

LESSON I: INTRODUCTION AND CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

Theme/Topic/Big Ideas: Diversity in our Community and Beyond

Summary: In this lesson, students will identify what they want to know about diversity in their local Jewish community, participate in a game exploring classroom diversity, and create identity maps.

Essential Question(s)

- How are Jews a diverse people, and how does that diversity show up in my community?

Objective:

Students will learn about Jewish diversity in their own communities to prepare to make connections with broader Jewish experience.

Time: 1 hour

Materials and setup

- Whiteboard or chart paper and markers
- Sticky notes and markers, plus big paper with header questions for sticky notes activity
- Printout of poster and Jewish of Color Initiative infographic
- Identity map template, if desired
- Jewish diversity articles and/or link to video and way to play it
- White paper and art materials for writing and drawing (markers, colored pencils, etc.)
- Access to all images and handouts

**Handouts and
Visuals Link**

Background information for teachers:

"Beyond the Count: Perspectives and Lived Experiences of Jews of Color," commissioned by the Jews of Color Initiative.

https://jewsofcolorinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/BEYONDTHECOUNT.FINAL_.8.12.21.pdf

Process: Introduction/Set Induction: Assess Prior Knowledge (KWL) (10 min)

Create a K/W/L chart on the board, dividing it into 3 sections:

K: What do we know?

W: What do we want to know?

L: What did we learn? (you'll come back to this at the end)

K: Ask, what do we know about the diversity of our school or synagogue community? Probe with follow-up questions as needed (e.g., what different kinds of diversity can we identify, giving examples like family structure, languages spoken, cultural identities, race, Jewish practice, etc.). You can expand this question to your neighborhood, city, or regional Jewish community. What is something unique to your Jewish identity? Take notes in the K section as students share answers. Once you have a representative list, move on to W.

W: Ask, what do we want to know about the diversity of our community that we don't already know?

Share with students that during the course of this unit, we'll be exploring some of the diversity we've identified, but also figuring out how to learn more about the areas we don't yet know about. At the end of the unit, we'll reflect on what we've learned.

Let's now see if we can learn a bit more about each other:

Explore: Identity Sticky Notes Exercise

(Inspired By Jared Jackson of Jews in All Hues) (10 Min)

Choose a number of walls or surfaces that are blank and are able to have adhesives stuck to them. Label several walls or sections of each wall with the headers: "My family is," "I am," and "Something I've noticed about my community is . . ."

Hand out stacks of sticky notes and pens/markers to each student. Ask them to document as many identities (and intersectional identities) as they would like to include, noting that this activity is anonymous. Encourage students to write a "+1" on another student's sticky notes if they also identify in the same way.

Explore: Identity Sticky Notes Exercise

(Inspired By Jared Jackson of Jews in All Hues) (10 Min)

After about 5–7 minutes, read many of the answers on the wall aloud, noting patterns or commonalities as you see them.

Reflect on the activity.

Ask students to write down on one more sticky note: What did we notice about our class based on the sticky notes activity? Have students place these on the wall, and summarize.

Discuss: What does this tell us about our classroom community? What can we add to the K in our KWL chart? What else do we want to know that we might add to the W, or what we want to know?

If language diversity comes up or isn't mentioned at all, please note it to the class. Sharing examples of "Jewish English" is a great way to introduce students to the idea (continued in lessons 2 and 3) that Jews have historically spoken a variety of the local language infused with cultural elements unique to Jews. Like some Mexican-Americans refer to speaking "Spanglish," when we, as English-speaking Jews, sprinkle Yiddish or Hebrew into our speech, we are speaking Jewish English. And the type of Jewish English varies depending on our ancestral languages, religiosity, etc. For example, some Jewish groups incorporate Spanish, Russian, Persian, or Arabic into their English, and Orthodox Jews tend to use many more Hebrew words than non-Orthodox Jews.

Discuss: Jewish Diversity

Handout Link

As a class, watch one or more of these videos (linked below!)

[The Differences Between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews](#) (8:26)

[Is There A Difference Between Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews?](#) (11:30; after 4:03 the video addresses immigration to Israel, discrimination against Mizrahim there, and related civil rights movements.)

[Judaism and Race](#) by Be'chol Lashon, focuses on Jews of Color, particularly in the US (9:00)

As the videos explain, Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Mizrahi are just a few of the groups of Jews based on geography. There are also Italian, Greek, Ethiopian, Indian, and Jews from other places. What stood out to you? What was familiar or unfamiliar?

Discuss: Jewish Diversity

[Handout Link](#)

Another type of diversity is racial diversity. While Jews in America are often seen as white, a growing percentage come from different racial backgrounds, including African American, Latino, Asian American, Native American, and others. Let's look at a bit more information about Jews of color.

Handout:

Pass out these handouts, offering information about Jews of Color in the United States, and images of diverse Jews. Ask students to look carefully, read, and discuss in pairs.

As a class, discuss:

From the videos, infographic, and poster, what new information did you learn about the diversity of the Jewish community in general? Did anything surprise you? If so, what?

How does the diversity in this classroom compare to the Jewish community in general?

What communities or identities are not represented here?

Create and Connect: Identity Maps (15 min)

[Template Link](#)

Pass out paper and art materials.

Have students create an identity map. An identity map is a graphic tool that offers students a visual representation of their multiple identities. Have students begin by writing their name in the center of a paper, then add words or images representing their identities (e.g., daughter, Jew, artist, Mexican-American, sister). Use a template like the ones below (and linked in the handouts PDFs), if desired. Students may make this as artistic as they choose. Bring each student's identity map together to create a "quilt" of all of the class identities.

Show identity map examples as needed.

[Examples Link](#)

Reflection/Conclusion: Gallery Walk (5 min)

Have students walk around the room to view each other's identity maps. What stands out to you? What are we learning about our classroom community?