



## **Bringing Jewish Culture to the Classroom: Parent Guide**

### **1) Asking the Teacher**

At the start of the year, get in contact with your child's teacher and express your excitement about bringing in Jewish culture to the classroom. Here is some example language for that note:

Dear [Teacher's Name],

I hope this letter finds you well and excited for the new school year. My name is [Your Name], and I am the parent of [Child's Name], who is thrilled to be in your class this year. I am writing to kindly remind you that our family observes Jewish traditions, and [Child's Name] will need to miss school on certain days for Jewish holidays.

Additionally, I would love the opportunity to come into the classroom and share some of our Jewish traditions with the students. I believe it would be a wonderful experience for the class to learn about different cultures and customs. Please let me know if and when this might be possible.

Thank you so much for your understanding and support. We are looking forward to a fantastic school year.

### **2) Planning Suggestions for your Lesson**

Introduce yourself and your student.

- a. Briefly describe your reason for visiting (to share some of your culture with the class)
- b. Provide a brief background on Judaism and your family. This could include where your family comes from, where you go to synagogue, languages spoken at home and more! Show a map or other visual aids.

Introduce the aspect of Jewish culture that you'd like to share (holiday, food, clothing, or custom)

- a. Explain why it is meaningful to your family in particular, and to other Jewish people on a larger scale.
- b. Make it engaging with photos, videos, and more! This is a great spot for reading a story book for younger children.

Do a hands-on activity that will engage the students in students in the cultural topic

- a. Teach a simple dance, game, or sport
- b. Have students learn to say or write phrases related to the topic in your home language (Hebrew, Russian, German, Yiddish, Ladino, and more)
- c. Allow students to explore artifacts from Judaism (mezuzah, kippah, tallit, holiday symbols)
- d. Make and/or taste traditional foods (if allowed and feasible)
- e. Do a thematic art or writing project



### 3) Content Recommendations by Topic

#### Holidays

- Rosh Ha'Shannah:
  - Setting goals for the new school year.
  - Discussing Foods as holiday symbols (Round Challah, Apple and Honey) and having the kids pick foods that serve as a metaphor for their own goals.
- Yom Kippur
  - Restorative Justice, learning how to make things right,
- Sukkot
  - Harvest, Appreciation for Nature
  - Teach the lesson outside
- Hannukah
  - Teach, play, and/or make dreidel
  - Make/ Eat latkes and sufganiyot
- Tu B'Shvat (Birthday of the Trees)
  - Plant a tree at the school/ Plant seeds for each student
  - Discuss Tikkun Olam (repairing the world)
  - Create art from recycled items/ found items/ trash
  - Create art from items found on a nature walk
  - Purim, Passover, Lag Ba Omer, Shabbat and more!

#### Principals (Jewish ideas and concepts that can be addressed year-round)

- Tikkun Olam (Improving the World)
  - School/ Classroom improvement projects
- Todah (Thankfulness)
  - Thanksgiving projects
  - Teacher Appreciation Activity
- Tzedakah (Helping Others)
  - Food / Clothing Drive
  - Writing letters to students preparing them for moving up a grade.
  - Discussing how to be helpful with family members and at home.

#### Other Traditions

- Baby Naming Traditions (Especially fun if you or their teacher is expecting a new baby)
  - Have everyone write the story of their name if they know it or creating a name story if they don't.
  - Each student puts their name on a paper, and everyone else writes a kind adjective that describes that paper.
- Bar/ Bat Mitzvah (Great for 7<sup>th</sup> Grade)
  - Writing, speech, or power point activity: If you could teach your whole community something- what would you teach?
  - Debate/ Argumentative activity: What is the most important coming of age rituals for American tweens and teens?

For support in planning and for additional resources, please visit <https://jcrc.org/blog/education-initiative/> or email Allison Barnes: [abarnes@jcrc.org](mailto:abarnes@jcrc.org).