Artistic Approaches to Prayer

*Elective 2*

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| **Author(s):** | Daniel Abramson |
| **summary:** | In this session, you will master a handful of art-making activities that can be used to help open up meaningful entry points into prayer at camp. You will understand how artistic practice can be an engaging alternative or supplement to Tefillah at any camp.  - *Submitted by* *Daniel Abramson* |
| **Topic(s):** | Tefillah Alternatives, Visual Arts, Young Children |
| **Learning Objective:** | Participants will learn how to collaboratively create an artwork and illustrate the big ideas from traditional text in a way that helps us to explore our diverse connections to important themes. Participants will also learn how to create their own interpretive and interactive siddur to find personal connections with prayer. Last, participants will consider ways in which our favorite music can help us feel centered and calm in the same way that traditional prayer does. |
| **Audience:** | Ideal for groups of 10-15 participants. These projects can be implemented across whole age groups at camp or created in different ways to include more participants. |
| **TIMING:** | 90 minutes |
| **AppendiCes:** | Full Text of the Amidah |
| **Materials Needed:** | 18 11x17 silk squares  18 precision squeeze bottles  Water-based wax resist  Silk paints  Small brushes  Small sketchbooks  Superfine tip pens  Stereo with connector for mp3 players / iPods |
| **Set-UP DETAILS:** |  |

**Session Timeline & Outline:**

**Before the program:**

1. Create large posters with the Hebrew and English words for each idea in the Amidah (with extra room to write ideas on them). See included printable pages and an explanation of the traditional text.
2. Select a few songs that can connect with specific ideas in the Amidah. \*\*This is an amazing activity all on its own. Be prepared to spend a while on it. Ask friends, ask faculty, be creative. You will be better able to find connections with each part of the Amidah after trying to find connected themes in music!\*\*
3. Set up stations with the materials for painting on silk squares with the Hebrew title for each section around the room.

**Introduction: Connecting to the Amidah through music / ice-breaker to create community (10 minutes)**

Facilitator will welcome participants into the space with a song about ancestors. “Shadowland” from the Lion King soundtrack is the best, but “They Live in You” is great, too! After the song, the facilitator will ask participants to introduce themselves and name one person, an ancestor distant or recent, that they learned something from.

Explain to participants that you will be playing a “Curated Soundtrack” throughout the session. All of the tracks link to an idea from Tefillah. Invite participants to consider what songs they would add to the playlist and have them write the name of the song on the Amidah Idea Posters at any time. During the session. If they happen to have a device to play the song, you can add their music in anytime.

The facilitator should explain that music is an amazing way to set a tone for a program. If we want kids to experience the feeling of prayer, we can use a song to connect to the idea, thereby creating a prayerful atmosphere very simply.

Facilitator will ask participants what Tefillah should be like, ideally. How do we know if we are doing it right? The answers are recorded on a chart for reflection later. Participants might suggest words like:

* Focus
* Calm
* Connected
* Inspired
* Safe
* Happy
* Peaceful

**Praying with our pencils (a private personal prayerful moment) – 10 minutes**

Participants will receive a small sketch book and a fine tip pen and will choose one of the Tefillah Ideas and write it on a blank page in their sketchbook. They will spend 10 minutes in quiet reflection with the word and explore it introspectively through art. For example, a participant might choose “redemption” or גאולה in their sketchbooks and will spend the next 10 minutes doing a visual brainstorm of all the ideas, shapes, and words that they connect to that idea. The goal here is parallel to the goals of silent Tefillah: introspection, calm, focus, and intention.

**Praying with our Brushes (a Community Moment of Prayer) – 45 minutes**

Facilitator will then explain that we will be doing a similar type activity, but collaboratively and with different materials. Participants will watch the facilitator demonstrate the use of the wax resist and the fabric dye to complete the blank silk paintings around the room.

The facilitator will play more of the songs from the playlist and ask participants to spend time at several of the silk painting stations. The goal is for participants to respond with words, images, colors, or abstract forms on all the canvases that have resonance for them in the moment. In other words, if I feel the need for freedom, then I would spend time working on the **Ge’ulah** square. If I am thinking about inner or outer peace, I would spend time working on the **Shalom** square.

The facilitator should explain that while only some of the ideas might resonate with us at any one time, other ideas might be important for another person in the community. Imagine that another person knows someone who is sick; ideas of healing might be important for that person. The facilitator should explain that some aspect of Tefillah is that it is a community practice, so we should also intentionally spend some time working on those Tefillah ideas that don’t resonate with us in the moment so that by the end, we will have completed a whole community visual Amidah.

Importantly, this part of the program is meant to address the community aspect of Tefillah and is a counterbalance to the silent introspection that we did in the sketchbooks.

**Talking about “Art” (Reflections on Looking with Intention) – 10 minutes**

The pieces (finished and unfinished) are brought together and participants reflect on the art and on the process of creation. Guiding questions may include:

* Did you feel any moments that shared the characteristics that we brainstormed earlier? Did you experience calm, focus, connection, inspiration, etc.?
* Was it easier to connect to ideas through music or art?
* Are there other ways that you might feel more connected?
* What was more meaningful for you; personal artistic reflection or collaborative creation?
* Why do you think that is?
* Does your camp have specific approaches to Tefillah that help or hinder the implementation of these kinds of approaches to prayer?
* What would you need to do to pave the way for alternative approaches to be embraced at camp?

Collect the pieces and display them in a public Tefillah space so that others in the camp community can see the visual Tefillah.

**Additional Notes for Bringing it Back to Camp:**

This program can be adapted to use other modalities to create prayerful moments. You might consider trying to engage in Tefillah through movement (like Yoga), meditation, music, sculpture, drama, or other creative arts. It can be an exciting way to include people who don’t connect with traditional prayer through text and recitation. The key is to help participants find points of connection to big ideas and to ensure that they feel validated in the way that they create those connections.