The Playdoh Museum

*Art Track 1*

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| **Author(s):** | Daniel Abramson |
| **summary:** | You will learn how to use very basic art materials to ask and answer simple questions that help campers (or staff) to talk about important ideas and to make meaningful connections with one another. - *Submitted by* *Daniel Abramson* |
| **Topic(s):** | Community Building and Visual Art |
| **Learning Objective:** | You will learn how to use very basic art materials to ask and answer simple questions that help camper (or staff) talk about important ideas and to make meaningful connections with each other. |
| **Audience:** | Ideal for groups of 5-15 people. Great for kids 12+, but with modified questions it will work for any group. |
| **TIMING:** | 90 minutes |
| **AppendiCes:** | Play-doh Questions List, Play-doh recipe, Printable label sheet with questions |
| **Materials Needed:** | 1 container of Play-doh or a small handful of plasticine per participant. You can also make your own Play-doh, which can be another fun program especially with younger campers! |
| **Set-UP DETAILS:** | This program is completely portable. It can be done in any space where there is room to sit as a group. There are important discussion elements, so the space should be one where you likely won’t be interrupted often. |

**Session Timeline & Outline:**

**Introducing the Program – 5 minutes**

Explain to participants that…

“You will be given a series of symbols to create. You will only have about 2 minutes to make the symbol, so don’t worry about making it perfect. It’s the idea behind what you are making that is important. After each round, you will have a chance to tell everyone about your symbol. You are free to pass on the explanation if you choose to, but remember that your idea is valuable to the group.

So if you can, please share your thoughts. After everyone has explained their symbol, everyone will squish up the dough and begin a new symbol. The symbols will get harder as the session goes.”

**Creating the First Symbol – 10 minutes**

If the group is large, divide everyone into groups of 3-5 people and give one deck of index cards with the list of questions to each group. You can create your own questions or use the ones provided depending on your goal with the group.

“OK, here we go… Flip over your first card and create a symbol with your Play-doh to answer the question. You have 45 seconds to make “a symbol of something you like”

Give only about 2 minutes for participants to make their symbol. Then, have everyone stop creating and explain to their group what their symbol is about. In the first rounds, the sharing is likely to be fairly easy and quick, but as the questions get more complex, please adjust the time for sharing so that participants can say what they need to say.

Proceed in this way with quick creating, then small group sharing for each question until you have completed the first 4 questions, then pause to explain about metaphors, meaning, and symbols.

**Connecting with a Traditional Way of Reading “Text” – 5 minutes**

The first few symbols are generally pretty literal and will be easy for most participants, however as you progress through the list, answers generally become more metaphorical. For example, I like pizza so I made a pizza, but my most prized possession is my undergraduate degree, not because of its material value, but rather because it represents a significant accomplishment.

This progression of the literal meaning of symbols to the metaphorical and hidden meanings of things can be compared to a way of analyzing the Torah as a text called “PaRDeS”. The simple literal meaning is sometimes called the P’shat. The implied or connotative meaning of the text is called the Drash. It can be likened to the context. Metaphorical meanings are sometimes called the Remez or “hints.” Lastly, meanings that are mainly hidden are referred to as Sod. These are mysterious or

esoteric meanings of text.

These levels of interpretation are often similar to the ways in which artists and viewers glean or create meaning in artworks. For example, a family photo may be read as P’shat by seeing a family. Economic status and nationality or aspect of culture and religion might be gleaned by looking carefully at styles or clothes (Drash). The Sod of an image however might be compared to the meaning that exists but can’t be gleaned without some background insight. It is why a very old image of my relatives can have real meaning to me that would be hidden from anyone who didn’t know my ancestry. Session leaders should refer to these levels of meaning as participants create more metaphorical symbols as these will become the important building blocks of a personal lexicon of symbols of identity. (Ex: Participant makes a scale to represent his/her hero who taught her or him the value of fairness and justice.)

**Creating the Rest of the Symbols – 40 minutes (or more)**

Continue to work through the questions at the pace that feels meaningful to the participants. Ask participants to keep the final symbol, the one that they created to represent their personal Jewish Identity, then bring all small groups back together to the large group (if applicable).

**Connecting Our Stories: The Making of a Museum – 10 minutes**

Ask participants to explain in one sentence, one at a time, what their symbol is and what it means. After all participants have hear short explanations of one another’s symbols, they will find 2 or 3 other participants with whom they will make a museum-style display of their work. Participants need to find and discuss what connects their symbols/ideas/experiences together so that a kind of theme or narrative emerges from their curated display.

**Gallery Walk (reflection)– 10 minutes**

Participants can walk around the “Gallery” to browse the work of others and to ask questions of other artists. Think about this as a participant Schmooze time so that people can share and discuss their work with others with whom they didn’t previously share.

**Reflection – 5 minutes**

In their notebooks, participants will write some thoughts and reflections about their creations and about the workshop in general.

**Questions – 5 minutes**

Ask participants what questions they have about bringing this program back to camp. The facilitator will discuss ways that the program can be modified to suit smaller groups or different ages.

**Order of symbols**

* Something you like
* Something you don’t like
* Something you are good at
* Something you are not good at
* Your most prized possession
* A symbol of Judaism in general
* A symbol of Israel
* A food that reminds you of home
* A symbol of someone you look up to
* Something you are afraid of
* Something that is broken
* Something that is hidden
* Something that is full of awe and wonder
* A symbol of your personal Jewish identity (something that makes you feel proud, good, or
* strong as a Jewish person)

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

The list of questions to ask can be modified based on the topic that you wish to explore. For

example, one might ask campers to make a symbol of “difference” if you wanted to talk about

Inclusion or Bullying. You could also ask questions like “a symbol of home” in order to learn about

how to make your cabin feel like “Home.”

For campers who are interested in science, you can make Squishy Circuits using conductive and

non-conductive Play-doh that you can make yourself and then add batteries, bulbs, or even

motors into your art. Visit <http://courseweb.stthomas.edu/apthomas/SquishyCircuits/>.

Session leaders also should feel free to alter the list in order to open discussions about

important topics that we want to explore with participants. The program is very well-suited to creating a format for discussing big ideas in non-threatening ways. Decide what you need to talk about and modify the questions accordingly.