UNPACKED FOR EDUCATORS

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Educator's Guide

The Intersection of Black & Jewish Histories in America Program Resource Pack

Today, Black and Jewish communities in America are largely separate. Yet, the overlapping history of these communities is predominantly unknown. This series examines a relationship both united and divided by prejudices and discrimination. It provides context to open up a new dialogue which is needed now more than ever.

Link to series

Discussion Questions

1. What are some commonalities between the Black and Jewish experiences and how can those shared experiences serve to further develop understanding and community building between the two groups?
2. Watch MLK's close friend Rabbi Joachim Prinz's speech from the iconic March on Washington in 1963. What is Rabbi Prinz's primary lesson? Do you think it's a model for Black-Jewish relations today?
3. When there are simmering tensions between different communities like the ones between Blacks and Jews around the time of the Crown Heights Riots in 1991, who do you think should be responsible for calming the tensions and building bridges? Individual

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citizens? Communities as a whole? The educational system? Or are political moves the most useful tool in this situation?

4. Nissim Black, a Black Jewish rapper refers to himself as “Hitler’s worst nightmare” in his song “Mothaland Bounce”. How do you interpret this self-description? Do you think it’s accurate?

5. In Martin Luther King Jr’s final speech before he was assassinated, he made multiple biblical references to Moses and the Jewish peoples’ journey through the desert on the way to the Land of Israel. He said “I’ve been to the mountaintop… I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you.” How does the story of the Jewish people and Black Americans relate? How can these two communities work together to fight for tolerance, equality and human rights?

Learning Activities

1. **Visual Literacy: A picture is worth 1,000 words.**
   Many argue that this powerful image from 14-year-old Emmitt Till’s funeral (after he was lynched in 1955) helped change and energize America’s Civil Rights movement forever. Explain to your students that there are some photographs that are so captivating that they can elicit action in response. Ask your students to choose an image of historical significance (can be a recent image as well) that led to major change. Students should:
   - Share the image
   - Explain the context behind the image
   - Describe the historical or societal changes the image helped lead to
   - Reflect on how the image made them personally feel

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2. **Defending an Argument:** Starting in the 1970s, affirmative action became a significant part of governmental efforts to address disparities between white and Black Americans in areas like employment, education, and housing. Some Jews felt affirmative action put Jewish advances at risk and felt the system was too close to the antisemitic quotas they faced in the recent past. Color, they argued, shouldn't matter. The Black community responded that maybe it shouldn't but it does. Ask your students to debate the pros and cons of affirmative action. Each group should develop three strong arguments on their side of the debate with strong reasoning and examples to back up their points. Use this link as a starting off point. After the debate, hold an anonymous vote to determine if your students support or oppose affirmative action.
3. **Social Media Content Creation:**
   Until the 19th century, Ethiopian Jews believed that they were the only Jews left on Earth and that all Jews were Black. Upon the mass immigration of Ethiopian Jews to Israel, the perception of Jews changed in Israel and around the world. Learn about Ethiopian Jews by watching this video. After learning about Ethiopian Jews and their story, students should write a list of three main messages or interesting facts that they learned from the video. Then, students should create an educational TikTok video which includes both a presentation of the three messages and facts and a short reflection on Ethiopian Jews being a minority within a minority.

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4. **Problem Solving and Decision Making**: After the Holocaust, Black and Jewish Americans began to work together due to a common enemy (Nazism) as well as to achieve a common vision for the future. In small groups, imagine you are part of a Black-Jewish committee that has gathered in the wake of the Holocaust tasked with producing an action plan for a better future based on five big lessons learned by both communities. Groups should create a presentation that outlines the five lessons learned along with steps that the committee could take to address each lesson. Explain how the committee could implement the action plan. Present the five ideas along with how you would implement them.
5. **Guided Practice: Empathy Development:**
   Freewriting is a creative exercise in which students write without stopping for a certain amount of time. Students should watch the following video and engage in a five-minute freewriting exercise. After the exercise is finished, open a class discussion by asking your students to share if they have ever experienced feeling alienated within their own group.

Reflection Questions

1. When you close your eyes and imagine what a Jew looks like, does a particular "look" come to mind? If so, why do you think that is the case? Did learning about diverse Jews change your perspective on how Jews "look"?
2. How does ignorance and lack of face-to-face interaction lead to tensions between different groups? Can you think of an example of this today on a personal level? Communal level? National level?
3. **Guided Practice** - Sensory Statements: Put yourself in the shoes of a Black American living in the South in the years before the civil rights movement. You are barred from entering most establishments and you are discriminated against in many ways from employment to discriminatory housing laws and more due to the color of your skin. Also, put yourself in the shoes of a Jewish American living in the same time period. You also face discrimination like being barred from country clubs, private beaches and entire neighborhoods because you are a Jew.
   Imagine yourself in these positions. Express your feelings by using the following sentence starters:
   a. With my head I think…..
   b. With my mouth I say….
   c. With my heart, I feel….
   d. With my ears I hear….
   e. With my hands I ……
   f. With my legs I stand for….

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When crafting your sensory statement, consider:
How do the events taking place make you feel?
What thoughts or concerns do you have for yourself, your family and community?
What might be your actions or responses to the events and occurrences taking place in your community?

4. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was close friends with Martin Luther King Jr. and an advocate of the American civil rights movement of the 1960s. Rabbi Heschel famously said “when I marched with Martin Luther King in Selma, I felt my legs were praying.” Reflect on this quote from Rabbi Heschel. Have you ever experienced a situation in which you felt your legs were praying? When has doing an action taken on spiritual significance for you?



5. As the experience between Black and Jewish Americans has taught us, the way people see themselves doesn't always align with how others see them. For example, many American Jews saw themselves as Jewish, not white but many Black Americans saw them as white. Can you relate to this in your own life? Give an example of a time when someone else saw you, your family or community differently than you saw it. How did that affect you?

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Further Learning

1. Unpacked for Educators:
    - Black and Jewish Relations (video)
    - MLK's Jewish Connection (video)
    - Ethiopian Jewry (video)
    - Ingathering of Exiles: From Ethiopia to Israel (podcast)
    - Why Judaism Forbids Racism (video)
2. The Lubavitcher Rebbe To Mayor David Dinkins: The Melting Pot
3. People of the Pod: Black-Jewish Congressional Caucus
4. Jersey City shooting: Blacks, Jews see progress one year after attack
5. ELI Talks, What Makes This Jew Different Than All Other Jews? Race, Difference, and Safety in Jewish Spaces
6. Kylie Unell, My mom is white and my dad is black. Don't call me a 'Jew of Color.' - Jewish Telegraphic Agency
7. Hayehudi Hachadash - the New Jew (only available in Israel)

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