The Snowflake Principle

*Elective 2*

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| **AUTHOR(S):** | Sarra Alpert |
| **SUMMARY:** | What do we really know about each of our campers? What are the questions we do and don't ask? There's more diversity in our camp communities than we often realize, and we have to build ways of exploring and encouraging these expressions of difference while maintaining a cohesive, bonded group. In this session, we'll look at how to create programs and rituals (Jewish and otherwise) to take on this intriguing and generative tension within camp so that everyone can shine a little more brightly.  *- Submitted by Sarra Alpert* |
| **TOPIC(S):** | Community Building, Identity |
| **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:** | Fellows will have new tools for understanding the diversity within their groups of campers, as well as ideas for activities that engage with and celebrate the various ranges of identities, experiences, and skills within the group. |
| **AUDIENCE:** | The session is designed for staff training, but includes activities that can be used for campers ages 8-16. |
| **TIMING:** | Full session is 90 minutes; camper activities range from 20-60 minutes. |
| **APPENDICES:** | Handouts, worksheets, and text studies for programs (see outline) |
| **MATERIALS NEEDED:** | Handouts (see outline) |
| **SET-UP DETAILS:** | These activities can be done in any space, although parts of the staff training piece would be best indoors. For all of these activities, you’ll want enough space for everyone to sit in one big circle. |

**Session Timeline & Outline:**

Starting with Connection:

* Start with an exercise that immediately sets the tone of direct interpersonal connection and trust-building. For example:
* Put on some slow-paced music and ask everyone to walk around the room/area at a leisurely pace, making as much eye contact as possible.
* When the music stops, get into a pair with whomever you’re currently holding eye contact (or find a partner if you weren’t currently holding eye contact with anyone).
* Hold eye contact for 10 more seconds (tell them when time is up). Then introduce yourselves to each other, sharing your name and one of your favorite things.
* Repeat this at least three more times (or if you have time, you can do it as many times as there are people, so that everyone has a chance to meet everyone else this way. By later in the game, people will be consciously seeking out those people with whom they haven’t partnered).
* Come back together and discuss:
  + What felt uncomfortable about this?
  + How did you push through that discomfort to stay present in the moment?
  + How did you see differently than you might have otherwise?
  + How did you feel differently after your encounter than you might have felt otherwise?

A Different Kind of “Get to Know You”:

* Start by making a list together (on flip-chart paper) of the types of questions that come up in standard get-to-know-you games (e.g., number of siblings, hobbies, etc.). *\*You can start with a list that includes some examples that you’ve prepped in advance.*
* Make a second list (post next to first list): Examples of things that you feel are important in getting to know you genuinely well, but which aren’t necessarily on the first list.
  + Discuss: How do these types of topics come up eventually in relationship-building? Why are they harder to discover/share?
* Make a third list (best to have this list partially prepped in advance): What are the assumptions/generalizations that we make about our campers (e.g., likes/dislikes, Jewish background, social feelings, income/class, gender expectations, etc.)?
  + Share some information about how we’ve come to know that these assumptions are far from accurate. Within the Jewish community, there are people from many ethnic backgrounds, racial identities, Jewish beliefs and practices, gender identities, class backgrounds, sexualities, and personalities with a wide range of Jewish rituals and customs, some of which are inherited and others of which are created. You can share a few facts as examples:
    - 20% of U.S. Jews report household incomes of less than $30,000 per year; about six-in-ten Jews in this low-income category are either under age 30 or over age 65 (Pew Study, 2014). In Canada, 15% of Jews live below the poverty line (Jewish Federations of Canada survey, 2011).
    - Depending on which groups you count, 10-20% of the U.S. Jewish population is racially and ethnically diverse. The 20% number includes African, African American, Latinx, Asian, Native American, Sephardi, Mizrahi and mixed-race Jews by heritage, adoption, and marriage (from the Institute for Jewish and Community Research study, 2002).
    - 1 in 6 U.S. Jews are new to Judaism (Pew Study, 2014).
* Ask everyone to find space a little bit apart from one another, far enough that they can’t read one another’s papers. They can also lie down or face outward for more privacy. Slowly read through the questions on the “A Different Kind of Get to Know You” handout. As you read through the questions, people can feel free to consider their own personal answers in their minds or can simply listen to the range of questions. After each set of questions, give a moment for people to write a little about their reactions to that set - which ones most surprised them or made them uncomfortable or struck them as important, etc.
* Storytelling:
  + Pair up.
  + First each person should share a significant experience from his/her life and personal response to one of the questions from the worksheet.
  + Then each person should share an experience with a camper that relates to one of those questions and/or the larger concept, i.e., a moment when you thought you had a camper all figured out, but then they did something that forced you to reevaluate your understanding of them or a moment when a camper helped you to see that a particular activity was shutting them out in some way.

How to Do This Well?

* Spend some time discussing the importance of approaching this kind of work from a place of partnership, respect, gentleness, and sensitivity. Remember that this is about building relationships that can ground and inform our work as educators and programmers.
  + What these kinds of activities/practices shouldn’t be:
* Demanding: creating structures that force anyone to “out” themselves on any particular aspect of their identity or life story.
* Spotlighting: creating activities that single out campers whose identities or life experiences are different from the majority of the group.
* What these kinds of activities/practices should be:
* Invitational: designing activities that invite people to share and celebrate their differences.
* Culture-shifting: activities that help the entire group shift a particular norm or expectation in a way that opens up more possibilities for all individuals.
* Evaluative: a lens for examining your own programming and other choices to see if those programs/choices reflect certain assumptions or shut down differences.
* In this session, we’ll model a couple of examples for the invitational approach; later we’ll generate some examples for the other types as well.

Examples of Invitationally Inclusive Programming:

* Who Are You?
  + Give everyone the handout of a page divided into three categories with the headings: Who I Am, Who I’m Not, Who I Hope to Be. Explain the sections:
    - The first list is for names/terms/titles that you wear proudly (for example: sibling, smart, feminist, Jew, mensch).
    - The second list is for names/terms/titles that you don’t like and which have either been applied to you or that you worry have been applied to you (for example: racial slurs, Jewish American Princess, bossy, not really a Jew, bitch).
    - The third list is for names/terms/titles that don’t apply to you yet, but which you hope will someday (for example: parent, graduate, ally).
  + Be sure to tell them that they will be sharing this list with other people. If they’d like to write down terms they don’t want to share, they should put those on the back.
  + Give everyone time to fill out their lists.
  + Form concentric circles. Each person should allow his/her partner to read through his/her list, and choose one of the terms on the partner’s page and ask them to share more about it.
  + After a couple of minutes, switch partners (number of switches will depend on amount of time allotted for program).
  + Create posters that highlight the words participants wrote down on their first "Who I Am" list (e.g., collage, drawing, etc.). Hang these posters around your bunk or in other group spaces. You can also create “Who We Are” posters for a bunk/tent to then post in a larger camp space (these posters would include identifiers for every individual in that bunk/tent).
* Who’s in the Room?
* In the usual version of this game, everyone stands in a circle with one person in the middle. That person shares an “I statement” (e.g., I have brown eyes, I like to eat ice cream in the winter) and everyone else who also identifies with that statement switches places within the circle, with someone new taking the center spot.
* In its original incarnation, the goal of the game was to identify commonalities.
* In this variation, we’ll alternate between finding commonalities and intentionally seeking out unique differences that we can celebrate.
* The mission of the person standing in the middle is to find an “I statement” that is completely unique to him/herself.
* Until that happens, they remain in the middle (other people who share the statements along the way still step in and switch places around the circle).
* Once the middle person finds a completely unique identifier, everyone applauds him/her and someone else takes his/her place in the circle.
* Either way, the goal is celebration of both what we share and what makes each of us utterly distinct.

Quick Brainstorm on Other Ideas:

* Spend a few minutes brainstorming other ideas in the invitational category, as well as ideas for the *culture-shifting category* (e.g., bunk/tent programming that bucks traditional gender norms; Jewish-culture programming that highlights Jewish practices that originate from all over the world) and the *evaluative category* (e.g., regular co-counselor meetings where you share what you’re learning about your different campers and consider particular program ideas that might give various campers a chance to shine).

Closing: Text Study:

* Ask four people to read out loud the four texts on the text handout.
* Discuss concept of “B’tzelem Elohim.” What does it really mean to consider ourselves as created in God’s image?
  + Or, for those who don’t connect to the idea of God, what does it mean to consider the individual as holy?
* How can we create a sense of community that doesn’t dissolve difference?

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

All notes on bringing this material back to camp are included in the session outline. Please note in particular the section on “How to Do This Well.” There are also some additional activity/project suggestions to build out the two central activities.

**A Different Kind of “Get to Know You”**

*After each set of questions, free-write about your reactions to that group of questions: Which ones most surprised you? Which made you uncomfortable? Which struck you as important? Why?*

What in your day-to-day life is particularly difficult for you to do? Who in your life knows that these things are hard for you? Are there times that you need different things (or more help, etc.) than others seem to need? Have you asked for what you need at those times? Is there anything you’re really good at that you don’t get a chance to do at camp? If you could design your day at camp (regardless of what activities are actually offered at your camp), what would it look like? What parts of the camp day are most challenging for you?

Where are you from? Where is your family from? What languages do you speak or hear at home? Are there moments when your specific family story makes you feel more connected or less connected to the Jewish communities you’re a part of? Are there moments when your specific family story makes you feel more connected or less connected to your particular city or country?

Who in your family is Jewish? What other faiths or cultures are part of your family heritage? What Jewish rituals are part of your life at home? Have you ever had an experience where you felt “not Jewish enough”? Have you ever felt that way at camp? Are there other important cultural or religious traditions that inform your identity? If so, do you feel comfortable bringing those up?

Which of the gender-based bunk/tent activities are fun for you? Which would you prefer to avoid? Have you ever questioned your sexual identity? Do you pretend to identify as heterosexual even if you’re not sure if you are or know that you’re not? Do you feel ready for a romantic or sexual relationship in general? Do you (or did you ever) pretend to have crushes because it seems like that’s what everyone talks about? Do you find that there are moments of gender-based bonding that revolve around assumptions about your romantic or sexual desires?

Where do you live (for example, an apartment, a rented house, a house that your family owns, a trailer, a shelter, a house or apartment with multiple family generations)? How much private, personal space do you have where you live? Where do you get most of your clothes? Where does your family usually get food? How often do you think about these aspects of your life? When do you tend to notice them? Are there moments in your camp community when you feel aware of potential differences between your economic experience and others’?

What is your racial identity? What elements of your racial identity and/or history are especially significant to your personal identity and story? How does your race impact your day-to-day experiences? How does your race impact your experience in Jewish communal spaces?

**Jewish Text Study**

If you see a great gathering of people, recite the blessing “Blessed is the Wise One who knows all secrets” (*Baruhk hacham ha-razim*). For just as their faces are different from one another’s, so are their minds unlike one another’s. In fact, each person has a distinctive and individual mind.

You can see that this is so from the request that Moses made at the time that his death was drawing near. He said to God: Master of the Universe! The mind of every single person is known by You, and you know that no two people are exactly alike. When I leave them, I plead with You -- should you appoint a new leader, please appoint someone who will accept each and every person according to that person’s individuality. How do we know that Moses made this request? From the way he addressed God as *Adonai Elohei ha-ruchot l’kol basar* (Adonai, God of the various kinds of human spirit).

*- MIDRASH TANHUMA, PINCHAS #10 (Torah commentary, Numbers)*

While I know myself as a creation of God, I am also obligated to realize and remember that everyone else and everything else are also God’s creation.

*- MAYA ANGELOU (African-American writer, 1928 - 2014 )*

Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it.

*- CONFUCIUS (Chinese philosopher, 551 BC - 479 BC)*

Beloved is the human being who was created in God’s image. It is indicative of a greater love still that it was made known to human beings that they were created in God’s image.

*- PIRKEI AVOT (ETHICS OF THE FATHERS) 3:18 (Talmud)*

**Who Are You?**

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| **What I Am**  *(names/titles/descriptors that you wear proudly)* | **What I’m Not**  *(names/titles/descriptors that*  *you don’t like and which have*  *either been applied to you in the past or that you worry have been applied to you)* |
| ***What I Hope to Be***  *(names/titles/descriptors that don’t apply to you yet but which you hope will someday)* | |