The Art of Jewish Learning - Wire and Bead Kippah

Grade Level: 7th/8th
Length: 90 minutes (can be divided)

Enduring Understandings

- Jewish practices like wearing a kippah express awareness of something greater than oneself (God, community, tradition).
- Ritual objects can be both personal expressions and communal symbols.
- Jewish identity can be expressed in multiple ways such as through practice, creativity, and intention (*kavanah*).
- Tradition evolves, and Jews make meaning through both inherited and personal practices.

Essential Questions

- Why do some Jews wear a kippah?
- What does it mean to show respect or awareness of God?
- How do outward symbols reflect inner identity?
- Can a ritual object be both traditional and personal? How?
- When do I feel connected to something bigger than myself?

Materials

- Kippot of various sizes, materials, and designs
- Worksheets
- Pens/pencils
- Wire kippah base (or pre-formed spiral frame)
- Thin wire
- Beads (variety of colors, shapes)
- Needle-nose pliers
- Optional: comb clip, decorative elements

Timeline

Introduction (10-15 minutes)

Ask: What is something you wear that represents something about you?
What are ways people show respect in different situations?

After students share their answer to the above questions, show them various styles of kippot. If you're unable to have them in-person, you can use images. It's important to show a wide variety of styles: knitted, wire, velvet, colorful, neutral, hobbies (i.e. sports kippah), interests (i.e. a team or community), etc

Ask:

- What messages might each of these kippot send?

Facilitator's note: encourage answers such as "they like X team," "they attended Y school," "they got the kippah from so-and-so's bar mitzvah" - these are all important messages!

The Meaning of Kippot (10-15 minutes)
Say: A kippah, also called a yarmulke, is a head covering worn by many Jews around the world. It is traditionally worn during prayer or in synagogue. Some people wear their kippah all the time.

Ask: does anyone know why one might wear a kippah?
You can have students answer this question in writing on their worksheets.

Say: There are a few key meanings behind a kippah that have developed over time, including:

- Reminder of God above
- Sign of humility
- Marker of Jewish identity

Text Study (10 minutes)
Say: In small groups, you're going to look at a very short text and discuss the quote together.

Kiddushin 31a:

> *A sage would not walk four cubits* (a measurement) *with his head uncovered, saying: "The Divine Presence is above me."*

Discuss:

- What does "God is above me" mean in your own words?
- Do you need a physical reminder to think about something important? What are your reminders (bracelets, notes, habits)?
- What does this suggest about why someone wears a kippah?
- Is wearing a head covering about rules? Is it about awareness? Explain.

Share Back + Introduce Wire Kippah Project (5 minutes)
Say: is there anyone who wants to share a bit about what your group discussed?
Take a few responses before explaining:

Today, you're going to create your own personalized kippah that represents you, your values, and what is important to you in this moment. Before diving in, you're going to do some reflecting on your worksheets about what you want your kippah to reflect.

Design Planning (10 minutes)
Say: on your worksheet, you'll circle 3-5 values that are important to you. Then, you'll pick a color of the beads that will represent each value and you will sketch your design. For example, blue might be spirituality, red might mean courage, and green might mean growth.

Kippah Creation (30 minutes)
Facilitator note: if it works with your classroom culture, it's encouraged to play some music in the background while the students work on their projects.

Steps:
- Anchor the wire to the base
- Add beads one by one, wrapping the wire around as you go

For a more detailed description of the steps, including images, here is a resource from the Women's League for Conservative Judaism:
https://www.wlcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/wire_kippah.pdf

Reflection and Sharing (10 minutes)
Say: everyone has made a kippah that is unique to them! To wrap up, please share your response to one of the following prompts:
- One thing my kippah represents…
- A value I included is…

After everyone shares, say: Jewish tradition gives us tools to remind us who we are and what matters. What we do with those tools is where your voice comes in - you have the opportunity to choose.