

# The Pride of Argentina: the Jewish Town of Moisés Ville

## A GREAT JEWISH BOOKS TEACHER WORKSHOP RESOURCE KIT

### Teachers' Guide

This guide accompanies resources that can be found at: <http://teachgreatjewishbooks.org/module/pride-argentina-jewish-town-mois-es-ville>.

### Introduction

After years of facing persecution and anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, Jews began immigrating *en masse* to different parts of the world in the late nineteenth century. One such place was Moisés Ville, Argentina. Jews first arrived in Moisés Ville in 1889 aboard the SS *Weser* from Ukraine. From there, the immigrants created a lively and vibrant Jewish community that became the center of Jewish life in South America. This kit provides resources to help teachers teach about the immigration to and assimilation of Jews in Argentina, the challenges they faced, and about Moisés Ville's unique culture as a city.

### Subjects

Anti-Semitism, Immigration, Latin America

### Reading and Background:

- The World Heritage Centre's website describes Jewish immigration to Argentina during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, **and specifically to Moisés Ville**, one of the most vibrant centers of Jewish settlement.
- Judith Noemí Friedenberg writes of Jewish acculturation in Argentina and the hybrid identities that emerged from that process in her book *The Invention of the Jewish Gaucho*.
- Alberto Gerchunoff's *The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas*, is a fictional series of vignettes depicting different aspects of shtetl life in Argentina.
- Mónica Szurmuk **explores Gerchunoff's life and legacy**.

### Resources

#### 1: Verse from the song "Moises Ville" by Javel Katz.

This song was written and performed by Javel Katz, who immigrated to Argentina from Lithuania in 1930 and became a popular singer and comedian within the Yiddish-speaking communities in both Argentina and Uruguay. In this verse, Katz describes what it was like walking down the streets in Moises Ville.

**Suggested Activity:** Play the excerpt for students and discuss its meaning. What picture does it paint of Moisés Ville and its population? To what extent does it seem the Jews have assimilated into their new environment? Why do you think the speaker calls Moisés Ville "a Jewish state" and "the pride of Argentina"? What musical style is this song in? Does it sound Eastern European or Latin American? Or both?

**Source:** Katz, Javel. *Moisesville*. RGS Music. January 2, 2006.

#### 2: An image of some of the first immigrants to Moisés Ville in 1889 and an image of a Jewish grandmother at Ellis Island in 1904.

These two images, one from the Aaron Goldman Museum in Moisés Ville and one from the collection of the New York Public Library, are iconic in their representation of new Jewish immigrants to South and North America, respectively.

**Suggested Activity:** Have your students do a close reading of each photograph. Ask them to describe as many details as they can – the clothes, the faces, the postures, the settings. Ask them: what does each picture make you wonder or imagine about these immigrants? What about the two photos is similar? What is different? What may have been similar or different about their



immigration experiences to Moisés Ville and New York, respectively?

You can also ask students to bring in pictures (from their own families or from books) of newly arrived immigrants and to talk about the significance of these portraits.

**Sources:** The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New York Public Library. "Jewish grandmother, Ellis Island" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed March 27, 2017.

Museo Histórico Comunal y de la Colonización Judía, Moisés Ville, Argentina.

### 3: An image of two Jewish gauchos in Moisés Ville and an image of an Argentinian gaucho, both from the twentieth century.

These two images, one from the Aaron Goldman Museum in Moisés Ville, Argentina, and one from the Oregon State University Special Collections, depict Argentinian gauchos, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Gauchos, which are the South American equivalent of cowboys, were migratory horsemen that roamed the plains with their cattle.

**Suggested Activity:** Have your students do a close reading of each photograph. Ask them to describe as many details as they can—the clothes, the faces, the postures, the settings. What about the two photos is similar? What is different? Could you tell which of these people were Jewish and which weren't? Now compare the photo of the Jewish gauchos with the photo of the new Jewish immigrants to Moisés Ville in the previous resource? What do you notice? What do you wonder?

Aaron Goldman Museum, Moisés Ville, Argentina.; Visual Instruction Department Lantern Slides, Oregon Statue University Special Collections and Archives. "A Gaucho or Cowboy, 1915." Accessed March 27, 2017.

### 4: Excerpt, Alberto Gerchunoff's "Los Gauchos Judíos," 1910.

*Los Gauchos Judíos*, written by Alberto Gerchunoff in 1910, contains a series of vignettes depicting what life was like for new Jewish immigrants in Argentina. He writes about a range of topics including about how the immigrants learned to work the land, what it was like when they arrived, and how they ultimately blended their Eastern European identity with that of their newfound Argentinian identity.

**Suggested Activity:** Have students do a close reading of the excerpt. How does Gerchunoff portray the immigrants? Do they seem excited to be in Argentina? Are they longing for the lives they left behind in Russia? What insight do the "little verses in Russian, praising the soil" of Argentina give us? What new opportunities does Argentina give the immigrants?

**Source:** Gerchunoff, Alberto. *Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas*. (New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press), 1998.

### 5: Film excerpt, "Los Gauchos Judíos," director Juan José Jusid, 1975.

*Los Gauchos Judíos* (1975) is a film directed by Juan José Jusid and written by Alberto Gerchunoff. The film is based on Gerchunoff's book, and features a series of comedic vignettes that depict life for Jewish immigrants in Argentina.

**Suggested Activity:** What story does this film clip seem to tell? What do you imagine the immigrants felt about working the land and why? How is this portrayal of Argentina similar to or different from Gerchunoff's (resource #3, above)?

**Source:** *Los Gauchos Judíos*. Directed by Juan José Jusid. 1975. Argentina: Emerald, 2008. DVD. Translation into English by Michael Yashinsky and Christa Whitney.

### 6: Oral history video excerpt, "My Grandmother's Folk Tales and Card Games," 2012.

In this clip from the Yiddish Book Center's Wexler Oral History Project, Avrom Lichtenbaum, a Yiddish teacher and the director of the IWO (Yiddish Research Institute) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, speaks to what it was like growing up in Argentina, and balancing his Eastern European roots with his new Argentinian identity.

**Suggested Activity:** Play the excerpt for students. Ask them what they take away about Lichtenbaum's experience as an immigrant in Argentina. How do his experiences as an immigrant compare to those portrayed in Gerchunoff's story and Jusid's film (resources # 3 and 4 above)? How did his experience living in the capital city of Buenos Aires differ from the experiences of those who immigrated to Moisés Ville? In what ways was his experience similar to theirs?

For a larger project, have students plan, conduct, and record an interview with a family member, friend, or community member on their immigration experience. Review and discuss the basic principles of oral history with students before they begin their interviews. For tips on how to conduct an oral history interview, visit [this helpful page from the Library of Congress](#).

**Sources:** Avrom Lichtenbaum, interview by Christa Whitney in Vilnius, Lithuania (Yiddish Book Center's Wexler Oral History Project, July, 31, 2012), <http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/oral-histories/excerpts/woh-ex-0002336/my-grandmother-s-folk-tales-and-card-games>. For the complete interview with Lichtenbaum: <http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/oral-histories/interviews/woh-fi-0000329/abraham-avrom-lichtenbaum-2012>