

Exploration of Personal Identity Transformation Through Writing and Theater

Overview: The 6th/7th grade religious school curriculum is based on a study of lifecycle events and Jewish ethics and dilemmas. This activity is designed for students to over the course of the school year explore their evolving Jewish identity in connection to Jewish ethics and values.

Goal/Essential Questions: For students to explore their Jewish identity and how it changes throughout the course of the year and also how their identity development connects with their peers’.

- At this time in my life, how do I want to be Jewish?
- What parts of Judaism do I want to learn more about?
- How do Jewish values impact my life?

Grade Level: 6th/7th

Time Frame: 1-2 full classes in the beginning of the year, periodic brief check ins throughout the year, and 3-4 class periods at the end of the year

Lesson Plan:

In the beginning of the school year, students will complete writing prompts about some of the following questions to get a baseline of where they are in their Jewish identity development coming in to the class.

Potential questions:

1. What does being Jewish mean to you?
2. What are Jewish values to you?
3. How are they different from non-Jewish values?
4. How do Jewish values/ethics impact your life? How do you use them to solve problems?
5. What do you like about being Jewish? What do you not like?
6. What would you change about Judaism if you could?
7. What questions do you have about Judaism/what do you want to know more about?
8. If you could add a Jewish lifecycle event what would it be and why?
9. What makes you happy?
10. If you could do anything for a day, what would it be?
11. What is the story of your name? Do you have a Hebrew name?
12. What is your favorite Jewish holiday or tradition and why?

Throughout the year, students will study Jewish lifecycle events and Jewish ethics and dilemmas, with the goal of the students understanding what Judaism means to them and how they want Judaism to be part of their lives. Throughout the year, we will return to these questions of identity in the form of:

- Journaling when students see something related to Jewish values
- Journaling when student ideas about Judaism changes or come across something they want to explore/learn more about

At the end of the year, students will answer the same questions as in the beginning of the year to see if their sense of Jewish identity has changed. Drawing on the differences in their personal responses and the connection between their responses and others in the class, students will collaboratively write a script that weaves together their narratives in the style of Undesirable Elements. We will then stage the script to be done as a culminating event for the year.

Future Implications:

With experience leading this type of lesson with a small group of students, I would want to a similar activity with a class of ELL students. With this group, students would only answer the set of questions one time. The goal would be for students to share their personal experience to create connections and empathy within the classroom. It would also make people feel validated/connected, understood, and heard. In addition, it would align to standards in the domains of writing, speaking, listening, and reading comprehension. Students would read anchor texts of other immigrant/refugee youth before beginning this project.

It could also be the beginnings of design thinking:

D-self

E-empathy for others

E

P -social justice

Potential questions to ask the students:

1. How has the way you see the world changed over time?
2. How does your identity differ from an older generation?
3. How has your identity changed over the course of your life (relating to moving)?
4. How do you see yourself now vs before?
5. Who are you today vs before?
6. When were you confused/conflicted about culture?
7. How has your culture changed over time?

8. How do you see yourself in your previous country? How do you see yourself in the US (journey to come here, interacting with others)
9. How has your own perception of yourself changed over time?
10. What do you wish other people knew about you/your culture?
11. What do you wish would change in the US or other places you have lived?
12. What defines your personal narrative-parents, history, self?