



# A Teacher's Guide

to the Jewish Historical Sites Series



**CLOSE READING, CRITICAL THINKING**  
Focus on Text Features

Dear Educator,

Today's literacy standards demand that students become proficient at close reading. Reading closely involves reading – and rereading – the same text multiple times to construct meaning. In close reading lessons, students are asked to read the text carefully as they consider the main ideas and details, and then to reread the text as they look at the craft and structure and as they integrate what the text says with what they already know.

The **Jewish History Comes Alive** books can be used for close reading in your elementary classroom. Your third through fifth graders might be ready to read these books with your scaffolding and support. Remember that close reading should involve texts a bit beyond what students can read on their own to meet the Common Core expectations for text complexity. Asking students complex questions with room for deeper thinking ensures that these lessons meet the expectation of rigor. Use this instructional routine to guide your students through the close reading of *It Happened in Vilna*.

**Sara Chaya Farbstein, PhD**

Educational Consultant, Menucha Publishers

#### **Next Generation English Language Arts Anchor Standards**

Reading, discussing, and responding to the Jewish History Comes Alive series helps students move toward the Next Generation English Language Arts Learning Standards.

- *Reading Anchor Standard 1* expects children to “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly/implicitly and make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.” The close reading activities detailed in the teacher's guide encourage students to read closely to construct meaning from the text and to support their ideas with textual evidence.
- *Reading Anchor Standard 2* calls for children to “determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas,” skills that are woven into the first read of the close reading routine.
- *Reading Anchor Standards 4 and 5* focus on vocabulary and text structure, skills that are targeted during the second read of the close reading routine.
- *Reading Anchor Standard 9* requires children to “analyze and evaluate texts... through a variety of lenses and perspectives.” In their third read, children work toward this standard as they integrate knowledge and ideas within the text and across texts.

#### **For more information, please contact:**

Menucha Classroom Solutions  
1235 38th Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11218  
Tel/Fax: 718-232-0856  
[www.menuchaclassrooms.com](http://www.menuchaclassrooms.com)  
[info@menuchaclassrooms.com](mailto:info@menuchaclassrooms.com)

## STEP-BY-STEP LESSON PLAN

### CLOSE READING, CRITICAL THINKING

#### 1: PREPARING TO READ

Distribute the book *It Happened in Vilna* to students. Explain that this book is full of interesting and new information. Students will be reading the book more than once in order to understand it completely. Decide how they will be reading the book – individually, with partners, or in a small group. Remind students to use whatever strategies they know to prepare for reading the text, such as looking at the cover, table of contents, and illustrations.

#### 2: READING AND DISCUSSING

##### READ THE BOOK – FIRST READ

Students read the entire book and determine what the text is about. Remind students that during this read, they should be thinking about what the book is *mostly about* as well as the *most important details* in the book.

##### CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

Discuss some of the following key questions after students read the entire book.

- » **What is the book mostly about?** *The book is mostly about the Strashun Library which had been created by Matisyahu Strashun and then given as a gift to the Jews of Vilna.*
- » **Who first created the Strashun Library?** *Matisyahu Strashun first created the library.*
- » **How did the library get lost?** *The Germans stole many religious books during World War Two.*
- » **How was the library found again?** *American soldiers found thousands of books that the Germans had stolen.*
- » **Where are the books today?** *Today these books are kept at the YIVO in New York City.*

##### READ THE BOOK – SECOND READ

Direct students' attention to pages 18-25 of the book. This time, focus on the language used by the author and how the text works.

##### CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

Discuss some of the following key questions as students look at these pages.

- » **On p. 21, the text mentions "YIVO." What is the YIVO?** *(focus on vocabulary) The YIVO is a center for Jewish history in New York.*

» **How did the author organize ideas in this section of the text?** *(focus on text structure) These ideas are organized in chronological order, the order in which they happened.*

» **Look back at the table of contents. How do the sections of this book fit together to develop the main idea?** *(focus on text structure) The different parts of this book fit together to tell the story of the Strashun Library from its creation until today.*

» **The first title in this section is "Lost and Found." Why does the author use this title? What does it mean?** *(focus on text structure) This section describes how the Strashun Library was lost during World War II and then how it was restored after the war.*

##### READ THE BOOK – THIRD READ

Students look back at pages 18-25 one more time, this time with a focus on looking for meaning by making inferences and putting ideas together. Have students think about the following key questions as they read: What inferences can I make from the text to help me understand what the author doesn't say explicitly? How can I connect any of the ideas of the text to another text I've read or something I've learned? What larger message do the writer's ideas add up to?

##### CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

Discuss the following key questions after students reread these pages.

- » **Look at the map on p. 18. How does it help you to understand the content of the book?** *This map helps the reader understand where the books were stored after they were looted from the original library in Vilna.*
- » **Which sentence on p. 20 explains why the books were sent to YIVO in New York? How?** *The sentence "And there weren't too many Jews left in Vilna" explains why the books were sent to YIVO in New York. This shows us that there was no one left to care for these books in Vilna, so they were sent to New York where there were Jews who were interested in them and would care for them.*
- » **What text features (headings, table of contents, glossaries) did the author include to help the reader?** *Bold words, headings, table of contents, glossary.*

#### 3: CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

Engage students in a class discussion around the following points. What does this text show us about the importance of books in Jewish tradition? How have you seen the significance of books in your own life or home?

## **CLOSE READING: IT HAPPENED IN VILNA**

### **DIRECTIONS:**

Answer the questions below to help you explore the text features and primary sources in *It Happened in Vilna*.

1. Read the subheading and study the map on page 28. What do these help you understand about the Strashun Library? Explain.

---

---

---

2. Study the photograph on page 20. What details can you find in the photograph and how do these help you understand the text?

---

---

---

3. Study the photograph on page 25. How does this photograph contribute to the section "The Books Are Saved"?

---

---

---

4. Read the table of contents at the beginning of the book. How does the author structure information in this book?

---

---

---