



Core Lesson/Group Activity

2. Pluralism in Action

Description: This role play debate gives students the opportunity to examine what pluralism looks like in action. Students take on the roles of members of a religious policy committee at a new school to discuss, debate, and determine school policy on three issues.

Time Needed: 45 minutes

Recommended Age Range: grades 7 – 12

Objectives:

- To challenge students to think about how they would define pluralism.
- To experience how pluralism works in action.

Materials Needed:

- Board or easel with newsprint or large paper
- Colorful markers



Suggested Film Clips:

Title	Length
Change in Perspective	3:23
Pluralism in Practice	4:13
A Compromise Decision	2:19
Learning Tolerance	3:18

Note to the Educator/Facilitator: This lesson may be adapted for different settings. The activity may also be used as a prompt for a written assignment.

Instructions:

1. To begin this lesson, ask students to briefly discuss the word “pluralism” and what it means in different contexts, e.g., in American society generally, in your synagogue, in your school, in your neighborhood. As a whole group, take five minutes to come up with a working definition of pluralism that students can use in their role play activity. A quick screening of relevant film clips from *Hineini* may be useful after students have developed their own working definition of pluralism.



2. Next, tell students that they are going to be members of a religious policy committee at a new pluralistic Jewish school or institution. They must debate and determine community policy on some issues that have come before the committee. In formulating the policy, ask students to take into consideration the different perspectives of each of the following members of the community.
 - a. A Reform family
 - b. A secular Jewish family
 - c. A Conservative family
 - d. A modern Orthodox family
 - e. A Reconstructionist family
 - f. An Interfaith Family
 - g. A multiracial Jewish family
 - h. A gay or lesbian Jewish teen

3. The issues before the committee are:
 - a. Bringing non-Jewish dates to dances and other school programs
 - b. Whether or not the theater group is allowed to produce a performance of the musical “Jesus Christ, Superstar”
 - c. Rules for Shabbat observance during weekend retreats
 - d. Whether or not a group of gay and straight students can establish a Gay/Straight Alliance
 - e. Kashrut rules for the group or institution

(Note: these issues may be adapted for non-day school settings or as appropriate for your specific setting.)

4. Students must debate the merits of each issue and come to a decision. It is not necessary for the group to debate all five issues, but one of the issues they debate should be about the formation of a Gay/Straight Alliance. Give the students a maximum of ten minutes to debate each issue.

5. When the debate is over, return to the definition of pluralism that the class outlined at the beginning of the lesson. Working together, ask the students to adapt their definition based on their experiences from the debate. Explain that this will take discussion and may be challenging, but the goal is to put the principle of pluralism into action by creating a new definition that everyone can support.