

Sonia Belkind (1870–1943)

Israel's First Female Doctor

Biography

Alexandra or Sonia Belkind was born in 1870 in Minsk. In 1887, at the age of 17, she immigrated to Ottoman Palestine with her parents, joining her older siblings who had immigrated five years earlier. In 1889, she moved with her parents and her brother from Gadera to Tel Aviv.

The lack of medical services in Tel Aviv inspired Sonia to pursue a career in medicine, and in 1898, she went to Switzerland to study medicine, the first Israeli student to attend that school. On completing her studies, Sonia returned to Tel Aviv and started working at the Sha'ar Zion Hospital in Jaffa and Sha'are Tzedek Hospital in Jerusalem. She was the only female doctor in the country. Sonia also opened a private clinic where she treated Jews, Arabs, and Christians, and also traveled on foot between cities, treating anyone who was sick.

Sonia realized that women were embarrassed to be examined by a male doctor, so in 1904, she went to France to specialize in gynecology and became the first gynecologist in Ottoman Palestine. She opened a women's health clinic where she worked with her sister, Olga, who was a nurse. Almost half of her patients were Muslim women.

During World War I, when most male doctors were drafted into the Turkish army, Sonia was one of the few remaining doctors in the Tel Aviv area and continued to provide essential medical care to both civilians and injured soldiers.

Sonia's brothers founded the Nili underground Zionist spy network, which assisted the British in their fight against the Ottomans during World War I, with the hope that it would lead the British to grant the Jews a national homeland in Israel. Her three nephews were also highly involved, and all were imprisoned in Damascus, Syria, for their Zionist activities.

In 1917, in their attempt to suppress growing Zionist activity, the Ottoman authorities deported the Jewish population from Tel Aviv. After being arrested and acquitted of Zionist activities, Sonia relocated to Haifa, where she was the only doctor in the area.

Sonia married Mendel Henkin, the brother of her brother-in-law, Yehoshua Henkin, who was married to her sister, Olga. In 1938, Olga founded Shalva, an organization dedicated to supporting individuals with special needs.

Framing

Before becoming Israel's first female gynecologist, Sonia Belkind was the only female doctor in Israel. She was a trailblazer for women in the medical field, providing exceptional medical care to people in Israel, particularly to women. This lesson explores Sonia's life and offers an opportunity to become familiar with other Jewish medical "firsts".

Scope

This unit can be completed in one 45-minute class:

- Introduction Video 5 minutes
- Activity #1 (Crossword Puzzle): 5-7 minutes
- Activity #2 (I Spy): 5-7 minutes
- Activity #3 (Jewish Medical Firsts Matching Game): 10 minutes
- Activity #4 (Jewish Medical Firsts Advertisements): 15 minutes

Preparing the Time Capsule

- Supplies to create advertisements for the Jewish Medical Firsts Advertisements

Printing

- Crossword Puzzle for each student or group
- I Spy Packet for each student or group
- Jewish Medical Firsts Matching Game Set, one for each group

Activity #1: Crossword Puzzle

- Students use the information learned about Sonia in the video and the biography provided to solve the clues and complete the [Crossword Puzzle](#).
- The correct answers for this activity can be found in the Appendix.

Activity #2: I Spy

- Students have 5 minutes to read the clues and use them to identify and circle the correct items pictured in the three primary sources included in the [I Spy Packet](#).
- The correct answers for this activity can be found in the Appendix.

Activity #3: Jewish Medical Firsts Matching Game

- Discuss with students which Jewish medical inventions they may be familiar with, if they use or have used any of them, and other Jewish contributions to green technology, food, business, and technological advancements.
- Divide the students into groups of three, provide each group with a set of the [Jewish Medical Firsts Matching Game](#), and give them 7–10 minutes to match the names of Jewish medical firsts with their descriptions.
- After playing, discuss with the students which Jewish Medical first surprised them most or which was their favorite and why.
- The correct answers for this activity can be found in the Appendix.

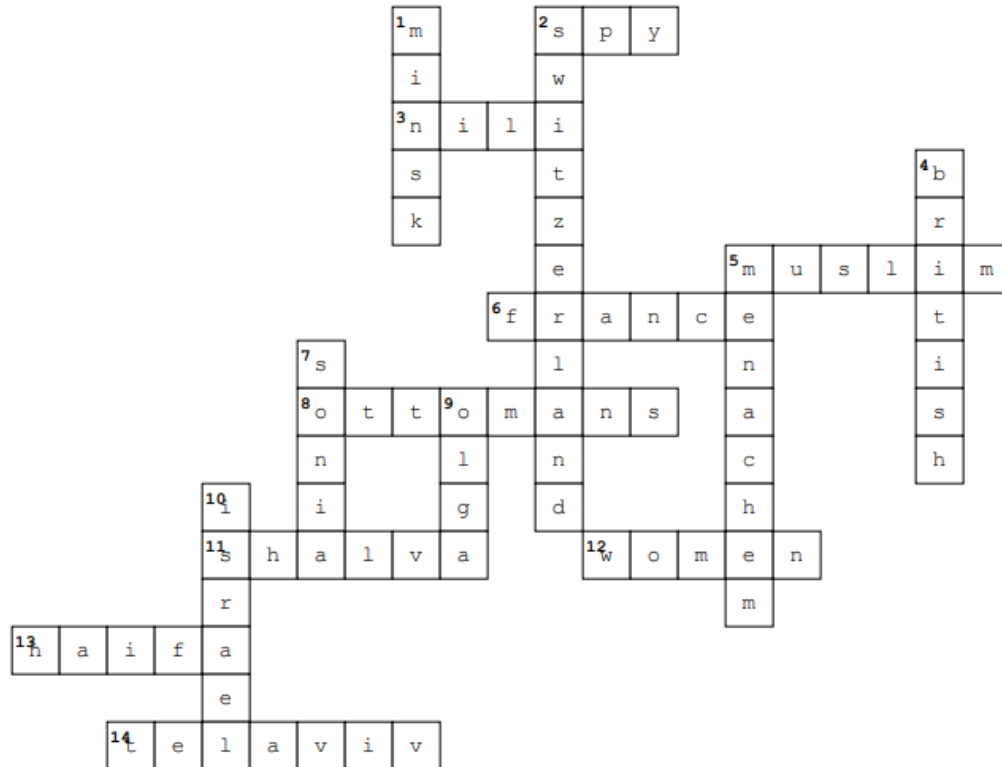
Activity #4: Jewish Medical Firsts Advertisements

- Students create an advertisement for the Jewish medical first that they liked the most from the matching game (Activity #3). The ad should include a picture and a short explanation of the medical first and its purpose.

***Optional:** Students can do additional research on their medical first and then write up a description of the invention and the company or scientist responsible for it.

Appendix

• Crossword Puzzle Answers



Across

2. Nili was this type of Zionist organization
3. The name of the Zionist Underground Spy Organization that Sonia's brothers established
5. Half of the women Sonia served were from this religion (not Jewish)
6. Where Sonia went to study female medicine
8. They ruled the region when Sonia moved to Israel
11. The name of the organization Olga established
12. The group of people whom Sonia focused her medical studies on
13. The city where Sonia was the only doctor
14. City where Sonia moved with her family

Down

1. Where Sonia was born
2. Where Sonia studied medicine
4. Nili sent the information it collected to the following people
5. The name of Sonia's husband
7. Alexandra's other name
9. The name of Sonia's sister, with whom she worked
10. Nili wanted to be rewarded with this for spying for the British during World War I

- I Spy Answers

Primary Source 1: Sonia Belkind Medical License

1. I spy the city where Sonia studied medicine.
2. I spy the date on which Sonia received her medical license.
3. I spy Sonia Belkind's medical license number.

U. M. 171.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH.
GOVERNMENT OF PALESTINE.

LICENCE
TO PRACTISE THE PROFESSION OF DOCTOR OF MEDICINE.

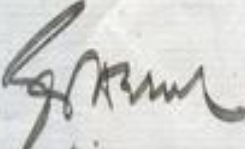
In pursuance of the powers conferred under Public Health Ordinance No. 1 dated 16th May, 1918, authority is given to Mrs. ALEXANDRA BELKIND.

Qualifications M.D.- GENEVA. Serial No. DR.029

to practise the Profession of Doctor of Medicine within the limits of the jurisdiction of the Government of Palestine, and in virtue thereof his name has been entered on the Roll of Practitioners.

Given under my hand this 6th day of May, 1919.

DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
GOVERNMENT OF PALESTINE
DR.029 DATE 6/5/19.



DIRECTOR OF HEALTH.

Primary Source 2: Sonia Belkind in her private office

1. I spy what Sonia would use if she didn't know how to treat a patient.
2. I spy what Sonia would use after she drew the patient's blood to test.



Primary Source 3: Sonia's Marriage Certificate

1. I spy Sonia's husband's name in Hebrew and English.
2. I spy the city where they got married in Hebrew and English.
3. I spy the seal of who approved their marriage.

THE CHIEF RABBINATE
OF JAFFA and TEL-AVIV, DISTRICT.
TEL-AVIV, Javne str.

הרבנות הראשית
למחוז יפו-תל-אביב
תל-אביב רחוב יבנה

89/112

MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE.

The present is to certify that on ground of entries made in the records of the Local Head Rabbinical Office, under No 89/112 it results that M. Menachem Mondel Chansliu of the city of Tel Aviv residing at Tel Aviv has married conforming with the Jewish Religion the day 23 month January year 1928 Miss, Mrs. Alexandra Sonia Belkind of the city of _____

תעודת נשואין.
תעודתנו זאת לאשר על יסוד הרשום בספרי מסד הרבנות הראשית מה תחת מספר 89/112 יוצא כי ה מנחם בענדל קאנשליא חנסיא ידוע גימיה ערומי of the city of _____ residing at _____ has married נשא לו לאשה כדת משה וישראל בעיר ביתר גלוצי ביום כ"ג לחדש שבט שנת תקס"ח את הניש אלכסנדרה סאליא קאנשליא בעיר _____ ולראיה ועדיא נתנה תעודה זאת- תל-אביב, ארץ-ישראל, יום כ"ג לחדש שבט שנת תקס"ח

In proof and virtue of which the present certificate is issued.
Tel-Aviv, Erez-Israel,
Day 15 Month March Year 1928
Chief Rabbinate of Jaffa and Tel-Aviv, District.

הרבנות הראשית
למחוז יפו-תל-אביב

אברהם אהרן
S. Aronson

בנימין זאב
Bennison



• Jewish Medical Firsts Matching Game Answers

<i>CorNeat</i> created a synthetic cornea that heals blindness by attaching a biometric lens on and around the eye that is connected to the patient's natural eye muscle tissue. Sight recovery occurs almost immediately after surgery.	CorNeat KPro 
Former American Israeli IDF medic <i>Bernard Bar-Natan</i> created a bandage used to stop excessive bleeding in traumatic injuries on the battlefield and by emergency medical technicians (EMTs). It is made from an elasticized bandage (similar to an ACE bandage) that is tightened with a twistable clip to put pressure on the wound and stop the bleeding.	The Israeli Bandage 
<i>Medinol</i> invented a flexible and extendable tube-shaped stent that is inserted into the arteries around the heart to prevent and treat heart disease and blockages with the goal of eliminating the need for open heart surgery.	Flexible stent 
<i>Jonas Salk</i>, a Jewish doctor from New York, developed the first safe and efficient vaccine for polio, a virus that causes paralysis of all muscles and lungs. The vaccine is given at six weeks and again at seven years old.	Polio Vaccine 
<i>Tyto Care</i> created a system for doctors to conduct remote physical exams of lungs, ears, throat, heart, and skin through a specialized camera that is attached to the patient's computer.	Tyto Care 
A team led by Israeli inventor and researcher <i>Nir Peled</i> from the Technion, with researchers from America and Britain, used nanochip technology to create this breathalyzer, which "smells" the breath breathed into it and can diagnose early stages of lung cancer and more than 18 other diseases.	NaNose Breathalyzer 
<i>OrCam Technologies</i> created a small camera (usually attached to glasses) to help visually impaired people read books and signs, recognize faces, and identify products by telling the camera wearer what it identifies. The camera can be activated by voice command, hand gestures, or a touch bar.	MyEye 
While performing surgery, American Jewish cardiologist <i>Paul Zoll</i> realized that when specific spots of the heart are touched, the heartbeat starts. He subsequently developed technology that sent electronic pulses to the heart to maintain a regular heartbeat (pacemaker) or restart it (defibrillator).	Pacemakers and Defibrillators 
<i>Theranica</i> invented a nonmedical and noninvasive way to treat migraines by wearing a band on your arm that sends electric pulses to stimulate nerves in the upper arm, which contributes to the natural pain relief process in the brain. The person puts on	Nerivio 

the armband when the migraine begins and controls the electric pulses through an app on their phone.	
<i>ReWalk</i> created a bionic walking assistance system, powered by a battery worn in a backpack, that people with spinal cord injuries wear on their legs to enable them to stand upright, walk, and climb stairs. The system is controlled by a watch-like remote that detects the user's movements.	ReWalk Exoskeleton 
<i>Covidien</i> created a swallowable medical camera that gives doctors high-definition pictures of the large and small intestines and the stomach in order to diagnose infections, disorders, and cancers.	Pill Cam 
<i>WaisMed</i> created a pocket-sized spring injector that injects medications into the bone marrow. In emergencies, medication can be injected into the bone marrow for quicker absorption, more precise treatment, and quicker healing.	Bone Injection Gun 
<i>Hatzalah</i> created small bikes and motorcycles equipped with lifesaving medical equipment that can maneuver through traffic and narrow streets and arrive at an emergency within one minute of receiving a call and provide treatment until the ambulance arrives.	Hatzalah Ambucycle 
<i>Nuvo Group</i> created a belt worn around a pregnant woman's belly that constantly monitors her and the fetus' heartbeats. It sends real-time information on fetal stress to her healthcare provider and thus enables a safer gestational period and birth.	Invu Remote Pregnancy Monitor 