

Introduction to Judaism – Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program Classroom Materials

Note to Teachers: These materials are intended to be used in your class to prepare your students in advance of their visit to the Jewish Museum of Maryland. Included are a pre-visit lesson plan, a description of what you can expect during your visit, a follow-up post-visit lesson plan, and a suggested resource list.

Overview:

Introduction to Judaism provides students with an introduction to Jewish ritual practices by inviting them to learn about an important Jewish coming-of-age ceremony, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. They will have the opportunity to compare and contrast the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony with other coming-of-age rituals with which they are familiar. The program also invites students to examine and to interpret Jewish ritual objects. They will also learn about the history of Baltimore's Jewish community. The program takes place in the historic Lloyd Street Synagogue, which was built in 1845 as Maryland's first synagogue.

Grade Level:

While these materials have been designed for students in Grades 6-8, they can be modified to suit older and younger grades.

Objectives:

- To introduce non-Jewish students to Judaism, by providing an overview of some of its religious traditions through a multi-sensory program which allows students to listen to liturgical music and to handle religious artifacts
- To introduce students to a Jewish house of worship and to explain the importance of the specific features found in the Lloyd Street Synagogue
- To teach students about a significant Jewish ceremony, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and to explain its meaning
- To encourage students to use critical thinking skills as they compare the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony to other coming-of-age ceremonies with which they are familiar
- To encourage students to ask questions about Judaism and to learn how to distinguish between fact and stereotype
- To enrich the teaching of a multicultural curriculum by exposing students to an authentic and historic Jewish site

Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Curriculum Standards

I. Social Studies Standards

Grade 6

Peoples of the Nations and the World:

1. Describe characteristics that are used to organize people into cultures
 - a. Describe and compare the elements of culture, such as art, music, religion, government, social structure, education, values, beliefs, and customs, from civilizations in world history
2. Explain how cultural diffusion influenced the development of cultures in world history
 - a. Describe factors that resulted in cultural diffusion, such as trade, conflict, and migration
3. Analyze the practices and beliefs of world religions and philosophies
 - a. Identify the concepts of monotheism and polytheism
 - b. Describe the major traditions, customs, and beliefs of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism
 - c. Analyze the impact of various religions on a civilization, such as its effect on political, economic, and social systems

Grade 7

Geography:

3. Analyze and describe population growth, migration and settlement patterns
 - a. Identify reasons why people migrate such as economic opportunity, climate, political reasons, and government policies
 - b. Analyze the patterns of migration and settlement within regions and throughout the world, such as urban to suburban, rural to urban, or immigration
 - c. Evaluate the consequences of migration and settlement to various regions of the world, such as employment, changes in population, and cultural diversity/conflict

Peoples of the Nation and the World:

1. Describe characteristics that are used to organize people into cultures
 - a. Analyze the elements of culture, such as art, music, religion, government, social structure, education, values, beliefs, and customs in modern world regions
2. Analyze how diverse cultures shape a pluralistic society
 - a. Identify cultural groups within a modern world region. Describe how migration contributes to the diversity of nations and regions around the world
 - b. Analyze how cultural diffusion is influenced by factors, such as trade, migration, immigration and conflict

Grade 8

History:

6. Analyze patterns of immigration to the United States
 - a. Identify the push and pull factors responsible for immigration to the United States, such as the forced migration of Africans, Western European immigration

II. Reading/English Language Arts

Grades 5-8

1.0 General Reading Processes: Vocabulary - Students will use a variety of strategies and opportunities to understand word meaning and to increase vocabulary

- a. Use resources to confirm definitions and gather further information about words
- b. Use new vocabulary in speaking and writing to gain and extend content knowledge and clarify expression

Background:

The rite of passage from early adolescence to Jewish adulthood is marked by a ceremony known as a Bar Mitzvah for a boy and a Bat Mitzvah for a girl. The term Bar/Bat Mitzvah is composed of two Hebrew words. The first word “Bar/Bat” means “son/daughter” and depends on whether a boy or a girl is the participant. The Hebrew word “Mitzvah” is more difficult to translate. It literally means “commandment” but has come to have a broader meaning. It implies the joy of doing something for the sake of others and for tradition. It also speaks of living “Jewishly,” of meeting life’s challenges and opportunities in specific ways. Performing the rituals is the way a Jew remains a part of the larger community with its ties to ancient times and also expresses one’s devotion to G-d. As an adolescent becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, he/she agrees – from that moment on – to fulfill all of Judaism’s commandments. It is a turning point in his/her life.

The Bar Mitzvah is the older of the two ceremonies. It originated in Germany in the 14th century. The Bat Mitzvah ceremony is more recent, and it was not until the second half of the 20th century that the practice began in the United States. The term refers to both the ceremony and the individual participating in the ceremony.

Today we refer to the teen years as the transition period between childhood and adulthood. However, in the past, there was not an extended adolescence, and at the age of 13, an adolescent was considered fully responsible for his behavior. Thus, the Bar Mitzvah signified an initiation into adulthood. Today, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony represents a significant rite of passage. A Bar/Bat Mitzvah is called to chant or read in Hebrew from both the Torah and/or the Book of Prophets publicly before family members, friends, and the synagogue congregation. The ceremony emphasizes the Bar/Bat Mitzvah’s readiness to pursue the ways of the Torah and to live according to traditional Jewish religious and moral standards. Parents often celebrate this event with a special party for family and friends.

Pre-visit lesson plan: Synagogue Terms

Materials: Teacher Resource Sheet #1, index cards

Advanced preparation: Write each term that is listed on Teacher Resource Sheet #1 on an index card

This lesson plan focuses on the terms that are described in the glossary (Teacher Resource Sheet #1). Divide students into groups of 2-3 students each. Distribute an index card to each group. Have students research their assigned term using resource materials in your school's library or the internet. Give students 15-20 minutes to conduct research and then some additional time to prepare how they are going to present their findings to the class. They should also think about how to compare the Jewish term that they have researched to similar concepts or objects from other faiths with which they are familiar. While some of the terms may seem simplistic, encourage students to research their history or significance. Students should present the results of their research in a creative manner. Some examples are as follows: students can perform a short skit that demonstrates their understanding of their assigned term; they can produce a drawing of the item they've researched; they can write a song or poem about the term. Once the students have completed this assignment, reassemble the students and give each group five minutes to present what they researched to the rest of the class.

If your class time is limited, on the back of each index card, write the definition of the term. Hand out to each group the index card that lists both the term and the definition. Have students spend twenty minutes discussing how to interpret the term to the rest of the class in a creative fashion. For the remainder of the class, each group should present their term to the rest of the class.

During Your Visit: Introduction to Judaism

When your group arrives at the Museum, you will be greeted by a Museum representative who will lead your students to the Lloyd Street Synagogue where the program will begin. If your group is larger than 25-30 students, you will need to split the group into smaller groups of no more than 25-30 students. Please note that the maximum number of students that we can accommodate for this program is 60. If your group is larger, we ask that you split it into smaller groups and schedule separate visit times for each group. The Museum can recommend other nearby museums for part of the class to visit while the other group is touring the Lloyd Street Synagogue.

Post-Visit Lesson Plan: Rites of Passage

Materials needed: Student Resource Sheet, paper, crayons, markers, and colored pencils, Teacher Resource Sheet #2

Advanced preparation: Make enough copies of the Student Resource Sheets for all students

Review with your students what they have learned during their visit to the Jewish Museum of Maryland. Have them discuss the details of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony that they witnessed and ask them to reflect on what they learned about Judaism and the role of the synagogue in the Jewish community.

Once they have finished, ask students to name some of the rites of passage that they discussed during their visit to the Museum, along with any additional ones. List these on the blackboard. Ask students to group different events together. Which events are

religious, and which ones are secular? Are there any rites that are specifically male or female in nature? Do any of the rites belong to one particular culture? Highlight the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony and have students discuss the skills, knowledge, or accomplishments a person must master to fulfill this rite of passage. Ask students for their opinions as to why the Bar/Bat Mitzvah was initially established and why it has remained such an important ceremony.

Have students select one of the rites of passage listed on the blackboard. They should choose something that they themselves have experienced. Ask students to provide a written description of that experience, including the preparation involved in participating in the rite, what skills or accomplishments were necessary to participate, and how the event unfolded. They can use the Student Resource Sheet as a guide for this description. Students should also describe how it felt to participate and why (or why not) the rite of passage was significant in their lives. Students can also create illustrations to accompany the written description of the rite of passage that they have selected. Have students share their descriptions with the other members of the class.

If you have additional time, you might want to share some of the rituals described on Teacher Resource Sheet #2 that describe rites of passage in other cultures. Describe the rituals to students and ask them to talk about what these rites tell them about the cultures and communities that celebrate them. They might also want to compare these rites with the ones they have already discussed.

One final class activity is as follows. As a class, ask students to create a rite of passage that is reflective of your classroom community. What will it celebrate and why? Is it a group ritual or something that each individual will go through by him/herself? What are the standards by which students will be judged to assure that they have successfully completed the rite? How does this rite reflect the values and goals of the class?

GLOSSARY OF SYNAGOGUE TERMS

- ✓ ALIYA-Hebrew term meaning going up. When a person blesses the *Torah* before and after it is read, it is called an *aliya* because he or she is “going up” to the *Torah*.
- ✓ BAR/BAT MITZVAH - Hebrew term meaning son/daughter of the commandment. At the age of thirteen, a child becomes a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* at a special ceremony when he or she reads from the *Torah* and accepts the duties of the commandments. The plural of *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is *B'nai Mitzvah*.
- ✓ BIMAH - a raised platform holding a table that faces the ark. Parts of the service are conducted from the *bimah*.
- ✓ CHANUKKIAH – Chanukah menorah with eight apertures plus one more that is set apart for the *shamash* or master light.
- ✓ ETERNAL LIGHT - a continuously lit lamp located in front of the ark to recall the eternal light in King Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem. The eternal light serves as a symbol of God’s eternal presence. In Hebrew, it is called *Ner Tamid*.
- ✓ HAFTORAH - Selections from the book of Prophets that are read on *Shabbat*, after the *Torah* reading. Each *Shabbat*, a different selection is read, according to the *Torah* portion of the week.
- ✓ KASHRUT - Dietary laws observed by some Jews that contain specific guidelines for what people can and cannot eat. For example, the mixing of meat and dairy products is prohibited, as well as eating certain kinds of animals such as pork and shellfish. This is also referred to as keeping *Kosher*.
- ✓ KIPPAH (Yarmulke) - a head covering worn by Jews as a constant reminder of God’s presence. *Yarmulke* is the Yiddish term for a *kippah*.
- ✓ MATZAH - Special kind of bread that is eaten on the holiday of Passover. It is flat and hard because it is not allowed to rise.
- ✓ MENORAH – Hebrew for candelabrum. The name given to the seven-branched candelabrum, which was a prominent feature in the Jerusalem Temple. After the destruction of the Temple the menorah became the most important Jewish pictorial motif, and from an implement it became an emblem.
- ✓ MEZUZAH - a small case attached to the right upper doorpost of a house, slanting inward. It contains a parchment with two passages from the Bible (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21) with the commandment to write God’s words upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates. When you see a *mezuzah* on a door, you know that it marks a Jewish home or organization.
- ✓ MIKVEH - a modern day custom based in antiquity. A *mikveh* is a ritual bath for

purification and rededication. A *mikveh* is built to exacting standards, must be partially filled with water collected from rain or from a stream, and cannot have a drain in its bottom.

- ✓ RABBI - a Hebrew word meaning my teacher. A *rabbi* serves as a synagogue congregation's leader who conducts services and teaches classes. Other duties include counseling, conducting weddings and funerals, and visiting the sick and bereaved.
- ✓ SHABBAT - The Jewish Sabbath that lasts from sundown on Friday through an hour past sundown on Saturday. This is the Jewish day of rest, and observant Jews refrain from all types of work on this day.
- ✓ STAR OF DAVID - a six-pointed star consisting of two superimposed triangles. It is a universal Jewish symbol.
- ✓ SYNAGOGUE - a Greek term referring to Jewish house of worship.
- ✓ TALLIT - a four-cornered prayer shawl with fringes worn as commanded in the Bible to serve as a constant reminder of God's presence, love and the importance of fulfilling commandments.
- ✓ TEFILIN - phylacteries boxes containing prayer selections that are worn during morning prayers, but not on *Shabbat*. One box is worn on the forehead and the other box is worn on the arm. The straps of the arm box are wrapped around the arm seven times, and then around the hand three times.
- ✓ TORAH - the history and laws of the Jewish people handwritten on parchment in Hebrew by a trained scribe that has been rolled to form a scroll. The *Torah* is partially unrolled during synagogue services. In book form the *Torah* is also known as the Five Books of Moses. There are several components of the *Torah* with special meanings:

BREAST PLATE - a decorative piece on the *Torah* that is usually designed to imitate the breast plate worn by the High Priest in ancient times.

GARTL - a Yiddish word meaning "belt". This belt secured the *Torah*, so it does not unroll on its own.

MANTLE - a covering for the *Torah* that is both decorative and protective.

RIMMONIM - individual crown-like objects that are placed over the handles of the *Torah* to emphasize the *Torah's* importance. The wooden handles are often called *rimmonim* themselves.

YAD - a Hebrew word meaning hand. It is a pointer that is usually in the shape of a hand with an outstretched pointer finger. A *yad* is used to point to words while reading the *Torah*, because people are not supposed to touch the parchment with their hands.

- ✓ TORAH ARK - a closet or container for the *Torah* scrolls when they are not in use. In America, the ark is usually located on the eastern wall of the synagogue facing towards Jerusalem.

- ✓ TZEDAKAH - often translated as charity, but in fact, a more literal translation is "righteousness." According to Judaism, the giving of *tzedakah* is not only to be done as an act of compassion, but instead is the "right" thing to do.

Rites of Passage Across Cultures

- **Quinceanera: Latin Sweet Sixteen**

The *quinceanera*, or *quince*, is a Latin American custom that traditionally occurs when a girl turns fifteen. Among Latinos in America, this celebration takes place at age sixteen, usually in conjunction with a sweet sixteen party. This celebration marks a young girl's entrance into womanhood. Originally, the ceremony also signified a young woman's eligibility for marriage. The *quinceanera* involves both a religious ceremony and a celebration. The young woman participating in this rite dresses in white and is presented to the priest for a blessing during the weekly mass. The participant then offers flowers to the Virgin Mary and asks for her blessing as she makes the transition to adulthood. The ceremony is followed by an elaborate celebration for friends and family.

- **Sunrise Ceremonial: An Apache Girl's Coming of Age**

In traditional Native American Apache culture, a girl comes of age through a four-day feasting and dancing festival called a Sunrise Ceremonial. During this time, the girl takes on the role of Changing Woman, believed by Apaches to be the first woman on Earth. This ceremony occurs during a girl's teen years. The Sunrise Ceremonial marks a girl's transition from a child to an adult in the eyes of the Apache community. The ceremony involves intensive preparation. The girl is dressed in a special costume, and an elaborate meal is prepared. The ceremony is as much a test of endurance as a celebration. The rite lasts four days during which the young girl must dance before family and friends. This ritual is a community event, as well as a personal coming-of-age ritual.

- **Nkanda/Mukanda Initiation Ritual: An African Rite of Maturity**

The *Nkanu* people of Angola and the Congo have an artistic initiation for the boys and young men of their society. The rite lasts several months and is designed for boys who have reached puberty. The main theme of the ritual is the symbolic death and rebirth of the individual, who begins the rite as a boy and re-enters society as a man. Initiates are separated from their families for the duration of the ritual in housing situated outside the community. The young men use this time apart to acquire specialized knowledge necessary for adult life. Another integral aspect of the ritual is the creation of carved masks, figures, and panels that will go on display at the conclusion of the initiation. An elaborate celebration at the end of this ritual reintroduces the boys into society.

- **Seijin No Hi: Japan's Coming-of-Age Day**

When young men and women reach the age of twenty in Japan, they participate in a national holiday called *seijin no hi*, or coming of age day. This ceremony

takes place on the second Monday in January and celebrates the entrance to adulthood. Anyone who has turned twenty before this date can participate. The day involves local celebrations by municipal governments. Many men wear western style suits, while some women choose to wear the traditional *furisode* kimono, an elaborately decorated silk robe that delineates the wearer as an unmarried woman. In modern Japanese society, an individual can vote at age 20, and a young person becomes legally responsible for his or her actions. Traditionally, the day was celebrated at a younger age – when a boy turned fifteen, or a girl turned thirteen.

Rites of Passage Preparation Sheet

- 1) Choose one particular rite of passage that you have experienced. What is it? Describe the nature of the event – where it took place, how many people were in attendance, etc.

- 2) For whom is this rite-of-passage designed? Is this event tied to a religious or cultural tradition?

- 3) What skills does it test? Was there any preparation necessary in advance of the event?

- 4) Does this rite involve a ceremony? How does it unfold?

- 5) What are the standards for judging if someone has met the goals of this rite of passage?

- 6) Why was this rite of passage important in your life? What does it symbolize for you? What do you remember most about the event?

- 7) What does this rite say about the values of your community?

Resource List

Books

Introduction to Judaism Resources:

- Corrigan, John (editor), Jews, Christians, Muslims: A Comparative Introduction to the Monotheistic Religions, Prentice Hall Inc., 1997.
- De Lange, Nicholas, An Introduction to Judaism, Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Einstein, Stephen J., Introduction to Judaism: A Sourcebook, UAH Press, 1999.
- Solomon, Norman, Judaism: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford University Press, Inc., 2000.
- Wylen, Stephen M., Settings of Silver: An Introduction to Judaism, Paulist Press, 2000.

About the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony:

- Cohen, Nachman, Bar – Bat Mitzvah and Beyond, Phillipp Feldheim, Inc., 1997.
- Cutter, William (editor), A Spiritual Journey: The Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah Handbook, Behrman House, Inc., 1998.
- Leneman, Helen, Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Family Guide to Coming of Age Together, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991.
- Salkin, Jeffrey K., Putting God on the Guestlist: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996.
- Seiffer Sage, Linda, The Complete Bar-Bat Mitzvah Planner, St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1993.

Web Sites

- <http://www.jewfaq.org/> - Judaism 101
- http://Judaism.about.com/library/intro/bl_intro.htm - answers basic questions about Judaism
- <http://www.shir-tikvah.org/jewclass/> - brief introduction to Judaism