

People of the Book

Author: Martine Rawlings Fein

Content Areas: Jewish Literacy, LGBT Literacy, Jewish Law

Grades: 8th -12th grade

Objective: This lesson will help students think about the relationship between traditional Jewish sacred texts and contemporary Jewish texts, through exploring the concepts of *midrash* and the *genizah*.

I. Sacred Texts and Contemporary Interpretations

con·tem·po·rar·y

[kuhn-tem-puh-rer-ee] **adjective, noun, plural -rar-ies.**

adjective

1. existing, occurring, or living at the same time; belonging to the same time: *Newton's discovery of the calculus was contemporary with that of Leibniz.*
2. of about the same age or date: *a Georgian table with a contemporary wig stand.*
3. of the present time; modern: *a lecture on the contemporary novel.*

What are contemporary Jewish books that we can name off the top of our heads?

Ask for student responses, and then offer your own:

- *Balancing on the Mechitza: Transgender in Jewish Community* Noach Dzmura (Editor) (2010 North Atlantic)
- *Queering the Text: Biblical, Medieval, and Modern Jewish Stories* (White Crane Wisdom) [Paperback] Andrew Ramer (Author), Jay Michaelson (Introduction), Rabbi Camille Shira Angel (Afterword), Rabbi Dev Noily (Afterword)
- *Keep Your Wives Away from Them: Orthodox Women, Unorthodox Desires* [Paperback] Miryam Kabakov (Editor)
- *Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism* [Paperback] Danya Ruttenberg (Editor), Susannah Heschel (Foreword)

Watch Andrew Ramer read a portion from his book *Queering the Text: Biblical, Medieval, and Modern Jewish Stories* and discuss.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwMXcozF_2k

Discussion Questions

1. Why do contemporary authors use primary texts as spring boards for their thought processes?
2. Why do contemporary authors insert their voices into the primary texts (Torah) through Midrash? *Midrash* is a way of interpreting biblical stories that goes beyond simple



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distillation of religious, legal or moral teachings. It fills in many gaps left in the biblical narrative regarding events and personalities that are only hinted at.

3. Why do we write so many Midrashim, as Jewish people?

II. Relating to Sacred Texts: The Genizah

A **genizah** (or **geniza**; Hebrew: **גניזה** "storage") is the store-room or depository in a Jewish synagogue (or cemetery).

Watch video of Burial of sacred Jewish books in New Orleans, after hurricane Katrina and discuss implications.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q62vtemZxD4>

Discussion Questions

1. Why don't we just clean the books and repair the scrolls?
2. Why do we have to bury them?
3. What is a sacred book vs a profane one? Would the people who are burying sacred texts think our contemporary texts are sacred or profane?

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