

## TEACHING JEWISH VALUES THROUGH LITERATURE: A NEW CURRICULUM UNIT

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**Description:** Anne Dublin, Donna Robins, and Myrna Ross will demonstrate several model lessons from the curriculum unit entitled Teaching Jewish Values in the Supplementary Jewish School. They developed this unit for the Board of Jewish Education (Toronto). The literature-based unit provides lessons for Kindergarten to Grade 3 on four Jewish values: "lev tov" (caring), "hachnasat orchim" (hospitality), "kavod" (respect), and "tikkun olam" (repairing the world).

**Anne Dublin** is teacher-librarian at Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto. She has been an elementary school teacher in Kingston, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Nairobi. She is the vice-president of the AJL-Ontario and editor of Library Links, the Ontario chapter newsletter. Anne is secretary of the SSC Division, serves on the Accreditation Committee, and writes reviews of children's books for the *AJL Newsletter*. She is one of the authors of the curriculum unit, "Teaching Jewish Values in the Supplementary Jewish School" for the Board of Jewish Education in Toronto. Her article, "Why Should Young Adults Read Holocaust Literature, Anyway?" was published in the 2002 issue of *The New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* (Birmingham, England). She is the author of books for children and young adults.

Let me tell you the story of how our curriculum unit came to be. One day, a few years ago, Myrna Ross came to my school library. She was shaking her head in despair, and said to me, "I'm **so** tired of teachers using *The Giving Tree* to teach Tu B'Shevat! I see that book as being about respect for each other as well as for the environment." We started discussing other books teachers could use to teach Jewish values. We talked some more, and soon I began pulling books off the shelves: "Here. How about this one? Or this one? Or this?"

About that same time, the Board of Jewish Education of the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto was offering grants for special projects created by educators. We decided to apply for a grant in order to create a literature-based curriculum unit about Jewish values for children in Kindergarten to Grade 3. We invited Donna Robins to join us in the project. *Teaching Jewish Values through Literature* is the result of our collaboration.

This unit provides model lessons for teachers, lessons that we hope will convey Jewish values to our students. We include these lessons under the umbrella term of "gemilut chasadim" (personal acts of lovingkindness). In their book, *Living a Jewish Life*, Anita Diamant and Howard Cooper state that "gemilut chasadim" is more spiritually powerful than "tzedakah" (righteousness) because it requires personal involvement and can be done for anyone, regardless of his or her station in life.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Anita Diamant and Howard Cooper, *Living a Jewish Life: Jewish Traditions, Customs, and Values for Today's Families* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991) 74.

Here is an overview of our unit.

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Hospitality / Hachnasat Orchim

Respect / Kavod

Repairing the World / Tikkun Olam

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This curriculum unit contains the following features:

1. Lessons can be used in all streams of Judaism.
2. Four Jewish values are used as examples. These are: "lev tov" (caring), "hachnasat orchim" (hospitality), "kavod" (respect), and "tikkun olam" (repairing the world).
3. As I've already mentioned, this is a literature-based unit i.e. every lesson has as its core a book or story to exemplify a Jewish value. If the book does not have obvious Jewish content, another book or story is suggested as an alternative.
4. Lessons can be taught independently, or be part of a larger unit of study.
5. One lesson plan is provided for each level from Kindergarten to Grade 3. The teacher can adapt the lessons to many age levels and grades.
6. Quotations from tradition for the teacher and the child appear in both Hebrew and English at the beginning of each lesson. The excerpts are taken from such writings as the *Tanach* (Bible), the *Talmud*, and the *Pirke Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers).
7. We use a variety of teaching methods to engage students in different ways and to appeal to various learning styles.
8. An extensive bibliography is provided so that teachers can purchase materials and develop their own lesson plans. In addition, all books and stories used in the lessons are included in the kit.
9. A glossary of Hebrew terms is included.

When we first began working on the lessons, we used the lesson plan outline we were familiar with: Goals, Objectives, Introduction, Learning Activities, and Conclusion. However, sometimes you have to be hit on the head before you get things right—as the line from the old Shaker song goes, “‘Til by turning and turning we come round right.’”

Last autumn, the three of us attended the biennial convention of the Canadian Council for Reform Judaism in Toronto. Jan Katzew explained a curriculum model called “Understanding by Design” used in the new *Chai Curriculum* that’s being developed by the UAHC Department of Education. It seemed so sensible, so obvious, that we decided to change our lessons to fit the model. We were delighted with the results.

I don’t have time to explain the model in detail, but its basic concept is that of “Backward Design”. This is a “process to design a curriculum where the teacher begins by determining the desired outcomes, next devises the ways they will tell whether the outcomes have been achieved, and only then creates the specifics of the lessons.”<sup>2</sup> In a nutshell, “Backward Design” can be explained like this:

1. **The Desired Outcome:** After this lesson, the student will understand . . .
2. **Assessment:** I will be able to tell students are understanding by . . .
3. **Plan Instruction:** I will use the following learning experiences . . .

Therefore, using “Backward Design”, every lesson in this unit is structured in the following way:

1. **Our Tradition Says** and **For the Child.** These are quotes taken from various Jewish sources in order to base the lesson on a firm foundation.
2. **Enduring Understanding:** “The big ideas that teachers want students to retain long after the class has ended, the core ideas of the lesson that tend to be abstract and meant to engage students in active learning experiences.”<sup>3</sup>
3. **Essential Questions:** “Essential questions are abstract questions that are used to assist the teacher in getting at the core of the subject.”<sup>4</sup>
4. **Evidence of Understanding:** The assessment the teacher uses through a variety of formal and informal means e.g. teacher observation, traditional testing, projects, and student self-assessment. “This ‘evidence’ can be expressed orally, in writing, or demonstrated by a positive response in a student’s behavior.”<sup>5</sup>
5. **Materials and Resources:** A complete listing of all materials and resources needed to execute the lesson.
6. **Set Induction:** Taking the student from the “known” to the “unknown”; from the real to the abstract.

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<sup>2</sup> Marlene Myerson, *Chai for Kids: The Chai Curriculum Core*, presented at the CCRJ Convention, Toronto, Nov. 3, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Marlene Myerson, *Chai for Kids: The Chai Curriculum Core*, presented at the CCRJ Convention, Toronto, Nov. 3, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Marlene Myerson, *Chai for Kids: The Chai Curriculum Core*, presented at the CCRJ Convention, Toronto, Nov. 3, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> *Chai: Learning for Jewish Life: Second Grade Curriculum Core* (New York, UAHC Press, 2002) ix.

7. **Learning Activities:** The planned “action” that takes place in the classroom to make the learning real.

8. **Sharing and Conclusion:** The final activity that reinforces the learning both at school and at home. This demonstrates that the desired learning has, in fact, occurred.

At the completion of each lesson, we hope the teacher will extend the awareness of the specific Jewish value to other activities in the classroom, and that the value will carry over to the home and ultimately to the community.

Ideally, our task as teachers is to help children discover what it means to be a “mentsch”--an upright, honourable, decent person.<sup>6</sup> We hope our children will learn that these values are a Jewish way of life and can be integrated into everyday living.

This unit is only a beginning. We hope these sample lessons will inspire teachers to adapt and revise the existing lessons, and to develop their own lessons for communicating other Jewish values. In so doing, teachers and librarians will be able to extend the possibilities of Jewish learning for themselves and for their students.

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6 Leo Rosten, (rev. Lawrence Bush), *The New Joys of Yiddish* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001) 232.

If you would like to receive a copy of the CD of *Teaching Jewish Values Through Literature* (rev. ed.), please fill in the information below and send to:

Anne Dublin, Librarian  
Holy Blossom Temple  
1950 Bathurst Street  
Toronto, ON M5P 3K9  
CANADA

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**APPENDIX A**  
**TITLES OF BOOKS & STORIES**  
**BY THEME AND LEVEL**

**CARING**

Kindergarten	<i>Herman the Helper</i> by Robert Kraus “Spiders Make Good Friends” from <i>Seven Animal Stories for Children</i> by Howard and Mary K. Bogot
Grade 1	<i>Princess Alopecia</i> by Yaacov Peterseil “Duncan the Talking Donkey” from <i>Seven Animals Wag Their Tails</i> by Howard and Mary K. Bogot
Grade 2	<i>God Said Amen</i> by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso
Grade 3	“A Visit from Heaven and Hell” from <i>Jewish Values Alef to Tav</i> (“G’milut Hasadim”) “Miriam’s Mysterious Well of Water” from <i>Seven Delightful Stories for Every Day</i> by Dov Peretz Elkins

**HOSPITALITY**

Kindergarten	<i>Dovy and the Surprise Guests</i> by Goldie Golding
Grade 1	“Three Wishes Too Many” from <i>Seven Delightful Stories for Every Day</i> by Dov Peretz Elkins
Grade 2	<i>The Borrowed Hanukkah Latkes</i> by Linda Glaser
Grade 3	<i>Bone Button Borscht</i> by Aubrey Davis

## **RESPECT**

- Kindergarten      “A Big Red Tomato” from *Who Knows Ten?* by Molly Cone
- Grade 1              “What a Few Words Can Do” from *Seven Delightful Stories for Every Day* by Dov Peretz Elkins
- Grade 2              *You Never Know: A Legend of the Lamed-Vavniks* by Francine Prose
- Grade 3              “The Honoured Garment” from *One-Minute Jewish Stories* by Shari Lewis

## **REPAIRING THE WORLD**

- Kindergarten      *The 11<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Wisdom From Our Children* by Sandra Korinchak (ed.)
- Grade 1              “Honi Sleeps for Seventy Years” from *Jewish Values from Alef to Tav* (“Teva”)
- Grade 2              *Partners* by Deborah Shayne Syme
- Grade 3              “The Jewel” from *Jewish Values Alef to Tav* (“Tikkun Olam”)

## APPENDIX B

### TEACHER RESOURCES

Abraham, Michael Shapiro. *The Be a Mensch Campaign: A Strand Curriculum for Teaching Jewish Values*. New York: UAHC Press, 2000.

Artson, Bradley and Gila Gevirtz. *Making a Difference: Putting Jewish Spirituality Into Action, One Mitzvah at a Time*. West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, 2001.

---. *Chai: Learning for Jewish Life. Grade 2 Curriculum Core*. New York: UAHC Press, 2002.

*Dear World / Cher Monde: The Canadian Children's Project*. Toronto: Methuen Publications, 1986.

*Jewish Values: Alef to Tav*. Los Angeles, CA : Torah Aura Productions, 1997.

Freeman, Susan. *Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities*. Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 1999.

Goldstein, Niles E. and Steven S. Mason. *Judaism and Spiritual Ethics*. New York: UAHC Press, 1996.

Grossman, Cheryl Silverberg and Suzy Engman. *Jewish Literature for Children: A Teaching Guide*. Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 1985.

Halper, Sharon D. *To Learn is to Do: A Tikkun Olam Roadmap*. New York: UAHC Press, 2000.

Isaacs, Ronald. *Derech Eretz: The Path to an Ethical Life*. United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 1998.

Jacobs, Louis. *Jewish Personal and Social Ethics*. West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, 1990.

Jules, Jacqueline. *Clap and Count!: Action Rhymes for the Jewish Year*. Rockville, MD: Kar-Ben Copies, Inc., 2001.

Muraskin, Bennett. *Humanist Readings in Jewish Folklore*. Farmington Hills, MI: International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, 2001.

Musleah, Rahel and Michael Klayman. *Sharing Blessings: Children's Stories for Exploring the Spirit of the Jewish Holidays*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997.

Richards, Stephen (ed.) *Manginot: 201 Songs for Jewish Schools*. New York: Transcontinental Music Productions, 1992.



Scharfstein, Sol. *Let's Do a Mitzvah*. New York: KTAV Publishing House Inc., 1986.

Siegel, Danny. *Tell Me a Mitzvah: Little and Big Ways to Repair the World*. Rockville, MD: Kar-Ben Copies, 1993.

Stern, Shirley. *Exploring Jewish Wisdom: Stories from the Midrash with Values Clarification Strategies and Skill Exercises*. New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1981.

Vorspan, Albert and David Saperstein. *Jewish Dimensions for Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time*. New York: UAHC Press, 1998.

## **WEB SITE**

Silver, Linda R. (ed.) *The New Jewish Valuesfinder: A Guide to Values in Jewish Children's Books*. Association of Jewish Libraries, 2003. <http://www.ajljewishvalues.org>.