OPEN BOOK

Overview

Discovering
American
Jewish History
Through
Objects

The National Museum of American Jewish of History is pleased to offer *Open Book: Discovering American Jewish History Through Objects*. Based on material culture from the Museum's collection, the lessons in this curriculum challenge students to exercise critical thinking and inquiry-based learning skills while exploring the American Jewish experience. In the spirit of traditional Talmudic study, Open Book invites students to approach the study of history in unexpected ways and connect what they learn to their own ideas, experiences, and passions. This open-ended process of discussion and discovery empowers students to see themselves in the larger story of American Jewish life and inspire a sense of pride and connection to their heritage.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY
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The curriculum takes its inspiration from the traditional Jewish method of *havruta* learning.

Havruta is an Aramaic term meaning friendship or companionship and commonly refers to two people studying a text together. This form of learning puts relationships at the very center of the learning process: relationships between people and relationships between people and the materials they are studying. *Havruta* partners are responsible for respectfully listening to one another, allowing each partner to fully express themselves, and keeping an open mind to new possibilities. It can be a challenge to be silent while someone else speaks!

EACH LESSON CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING:

— Talmud page

— Student Discussion Guide

— Teacher Guide which includes:

    — Suggestions for pre and/or post-lesson activities

    — Procedure for lesson plan

    — Additional information about the object featured on each Talmud page

    — Historical background

    — Additional information and full text of the commentaries on each Talmud page

The heart of each lesson is a "Talmud page," not actually from the Talmud, but formatted similarly. Each page has an object or image at the center, surrounded by relevant commentaries. Working in groups of two to three, students explore, discuss, and interpret this object or image in conjunction with surrounding texts. Talmud means "study" in Hebrew. Written over multiple generations, the Talmud records debates over religious practice and tradition that took place during the early centuries of the Common Era—and continues to be studied, discussed, and interpreted today. Talmudic learning, although sometimes called debate, is not about winning an argument, it is about expanding one's thinking. Show students an image of the Talmud or a volume from your school library.

Lessons are designed for a 50-minute class session. Each begins with analysis of the central object or image (15 minutes), followed by *havruta* study (25 minutes) and a wrap-up activity (10 minutes). If you would like to devote more time to the lesson, feel free to take more time with each section and extend it to two periods!

See, Think, Wonder (15 min)

"See, Think, Wonder" is a method of analyzing objects, images, and texts. It emphasizes curiosity, attention to detail, critical thinking, and discussion as a way of interpreting historical materials.

STEP 1:

Begin by showing or passing out the image at the center of the Talmud page (we've provided a larger image file, but it is also on each student's Talmud page).

ASK STUDENTS: "WHAT DO YOU SEE?"

Have volunteers describe the image. If students make statements like "They look sad," respond with a question that elicits a specific observation such as "What makes you think they look sad?" or guide them with statements like "I see that they're frowning."

Help students focus on observing and identifying visual details such as size, color, images, numbers, dates, keywords, and other findings.

STEP 2:

Help students interpret their observations.

ASK STUDENTS: "WHAT DO YOU THINK?"

Having made observations, the activity begins the process of interpretation with background knowledge and experiences. Ask: How do you think this object used? By whom? For what purpose? What do you see to make you think that? Based on what you already know, what additional observations can you make?

STEP 3:

Encourage students to pursue further inquiry through "I wonder" questions.

ASK STUDENTS: "WHAT DOES IT MAKE YOU WONDER?"

Broader, open-ended questions encourage students to seek additional information beyond their interpretations that might not be directly answerable from the object, image, or text. Example questions include: What do you think came before and/or after what is depicted? What is missing or not revealed by the object?

EXAMPLE:

Imagine a family photo:

- I see young children and adults
- I think they are a family
- I wonder why they are taking this photo
- I wonder what year was this technology introduced

Havruta Study (25 minutes)

1. Divide the class into groups of two to three.

Explain the keys to a successful *havruta* experience:

— Read the text aloud.

— Take turns sharing ideas.

— Ask one another to clarify and elaborate; keep asking
   "Can you tell me more about what you mean?"

— Take time considering how ideas are similar and different.

— Return to the central image after each text. How has your understanding of the object changed?

2. Give each group the Talmud page and Student Discussion Guide.

If your students are not familiar with the Talmud, share a picture of a traditional Talmud page, highlighting the central text and surrounding commentaries. Ask them if they see any similarities between this and the Talmud pages you handed out.

3. Suggest that students keep the "See, Think, Wonder" paradigm in mind when following the discussion guide.

How does each text help them "read" the object?

4. The Student Discussion Guide suggests an order for reading the texts on the Talmud page, but students can also follow their own order.

5. Circulate throughout the classroom answering questions, focusing attention, and facilitating conversations.

When time is up, bring the class back together for a wrap-up discussion. If time does not allow for discussion of all texts, you might consider assigning different commentaries to various groups, to make sure all the texts are covered.

Wrap-up (10 MINUTES)

Reconvene the class and pick one text (or more if this serves your class best) and discuss the following questions together: How has your understanding of the object changed or evolved? Which was your favorite text? Why? Which two texts would you pair based on similarities or differences?

End the lesson by asking: What's one thing you learned from your partner?

After the lesson, take a moment to reflect on your experience teaching the curriculum:

— Did students participate effectively in their *havruta* groups?

— Did students integrate information and evidence into their discussions and use it to formulate their opinions?

— Were the key questions effectively addressed during the lesson?

— Did students learn something new about themselves? About their families?

SUGGESTED SUBJECT AREAS:

Arts, History, Language Arts, Social Studies

COMMON CORE STANDARDS:

Key Ideas and Details

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Comprehension and Collaboration

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Make strategic use of digital media and isual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

For further information see: Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects