

Arts and Crafts (Part 1) *Specialty Track*

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SUMMARY:	In this session, participants use Playdoh sculpt response to a number of prompting questions. The questions can be changed to suit a variety of ages and ideas that come up at camp. It is an exceptionally great as a cabin community building session. - <i>Submitted by Daniel Abramson</i>
TOPIC(S):	Community Building and Visual Art
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	You will learn how to use very basic art materials as a vehicle to start discussions about important ideas and foster meaningful connections between people at camp. You'll see a simple activity can allow you to explore even challenging topics.
AUDIENCE:	This program can be modified to suit any age group at camp from the youngest campers to senior staff. This session is meant to speak to experienced counselors.
TIMING:	90 minutes – For younger campers the time can be shortened to account for different attention spans
APPENDICES:	Basic Playdoh Recipe
MATERIALS NEEDED:	1 container or small handful of Playdoh or plasticine per participant.
SET-UP DETAILS:	The materials for the program are very portable so the session can be done anywhere kids can gather and sit comfortably in a circle The session requires participants to be able to see and hear each other so a circular set up is ideal. If the group size is large, then with multiple facilitators it can be split into smaller groups.

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

Introducing the Program – 5 minutes

The facilitator can give the following instructions:

“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

Facilitator invited the participants to respond to the first question:

“First, make a symbol of something that 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 group sharing for each question until you have completed the first 4 questions, then pause to explain about metaphors, meaning and symbols.

Making a Jewish connection 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 it's 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 with 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 their hero who taught her or him the value of fairness and justice)

Read more about it here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pardes_\(Jewish_exegesis\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pardes_(Jewish_exegesis))

Creating the rest of the symbols – 45 minutes (or more)

Order of symbols

1. Something you like
2. Something you don’t like
3. Something you are good at
4. Your most prized possession
5. A symbol of your personal Jewish identity (something that makes you feel proud, good, or strong as a Jewish person)
6. A symbol of someone you look up to
7. Something that gives you a sense of awe and wonder

Continue to work through the questions at the pace that feels meaningful to the participants.

Group Question – 10 minutes

As a whole group, ask participants to create a final scene or diorama that represents a community where they feel known and welcomed. Each person should add an element to a collaborative scene that incorporates everyone's individual creation.

Reflection – 15 minutes (5 minutes of writing, and 10 minutes of group reflection)

In their notebooks, participants will write some thoughts and reflections about their creations and about the workshop in general in their notebooks. Participants are then invited to share things that were meaningful, challenging, interesting etc. with the group.

Questions – 10 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. This time might also be used to brainstorm alternate questions that counsellors might use with different groups at camp.

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 Playdoh that you can make yourself and then add batteries, bulbs or even motors into your art. <http://courseweb.stthomas.edu/apthomas/SquishyCircuits/>

Session leaders should also 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.



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