

CREATING INCLUSIVE CURRICULA

Suggestions for Inclusive Lesson Planning at the Elementary Level

Family History

Family history projects are popular lessons in many Jewish educational programs. It is important to take family diversity into account when creating assignments of this type. Most pre-printed materials for Jewish family history projects or family trees present the assumption that all students have only one mother and one father who are married to one another and who are both Jewish. Rather than create a situation in which the materials only fit some of the students, why not let them create their own imagery to represent the relationships in their families. David Shneer's essay "Out at School: A Queer Jewish Education" in the anthology *Queer Jews* presents some great examples of alternatives to the family tree model that students created when given the opportunity.

Hebrew Language Lessons on Family

Most Hebrew language workbooks include a picture of a traditional family – mom, dad, daughter, son – along with the words for these people in the lesson plans designed to teach the Hebrew words for family members. How can this lesson plan be adapted to avoid reinforcing a heteronormative model? In a Keshet workshop, an Israeli Hebrew teacher and director of education at a large Reform temple suggested teaching all the words as single and plural first and then allowing each child to choose the words they need to represent their family. This allows the child from blended families with step-parents, the child of same-sex parents, the child of a single parent, and everyone else the same freedom to find themselves in the lesson. If your book has pictures, why not photocopy the page with the pictures, cut them apart and have piles of *imahot*, *avot*, *banim*, *banot*, and other family members available so each student can take what they need to represent their family.

Family Diversity

How can family diversity be taught using Jewish texts? The story of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah is a great opportunity to talk about different types of family structures. This biblical family has two mothers and one father. While the details of this biblical family differ from modern families with more than one father and one mother, the story can create an opening for talking about different kinds of families, with different numbers and arrangements of parents.

Opportunities for Including GLB/Trans Experiences and Perspectives in the Curriculum

Kindergarten - Grade 2

- **Family** (Non-traditional families, blended families, single parent families) – Use family structures of Biblical families to explore different kinds of family structures:
 - Jacob, Leah, and Rachel (adoption and surrogacy, non-traditional family structure)
 - Joseph, Anat, Ephraim, Menashe (assimilated and intermarried families)
 - Ruth and Naomi (family of women)
- **B'tzelem Elohim** – Use the creation story and the verse from Bereshit to model inclusion, respect for all forms of diversity, and the equality of all human beings as created in the image of the divine.
- **Hebrew Language** – Pay attention to the diversity of family structures as well as gender role stereotyping when teaching Hebrew language.

Grades 3 - 6

- **Tzedek Chevrati / Tikkun Olam** – Use Biblical stories or facts from Jewish history to introduce contemporary issues of social justice and respect for diversity including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.
- **Family Diversity** – Redesign the family tree as a constellation of stars with the child at the center.
- **Hebrew Language** – Pay attention to diversity of family structures as well as gender role stereotyping when teaching Hebrew language. Try to avoid using “opposites” to teach words for people, e.g. *abalima*.
- **Lifecycle** – Rethink the mock wedding. Find ways to present life cycle rituals that validate all family structures.

Grades 7 - 12

- **Lifecycle** – Include discussions of contemporary wedding rituals and baby naming ceremonies. (See www.RitualWell.org for examples of alternative models for Jewish life cycle rituals.)
- **Holocaust** – Show and discuss the documentary film *Paragraph 175*, a film about the Nazi persecution of gay men. Explore the connections between Nazi anti-Jewish propaganda and contemporary hate speech about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.
- **History of Jews in America** – Teach about the lives and contributions of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Jews in American life, including Harvey Milk, Maurice Sendak, some early Jewish feminists, and some Jewish labor organizers.
- **Israel** – Use the study of Israel to examine the diversity of the Jewish people, including information on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender rights in Israel.
- **Civil Rights** – Examine the Stonewall Riots as part of a larger study of civil rights, tie in the fight against laws prohibiting interracial marriages in the south to current debates about laws prohibiting same gender marriage.
- **Current Events** – Include debates about marriage equality, campaigns to extend anti-discrimination laws to include gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, and other issues relevant to both national and local gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender rights.
- **Tanach**
 - Use David and Jonathan’s story to examine our own discomfort with emotional intimacy between men (also devotion between Ruth and Naomi).
 - Teach Bereshit 1:26 and the Talmudic discussion of the gender of the first human.
 - Examine non-conforming gender roles – Deborah, Yael, Tamar, Ruth and Naomi, Joseph.
 - Use the Purim story as place to explore issues of hidden identities and the power of “coming out” and claiming your identity.