

### People of the Books (and the Music and the Art...) *Shabboption*

<b>AUTHOR(S):</b>	Sarra Alpert
<b>TOPIC (S)</b>	Jewish Text, Shabbat
<b>SUMMARY</b>	At the heart of text study is simply the practice of being in conversation with someone else's creation. We get to explore and connect with another person's mind and heart, and even better, we get to do that together. Judaism is rooted in parsing, arguing with, learning from, and reinterpreting the stories, laws and other texts that have formed our history and tradition. And what's especially cool is that we can do all of that with whatever texts we want, from Octavia Butler to the Muppet Show to a Bernie Sanders meme. In this session, we'll travel the limitless universe of text and the many wonderful conversations we can have across time and space.
<b>GOALS:</b>	Participants will feel more comfortable bringing a wide range of sources into text study. Participants will feel empowered to teach the texts they love. Participants will have new tools for text study.
<b>AUDIENCE:</b>	The texts we'll use here will be aimed at adults. However, you can use this same model with any texts, so you can adapt the text options for any age.
<b>TIMING:</b>	30 minutes
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	Text study handouts
<b>MATERIALS NEEDED:</b>	Just copies of the text!
<b>SET-UP DETAILS:</b>	Anywhere quiet enough for chevruta (paired) conversation.

### SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00-00:05 - Introductory share
- 00:05-00:15 - Teach text study tools
- 00:15-00:25 - Chevruta text study
- 00:25-00:30 - Closing go-round

### SESSION OUTLINE:

#### Introduction (5 minutes):

- Welcome the group and explain that “text” in this context is anything that anyone has created for others to engage with. That can include traditional Jewish texts but also movies, music, visual art, memes, fiction, poetry, essays, TV shows, podcasts, and on and on.
- Welcome the group and have everyone introduce themselves in the chat by sharing a text (using the definition above) that they especially love.

#### Teach text study tools (8 minutes):

- Start with some key frameworks for how we can engage with texts:
  - There are so many ways to engage with text! No method is right or wrong - they all just lead us along different pathways. For example:
    - Discussion about the text and its ideas.
    - Artistic representation of the text and the ideas you find in it.
    - The Bibliodrama/Storahtelling approach - act out scenes from the texts or dramatically embody the characters and further draw out what they’re experiencing and how they might feel about it.
    - Midrash (or fan fiction!) - create your own offshoot from the text that continues the story or fills in a gap in the narrative.
    - Debate - have different people learn different texts that have conflicting ideas and then engage in a debate with each text represented.
    - What else?
  - Make sure to make the texts accessible: offer translations, key context, etc.
  - Teach texts that you find meaningful -- and at some point in the session, share with your learners about what that text means to you.
  - Invite personal connection to the text and personal reflection, but don’t require it -- allow learners to set their own pace and build trust.
- Share some practices you can use to engage with a text (not all of these formats work for all texts - consider the type of text as well as the goal of your program when

deciding which ones feel most relevant):

- You / Me / Us:
  - What do you think the creator of this text is trying to share with us? What do they seem to care about?
  - What in this text resonates for you personally?
  - What in this text do you think is meaningful or important for your community (or for everybody) to know or think about or hear?
- Know / Learn / Want:
  - What did I know about this topic before I read this text?
  - What did I learn about this topic from this text?
  - What new questions do I have? / What does this make me want to learn more about?
- Pardes (a Jewish text study practice with four levels of delving more and more deeply into the text):
  - Pshat (simple or literal): Restate what the text is saying (on its most literal level) and talk through any clarifying questions.
  - Remez (hint): What do you think the text is implying? For example, is there a broader idea or principle that the text's creator might be implying through their particular examples or characters or situations?
  - Drash (concept or interpretation): Expand on the text's ideas. What do you think it means? Why are the ideas valuable? What about the ideas trouble you or present something you might want to argue with? Where do these ideas lead you?
  - Sod (secret): What feels hidden in the text? What other ideas does the text connect to (that might not be named)? What do you know about the context in which the text was created (or about the person who created it, or the people who are represented in it) and how do you think that potentially influences the text's ideas, or how does that context affect the way you personally engage with the text?
- Lectio Divina (a Christian practice that means "divine reading" - the version written here is adapted towards universal use):
  - Read the text out loud more than once, slowly.
  - Choose a word or phrase that touches your heart (it can be a different word or phrase for each participant).
  - How do you see that word or phrase touching your life today? What about it is resonating or bringing something up for you?
  - What do you see the text (or maybe just the word or phrase you chose from the text) as calling you to do or become?

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### Setup for shared text study (2 minutes):

- Show the text options - each one will be paired with a text study format.
- Explain that everyone will get to choose which of those text/format combinations they want to engage with today.
- Have breakout rooms set up in advance for the different options.

### Shared Text Study (10 minutes):

- For today, we'll be using this set of text options below.

### Closing (5 minutes):

- Ask everyone to think of one text that holds significant meaning for them and what value that text represents or teaches about (i.e. text: The Little Prince; value: being in relationship with others).
- Go around with each person sharing their text and value.

### BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP & SHIFTING TO IN PERSON:

This session is both a program itself and a how-to about that program. The part about the frameworks for text study, the methods, and the potential formats are all for you to have as background that will help you craft your program. The program itself would be the text study! In an ideal setting:

- There would be a much longer time frame for the actual text study portion.
- You could include longer texts if you have more time to work with.

### Text #1:

**[“Instructions on Not Giving Up” - Ada Limon \(2017\)](#)**

More than the fuchsia funnels breaking out of the crabapple tree, more than the neighbor’s almost obscene display of cherry limbs shoving their cotton candy-colored blossoms to the slate sky of Spring rains, it’s the greening of the trees that really gets to me. When all the shock of white and taffy, the world’s baubles and trinkets, leave the pavement strewn with the confetti of aftermath, the leaves come. Patient, plodding, a green skin growing over whatever winter did to us, a return to the strange idea of continuous living despite the mess of us, the hurt, the empty. Fine then, I’ll take it, the tree seems to say, a new slick leaf unfurling like a fist to an open palm, I’ll take it all.

### Text #2:

**[Excerpt from “The Handmaid’s Tale Season-Premiere Recap: Under His Eye” - Laura Hudson, New York Magazine \(April 2017\)](#)**

There has been no shortage of essays calling *The Handmaid’s Tale* disturbingly relevant to current events, but it’s important to remember that this has always been the case. Margaret Atwood [once called](#) her novel a response to the idea that this sort of oppression “can’t happen here,” a dystopian vision designed to feel chillingly on the cusp of plausibility. The overthrow of American democracy is relatively recent when we meet our protagonist Offred (Elisabeth Moss), which means that every woman in the freshly minted totalitarian theocracy of Gilead grew up in an America like the one we know, and watched her freedoms get wrenched away by a regime that makes the Puritans look progressive.

Offred is us, in other words. The first time we see her, she’s dressed not in her Handmaid’s garb, with all its antiquated, pseudo-colonial piety, but as a contemporary in ripped jeans and a hoodie, running for the border with her husband and daughter in hopes of escaping the machine-gun-wielding men who want to turn her into nothing more than a possession, nothing more than a walking uterus forced to breed in a world where her ability to bear children makes her a very valuable commodity. A very valuable thing. She does not escape.

### Text #3:

**“You Are Not Alone” - Mavis Staples and Jeff Tweedy (2010)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KW0kE6mucFY>

You're not alone  
I'm with you, I'm lonely too  
What's that song  
Can't be sung by two?

An open hand, an open heart  
There's no need to be afraid  
Open up this is a raid  
I wanna get it through to you  
You're not alone

A broken home, a broken heart  
Isolated and afraid  
Open up this is a raid  
I wanna get it through to you  
You're not alone

A broken dream, a broken heart  
Isolated and afraid  
Open up this is a raid  
I wanna get it through to you  
You're not alone

You're not alone, every night  
I stand in your place  
Every tear on every face  
Tastes the same

I wanna get it through to you  
You're not alone  
I'm gonna get it through to you  
You're not alone

### Text #4:

**Tweet from [Adrienne Maree Brown](#) (January 2021)**





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