

THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ISRAEL

What is a book? According to the Merriam Webster dictionary it is “a set of printed sheets of paper that are held together inside a cover.”

At this year’s ETAI winter event, which took place on December 14, 2015, more than 50 English teachers were taken on a book discovery tour through the impressive National Library of Israel (NLI,) in Jerusalem. The 120 year old library has a collection of more than 5,000,000 books, 2000 manuscripts, 700 personal archives and 30,000 hours of recordings which are available to the public, at no cost.

As a consequence of my experience I would like to share with you “10 things I now know about the National Library of Israel”:

1. The map room houses the most significant Holy Land maps’ collection in the world.
2. The Ardon Windows represent Isaiah’s vision of eternal peace.
3. The oldest book in the museum is a Koran, dating back to the ninth century.
4. Israel’s *Book Law* requires two copies of all printed matter published in Israel to be deposited in the National Library.
5. The museum is divided into four major collections: Judaica, Israel, Islam & the Middle East and the Humanities
6. Gershom Scholem loved to write notes in the margins of his books, which can be seen in the Gershom Scholem Library (comprising 35,000 items related to the Kabbalah, Jewish Mysticism and Hassidism).
7. *Ephemeral* means transient or short-lived
8. The Time Travel and European Ephemeral collections are made up of letters, tickets, posters, postcards etc., and provide a rich resource of life and culture that can be used for engaging our students in the English classroom
9. The library has an educational partnership with the UK, available via an online site (<http://www.nli-education-uk.org/>.) and includes lesson plans and worksheets for use in British classrooms, which could be relevant to our English language classrooms in Israel.
10. The National Library has a resource-rich Facebook page in English (www.facebook.com/education.nli.uk/) which is regularly updated, and provides authentic materials for English teaching.

So why should English teachers teach with Primary Resources? Karen Ettinger, Project Manager for Education at the NLI, explained that primary resources are motivating, relevant, make use of authentic material, enable students to practice 21st century skills, exercise their critical thinking and research skills, whilst connecting them with their past. So if you want to do some or all of the above, I strongly recommend a trip – either physical or virtual – to the National Library of Israel.

Thank you to all of the National Library staff who took us on a journey which made me think differently about the role of the library in the English language classroom today.

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*This article was originally published on Jane’s blog “Route CPD for ELT”
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