Syria, Greece, Turkey and North Africa. Most Jews arriving during this time settled in the large industrial centers and supplied skilled and unskilled labor.

In New York City, the Lower East Side was an incubator for the newly arrived Jews. Here they found employment, cheap housing, people who spoke Yiddish (the language of most Eastern European Jews), kosher food and synagogues. Outwardly, the Lower East Side was a depressing slum, and the new immigrants worked under miserable conditions. Inside, however, it was throbbing with ideas, arguments, talk, organization and boundless hope for the future. As a family-oriented people, parents sacrificed comfort in their own lives so that their children would survive and prosper. The importance of education was emphasized. The newcomers were lucky enough to have been preceded by fellow Jews who took an interest in their intellectual and emotional welfare. Soon, there were hundreds of communal and social service agencies, labor unions and theater groups. Many of these organizations exist today, improving the quality of life for both Jewish and non-Jewish New Yorkers.

As the children and grandchildren of these and earlier immigrants became more acclimated to the American way of life, they settled throughout New York City and began to influence the city's culture, politics and business. Although some Jews moved to the suburbs and other regions of the country, many stayed and were joined by new immigrants. A small number of Jews who escaped from Europe before World War II and some of the few who survived the Holocaust settled here. Many in this group were middle class professionals, white collar workers, businesspeople and scientists. Also included in this migration were Hasidim, Orthodox Jews who came mainly from Poland and Hungary. More recently, Jews with varying levels of education and vocational training have immigrated from the republics of the former Soviet Union, such as Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, from Syria and Iran, and a smaller representation from Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia and India and moved to neighborhoods throughout the metropolitan area. These new arrivals, along with the established Jewish community, will help sustain New York City's legacy as a thriving metropolis for centuries to come.

Adapted with permission from "Jewish Migration to America" by Evelyn Becker and "The Development of the Jewish Community in New York" by Harvey Goldenberg, [Topics in Jewish-American Heritage](#), published by the United Federation of Teachers

COVER PAGE FOR JEWISH HERITAGE-NY2016 WRITING CONTEST

(Please complete in full)

STUDENT _____

GRADE _____

TEACHER/CONTEST COORDINATOR _____

TEACHER'S E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

SCHOOL _____

SCHOOL ADDRESS _____

SCHOOL TELEPHONE NUMBER _____

PRINCIPAL _____

STUDENT'S HOME ADDRESS _____

STUDENT'S HOME PHONE NUMBER _____

Please staple completed form to entry and return to Marcy Fishman at JCRC-NY, 225 West 34th Street, Suite 1607, New York, NY 10122 no later than **Monday, May 2, 2016**. If you have any questions, please contact Marcy at fishmanm@jrcny.org or (212) 983-4800, x142. Thank you for your participation.