

Biting the Apple

Early Genesis: Developing an Appreciation of Torah for B'nei Mitzvah Students
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Subject Areas: Torah, Jewish identity, Jewish values, community building, holiday awareness, Jewish history and culture

Multi Lesson Plan (3)

Target Age: 6th – 8th grade

Lesson One: Introduction to Torah – presenting a historical context for Torah study

Lesson Two: Creation story – emphasizing methods for Torah study

Lesson Three: Noah and early Genesis stories – developing awareness of key underlying concepts in Torah

Overview: Torah holds the master symbols, stories, and metaphors for the Jewish narrative throughout our history. Torah will be introduced as a guidebook that is relevant for living a modern Jewish life, with study tools on how to access this ancient wisdom. Students will learn the art of the question, develop a curiosity for learning about Torah, and begin to learn the process of analysis that has helped shape the Jewish mind over millennia.

Objectives: Students will be able to find chapter/verse in the Torah with ease, without needing page numbers. Students will learn basic text study skills:

- paraphrase or explain the plain meaning of the text
- find major themes in the text
- ask relevant questions about the text

Students show a basic understanding of the historical context of early Genesis stories

Students can apply Torah stories and its lessons to their every day life

Students demonstrate an interest and curiosity for further Torah study

Assessment or Outcome

Students will be observed in all class periods for their ability to read Torah stories and learn how to create meaning from the text. This will also be demonstrated at the last class, where they take a Torah

passage that they have never seen, and study it in front of their parents.

Teacher procedures for all three segments of the multi-unit lesson plan

Engaging the students includes creating an atmosphere for study that is both conducive to learning and enticing to the imagination.

Suggestions for every class meeting:

Before each class -

- Familiarize thoroughly with the specific chapter/verses for each lesson (see attached lesson plans). Be sure that you yourself understand the literal (*p'shat*) meaning of the text, historical context of the story, some commentary, and the moral lessons that are embedded within the text.

At each class -

- Set up the space in order to create an aesthetically pleasing environment. This allows the space to have the proper honor/kavod, using things like tablecloths on tables, candles. Healthy snacks are a nice addition.
- Greet your students and leave space and time for students to get to know each other.
- It is essential to look up *pesukim* (specific verses), discuss the text, and reflect upon its meanings. Ask students to read the text out loud.
- Encourage questions from all students. Be sure to allow space and time for the quiet students as well as the eager ones.
- Prompt the students with your own questions about the meaning of the passage, if necessary.
- Study key stories and look for the moral lessons. Help the students find themes in the stories.
- Keep things in historical perspective, comparing then and now.
- Talk about everyday life and our version of the tensions and conflicts. How do we deal with these things now?
- Discuss personal narrative in relationship to the text.
- Use a combination of lecture, discussion, bibliodrama and small group breakout sessions.

Notes to teachers:

1. Be sure to completely familiarize yourself with the text before class. The students ALWAYS ask insightful questions, and the greater your familiarity, the more prepared you will be.
2. Inviting and encouraging open-ended discussions will enhance the learning experience, increase the fun, and ensure comfort with Torah.
3. Take time to ensure that all students are actively participating. Encourage the class to also be responsible to be sure that everyone's voice is heard.
4. To ensure the buy-in of students to the study of Torah, it is valuable, to create a context for understanding the role of Torah in modern Jewish life. Hence, it is valuable to gather personal stories from the student's lives so that they can relate to the stories they are learning about. This enhances Jewish identity and builds community, as the students get to know each other. The aggadic nature of this multi-unit lesson invites personal relationship to the text and to one's own life.
5. It is important to develop the art of relevant questioning. Extroverted students will raise their hand often, and need to learn how to pinpoint their questions to the material. Introverted students need to learn to engage more fully. Both styles need to learn the give and take of group process, and it is the teachers' job to balance who asks questions, while ensuring that the questions are germane to the material.

Methodologies Used

- Didactic
- Dialogue
- Experiential labs: Bibliodrama and Discussion groups

List of materials needed

Classroom with a writing board, tables and chairs

Tablecloth, candle in the center of the table

Writing notebooks

Chumash for each student

Reference: *Etz Chayim*

Biting the Apple: Lesson One

Early Genesis: Developing an Appreciation of Torah for B'nei
Mitzvah Students

PRÉCIS of Overview (for full overview, see page 2): Torah holds the master symbols, stories, and metaphors for the Jewish narrative through time. It is an unfolding map of how to become a righteous person, and is a continual revelation throughout time. What seem like stories of yesteryear can indeed be reframed through the stories of our own life.

Lesson One Goals:

- Learn about the Torah in the context of Jewish history
- Learn basic study skills for approaching Torah text
- Use these skills on High Holiday texts

Lesson One Procedures**1. Review teacher procedures (Page 2)**

2. - Place Torah in a historical context - In order to study Torah it is essential that the students have a historical perspective as to when the events took place in history. Many stories will seem archaic and incomprehensible through a modern lens. By creating a 4-Square approach to the Jewish story, beginning with 2000 BCE, one can see each side of the square as a 1000-year period. It is helpful to draw a large square on the board as part of the presentation (see Appendix for an example).

Give a simplified history and timing of how the Biblical stories fit in with our historical understanding of the world. Here is a truncated four-millennium perspective:

- a. 2000 -1000 BCE - Age of Torah
 - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - ~ 1950 - 1650 BCE
 - Moses - ~ 1250 BCE
- b. 1000 BCE -70 CE
 - Age of First and Second Temple
 - Time of the prophets and the writings
- c. 0-1000 CE
 - Early rabbinic culture
 - Middle Ages
- d. 1000 - 2010 CE
 - Late Middle Ages
 - Through modern history

3. Explore approaches to biblical text

- a. Give the Names of the Five Books of Moses. Write these on the board. Give both Hebrew and English names.
- b. Explain the general idea each of the five books.
- c. Show how to find chapters and verses in the text.

4. High Holiday's: Classes often start around the High Holidays, so it is helpful to study the portion of Torah where we are instructed to

observe the appropriate holiday. Use the following skills to study the Torah *pesukim*/verses listed below:

- a. Let students practice finding chapter and verse with the verses listed below
- b. Explain what is meant by *p'shat*, the plain meaning of the text
- c. Encourage students to tease out the plain or literal meaning of the text
- d. Begin coaching the students in the art of relevant questioning
- e. Encourage conversation about what they will be doing for the holidays

Verses to Use

Rosh Hashanah: Numbers 29:1-6

Yom Kippur: Leviticus 16: 29-30 and Numbers 29:7-11

Sukkot: Exodus 23:16, 34:22 and Leviticus 23:3

Biting the Apple: Lesson Two

Early Genesis: Developing an Appreciation of Torah for B'nei Mitzvah Students

PRÉCIS of Overview (for full overview, see page 2): Torah holds the master symbols, stories, and metaphors for the Jewish narrative through time. It is an unfolding map of how to become a righteous person, and is a continual revelation throughout time. What seem like stories of yesteryear can indeed be reframed through the stories of our own life.

Lesson Two Goals:

Learn methods for torah study and apply to the creation stories

Lesson Two Procedures

1. Review teacher procedures (Page 2)
2. Orientation to *PaRDeS* approach

PaRDeS - Visualization of an Orchard - This exercise takes between 10-20 minutes.

Explain the four levels of studying Torah to the complexity of the text, and point to its depths.

One can best introduce this concept via visualization. We have directed the students to find a comfortable place to sit or lie, and then turn off the lights, so that only the candlelight is present. Ask them to visualize an apple orchard, in the wintertime. Every sense is invited to explore this garden, from sight/sound/smell/feel of the elements on one's skin, etc. Each season is visited thoroughly. Invite the students to slowly bring their awareness back to the room, and invite their experiences. They can be quite inventive and creative.

Next, introduce the four levels of Torah, as if they are corresponding to the four seasons in the Orchard. Explain that *pardes*, or orchard, is a pseudonym for Torah, and that all four seasons must be experienced for a full understanding of Torah. Explain that we will mainly focus on *p'shat* and *drash*, and that further study throughout their lifetime will deepen their relationship to Torah, and create a full experience of the orchard of learning available to us. Be sure to give examples of each:

P'shat – winter – literal, historical, story as written. The context.

Remes – spring – figurative meaning of the text; allegorical or philosophical interpretations.

Drash – summer – stories between the lines; homiletic or moral meanings.

Sod – fall – mystical or esoteric meanings that point to the transcendent.

3. Bereshit: explore the word **XIWARB** (*Bereshit*) from a *PaRDeS* perspective, to give an example of how to apply the four level model. For example:

P'shat – in a beginning.

Remes - Break it down into several different words, to demonstrate complexity, i.e., within the one word is a variety of words: Bara Shesh; B' Rosh; Brit; Bayit. Explore meanings.

Drash – each day of creation represents a day in the week.

Sod – there were several other beginnings before this one, which is why it is best translated as ‘a’ beginning and not ‘the’ beginning.

4. Explore text study tips in relationship to a first chapter of Genesis or story of your choice. Read together and use the format below to study the text. Encourage curiosity about the text. Each sentence or word has its own special treasure, waiting to be discovered. We can move inside the stories and lessons and learn in a new way.

Example: Creation - Genesis 1:27 – 2:7

- Have the students read this story out loud
- Ask students to summarize the story, according to its plain meaning
- Ask: Who are the main characters? What do you think you know about them?
- Ask: what are some themes and key words of the text?
- Are there key Hebrew words that you recognize?
- Ask: What information do you wish you had, to better understand the text?
- Ask: Is there anything in your own life the text reminds you of?

5. Introduction to Bibliodrama – we will now look at a different story and use bibliodrama to further explore its meaning.

“Bibliodrama is a form of biblical interpretation that makes use of role-playing. In it, a particular text is explored for its subtexts and these are brought to life as the facilitator interrogates the participants in their roles. The facilitator, a kind of Socratic director, serves a number of functions: s/he presents the story to be interpreted, guides the role-play in its emerging polyphony, manages the movement of the drama in succeeding roles and scenes, and finally brings the collective story to its conclusion and de-roles the participants from their enactments. We move from the role of critic to that of storytellers.”¹

Example: Genesis 3:23-24

Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden to till the ground whence he was taken. So he drove the man out of Eden.

The teacher can direct the students to study these verses in a bibliodramatic way. In order to do Bibliodrama, take a piece of text, preferably filled with dialogue, and present it to the class. You can take several approaches.

A. Have a student play each character in the text. Have them act out the dialogue or coach them in the situation that the characters face, and have the students create their own dialogue, staying true to the topic. Be sure to ask questions during the performance, to coax insight from them. For example:

“Let’s see what Eve has to say about the moment of expulsion. So I’d like all of you to imagine that you are Eve at this moment in the story. Tell me, Eve, what is this like for you?” Hands go up, each hand a potential voice of Eve. Continue the development of the characters, their feelings, and what the students believe the story is about.

B. Have the students create their own play or skit that reflects their understanding of the text.

C. Have the class read the text and ask a series of questions that illuminates the dilemmas and situations in the text.

*Storahtelling*TM uses questions such as:

¹ Peter Pitzele – modern teacher of this form of study

“You have been given the foregoing text by Steven Spielberg. He has asked you to think about it cinematically. How many scenes can you find or imagine in this story?”

How might you construct each scene dramatically? He has asked you to think about supplementing the story outline with more dialogue, and even soliloquies. Where might you like more information?

He is giving you time to rehearse with the actors. You can use their skills as improvisers to create supplementary material and you have an opportunity to interview each character in role. What questions would you want to ask each character?

Establish the sequence of characters to be heard from. Who would you want to hear from first? Second? Third? Last?

What would be your closing shot in this story?”

Biting the Apple: Lesson Three

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Lesson Three Goals: Now that we have established a historical context and some methods for study, we can begin to explore some of the underlying concepts of Torah that point to its relevancy in modern life. Many deep issues that are key to living a Jewish life are embedded in these early stories.

Lesson Three Procedures

1. Review teacher procedures (Page 2)

2. By now, you should know your students well enough to know their individual learning preferences. It is helpful to create a variety of methods to explore the text, based on student's different learning styles. The teacher needs to assess the students and assist them in self-selecting which of the following best suit their style. Ideally, every student should be able to learn by all methods. The following are some possible styles and text approaches:

<u>Actors and Poets</u>	<u>Scholars</u>	<u>Philosophers</u>
Bibliodrama contemplation	Text study	Meditation and
Exploring the emotional story from an spiritual	Understanding the	Pondering issues
		structure of the story, and/or intellectual point of view with its lessons

3. Split the group up and have them study the text in their preferred approach.

Examples of different approaches to Bibliodrama (see page 8 for further instructions on bibliodrama):

Have the students study the following text, and have them 'act out' the story, or use any of the methods described above to understand the text.

Creation Bibliodrama:

The Garden – study these lines and tell its story via one of the above perspectives

Genesis 2:9 - Two trees

Genesis 2:18 - not good for man to be alone

Genesis 2:22 - Woman was formed; second Creation story

Genesis 3:1-7 - Serpent and Eve story

Leaving The Garden –

Genesis 3:1-23: : The difference between Gad Eden and the world of Exile

Abel and Cain – origins of violence and brotherly responsibility
Genesis 4:1 - 14

Noach and the Flood - emphasize Noach was righteous in his own generation, compare to Abraham. Talk about the Nefilim and who they were. Genesis 6:9 - 8:21

Scholars, Poets, & Philosophers - Thinking and pondering:

The difference between Gad Eden and the world of Exile
Genesis 1:1 – 3:1

Nefilim - What do you think of the fallen ones?
Genesis 6:2

Noach – Noach walked with God and was righteous in his own generation

Genesis 6:1-14, 8:21

Tower of Babel -Believing in man's providence over the will of Hashem

Genesis 11:1 – 9

Issues for contemplation and discussion:

Believing in man's providence over the will of Hashem – what is free will? What do you think it means? Where does the text explore these issues?

Righteousness

What are some of the qualities of righteousness? How does Noach demonstrate this?

Explore the concept of free will.

4. Bring the groups back together, have each group present their take on their passage and have them ask two questions to the group, based on their presentation.

Appendix

This four square, quick read historical view can be filled in by the teacher, during the class presentation. Below is a brief sample of how to do so. The amount of material that is covered is dependent upon the students' background.

- 2000 -1000 BCE - Age of Torah
- 1000 BCE -70 CE - Age of First and Second Temple
 - Time of the prophets and the writings
- 0-1000 CE - Early rabbinic culture
 - Middle Ages
- 1000 - 2010 CE - Late Middle Ages - through modern history

2000 BCE	1500 BCE	1250 BCE
1000 BCE		
Abraham	Isaac	Jacob
		Moses
		King
David		
		Building of First
Temple		
Denominations begin		
Ba'al Shem Tov, modern Chasidism		
		Destruction of First
Temple		
		Building of Second
Temple		

Expulsion of Jews from Spain

Torah is scribed by

ezra

Golden Age of Spain

Talmud redacted

Mishnah written down

Destruction of First Temple

1000 CE

0 CE