

The TEL Program

Teens: Experience & Learning

Hiddur Mitzvah Six *Havayot* Lesson Plans

Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer, author

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Rabbi Erin Hirsh, JRF Director of Education & TEL Project Director

PLEASE NOTE: Because this curriculum is six years old and has not been updated, we encourage you to find newer, more relevant examples of stories, images, clips, and movies to add to the existing material. We invite you to update the curriculum in the most effective way for your community and hope that you will share your newfound examples with other educators. We welcome all feedback before, during, and after your use of the curriculum; please send your suggested additions to Jackie Land (jland@rrc.edu), who will create an updated resource bank for *Hiddur Mitzvah*. If you have additional questions or comments, please contact Jackie. We're excited to be able to partner with RENA in keeping this curriculum modern and relevant!

The Essential Reconstructionist-ness of a Teen Curriculum about Creativity and Jewish Identity

Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionism, taught that Judaism is a Civilization. Traditionally, Judaism was thought of primarily or exclusively as a religion, but Rabbi Kaplan pointed out all the cultural, social, and political dimensions to Jewishness. The food, clothing, music, politics, sexuality, ethics and mores of each civilization has had a tremendous effect on the evolution of the Jewish people.

Rabbi Kaplan then went on to teach a second and related concept, that Judaism is a civilization, but it is not a static civilization – it is not something that just exists and we can opt to be part of or not.

Rather, Judaism is an Evolving Religious Civilization. It changes and evolves - actually, Jewish people change and shape and re-imagine Judaism as they wrestle with it and bring new points of view and new experiences into dialogue with their –our- tradition.

This year, the TEL program invites you to own your place in our shared Jewish civilization. The creative and artistic dimensions of Judaism have always been a core aspect of the Jewish Civilization and a primary tool for exploring and expressing Jewish identity.

Hiddur Mitzvah *Havayot* Outline

Below please find a list of all Hiddur Mitzvah *havayot*:

Havayah One:	Judaism & Film
Havayah Two:	Judaism & Literature
Havayah Three:	Judaism & Comedy
Havayah Four:	Judaism & Music
Havayah Five:	Judaism & Visual Arts
Havayah Six:	Judaism & Television

Guide to *Hiddur Mitzvah* Curriculum

A *TEL* is a hill made of and built upon an archeological site – the remains of previous experiences. The *TEL* project is designed to enable teens to build upon past learning as congregational communities within a community of congregations and *havurot*.

The word *havayah* comes from the Hebrew word for experience. *Havayot* are experiential learning sessions. These lesson plans have been written to enable groups of teens to have a meaningful set of experiences together.

This year's TEL theme is ***Hiddur Mitzvah*** (beautification of a mitzvah), which we are interpreting to mean ***creativity*** in the broadest sense. Many of our teens have learned about Jewish traditions and holidays through arts and crafts, and we want to emphasize that this curriculum is not about that. Rather, each monthly *havayah* explores a different type of Jewish creativity, all in terms of the theme of Jewish expression and identity. The *havayot* explore examples of critically-acclaimed Jewish film, literature, comedy, visual arts, music and television as expressions of Jewish identity. Each *havayah* contains a highly flexible set of materials, so that as the group leader, you can pick and choose what to use and emphasize based on what will speak to your group.

Each *havayah* contains a series of distinct sections:

Jewish Identity Games...an opening ice-breaker that allows the teens to consider their own Jewish identity before they explore the artists' identity (10-15 minutes)

Whaddya Know About...a fun, interactive introduction to the *hiddur mitzvah* topic (10-15 minutes)

A Brief History Of...some background about the topic in the form of a short article(s). Rather than reading the whole articles as a group, you may want to assign teens different parts of the articles to read and present back to the

whole group. They could write out main points of the articles on poster board, butcher paper or a blackboard. This process will help them to develop their ability to categorize and summarize main points (15-30 minutes).

Experiences in...In each lesson, the teens will get to experience the art modality first hand through samples or excerpts of the art. You may need a computer, cd player, tv/dvd player, etc., depending on the lesson (45-60 minutes). This section contains discussion questions about each creative expression. You may want to use the art experiences to create expanded experiences; for example, if your teens really enjoy a film clip, you could schedule a movie night to watch the whole film together. If they are taken with a literature excerpt, you could assign outside reading of the entire book. These kinds of outside assignments of course depend on the parameters of your particular teen program, but could certainly enrich and deepen the teens' experience of *Hiddur Mitzvah*.

Making Connections...are discussion questions that you can use to go deeper into conversations about the art and Jewish identity.

Reflections in...This section allows the teen to take some personal time to reflect at the end of each session about how he/she felt about the art being presented and how it connected to his/her own Jewish identity. Each teen will have a *Hiddur Mitzvah* journal with the Reflection questions. You may want to set up time for teens who wish to share their reflections with the rest of the group.

Resources...for you as a group leader to learn more about each topic.

Resources on the Creative Arts from JRF

The Tapestry of Creation - Creative Drama and Music by Rabbi Shawn Israel Zevit

http://www.lookstein.org/online_journal.php?id=148

Growing Self and Community through Creativity and the Arts

<http://www.jewishrecon.org/search-results?cx=008954817335942308364%3Ah-4vvzjlbyu&cof=FORID%3A11&ie=UTF-8&Q=Growing+Self+Community+Through+Creativity+and+the+arts&sa.x=0&sa.y=0>

- document

<http://www.jewishrecon.org/audio/omer-project-growing-self-and-community-through-creativity-and-arts> - audio

Havayah One: Judaism & Film

Jewish Identity Games

This first exercise is less a game and more of an opportunity to introduce the topic of “identity.” It is also an opportunity to establish trust and listening ground rules in your group.

Before the teens enter the room, write IDENTITY in capital letters on a piece of butcher paper. As teens enter the room, put them in pairs and give them a marker. Invite them to write what they think “identity” means on the paper. When they finish, hand them an index card. Tell them: On one side, write about a time when you felt really proud of your *Jewish* identity. On the other side, write about a time when you felt that your Jewish identity was challenged.

After every teens has written on the IDENTITY paper and completed their cards, call out a color and the teens with that color marker can share what they wrote on the paper and on their cards. They call on another color group until everyone has shared.

Wrapping up: As a group, brainstorm a working definition for “Jewish Identity.” Explain that in TEL group this year, we will be exploring different kinds of arts in which Jewish artists express their individual sense of Jewish identity. Each artist is very unique; there is no one correct way to express your Jewish identity. As we learn about their work, we will continue to explore our thoughts and feelings about our own Jewish identities.

Breaking the Ice: *Jews and Film—Whaddya Know?*

Divide your teens into pairs and hand out the “Jews & Film” quiz. The first team to complete all of the answers wins a prize.

Name two movies that contain Jewish stories/themes:

Name two movies made by Jewish directors:

Name two movies that feature Jewish actors:

When you have a winner, bring everyone together to share their answers.

Make a list on a blackboard or piece of butcher paper with three columns featuring

- 1) films with Jewish themes;
- 2) Jewish filmmakers/directors;
- 3) Jewish actors/actresses.

Keep the list posted to refer to during the havayah.

Share the following text with your teens and take turns reading:

A Brief History of...Jews and Film

What makes a film a “Jewish film”? Sharon Rivo, a film historian from Brandeis University says that, “Jewish film has to do with the subject matter that is depicted on the screen. It’s the images that are projected . . . [or] if it’s in Yiddish, Ladino, or Hebrew.” For nearly as long as films have been made, movies have been influenced by Jewish characters, themes, and plots, as well as by Jewish directors, actors, and also movie executives and producers. Jews and Judaism have appeared in films in different ways and degrees throughout the history of film.

In Poland in the 1920s, filmmakers made Yiddish films featuring dramas and comedies spoken in Yiddish. These popular films were made during the twenty years preceding the Holocaust and have been preserved by several different film archives.

In the United States, Jews have always played important roles in Hollywood’s major studios, such as Metro Goldwyn Mayer. The first “talkie”--*The Jazz Singer*--told the story of a cantor's son finding success on Broadway despite his parents' objections. However, it wasn’t until the 1970s and 80s when successful Jewish filmmakers including Woody Allen, Mel Brooks and Steven Spielberg gained critical acclaim and regularly brought Jewish-themed movies to mainstream audiences.

The Holocaust has been an important theme in American and international film, made by both Jewish and non-Jewish filmmakers. The 1985 documentary *Shoah* is an example of a film that is unique in its style and format: it is nine hours in length and consists of interviews with people who were involved in various ways in the Holocaust, and visits to different places they discuss.

In the 1980s and 90s, many cities and smaller Jewish communities began running Jewish film festivals, featuring movies with Jewish themes made by lesser known directors. They also began to feature Israeli films and movies by Jewish directors from around the world.

In recent years, Jewish characters appear in films in which being Jewish is just part of their character and the film’s main themes/story does not revolve around their Jewishness (think “Nora” in *Nick and Nora’s Ultimate Playlist*). What do you imagine it means in terms of Jews being integrated into American society that being Jewish can simply be part of a character’s complex identity?

Experiences in Jewish Film

Depending on your time, you may choose two-four of these film excerpts to watch and discuss:

***Crossing Delancey* (Joan Micklin Silver)**

Crossing Delancey is a 1988 romantic comedy starring Amy Irving as Izzy Grossman, a 33-year-old single New Yorker who works in a bookstore and organizes literary events. Izzy's bubbe, played by veteran Yiddish actress Raizyl Boyzik is bothered that Izzie is 33 and single and shadchen (matchmaker) in her Lower East side neighborhood to find a match for Izzie.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLDCbFV8n1g>

Questions to discuss from this film excerpt:

- What does Izzy value in life? What does her Bubbe value?
- Describe Izzy's identity. What part of being Jewish is important to her?
- What parts of the film clip shows you that this is a Jewish film?

***A Serious Man* (The Coen Brothers)**

Oscar-winning filmmakers Joel and Ethan Cohen explore their own childhood memories in *A Serious Man*, a part comic, part serious movie depicting a modern life Job, Larry Gopnik, who is pushed to the edge of a breakdown facing problems at home and at work. Larry's problems push him to explore spiritual questions and to meet with three local rabbis, none of whom offer Larry much help in his quest to comprehend the universe.

The First Rabbi <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Uy5DyoZDPA>

- Why does Larry go to see the rabbi?
- What advice does the “first rabbi” give? What do you think of the advice?

The Second Rabbi http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdYC_gliT8g&feature=related

- How is Larry feeling when he goes to see the second rabbi? How does the meeting make him feel?
- Larry asks, “Why does Hashem make us question when he doesn’t give us the answers?” What do you think about what Larry asks?
- What happens to the dentist, Sussman? What do you make of his experience?

Marshak The link to original clip is no longer working. Please find an appropriate clip in the movie, *A Serious Man*

- What does Larry mean when he says “I’ve tried to be a serious man?”
- Why does Larry go to see Rabbi Marshak?
- What do you make of Marshak’s response?

Rabbi Marshak and the Bar Mitzvah The link to the original clip is no longer working. Please find the appropriate link the movie, *A Serious Man*.

- Describe how Danny feels walking into Rabbi Marshak’s office
- What is it like for him to sit across from Rabbi Marshak?
- How are the rabbis in *A Serious Man* different from the rabbis that you know?

***Annie Hall* (Woody Allen)**

Woody Allen is an Oscar-winning filmmaker, screenwriter and comedian whose large body of comedies and dramas explore themes including psychology, philosophy and Jewish identity. In *Annie Hall*, a bittersweet romantic comedy, Allen plays Alvy, a neurotic, intellectual Brooklyn-born Jewish stand-up comedian who meets Annie Hall, a Midwesterner living in New York, and falls in love. –You may want to choose a different movie as an example.

“D’jew?” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaPBhxXhprg&feature=related>

- What does this clip show you about Alvy’s character? How does he view the world?

Young Alvy the fatalist <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Pa34orcwwA&feature=related>

- What is Alvy like as a child? How does his experience as a child foreshadow his experience as an adult?
- Describe Alvy’s mother. What is she concerned about?

Easter dinner <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0v2MpBbQPM&feature=fvw>

- How does Alvy connect to the conversation at the dinner table? What does Annie’s family think of him?
- Describe Alvy’s identity; how would he describe himself?

Making Connections

- Of the film clips that you viewed in class, which characters did you connect with the most? Why?
- Which characters had Jewish experiences that you could appreciate or understand?
- Which experiences seemed really different from your experiences?
- Pick one of the filmmakers whose work you saw tonight. What do you think he/she expressed about being Jewish through the characters in the film?

Closing Reflections

If you could make a film to **express** any aspect of your Jewish identity, what would the film be about?

Write out an outline for a screenplay by journaling about the following questions:

- Where would your movie take place? (synagogue, home, school, family/holiday event, camp, etc.)
- Who would the characters be?
- What is the conflict in the movie? What does the main character want to do/change? How is the conflict resolved?

Share your screenplay ideas with your TEL group.

(You may want to develop a screenplay as a group later in the year for your TEL group project!)

Resources on Jewish Film

The 100 Greatest Jewish Movies: A Critic's Ranking of the Very Best was a 1998 book published by Kathryn Bernheimer. Bernheimer ranked the "top 50" films dealing with Jewish topics.

- 1 *The Chosen* 1981 PG Jeremy Kagan
- 2 *Fiddler on the Roof* 1971 G Norman Jewison
- 3 *Schindler's List* 1993 R Steven Spielberg
- 4 *Shoah* 1985 NR Claude Lanzmann
- 5 *The Jazz Singer* 1927 NR Alan Crosland
- 6 *Annie Hall* 1977 PG Woody Allen
- 7 *Funny Girl* 1968 G William Wyler
- 8 *Gentleman's Agreement* 1947 NR Elia Kazan
- 9 *Exodus* 1960 NR Otto Preminger
- 10 *Ben-Hur* 1959 NR William Wyler
- 10 *The Ten Commandments* 1956 G Cecil B. DeMille
- 11 *Crossing Delancey* 1988 PG Joan Micklin Silver
- 12 *The Golem* 1920 NR Paul Wegener and Carl Boese
- 13 *Au revoir, les enfants* 1987 PG Louis Malle
- 14 *Almonds and Raisins* 1988 NR Russ Karel
- 15 *Enemies, a Love Story* 1989 R Paul Mazursky
- 16 *The Great Dictator* 1940 NR Charlie Chaplin
- 17 *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* 1974 PG Ted Kotcheff
- 18 *Blazing Saddles* 1974 R Mel Brooks
- 19 *Chariots of Fire* 1981 R Hugh Hudson
- 20 *Body and Soul* 1947 NR Robert Rossen
- 21 *The Pawnbroker* 1965 NR Sidney Lumet
- 22 *Goodbye, Columbus* 1969 PG Larry Peerce
- 23 *Bugsy* 1991 R Barry Levinson
- 24 *Cabaret* 1972 PG Bob Fosse
- 25 *Crimes and Misdemeanors* 1989 PG-13 Woody Allen
- 26 *The Last Angry Man* 1959 NR Daniel Mann
- 27 *The Outside Chance of Maximilian Glick* 1988 G Allan Goldstein
- 28 *Job's Revolt* 1983 NR Imre Gyöngyösy and Barna Kabay
- 29 *Homicide* 1991 R David Mamet

- 30 *Madame Rosa* 1977 PG Moshé Mizrahi
- 31 *Driving Miss Daisy* 1989 PG Bruce Beresford
- 32 *Reversal of Fortune* 1990 R Barbet Schroeder
- 33 *Europa Europa* 1991 R Agnieszka Holland
- 34 *The Big Fix* 1978 PG Jeremy Kagan
- 35 *Broadway Danny Rose* 1984 PG Woody Allen
- 36 *Julia* 1977 PG Fred Zinnemann
- 37 *Marathon Man* 1976 R John Schlesinger
- 38 *A Majority of One* 1962 NR Mervyn LeRoy
- 39 *Oliver!* 1968 G Carol Reed
- 40 *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* 1986 R Paul Mazursky
- 41 *Holocaust* 1978 NR Marvin Chomsky
- 42 *Dirty Dancing* 1987 PG-13 Emile Ardolino
- 43 *The Front* 1976 PG Martin Ritt
- 44 *Biloxi Blues* 1988 PG-13 Mike Nichols
- 45 *The Diary of Anne Frank* 1959 NR George Stevens
- 46 *Shine* 1996 PG-13 Scott Hicks
- 47 *Daniel* 1983 R Sidney Lumet
- 48 *Yentl* 1983 PG Barbra Streisand
- 49 *The Young Lions* 1958 NR Edward Dmytryk
- 50 *Marjorie Morningstar* 1958 NR Irving Rapper

Websites for updated lists of Jewish Movies with short synopses.

<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/84451/100-greatest-jewish-films>

<http://www.tabletmag.com/?cat=14822>

<http://theotherjournal.com/filmwell/2010/05/16/25-essential-jewish-movies-bangitout-com/>

<http://www.momentmag.com/great-jewish-films>

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/louispeitzman/jewish-movies-to-watch-on-christmas>

Havayah Two: Judaism & Literature

Jewish Identity Games

Tell the teens: In this lesson, we are exploring Jewish identity through the *biddur* lens of literature. In that spirit, we will begin with a creative writing exercise.

There is a legend that the writer Ernest Hemingway wrote a whole story in just six words. The story was, "Baby shoes, for sale, never worn."

In the spirit of that legend, a magazine about Jewish culture called "Guilt & Pleasure" recently sponsored a contest called six-word Jewish stories. Here are some of the entries:

Jewish dad, not mom. No guilt here.

"Yes, we can drink chocolate milk."

Ten summers at camps in Wisconsin.

God said 'Go.' 'Stop' He forgot.

Pogroms, pogroms and more pogroms.

God likes us. We don't.

Yeshivah banned trick-or-treating. Left after Kindergarten.

You're really wearing that to synagogue?

Little boy, now a dad. Oy!

Post-Rosh Hashanah with Cantor Dad: Cheeseburgers.

Stuck in the desert, messiah AWOL.

Knishes, yes. *Kishka*? Not so much.

Food is basically love to me.

Try your hand at a six-word story about your Jewish experiences/identity. It could be funny or serious. Try a few if you are able!

Breaking the Ice: *Jews and Literature—Whaddya Know?*

Tell the Teens: “Literature, books and learning have always been of central importance to Jewish culture. Below are a list of quotations, some ancient and some more contemporary, about the importance of books and literary knowledge to the Jewish people. Read them out loud with a partner (this is called *hevruta style* studying). After reading, each partner will pick one quote that resonates with them in some way. It may connect to how you think about books or it may challenge you. Share with your partner.”

After the teens have worked in hevruta, bring the group together and invite the teens to share a few responses in the large group about which quotes connected to their own ideas about books and learning.

Cover your bookcases with rugs and linens of fine quality; preserve them from dampness and mice and injury; for it is your books that are your true treasure.

~ Ibn Tibbon 1120-1190? Spanish Jewish Scholar

Never refuse to lend books to anyone who cannot afford to purchase them, but lend books only to those who can be trusted to return them.

~ Ibn Tibbon 1120-1190? Spanish Jewish Scholar

If you drop gold and books, pick up the books first, then the gold.

~ Anonymous

My pen is my harp and my lyre; my library is my garden and my orchard.

~ Judah Ha-Levi Spanish Poet, Physician

Make books your companions; let your bookshelves be your gardens: bask in their beauty, gather their fruit, pluck their roses, take their spices and myrrh. And when your soul be weary, change from garden to garden, and from prospect to prospect.

~ Ibn Tibbon, c. 1120-1190 ? Spanish Jewish scholar

Three possessions should you prize: a field, a friend, and a book.

~ Hai Gaon, Head of Bet Din in 998; Wrote commentaries on Torah and Talmud until his death at age 99.

None is poor save him that lacks knowledge.

~ The Talmud

Books lead us into the society of those great men with whom we could not otherwise come into personal contact. They bring us near to the geniuses of the remotest lands and times. A good library is a place, a palace, where the lofty spirits of all nations and generations meet.

~ Samuel Niger, Gathered Works 1928

My mother and my father were illiterate immigrants from Russia. When I was a child they were constantly amazed that I could go to a building and take a book on any subject. They couldn't believe this access to knowledge we have here in America. They couldn't believe that it was free.

~ Actor Kirk Douglas

A Brief History of...Jews and Literature

For many years, Jews have been known as “the People of the Book” because of the importance of reading and studying to our culture. Originally, Jewish literature was sacred in its context—*midrash*, for example were stories that were written to explain and comment on the Torah.

In Eastern Europe, during the 1800s, Jewish authors began to tell stories that were more secular in nature, written in Yiddish. One of the most famous Yiddish writers was Sholem Aleichem, whose stories about Tevye the Dairyman and his family became the basis for the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. Writers like Shalom Aleichem used satire and humor in their exploration of very human characters. Poland-born author Isaac Bashevis Singer emigrated to the United States and was a winner of the Nobel Prize.

At the end of the 19th century, as Jews from around the world began to make aliyah to Israel and the Hebrew language was modernized, writers began to pen secular stories, poems and longer works of fiction in Hebrew. Some of the best known early Israeli authors include Chaim Bialik and S.Y. Agnon; later authors include Yehuda Amichai, Amos Oz and Orly Castel-Bloom.

In the United States, Many acclaimed Jewish-American authors have emerged in the last century, exploring Jewish themes, characters, issues and identity in their work. Some important Jewish-American authors include Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Grace Paley, Cynthia Ozick, Rebecca Goldstein and Michael Chabon.

Today, Jewish authors around the world are writing fiction, poetry, graphic novel and other forms of literary expressions.

Experiences in Jewish Literature

Poetry, Marge Piercy

Marge Piercy is a poet, novelist and social activist. Born to a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father, Piercy credits her Jewish grandmother for inspiring her storytelling. Piercy's book of poems *The Art of Blessing the Day* contains poems with Jewish themes and interpretations of Jewish prayers. Here is a sample of her poetry:

Kaddish

Look around us, search above us, below, behind.
We stand in a great web of being joined together.
Let us praise, let us love the life we are lent
passing through us in the body of Israel
and our own bodies, let's say amen.

Time flows through us like water.
The past and the dead speak through us.
We breathe out our children's children, blessing.

Blessed is the earth from which we grow,
Blessed the life we are lent,
blessed the ones who teach us,
blessed the ones we teach,
blessed is the word that cannot say the glory
that shines through us and remains to shine
flowing past distant suns on the way to forever.
Let's say amen.

Blessed is light, blessed is darkness,
but blessed above all else is peace
which bears the fruits of knowledge
on strong branches, let's say amen.

Peace that bears joy into the world,
peace that enables love, peace over Israel
everywhere, blessed and holy is peace, let's say amen.

Questions:

- In this poem, Piercy writes her own version of the Kaddish. How is her version different from the English translation of the prayer?
- What poetic liberties does she take?

Poetry, Alicia Ostriker

Alicia Ostriker has published eleven volumes of poetry, including *the volcano sequence* and *No Heaven*. Her work appears in numerous Jewish journals and anthologies. She is also the author of *The Nakedness of the Fathers* (midrash and autobiography) and *For the Love of God: the Bible as an Open Book* (essays). For more info on her work, <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~ostriker/home.htm>

KOL NIDRE

by Alicia Ostriker

As to the deep ineradicable flaws
in the workmanship
anger and envy
anger and envy
stemming from over-enthusiasm
that rises like a water lily from mud

and the stone
of self, of ego
that insists on its imperial monolog
that strangles its audience

I would like to repent but I cannot
I am ridden like a horse

What does the contriver have in mind
the contrivance wants to know
because otherwise what is the point
of all this moaning

pretending to be sorry for everything
groveling like a chained-up snake
crawling over a stone book
in the rain of words
for which someone is responsible
at times the food devours the eater
the pot wishes to speak to the potter
the clay chooses the hands

We are not competent to make our vows
we are truly sorry
we pull you down from a cloud
or bend our knees to you like dancing dogs

death breathing invisibly next to us in the subway

in the office in the kitchen on the park bench
we promise to love only you
faithful, faithful, we promise
we lie, we are not competent
still we implore you
please look at us and take us in your arms
not like a master like a mother

Questions:

- Ostriker titles her poem “Kol Nidre.” What is Kol Nidre? Explain its spiritual significance.
- What does she mean by “I would like to repent but I cannot”?
- What images of Kol Nidre does the poem capture?
- How does it relate or not relate to your experience of Kol Nidre?

To my granddaughter on her *bat mitzvah*

A girl stands in a doorway
what a bright morning
what fresh air
everything underground is pushing up

The girl walks down the street with her nose in a book
what a bright morning
she knows she herself is the book
she is learning to read

The letters are magic
the letters are holy
the letters are fire and water

what a bright morning

O if we could speak
what a bright morning
O if our accumulated wisdom
were a magic ring she could rub or wings to fly

The girl would still smile to herself
the girl would smile to herself and walk forward
her secrets are holy
what a bright morning this is

Questions:

- In this poem, Ostriker addresses her granddaughter on the morning of her Bat Mitzvah. What is the mood/feeling of the poem?
- What is Ostriker referring to by “The letters are magic the letters are holy the letters are fire and water?” Explain what this image means to you.
- What does Ostriker mean by “if our accumulated wisdom were a magic ring she could rub or wings to fly?” How does that idea relate to what happens at a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

Graphic Novel: Art Spiegelman/*Maus* excerpt

Chapter 3: Prisoner of War

Art Spiegelman is a comics artist and writer best known for his Pulitzer-prize winning memoir *Maus*. In 1986, he released the first volume of *Maus* (*Maus I: A Survivor's Tale*, also known as *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*) The second volume, *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* followed in 1991. *Maus* attracted an unprecedented amount of critical attention for a work in the form of comics, including an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 2005, Time magazine named him one of the “Top 100 Influential People.”

In *Maus*, Spiegelman tells about his parents’ experience in Poland before and during the Holocaust. He also makes himself a character in the comic, exploring his relationship to his father.

Questions:

- What do you make of Spiegelman’s choice to make the Jews of Europe portrayed as mice?
- Describe his relationship to his father.
- What do you learn about his father’s experience as a prisoner of war? What are the traits that help his father survive that experience?

Fiction: Nathan Englander short story, “Reb Kringle”

Nathan Englander’s short fiction has appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, and numerous anthologies including *The Best American Short Stories*, *The O. Henry Prize Anthology*, and the Pushcart Prize.

Englander’s story collection, *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* (Knopf, 1999), became an international bestseller, and earned him a PEN/Faulkner Malamud Award and the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Englander was selected as one of “20 Writers for the 21st Century” by *The New Yorker*.

Questions:

- Describe Buna Michla’s attitude about Reb Yitzhak’s job. How is different from his attitude?
- How does he feel about the words “Merry Christmas”? Why?
- What makes Reb Yitzhak stop playing his Santa role? What is at stake for him? Why is he willing to lose his job?

Making Connections

- Select one of the authors whom we read in class. How does he/she express his/her Jewish identity through his/her work?
- Have you read other literature by Jewish authors? What were some of the themes the authors wrote about?

Closing Reflections

We began our havayah with a very short writing exercise. After learning about Jewish literature during class, we see that there are many different ways to tell a story and to capture your experiences.

Which author has inspired you the most?

What genre of literature do you most appreciate?

Which writer connects most to your own sense of Jewish identity?

Pick out 1-2 sentences or lines of poetry that connect with you and write them down in your journal.

Websites with lists of Jewish books:

http://www.goodreads.com/list/show/13413.Best_Jewish_Books

<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/145840/101-great-jewish-books>

Havayah Three: Judaism & Comedy

Jewish Identity Games

Tell the Teens: “In honor of tonight’s Hiddur Mitzvah theme—comedy—we are going to open our session with time for some “rants.” In this game, each teen has one minute to rant—say whatever comes to mind on a topic that I will throw out there. When your minute is up, you have to stop wherever you are in your rant. The rants may be funny or they may just be observations (Don’t feel like you have to be funny). You can say anything that you want about the topic.”

Some topics to try:

“What do you have to say about...”

- Synagogues
- Gefilte Fish
- Grandparents
- Horseradish
- Chanukah

When the teens finish “ranting,” talk about which observations were really funny.

- What was funny about them?
- What makes something funny?
- In thinking about your Jewish identity, what role has humor played in your experience?
- How is humor valued (or not valued) in your family, synagogue, camp experience?
- Have you ever thought about sense of humor as being part of your Jewish heritage?

Breaking the Ice: *Jews and Comedy—Whaddya Know?*

Jewish Comedians Dominoes

- Hand each teen two index cards and a pen
- On each index card, instruct them to write one of their favorite Jewish comedians (use the resource list if they are stuck).
- Invite one teen to read his/her answers first. He/she is the first “domino.”
- Another teen who has one of those comedians can come stand next to the first teen.
- Give the teens 3 minutes to form into a human domino board.
- Whip around and find out which comedians the teens named. Who was the most popular comedian?
- Write the names of the comedians whom the teens named on the board or a piece of butcher paper.

Bonus: Do you know any good “Jewish jokes”? Whip around the group and share what you got!

A Brief History of...Jews and Comedy

Divide the teens into two groups and have each group read one of these articles about Jewish comedy. Come back together as a large group and have each of the groups share the articles' main points.

“Defining Jewish Humor” from www.myjewishlearning.com

Jewish humor mocks the powerful (including God) and pokes fun at the Jew's often-downtrodden status

By William Novak

Reprinted with permission from 'The Big Book of Jewish Humor' (HarperCollins Publishers)

What do we mean by Jewish humor? To begin, it is humor that is overtly Jewish in its concerns, characters, definitions, language, values, or symbols. (A Jewish joke, goes one definition, is one that no *goy* can understand and every Jew says he has already heard.) But not all Jewish humor derives from Jewish sources, just as not all humor created by Jews is necessarily Jewish. In these matters it is best to examine not the singer but the song.

Jewish humor is too rich and too diverse to be adequately described by a single generalization. Jewish theologians used to say that it is easier to describe God in terms of what He is *not*; the same process may be useful in understanding Jewish humor. It is not, for example, escapist. It is not slapstick. It is not physical. It is generally not cruel and does not attack the weak or the infirm. At the same time, it is also not polite or gentle.

But individual humorists come to mind immediately to negate each of these tendencies: the Marx Brothers are slapstick performers; Jerry Lewis and Sid Caesar are physical; Don Rickles is cruel; Sam Levenson is polite, and Danny Kaye is playful. So much for generalizations.

What Jewish humor *is* may be even more difficult to determine, and we offer the following broad statements in full awareness of the possible futility of the exercise:

Jewish humor is usually substantive; it is *about* something. It is especially fond of certain specific topics, such as food (noshing is sacred), family, business, anti-Semitism, wealth and its absence, health, and survival. Jewish humor is also fascinated by the intricacies of the mind and by logic, and the short if elliptical path separating the rational from the absurd.

As social or religious commentary, **Jewish humor can be sarcastic, complaining, resigned, or descriptive**. Sometimes the "point" of the humor is more powerful than the laugh it delivers, and for some of the jokes, the appropriate response is not laughter, but rather a bitter nod or a commiserating sigh of recognition. This didactic quality precludes laughing "for free," as in slapstick humor, which derives its laughter from other people's misfortunes.

Jewish humor tends to be anti-authoritarian. It ridicules grandiosity and self-indulgence, exposes hypocrisy, and kicks pomposity in the pants. It is strongly democratic, stressing the dignity and worth of common folk.

Jewish humor frequently has a critical edge, which creates discomfort in making its point. Often its thrust is political--aimed at leaders and other authorities who cannot be criticized more directly. This applies to prominent figures in the general society, as well as to those in the Jewish world, such as rabbis, cantors, sages, intellectuals, teachers, doctors, businessmen, philanthropists, and community functionaries. A special feature of Jewish humor is the interaction of prominent figures with simple folk and the disadvantaged, with the latter often emerging triumphant. In general, Jewish humor characteristically deals with the conflict between the people and the power

structure, whether that be the individual Jew within his community, the Jew facing the Gentile world, or the Jewish community in relation to the rest of humanity.

Jewish humor mocks everyone--including God. It frequently satirizes religious personalities and institutions, as well as rituals and dogma. At the same time, it affirms religious traditions and practices, seeking a new understanding of the differences between the holy and the mundane.

The Gift of Jewish Women's Comedy

by Joyce Antler

from Jewish Women's Archive. "[JWA - Jewish Women in Comedy](#)."

In featuring Jewish women comediennes, the Jewish Women's Archive puts the spotlight on a tradition that has been neglected for far too long. The significance of American Jewish women's comedy was brought home to me some years ago, when I dedicated my book on Jewish women's history, *The Journey Home*, to my two daughters, calling them *badkhn*tes of the next generation.

Some experts tried to discourage my use of the word, telling me that there simply was no feminine form for *badkhen*, the Yiddish word meaning jester or clown. The *badkhen*, who had amused Jews in Europe for hundreds of years with his witty rhymes-composed on the spot at weddings, and later, at other social gatherings-had influenced the creators of Yiddish theater and may be seen as the forerunner of today's standup comedian. However, this important Jewish icon-and the tradition he started-has been always considered wholly male.

As in so many other areas, coming to America meant breaking the Old World pattern by which Jewish women performed in dramatic roles but rarely as comedians. American Jewish women became prominent comic performers in the immigrant generation, when comedic talents like Sophie Tucker, Fanny Brice, and Molly Picon took to the stage. Their comic routines expressed the experiences and desires of many second generation Jews, yet they appealed to mainstream audiences as well.

In every successive generation, Jewish women comediennes helped shape the contours of American comedy. From Sophie Tucker, Fanny Brice, Molly Picon, Gertrude Berg, and Judy Holliday, through Joan Rivers, Totie Fields, Gilda Radner, Madeline Kahn, Elaine May, Roseanne Barr, Fran Drescher, and most recently, to Judy Gold, Susie Essman, Rain Pryor, Jackie Hoffman, Wendy Leibman, Sandra Bernhard, Sarah Silverman, Lisa Kron, and many other younger comediennes, Jewish female comics have been found in every corner of American culture vaudeville, burlesque, radio, television, legitimate theater, film, stand up comedy, performance art.

Like generations of male Jewish comedians, they have demonstrated a superb wit, wonderful verbal skills, and the masterful use of irony, satire, and mockery, including self-mockery. Their heritage as Jews especially, the Diasporic experience of living between two worlds has given them a sharp critical edge and the ability to express the anxieties and foibles of contemporary culture.

Yet there is something unique about female Jewish comics which distinguishes them from male colleagues and peers. Jewish comediennes often center their humor on a specifically female—and sometimes explicitly feminist—perspective that showcases issues of particular interest to women.

Whether they are openly rebellious, using bawdy, sexually frank routines in the manner of a Sophie Tucker, Belle Barth, Totie Fields, Bette Midler, or Joan Rivers, or whether they present more gentle challenges, with portrayals of innocent, endearing characters—think Molly Picon, Fanny Brice, Gilda Radner, and Goldie Hawn—these comediennes have stretched the boundaries of conventional thinking about gender roles and stereotypes. The laughter they engender is powerful, and it can be subversive.

What we learn from the tradition of Jewish female comedy is that laughter can critique and even disrupt the social order. Nothing was sacred to these Jewish women comics—everything could be mocked—but by and large they stood proudly within a Jewish tradition that offered comfort, familiarity, and guidance.

Many of them earned the laughter they achieved through tears that bore witness to unhappy romances, the see-saw of illness and recuperation, the struggle with beauty and weight issues, the separation from loved ones in order to pursue careers. Laughter provided a way not only to cope with the pettiness and pains of daily life but to transcend them.

The gift of Jewish women's comedy is to make us transcend our own daily lives as well, and to see, through humor, alternative visions of who we could be if we, too, had the courage to challenge—and mock—the strictures that hold us back.

Joyce Antler is the chair of the Academic Advisory Council and a founding board member of the Jewish Women's Archive. She is the Samuel Lane Professor of American Jewish History and Culture at Brandeis University.

Experiences in Jewish Humor

Joan Rivers

Joan Rivers, b. 1933 as Joan Rosenberg, is an American comedian, television personality and actress. She is known for her brash manner, her loud, raspy voice with a heavy metropolitan New York accent. Joan won *The Celebrity Apprentice* in 2009.

Clip: Joan Live at the Apollo

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwHfxj6QrkM&feature=related>

- Describe Joan's comedy style
- Can you tell that Joan is a Jewish comedian? How?

Clip: Joan Rivers, Bravo Special

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8aVGtLW0Zw&feature=fvw>

Don Rickles

Don Rickles, b. 1926, has had a long career in comedy and is best known as an "insult comic." Rickles earned the nicknames "The Merchant of Venom" and "Mr. Warmth" for his insult comedy, in which he pokes fun at people of all ethnicities and walks of life, including Jews. Don has had a long career performing in Las Vegas, Atlantic City and is a frequent guest on talk shows.

Intro: Mr. Warmth

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DD_65Kb_n-U&feature=related

- What do you think of the "insult humor" genre and Don's humor?
- How does Don get away with making fun of people?
- Can you tell that Don is a Jewish comedian? How?

Adam Sandler

Adam Richard Sandler is an actor, comedian, singer, musician, screenwriter, and film producer. He grew up in a Jewish family and is now a member of a Reconstructionist congregation. After becoming a *Saturday Night Live* cast member, Sandler went on to star in several Hollywood feature films that grossed over \$100 million at the box office. He is best known for his comedic roles, such as in the films *Billy Madison* (1995), *Happy Gilmore* (1996), *Big Daddy* (1999), and *Mr. Deeds* (2002), though he has ventured into more dramatic territory. One of Sandler's most famous bits of comedy is "The Chanukah Song."

Clip: The Chanukah Song (original)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNisJddhIkA>

The Chanukah Song (version 3)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBQ4-JY-kuc&feature=related>

- The "Chanukah Song" is one of Sandler's pieces from SNL that made him a stand-out character. What is unique and creative about it?
- Sandler takes a theme about identity that is very common for Jewish children to experience at Christmas time: feeling alone or outside of the holiday and he turns it into something humorous. What is your experience at Christmas/Chanukah time? How does it impact your sense of Jewish identity?

Chelsea Handler

Chelsea Joy Handler is a stand-up comedian, humorist, television host, actress, and best-selling author. She has her own late night talk show *Chelsea Lately* on the E! Cable Television Network. In 2009 she won a Bravo A-List Award. Chelsea grew up in New Jersey. Her mother is not Jewish but she was raised Jewish and her family belonged to a Reform Temple.

Clip: Jewish Basketball

THIS LINK IS NO LONGER AVAILABLE. Please choose a different example.

In this clip, what is the stereotype about Jewish identity that Chelsea is playing with?

- What do you think about her premise?
- Can there be comedy in stereotypes even if we know they aren't always true?

Making Connections

- Which was your favorite comedian of the clips that we watched—why?
- How would you describe the relationship between Judaism and comedy?

Closing Reflections

“Laughter Through Tears”

Making jokes about a situation is one of the most effective ways of confronting adversity and coping with difficult things in life. "By laughing at our fate, it is as if we were stepping out of a situation and looking at it from a distance, as if we were outside observers, so to speak," writes Rabbi Reuven Bulka.

What do you think has made Jewish people historically—and today—make jokes about adversity? In Yiddish there is a term called "*a bitterer gelekhter*"; laughter through tears. Can you think of a joke or video clip that was shown tonight in which the comedian experienced *a bitterer gelekhter*?

For Your Discretion:

Tel Leaders: Two very influential contemporary Jewish comedians are Sacha Baron Cohen and Sarah Silverman. Many people could understandably find their material inappropriate for teens. At the same time, their work very much speaks to the topics of Jewish humor, creativity, and Jewish identity. Therefore, we are including this material to be used at a Group Leader's discretion. WE STRONGLY ENCOURAGE you to consult your Education Director before sharing this material with any teens.

Sacha Baron Cohen

British-born Sacha Baron Cohen became widely known to American audiences from his HBO hit comedy series "Da Ali G Show." One of the characters that he created on the show, Borat, is from Khazakstan, and plays a well-meaning reporter who comes to America and exposes racism and anti-Semitism.

A CNN review of the *Borat* movie says, "Taken at face value, this (Borat) is certainly the most anti-Semitic American movie ever made -- all the more shocking because Baron Cohen is a devout Jew. But this is a film *about* racism, not a racist film. By saying the unsayable, Borat encourages others to do the same, with depressing -- but very funny -- results."

In this clip, from *Da Ali G* show, Borat gets patrons in a country-western bar to sing a horrifying song.

Borat, "Throw the Jew Down the Well"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vb3IMTJjzfo>

Sarah Silverman

Sarah Silverman, known to audiences from her movie *Jesus Is Magic* and her Comedy Central show *The Sarah Silverman Program*, makes social observations about topics that are generally considered to be "taboo" subjects—including the Holocaust.

In these two clips, Sarah takes on the trend of "kabbalah" and comparisons between elderly Jewish people and young black men.

Sarah on Kabbalah

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOX4UGnOexE&feature=related>

Sarah "Blacks and Jews"

This clip is no longer available. Please choose a different example.

Resources on Jewish Comedy

Here is a list of 30 great Jewish comedians:

1. Mel Brooks
2. Groucho Marx*
3. George Burns*
4. Larry David
5. Joan Rivers
6. Jon Stewart
7. Sarah Silverman
8. Don Rickles
9. Bette Midler
10. Jerry Seinfeld
11. Sacha Baron Cohen
12. Chelsea Handler
13. Billy Crystal
14. Fran Drescher
15. Gary Shandling
16. Madeline Kahn*
17. Richard Lewis
18. Gilda Radner*
19. Robert Klein
20. Sandra Bernhard
21. David Brenner
22. Lenny Bruce*
23. Susie Essman
24. Adam Sandler
25. Roseanne Barr
26. Dave Attell
27. Jeffrey Ross
28. Jackie Mason
29. Seth Rogan
30. Andy Samberg

**Deceased*

Havayah Four: Judaism & Music

Jewish Identity Game

Tell the teens, "In this havayah, we are going to explore Jewish identity through music. In that spirit, we're going to begin writing our own lyrics about our Jewish identity."

Here's a song (you may have heard before) written by John Denver called *Thank God I'm a Country Boy*:

Well life on the farm is kinda laid back
Ain't much an old country boy like me can't hack
It's early to rise, early in the sack
I thank God I'm a country boy

Well a simple kinda life never did me no harm
A raisin' me a family and workin' on a farm
My days are all filled with an easy country charm
Thank God I'm a country boy

Well I got me a fine wife, I got me ol' fiddle
When the sun's comin' up I got cakes on the griddle
And life ain't nothin' but a funny funny riddle
Thank God I'm a country boy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRgL92K5zuE>

After listening to the song, divide the teens into small groups.

Change the lyrics to "Thank God I'm a Jewish Teen" and see what they come up with for the rest of the lyrics.

When they finish writing, each team can stand up and perform their new creation.

Breaking the Ice: *Jews and Music—Whaddya Know?*

Jews Rock—Circle the Jewish Musicians:

Paula Abdul

The Beastie Boys

Beyoncee

Justin Bieber

Jon Bon Jovi

Bob Dylan

Jakob Dylan

Beck

Jack Black

Leonard Cohen

Drake

Art Garfunkel

Jerry Garcia

Paul Simon

PJ Harvey

Peter Himmelman

Gene Simmons

Courtney Love

Lisa Loeb

Morissey

Tom Petty

Hillel Slovak (Red Hot Chili Peppers)

Lou Reed

Jonathan Richman

David Lee Roth

Bruce Springsteen

Warren Zevon

Joey Ramone

Usher

Van Morrison

Mark Knopler (Dire Straits)

Bonus: What were Bob Dylan and Gene Simmons's birth names?

Answer Key

The Jewish musicians are:

Paula Abdul

The Beastie Boys

Bob Dylan

Jakob Dylan

Beck

Jack Black

Leonard Cohen

Drake

Art Garfunkel

Paul Simon

Peter Himmelman

Gene Simmons

Courtney Love

Lisa Loeb

Hillel Slovak (Red Hot Chili Peppers)

Lou Reed

Jonathan Richman

David Lee Roth

Warren Zevon

Joey Ramone

Mark Knopler (Dire Straits)

Bonus Question Answer: Robert Zimmerman and Chaim Witz;

A Brief History of...Jews and Music

Opening Discussion Questions:

- When you think of Jewish music, what comes to mind?
- What are some of the different styles of Jewish music?
- Where might Jewish music be heard? (home, synagogue, life cycle event, holiday party, your ipod, etc)

In this *havayah*, we'll learn a bit about the history of Jewish music and then listen to contemporary Jewish artists to hear their different sounds.

(Jewish) Music 101 from www.myjewishlearning.com

Music has been a part of Jewish life since biblical times, and remains integral to the Jewish religious and cultural experiences. At the moment of Israel's birth as a nation--the Exodus from Egypt--the Bible tells us that Moses led the people of Israel in a song of divine praise. Music was part of the sacrificial worship in the Temple, and later became part of synagogue prayer services and at-home religious observance. Jewish music tends to blend unique elements with aspects that reflect the cultures in which Jews have lived, composed, played instruments, and sung.

Religious Music

Jewish religious music includes cantorial music--the music of the professional prayer leader; *nusah*, the melodies to which traditional prayers are chanted, with different tunes used for different services; modern liturgical music, in which composers set excerpts of Jewish prayer to choral or other music that is not necessarily inherently "Jewish"; cantillation, which is the notes for chanting public readings of the Torah, *haftarah* (selections from Prophets), and other Jewish sacred texts, such as the Scroll of Ecclesiastes on the festival Sukkot; and *nigunim*, which are wordless melodies. Different Jewish communities throughout history have produced their own distinctive forms of these different Jewish religious expressions. However, as the global community has grown

increasingly connected, so too have the different Jewish communities, resulting in a cross-fertilization of musical styles between Jews of different countries and different denominational affiliations.

American Jewish Music

The music of North American Jews reflects the delicate balance these communities attempt to maintain between upholding their distinct Jewish identity and participating in the broader North American culture. The rise of North American Jewish folk music, blending the sounds of the American folk music tradition with Jewish lyrics--often based on Jewish texts--is an example of such a phenomenon. In addition, the revival of klezmer music in recent years reflects American Jewry's largely Eastern European roots and the endeavors of young musicians to reconnect with the cultures and traditions of past generations. In addition, some of America's greatest composers and songwriters are Jewish, including Aaron Copeland, George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Carole King, and Bob Dylan.

Israeli Music

In its relatively short life so far, the state of Israel has created a rich musical tradition of folk, popular, and classical music. Israel's diverse immigrant population--and their native-born offspring--has fused their many musical traditions, from both the East and the West, to create an authentic Israeli sound. Before statehood, the Zionist movement used folk music to instill in Jews the ideals of the movement. As European musicians emigrated, a rich tradition of classical music was born in Israel. And more recently, Israeli musicians have created distinctive pop tunes, reflecting the unique roots of the musicians as well as the culture and politics of the Jewish state.

Experiences in...Jews and Music

Mattisyahu

Song: King Without A Crown

Born Matthew Paul Miller, Mattisyahu is the Hebrew name of this Hasidic reggae pop star. Known for mixing traditional Jewish themes with a rock, reggae and hip hop beat-boxing sound, Mattisyahu has had top 40 hits like "King Without a Crown." Mattisyahu grew up with his family in White Plains, NY, where they were members of a JRF congregation Bet Am Shalom. When he was in high school, he spent a semester studying in Israel and became interested in Orthodox Judaism. Mattisyahu is an observant Jew who does not perform on Shabbat.

King Without A Crown, lyrics

I said, You're all that I have and you're all that I need. Each and every day I pray to get to know you please. I want to be close to you, yes, I'm so hungry. You're like water for my soul when it gets thirsty. Without you there's no me, you're the air that I breathe. Sometimes the world is dark and I just can't see. With these demons surround all around to bring me down to negativity. But I believe, yes I believe, I said, I believe. I'll stand on my own two feet, won't be brought down on one knee. I'll fight with all of my might and get these demons to flee. Hashem's rays fire blaze burn bright and I believe. Hashem's rays fire blaze burn bright and I believe. Out of darkness comes light, a twilight unto the heights. Crown Heights burnin' up all through the twilight. Said, "I thank you" to my God, now I finally got it right. And I'll fight with all of my heart and all my soul and all my might. What's this feeling? My love will rip a hole through the ceiling. I give myself to you from the essence of my being. An' I sing to my God, these songs of love an' healing. I want Mashiach now, so it's time we start revealing. What's this feeling? Me no want no Sinsemilla, that would only bring me down. Burn away my brain, no way, my brain is too compound. Elevated my soul, you're a flying my sound. Like the sun of a sun ray burning up through a cloud. Say, Torah food for my brain, let it rain till I drown. Thunder, let the blessings come down. Say, Torah food for my brain, let it rain till I drown. Strip away the layers and reveal your soul. Give yourself up and then you become whole. You're a slave to yourself and you don't even know. You want to live the fast life but your brain moves slow. If you're trying to stay high, then you're bound to stay low. You want God but you can't deflate your ego. If you're already there, then there's nowhere to go. If you're cup's already full, then it's bound to overflow. If you're drowning out in the waters and you can't stay afloat. Ask Hashem for mercy and he'll throw you a rope. You're looking for help from God, you say he couldn't be found. Looking up to the sky and searchin' beneath the ground. Like a king without his crown, yes, I wanna get down. A king without his crown, yes, you keep fallin' down. You really want to live but can't get rid of your frown. Try reach him to the heights and wound down, down, down, down. Say what's this feeling? My love will rip a hole through the ceiling. I give myself to you from the essence of my being. An' I sing to my God, these songs of love an' healing. I want Mashiach now, and it's time we start revealing. Said, I'm reelin' him in, I reel him in. Where ya been, where ya been for so long for so long? It's hard to stay strong. I've been livin' in Galus for like too long? I said, Where ya been, a where ya been for so long for so long? What's this feeling? My love will rip a hole through the ceiling. I give myself to you from the essence of my being. An' I sing to my God, these songs of love an' healing. I want Mashiach now, and it's time we start revealing. What's this feeling? My love will

rip a hole through the ceiling. I give myself to you from the essence of my being. An' I sing to my God, these songs of love an' healing. I want Mashiach now, and it's time we start revealing. Said, I'm reelin' him in, where ya been, where ya been? I said, I reelin' him in, where ya been for so long? Oh Where ya been for so long? It's hard to stay strong. Been livin' in exile.

Klezmetics

Song: Gonna Get Through This World

The Klezmetics are superstars of the Klezmer revival world. They are Grammy award-winning musicians whose klezmer music is steeped in Eastern European Jewish tradition and spirituality, while incorporating contemporary themes such as human rights and anti-fundamentalism and eclectic musical influences including Arab, African, Latin and Balkan rhythms, jazz and punk.

Yael Naim

Yael Naim is a Franco-Israeli Jew who was born in Paris to Tunisian Jewish parents but moved with her family to Israel when she was four years old, which is where she grew up. Her 2008 hit “New Soul” was a breakout hit, reaching #7 on the Billboard Top 100, making her the first Israeli solo artist to have a top ten hit in the US. Naim writes lyrics in English, Hebrew and French.

Song: Too long

Neshama Carlebach

Neshama Carlebach is a singer-songwriter whose music expresses Jewish spirituality. She is the daughter of the late Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, whose melodies are used in many contemporary synagogues.

Song: Return Again

<http://www.neshamacarlebach.com/home.htm>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sU4ZDqJrRgU>

Subliminal

Song: Ba’a Li Tov

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sU4ZDqJrRgU>

Israeli hip hop artist Ya’akov “Kobe” Shimoni is known as “Subliminal.” His mother is from Iran and his father is from Tunisia and Subliminal grew up in Tel Aviv. His music started a trend called “Zionist hip hop,” in which he uses his music to inspire youth to stand for a unified Israel. Subliminal wears American hip hop clothing but is also known for wearing a large Star of David chain.

Making Connections...Jews and Music

Jews have used music to express many different kinds of experiences, both religious and secular. In some of the artists that we listened to, there is a blurring between what is “religious” vs. “secular” music.

- Which artist do you think expresses a Jewish identity that is more religious?
- More secular?
- Can an artist (and anyone) be culturally Jewish if not religiously Jewish?

Reflections

Has there been a time when Jewish music has helped you to have a prayerful/holy experience?

Is there a style of Jewish music that you like/connect to the best? Describe what you like about that music.

Who was your favorite musician/band whom we listened to today? What do you like about his/her/their sound?

Jewish Music Resources

<http://www.jewishmusic.com/> Tara publications—extensive collection of Jewish music

<http://www.tabletmag.com/category/music/?gclid=CPrCm4Gm4aICFV195QodvRS8wg>
Tablet online magazine has great coverage of contemporary Jewish music

<http://www.greatjewishmusic.com/> Download Jewish music for holidays and other occasions.

<http://www.israel-catalog.com/music-cds> - Jewish and Israeli music

Havayah Five: Judaism & Visual Arts

Jewish Identity Games

Before the teens arrive, put out a variety of fun art supplies: pastels, glitter glue pens, dot paint, colored pencils, different kinds of paper, etc.

Tell the teens that in this *havayah*, we will be learning about Judaism and visual arts.

In that spirit, invite them to create an expression using any of the available materials that shows any of the following:

- A memory of a Jewish holiday with your family
- A self-portrait exploring your Jewish identity
- A favorite Jewish moment from camp, Hebrew school or any other time
- Your relationship with your favorite Jewish mentor (teacher, rabbi, grandparent, etc)

Breaking the Ice: *Jews and Visual Arts—Whaddya Know?*

Jewish Art Tour—10 in 10

Tell the teens:

With a partner, take a quick tour of the synagogue and write down at least 10 different objects that are considered to be Jewish art. You have 10 minutes!

When the teens return from their “tours,” whip around the group and share answers.

You can record them on the board or a sheet of butcher paper.

Bonus question: What is the difference between **fine art** and **ceremonial art**? (See article below.)

A Brief History of...Jewish Visual Art

The first Jewish artist is recorded in the Torah: after the Exodus from Egypt, Betzalel is commissioned by God to create the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Since that time, Jewish visual arts have played an important role in expressing Jewish culture, value and traditions. Jewish art can be divided into categories including: **folk art**, such as paper-cuts and micography; **ritual or ceremonial art**--artistic renditions of objects used in rituals/ceremonies such as candlesticks, mezuzot and ketubot; and **fine art** by Jewish artists, which includes different kinds of visual expression, from painting to sculpture to avant-garde art.

The Jewish experience in art has been influenced by two important, contradictory factors: on the one hand, the value of *hiddur mitzvah* encourages the creation of beautiful ritual/ceremonial items, while some interpret the Second Commandment (forbidding the creation of "graven images") as a prohibition against *all* artistic creations, because they could be used for idolatry.

In the age of Enlightenment in Europe (beginning approx. 1700), some Jewish artists left their *shtetls* to formally study the fine arts and some became successful artists. In some cases, Jewish artists expressed their Jewish identities, while some Jewish artists did not incorporate their Jewishness into their artistic work at all. With the rise of such artists came the question of what constitutes "Jewish art," a question still debated today. Some artists, such as Marc Chagall, clearly draw upon their Jewish heritage for their work. For others, such as Camille Pissaro, Judaism is tangential or even irrelevant to their work.

Jewish folk art has been an important expression in Jewish homes and synagogues for centuries. Examples include the art of micography, which uses sacred words and texts to create visual images.

Traditional folk art forms are now being used by professional, trained artists. Jewish ritual/ceremonial art is also a popular form of expression from many contemporary Jewish artists.

Experiences in...Jewish Visual Arts.

Art Gallery

Below are bios and images of three different Jewish artists—Marc Chagall, Helene Aylon, Tobi Kahn and (note: all are contemporary, working artists except Chagall).

One way for the teens to experience the art is for you to create a “gallery.”

On three different walls, print out and hang the artist’s bio and the images of their work.

Hand out the discussion/reflection questions so that the teens can consider them while they are looking at the art.

Marc Chagall

Marc Chagall was born in 1887 to a poor Jewish family in Russia as the eldest of nine children. Chagall began to display his artistic talent as a boy, and despite his father's disapproval, in 1907 he began studying art with Leon Bakst in St. Petersburg.

In 1910, Chagall, moved to Paris for four years. It was during this period that he painted some of his most famous paintings of Jewish village, and developed his unique style of art. Strong and bright colors began to portray the world in a dreamlike state. Fantasy, nostalgia, and religion began to fuse together to create powerful images.

In 1914, before the outbreak of World War I, Chagall held a one-man show in Berlin, exhibiting work dominated by Jewish images. During the war, he resided in Russia, and in 1917, endorsing the revolution, he was appointed Commissar for Fine Arts in Vitebsk and then director of the newly established Free Academy of Art. In 1922, Chagall left Russia, settling in France one year later. He lived there permanently except for the years 1941 - 1948 when, fleeing France during World War II, he resided in the United States. Chagall's horror over the Nazi rise to power is expressed in works depicting Jewish martyrs and refugees.

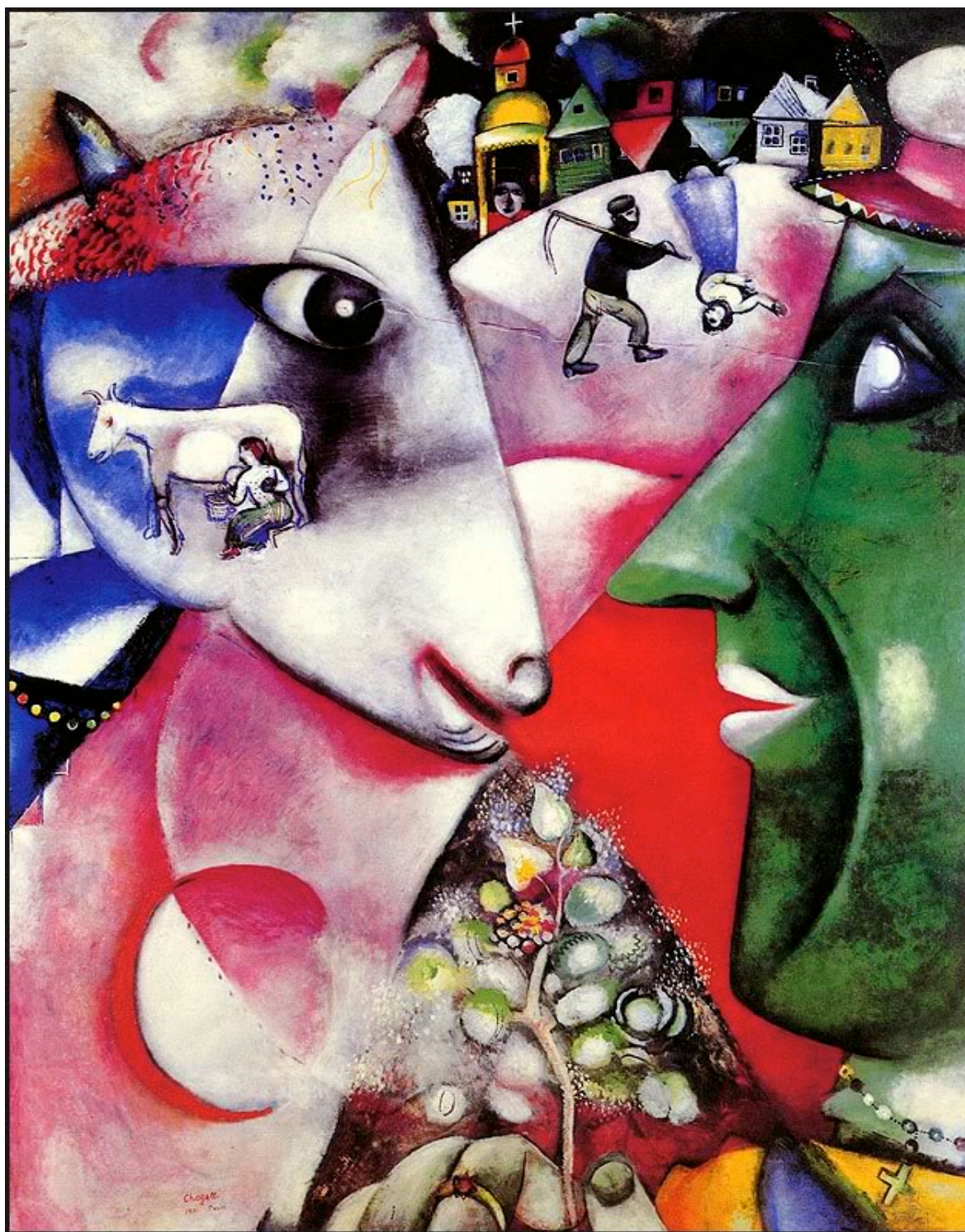
In addition to images of the Jewish world, Chagall's paintings are inspired by themes from the Bible. His fascination with the Bible culminated in a series of over 100 etchings illustrating the Bible, many of which incorporate elements from folklore and from religious life in Russia.

Israel, which Chagall first visited in 1931 for the opening of the Tel Aviv Art Museum, is likewise endowed with some of Chagall's work, most notably the twelve stained glass windows at Hadassah Hospital and wall decorations at the Knesset.

Chagall received many prizes and much recognition for his work. He was also one of very few artists to exhibit work at the Louvre in their lifetime.



Marc Chagall - Musée National Marc Chagall





Tree of Life

Tobi Kahn

Bio: www.tobikahn.com

Tobi Kahn is a painter and sculptor whose work has been shown in over 40 solo exhibitions and over 60 museum and groups shows since he was selected as one of nine artists to be included in the 1985 Guggenheim Museum exhibition, *New Horizons in American Art*. Works by Kahn are in major museum, corporate, and private collections.

A museum exhibition of over a decade of his work, *Tobi Kahn: Metamorphoses*, curated by Peter Selz, traveled to eight museums from 1997 through 1999, including the Weatherspoon Art Gallery in Greensboro, North Carolina and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Dore Ashton, Michael Brenson, and Peter Selz wrote the essays for the catalogue of *Metamorphoses* (University of Washington Press). Kahn's work has received significant critical attention.

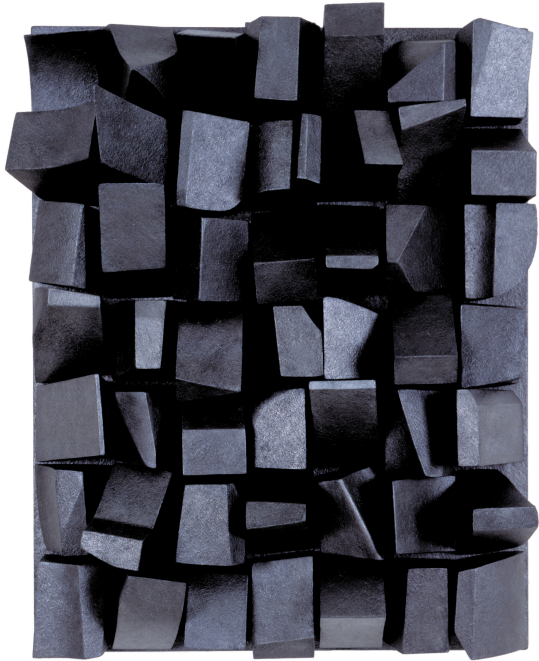
For thirty years, Kahn has been steadfast in the pursuit of his distinct vision and persistent in his commitment to the redemptive possibilities of art. In paint, stone, and bronze, he has explored the correspondence between the intimate and monumental. While his early works drew on the tradition of American Romantic landscape painting, his more recent pieces reflect his fascination with contemporary science, inspired by the micro-images of cell formations and satellite photography.

Kahn's belief in art's spiritual capacity is at odds with the contemporary emphasis on irony and displacement. As Peter Selz wrote: "His paintings and his sculptures, executed with consummate craftsmanship, are animated by a yearning for the transcendent...at a time when the concept of beauty has become anathematized in critical discourse and the perception of the spiritual remains marginalized in the discussions of the art world."

Nevertheless, the influence of his vision is growing steadily. Since *Metamorphoses*, he has had four additional traveling museum shows, *Avoda: Objects of the Spirit*, *Correspondence*, *Sky and Water*, and *Paradisus*.

In 1999, Kahn initiated the *Avoda* project, an educational program that accompanied the exhibition as it traveled for nine years throughout the United States. Led by Kahn, over 9,000 university students of all races and religions have made their own ceremonial art for both traditional and contemporary ritual in their lives. For many, the *Avoda* workshops were their first experience in seeing, creating, and understanding the visual world. *Objects of the Spirit: Ritual and the Art of Tobi Kahn*, a book about Kahn's ceremonial art, was published in June 2004 by Hudson Hill Press and the *Avoda* Institute.

For twenty-five years, Kahn has been making miniature sacred spaces he calls "shrines." The first full-scale shrine, *Shalev*, is in New Harmony, Indiana, commissioned as an outdoor sculpture for Jane Owen and the Robert Lee Blaffer Trust.



SAPHYR
Omer Counter
2009
Acrylic on wood



HAVDALAH SET
1991 and 1994
Bronze and acrylic on wood



SHALEV

1993

Blatford Owen Trust, New Harmony, Indiana

Granite exterior, Bronze interior

Helene Aylon

Artists Statement www.heleneaylon.com

In the 90's my aim was to shine a feminist lens with scholarly inquiry into ancient texts and practices that omit or deny the presence/input of women; In the 00's the G-D work has become more autobiographical regarding my ultra orthodox background.

In 1979, I was part of the first conference on Eco-feminism in Amherst, Mass; I saw the body of the land and the visceral body as connected.

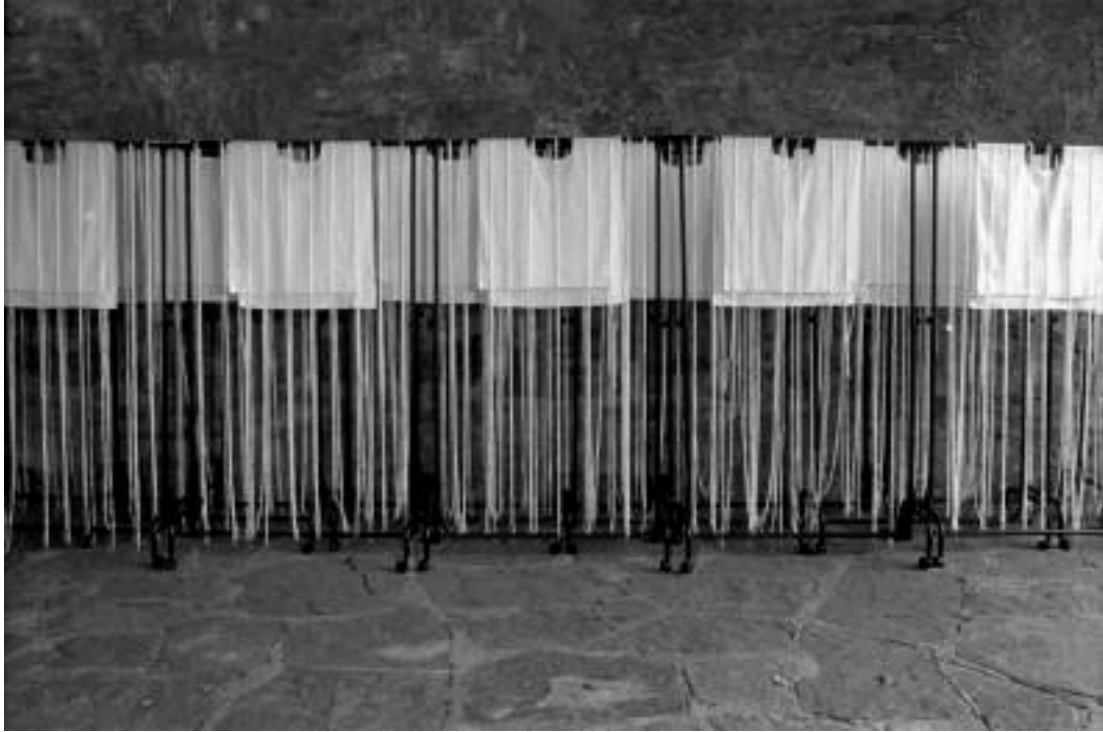
After hearing Dr. Helen Caldicott speak of the Arms Race, I drove an Earth Ambulance to military S.A.C. sites in the 80's to dramatize concern for the health of the Earth and concern for the danger of the Arms Race.

After dealing with the military mindset throughout the 80's, I realized early in the 90's that G-D (whatever G-D may be) had to be liberated from patriarchal projections and that I had to deal with my orthodox identity issues."

-- Helène Aylon

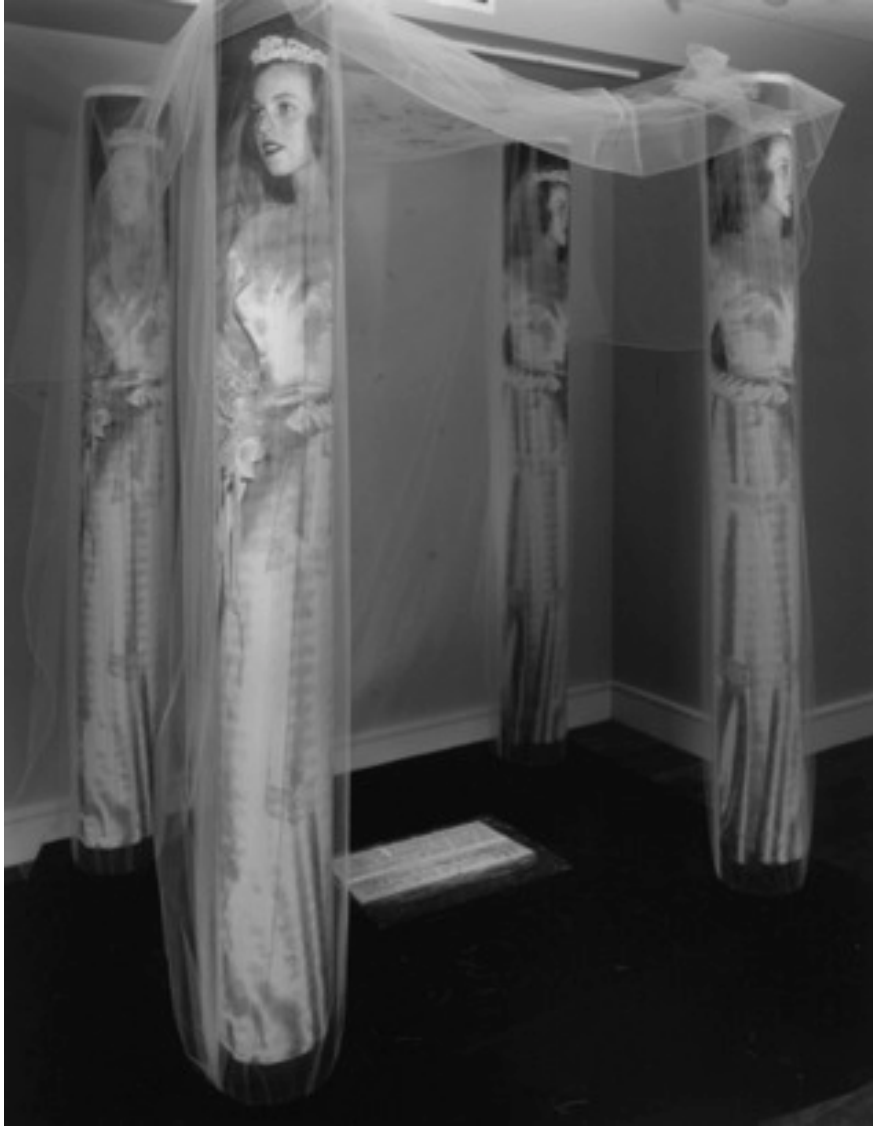


Self Portrait 2005, from the series, Self Portraits 2005-07



"The material I thought appropriate for the Partition ('Mechitza) that separates the male and female worshippers, is made of the ritual garb worn by religious Jewish men ('Tsitsit'). But if there were nine male worshippers and one thousand female worshippers, the service could not begin because the service requires the presence of ten men."

-- Hélène Aylon



"My Marriage Contract" has 4 columns of myself as a bride of 18 years of age, holding up the canopy. The wording of the Marriage Contract "Ktuva," refers to me as Helene "Virgin daughter of Anshel" (i.e., my father with no mention of my mother.)

Dedicated to the mothers whose names were omitted on the happiest and the saddest of occasions: the marriage of a child and the death of a child.

A photograph (highlighted where the mother's name was omitted) of my late husband's headstone is on the floor of the platform in the installation.

Making Connections

- Briefly describe how each artist uses his/her Jewish identity in his/her work:

Marc Chagall:

Tobi Kahn:

Helene Aylon:

- If you didn't know anything about Judaism, what could you learn about it from these artists?

Closing Reflections

For this closing reflection, make small copies of the art that was used in the havayah for the teens to select for their closing reflections.

Choose a piece of art that moved you and tape it into your journal.

Take a few moments to write about what inspires you about this piece of art.

Jewish Visual Art Resources

Helpful web sites on Jewish art:

<http://cja.huji.ac.il/>-- The Center for Jewish Art, Hebrew University

<http://jewisharteducation.com/>, Educator Myrna Teck (a member of Reconstructionist Congregation Adat Shalom) shares many resources about visual arts and Jewish life

<http://www.jewishart.org/> American Guild of Judaic Artists



Jewish Reconstructionist Communities
In Association with the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

PLEASE NOTE: Because this curriculum is six years old and has not been updated, we encourage you to find newer, more relevant examples of stories, images, clips, and movies to add to the existing material. We invite you to update the curriculum in the most effective way for your community and hope that you will share your newfound examples with other educators. We welcome all feedback before, during, and after your use of the curriculum; please send your suggested additions to Jackie Land (jland@rrc.edu), who will create an updated resource bank for *Hiddur Mitzvah*. If you have additional questions or comments, please contact Jackie. We're excited to be able to partner with RENA in keeping this curriculum modern and relevant!

Havayah Six: Jewish Characters & Television

Jewish Identity Games

Tell the teens, “In this *havayah*, we will be exploring Hiddur Mitzvah through the lens of looking at how Jewish people are portrayed on television. In that spirit, we will begin this session by getting into small groups and creating commercials for some Jewish products.”

Divide the teens into small groups. They can draw their “commercial product” from a slip of paper.

Products might include:

- The Torah
- Kosher Cheese
- Chanukah candles
- Jewish schools/camps
- Synagogues (your congregation!)
- Jdate/Jewish dating
- Bagels
- Etc!

If you are able to get a video camera, record each group’s commercial.

Share it with other TEL groups.

Breaking the Ice: *Jews and Television—Whaddya Know?*

As individuals, see if the teens can name the following:

- A sitcom with Jewish characters
- A drama with Jewish characters
- Jewish characters on an animated series
- A Jewish talk show host

Bonus: What was the first TV sitcom with Jewish characters? (The Goldbergs) – Please note, this is not the current “Goldbergs” TV show.

Whip around the group and record the answers that they share.

List: Contemporary Jewish Characters on TV shows

Erin Silver 90210

Cristina Yang, Grey’s Anatomy

Charlotte (Jew by Choice) Sex and the City

Ari Gold, Entourage

Cyrus Rose, Gossip Girl

Larry David, Susie and Jeff Greene, Curb Your Enthusiasm

Chris, Lisa & James, House

Rachel Berry & Noah Puckerson, Glee

Ziva David, NCIS

Howard Wolowitz, Big Bang Theory

John Munch, Law & Order, SVU

Animated Characters:

Family Guy (Neil Goldman & parents)

Simpsons (Krusty the Clown & father)

South Park (Kyle and family)

A Brief History of...Jews and TV

Television came into American homes during the 1940s and some of the first, popular programs were variety shows, with such hosts as Milton Berle and George Burns. Through the variety show format, these popular Jewish comedians brought Jewish humor to mainstream American homes.

In the 1950s, dramas and sitcoms gained popularity over variety shows; this was the era of classic shows like “Leave It to Beaver” and “Father Knows Best.” In 1949, the first show with Jewish characters and themes appeared on TV: The Goldbergs, featuring Gertrude Berg as the Jewish mother Molly Goldberg. The Goldbergs ran on TV for almost a decade.

It wasn’t until the 1970s that more Jewish characters began appearing in a number of different shows. Norman Lear’s “All in the Family,” featuring the racist character Archie Bunker, featured a story line in which the formerly anti-semitic Bunker became the guardian for a Jewish niece. “Rhoda,” a comedy which was a spin-off from the Mary Tyler Moore show, starred Valerie Harper as a single Jewish woman.

In the 1980s, Jewish TV characters became even more complex. Some shows with Jewish characters included “thirtysomething,” which explored the theme of interfaith marriage and “Northern Exposure,” in which a Jewish doctor from New York moves to a small Alaskan town.

In the 1990s, several popular shows featured Jewish actors as Jewish characters, but their Jewish identity was more implicit than explicitly explored in the shows. “Seinfeld,” created by Larry David and starring Jerry Seinfeld, is an example of this kind of show. On “Friends,” siblings Ross and Monica (as well as friend Rachel) are Jewish, but their Jewish identity is not often explored.

In the last ten years, Jewish characters have appeared on a wide range of comedies and dramas, with some characters Jewish identities being explored in depth and some only being touched upon. Jewish characters have also appeared in animated series, from Krusty and his rabbi father in the Simpsons to Kyle and family on Southpark.

Experiences in...

Show the following clips:

The Simpsons “Rappin Rabbis”

– This clip is no longer available. Search for archived Simpsons episodes to find a clip.

Krusty and His Father

– This clip is no longer available. Find the appropriate clip in past Simpsons episodes.

Curb Your Enthusiasm, “The Go Home Stain”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ppt-Bnhn5Ow&feature=related>

The Wonder Years

– This clip is no longer available. Find the episode entitled “*Paul’s Bar Mitzvah*.”

The Goldbergs

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8U7lu5RGJhQ&feature=related>

Film clip based on the tv show

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7T1P4dBXcI8&NR=1>

Feel free to replace the TV suggestions with different TV shows that your students will relate to more.

Reflections

In this session, we watched clips from different shows that feature Jewish characters.

- Which show did you appreciate/connect to the most?
- Why?
- If you could imagine your life as a TV show, what kind of show would it be?
- A drama or a sitcom?
- A reality show?
- What actor would play you?
- Who would the other characters be?
- What would the show of your life be called?

Jewish Characters On Television Resources

www.jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/television-in-united-states from the Jewish Women's Archive—analysis of Jewish characters on television

www.myjewishlearning.com/blog/culture/jewish-characters-on-tv-the-best-of-2009 great article exploring contemporary Jewish TV characters

<http://blog.beliefnet.com/idolchatter/2007/08/top-10-jewish-tv-characters.html> more Jewish characters on television analysis

http://www.jewishjournal.com/up_front/article/krustys_adult_bar_mitzvah_20031205/: article about Krusty the Clown's adult Bar Mitzvah—another great Simpson episode to share