

Vladimir Jabotinsky *An Individualist* Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question: What character traits did Jabotinsky exhibit that would help him as a leader?

Materials:

- An Individualist PowerPoint
- *An Individualist* Video
- Copies of *Documents A, B, C, D, E.*

Plan of Instruction:

The PowerPoint, video and supporting documents reinforce lesson content through purposeful repetition and the gradual addition of new material.

1. Pass out *Documents A, B, C, D, E.*

Mini-lecture with PowerPoint:

- Slide: Individualist: *Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky is born in Odessa, Russia in 1880. Even as a child he displays a strong independent streak. Once, when asked as a young child, “Whose boy are you?” He answers, “I am myself!” To everyone’s surprise, at the age of 17, he decides to quit school and study in Rome. When he returns, his individualistic streak is still strong. Socialism is in vogue but Jabotinsky takes an opposing view. One of his main criticisms is the fact that socialism emphasizes the collective over the individual. Jabotinsky’s philosophy is that the individual is king.*
- Slide: Jewish Self-Defense: *When a pogrom breaks out in 1903 in the small town of Dubossary, there are fears that violence will occur in Odessa, too. Jabotinsky begins organizing self-defense. When he discovers that a Jewish self-defense organization already exists, he promptly joins up. No pogrom takes place in Odessa, but one does take place in Kishinev.*
- Slide: Kishinev Pogrom: *In April, 1903, Russians rampage through the city. The pogrom represents a dramatic change for the worse. In earlier pogroms, the Russians looted and destroyed property. At Kishinev they murder as well, killing 50 and wounding hundreds more.*
- Slide: Pogrom’s Impact: *The pogrom has a profound effect on Jabotinsky. He goes to Kishinev where he distributes clothing, talks to eyewitnesses and searches through the rubble. At Kishinev, he meets the famous poet Nachman Bialik. Bialik writes a poem about the massacre in Hebrew. As few Jews know enough Hebrew to understand the poem, Jabotinsky*

translates it into Russian. The Russian translation is distributed far and wide and memorized by the Jewish youth for whom it becomes a rallying cry. It is generally agreed that the Kishinev pogrom is the catalyst that helps Jabotinsky decide to formally identify himself with the Zionist Organization.

- *Slide: Sixth Zionist Congress: After the Kishinev pogrom, Jabotinsky returns to Odessa. A local Zionist group, Eretz Israel, offers to send him to the Sixth Zionist Congress, where he meets for the one and only time Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism. Jabotinsky by this time has displayed talents that will serve him well as a Zionist leader. He has shown himself to be a skilled writer and a talented speaker. As one historian writes, "There was rhythm in his speech; the choice and order of his words, his measured pauses injected tension and drama into his sentences. ... And there was the voice itself; there was an indefinable natural quality about it that may have been hypnotic. It was always warm, it sometimes thundered and was never shrill. Altogether, content and style combined to give his audience a sense of cold steel shot through with fire."*
- *Slide: A Literary Future?: Jabotinsky hovers between two worlds for a few years. His literary talent is such that it is within his reach to become a great Russian writer. And his writings have already attracted the attention of some of Russia's greatest writers, like Maxim Gorky and Leo Tolstoy.*
- *Slide: A Committed Zionist: But Jabotinsky decides to devote his life to Zionism. When in 1908 the Ottoman Sultan is overthrown, the Zionist leadership gives Jabotinsky an assignment in Turkey to engage in Zionist educational activity and propaganda in order to try and influence the new Turkish government.*
- *Slide: Turkey Enters WWI: When World War I breaks out, Jabotinsky takes a neutral stance toward the war. But when Turkey enters on the side of the Central Powers, he changes his mind. He sees immediately that if the Jews fight for the Allies against Turkey, the Jews will have won the right to have a seat at the table during the peace talks after the war and a say in what happens in the Holy Land.*

He writes in his autobiography: "Overnight, I changed my mind and my earlier attitude completely from A to Z. I smothered in my heart all my arguments and complaints about the Russian regime, I buried all the calculations about the prospects for equality of rights ... I erased everything except the essential fact: our fate would be dependent on the liberation of Palestine from Turkish rule, and in that liberation we must participate as a Jewish military unit."

- Slide: A Jewish Army: *Jabotinsky first travels to Alexandria, Egypt where he encounters Jews who have been expelled from Palestine by the Turks. He meets Joseph Trumpeldor, a famous Jewish war hero who served in Russia. Trumpeldor is excited about the idea of a Jewish army. He and Jabotinsky go to the British military authorities to suggest their idea. But the British are only willing to form a Zion Mule Corps, one that will help in transport and supply. Trumpeldor signs up. But Jabotinsky isn't satisfied. He even finds the idea of Jewish "donkey drivers" faintly insulting.*
- Slide: Lobbies for a Legion: *Jabotinsky travels to London to lobby for a real Jewish Legion. He finds the exploits of the Zion Mule Corps. is the best thing he has going for him and admits he was mistaken and Trumpeldor was right. But Jabotinsky also encounters enormous opposition to his Legion idea from an array of hostile groups, including the Zionist leadership itself, which fears abandoning its policy of neutrality.*
- Slide: Conviction: *Jabotinsky, however, is undeterred. He is convinced he is right. He says: "If we play with both sides, we shall lose everything. We must come out in favor of the Allies and help them, with our Jewish soldiers, to conquer Eretz Israel."*

2. Play video: An Individualist

Introduce inquiry question: What character traits did Jabotinsky exhibit that would help him as a leader?

3. Whole class discussion:

- What were the ways in which Jabotinsky showed himself from early on to be an individualist?
- Jabotinsky would later be accused of fascism, a system of government that puts the state before the individual. Does this accusation make sense given his philosophy?
- Jabotinsky is an individual with no organization behind him. Yet, he has the "chutzpah" to go to England to convince highly placed government officials to create a Jewish Legion. At this point in the story, how would you rate his chances?
- What gives him confidence he can succeed?

4. Hand out Review Questions (may be used as end of class Quiz).

Document A: “Every Individual a King”, *Raphaella Bilski Ben-Hur (1993)*

The key to Jabotinsky’s corpus of general thought is the assumption that the supreme value was the individual, and after the individual, the nation. Jabotinsky’s conception of “individualism,” which he had evolved since his youth, stood in sharp contrast both to etatism, which regarded the state as the supreme value and the individual as a tool of the state, and to totalitarianism, which championed large-scale intervention by the state in the life of the individual – fascism, for example, incorporating both these elements. Thus Jabotinsky espoused:

the idea of “individualism” ... upon which, if my maker had blessed me with sufficient wisdom and knowledge to formulate a philosophical system, I would establish and construct my entire system: in the beginning, God created the individual; every individual is a king who is equal to his fellow individual – who also is a “king”; it is better that the individual sin against the public than that society sin against the individual; society was created for the good of individuals, and not the contrary; and the future end of days, the vision of the days of Messiah – is the paradise of the individual ... and “society” has no purpose other than to help whoever has fallen, to comfort him, and to raise him up.

The nation, not mankind, was of secondary importance to the individual. In contrast to the universalism of Marxism and socialism. Jabotinsky maintained that in the beginning God created the nation and not humanity. Thus he averred: “I believe with complete faith that in the competition between these two, the nation takes precedence,” and that “likewise, the individual takes precedence over the nation.”

This approach emphasized man’s freedom and his mastery over his fate. Therefore, he could not morally be compelled to dedicate his life to building the state. Such a crucial decision – to subjugate one’s life to the service of the nation – had to be the decision of each individual, derived from his rational conviction that this indeed was the right thing to do. When man himself decided to dedicate his life to

his nation, his freedom was in no way compromised. In this, Jabotinsky's view differed fundamentally from that of the early fascism of the late nineteenth century and from the mature fascism of the 1930s, which considered the individual a tool of the collective entity – that is, of the nation or state.

Source: Every Individual a King, The Social and Political thought of Ze'ev Vladimir Jabotinsky, Raphaella Bilski Ben-Hur, B'nai B'rith Books, Washington, D.C., 1993, p. 15.

Document B: “Lone Wolf”, Shmuel Katz (1996)

A pogrom did take place, in Kishinev, a city which, through the horror of the event – and its shame – achieved an infamous place in modern Jewish history. Kishinev marked a turning point in the style and scope of Russian pogroms and was to serve as the exemplar for their future development. Previously pogroms had consisted largely of robbery, looting and general violence. At Kishinev, from the sixth to the eighth of April, 1903, for the first time murder was added. Fifty Jews were killed, hundreds were injured, many women were raped – and the state authorities encouraged the rioters, the rapists and the murderers.

Jabotinsky’s reaction to the news from Kishinev was startling. It is Kornei Chukovsky who recollects that “that savage event which horrified the civilized world marked the turning point in his life. Jabotinsky,” he recalls, “stormed into the *Odesskiya Novosti* office late one spring afternoon and angrily upbraided us, the non-Jewish members of the staff, accusing us of indifference to that terrible crime. He blamed the whole Christian world for the Kishinev pogrom. After his bitter outburst he left, slamming the door behind him.”

A flood of contributions for the relief of victims poured into the *Odesskiya Novosti* offices, and Jabotinsky went to Kishinev to distribute food and clothing. He visited hospitals, talked to eyewitnesses and burrowed through the ruins.

Source: Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky, Vol. 1, Shmuel Katz, Barricade Books, New York, 1996, p.46-47.

Document C: “The Jabotinsky Story: Rebel and Statesman,” Joseph B. Schechtman (1956)

[Bialik’s] poem, comparable only to the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy in the bitterness of its invective against Jewish meekness and cowardice, caused a deep and lasting spiritual upheaval in wide Jewish circles. But it was available only to those who understood Hebrew. In 1904, Jabotinsky translated the poem into Russian. He put into this translation all the deep feeling of his own soul, all the fire of his indignation, and all the intensity of his pride. So imbued was this Russian version of Bialik’s poem with the spirit and personality of its translator that it came to be regarded as an original poem of Jabotinsky’s rather than the translation it was supposed to be.

Since the censorship at that time would not permit the printing of this rebellious piece in Russian, it had to be mimeographed. L. Sherman, who lived at the time in Odessa, recalls that “the national Jewish youth and the members of the self-defense corps would come together and read aloud the Russian translation of that stirring poem. The one who obtained a mimeographed copy was fortunate, but even luckier was he who had the privilege to hear Jabotinsky declaim the poem at one of our secret, illegal meetings. The present writer remembers that many of the younger generation learned Jabotinsky’s translation by heart and would recite excerpts from it in their private conversations and group discussions. ... Most impressive was Jabotinsky’s poetic introduction to the poem. ...

Once, in that town, under a heap of garbage
I noticed a piece of parchment –
A fragment of the Torah.
I picked it up and carefully removed the dirt.
Two words stood out: *Be’erts Nokhriya*, “In Alien Land.”
This scrap of parchment
I nailed above the door to my own home.
For in these two words out of the Book of Genesis
Is told the entire story of the Pogrom.

Source: The Jabotinsky Story: Rebel and Statesman, Joseph B. Schechtman, Thomas Yoseloff Books, New York, 1956, p. 78-79.

**Document D: “Your New Year”, Vladimir “Ze’ev”
Jabotinsky (January 3, 1908)**

Long ago I had a strong sense of the beauty in the sovereignty of a free person, who has no label on his forehead, who owes nothing to anybody on earth, whose attitude to members of his own people is the same as to members of another people, the sovereignty of a man who moves according to his own will and not that of others. Today I still see its beauty. But for myself, I have given it up. My people had a custom, cruel but profound: when a woman married, she cut off her hair. As a custom – you have here a primitive act. But there exists, even if seldom, a supreme love, which longs to sacrifice everything, even beauty. Maybe I, too, could float on the wings of wonderful freedom, sing charming songs, bathe in the cheap favor of your applause. But I want this no longer. I have cut off my locks because I love my faith. I love my faith, I am happy in my faith, my happiness is such as you have never known and such as you never will know, and I want nothing more.

Source: As Quoted In: Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky, Vol. 1, Shmuel Katz, Barricade Books, New York, 1996, p.75.

Document E: “The Jabotinsky Story: Rebel and Statesman,” Joseph B. Schechtman (1956)

Jabotinsky went to Bordeaux. There, one wet morning, he read in a poster on a wall that, on October 30th, Turkey had joined the Central Powers and begun military operations.

This piece of news radically changed Jabotinsky’s entire outlook. His own evidence as to the position he had taken in the first months of the world conflict is rather contradictory. In *The Story of the Jewish Legion*, written in 1928, he states that until that morning in Bordeaux he had been “a mere observer, without any particular reasons for wishing full triumph to one side and crushing disaster to the other.” His desire at that time was stalemate, and peace as soon as possible. In his *Autobiography*, which was written in 1934, we find a different emphasis: “From the first moment I hoped and prayed with all my heart and soul for the defeat of Russia. If the fate of the war had depended on me in those weeks, I would have decided: quick peace in the West, without victors or vanquished – but first of all Russia’s defeat.” Whatever Jabotinsky’s initial position, Turkey’s entry into the war converted him into a “fanatical believer in war until victory” of the Allied Powers and made this “his” war. It gave final shape and direction to his ever-growing conviction that “where the Turk rules neither sun may shine nor grass may grow, and that the only hope for restoration of Palestine lay in the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire.” He drew the only possible logical conclusion from this premise: whatever the outcome of the war with Germany (at that time he did not predict that Germany would be beaten into unconditional surrender), Turkey would be defeated and sliced to pieces: “stone and iron can endure a fire; a wooden hut must burn, and no miracle will save it.”

Source: *The Jabotinsky Story: Rebel and Statesman*, Joseph B. Schechtman, Thomas Yoseloff Books, New York, 1956, p. 201-202.

Review Questions

Name _____

1. Can you give an example of how Jabotinsky marches to his own drummer?

2. What was the impact of the Kishinev pogrom on Jabotinsky?

3. Why does Jabotinsky decide to fight for the Allied Powers?

In the space below answer the following: *What character traits did Jabotinsky exhibit that would help him as a leader?*