



Jewish Community Relations Council of NY
Department of Jewish Communal Affairs
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JHNY2011'S JEWISH HERITAGE WEEK, MAY 8-15, 2011
The Toby Nussbaum Jewish Heritage-NY2011 Writing Contest
Mensch: A Person of Integrity and Honor

SUBJECT: In honor of **Jewish Heritage-NY2011** and the annual observance of **Jewish Heritage Week (May 8-15, 2011)** 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-NY2011 Writing Contest*** for New York City Public School students on this year's theme, *Mensch: A Person of Integrity and Honor*.

BACKGROUND: Yiddish was the language of Eastern European Jews who arrived in America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many Yiddish words and expressions are familiar to New Yorkers today, including the word *mensch*, which means a particularly decent, responsible, trustworthy and caring person with integrity and honor. More than in rising to the top, making good grades, achieving financial success, a *mensch* is interested in relieving suffering, showing kindness and being honest. Every community is lucky to have such individuals in their midst. (Adapted from Wikipedia and Magill Book Reviews. Salem Press, 1987. eNotes.com. 2006. 12 Oct, 2010 <http://www.enotes.com/raising-your-child-mensch-salem/raising-your-child-mensch>)

QUOTE: *The term "mensch" literally means a "person," . . . but it represents a moral ideal for all people, men and women alike. . . . It means being sensitive to other people's needs and seeking out ways to help them. It is acquired by living close to family and extending one's sense of obligation beyond the family to the broader community. In the Jewish culture of Eastern Europe where the term arose, to call someone a mensch was the highest compliment that could be given.*
-Rabbi Neil Kurshan, author of Raising Your Child to be a Mensch (Mass Market Paperback, 1987)

CONTEST: Students are asked to relate the word *mensch* and the quote above to the experiences of Jews and other ethnic groups in New York. Students may refer to the background piece, *Jewish Life in New York City* (see reverse side), 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, 14 Penn Plaza, 225 West 34th Street, Suite 1607, New York, NY 10122. All entries are property of the JCRC-NY. Please call her at 212-983-4800, ext. 142 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 Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott on Monday, June 13 at 4 PM at City Hall.

DEADLINE: Entries must be received by Monday, May 9, 2011. (Original deadline was extended.)

**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-NY2011 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 the JCRC-NY, 14 Penn Plaza, 225 West 34th Street, Suite 1607 , New York, NY 10122 no later than **Monday, May 9, 2011 (original deadline was extended)**. If you have any questions, please call Marcy at (212) 983-4800, x142. Thank you for your participation.