

“In this Time...” Jewish Medieval Life “Quote Strips”

Cut these quotes into individual strips and give one per student

In this time.....Jewish poets spoke and wrote poetry in both Hebrew and Arabic. Judah Halevi was the greatest Hebrew poet of his time, born in Toledo, Spain. In addition to mastering biblical Hebrew, Arabic and the Talmud, Judah explored the physical sciences, philosophy and metaphysics.

In this time ... the Arabs ruled Palestine, having conquered it during the 7th century. They established a Muslim sanctuary in Jerusalem which became a holy city to Jews, Christians and Moslems. The small community of Jews living in in Jerusalem were permitted to pray in at the ruined western wall of the Temple.

In this time ...Jewish physicians, mathematicians and astronomers contributed to the growth of science.

In this time ...Jewish merchants helped to establish trade routes through the Middle East.

In this time ... the center of Jewish life was still in Babylonia, even though the Jewish community in Jerusalem had been restored after the Moslem conquest. The majority Jews lived in a far reaching diaspora in Western Europe, Middle East, Persia, Arabia, India and other lands.

In this time ...whenever Jews anywhere in the world were unsure of Jewish law (*halakha*) they sent messages to the Gaon (wise scholars) in Babylonia. By this means, Jewish knowledge of the Talmud was spread far and wide and a bond was established among the Jews living in different centers of the world. Source: *Sharfstein*.

In this time ... Saadia Gaon (882-942 C.E.) was an accomplished poet in Hebrew and Arabic. During this time he compiled one of the first Jewish prayer books, called the *Siddur*—meaning “order”. This was an important achievement as until this time the synagogue service had no fixed order or content.



In this time ...in 711 C.E. the Moors crossed over the Straits of Gibraltar, the waterway that separated North Africa from Spain and conquered Spain. They were tolerant rulers who respected all religions. They wanted everyone to participate in all opportunities. Between the 10th and 12th century the Moors of North Africa converted to Islam and ruled the region. Under their rule, the Jews living in North Africa prospered.

In this time ...this “Golden Age” between the 10th and 12th century was a time of opportunity and achievement for the Jews of Spain. They worked as farmers and wine makers, goldsmiths and tailors. They were merchants and traders who prospered.

In this time...Spanish Jews had new opportunities to study in fields that had been inaccessible to them. They became well know doctors, scientists and mathematicians. They advanced their fields of work with new knowledge and invention. They travelled widely, became well educated and had access to government positions.

In this time....new schools of Jewish learning were founded. Great poets, writers and thinkers developed their creative work in the Jewish community of Cordoba, Spain. Scholars from Babylon came to Cordoba with copies of the Talmud, and all of these ideas intermixed and enriched the entire Jewish diaspora with both religious and secular learning.

During this time... most Jews were fluent in Hebrew, Arabic and Judeo-Spanish, known as *Ladino*. Judah Ha Levi was one of the great Jewish poets of Spain who wrote in both Hebrew and Arabic. “His every new poem was awaited and recited by Jews who lived in both the Christian and Moslem regions of Spain.

During this time... Christian Europe felt threatened by the rise of Islam. The leaders of the Church wanted to drive Moslems out of Spain and Palestine as it was holy land to Christians as the birthplace of Jesus Christ.



During this time... beginning in in 1096 C.E. the Christian Church supported marches to Jerusalem called the “First and Second Crusades. ” In other parts of Europe, armored knights and their followers murdered thousands of Muslims and Jews as they rode on horseback from Europe to Palestine. By 1187 the Crusaders were defeated by the Egyptian Sultan Saladin whose court doctor was Maimonides! Saladin had been a tolerant ruler.

During this time....Jewish scholars translated Arabic and Jewish books in philosophy and science into the European languages of the places they lived.

During this time....all books were handwritten, there were no printing presses. Specialized scribes created manuscripts by hand, writing out each letter with ink, and creating colorful paintings around the words to illuminate and decorate the text.

During this time.....the great scholar Rashi lived in France and was completing his great books and commentaries which became part of the Talmud. At the end of his life he was affected by the First Crusade in 1099. Christians killed 12,000 Jews in France as they rode to east to liberate Palestine from the Jews and Muslims they saw as “unbelievers.” Rashi wrote several poems mourning the slaughter and the destruction of the region’s great houses of Jewish learning, called *yeshivot*.

During this timeMaimonides was a young boy of 13 growing up when the “golden age” began to decline. His family left Spain for Morocco to flee the dangers Jews were increasingly facing. Eventually settling in Egypt, Maimonides became one of the greatest thinkers in Jewish history.

