



ACTIVITY

Jewish Books

Materials Needed

- Video clip
- Screening device and Internet connection
- A book that inspired you

Time Needed

1 hour

Goals

- To expand our understanding of the “Jewish bookshelf”
- To appreciate and learn from Jewish books!

Before you Get Started

Look at the list of Enduring Understandings:

- Judaism is a civilization, and not primarily a religion.
- A civilization is constituted by its history, literature, language, social organizations, folk sanctions, standards of conduct, social and spiritual ideals, esthetics and values. All of these elements form a civilization.
- Jewish communities share the content of the civilization and the drive for sustaining it, but they also each bring to the table their unique local perspective and interpretation, which in turn contributes to and enriches the collective global civilization.
- The local and global dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood, as perceived through the prism of developing and sustaining Jewish civilization, represent two sides of the same coin.
- The work of building and strengthening Jewish civilization at the local Jewish community level is central to the future of Jewish peoplehood.
- The contribution of every Jew in every community can be significant to the development of the Jewish People's collective enterprise.

Which one would you like to emphasize through this activity?

Directions for Activity

1. Ask all the participants to bring in a Jewish book that had inspired or influenced them in some way. Be as expansive as you can! (Classic Jewish books, Yiddish literature, modern Israeli poetry, a book about Jewish sociology/politics/ current events, a book written by a Jewish author.) If nothing comes to mind at first, dig deeper—perhaps a book from school or university? Even a childhood book would be interesting to share.
2. Ask them to share, in a couple of sentences, what inspired them about the book and why they found it meaningful.
3. Now get learning! Ask each participant (ahead of time) to isolate one passage or set of passages that were particularly meaningful for them in the books they brought. Put the books in the center of the room and have participants in pairs (or chevrotot) select a book to study/ read together.

Guided questions:

- Read through the text once to appreciate it.

- What moves you about the text?
- What questions do you have about the text?
- In what ways do you think this book might contribute to Jewish life/ identity/ community today? Does it add something to the vision of how our Jewish civilization is evolving?

Note to facilitator – even if participants brought radically different kinds of books, the goal is to be expansive and find a place for all of them within an evolving Jewish civilization. If there are “red lines” that are crossed and triggers some people in the group (e.g. books about Holocaust denial) use these triggers as an opportunity to explore difference in your community. (See our section on Diversity and Pluralism to help frame a discussion about difference in your community.)

If the participants want to learn more about one book or another, one of the outcomes of the session might be to start a book club!

4. To broaden the discussion about the meaning of Jewish books and literature, close by viewing Miriam Udel’s Eli Talk, “Discovering and Delighting in the Lost Arc of Yiddish.” (<http://elitalks.org/discovering-and-delighting-lost-ark-yiddish>)

Shavuot Friendly Idea

At the end of the session build your own Mt. Sinai out of books! Take chairs, boxes and whatever other supplies you might need to construct your Mountain and have it be a display for all of the books that have inspired and influenced you! It can also be a great installation for the Shavuot celebration in your community.

Note to Educator

Did the enduring understanding that you set out to teach surface during this activity?

Additional Resources

Starting a book club with Israeli Literature