

A Reconstructionist Readymade, Teacher's Guide: Living in Two Civilizations

For students in grades 3-6 • American Version

Jewish Objects in Your Home

When someone comes to your house, which of these Jewish objects would he/she see?

- מְזוּזָה Mezuzah
- Jewish art on the walls
- Jewish books
- Art/pictures of **יִשְׂרָאֵל** Israel
- Momentos/souvenirs from **יִשְׂרָאֵל** Israel
- Jewish food
- Jewish ritual objects displayed in a special place, including:
 - **שַׁבָּת** Shabbat candlesticks, **קִידוּשׁ** kiddush cup, **הַלְלָה** hallah cover
- **הַנּוֹכֵייה** Hanukah menorah
- **קְעָרָה** Seder Plate
- **צְדָקָה** Tzedakah box
- A **כְּתוּבָה** ketubah — marriage contract or commitment agreement



Guide to Illustrations

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>Page 1:
<i>Top, left to right:</i>
Statue of Liberty – American
Seder Plate - Jewish
Apple Pie - American
Mezuzah - Jewish
Chanukiah/Chanukah Menorah - Jewish
<i>Bottom, left to right:</i>
Bob Dylan - Jewish American musician wearing Tallis (prayer shawl) and Kippah (Yarmulke)
Uncle Sam – American</p> <p>Page 2:
<i>Left to right:</i>
Rosie the Riveter – American symbol of equality for women
Girl reading Torah – Jewish</p> | <p>Page 3:
<i>Top to bottom:</i>
Western Wall – Jewish
Mount Rushmore – American
Hank Greenberg – Jewish American baseball player</p> <p>Page 4:
<i>Top, left to right:</i>
Falafal—Jewish (Middle Eastern)
Hamburger – American
Latkes/Potato Pancakes – Jewish
<i>Middle, left to right:</i>
Jon Stewart – Jewish American comedian
Independence Hall – American
The Liberty Bell – American
<i>Bottom, left to right:</i>
Hamentashen – Jewish cookies for Purim
Kippah/Yarmulke - Jewish</p> |
|--|--|

Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer: author • Rabbi Erin Hirsh: editor • Ezra Sherman: designer/illustrator

A Reconstructionist Readymade, Teacher's Guide: Living in Two Civilizations

For students in grades 3-6 • American Version

This Reconstructionist Readymade focuses on Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan's idea that Jewish people have historically lived in two civilizations: one Jewish and one secular/national. Rabbi Kaplan acknowledged and appreciated the way that Jewish life could grow and evolve by incorporating values, customs or characteristics of the nation in which they lived. In this lesson, there is an example of such a moment that students will be able to relate to: Rabbi Kaplan was influenced by the women's suffrage movement. He believed that women should have equal rights in Jewish life. His daughter, Judith, became the first **בַּת מִצְוָה** Bat Mitzvah in North America in modern history.

There are many opportunities within this lesson to help students both learn about Kaplan's philosophy and to also reflect on their own Jewish identity.

Jewish Objects

The lesson begins by imagining what a guest in the student's home might notice that shows that Jewish people live in the home. This scenario offers an opportunity for you to have a class discussion about the Jewish objects and artifacts in the students' homes. At the end of this guide, you will find an inventory of Jewish objects that you can share with your students.

You might wish to ask your students to bring in special Jewish objects from their homes to share with classmates. You could also create a small museum of Jewish objects in your classroom and invite other classes (and parents) to come visit.

For older students, you could ask them to role play a non-Jewish friend coming to visit you. Have one student play the friend and the other student explain the different objects to the friend.

Jewish Moments

The lesson includes a checklist of Jewish activities that the student may do/have done over the course of a week. After students complete the checklist, you can go down through the activities and have them raise hands if they did them. Or have students stand in a circle and step into the middle if they went to services, ate kosher food, etc.

You could begin each class with a ritual in which you take 5 minutes to invite students to go around and share a Jewish moment that they experienced during the week.

Jewish Food

What do you think of when you think of Jewish food? Look at the different pictures and circle any that you think of as Jewish food. What makes you think of those as Jewish?

The foods that most of us think of as Jewish actually came from other cultures. For example, hummus and falafel, which we think of as Israeli food, were originally Arabic food. Russian Jews who came to North America brought the recipe for latkes with them and now many Jews eat latkes as they celebrate Hanukkah. The way Jewish people have brought foods from other civilizations into our Jewish civilization is a good example of how our Jewish civilization can become more interesting (and tasty!) when we are also part of other civilizations at the same time.

Jewish Texts

The story of Queen Esther is introduced as an example of a Jewish person living in two civilizations. You may want to bring in a short excerpt of text from the Book of Esther to read with the students. A fabulous version is Ruth F. Brin's *The Story of Esther* (Lerner Publications Company, Minneapolis Minnesota, 1976). Eric Kimmel's *The Story of Esther: A Purim Tale* (Holiday House, 2011) is a good, and easier to purchase, version of the story to use.

You could extend this activity by giving students a chance to write a monologue/journal entry from Esther's perspective. What is she thinking/feeling the night before she reveals her Judaism to the King?

More Than Two Civilizations

We can be proud that many of our Reconstructionist communities are multi-cultural and welcome interfaith and multiracial families. In this lesson, we want to be especially sensitive to the idea that many of our students come from

multiple civilizations. For example, a child who is adopted from China may also feel intensely connected to Chinese civilization. Allow time for students to share about special customs or traditions from the non-Jewish parts of their families if they wish.

Emphasize how interesting—and at times complicated—it can be to come from multiple civilizations. A hallmark of Reconstructionist approach to Judaism is a belief and trust that Judaism will ultimately be enriched and strengthened by its dynamic interactions with other civilizations.

Jewish/Secular Names

An interesting example of living in two civilizations is the way that the primary names of some Jewish children in North America are Hebrew or traditional Jewish names, while the primary names of some Jewish children are secular names or names that come from other cultures. Many Jewish children, whose primary names are not Hebrew, are also given Jewish names.

Bring in a Hebrew/English name dictionary and invite children to share what their Jewish name is (if they have one) and to talk about where their name comes from. An expansive option is Alfred J Kolatch's *The Complete Dictionary of English and Hebrew First Names* (Jonathan David Publishers, Inc. Middle Village, NY, 1984).

What does it mean that some Jewish children have Jewish names and “regular”/secular names? What do your students think of when you say “Jewish names?”

Hank Greenberg Quotation

Have a student read the quotation out loud and ask students what it means to them. Then tell them a little bit about Hank Greenberg:

Hank Greenberg was an American baseball player in the 1930s and 1940s for the Detroit Tigers and the Pittsburgh Pirates. Greenberg was a five-time All-Star, was twice named the American League's Most Valuable Player, and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1956. The first real American Jewish sports superstar, Greenberg was known as, "The Hebrew Hammer." Greenberg attracted national attention in 1934 when he refused to play baseball on **יום כּפּוּר** Yom Kippur, even though his team was in the middle of a pennant race and he was not a particularly observant Jew.

Follow up by asking the students what they think of the quotation now that they know a little bit more about Hank Greenberg. Does this information help them understand the quotation? Why or why not?

Was Hank Greenberg proud of being Jewish? Was he proud of being a great baseball player?

People thought of Hank Greenberg's baseball ability being connected to his being Jewish. When you play a game or perform, do you think of your achievement having to do with your being Jewish? Do other people?

Does this teach you anything about how being an American Jew might have changed since the 1930s and 1940s?

Baseball and Yom Kippur:

Baseball players Hank Greenberg and Sandy Koufax (1965) both famously made decisions to not play baseball on **יום כּפּוּר** Yom Kippur. This choice is another excellent example of the complexities of living in two civilizations. You could do an in-depth follow-up lesson focusing on this dilemma in American Jewish history. Some resources include:

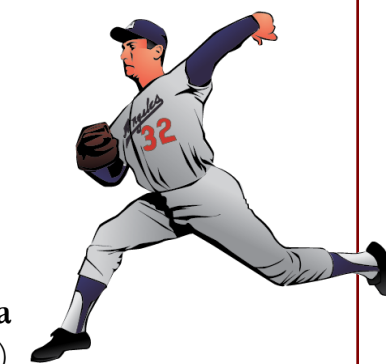
3rd Grade:

Matzah Ball:

A Passover Story
Mindy Avra Portnoy
(Author)

4th-6th grade:

The Koufax Dilemma
Steven Schnur (Author)



Jewish Heroes, Jewish Values:

Living Mitzvot

Barry L. Schwartz (Author)

This book includes an excerpt from Koufax autobiography about his Yom Kippur decision.

Comparing Two New Years:

Another example of living in two civilizations is celebrating two new years: **ראש השנה** Rosh Hashanah and our secular new year. Make a list on the board with two columns and have students brainstorm customs and traditions to go with each New Year's celebration. What does it mean to celebrate two different new years?