

CORNERSTONE 2017 RESOURCE

What's Your Backstory? Writing Fan Fiction for the Torah *Spin It!*

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SUMMARY:	An exploration of how each of us can create Midrash by filling in missing details from stories in the Torah. This session focuses on the story of the daughters of Tzafchad, from a Torah portion that falls during the summer. - <i>Submitted by Ariella Rosen</i>
TOPIC(S):	Torah, Writing
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	Participants will feel personally connected to the story through their own participation in creating the world that the characters inhabit, and be able to recreate the experience for other Torah stories.
AUDIENCE:	Ages 10 and up, ideally no more than 20-30 individuals
TIMING:	20 min.
APPENDICES:	Handout 1, Handout 2
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Copies of the text, copies of question prompts cut in strips by verse, large sheets of paper and markers (optional)
SET-UP DETAILS:	No specific space setup needed. Ideally a setup in the round: chairs in a circle with open space in the middle. Or, space around the outside edges of the space to spread out in a circle.

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

Timeline

00:00-00:05 Introduction to the Daughters of Zelophechad and asking questions

00:05-00:10 Filling in the gaps by answering prompts

00:10-00:16 Retelling the story

00:16-00:20 Debrief

Introduction to the Daughters of Zelophechad (5 min)

Welcome everyone.

We're going to read a story today, a real human interest piece. However, a lot of the details are missing. We need your help in getting to know who these people truly are: their backstories, their family dynamics, what gets them motivated/what makes them tick. We'll start by reading the story as we have it right now. As we read, think about some questions that you would want answered to get to know the characters better, and therefore transforming this story into a must-read.

Read the Torah verses out loud. (Handout 1)

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Generate questions. What gaps need to be filled in?

- Potential questions include: How did Zelophchad sin? What was the dynamic like among the five sisters? What did they stand to inherit? How did they react to the news that the law was changed on their behalf? How did they feel needing to petition for the change in the first place?

Filling in the gaps. (5 min)

Gather into groups of no more than 5 people. Hand each group a slip of paper which includes one verse from the story and one prompt based on a question generated above. (See Handout 2)
Create an anecdote that answers the question in 30 seconds or less and helps illuminate the verse with more details about the characters.

Retelling the story: A Collaborative Midrash on The Daughters of Zelophechad (6 min)

Read each verse of the Torah story again, pausing after each verse to have groups fill in with their added details.

Examples of Prompts:

- Describe a formative childhood experience that Hoglah, the middle daughter had that she is remembering right now.
- What was Zelophchad's sin?
- Describe Zelophchad's prized possession that his daughters will be inheriting.
- What was the oldest daughter Mahlah daydreaming about while they waited for an answer from Moses? What about Tirzah, the youngest?
- Narrate Moses' opening argument to God about the case.
- How did the Noah, the second oldest react to the news? Who did she run and tell first?
- How did the rest of the Israelites behave toward the five daughters after this?

Debrief (4 min)

How did it feel to fill in the gaps of the story? Easy? Challenging? Why?

How did the additions change the way you understood the Torah story or how you related to it?

You just created Midrash, biblical interpretation, just like rabbis have been doing for centuries. How else might you apply this technique (of taking a story, asking questions, and trying to answer them)?

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

This activity can be done with pre-made questions and prompts, or both can be generated on the spot. If your camp has services on Shabbat and you either read from the Torah or do some learning based on the Torah portion, this activity can happen during services.

Creating collaborative Midrash can be turned into a fun group bonding activity. For example, a camper could share the basics of a story of something that happened at camp, and the group could generate questions and imagine additional details to fill in the gaps of that story in hilarious ways.

Note: the message of this story differs based on the back stories you invent. You can focus around a specific lesson by setting a specific theme for the story. (Equality, standing up for oneself, etc.)