Culture & Famous Jews!

*Elective 2*

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| **AUTHOR(S):** | Asya Gribov |
| **SUMMARY:** | Through games and discussions, participants will learn about the many contributions of Jewish people to modern society and culture. Participants will question and debate whether and how their Jewish identity contributed to their legacy. *Submitted by* *Asya Gribov* |
| **TOPIC(S):** | Jewish Culture, Historic Jewish Figures |
| **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:** | Participants will learn about the many contributions to modern society and culture made by Jewish people.  *Participants will utilize the debate format to explore different topics.* |
| **AUDIENCE:** | Teens, 8-15 people |
| **TIMING:** | 1 hour and 30 minutes |
| **APPENDICES:** | Handout 1 – Famous Jews Jeopardy  Handout 2 – The Art of Debate  Handout 3 – Jewish Texts |
| **MATERIALS NEEDED:** | Post-its  Sharpies  iPhone or like with sounds and video capabilities  Barbie doll |
| **SET-UP DETAILS:** | Any room that is conducive to discussions |

**Session Timeline & Outline:**

**Ice Breaker: Who Am I Game** **(15 minutes)**

Facilitator sticks a sticker with the name of a famous Jew on the forehead of each participant so that participants can see other names, but not their own. Participants take turns asking yes or no questions in order to guess who is on their own forehead. Facilitator should suggest some questions:

Is the person still alive? Were they a musician? Did they live in America?

List of Possible Names: Sigmund Freud, Pink, Sandy Koufax, Seth Rogen, Steven Spielberg, Matisyahu, Marc Chagall, Jerry Seinfeld, Franz Kafka, Bernie Sanders, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Natan Sharansky, Harry Houdini, Golda Meir, Albert Einstein

**Famous Jews UnJeopardy (20 minutes)**

Divided into two teams. Participants play Jews UnJeopardy.

Questions can be written on Post-its and attached to a board with the question on the sticky side and the points on the outside. (Handout 1: Jeopardy)

**Is there something to it? (5 minutes)**

I have a question:

* Does it matter that Einstein was Jewish?
* Does it matter that Pink is Jewish?
* Does it matter that Oppenheimer, the inventor of the atomic bomb, was Jewish?

Write your gut instinct on a piece of paper. Ask participants how they responded, uniformly for all or different? Regardless of what your answer was, WHY did you give that answer?

Explain that we are creating a platform for discussion and we are not necessarily going to find an answer during this session. We want to engage in a chevruta, dialogue, brainstorm to ask questions and debate to further our thinking together.

**Textual Debate (35 minutes)**

*“For two thousand years Jewish discussion, debate and dialogue have been manifest through the Jewish book. Traditional Jewish debate takes place not in open forums, but on the written page. Subject matter of the debates, often spanning centuries, even millennia, converge on the written page. The reader of Jewish texts does not simply read words printed on a page, the reader is an active player on the page and with the page. The reader is a vocal participant in the conversation.” -* Micah D. Halpern, *The Art of Debate: Jewish Style* (Retrieved from <http://asiasociety.org/countries/religions-philosophies/art-debate-jewish-style>).

Let’s look at a few examples of contributions to Western Culture by Jewish people in relatively recent history by way of a “Jewish Debate.” Put pieces of “Jewish text” in the center of a large Post-it board. Have participants walk around and comment on the quote or art work. Participants should be at least somewhat familiar with these pieces. Suggested texts:

* Painting by Marc Chagall
* Song (can be played on an iPhone) by Leonard Cohen
* Image and story of Sandy Koufax
* Barbie Doll by Ruth Handler
* Image of Jonas Salk and his creation of the Polio Vaccine
* Passage from Sigmund Freud
* Clip of Jon Stewart
* The New Colossus by Emma Lazarus
* Text by Karl Marx

Ask participants to either ask a question about these Jewish texts or comment on something they notice in these pieces. Encourage participants to write a few sentences that would spark conversations. What is Jewish about these texts?

After everyone is finished, ask participants to do a second round responding to a comment or question that they read. Prompt participants to not contradict, but rather to build upon the comments or ask furthering questions. Participants can also reference other cultural pieces that can be brought into the conversation. In the third round ask participants to bring up a counterpoint to some of the comments that they read.

Bring everyone together for a debrief:

All of these are contributions to our culture that were presented by Jewish people. So what?

**Debate (15 minutes)**

Split participants into two groups. Assign at random the stance of each group. Participants have 10 minutes to brainstorm and develop their arguments. They are allowed to use their smartphones for research.

Decide as a group on a question (based on what topics emerge from the previous exercise) that would be of interest to debate. The question then should be stated as a sentence that can be agreed or disagreed with. For example:

* It matters that these contributors to society are Jewish.
* Jewish values/ religion/ ideas influenced the success of these people.
* The fact that these people are Jewish is irrelevant.
* There are core Jewish things that fostered this kind of success among Jewish people.

Debate Format:

1 group should argue – yes, it matters

1 group should argue – no, it doesn’t

Team 1 provides argument (3 minutes)

Team 2 presents questions about team 1 (2 minutes)

Team 1 provides argument (3 minutes)

Team 1 presents questions about team 2 (2 minutes)

Rebuttal points from team 1 (2 minutes)

Rebuttal points from team 2 (2 minutes)

1minute position summary for each

Debrief Topic**:**

* Did we ask the right question? Is there another question we might want to ask now having done this debate?
* What other information would help us in thinking about this topic?
* So what?

Debrief exercise**:**

* What are the benefits of using debates to think about topics?
* What about facts vs. opinions?
* How can we use debate formats to teach topics we do not have answers for?
* What are the challenges in using this format to explore different topics and how can they be mediated?
* Was this an effective tool for learning?