



## JEWISH IDENTITY THEATRE PROJECT

Submitted by Tracy Ayers

### Lesson Plan

*The script and song lyrics for the Jewish Identity Theatre Project are included with this general lesson plan.*

### General Points of Information

Although this lesson was designed around the topic of Jewish Identity, it can easily be adapted for many other subjects such as diversity, family, traditions, conflict, teen issues, or independence.

This lesson is geared toward 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders. When I taught this, we met once a week for two hours for ten weeks and developed a 25 minute performance.

This project can be taught as a one-time workshop or as an ongoing class. You may choose to culminate with a performance or not. Any type of closure can work well.



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No matter how you design your program, I recommend you start with the introduction, the trust building, and the name game. However you decide to use the remaining exercises is up to you, your time frame, and your class. I utilized a variety of all the activities listed in this lesson plan.

Have fun!!

### INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Have students sit in a circle.
- ❑ Introduce yourself and give a brief overview of the project.
- ❑ Going around the circle one person at a time, each student tells his/her name, grade, and reason for participating in the project.

### TRUST

- ❑ Explain the importance of building trust within a group.
- ❑ Ask each student to think of what he/she needs to feel safe and record all responses on a piece of butcher paper that everyone can see.
- ❑ Ask students to vote for their top three. Post the top three in the room or bring them to class each time.



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### NAME GAME

- ❑ In a circle each student says his/her name and does a movement (e.g. a jump, clapping hands, shaking head).
- ❑ Going around the circle, each student must remember the previous names with their movements.
- ❑ The entire group then repeats each movement adding on each new student until all students have participated.

### QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION TO GENERATE IDEAS

- ❑ Questions should be open-ended (geared toward discussion, not a simple yes or no).
- ❑ Examples of possible questions include the following:
  - What does it mean to be Jewish?
  - Describe a time when you felt that your Judaism was challenged.
  - Describe a time you felt proud to be Jewish.
  - What creates someone's identity?
- ❑ One person should speak at a time. A helpful strategy is to have a "talking piece" that a student holds to indicate that he/she has the floor. I used a small stuffed animal.



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- During the discussion of the questions the leader should take notes, including actual quotes of the students and any recurring themes.

***WITH THE REMAINING GAMES AND EXERCISES, YOU CAN DO ANY OR ALL DEPENDING ON YOUR TIME ALLOTMENT. ANY OF THESE ACTIVITIES CAN BE DEVELOPED INTO A PRODUCT TO PRESENT TO AN AUDIENCE.***

### **GROUP SHARE**

- In groups of 3 to 4, each group member shares with the other members a true incident related to Jewish Identity (e.g. a time when your Judaism was challenged) or whatever the class topic might be.
- The person whose story it is will direct the other members of the group in acting out that incident.
- Allow time for the groups to rehearse and then to perform their “incidents” for the rest of the class.
- Conduct a follow-up discussion about clarity of the scenes.



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### GIVE AND TAKE

- ❑ The leader provides students with a location related to the class topic (e.g. a bar mitzvah).
- ❑ Students arrange themselves on stage (or in some open part of the room) without talking.
- ❑ They will “freeze” as a character who could be at the given location.
- ❑ The leader then chooses one student to begin by “giving.” This character moves around the space as his/her character using dialogue that the character might say.
- ❑ This first student does this until he/she “gives” the focus to another student. The first student “gives” focus by freezing next to the other student.
- ❑ Then that student moves around the space in character with dialogue until that person “gives” to someone else.
- ❑ The process of “give and take” continues until all students have had a chance to participate.



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### WORD DEFINITIONS

- ❑ Brainstorm words related to the class topic or to themes developed from the earlier discussion of questions.
- ❑ For example, with “diversity” students might come up with *discrimination, prejudice, variety*, etc. For “identity” they might think of *race, religion, independence, uniqueness*, etc. For Judaism, they might say *family, tradition, synagogue*, etc.
- ❑ Look up the definitions of the brainstormed words in the dictionary.
- ❑ Let the students “present” the definitions by “dividing them up” in different ways. They may want to experiment with voice and/or body movement. You might have a few students say words or phrases together. You might also encourage students to write and present their own definition. You might divide the definition entirely word by word using students to recite each word



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### RANT

- ❑ Students stand in a straight line
- ❑ The leader states one word relating to the class topic (e.g. family or synagogue or tradition).
- ❑ One at a time, each student creates a “mini monologue” about the word. Mini monologues should be approximately one minute each.
- ❑ Go down the line until all students have responded.
- ❑ These mini monologues may be developed into longer pieces.

### SONG LYRICS

- ❑ Select an existing song with the music but no lyrics to that song.
- ❑ Using the notes you have from the discussion of the questions, write lyrics to the song.
- ❑ Teach the song and music to the students using very basic choreography (or none at all).
- ❑ Lyrics can be serious or humorous or a combination.



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### WORD POEM

- ❑ This is a type of Reader's Theatre activity for the beginning or end piece of a presentation or performance.
- ❑ Readers Theatre incorporates word association where students sit in a circle and are each given a piece of paper with the same word written at the top. For example, the word used might be Judaism.
- ❑ Students write a personal response to that word, fold their paper to cover their response, and pass it to the next person.
- ❑ This activity continues until every student has written on every paper and the paper has come back to the beginning student.
- ❑ This exercise allows students to see how others perceive words or symbols and how these perceptions may or may not be connected.
- ❑ This activity can then lead to the creation of poems to be used at the beginning or end of the performance piece.
- ❑ These word poems may be presented much like the word definitions.



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### Song Lyrics to “What the World Needs Now”

What the world needs now is sensitivity,  
To accept that Judaism is a part of our identity.

What the world needs now is an open mind;  
We all share differences and we're not two of a kind.

Community and belief we share  
To base who we are on stereotypes is not fair.  
People can be cruel, mean, and ignorant,  
Without thinking twice that we just might even care!

What the world needs now is sensitivity,  
To accept that Judaism is a part of our identity.

What the world needs now is an open mind;  
We all share differences and we're not two of a kind.



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We wish that people would take a stand  
And vow to share peace over religion and land.  
There is hatred and prejudice all around  
If people could only understand.

What the world needs now is an open mind;  
We all share differences and we're not two of a kind.

What the world needs now is understanding,  
No not just for some,  
Oh but just for every, every, everyone.

### SCRIPT FOR JEWISH IDENTITY PERFORMANCE

1. **INTRODUCTION - WORD POEM** (Judaism or Identity.)
2. **Hebrew/English- identity and Judaism with partners.**
3. **Dictionary definition of identity** (all in straight line facing the audience- very factual)



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*The collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing is definitively recognizable or known. The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group*

4. **Mini-monologues about identity** - one at a time, step forward and present ideas. Once all have gone- begin ranting simultaneously. Build rant and then all freeze.

5. **Partner scenes.** (Scenes should be no more than 2 minutes each.)

- Scene A will step forward and perform a scene.  
Immediately establish relationship, environment and situation. Two friends are playing after school together and discover one is Christian and the other is Jewish. Scene A will freeze in a pose after the discovery.
- Scene B will step forward and perform a scene.
- Immediately establish relationship, environment and situation.
- A student and his/ her teacher are discussing the purpose of Mitzvahs and the assignment to go do a Mitzvah in the community.  
Scene B will freeze in a pose.



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### 6. Entire group will move in to a tableau and perform the following quotes.

- Identity doesn't mean it's your strongest point.
- In school, they expect me to know everything. I'm not responsible for it all.
- I can't doodle stars freely anymore.
- Cats and dogs don't get along- but they can learn to live with each other- why can't we?
- Why does it matter that I'm Jewish?
- What's the big deal, so I'm Jewish?
- Jewish people are allowed to have friends too.
- Being the majority does not happen very often.

### 7. Mini-monologues- FUNNY! - Family

- In a straight line each person gives a mini monologue about a member of his or her Jewish family.



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### 8. **Scene A continues scene.**

This scene needs to end at the climax. In this scene we see the Christian friend telling her mom or dad about her new Jewish friend and we see the mom or dad tell the child that she can be friends with the Jewish friend even though she is Jewish. FREEZE.

### **Scene B continues scene.**

This scene needs to end at the climax. In this scene we see the student approaching a homeless person and trying to give the homeless person some coupons for food. The homeless person refuses to take the coupons when he/she discovers that the student is Jewish. FREEZE.

### 9. **Song sung by Lauren and Maya.**

- ❑ Doughnut monologue by Peter.
- ❑ Definitions of race and religion.



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### 10. **Scene A continues scene.**

This scene is the ending. In it we see the Christian friend tell the Jewish friend that they can be friends even though he/she is Jewish. This scene needs to freeze at the line, "I can be friends with you even though you're Jewish."

### **Scene B continues scene.**

This scene is the ending. In it we see the student say to the man, "Excuse me, Christ will save you? I'm just trying to help you out. You can accept my help even though I'm Jewish."

### 11. **Frozen in positions around the stage-** Give and Take.

Inner thoughts of what you wish you would have said at a time when your Judaism was challenged.

### 12. **CONCLUSION-WORD POEM** (Judaism or identity.)