

Jewish Journeys

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Content areas: Jews by Choice, Jews of Color, Ritual/Liturgy/Prayer, Transgender and Gender Identity

Grades: 4th -7th grade

Objectives:

- Students will explore diaspora Jewry
- Students will explore contemporary representations of Jewish identity
- Students will make *mezuzot* as a symbol of Jewish homes regardless of where their homes are.

Hour 1: Questions to start class discussion:

- What makes us Jewish? (Spend a few minutes brainstorming about what makes us all Jewish.)
- Historical definitions of Jewish identity have traditionally been based on *halakhic* definitions of matrilineal descent, reform recognition of patrilineal descent, and *halakhic* conversions.
- Where do we find Jewish people in the world? (Spend a few minutes brainstorming about where Jewish people live.)
- Everywhere from Africa to China to Israel and Middle East to Canada and the United States, just everywhere in every nationality!
- Why are we on every Continent across the globe?

Throughout Jewish history, Jews have repeatedly been directly or indirectly expelled from both their original homeland and the areas in which they have resided. This experience as refugees has shaped Jewish identity and religious practice in many ways, and is thus a major element of Jewish history.

Share the two following short video clips from You-Tube (you will want to watch them first to make sure they feel like the right fit for your setting):

1. "Choosing to be Chosen" short about LGBT converts to Judaism.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTVINBVxWDw>
2. Erika Davis (blogger at www.blackgayjewish.com), discusses the question of who's a Jew.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXU22zVjqs4>

Discuss what the students feel about what makes us Jewish after seeing the short answers from the short films. Has their view changed? Has it gotten stronger?

20 min break

Hour 2: Art Project -- Make a Mezuzah

Sculpey can easily be made into clay *mezzuzot*. Just have the students make an oval ball of clay. Flatten slightly the bottom so it can lay flat when not in use. Make hole with tool in the top and bottom. Take a small scrap of clay and roll into a snake. Take snake and write the Hebrew Letter Shin to represent G-d as on proper *mezzuzot*. Have them write their name on the back when done. *Mezuzot* need to be baked to be completed.

Discuss with students the symbolism of the mezuzah – that when the attach it to their doorpost, they show a sign that they are in a Jewish household, wherever that house may be.

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