

Making Sense of This World: Applying Reform Values in a Meaningful Context

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Acknowledgments

Only the learning that is enjoyed will be learned well.

--B. Talmud

To my mentor, Rabbi Samuel Joseph:

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Introduction and Curriculum Rationale

Description of Topic

More than 150 years ago, under the leadership of Rabbi Isaac Meyer Wise, Reform Judaism took root in America. Today, more than 1.5 million people affiliate with Reform Judaism, North America's largest denomination of Judaism.¹ Some argue that "the great contribution of Reform Judaism is that it has enabled the Jewish people to introduce innovation while preserving tradition, to embrace diversity while asserting commonality, to affirm beliefs without rejecting those who doubt, and to bring faith to sacred texts without sacrificing critical scholarship."² Within these tenants, Reform Judaism established itself in America, while continually evolving and innovating to meet the changing needs of American Jewry.

According to the National Jewish Population study conducted in 2000-2001, more than one third of American Jewry self-identify as Reform Jews and more than forty percent of American Jewish households are affiliated with a Reform synagogue.³ In families that belong to Reform synagogues, eight of ten children attend supplementary school; yet in recent years, supplemental religious schools have undergone numerous changes, including increased efforts to try to retain youth for the post bar/bat mitzvah years.⁴ Such efforts are specifically reflected within the Reform movement's Campaign for Youth Engagement and the *B'nai Mitzvah* Revolution that strives "to empower synagogues to improve the quality of Jewish education in their communities, reduce the staggering rates of post-*B'nai Mitzvah* dropout, and return depth

¹ "Reform Judaism," Union for Reform Judaism, accessed on October 7, 2012, <http://reformjudaism.org/>.

² "What is Reform Judaism?" Union for Reform Judaism, accessed on October 7, 2012, <http://reformjudaism.org/whatisrj.shtml>.

³ "National Population Survey 2000-2001: Reform Jews," United Jewish Communities, accessed on October 7, 2012, http://www.jewishfederations.org/local_includes/downloads/6262.pdf.

⁴ Jack Wertheimer, *Recent Trends in Supplemental Jewish Education*, (Avi Chai: 2007), accessed on October 7, 2012, <http://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/bitstreams/15838.pdf>.

and meaning to Jewish learning.”⁵ In 2008, of the nearly 17,000 annual *B’nai Mitzvah* that occur in Union for Reform Judaism affiliated congregations, only half of those children continue in religious school until tenth grade and only one in ten remains enrolled through twelfth grade.⁶ The Campaign for Youth Engagement has argued that “the most powerful [Jewish learning] experiences are hands-on opportunities to build, taste, and explore while nurturing powerful, life-long friendships.”⁷ With all of this information in mind, this curriculum will strive to create hands-on learning opportunities to engage middle-school aged children with the complex and rich history of Reform Judaism and its application to modern-day issues of central importance to American Jewish middle school age children, such as social justice, Israel, and environmentalism. At the same time, this curriculum, through a series of regularized activities, inspired by the writings of Rachael Kessler, will strive to create a classroom community where life-long friendships are able to flourish.

Setting and Model

This curriculum is intended to be used at Isaac M. Wise Temple in Cincinnati, a congregation affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism, in their two day-a-week supplemental school; however, it could easily be adapted to be used in other settings. The curriculum will include a thirteen week-long semester course for sixth graders. Each of the thirteen units will be two hours and fifteen minutes in length. Each unit is intended to be taught

⁵ “About Us,” B’nai Mitzvah Revolution, accessed on October 7, 2012, <http://www.bnaimitzvahrevolution.org/about-us/>.

⁶ “Education: Preventing Post-B’nai Mitzvah Dropout-itis,” Reform Judaism Online, accessed on December 16, 2012, <http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=1538>.

⁷ “Top 10 Things to Know about the Campaign for Youth Engagement,” Reform Judaism, accessed on October 7, 2012, <http://blogs.rj.org/blog/2012/05/02/top-10-things-to-know-about-the-campaign-for-youth-engagement/>.

in consecutive weeks, either during the weekday or during weekend religious school sessions, depending upon the specific needs and structure of the congregation.

Rationale Describing Worthiness of Unit

This curriculum is intended to expose students to social issues in the world, in order to help them confront life's often confusing and difficult questions with Reform values and to help them begin to think about the direction they want to take their *B'nai Mitzvah* projects, something determined during the 7th grade academic year. Each of the topics covered, at least the ones suggested in the curricular outline, represent a spiraling back to topics covered in greater depth as a part of their education program in previous years. For example, the topic of Israel, addressed in session number five, is a return to a topic that is covered for the entire year in grade four. Therefore, the topics addressed in this curriculum do not function as an exhaustive introduction and overview of the topic, but rather represent the revisiting of a topic that has previously been addressed with the hope that this spiraling to the same topics at new developmental and experiential levels will create richer, deeper learning and allow the learner the time and space to consider the potential role that Reform values play when confronting these important topics.

Intended Learners

Jewish middle-school age students are at a critical time of Jewish identity formation, still in the process of preparation for *B'nai Mitzvah*. They are beginning to explore what it means to be an adult in the Jewish community and the responsibilities that this entails. At the same time, they are often extremely sensitive and aware of inequality in the world around them and they are

highly inspired to right these injustices. Developmentally around puberty, some early adolescents, ages ten to fourteen “begin to incorporate moral traits into their overall sense of self” and by older adolescence, “high moral values are a central part of their overall identity.”⁸ “These individuals often show a strong commitment to helping those less fortunate than themselves.”⁹ This curriculum aims to reach students who themselves are transitioning from early to late adolescence and are beginning to explore their own personal understanding of how moral reasoning relates to the self and to challenge them to think critically about social and moral issues to which Reform Judaism responds. Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987), a psychological theorist made famous by his stages of moral development, argued that children morally progress when presented with challenges that their current stage of morality cannot address. Although Kohlberg’s stages have been contested by modern theorists; his understanding that disequilibrium leads to moral development has been supported by contemporary theorists. “For instance, discussions of controversial topics and moral issues appear to promote the development of moral reasoning, especially when children are exposed to reasoning that’s slightly more advanced than their own.”¹⁰ This curriculum hopes to challenge its learners to explore new issues related to morality and to present social issues in a way that causes them to evaluate their own beliefs and reconsider their previously held notions.

It is important to understand, not only the learner’s moral development, but also their relationship with Reform Judaism. At best, these teens may be actively involved in a Reform youth group, attend URJ overnight camps or at least actively identify as Reform Jews. Yet Reform middle schoolers are often unaware that Reform Judaism provides a path to self-

⁸ Teresa M. McDevitt and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Child Development and Education* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004), 520.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 521.

exploration by welcoming a broad range of opinions and encouraging individuals to confront injustice in the world. This curriculum aims to fill this void and to provide hands-on activities to encourage teens to confront and think about social issues within the context of a Reform framework.

Although every session addresses a different content area, each session follows the same class structure in order to provide a feeling of uniformity to the curriculum. At the suggestion of educator Cyd Weissman, each lesson abides by the following form— 1) stop, 2) look right, 3) look left, and 4) move forward. This is intended to be easy to remember, when one confronts a situation in life that is confusing and challenging, such as stop, drop, and roll when one sees a fire or smells smoke. It is hoped that this model of stop, look right, look left, and move forward will provide the pause necessary to make well informed decisions inspired by Reform Jewish tradition. Stop means pausing to consider and reflect on the confusing and challenging world that often confronts us and assessing what is really the question at hand. Look right means looking right toward Reform Jewish tradition and looking left means looking toward society, family and peers for discussion and dialogue. Finally, move forward refers to moving forward with one's own life after having first clarified the issue at hand, considered Reform Jewish tradition and the voice of others, and finally moving forward. This form is introduced during session one and repeatedly reinforced during sessions two through twelve.

After each content area has been covered—Environmentalism, Israel: The People and the Land, Seeking Justice, and Prayer and Spirituality, and two additional topics to be determined by the learners (the process for determining these subjects will be addressed below), each participant will select one area in which to “move forward,” in the form of a group project. Each

content area has a group project that will be introduced at the end of every lesson. The entire class will have the opportunity to begin thinking about the project, however, the final project will be worked on by those who choose that project as their opportunity to “move forward,” and participate in his or her project-based learning opportunity. Inspired by educator Ron Berger’s project-based learning, the curriculum includes the opportunity for students to prepare presentations to be presented to their families during a family *siyyum* that occurs during the final session, session 13. Berger believes that the pressure placed upon the students of presenting their work to the community can serve as a motivating factor.¹¹ Additionally, as Berger suggested in his work *An Ethic of Excellence*, it is not enough for learners to simply prepare a presentation, but instead there is great value in the process of peer critique and redrafting/revising. Berger believes that “critique sessions *are* the lessons.”¹² Berger has three rules for protocols—1) Be kind, 2) Be specific, and 3) Be helpful. An example of a protocol for critique can be seen in the fully scripted lesson plan for session 11. Finally, one other aspect of Berger’s project-based learning is utilized during session 12, revision of the group presentations to be presented during session 13. Berger argues that “students need to know from the outset that quality means rethinking, reworking, and polishing. They need to feel that they will be celebrated, not ridiculed for going back to the drawing board.”¹³ Although multiple drafts would strengthen the impact on the students’ learning, because of time constraints, the groups only have one opportunity to redraft and revise their presentations before delivering them to their families and other groups during the family *siyyum*.

¹¹ Ron Berger, *An Ethic of Excellence*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), 101.

¹² Berger, 93.

¹³ Berger, 90.

In an attempt to create meaningful life transfer of the values learned and practiced in the classroom to the “real world,” the students will be responsible to lead weekly discussions with their families, known as “Dinner Dilemmas.” Open-ended questions on the topic of the week, created by the students in the classroom at the conclusion of each lesson, will serve as the springboard for the “Dinner Dilemmas” conversations. The formulation of “Dinner Dilemmas” with their peers and then the corresponding conversations with their parents takes into account that parents and peers are two of the most influential factors in children’s moral development.¹⁴ Therefore, by having students generate and develop questions for discussion with their peers and then assigning students to bring home these questions to discuss with their families, it is hoped that these two powerful spheres of influence, peers and parents, will encourage the students to consider Jewish values when faced with tough decisions.

Following each “Dinner Dilemma” discussion at home with their families, the students will be responsible for going to the group’s Facebook page and posting on the wall something related to the discussion (something they never thought about, something interesting that came up, or a way in which the “Dinner Dilemma” conversation reinforced their previously held concepts). Each student will also be asked to comment on the postings of two other classmates. Parents and siblings will also be encouraged to post on the page or comment on the classes’ posted comments. In addition to the life transfer that this creates for the students, this is also an alternative way to engage in family education, utilizing the students as teachers. It will be necessary to meet with the parents at the beginning of each unit to explain the role of “Dinner Dilemmas” in the curriculum and the importance of their support in this endeavor.

¹⁴ Judith G. Smetana, “The Role of Parents in Moral Development: A Social Domain Analysis,” University of Rochester, accessed on April 15, 2013, <http://tigger.uic.edu/~Inucci/MoralEd/articles/smetana.html>.

Educator Rachael Kessler believes that a sacred community, wherein depth and personal discussions can occur, needs to be actively built by providing students with “opportunities to channel their energy constructively and to explore their mysteries with peers and supportive elders.”¹⁵ The creation of such an environment facilitates an opportunity for finding “balance, integrity, meaning, and connection.”¹⁶ Often, learners at this developmental stage are not able to access their own “personal mysteries” and they benefit from being guided through a process of personal exploration and community building, in order to get the most from learning in a group setting.

This sacred community and space for personal exploration can be created through a series of four steps, as suggested by Kessler. A portion of each lesson in this curriculum will utilize these four, sequential steps in the hope of forming a sacred community where learners are able to access and bring their questions for personal and group exploration. The four steps include: a ground rules process, games and symbolic expression, the mysteries questions process, and the council process. A brief description of each of the four steps and an explanation of its function follows.

First, Kessler argues that ground rules create a place for students to speak with authenticity, and “empowers students to define and take ownership of the conditions for safety in their group.”¹⁷ These ground rules can be determined through a series of questions. For example, “What actions, what behaviors tell us we can begin to trust?”¹⁸ The group’s response to these questions serves as a list of ground rules for the remainder of the course. After these

¹⁵ Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School* (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000), xiii.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

ground rules have been determined, Kessler suggests that the group spends a few weeks participating in a series of games and symbolic expression for the purpose of allowing participants to indirectly express themselves with the hope of gradually moving deeper. An example of such an activity may include asking every member of the group to bring something to the group that represents them and then putting these items on display for others to see as a way of getting to know one another. An example of such a game can be seen in the fully scripted lesson plan on Environmentalism. Next, the mysteries questions process, which is supposed to occur during the fourth or fifth week of the course, once trust has begun to develop, aims at helping the students uncover and discuss what is in the students' hearts. As one of the greatest concerns for middle schoolers is fitting in,¹⁹ it is often difficult for them to share their own opinions, which would involve them actively choosing to stand out from the group from which they are so desperately trying to be accepted. The power of the mysteries questions process is that it occurs anonymously, creating an opportunity for students to express themselves, free of the fear of being stigmatized or isolated from the group. In this way, under the promise of anonymity, each middle schooler is free to express what is really on their mind and in their heart. For example, the following prompt might be given, to which the students are asked to answer anonymously: "Please write about what you wonder about when you cannot sleep at night."²⁰ The teacher or facilitator then would collect all of the responses and share them with the entire group during the next session. An example of this can be seen in the fully scripted lesson plan number five on the topic of Seeking Justice. The topics that arise from this activity, drafted during lesson five, are shared with the group during lesson six and are used to determine the direction that the curriculum takes and the topics addressed in lessons seven and eight. Since

¹⁹ Julianna Michael and Steve Sawitsky, "Managing the Middle School Years," South Orangetown Central School District, accessed on May 8, 2013, http://www.socsd.org/soms/Managing_the_middle_school_years.pdf.

²⁰ Kessler, 11.

one of the functions of the curriculum is to respond to the learner's questions, this process allows us to access their questions and adapt the curriculum accordingly.

Finally, the last part of the four step process, the council process, begins immediately after the mysteries questions are read during lesson six and continues through lesson twelve. The council process is a series of structured group discussions on topics that allows learners to learn more about each other as well as themselves. It provides an opportunity for students to share stories and speak about what matters most to them. For instance, on the topic of trust, the following prompt might be raised. Share about "a time someone in your life was really there for you."²¹ These discussions are controlled via an object that is passed from participant to participant and designates who has the right to speak and a discrete time-keeping device is used to determine that each student has equal time to participate.²² An example of this step can be seen in fully scripted lesson number 11.

Guide for Educator, Literature Review, List of Resources

A successful teacher of this course will be a young adult, at least the age of a college student, who will relate well to a group of middle-school age children. He or she will be familiar with the students' cognitive and emotional development and also aware of their social interests. The instructor will need to have a general understanding of the history of Reform Judaism in America, in particular the various platforms of the movement. The teacher will need to be passionate about Reform Judaism, perhaps a product of URJ camps and NFTY and also have great pride in the history of Reform Judaism. Additionally, since the curriculum is geared toward the application of Reform values, the instructor will need to be passionate about social

²¹ Ibid., 14.

²² Ibid.

justice issues, Israel (the land and its people), Jewish peoplehood, environmentalism, and spirituality. Next, the instructor should have read *The Soul of Education* by Rachel Kessler and be good at facilitating group discussions, compassionate toward the needs of his or her learners, and mature enough to handle serious discussions and questions that will arise during Kessler's process of self-discovery. Finally, the instructor should also be organized and experienced enough to be able to create lessons seven and eight based upon the questions that the learners bring up during previous lessons. Therefore the instructor would need to be motivated enough to search out material on the desired subject matter in order to create meaningful lessons on these topics that have yet to be determined.

Resources for the teachers are essential. Possible resources include the following:

Books:

Bernstein, Ellen. *Ecology and the Jewish Spirit*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998.

Borowitz, Eugene B. and Naomi Patz. *Explaining Reform Judaism*. New York: Behrman House, 1985.

Grant, Lisa D. and Ezra M. Kopelowitz. *Israel Education Matters: A 21st Century Paradigm for Jewish Education*. Jerusalem: The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education, 2012.

iCenter. *The Aleph-Bet of Israel Education*. Chicago: iCenter.

Kessler, Rachael. *The Soul of Education*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000.

Meyer, Michael. *The Reform Judaism Reader*. New York: UAHC Press, 2001.

Perlstein, Linda. *Not Much Just Chillin': The Hidden Lives of Middle Schoolers*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2003.

Schwartzman, Sylvan D. *Reform Judaism in the Making*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1955.

Sonsino, Rifat and Daniel B. Syme. *Finding God*. New York: UAHC Press, 1996.

Vorspan, Albert. *Jewish Values and Social Crisis: A casebook for social action*. New York: UAHC, 1974.

------. *Reform Judaism Then and Now*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1971.

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

------. *Tough Choices: Jewish Perspectives on Social Justice*. New York: UAHC, 1992.

Curriculum:

Abraham, Michelle Shapiro. *And Makes Us Holy... An Exploration of Mitzvot*. 1996.

Appelman (Allee), Amy Nicole. *A Comparative Survey of Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, & Reconstructionist Judaism*. 2000.

Arian, Ramie. *Reform Judaism: A Resource and Study Guide*. New York: NFTY, 1984-85.

Bell, Missy. *Tzedakah Tzedakah Tirdof: A Curriculum Guide on Making Jewish Philanthropic Decisions*. 2009.

Bluman, Olga. *Exploring Reform Judaism through the Lens of Jewish Ritual and Sacred Practices*. 2008.

Fleekop, Andrea. *Reform Judaism in America: Modern, American, and Jewish*. 2003.

Frank, Carrie. *Economic Justice in Judaism: Understanding Hunger, Homelessness, Health Care and Worker's Rights through the Lens of Jewish Texts*. 2007.

Litwak (Berkowits), Deborah A. *Jewish Identity Through Reflection: A Look at the Platforms of Reform Judaism*. 1994

Pamphlets:

"21 Questions on Progressive Judaism." World Union for Progressive Judaism.

"What We Believe...What We do..." New York: UAHC Press, 1993.

Outcomes

Religious School Mission Statement (Isaac M. Wise Temple of Cincinnati, Ohio)

Reform Jewish education responds to the child's intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical needs. We believe that our school should give our students: 1) a sound foundation of knowledge about Jewish history, literature, customs, ceremonies, and prayers 2) opportunities to explore the spiritual, intellectual, and affective aspects of religion and tradition, and 3) "hands-on" experiences of Jewish life and learning.

Our educational program works to foster deep knowledge of and sense of responsibility toward Judaism and a commitment and connection to Jewish life and community. Our goals include:

To Teach Our Students to:

1. Strive to create a balance of Talmud Torah, Avodah, and Gemillut Chassadim (Jewish learning, Jewish living, and Jewish caring)
2. Decode Hebrew and gain contextual understanding of Torah and Prayer
3. Habituate understanding and practice of Tikkun Olam (acts of social justice)
4. Develop positive, celebratory experiences, and memories with Judaism
5. Learn and practice the values, rituals, and prayers of Judaism
6. Delve into the stories and history of the Jewish people
7. Approach Jewish living as active, joyous participants
8. Be responsible and caring members of our congregation, K'lal Yisrael, the Jewish people, and the broader community in which we live

To Nurture Jews who:

1. Are strengthened in their Jewish identity and connect themselves to the Jewish people by word and deed.
2. Celebrate Shabbat and the festivals and observe the Jewish ceremonies marking the significant occasions in their lives.
3. Affirm their historic bond to Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel.
4. Esteem their own person and the person of others; their own family and the family of others; their own community and the community of others.
5. Support and participate in the life of the synagogue.
6. Understand Jewish learning as a lifelong process.

We seek to provide a safe and sacred space for our children and their families to discover the joys, the values, the knowledge, and the tools of Jewish life and living.²³

Selected Priority Goals

This course will focus specifically on numbers three, four, five, seven, and eight from the area of “To Teach Our Students To.” This course will help to habituate understanding and practice of *Tikkun Olam* by introducing a variety of topics that may interest the students and later connect with their *B’nai Mitzvah* projects. This course will develop positive Jewish memories by engaging the children in meaningful discussions and activities with their peers about topics of central importance to middle schoolers, such as the environment, Israel, God, social justice, etc. They will also develop positive Jewish memories by building a sacred Jewish community through the four steps suggested by Rachael Kessler. Additionally, the students will learn the values of Judaism by being presented with different topics that are expressions of Reform Jewish

²³ “Religious School Philosophy and Curriculum,” Isaac M. Wise Temple, accessed on November 20, 2012, <http://www.wisetemple.org/?page=philosophy>.

values and helping to transfer these values to their everyday lives. The students will approach Jewish living as active, joyous participants, as they have the ability to choose and engage with areas that are of particular interest to them and then share their passion with their classmates and families both through the participation in “Dinner Dilemmas” and the family *siyyum*.

Additionally, this course will encourage learners to be responsible and caring members of our congregation, *K'lal Yisrael*, the Jewish people, and the broader community in which we live, by encouraging them to stand up against injustice. They will also bring the lessons learned in the classroom into their homes by facilitating weekly discussions with their families.

This course will focus specifically on numbers one, three, four, and five from the area of “To Nurture Jews Who.” This curriculum will nurture Jews who are strengthened in their Jewish identity and connect themselves to the Jewish people by word and deed by helping to inspire learners to stop, ask questions, and consider Reform Jewish traditions and the ideas/beliefs of their peers and families before moving forward to take action. Also, learners will affirm their historic bond to *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel by learning about the unique relationship between Reform Judaism and modern Israel. They will have an opportunity to affirm this bond by having the option to select the area of Israel: The People and the Land for their group project, allowing them to learn more about this area in preparation for their presentations to their classmates and families. Next, these lessons nurture Jews who esteem their own person and the person of others; their own family and the family of others; their own community and the community of others by building a sacred community through the four steps suggested by Rachael Kessler’s model of building a community. This lesson also tries to foster respect among families by empowering the students to lead meaningful conversations at home that parallel those occurring in the classroom. Additionally, the various units of content all are outward

looking, concerning broader issues both within and without the Jewish community—environmentalism, Israel, social justice, and prayer/spirituality. Finally, learners in this course hopefully will support and participate in the life of the synagogue by learning that they can use Judaism as a foundation to help them confront many of life’s challenges.

Enduring Understandings

1. The world can be a confusing and challenging place, and Reform Judaism helps to provide a mechanism for making sense of the world.
2. I can bring my life’s questions to Reform Judaism and find answers to subjects that matter to me.

Essential Questions

1. In what ways does Reform Judaism help me to be my best self?
2. How do I make a difference?

Learner Outcomes

1. **Know**—Learners will know the tenets and practices of Reform Judaism in the areas of environmentalism, social justice, Israel, and spirituality, and two topic areas to be determined by the learners.
2. **Do**—Learners will articulate their opinions at the beginning of the course on all of the subjects to be discussed. After learning more about the issues and confronting some of the challenges, and engaging in the initial steps of an application project with the entire class, they will select one area of personal interest to them and articulate their views at the end of the course through a final project to be presented to their peers and families. They will also use the process

of stop, look right, look left, and move forward to address a series of issues in various content areas.

3. **Value/believe**—Learners will explore and express the value of standing up for what is right, according to their own understanding of *tzedek* through the completion of a group project and its presentation to peers and families.

4. **Belong /describe**—Learners will explore their connection to the Reform Jewish community, by building a sacred community with their peers, teachers, families, and their congregation, by exploring the challenges and benefits of using a Reform framework to guide decision making and using the four steps suggested by Rachael Kessler.

Process to be Used to Engage Learners in Determining Outcomes

Throughout the unit, learners will keep a journal with prompts to which they will respond. This journal will be aimed at assessing how close they are to attaining the aforementioned learner outcomes. They will be asked to share some of their entries with each other and with the instructor. They can answer prompts through the use of essays, poetry, drawings, notes, etc. Additionally, learners will also be posting weekly comments on the group's Facebook wall about what transpired during their "Dinner Dilemma" conversation and commenting on one another's posts. Finally, learners will have a chance to fill out an electronic written survey at the end of the course evaluating their participation in the group project, critique process, revision process, and presentation and its impact on these four areas of knowing, doing, believing, and belonging.

Tools and Prompts for Data Collection

At the beginning of the unit, prior to commencing any instruction, the students will be asked to share their opinions on a number of areas that will be covered in the course, i.e.

environmentalism social justice, Israel, spirituality (sessions three through six). As the other two areas of content (sessions seven and eight) will be determined later in the course, as a result of the mysteries questions process conducted during session four and revealed during session five, journaling on these two alternative topics may occur during session five, after they are revealed or during session six. What is important is that the personal reflection of opinions occurs before the formal instruction on these topics, during sessions, seven and eight, so that there is material from which to draw a pre-class and post-class comparison.

At the end of content focused sessions of the curriculum (sessions two through eight), learners will select one area about which they feel particularly passionate and participate in a group project with others who select the same area of study. Upon completion and presentation of this project (session 13), a comparison can be drawn between their prior opinion on that topic, as expressed in their journals, and those that they expressed at the end of the course through their project. For the other content areas, those not covered by their group project, they will have an opportunity to respond in their journals to the same prompts that they did at the beginning of the course during each lesson on the aforementioned topic. During the time allotted to journaling in each content area, learners may go back to previous entries and add new questions, challenges, or insight. Throughout the unit, their journal entries may be used to keep track of a “close, middle, and far” chart to measure how close they are to the noticing targets. Additionally, both the students and the teacher will also be able to track growth throughout the unit by being able to look back at the history of the Facebook postings and comments. This data will be public to all members of the Facebook group (students, parents, siblings, teacher, and educational staff).

Lesson Outline

#	Topic	Core Concept
1	Building A Sacred Community	Learners will be introduced to one another as explorers in a shared educational journey. Based upon Rachael Kessler's book <i>The Soul of Education</i> , students will evaluate what is really important to them and will ask questions about their own "personal mysteries." Learners will engage in the ground rules process and journal on all of the pre-determined topics (e.g. Environmentalism, Seeking Justice, Prayer and Spirituality, and Israel: the People and the Land).
2	History of Reform Judaism	Learners will study the history of Reform Judaism and current trends and challenges. Learners will participate in games and symbolic expressions.
3	Environmentalism	Learners will explore Reform understandings of environmentalism, and students will apply these principles. Learners will participate in games and symbolic expressions.
4	Israel: The People and the Land	Learners will explore the dynamic relationship between Reform Judaism and Am/Eretz Yisrael and try to translate their own visions into action. Learners will participate in the mysteries questions process.
5	Seeking Justice	Learners will strive to understand the development of social justice in the Reform movement and will apply these principles to issues of importance to them. The results of the mysteries questions process will be revealed and the TBD content areas presented. Learners will journal one of the TBD topic areas.
6	Prayer and Spirituality	Learners will explore the place of God and prayer in Reform Jewish tradition and then create their own worship experience for their classmates. Learners will participate in the council process. Learners will journal the other TBD topic area.
7	TBD by Learners	Learners will select a topic of importance to them and explore its place within Reform tradition and create a project to translate their ideas into action. Learners will participate in the council process.
8	TBD by Learners	Learners will select a topic of importance to them and explore its place within Reform tradition and create a project to translate their ideas into action. Learners will participate in the council process.
9	Group Projects	Learners will select one topic to explore in more depth by working with peers to complete a major project. Learners will participate in the council process.
10	Group Projects	Learners will complete their projects and prepare their presentations for their <i>siyyum</i> . Learners will participate in the council process.

11	Peer, Self, and Guest Critique	Learners will give their presentations to one another and offer peer critique and self critique. Guest critique will add an extra level of expertise to the conversation. Learners will participate in the council process.
12	Revision/Redraft	Based upon guest and peer feedback, groups will make changes and revisions to their presentations in preparation for the closing <i>siyyum</i> . Learners will participate in the council process.
13	Family <i>Siyyum</i>	Learners will present their group projects to their classmates and families as a closing to the course.

Three Fully Scripted Lesson Plans

Session Three: Environmentalism

Relevant Unit Enduring Understanding utilized in this lesson:

The world can be a confusing and challenging place, and Reform Judaism helps to provide a mechanism for making sense of the world. This lesson provides a way to make sense of an environment in distress and demands action.

Relevant Unit Essential Questions utilized in this lesson:

How do I make a difference? A large portion of the lesson provides a space for the students to answer this very question in relation to the environment.

Relevant KDBB utilized in this lesson:

The lesson provides knowledge of the Reform position on environmentalism. Learners will clarify their own views on environmentalism and then stand-up for what they believe is right by advocating for a change within their congregation. They will feel a sense of belonging to and ownership of their congregation by working with their peers to draft a letter to congregational leadership urging them to make a change in the status quo related to the environment.

Core Concept:

Learners will explore Reform understandings of environmentalism, and students will apply these principles. This is significant for the learner because middle school children are particularly aware of the current state of the environment and the need for action.

Essential Questions:

How can I improve the environment? What does Judaism say about the environment? Why should I care?

Evidence of Understanding:

Students will be able to write a letter to congregational leadership articulating their personal beliefs related to environmentalism, supported by Reform Jewish values and traditional texts, if they desire and urge them to take specific actions, determined by the learners, to be more environmentally friendly.

Outline of the Lesson (2 hours and 15 minutes):

(Learners have previously been introduced to the big “why” in the first lesson.)

Note to the Educator:

This lesson is about framing the issue of environmentalism within a Reform Jewish context. Being “green” has already been accepted as an almost universal value. This lesson is aimed at exploring how Reform Judaism responds to this issue and then evaluating how the local synagogue responds and where it might improve its practice. You may choose to frame this conversation for the students by discussing how they live our “green” values. You might transition by mentioning that today they will be discussing how Reform Judaism addresses this issue.

Games and Symbolic Expression (15 minutes):

Everyone is asked to bring in an object that symbolizes something really important to them. Objects should be returned to school in a brown paper bag so that no one will know who brought in which object. Instruct students that they shouldn’t discuss with each other what they are planning to bring. The teacher or *madrichim* will display the objects on a long table. Allow the students to walk around and look at one another’s object and then have the students sit back down. Invite one student up at a time. This student should select an object, ask whose object it is and then say, “So and So, What’s your story?” Instruct students that their stories should be limited to 1 minute each.

STOP: Set-Induction (10 Minutes):

Prior to the class beginning, the teacher should go online to any major news source and select ten recent, relevant articles about the environment. They may consider looking at the “living, health, and science” sections of online news. Articles should be enlarged and hung on large Post-it notes in a hallway or free room in the building. Allow students to wander and glance at the articles (7 minutes). Bring the group back together and ask a few students to share in one sentence, what are some of the current, environmental issues that we are facing.

LOOK RIGHT: Exploring Jewish Tradition (15 minutes):

Students will spend 15 minutes with a partner studying the “*Tu B’svat* Living Talmud” page from the Religious Action Center (10 minutes). Before beginning the text study, the class should recite the blessing for the study of Torah, which should be posted around the room. The teacher should explain to the students that this page is structured like a traditional *Talmud* page, meaning that a central text appears in the middle, surrounded by other texts. In this case, it is a quote from *Bereshit*, Genesis, and can be found in the center box. All of the surrounding texts are commentaries, or interpretations of this central text. Some of these surrounding texts might clarify or explain the central text, while others may attempt to fill in missing details or suggest an application of the central text. Since this is a living *Talmud* page, it includes modern sources, both Jewish and non-Jewish. This living *Talmud* page teaches us that there is room for many voices and that we are in conversation both with each other and with the past. Today, you will have your chance to add your voice to this conversation, so listen to what others say and feel, but also listen to your heart. How do the issues that we will discuss today speak to you?

Recommend to students that they begin by reading the middle text aloud and then move to the surrounding texts. Explain that there is no order for the texts. They can move around the page in any way that they choose, stopping at texts that interest or challenge them and moving quickly over texts that don't. Throughout their discussions with their partners, they should stop and ask themselves, "What does this text mean and what can it teach me?" After students have completed their partner discussions, two student pairs will join together and share with each other something that they found interesting or challenging or something that they discussed with their partner. (5 minutes)

LOOK RIGHT: Reform Jewish positions on environmentalism (20 minutes):

Distribute the guiding question handout and review it with the students. Encourage students to take notes on the questions so that they can later use this handout as a resource. Give students 20 minutes to explore the URJ's Greening Initiative (<http://urj.org/green/>) on their cell phones or on a laptop. You may also encourage them to read portions of Rabbi Eric Yoffie's Toronto Biennial Sermon (http://urj.org/about/union/leadership/yoffie/?syspage=article&item_id=27481) or they may watch portions of the imbedded video on the same website.

Bring students back together and ask them to share with one another what they learned about the Reform movement and environmentalism. They may share as a large group or in pairs (5 minutes).

Synagogue slideshow (10 minutes):

Show portions of the following slide show to look at what other Reform congregations and URJ camps are doing to be more "green." Tell students that they should be watching the slides to see what other places are doing and what types of changes they find interesting. (http://urj.org/green/programs/?syspage=document&item_id=64974).

LOOK LEFT: What is our community doing? (25 minutes):

Divide students up into five groups ("Conserve Energy," "Conserve Land and Curb Consumption," "Conserve Eco-friendly Food, Cleaners and other Products," "Conserve Reduce Paper Wastage," and "Conserve Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle"). Each group will receive one page from the PDF below to help guide them on their search. They are simply looking to assess if the practice exists in the synagogue or if it's absent. Note that the students will not use pages five or seven of the PDF, because these categories would be too difficult for the students to assess in the allotted time. Have learners go around the synagogue building and explore what environmentally friendly policies the congregation has implemented and where they might yet become more green (http://urj.org/kd/_temp/ABF05967-1D09-6781-A1D799BB1A5EE9D6/Conservation%20Category%20full.pdf). Make sure that an individual who works in the office, a maintenance person, and someone familiar with the kitchen is available to meet with students during this time to help answer their questions about the synagogue's current practices (18 minutes). Have the groups report back their findings to one another (7 minutes).

LOOK LEFT: Considering Our Peers—Drafting a letter to congregational leadership (20 minutes):

After hearing the groups' reports from the scavenger hunt, the group will decide on one area that they would like the synagogue to improve upon in their current environmental practice. Students will then begin to draft a letter to the congregational leadership. Recommend to them that they consider the URJ websites they previously explored, what other synagogues are doing, as evidenced by the slide show that they viewed, and support their opinion with the Jewish texts that they studied during the set induction. They should also consider the insights of their peers. This group will only begin drafting ideas, as this project will become the final project for the students who choose to focus on Reform Judaism and environmentalism.

LOOK LEFT: Journaling (10 minutes):

Students will journal about environmentalism. They will respond to the same prompt about environmentalism that they did in the first lesson: What is the current state of the environment? How do you feel about that?

LOOK LEFT: Dinner Dilemma (5 minutes):

Students will create a question about environmentalism to which they would like their families to respond. The construct of "Dinner Dilemmas" will be outlined and discussed in the first lesson. After the students create their question, it will be posted by the teacher on the group's Facebook wall. A reminder should be sent out the following Friday afternoon, reminding the students to post their comments on their family's "Dinner Dilemma" conversation.

MOVE FORWARD: This is represented by choosing to select this topic as one's group project and ultimately determining the requests that will be made of the synagogue.

Materials:

Tu B'Shvat Living Talmud Handout

(http://rac.org/pdf/index.cfm?id=21828&pge_prg_id=14312&pge_id=3010)

Scavenger Hunt Handout

(http://urj.org/kd/_temp/476976E8-1D09-6781-A1EA2EDDD27529B4/Conservation%20Category%20full.pdf)

Projector

Screen

Laptop

Computers/smart phones

Lined Paper

Pens

Student Journals

Guiding Questions handout (See below.)

Wireless internet

Guiding Questions Handout for Internet Search

What basic environmental issues interest me and why?

Why is “greening” a Jewish issue?

What does Reform Judaism advocate about environmentalism and why?

How is this different than the “just Jewish” position on environmentalism? Is it different than what I learn in secular school?

Does this matter?

Where might I look for more resources on the topic?

Session Five: Seeking Justice

Relevant Unit Enduring Understanding utilized in this lesson:

The world can be a confusing and challenging place, and Reform Judaism helps to provide a mechanism for making sense of the world. This lesson provides a way to make sense of an unjust world by demanding action.

I can bring my life's questions to Reform Judaism and find answers to subjects that matter to me. Reform Judaism encourages me to pay attention to injustices in the world, ask critical questions about inequality, and provides a framework for me to be an advocate and actor in helping to right these wrongs.

Relevant Unit Essential Questions utilized in this lesson:

In what ways does Reform Judaism help me to be my best self? Reform Judaism provides a rich tradition of pursuing justice.

How do I make a difference? A large portion of the lesson provides the space for students to answer this very question in relation to injustice, by looking at the unique role of Reform Judaism as advocates for equality and by providing a space for students to explore issues of personal importance in the area of social justice.

Relevant KDBB utilized in this lesson:

The lesson provides knowledge of the Reform position on social justice. Additionally, learners will clarify their own views of social justice and try to apply these principles to a social justice issue that matters to them. Also, learners will explore and express the value of standing up for what is right, according to their own understanding of *tzedek*, by investigating a particular area of injustice in the world. Ultimately, one topic will be picked for the group project on the topic of "Seeking Justice." Finally, students will feel a sense of belonging to the larger Reform Jewish community by exploring the ways in which Reform Judaism responds to a given cause. It is hoped that this exercise will inspire and motivate learners to join a fight against injustice.

Core Concept:

Learners will strive to understand the development of social justice in the Reform movement and will apply these principles to issues of importance to them. The results of the mysteries questions process will be revealed and the TBD content areas presented. Learners will journal on TBD topic areas.

Essential Questions:

How can I improve the world around me? What does Reform Judaism teach about social justice? What actions can I take and what resources exist within the Reform community? Why should I care?

Evidence of Understanding:

Students will each select a social justice issue that is important to them. After exploring Reform Judaism's position on the topic and meeting with their peers, learners will suggest a course of action. Ultimately, one of these issues will become the group project in the area of "Seeking Justice."

Outline of the Lesson (2 hours and 15 minutes):**Mysteries Questions Process Revealed (10 minutes):**

All of the mysteries questions that were turned in anonymously during the last session (session four on Israel: The People and the Land) are read aloud to the entire group, unedited and uncensored. It is hoped that the level of respect for one another that has been actively constructed over the past 4 weeks will prevent any immature or deliberately obnoxious questions from entering the mix.

Responding to Mysteries Questions (10 minutes):

Students should be allowed an opportunity to respond to the questions shared by a means that is most beneficial for the students. The instructor might give them an option of journaling individually, talking about the mysteries questions in small groups, or discussing as a whole class. If the facilitator opts for a large class discussion, the following questions might be considered or may be distributed on a handout for small group discussion:

What surprised you about the questions?

In what subject areas did you hear overlap or conflicting ideas?

Does hearing the questions of your classmates change the way in which you see others?

Presenting TBD Topics (5 minutes):

Share with the students that as a result of the mysteries questions process, you have selected two additional areas that this course will address (sessions seven and eight). The instructor should select the topics based upon areas of overlap or an area where there is an area of conflict. For example, if many people wrote questions about concerns over safety and violence in school, this would become one of the TBD topics. Share that you would love to be able to take the time to consider all of the questions that they wrote, but unfortunately, due to time constraints, this isn't possible.

Journaling on TBD Topics (10 minutes):

Learners will select one of the two announced topics to respond to a prompt in their journal. Whichever topic they don't select to write about during this journaling period, they will have an opportunity to do during the next session (session six on Prayer and Spirituality). These journaling periods will act as the preliminary assessment for the TBD topics. As the instructor might recall, the assessment for the other topics was completed during the first class session;

however, this was not possible for the TBD topics, as they were determined only later by the mysteries questions process.

STOP: Set-Induction (15 minutes):

Break up the class into groups of four. Share with participants that for today, these will be your working groups. Ask the learners to discuss the following in their working groups:

Think of a time when you saw injustice in the world. This should not be a story that you heard from another person, but something that you saw with your own eyes. How did seeing this injustice make you feel? If you're comfortable, share the story and how it made you feel with your group.

(The instructor might begin by sharing a story from his or her own life and how it made him or her feel. If the teacher chooses to begin with a story, it is most effective to share the story before breaking up the class and giving instructions.)

LOOK RIGHT: Biblical Jewish Tradition and Social Justice (15 minutes):

Distribute the Seeking Justice Text Study Handout. They should complete the text study in their working groups. Prior to beginning the text study, the class should recite the blessing before the study of Torah together. The prayer should be hung up around the room.

LOOK RIGHT: Classical Reform Jewish Tradition and Social Justice (15 minutes)

It is recommended that the facilitator review the principles and history of Classical Reform Judaism before teaching this section. See <http://www.renewreform.org/principles.php>.

Share with the learners that the roots of social justice in the Reform movement are intimately connected with Classical Reform Judaism. "The term "Classical Reform" is the most commonly used expression to denote the historic expression of Reform Judaism, as it developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries."²⁴ However, it is worthwhile to clarify for the learners that the term Classical Reform Judaism doesn't only refer to this historical time period, but also refers to a modern, mainstream form of Reform Judaism that represents a series of Reform beliefs, such as accessibility of worship, using prophetic vision to ground decision making, centrality of the heritage of life as American Jews, and advocacy and outreach for Reform families.

Share with the students that Classical Reform Judaism had its roots in the prophetic writings, some of which we read during the previous text study. Classical Reformers believed that it was more important to live out these ideals through social justice and ethical action, than was religious observance or ceremonial law.²⁵ It was from this rich tradition, that the notion of *Tikkun Olam*, the obligation to repair the world, became a pillar of the Reform movement.

²⁴ Howard Berman, "Classical Reform Judaism: A Concise Profile," The Society for Classical Reform Judaism, accessed on May 10, 2013, <http://www.renewreform.org/docs/principles.pdf>.

²⁵ Ibid.

Put the following quote from the Union Prayer Book on a PowerPoint slide so that all of the students can read it:

"Almighty and Merciful God, You have called our people Israel to Your service and found us worthy to bear witness unto Your truth among the peoples of the earth. Give us grace to fulfill this mission with zeal tempered by wisdom and guided by regard for other people's faith. May our life prove the strength of our own belief in the truths we proclaim. May our bearing toward our neighbors, our faithfulness in every sphere of duty, our compassion for the suffering and our patience under trial show that the One whose law we obey is indeed the God of all goodness, the Creator of all people ... that to serve You is perfect freedom, and to worship You the soul's purest happiness.

Our God, open our eyes that we may see and welcome all truth, whether shining from the annals of ancient revelations or reaching us through the seers of our own time: for Your light is not hidden from any generation of Your children that yearn for You and seek Your guidance."

The Union Prayer Book

Share with the students that the Classical Reform Union Prayer Book, which first appeared in 1892, embodied the hopes and dreams of our prophets that we, as a Jewish people, would help to seek out justice in the world and make the world a better place.

Ask students the following question: How did Classical Reform Judaism, represented by this powerful quote from *The Union Prayer Book*, understand the role of Jews in the world? Do the Jewish texts that we studied previously support or contradict this understanding of "Seeking Justice?"

LOOK RIGHT: Reform Judaism and Social Justice (15 minutes)

Distribute Central Conference of American Rabbis Statements on Social Justice Handout. Assign each working group one of the following platforms to study: Pittsburgh (1875), Columbus (1937), San Francisco (1976), and Statement of Principles (1999). Ask each group to discuss their platform and how they understand and approach social justice and what our responsibility is as Reform Jews (5 minutes). After discussing the assigned platform in working groups, learners will break up and form a second group of four, with each member representing a different platform. In these new "jigsaw" groups, there will be one expert/presenter representing each of the four platforms. Every group member will share what they discussed in their first working group with their new group. (7 minutes). After each person has presented, the newly formed groups should attempt to articulate a broad generalization about the social justice in the Reform movement and its changes over time. (3 minutes)

LOOK LEFT: Exploring Relevant Social Justice Issues (25 Minutes):

Share with the group that now that they have considered what Judaism has to say about social justice, they are going to consider what society and their peers have to say about social justice.

Distribute the List of Social Justice Issues to Consider Handout. The group should go through the list and select one issue that they want to investigate further (5 minutes). They can feel free to add an issue, if they are interested in one that doesn't appear on the list.

Distribute Investigative Handout. As a group, they should fill in the STOP and LOOK RIGHT portions referring back to the Biblical Texts Handouts and the CCAR Statements on Social Justice Handout. The facilitator could also encourage them use the RAC's website: <http://rac.org/advocacy/issues/>. The group should go about determining how they want to fill out the LOOK LEFT portion on their own. They could each look separately on the internet or work together. For LOOK LEFT, they may use news, youtube videos, Facebook, friends, classmates, twitter, etc. as sources. The group should complete the MOVE FORWARD section as a group. Regardless of the method that each group chooses, at the end of the time, the group should have completed their information sheet as completely as they can in the allotted time. At the end of the time, each group will simply share the topic that they selected with the other groups.

Share with the groups that those who select the topic of "Seeking Justice" for their group project will look over the issue outlines by all of the groups and select one social issue to investigate further.

LOOK LEFT: Journaling (10 minutes):

Students will journal about social justice. They will respond to the same prompt about social justice that they did in the first lesson: How do you feel about injustice in the world? Do you have an obligation to make improvements?

LOOK LEFT: Dinner Dilemma (5 minutes):

Students will create a question about social justice to which they would like their families to respond. The construct of "Dinner Dilemmas" will be outlined and discussed in the first lesson. After the students create their question, it will be posted by the teacher on the group's Facebook wall. A reminder should be sent out the following Friday afternoon reminding the students to post their comments on their family's "Dinner Dilemma" conversation.

MOVE FORWARD: This is represented by choosing to select this topic as one's group project. This group will select one of the topics suggested by the class and create an action plan for how to go about "Seeking Justice" in this particular area. Students will be encouraged to consider what Reform Judaism and society say about the topic before making the determination of how to MOVE FORWARD.

Materials:

List of mystery questions from mysteries questions process

TBD topics

Student journals

Pens

Seeking Justice Text Study Handout (see below.)

Laptop with PowerPoint capabilities for facilitator

Screen

Projector

Central Conference of American Rabbis Statements on Social Justice Handout (see below.)

Investigative Handout (see below)

Laptops, smartpads, smartphones (at least one for every working group of 4)

Questions for Small Group Discussion Handout (Optional)

1. What surprised you about the questions?
2. In what subject areas did you hear overlap or conflicting ideas?
3. Does hearing the questions of your classmates change the way in which you see others?

Selected “Seeking Justice” Biblical Text Study Handout²⁶

As a group, read each text below. Use the space underneath each biblical quote to answer the following question, as it pertains to each text: What is Judaism’s understanding of justice?

Exodus 22:20-23: You shall not wrong or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans.

Exodus 23:5: When you see the donkey of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with your enemy.

Leviticus 19:16: You shall not be a tale-bearer among your people; you shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor; I am Adonai.

Leviticus 23:22: And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the LORD am your God.

Deuteronomy 15:7-11: If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kin in any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kin. Rather, you must open your hand and lend them sufficient for whatever they need. Beware lest you harbor the base thought, "The seventh year, the year of remission, is approaching," so that you are mean to your needy kins and give him nothing. They will cry out to the Lord against you, and you will incur guilt.

²⁶ Sources culled from “On 1 Foot: Jewish Texts for Social Justice,” American Jewish World Service, accessed on May 10, 2013, <http://on1foot.org/>.

Deuteronomy 16:18-20: You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that Adonai your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that Adonai your God is giving you.

Ezekiel 45:9-10: Thus said Adonai, God: Enough, princes of Israel! Make an end of violence and oppression, and do what is right and just! Put a stop to your evictions of My people -- declares Adonai, God. Have just balances...

Isaiah 1:17: Learn to do good. Devote yourselves to justice; aid the wronged. Uphold the rights of the orphan; defend the cause of the widow.

Isaiah 58:7-11: It is to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home; When you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to ignore your own kin. Then shall your light burst through like the dawn and your healing spring up quickly; Your vindicator shall march before you, the presence of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then, when you call, the Lord will answer; When you cry, the Lord will say: Here I am.

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS²⁷

Statements on Social Justice

Pittsburgh Platform, 1875

In full accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation which strives to regulate the relation between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve on the basis of justice and righteousness the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.

Columbus Platform, 1937

Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings to the economic order, to industry and commerce, and to national and international affairs. It aims at the elimination of man-made misery and suffering, of poverty and degradation, of tyranny and slavery, of social inequality and prejudice, of ill-will and strife. It advocates the promotion of harmonious relations between warring classes on the basis of equity and justice, and the creation of conditions under which human personality may flourish. It pleads for the safe-guarding of childhood against exploitation. It champions the cause of all who work and of their right to an adequate standard of living, as prior to the rights of property. Judaism emphasizes the duty of charity, and strives for a social order which will protect men against the material disabilities of old age, sickness and unemployment.

A Centenary Perspective, San Francisco, 1976

Until the recent past our obligations to the Jewish people and to all humanity seemed congruent. At times now these two imperatives appear to conflict. We know of no simple way to resolve such tensions. We must, however, confront them without abandoning either of our commitments. A universal concern for humanity unaccompanied by a devotion to our particular people is self-destructive; a passion for our people without involvement in humankind contradicts what the prophets have meant to us. Judaism calls us simultaneously to universal and particular obligations.

A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism, Pittsburgh, 1999

We bring Torah into the world when we strive to fulfill the highest ethical mandates in our relationships with others and with all of God's creation. Partners with God in *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, we are called to help bring nearer the messianic age. We seek dialogue and joint action with people of other faiths in the hope that together we can bring peace, freedom and justice to our world. We are obligated to pursue *tzedek*, justice and righteousness, and to narrow the gap between the affluent and the poor, to act against discrimination and oppression, to pursue peace, to welcome the stranger, to protect the earth's biodiversity and natural resources, and to redeem those in physical, economic and spiritual bondage. In so doing, we reaffirm social action

²⁷ Marla Feldman, "Why Advocacy is So Central to Reform Judaism," Union for Reform Judaism, accessed on May 10, 2013, <http://urj.org/socialaction/judaism/advocacy/>.

and social justice as a central prophetic focus of traditional Reform Jewish belief and practice. We affirm the mitzvah of *zedakah*, setting aside portions of our earnings and our time to provide for those in need. These acts bring us closer to fulfilling the prophetic call to translate the words of Torah into the works of our hands.

List of Social Justice Issues to Consider Handout²⁸

- Gun Violence
 - Poverty
- Labor Issues
- LGBT Equality
 - Immigration
- Abortion Rights
- Civil Liberties
 - Civil Rights
- Death Penalty
- Disability Rights
 - Education
- Environment
 - HIV/AIDS
- Human Rights
- Human Trafficking
 - Hunger
 - Israel
- School Prayer
- Race Relations
- Religious Liberty
 - Sudan/Darfur

²⁸ Culled from “Issues and Topics,” Reform Action Center, accessed on May 10, 2013, <http://rac.org/advocacy/issues/>.

Investigative Handout



What's the issue? Why should I care?



What does Judaism tell me to do? (Note the sources.)



What does society and my peers tell me to do? (Note the sources.)

Moving Forward ... What should we do about this issue?

Lesson Eleven: Peer/Guest Critique

Relevant Unit Enduring Understanding utilized in this lesson:

The world can be a confusing and challenging place, and Reform Judaism helps to provide a mechanism for making sense of the world. The presentation and peer, self, and guest critique of the group projects present a way to articulate learners' understanding of how Judaism provides a way of making sense of the topic that each student selects for his or her final group projects.

I can bring my life's questions to Reform Judaism and find answers to subjects that matter to me. Choosing a topic on which to focus a great deal of time and effort researching and preparing a presentation represents an opportunity to practice the process of "Stop, Look Right, Look Left, Move Forward" on a subject matter that was meaningful enough to the learner to select for more in-depth study. This process can serve as a model and practice for how to confront other "real life" problems in the future.

Relevant Unit Essential Questions utilized in this lesson:

In what ways does Reform Judaism help me to be my best self? By considering the experience that students had "Looking Right" at Judaism in general and Reform Judaism, in particular they will choose to incorporate or exclude Reform Judaism in their group project. Engaging in the critique process will help students further articulate their positions by considering, processing, and responding to the critiques.

How do I make a difference? Students will articulate to their peers how they can make a difference in the area that they selected.

Relevant KDBB utilized in this lesson:

As a group, learners will articulate their own opinions in the area that they selected for their group project through a group presentation to their peers. Additionally, learners will express to their peers the value of standing up for what is right, according to their groups understanding of *tzedek* through the medium of their presentation. All students will also have an opportunity to challenge others' understanding of what is right by offering critique of their peers' presentations, whereby they challenge others' notions of *tzedek* with their own. The process of offering critique and responding to critique challenges students to clarify and revise their own notions of *tzedek*. Gaps in between different understanding of what is right offer opportunities for informal discussions and learning. Learners will explore their connection to the Reform Jewish community by working as a part of a group to make their presentation and by working as a part of a classroom community to share critique.

Core Concept:

Learners will give their presentations to one another and offer peer and self critique. Guest critique will add an extra level of expertise to the conversation. Learners will participate in the council process.

Essential Questions:

How can I improve my presentation? Does the presentation represent my own understanding of what is right? Why is critique useful?

Evidence of Understanding:

Students will be able to clearly articulate their own beliefs on what is right after “Stopping, Looking Right, Looking Left.” Their ability to clearly articulate their own beliefs, as evidenced by how they express their opinions during their presentation, represents, in part, their success at using the information gathered to “Move Forward.” Additionally, learners’ ability to respond to critique and consider the comments offered by their peers will demonstrate how much they have internalized the issues at stake. One could also compare the content of their presentations to their previous individual journal entries.

Outline of the Lesson (2 hours and 15 minutes):

The Council Process (20 minutes):

Since this lesson is the sixth time that the group has undergone the Council Process, there should not be a need to explain the process. A candle should be lit in the center of the group and a student or two should offer a dedication for that day’s council meeting. For example, “I dedicate this council to honesty—and the friendships that come when we tell the truth” or “I dedicate this council to my grandpa, who is very sick right now and I’m worried about him.”²⁹

Whatever object has been designated as the object to pass, indicating who has the right to speak, should be utilized. Someone should be designated as the timekeeper to ensure that all students get equal time. The theme for this Council Process is: childhood fears you may be still learning to overcome.

Set Induction (10 minutes):

Have each person individually look at the brainteaser picture. Please note that if you look at the picture one way you will see a young woman and if you look at it a different way you will see an old woman. Have students stare at the picture and write what they see on their handout (3 minutes). Have them pair up with a partner and share what they see (3 minutes). Ask students to raise their hands if they see the young woman and then if they see the old woman. Ask them how looking at the same picture with someone else, changed or did not change their own perception of the same picture. Ask if there is someone who simply was not able to see the other woman in the picture without his or her partner pointing it out several times. Ask them, why is it sometimes important to understand how others see the same work? How can receiving another’s input on your work change the way that you see things?

²⁹ Kessler, 14.

Introducing Peer/Guest Critique Process (15 minutes):

Explain that what happened with the picture of the woman is exactly what can happen with our own work. There are times when we get so focused on our own work that we become unable to see it from another perspective. Today we will be engaging in a process of Peer/Guest Critique so that we can improve our groups' work in preparation for the Family *Siyyum* in two weeks. After this class, your group will have one more additional week to make revisions to your presentation in preparation for the final group presentations. This is one last opportunity to "Look Right and Left" before deciding the final way that you choose to "Move Forward."

We will have three ground rules for this Peer Critique Process. 1) Be Kind ("It's essential that the critique environment feel safe.")³⁰ Explain to the class that this is no different than the Council Process and we need to respect one another. 2) Be Specific. We don't share comments like "it's good" or "I like it." We want feedback that is specific enough that the group can utilize the comments during their revisions/redrafting next week. 3) Be helpful. "The goal is to help the [group] and the class, not for the critic to be heard. Echoing the thoughts of others or cleverly pointing out details that are not significant to improving the work also wastes our time."³¹

We will be following a specific protocol used for In-Depth Critique. This is a method of critique where we will spend a significant amount of time looking at each group's presentation. Distribute Critique Protocol Handout. As was mentioned previously, we have invited the congregational rabbis, cantor, temple president, and members of the board to be a part of our critique, because they represent the two different sides that we are considering [the Right—Jewish tradition (Rabbis/cantor) and the Left—peers and society (the chief lay leader)]. Go over handout with students and guests. Leave time for questions. The protocol guidelines include:³²

- The group presenting explains the ideas and goals of the presentation and suggests one specific area in which they would like to receive feedback (e.g. our PowerPoint presentation, the strength of our argument, etc).
- Critique will be about the presentation, not about the people making the presentation (e.g. I think that you might want to include more Jewish texts to bolster your argument. vs. You don't make it clear.)
- Begin critique statements with something positive about the work, then move on to constructive criticism. (e.g. I think that the presentation shows a lot of deep thought about the issue. I think that it could be strengthened with more examples.)
- Use I statements when possible. (e.g. I'm confused by this. vs. This makes no sense.
- Try to use a question format when possible (e.g. I'm curious why you chose to begin with this...? or Have you considered including...?)

³⁰ Berger, 93.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Berger, 93-94.

- Individuals cannot give a second critique, until all others have had an opportunity to share their ideas. This rule does not apply to our guests; however, they should also give one another an opportunity to share.
- The presenters will also have an opportunity to respond to the critiques given, especially to those phrased as questions.

Remind each group that their presentations and critiques will be recorded so that they can refer to them for self critique and during the next session.

Marking the moment Jewishly (9 minutes):

Ask all of the participants to share a few words of reflection about the Jewish journey that they have been on. In what ways are they preparing for the end of a journey and in what ways are they really beginning another? Take notes on their reflections in order to craft a concluding prayer to be used at the family *siyyum*.

Group 1 Presentation—Environment (5 minutes):

Group 1 will make their presentation to their peers and guests.

Group 1 Critique (6 minutes):

Following the Peer/Guest Critique Guidelines, the class and guests will offer critique on the presentation.

Group 2 Presentation—Israel: The People and the Land (5 minutes):

Group 2 will make their presentation to their peers and guests.

Group 2 Critique (6 minutes):

Following the Peer/Guest Critique Guidelines, the class and guests will offer critique on the presentation.

Group 3 Presentation—Seeking Justice (5 minutes):

Group 3 will make their presentation to their peers and guests.

Group 3 Critique (6 minutes):

Following the Peer/Guest Critique Guidelines, the class and guests will offer critique on the presentation.

Group 4 Presentation—Prayer and Spirituality (5 minutes):

Group 4 will make their presentation to their peers and guests.

Group 4 Critique (6 minutes):

Following the Peer/Guest Critique Guidelines, the class and guests will offer critiques on the presentation.

Group 5 Presentation—Topic TBD (5 minutes):

Group 5 will make their presentation to their peers and guests.

Group 5 Critique (6 minutes):

Following the Peer/Guest Critique Guidelines, the class and guests will offer critiques on the presentation.

Group 6 Presentation—Topic TBD (5 minutes):

Group 6 will make their presentation to their peers and guests.

Group 6 Critique (6 minutes):

Following the Peer/Guest Critique Guidelines, the class and guests will offer critiques on the presentation.

Self Critique (16 minutes):

Each group will meet and watch the video of their presentation (5 minutes). Then, each group member will write their own self critique about their group's presentation in their journals (6 minutes). These self critiques will be used and referred to during the next session.

Reflection (5 minutes):

Bring the whole group back together and ask people to reflect on the process of critique. What did they learn from the process? How will this process impact their presentations and their future work?

Materials:

What do you see? Handout (See below.)

Peer/Guest Critique Protocol Handout (See below.)

Student journals

Projector

Screen

Laptop

Group Presentation Materials

Candles

Lighter

Timer

Passing Object for Council Process

Pens

Congregational rabbis

Temple president

Board members

Recording capabilities (Video camera, iphone camera, ipad, etc)

Viewing capability for every group (laptop, ipad, iphone, etc)

What Do You See?³³ Handout



1. Look at the above image for 3 minutes. Write what you see below.
2. Pair up with a partner. Share with one another what you see.

³³ <http://www.braingle.com/wii/brainteasers/teaser.php?id=26745;op=0;comm=1>

Peer/Guest Critique Protocol Handout³⁴

Guidelines:

- The presenting group explains the ideas and goals of the presentation and suggests one specific area in which they would like to receive feedback (e.g. our PowerPoint presentation, the strength of our argument, etc).
- Critique will be about the presentation, not about the people making the presentation (e.g. I think that you might want to include more Jewish texts to bolster your argument. vs. You don't make it clear.)
- Begin critique statements with something positive about the work, then move on to constructive criticism. (e.g. I think that the presentation shows a lot of deep thought about the issue. I think that it could be strengthened with more examples.)
- Use I statements when possible. (e.g. I'm confused by this. vs. This makes no sense.
- Try to use a question format when possible (e.g. I'm curious why you chose to begin with this...? or Have you considered including...?)
- Individuals cannot give a second critique, until others have had an opportunity to share their ideas. This rule does not apply to our guests; however, they should also give one another an opportunity to share.
- The presenters will also have an opportunity to respond to the critiques given, especially to those phrased as questions.

³⁴ Berger, 93-94.

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Selected Annotated Bibliography

Berger, Ron. *An Ethic of Excellence*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003.

Berger's book explores project-based learning as an opportunity to create meaningful learning experiences for students that are transferable to real life. The book walks through all of the steps of a project-based learning approach and uses Berger's own real life experience as an educator to highlight the various steps for which he advocates. Berger both persuades and inspires readers about the benefits of this learning model and the skills that the students gain as a result. He argues that students are capable of high levels of performance when they are motivated, engaged, inspired, challenged, and committed to their teacher, peers, the community, and the subject matter about which they are studying. This book offers an inspirational road map for anyone interested in exploring project-based learning, and would be helpful for the educator of this curriculum to understanding the potential of the students' group projects to be meaningful learning opportunities. Within this curriculum, the critique process and family *siyyum* is best understood within the framework of project-based learning.

Perlstein, Linda. *Not Much Just Chillin': The Hidden Lives of Middle Schoolers*. New York:

Ballantine Books, 2003.

Perlstein provides a compelling look at the inside life of middle schoolers in various scenes--school, home, and social settings. The book follows the day to day lives of a number of middle schoolers, representing different ages, social circles, interests, abilities, and developmental levels. Relevant developmental theory is interspersed throughout these narratives and is supported by the lives of the students that Perlstein follows. It is shocking to see how broadly the developmental levels of middle schoolers can range within one grade and also the vast changes between the fall and summer semesters of the same academic year. This book and the window it provides into the lives of middle schoolers is invaluable for a teacher of a course, such as this one, geared toward middle school age students. Understanding middle schoolers' range of developmental and social abilities would help the educator to connect more effectively with the learners and to frame and adjust learning in a way that is essential for middle schoolers to have meaningful and relevant learning experience.