



# Creating Educational Experiences and Programming

An Introductory Guide for  
Supplementary School Teachers

# Welcome!

This Guide is intended for supplementary Jewish educators. Whether you are a new educator, or looking for some new ideas on how to structure your learning time, this guide is for YOU!



Supplementary Jewish education is an important way for young learners encounter to Judaism and engage in building their own Jewish identities. This Guide is a toolbox to support your role as educator in creating engaging and lasting educational experiences for your learners.

Everyone approaches education differently and there are many ways to be a Jewish educator. This Guide is meant to give ideas and inspire you to develop your own unique approach to Jewish education.

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# Lesson Planning

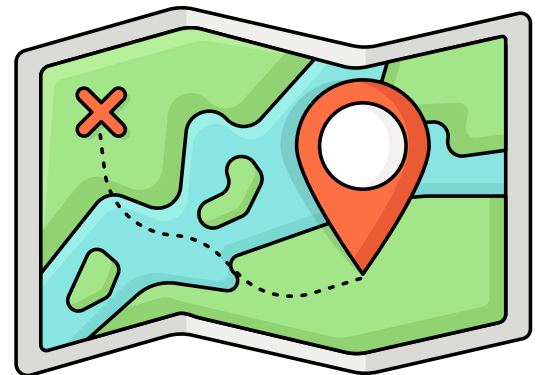
## What is a lesson plan?

A Lesson Plan is an outline of the educational experience. Some educators write very detailed lesson plans that break down each activity by exact timing and content. Others prefer to create a rough sketch and adjust as they work through the material.

A lesson plan is your map, so that you know where you're going and how you'll get there.

## Setting an Educational Goal

In most cases, you will want to set an educational goal – a long term or big picture goal you want to accomplish with your students. Your goal is your destination. Once you have a destination in mind, let's figure out how you will get there.



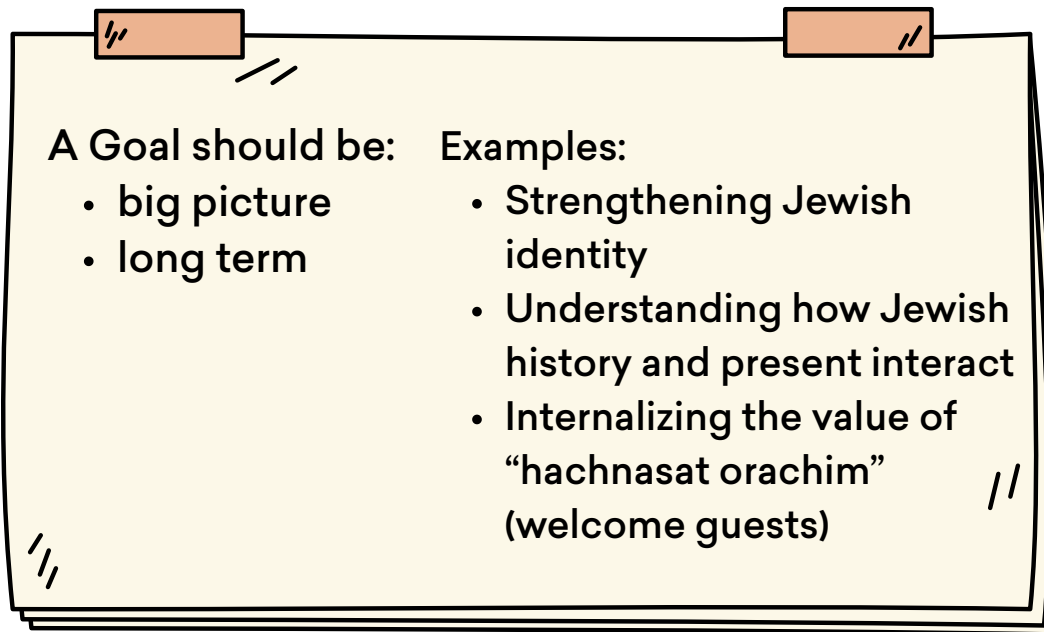
### A Note on Terminology

Different educators use different ways to describe their goals and means of achieving them. This Guide will use “Goals” to mean the long term and big picture ideas, and “Objectives” as the smaller, tangible ways that we accomplish those goals. If those don't work for you, you can also think of Goals as “What” or “Why” and Objectives as “How”.

## Setting Goals

Depending on your educational program, your Principal or Education Director may have already set goals for your group of learners. These could include specific milestones in Hebrew, Judaics, holidays, Torah stories, or prayers for learners.

Have a conversation with your Education Director about their expectations for your learners. This will help you structure your own goals and create lesson plans.



Likely, you will have overall goals for the entire year. This may include “students understanding Jewish holiday rituals”, or “exploring the Book of Genesis.” These big picture goals can help you set smaller weekly goals.

Remember that you cannot teach everything in one class session. Create goals that are achievable and realistic given your time, resources, students, and supports.

# Objectives

Now that you have a goal in mind, your Objectives determine how you will accomplish these goals.

Your objectives may include the types of activities learners will engage with to reach the goals or skills they will learn, etc.

**An Objective should be:**

- specific and measurable
- something students can demonstrate

**Examples:**

- Reading the Shema in Hebrew
- Identifying major moments in Jewish history
- Engaging in a mitzvah project

## Here's some examples of goals and objectives:

### Goal:

Students will understand the importance of shomrei adamah (protecting the earth).

### Objectives:

- Become familiar with Jewish values of environmentalism.
- Understand the current climate crisis.
- Present their learning to the community through an interactive display.

### Goal:

Students will begin to develop their own relationship with prayer.

### Objectives:

- Read and understand the words of Modeh Ani and Mah Tovu.
- Explore the role of self and community in prayer.
- Explain their own challenges when approaching prayer.

## Reaching Your Objectives

As you plan, here are some questions to ask:

- Who are my learners? (Age, background, etc.)
- How can I create an educational experience that is accessible and engaging for these students?
- What spaces do I have access to?
- What do my students already know?
- What are my limitations? (Time, space, resources, etc.)

## Accessibility & Styles of Learning

It's no secret that different students learn in different ways. Providing multiple modes of learning throughout an educational experience can ensure that every student can show up as their full self and learn with their classmates. You might want to:

- write things down for visual learners
- repeat directions and/or give simple step-by directions
- have fidget toys available for those who need them
- turn up or down the sensory input as needed
- use music, dance, or physical activity to engage learners' bodies

Creating accessible classrooms means thinking ahead about each activity and expectation, ensuring everyone can fully participate.

Consider:

- What are my students' physical needs?
- What are my students' mental/developmental needs?
- What are my students' social/emotional needs?

Accessibility asks us to be flexible. For example, if you planned a nature walk, but a student arrives unexpectedly on crutches from a soccer injury, you will likely need to adjust your plan to engage with the content in a more accessible location.

**An accessible educational experience means everyone can fully participate.**

## Choosing and/or Creating Activities

Now that you a goal, objectives, and have considered your learners and environment, it's time to choose or design activities that will make your lesson plan engaging, memorable, and educational. Your activities should all help accomplish your goals.

Let your own creativity shine! Students often internalize material more permanently and deeply through interactive and/or experiential learning.

### Example:

Your goal is for students to personally connect to the prayers in the morning service. One objective is to learn the words to Modeh/Modah Ani. How can you introduce concepts of gratitude in a way that will resonate with your students? Here's some ideas to consider:

- playing charades, using things we are grateful for
- creating an art piece about people or things we're grateful for
- making a gratitude journal



Now that students are finding personal connection to the content of the prayer, let's work on learning the words:

- in small groups, students pick a Hebrew word from the prayer and use their bodies to form the letters to spell the word
- each student is in charge of one word; see how quickly you can read through the prayer alternating by word and then rotate words
- have students put the words to various melodies of pop songs they know to ensure they solidly know the words
- invite students to lead the prayer for their class or the whole school



How else might you teach Modah/Modeh Ani and the value of gratitude?

# What if I Don't Know?



## **It's Okay to Not Know**

As educators, we may feel pressured to have the answers to everything. Jewish tradition teaches the importance of constantly learning and asking questions. One of the most important things we can do is model saying “I don’t know” or “Let’s find out together.” This can help build students’ own confidence when they don’t know something and encourage them to ask and learn.

## **Use the “Parking Lot” Model**

Sometimes students ask tangential questions that we don’t always have time to cover, or need to do more thinking or research on before we dive into. You can have a section of the whiteboard or poster in your room that is the “Parking Lot”, where you or students can write additional questions to address at a later time.

## **Is this a Question for Someone Else to Answer?**

Learners are curious! They may ask questions that you feel uncomfortable answering, or that are best answered by their parent or caregiver. Don’t be afraid to say, “That’s a wonderful question and I think you should ask your grown up.” Make sure you tell their grownup too and give the context of the question.

## **Transition Time**

Remember to build in transition time between activities. For example, if your class is making challah, you’ll need time to walk to the kitchen, wash hands, and get set up. If you’re going for a walk, leave time to use the bathroom, put on jackets or sunscreen, etc.

## **Life is Complicated**

Your students live full lives outside your classroom. School, family, current events, and personal challenges may impact their mood or readiness to learn. Try to be flexible and receptive to the energy and atmosphere of your classroom.

# Assessing Students' Success

How do we know that we have been successful?

Jewish education can be difficult to measure, because we're often trying to assess intangible growth. For example, how do we know if students deepened their connecting to tradition or strengthened their Jewish identity?



For some content, such as learning a prayer, understanding a story in the Torah, or reading Hebrew, it's easier to measure students' success.

For other content, we must use more subjective measurements to determine if we're succeeding. Here's just a few examples:

- Ask students open-ended questions to get a sense of their understanding and growth.
- Have students review a subject by teaching each other.
- Put the content into real-life examples and pay attention to how students apply the lessons learned.
- Students can showcase their learning through visual art, charades, creative writing, music, or other creative expression.
- Play a trivia game or use a quiz app (such as Kahoot) to measure students' knowledge

**Some learners will master the material quickly. Others may need more time to process. Ensuring you make space for different types of learning and assessment will help you and your learners to succeed.**

**LEARNING  
NEVER  
ENDS**

# Resource Mapping

As you plan activities for your learners, consider what resources you already have access to. This includes physical resources, personnel, local resources and virtual resources. By mapping out your resources, you may discover new opportunities for your learners and new ways to approach your goals.

## Physical Resources

- Does your synagogue have a library or does your local library have Jewish books?
- What books or resources does your Education Director or Rabbi have available?
- What art supplies, posters, maps, do you have access to?
- What Jewish ritual objects can your students explore in your building?



## Personnel: Who is in your community?

- Invite artists or musicians to your classroom, giving students an opportunity to explore self expression and Judaism through creative process.
- Talking to teens about college anxiety? Have Jewish college students join your teen program and share their experiences.
- Teaching about pikuach nefesh (preservation of life) or Jewish medical questions? Invite a doctor from your community to share their perspective.

## Local Resources:

- Are there museums, local landmarks, or places of interest in your community?
- Do you have access to parks, nature trails, community gardens, or other outdoor spaces?
- Are there other synagogues or houses of worship you may wish to visit?
- Are there local organizations whose work connect with values or content for your learners?
- What sort of volunteers are needed in your community and how might your learners connect to those opportunities?



## Virtual Resources

- What Jewish websites are you familiar with?
- What educational websites are available to you?
- What Jewish media are you familiar with or could your Director provide?
- Are there non-local Jewish communities, organizations, or projects you can connect with to bring via the internet to your learners?



Check out pages 12-13 for virtual resources!

**One of your most important resources is YOU!**

**What are your**

**Skills**

**Passions**

**Interests**

**Hobbies**

**How can you utilize these in your classroom?**

# Resources and Support for Jewish Educators

## **Educators' Hub: The Reconstructionist Education Database**

Find lesson plans, programs, resource guides, Hebrew writing charts, evaluations and more.

[edu.reconstructingjudaism.org](http://edu.reconstructingjudaism.org)

## **BimBam: Jewish Videos for Adults, Kids and Families**

Digital storytelling for learners of all ages and backgrounds.

<https://bimbam.com/>

## **Hebrew Through Movement**

Introducing Hebrew to students through verbal cues and movement.

<https://www.hebrewthroughmovement.org/>

## **Jewish Disability Inclusion News**

A forum for conversations at the intersection of accessibility and Jewish education.

<https://jewishdisabilityinclusionnews.substack.com/>

## **Jewish Education Project**

An online portal for resources, webinars, networking and more

<https://www.jewishedproject.org/>

## **Jewish Studio Project**

Resources and programs for weaving creativity into Jewish learning.

<https://www.jewishstudioproject.org/>

## **Jewish Venture Learning**

Resources for Jewish educators and families.

<https://jewishlearningventure.org/>

## **Keshet**

Resources, professional cohorts, events, inclusion and Safe Space posters, and more for creating LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Jewish community.

<https://www.keshetonline.org/>

## **Making Mensches**

From the Foundation for Jewish Camp, a mussar based program for cultivating positive qualities and values in youth.

<https://jewishcamp.org/camp-resources/making-mensches/>

## **Matan**

Resources, curriculum, professional development and coaching to create inclusive classrooms for students with disabilities.

<https://mataninc.org/>

## **Moving Traditions**

Programs that provide safe spaces for youth to connect and grow, providing a circle of support for Jewish teens.

<https://www.movingtraditions.org/>

## **My Jewish Learning**

A great place to find articles and information on a variety of Jewish topics, recipes, stories, and more.

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/>

## **#ONWARD HEBREW**

A Hebrew curriculum for supplementary Jewish education.

<https://www.onwardhebrew.org/>

## **NewCAJE**

Annual conference (usually July), plus networking opportunities and resources for Jewish educators.

<https://www.newcaje.org/>

## **Sefaria**

An online library of Jewish text, searchable by topic or book. Most texts are provided with English translations.

<https://www.sefaria.org/>

# Teaching Jewish Texts

## A Brief Guide to Jewish Texts

There are many different types of Jewish texts – ancient, classical, modern, and contemporary – that you might choose to share with your students. This is a brief guide to some of the most popular texts that you may encounter.

### Torah

The first 5 books in the Hebrew Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Torah is divided into 54 portions (parshiyot) that are read weekly on Shabbat morning.



### Tanakh

The Hebrew Bible, containing the Torah, Nevī'im (Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings).

### Midrash

“Midrash” refers to a wide range of rabbinic stories, which build imaginatively on verses or stories in the Tanakh.



### Talmud

The Talmud is a combination of the Mishnah (edited in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE), the Gemara (commentary and discussion on the Mishnah), and medieval commentary on the Gemara.

### Liturgy

Jewish prayers and rituals, including Shabbat, holidays and High Holidays.



### Contemporary

Contemporary Jewish thought and writing, which endeavors to expand our understanding and connection to our tradition, includes poetry, modernized rituals, LGBTQIA+ commentary, racial justice commentary, feminist thought, disability Torah, and more.

# Bringing Jewish Text into the Classroom

## The Weekly Parsha (Torah portion)

- Each Shabbat we read a portion (parsha) of the Torah, until we reach the end at Simchat Torah and start again. The weekly parsha is an easy way to add a little bit of Jewish text into your schedule.
- You could highlight something from the parsha: big events, well known stories or characters, connections to holidays or modern Jewish practice, values or lessons.



## Holidays

- Many of the Jewish holidays are described in the Torah, giving you a chance to bring students' attention to the Torah sources for the holiday. You could...
  - have a scavenger hunt, giving students the chapter/verse of the descriptions of the holidays and have them race to find them
  - use the descriptions of the holidays to explore the Jewish (lunar) calendar and its cycle
  - compare the Biblical description of the holiday to the contemporary celebrations and rituals

## Storybooks

- There are many Jewish children's books about biblical stories, holidays, rituals, life cycles and more. Check your synagogue's library to see what books you have available. There are also many read-along videos online.
- Children's books are an easy way to introduce a new topic, encouraging learners to share what they already know, to spark their curiosity and interest, and to hook their attention.



## **BIMBAM**

- Looking for short, engaging, summaries of Biblical stories? Check out the videos on [bimbam.com](http://bimbam.com)

## **Exploring Jewish Values**

- You can use Biblical stories to explore Jewish values.
- For example, explore welcoming guests through the story of Abraham and the angels, or the loving the stranger through the story of Pharaoh's daughter adopting baby Moses or Boaz welcoming Ruth into his field. Conversely, explore where the Biblical characters did not live up to our expectations and how we might act differently (such as Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery).

## **Bibliodrama**

- Engage with Biblical stories through dramatization. Encourage students to explore the feelings of the characters (including God) and connect the experiences in the stories to their own personal lives. For example, create space to talk about family dynamics and challenges using the Joseph story; talk about aging parents or grandparents by reading about the Patriarchs aging and dying, allowing students to process their own questions or feelings. Similarly, students could create their own modern retellings and short plays using the biblical stories. What would the story of Moses and the Exodus look like in the modern day? How might the tension of Rachel and Leah play out on reality TV? What would Ruth's experience as an immigrant look like today? Setting these stories in students' own historic context can help them connect the values and challenges to their own lives.



## Exploring Art as Text

- Biblical stories have depicted by artists for centuries. Share artistic portrayals of these stories as “the text” to offer students a new mode of engaging with these stories.
- Check out the mosaics found in ancient synagogues in Israel or the Middle East, Medieval haggadot, and modern Jewish art. There’s a lot out there to explore!



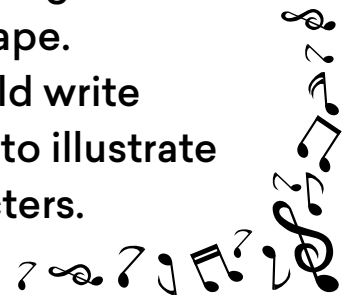
## Visual Art

- Creating their own artistic responses to biblical stories is another way to harness your students’ creativity.
- Depending on age and developmental level, you could choose between simple illustrations and retelling the story through visual art, or exploring the themes and values present through more abstract art, or encouraging students to place themselves into the story to deepen their own understandings.



## Music

- You can use music as another way to explore Jewish text.
- Check out *Girls in Trouble*, a musical storytelling project that highlights women from Tanakh.
- Students could also create playlists for particular stories or characters. This encourages them to dive into the values, challenges, personalities, and deeper understandings of the stories, while engaging their own cultural landscape.
- If you have musically-inclined students, they could write original songs (or new lyrics to songs they know) to illustrate their understandings of the stories and/or characters.



## Bringing Multimedia into the Classroom

We live in a world of technology and knowing how to appropriately use it in the classroom can enhance our learning and engage our students.

There are many ways to harness technology or effectively use multimedia in the classroom. Here are just a few ideas:

- Using short videos to introduce a topic.
  - A BIMBAM parsha video to introduce the Torah reading.
  - A scene from a children's movie to introduce a concept or value (such as clip from Inside Out to explore ideas of Joy (Purim!) or Sadness (mourning rituals))
  - Jewish music videos
  - Short clips of Jewish rituals, especially those that are different from your own community/culture.
  
- Creating Multimedia
  - Encourage students to create their own short videos – skits, dramatizations of biblical stories, songs or poetry, video collages, and more.
  - Students could create a short class podcast, talking about the current topics, values, holidays, or other class material.
  
- Social Media Templates
  - Especially for older students, social media is a familiar medium through which they explore the world and make connections.
  - Students can create social media posts about holidays, biblical stories or characters. These could include mood boards, music, “stories/reels”, biblical texts, and more.

## Utilizing Your Madrichot/im

Madrichot/im (classroom assistants) is a common way to engage your post b-mitzvah students. Some madrichot/im will have experience working with children and/or teaching, but for most, this will be a new experience.

You know your students and your madrichot/im best. Here are some ideas of how to engage them in the learning:

- What are their personal strengths, talents and interests?
  - Music? Art? Dance? Drama? Sports or yoga? How can you harness their talents into your lesson plans?
- What skills are they interested in developing?
  - Do they want to practice leading activities? Reading stories or facilitating group discussion?
  - Do they need to build their confidence or learn how to manage conflict in the classroom?
- How can you ease them into a leadership role?
  - In the first month, can they co-facilitate an activity with a teacher, in the second month, take on more of the facilitation, and in the third month, solo facilitate?
  - What leadership skills do they need to hone and how can they practice?
- Are there activities that madrichot/im can plan on their own?
  - Can they plan the Hannukah party or the Purim carnival?
  - If you do a Hebrew School Shabbat Service, can the madrichot/im serve in a leadership role?
  - What all-school activities can they plan and implement?