

BECOMING THEOLOGIANS

A Curriculum Guide for 4th-Grade Reform Supplemental
Education Programs

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In Fulfillment of the MEdL Requirements

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RATIONALE

For the past few years, I have taught Torah to fourth grade students at Leo Baeck Temple (LBT). My students learned our tradition's stories, questioned them, made their own commentary on them, and connected the stories to their lives. However, throughout my teaching, I noticed that I used the word "God" repeatedly without defining it.

Although I did not define God or create intentional moments for my students to define God for themselves, my students came up with a myriad of questions that showed me that they were grappling with the concept of God. As a teacher, they asked me:

- How does the creation story exist if we have the Big Bang?
- Is God Jewish?
- Was God responsible for the *Akeida* and the plagues?
- What if I don't believe in God? Does this Torah story relate to me?

I noticed that I could help my students think about each individual question, but I did not have a systemic way to answer their deep, theological inquiries.

I designed this curriculum because students, even in elementary school, have profound questions about God and the role of God in their lives. A student's religious education should give them a place to explore and question God. Furthermore, a student's Jewish education should allow them to connect with the Torah and its wisdom. This curriculum allows students to study the Torah while examining the role that God plays in it. The students will get to compare the many facets of God represented in the Torah to the God they may or may not believe in.

This curriculum guide is intended for fourth graders in a Reform synagogue supplementary school setting. In my experience, fourth graders can grapple with deep ideas and ask probing questions of the stories presented to them. Around this time, children begin to shed their childhood conception of God and start to grapple with all the contradictions embedded in what they have been told about God (Kushner, 1995). Around age ten, children start

to have a battle between the God they know and experience and the God of religion (Heller, 1986). This transitional age is an important time for educators to guide students as they work to grapple with God on their own.

Working to understand and know God is grounded deeply in Jewish tradition. For centuries, theologians, or thinkers who write about God and God's role in the world, have worked to uncover the ideas of Torah into conceptions of God that make sense to their lives. While many theologians go beyond the Torah in their understanding of God, the Torah is the foundation of the Jewish faith, and almost every Jewish theologian has incorporated the Torah in their work. This curriculum aims for students to become their own theologians and develop their own ideas of what God means to them. This guide is meant for students to add their own thoughts about God to the rich history of our tradition.

The idea of wrestling with God comes directly from our Torah, inspired by the story of Jacob wrestling with an unknown figure. After his wrestling match, Jacob gets the new name "Israel" because he had wrestled with beings Divine and human and had prevailed (Genesis 32:29). The Jewish people are known as *Bnei Yisrael*, or the children of Israel, meaning we are meant to wrestle with God and to find meaning within our wrestling. This curriculum guides students as they wrestle with ideas of God and work to understand God.

While many fourth-grade students learn about Torah, few educators have created resources to teach children about God. As of 2024, Behrman House Publishing has over a dozen books aimed to teach fourth graders about some aspect of Torah or the Bible, but only one book series teaching about God (n.d.). One-off programs and resources have been created for other age groups and settings. Cantor Ellen Dreskin, Rabbi Billy Dreskin and Rabbi Mark Shapiro (1987) created a program entitled "God Shopping" for teenagers and adults to explore their idea of God. Rabbi Dan Medwin created a two-page resource entitled "God is a Variable" (D. Medwin, Personal Communication, February 8, 2022) specifically for campers at 6 Points Sci-Tech Academy. The resource inspires children to think of God as a "variable" that can be substituted for many other words and meanings. Additionally, Vicky Kelman created a game called "Hide and Seek" to help families discuss God (V. Kelman, personal

communication, December 9, 2024). This curriculum guide aims to add to the existing resources by creating a new way to explore Torah in fourth grade *and* a year-long opportunity for exploration and learning about God.

Despite the paltry of existing resources, grappling with God and Torah can help children's spiritual and intellectual development. According to the *Census of Jewish Supplementary Schools* (The Jewish Education Project, 2023), spiritual development is one of the top goals for educational leaders when designing programs. While learning about God through Torah is not the only way students can explore their spirituality, creating multiple avenues for God exploration is important for a child's spiritual and overall development (Wolpe, 1993). As students engage with Torah, they will further their intellectual education and their spiritual growth by grappling with the stories and what it means for the world around them.

A child's unique view on the world opens new concepts of God and theology for everyone. In the Christian world, theologians wrestle with the idea of bringing children into theological conversations. The Christian theologian Nigel Asbridge (2009) believes that a child's viewpoint brings valuable ideas and lessons to any theological conversation, arguing that "much theology is that of the white, male, western adult and carries preconceptions from those genres [...] yet children have to tell us about God, for God calls them from their earliest beginnings and walks with children down the years" (p. 20). While Asbridge wrote in a Christian context, much of his argument holds true for Judaism. Much of Jewish theology and Torah study comes from adult, male voices (Plaskow, 1990; Eskenazi & Weiss, 2017). As Jews, we must aim to create more diverse understandings of our tradition from varied sources, including children. Children's perspectives can help clarify and ignite ways of understanding the Torah that adults cannot see. Discovering and unpacking the Torah and theology with children can bring new light and curiosity to our ancient text.

Despite these benefits, teachers and parents often have trouble talking with their children about God (V. Kelman, personal communication, December 9, 2024; V. Weber, personal communication, December 10, 2024). Children may learn to avoid conversations about God because they can see that it makes adults uncomfortable. However, children are thinking about God whether or not adults provide an open space to question and explore.

This curriculum guide is meant to give children the guidance and support that they need to learn about God. Students at this age may have never had a long, meaningful opportunity to explore the Torah and think about God. It aims to teach students that the synagogue is a safe place for their large questions about the world and its meaning. While this resource was created to help teachers guide students through textual and theological questions, it is my hope that the student's work, ideas, and insights help guide the future of Jewish learning and theology for generations to come.

LETTER TO THE EDUCATOR

Dear Educator,

This curriculum allows you to guide your students into a deep dive in both Torah and theology. It is my hope that the students will get the chance to explore their own theology (including their own conceptions/understanding of God and how God does or does not work in the world), while connecting to the Torah. This curriculum is a way for students to question the God portrayed in the Torah and their own ideas of God and to begin to formulate answers to some of life's biggest theological questions. It is my hope that by the end of the curriculum, students have thought about questions such as:

- Why is there evil in the world?
- Why do we pray? What does prayer mean to me?
- What does it mean to be chosen by God?

This curriculum is designed for fourth graders in a synagogue supplementary school setting to be completed over the course of one religious school year (roughly 22-25 sessions). Each lesson is expected to take between forty-five minutes to an hour. While this was designed for fourth grade, it could be used for any upper elementary school grade (3rd-5th grade) with minimal adjustments. This curriculum was also designed for students in a Reform synagogue, using Reform ideology around God and mitzvot.

In teaching about God, I realize that it is impossible for a teacher to divorce their own theology from what they teach. Even a teacher who tries their best to stay neutral will constantly be making decisions about what content to bring and what questions to answer. I encourage you to take time before teaching this curriculum to think through the theological questions posed in this guide yourself. This self-exploration will help you be more intentional about your teaching and what you share with your students.

Just as a teacher cannot divorce their own theology from their teaching, this curriculum was designed with my theological biases and assumptions in mind. I believe that the God of the Torah is a character that can inspire me to think about and challenge my understanding of God. I believe the Torah gives out general guidelines for what God is and what God is not, but the Torah is not a historical document that describes God's interactions with humankind. Thus, this curriculum is intended to allow students to wrestle with and question the God of the Torah and even discard parts of the depiction of God in the Torah that do not mean anything to them.

While this curriculum does involve quite a bit of Torah, it is not a curriculum solely about the Torah. By the end of the curriculum, the students should be able to identify Torah's importance in Judaism and have a greater knowledge of some of its major stories. However, students will not touch on every *parshah* (Torah portion) or learn the sequence of the Torah stories. Additionally, while the students are studying theology, they will not be studying theologians' ideas throughout history. Instead, the students will be urged to become their own theologians by using the Torah as a jumping off point to explore, reflect, and create their own ideas.

There is no specific background knowledge the students need, but they are expected to have heard of the Torah and thought about God before. This curriculum also does not require much background knowledge for the educator; however, the more that you know about Torah and theology, the more equipped you will be to teach this curriculum guide and adapt lessons for your classroom.

The units are generally sequenced in the order of most universal to most particular. The students begin by exploring God's relationship to the universe and end by learning about their personal relationship with God. Students also grapple with big questions, such as the nature of good and evil in the world. At the end, the students get to put their learning together by creating their own theological ideas.

While I believe that the units are in a logical order (especially the first four units, the introduction and God's relationships to the world), I encourage teachers to move units around based on the student's questions. This curriculum was designed to help me navigate and answer students' questions as they learned about the Torah. Thus, I believe that student questions should be honored and upheld when thinking about all facets of this curriculum.

Throughout the units, the students work on their "God portfolio," a keepsake that will help them work towards their final project. Each week, the students can answer a question, draw a picture, or think about something that they learned that week. This portfolio helps add consistency to the classes and helps the teacher see that the students were able to grasp and understand the material learned that day.

Most of the lessons assume that the students are in a standard classroom with access to basic classroom supplies (such as pencils, pens, markers, scissors, paper, etc.). The scripted lessons include age-appropriate translations of the Torah text. For unscripted lessons, I recommend having access to a children's bible or creating your own easy-to-read versions of the stories.

Additionally, there are a few special materials and lessons that might take prior planning:

1. Each student should have their own "God portfolio" that is kept safely in the classroom throughout the year. Referring to it will be crucial when it comes to the final project, when they create their own theology. This portfolio could be $\frac{1}{4}$ in binders with sheet protectors where students can insert drawings and pictures. Alternatively, it could also be a notebook that they draw directly in and/or paste their drawings and artwork in as they complete it, or even a folder for them to place papers in. Whichever option you choose, you should make sure that there is space for students to do their own exploration and ask their own questions about God—whether that's a few pages at the end of the portfolio or a few empty pages in the folder for them to write on. The students should also have a method of writing parts of their portfolio that are for you to read and parts that are only for them. You should establish a system for students to write their own private thoughts (such as folding over a page) to make sure that you respect their privacy. Keep track of the prompts you give the students throughout the year in one document or notebook for yourself, as it will help the students review at the end of the year.
2. Lesson 3.4 encourages the students to participate in some sort of mitzvah project to reflect on God's presence in the world. Putting together a mitzvah project may require advance planning and extra fundraising for materials or supplies. This specific mitzvah project can take on many forms, as mitzvot in Reform Judaism can take on many forms. Reform Jewish ideology often portrays mitzvot as "good deeds" in place of the traditional mitzvot. This mitzvah project is meant to inspire reflection and discussion. It is possible to do such reflection and discussion without a specific mitzvah project. It is also possible to join an already existing mitzvah project that is organized by the school rather than organizing a separate grade-specific project or trip.

This curriculum concludes with a letter that the students will write that encapsulates their personal theology. Before writing the letter, the students should have the opportunity to look through their portfolio and reflect on everything they learned about God throughout the year. The students should be encouraged or directed to open the letters at a later, specified date, so the students can have an idea in the future of how their theology changed and grew. There is not one way to do this; you may choose to hold onto the letters and mail them out yourself in a few years. You may store them with a synagogue clergy or staff member to hand out at a students' b'nai mitzvah or when beginning confirmation. While this takes extra organization, work, and communication, it will hopefully provide an interesting opportunity for students to reflect on how they have changed and grown spiritually as they grew older.

After the students write their letters, they put together a "God Museum," where they create art, poetry or writing to show off part of their belief or questions about God and what they learned from the year. Ideally, this museum would be displayed in some way to the community at large, such as displaying the artifacts in a public area, or inviting other educators and family members to the classroom to explore the museum. Children have unique ideas about God and should have the opportunity to show off their beliefs and add their ideas to the large constellation of Jewish beliefs in God.

If you choose to use this curriculum, you will have a unique opportunity to help students grapple with large, theological questions. You will get to help students realize that the synagogue is a safe space for them to grapple with God and ideas about the universe. Students have amazing questions—I hope you find this curriculum helpful in answering them.

Sincerely,

Shoshy Levine

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OVERARCHING EU'S AND EQ'S

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- The Jewish religion is based on the idea of a single God. However, there are many ways to define and understand that one God.
- There are multiple, valid ways to believe in (or not believe in) God. One does not need to prescribe to a specific idea of God to be Jewish.
- The Torah frames God in a multitude of ways. By exploring how God is portrayed in the Torah, we can begin to evaluate the ways God relates to (or doesn't relate to) our lives.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- How does my understanding of Torah help me define God?
- What does the word "God" mean to me? Does my definition of God change in different situations?
- What are the different ways that Jews believe in God? What makes a conception of God Jewish or not?
- How can there be one God and yet God can exist in so many ways?

UNIT 1: INTRODUCTORY UNIT (SCRIPTED)

UNIT 1 ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- The Torah is the story of the Jewish people. Even if a person doesn't think the stories in the Torah are true, they still can have valuable lessons and ideas.
- In Judaism, there is one God. However, there are many names and ways to understand that God.
- The Torah does not have one, concrete idea of God, and the ways that we believe in or understand God can be outside of the Torah. However, the Torah can help inspire questions about God.

UNIT 1 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What does Torah and its stories mean to me?
- How can there be multiple ways to understand and define one God?
- How do I relate to the God described in the Torah?

UNIT 1 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Get students ready to study and learn about God
- Introduce students to the Torah and its role in Jewish life
- Allow students to grapple with monotheism

Objectives (students should be able to..)

- Explain the role of the Torah in the Jewish tradition
- Explain what it means for God to be "one"

LESSON 1.1: INTRODUCTION TO GOD

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- To get students more comfortable (or give them practice) talking about God
- To create ground rules for how we approach discussions about God

Objectives (students should be able to..)

- Create a group *brit* to guide class discussions
- Reflect on instances they have heard about God throughout their lives

Materials:

- Paper
- Writing utensils
- Posterboard/large post it note for brit
- Large post it sheets for reflection with questions written on them (see below)

Estimated schedule:

00:00-00:15: Get to Know You

00:15-00:25: Introduction to year

00:25-00:40: Brit creation

00:40-01:00: Pre-assessment activity

Detailed Schedule:

00:00-00:15: Opener: Get-to-Know-You

- Because this is the first lesson, the students may not know each other or the teacher/madrachim. Make sure to start with some sort of ice breaker to start to learn each other's names and a little bit about each person.
 - A potential ice breaker could be where the wind blows: Choose one person to be the leader first. Everyone else should stand or sit in a circle around the leader. The leader introduces themselves and says, "the wind blows if..." and completes the sentence with a statement that is true for themselves. For example, someone might say "the wind blows if you have a pet" or "the wind blows if you play soccer." If the statement also applies to someone in the circle, they need to (safely) find a new spot in the circle. The last person to find a spot is the new leader. Complete several rounds until most of the students get the opportunity to be the leader.

00:15-00:25: Introduction to the Year:

- Say: “This year, we are going to be talking a lot about God. You may believe in God, or you may not, or you may not know. All of that is okay in this class. Believing in God is one way to express being Jewish, but there are many, many other parts of Judaism. We don’t have to believe or follow every part of Judaism to be Jewish; however, it can be helpful to learn about important concepts, like God, so that we can understand our tradition better.”
 - “There may be topics this year that you’re very comfortable with and topics this year that will challenge you, surprise you, or that you’ll disagree with. All of that is okay.”
- Say: “I want to start with doing an activity that will help capture some of what God is in Judaism. I want us to start by thinking about something else that we might know more about. I want us to think about love. Raise your hand if you know what love is.” *Everyone should raise their hands.*
- Say: “Raise your hand if you’ve ever smelled love.” *Possible that no one will raise their hands. However, some kids might have some creative answers about if they’ve smelled love (like I smelled chocolate cake and that was love). You can help frame those answers as something like “ok, you’ve smelled something that reminded you of love or you smelled something that you love”*
- Say: “Who here has seen love?”
 - *Possible that no kids will raise their hands. However, kids might also have answers like “I see people hug and that’s seeing love” or “I’ve been to a wedding.” You can frame those answers as “ok, you’ve seen how love has been acted out or expressed”*
- Say: “Can you taste love? Or hear love?”
 - *They might say no, or they might have creative answers again. It’s not possible to ‘taste’ or ‘hear’ the idea of love—so redirect their answers to something they are doing (tasting something they love or hearing words that are loving, for example)*
- Say: “ok, we can’t taste, see, smell, or hear love, but we all know it exists. How do we know?”
 - Possible answers:
 - *We can feel love*
 - *We feel connected to people*
 - *We learn the word love from a young age*
 - *Other people tell us about love*
 - *We see it in the ways we act—in hugs, or kind words, etc.*
- Say: “God is kind of like love. We can’t see, taste, smell, or hear God but we still can learn about and talk about God. Some people feel God. Just as you might not love everyone or everything, you might not feel that God is there; that’s okay. As we get started, I want to ask: why might it be important or valuable to learn about the idea of God even if you don’t believe in God?”
 - Possible answers:
 - *To learn more about what other people believe*
 - *It’s in Judaism and in our prayers*
 - *You might change your mind*
 - *It isn’t important*
 - If you get this answer, you can be prepared to direct the student(s) to the other possible answers (above).

00:24-00:40: Brit:

- Say: “I recognize that talking about God can feel personal or uncomfortable for people. As we continue to create our classroom community, I want to create a *brit*, a shared agreement, about how we want to act in this space so that we can make this a comfortable learning experience for everyone.”
 - Take suggestions about what should go into the class *brit*. Often it is helpful to help students re-word their statements to be positive rather than negative. For example, if a student says,

- “don’t call out,” you may help the student re-word that to “wait your turn” or “listen while others are speaking.”
- Write down the suggestions on a large post it or posterboard and have everyone in the class sign it. Then, put it up in the classroom in a place where everyone can see and remember what it says.
- Some examples of things to put into a *brit*:
 - Respect each other
 - Talk one at a time and listen to what other people say
 - Respect the classroom space
 - Clean up at the end of the day
 - Be kind even when you disagree
- Say: “These words are useful but don’t mean anything if we don’t act them out. We will come back to this throughout the year to make sure that we are still upholding these values.”
 - Note: there are many ways that teachers choose to come back to the *brit*. Some teachers have the students read it aloud every time they meet. Other teachers may read it out when students are not respecting the words on the *brit*. How you choose to use the *brit* is up to you!

00:40-1:00: Pre-assessment activity:

- Put out a few large post it papers around the room with one of these questions written on each one:
 - What is God?
 - What isn’t God?
 - When do I think about God?
 - What questions do I have about God?
- Say: “For our closing activity today, I want us to think about what we already know about God. When we walked into this room, I don’t think it was anyone’s first time hearing the word ‘God,’ so I think it’s important to make sure we think about and share what we already know before we dive more deeply into the year.”
 - “Around the room, you’ll notice some questions that you can answer. I want you to take a marker and start writing out responses. You don’t need to write your name on your answer.”
 - You and the madrichim should participate in this activity too if possible!
 - You also can have the kids write on post it notes at their seats and then go up and answer the questions.
- After you give the students some time to walk around and answer the questions (5-10 minutes), say: “now that we’ve all gotten the chance to read and respond to all the questions, I want to give you some time to read other people’s answers. If you read an answer and think ‘me too!’ I want you to put a check mark next to it.”
 - Give the students another 5-7 minutes for this
 - You and the madrichim should participate in this activity too if possible!
- Then, wrap up. You can say something like: “I noticed many of us said _____ or had questions about _____. That’s all great! No matter where we come from, I think this year will be a good reflection/learning experience for all of us.”
- As an educator, you can choose to keep these post it notes up in the classroom or take them down. You might want to hold onto them or take pictures of them so that you can refer to them throughout the year.

LESSON 1.2: WHAT'S GOD'S NAME?

In this lesson, the students will think about the meaning of their names and how the names represent who they are. They will also think about all the names they are called and all the names of the members of their family. They will reflect on how each person goes by many names, but they don't go by those names *all* the time. The students will then reflect on what it means for God to have multiple names. They will reflect on how God can be "one" even with all these identities. This lesson should lay the groundwork for the idea that they will be spending the next few lessons thinking about different ways God shows up and acts in the world.

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Expose the students to many names of God.
- Start to introduce the idea of God being "one"

Objectives (students should be able to..)

- List some of the names of God
- Evaluate which names of God are meaningful to them

Materials:

Paper

Pencils

God's names written on different sheets of paper posted around the room (choose 5-10 names from Reference 1.2.1 or from your own knowledge)

A whiteboard with different names/nicknames you go by written on it (optional).

In God's Name by Sandy Sasso (1994) (optional).

God portfolios (You'll need these in almost every lesson).

Copies of Reference 1.2.2 for each student

A note about this lesson:

This lesson includes many names of God and writing out many names of God. People have different feelings about writing out the name of God as they do not want to throw out or erase the name of God. For example, some people only write G-d instead of God. Before you do this lesson, ask your institution what their policy is on writing out the name of God.

Estimated Schedule:

00:00-00:10: Set Induction

00:10-00:45: Introduction to God's names

00:45-1:00: Introduction to God portfolios

Detailed Schedule:

00:00-00:10: Set Induction

There are two options for the set induction—either doing a name activity or reading *In God's Name* by Sandy Sasso (1994).

Set induction option 1:

- Before the students come in, write down a bunch of names people have called you throughout your life on the board. Some examples could be:
 - Mom/Dad
 - Little sis
 - [your actual name]
 - [a nickname]
 - [a funny nickname someone came up with]
 - Mr/Mrs/Dr/Rabbi [last name]
- Say: "Welcome—what do you think all these words on the board have in common?" *they are names you've gone by.*
- Say: "Yup! In a moment, I am going to pass out paper and pencils. I want you to take 2 minutes and write down every name you can think of that someone has called you."
- Give the students two minutes, then stop them. It's okay if they didn't think of that many or ran out of time before they could write them all.
- Take a few of the student's answers.
- Say: "okay, now I want us to think about what these names mean. Who calls us these names? What do these names make you think of or feel?"
 - Show an example on the board:
 - *Example: "This is my full name. People only really use this full name when I'm in trouble or when I'm writing on official forms" (Draw a line connecting to where you wrote your full name that says "people who are scolding me" and "official forms") "I feel kind of formal or serious when I use this name."*
- Give the kids another 2 minutes to do this for some of their names. It's okay if they don't get to all of them.
- Come back together and take some of the kid's answers.
- Ask: "Can you hold up with your fingers how many names you came up with?"
- Say: "Even though we have many names, and they might all mean different things or be used in different contexts, we are still one person!"

Set induction option 2:

Read “In God’s Name” by Sandy Sasso. After reading, ask:

1. What does it mean for God to be one?
2. Why did all the people have different names for God?
3. What name for God did you like the best? if you created your own name for God, what would it be?

00:10-00:45: Intro to God’s names

- Say: “Just as we have many names to describe ourselves in different contexts, so does God. Around the room are just some of the ways that God is described in the Torah, in prayer, or in other places in Jewish life. I want you to go around the room and read all of them. Then, once you’ve done that, write on some of the sheets a person you think might call God by that name. You also can write what thoughts or feelings come up for you when you see that name.”
 - Give students some time to walk around the room. Write the directions you just gave on the board so students can refer to them.
 - Note: you can also give the kids sticky notes to answer the questions and post around the name rather than write directly on the page on the wall.
 - You only need to post 5-10 different names of God from Reference 1.2.1. More than that might be overwhelming for the students. The names from the book “in God’s Name,” are listed separately so you can be intentional about adding them to the list if you read the book.
- After the students are done, have some of them read out some of their answers about the names of God.
- Ask: “What questions do you have about any of these names?”
 - *They may ask questions that you know the answer to or can look up in Reference 1.2.1. If they ask a question, you don’t know the answer to, look it up later and get back to them!*
- Say: “Please stand by a name of God that’s your favorite. It can be your favorite because it’s closest to what you believe, or it sounds cool, or you’ve heard it a bunch of times before. If you can’t pick a favorite, or are in between a few favorites, stand in the middle.”
- Once the students have re-arranged themselves around the room, ask for volunteers to share why they stood where they stood.
 - *Example: I stood next to “Adonai” because that’s how we say God in the prayers on Shabbat.*
 - *I stood next to “ruler of the world” because I think God is the ruler of the world*
- Say: “Please stand by a name of God that is your least favorite. It can be your least favorite because you don’t believe in it, you don’t like how it sounds, or something else. Just because you are standing by a name of God as your least favorite is not a judgment of God; you can really like a person and not like their nickname. Again, if you’re between two or don’t have an answer, you can stand in the middle.”
- Once the students have re-arranged themselves around the room, ask for volunteers to share why they stood where they stood.
 - *Example: I chose “ruler of the world” because I don’t think God makes an influence in the world. Otherwise, why would we have so many problems?*
 - *I chose yud-hey-vav-hey because I don’t like names I can’t pronounce.*

- Ask: In Judaism, we only have one God. How can God have so many names and still be one?"
 - Possible answers:
 - *We have a lot of names, but we are still one person*
 - *God does many different things so the names reflect that, but God is still one being*
- Say: "As you can see, God has many names because God can do many different things or mean something different to many different people. However, in Judaism, we never have more than one God. Even if we think that God is a protector, a peace maker, a parent, a friend, or something else, we are always referring to one God. We never refer to one God who creates the moon and another who creates the sun, or one God who causes peace and another who causes war. In Judaism, everything comes from one God."

00:45-1:00: Introduction to God portfolios

- Say: "Throughout the year, we are going to be working on something called a 'God portfolio'. This is a binder that is full of sheet protectors, folders, notebook where you will be able to write and draw and think about different ways we learn about God. We will have time at the end of most classes to add to our portfolios. Each class you'll have a different prompt to answer. Today's prompt is very general because we are just starting out the year; other prompts will be much less reflective and general."
 - Say: "At the end of the year, we are going to think about what God does (or doesn't) mean to us. I want you to take each entry seriously as it will help you at the end of the year."
 - You should also indicate to the students where they can ask questions or write things in the portfolio that are outside of the given prompts. For example, you might tell students to mark a few pages in the back of their notebook with the heading "extra questions I have" or give them each a few extra pieces of paper to write on when they want to.
 - You should convey a protocol to the students that allows them to mark certain entries as private—either by folding down a page, folding a page in half, writing private on the top, etc.
- Say: "We are going to make our first entry now. I have sheets of paper or questions on the board for you to write your first entry on. Please try to answer all the questions the best you can."
- Pass out Reference 1.2.2 or write the questions on the board so everyone can see as they enter their first entry.
- *Note: Keep track of all the prompts you give the students in one central place (a document on your computer, a notebook, etc. This will help you keep tabs on what you have asked them to write about and help with review at the end of the year.*

REFERENCE 1.2.1

Names of God (to be written or typed on **separate** pieces of paper and posted around the room. Make sure the text is big enough for students to see easily but small enough that there is still space for students to write comments on the page). The notes in italics are for the teacher's use to help explain and answer student questions about the name. They should not be written with the name.

Names from Jewish Tradition:

4. **Elohim**

- *Common name for God in the Torah. The ending “-im” is the way to pluralize masculine nouns in Hebrew. The word comes from pluralizing the Semitic word for God, “El”. It’s interesting that a singular God has a plural name!*

5. **El**

- *Semitic word for God. Also found in the Torah, such as (but not limited to) Moses’ plea to God to heal Miriam (Numbers 12:13).*

6. **Adonai**

- *Literally means “my lord.” Usually used as a substitute for pronouncing the unpronounceable/ineffable name of God (yud-hey-vav-hey)*

7. **HaShem**

- *Literally means “the name”. More commonly used in Orthodox spaces (but not exclusively by any means). It is also a way to pronounce the unpronounceable/ineffable name of God.*

8. **yud-hey-vav-hey**

- *This is the unpronounceable/ineffable name of God. Other names, like Elohim, mean “God”—it’s like a job title or description. Other religions may use the word Elohim, or God to describe their higher power. Yud-hey-vav-hey is God’s actual name. This is like how people have general descriptions and a personal name. For example, I am a person, and my name is Shoshy Levine. Likewise, God is a God named yud-heh-vav-hey.*
- *This name is the one that people are most likely be uncomfortable with writing out and then throwing out, which is why I did not even spell it out in Hebrew in this curriculum guide. You might be able to write it out and then put it in a geniza (a Jewish burial ground for texts). You also could open up a chumash (a book with the Torah printed in it) or other book that has this name in it, put sticky notes around the name and draw arrows on it and then put a page on the wall that says “the unpronounceable name of God (see the book below)”*

9. **God**

10. **G-d**

- *This is written this way because some people don’t want to write the name “God” and then throw out or erase the name. Other people (like me) don’t believe that’s an issue in English or in print script. Even if you’re okay with writing out “God”, it’s important to show this because students will probably come across it sometime and be curious.*

11. **Melech Ha-Olam/Ruler of the World**

- *Melech technically means “king” but I’m trying to make this gender neutral. The kids may know this name for God from simple blessings.*
- 12. **Eternal one**
- 13. **Makom/Place**
 - *This is an interesting one. It comes up a lot in rabbinic literature. It could be interesting to see what the kids say about it.*
- 14. **Shechinah/Spirit**
 - *This is usually a more feminine version of God since “Shechinah” is a feminine noun. It can refer to God’s presence in the world, or be a name used when God is being called as a source of comfort.*
- 15. **The one who blessed our ancestors before us**
 - *This comes up in Mi Sheberach, the prayer for healing. You can find the full Mi Sheberach text in most siddurim, and on page 371 of Mishkan T’filah (2007). (The page number is referencing the Weekday, Shabbat and Festival edition, not the Shabbat-only edition. If you have the Shabbat-only edition, the page with *Mi Sheberach* and any other page numbers referenced on this page will be in brackets next to the actual page number.)*
- 16. **The One Who Makes Peace**
 - *This is directly from Oseh Shalom (Mishkan T’filah, 2007, p. 100).*
- 17. **Our Parent, our Ruler**
 - *This is a gender-neutral translation of Avinu Malkeinu, the prayer from High Holidays. A more direct translation is “our father, our king.” You can find Avinu Malkeinu on page 223 of the Rosh Hashanah volume of Mishkan HaNefesh (2015) or on page 252 of the Yom Kippur volume of Mishkan HaNefesh (2015).*
- 18. **Rock of Israel**
 - *From the end of Mi Chamocha (Mishkan T’filah, 2007, p. 158).*
- 19. **The Mighty God**
 - *From the Gevurot (Mishkan T’filah, 2007, p. 168).*
- 20. **I will be what I will be or I am what I am**
 - *This comes from the burning bush scene with Moses (Exodus 3:14).*
- 21. There’s more you can look through: <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/247409?lang=bi>

Names Mentioned in “In God’s Name”

- Source of Life
- Creator of Light
- Shepherd
- Maker of peace
- My Rock
- Healer
- Redeemer
- Mother
- Father
- Friend
- Ancient one

REFERENCE 1.2.2

God Portfolio Entry

Name: _____

Date: _____

These were some of the names of God I learned today:

Name at least 3. Circle the one(s) you like the most and put a frowny face next to any you dislike.

What do you know about God now?

What thoughts, feelings or questions do you have about God right now?

What do you want to learn more about?

LESSON 1.3: INTRODUCTION TO TORAH

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Introduce the idea of the Torah as a collection of stories to get to know God
- Teach about the role of Torah in Judaism

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Describe the role of Torah in Judaism
- Compare non-Torah stories and Torah stories

Materials:

Copy of *It Could Always be Worse* by Margot Zemach (1976)

Access to a Torah scroll

Access to a sanctuary or prayer space (if possible)

Copies of Reference 1.3.1 for each student

Estimated Schedule:

00:00-00:10: Set Induction: Telephone

00:10-00:30: Interpreting the Torah

00:30-00:50: Torah Tour

00:50-01:00: Conclusion: Exit Ticket

Detailed Schedule:

00:00-00:10: Set Induction: Telephone

- Say: “Welcome everyone. The last few weeks we have started learning about God. There are many ways to learn about God; We are going to be spending a lot of this year learning about God through the Torah. Does anyone know what the Torah is?”
 - *Take some answers and/or define the Torah yourself. A basic definition could include:*
 - *It’s a book that Jews read*
 - *Jewish people read it every week, including on Shabbat.*
 - *It has stories and laws and poetry*
 - *You can study it to learn more about Judaism, the world, God, or values to live by*
- Say: “Many, many smart Jewish people have written a lot about God and come up with interesting things to say about God. All of them have been thinking about the Torah in some way, shape or form when they write about God. As we study the Torah this year, we will be adding to many generation’s thoughts about God and what God is.”
- Say: “Before we start really studying some of the text of the Torah, I think we should learn more about what the Torah is and how it’s created. To start off, I’d like to play a little game that will help us understand where the Torah comes from.”
 - Play telephone with the students: have the students sit in a circle. One person should start off by whispering a word or phrase to the person next to them (like “hamburger” or “Judaism is cool”), who will whisper it to the person next to them, and this will go on until everyone in the circle has listened to someone else and passed on a message. The last person to go will

say what they heard out loud. Most likely, the word will be a lot different from what the first person said.

- You can debrief what people heard and passed along. If the word drastically changed, you could try to figure out where that may have happened.
- Say: “The Torah is kind of like telephone. Just like telephone, the Torah was passed down from generation to generation with people changing things and adding things as they went. Nowadays, the words of the Torah don’t change; any Torah I pick up should be the same, the same way you expect if you have two copies of a book from the library that they’ll both have the same words printed in them. However, even when the words don’t change, the meaning can change—people will add new interpretations or ways to understand the stories every time they read them.”

00:10-00:30: Interpreting the Torah

- Say: “I want us to think about how we can interpret the Torah. A lot of the Torah is made up of stories. We’re going to read a story that is *not* in the Torah as a way for us to reflect and think about how we can begin to understand stories in general.”
- Read *It Could Always Be Worse*. If you don’t have access to this book, you can choose another fiction book with a moral/lesson.
- After you read, ask: “What were some of the values we can learn from the story? How might we act differently because we read this story?”
 - These answers depend on the book, but they could include:
 - *Appreciate what you have*
 - *Things aren’t always as bad as they seem*
 - *Try not to complain*
 - “Did the story tell us this lesson or did we have to figure it out?”
 - *We had to figure it out*
 - “What if I told you that these characters in the book aren’t real? Would that change what we learned from it?”
 - *No, it would be the same if they were real or not*
 - “Do we need to believe in a story to learn something from it?” *Nope!*
- Say: “We know this story wasn’t true. For the Torah, it’s a little bit more complicated; some people think the Torah is true and happened; others think it’s just a story to live by. Either way, we can derive meaning from the stories, the same way we derived meaning from this story.”
 - “The same is true of God. God is going to show up a LOT in the Torah. You might think “okay, the God in this story is a character and I can learn something from it.” You might think “yeah, this is what I believe in” or you might think “huh. I’m not sure if I believe in this or not.” All are okay! As we just said, we don’t need to believe in a story to learn something from it.”

00:30-00:50: Torah Tour

- Say: “Because we are learning about the Torah, I want to spend some time seeing what a Torah scroll can look like. We are going to go to the sanctuary for a ‘Torah tour’ where we can learn more about what the Torah is and what role it plays for us here in synagogue.”
 - This is a great opportunity for clergy to get involved and lead this tour, however you can lead it yourself.
- Here is a script of the tour, but like every educational decision, change this tour based on what works for your space!
- When you get to the sanctuary, ask: “Does anyone know where the Torah is in this room?”
 - *The students may point to the ark. Some synagogues have a book at each seat that says “Torah” on it (aka the chumash) which has the words of Torah printed on the page and translated. If that’s the case, the students may point to the chumash at their seat.*
 - *You can validate that both of those answers are correct and that we are going to learn about the Torah scroll in the ark and then look at the books that are at people’s seats.*

- Say: “We are going to be looking at the Torah scroll together. As we said before, the Torah has been passed down for thousands of years, and we have been using the same methods of writing a Torah scroll for thousands of years. Even though the Torah is a book, it’s going to look much different than a book that we see on a shelf at a bookstore.”
- Open the ark and take out a Torah scroll. Have the kids help you undress the Torah and put it down in a safe way on a table or podium where the kids can all see.
- Say: “I want us to look at the Torah before we touch or feel or use any other senses to get to know this scroll. What do you see/notice about this Torah?”
 - Possible answers:
 - *It’s in Hebrew*
 - *It’s in Hebrew with no vowels*
 - *No punctuation*
 - *No pictures*
 - *Some of the letters are weirdly long or cramped*
 - Note: that’s because the scribes are trying to make the lines even on the columns!
 - *It had a pretty cover*
 - *You roll it out*
- You may give the students the chance to touch/feel the Torah. If so, make sure you tell them where they can safely touch (the handles and back of the parchment are fine, but the top of the parchment with the words is a not okay—we don’t touch the top of the parchment especially not the words because we don’t want to smear the ink).
- Ask: “Has anyone seen anyone read out of this scroll or a scroll like this? What was it like?” *Take some answers or describe a Torah service you’ve been to yourself. You can include in your description:*
 - *We rise when the Torah was moving*
 - *People went around with the Torah and people touched their prayer books to it and then kissed their prayer books*
 - *There’s a lot of singing before you read*
 - *When you read, you are usually singing/chanting*
 - *People usually chant Torah—it’s a way to honor our tradition when people would sing out the Torah to try to memorize it. It’s hard to read the Torah because it doesn’t have any vowels or any way to know the tune, which is why it takes time to study.*
 - *You can open to a part of the Torah and read or chant a part of it. You can point out all the times it says the word “God” in different forms and have the students help identify the name “God” (depending on their Hebrew knowledge).*
- After the kids have had some time to look at and learn more about the scroll, put the scroll away. Then show a *chumash*. Say: “this is also a Torah! This is not the scroll that is holy and precious like the one we just looked at; it’s printed just like every other book. What do you notice about the pages?”
 - Possible answers:
 - *The pages are thin*
 - *There’s writing all over it and at the bottom*
 - *It’s in Hebrew and English*
 - *The Hebrew has vowels*
- Say: “We read out of the special scroll that we looked at when we are all together in services as a way of honoring our tradition; however, the Torah can be published in all kinds of ways, including books and apps. Sometimes the Torah is translated to English, sometimes it’s not. All the versions of the Torah have the same Hebrew words and same stories, they just have different formats and sometimes slightly different English translations.”
- Take any questions the kids have or any other observations they may make. Then return to the classroom.

00:50-01:00: Conclusion: Exit Ticket

- Give the students some time at the end of class to fill out an exit ticket (Reference 1.3.1) This exit ticket will help assess if the students met the objectives of the lesson and so you can learn what questions the students may have.

REFERENCE 1.3.1

Exit Ticket:

Name: _____

Date: _____

What is the Torah? How is it important to Judaism?

Why do we study the Torah?

What questions do I have about the Torah?

UNIT 2: GOD’S ROLE IN THE WORLD (2/6 LESSONS SCRIPTED)

UNIT 2 ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- In the Torah, God affects things that happen in the world. I may believe that God affects my actions or the world around me, or I might not believe that.
- There are many ways that God acts in the Torah.

UNIT 2 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How does God act in the world according to the Torah?
- How do I think God acts in the world?

UNIT 2 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Expose students to different ways God acts in the Torah
- Help the students reflect on their own understanding of God’s role in the world

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Describe how God acts in different stories throughout the Torah
- Compare how God acts in the Torah to their own conceptions and understandings of God

LESSON 2.1 GOD AND THE CREATION STORY (PART 1)

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Teach students about the creation story
- Give students a space to reflect on God's role in the creation story

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Recall the 7 days of creation story
- Name some of the qualities of God depicted in the story

Materials

- Copies of Reference 2.1.1 for each student
- Speaker/something to play music on and phone/computer to play music with
- 3x3 inch post it notes
- Drawing/writing materials

Estimated Schedule:

00:00-00:10: Set induction

00:10-00:30: Read and act out the story of creation

00:30-00:45: God's role in the story of creation

00:45-1:00: Portfolio addition

Detailed Schedule:

00:00-00:10: Set induction

- Ask: What's something you've created recently?
 - Possible answers:
 - *"I made an art project"*
 - *"I created a new song"*
 - *"I created a new word"*
 - *"I baked challah with my family"*
 - Write down their answers on the board.
- Make 2 columns on the board. Label one column "Created using materials" and the other "Created just by speaking"
- Ask: "Which of these creations could you make just by speaking and which of these required something else to help you create it?"
 - Examples:
 - *"I needed pencils and paper to make my art project"*
 - *"I made up my new word just by speaking"*
 - Record their answers in the appropriate columns on the board. If the students don't come up with answers that involve speaking, help them come up with them!

- Say: “As you can see, there are some things that we can create just by ourselves, like ideas and stories, and there’s other things that we create through working with stuff. However, while we can change how stuff looks or its purpose, we can’t create stuff just by speaking. I can’t say ‘I want there to be a table right here!’ and have a table appear.”
 - “We are about to learn the story of creation as told by the Torah. As we read, I want you to think about: what’s God’s role in the story? What are God’s powers?”

Read and act out the story of Creation (20 minutes)

- Hand out the story of creation to all the kids (Reference 2.1.1). Read the story together.
- Say: “Alright, that was interesting, but I think we can bring it to life a little better. This is the CREATION story! Everything is being made! As a class, we are going to create an interpretive dance to represent this story.”
 - “I am going to break you into small groups. Each group will create a dance move for day of the story.”
 - Break the kids into small groups. Tell each group which day (or days if there are less than 7 groups) of the creation story they should act out. (see Reference 2.1.1)
- After all the groups have had some time to prepare (5-ish minutes), line up the groups in order of day of creation. Play dramatic music (such as, but not limited to: [The Circle of Life](#) from the Lion King or the theme [from 2001: a Space Odyssey](#)) and give each group a turn to show off their interpretive dance.
- Have the kids return to their seats.

God’s Role in the Story of Creation (15 minutes)

- Say: “Okay, now that we have read the story and danced it out, I want to go back to my original question: what was God’s role in this story? What was God able to do?”
 - Have the students write down 3 things God did in the story on a post it note. Then have the students post their post it on the board. Kids who finish early can help group the post it notes based on similar answers.
 - Read out some of the responses.
 - Possible answers:
 - *God created everything.*
 - *God created just through talking.*
 - *God created light and darkness*
 - *God created all the animals all over the Earth*
- Ask: “Were there things God could do that we can’t? if so, what were they?”
 - Possible answers:
 - *God created out of nothing*
 - *God spoke and the world came to being*
 - *God created everything on Earth*
- Say: “If you were to use a few words to describe God in this story, what would you say? Can you complete the sentence, ‘God is...’ or ‘God does...’”
 - Write “God is...” on the board and collect the student’s answers. The teacher may have to start the students off if they are struggling to think of answers.
 - Possible answers:
 - *God is all-powerful*
 - *God is a creator*
 - *God is a being that speaks*
 - *God is a judge (God judges that things are good)*

God Portfolio Addition (15 minutes)

Say: “We just brainstormed together some of the ways that God showed up in this story and answered the question “God is...” as a class. I want to give you some time to answer the question on your own. You can use the descriptions we came up with together or use your own. You should write it or draw it in a way so that you can remember it and look back on it at the end of the year.”

Pass out Reference 2.1.2

- Give the students time to complete the handout and color. Collect their drawings and put them in their individual God portfolios.

REFERENCE 2.1.1

The First Creation Story

An adaptation of Genesis 1:1-2:3

Day 1

In the beginning, God began to create heaven and Earth. God said, "Let there be light!" and there was light. God saw that that light was good, and God separated the light from darkness. God called the light "day" and the darkness "night."

Day 2

God said, "Let there be a sky." God made a big sky and separated it from the waters below.
--

Day 3

God said, "Let the water on the Earth be gathered into one area so that dry land may appear." And it was so. God called the dry land "Earth" and the water "Seas". And God saw that it was good. God said: "Let the Earth sprout plants. Let the Earth have fruit trees and plants with seeds." And the Earth sprouted fruit trees. And God saw that this was good.

Day 4

God said, "Let there be lights in the sky that separate the day from night. These lights should show the time. Let those lights shine upon the Earth." And it was so. God made a great light to shine during the day (the Sun) and lesser lights to shine at night (the stars). And God saw that it was good.

Day 5

God said, "Let there be fish in the sea and birds in the sky."
--

Day 6

God said, "Let there be beasts and animals of every kind." So, God made every type of animal, beast, and insect. And God saw that it was good. God said, "Let's make humankind in God's image," And it was so. God said to the human, "You can eat all of the seed-bearing plants, fruits and animals on the Earth." And God saw all that had been made and found it very good.

Day 7

The heaven and Earth were finished, and so God rested.
--

REFERENCE 2.1.2

God Portfolio Entry #1: God in Creation.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Today, we learned about God in the very first story in the Torah. We learned that in the Torah God created the world in 7 days.

What did God do in this story? What powers did God have? Please write or draw an answer to this question.

LESSON 2.2: CREATION PART 2: B'TSELEM ELOHIM AND SCIENTIFIC VIEWS OF CREATION

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Teach the value of *B'Tselem Elohim* from the story of creation
- Have the students think about what the role of science and the role of God in creation

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Compare the scientific and biblical roles of creation
- Define *B'Tselem Elohim*
- Describe how *B'Tselem Elohim* can inform how they behave

Materials:

- 1 copy of Reference 2.2.1 per 2 students, cut into strips and mixed up in order
- Assortment of objects around the room (pencils, staplers, colored paper, etc.)
- Plain white paper for each student
- 1 copy of Reference 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 for each student
- Pencils, pens, markers, etc.

Estimated schedule:

00:00-00:10: Review of last session

00:10-00:35: B'Tselem Elohim

00:35-00:40: Scientific and biblical views

00:40-00:50: Scientific and biblical views group work

00:50-1:00: God portfolio entry

Detailed Schedule:

00:00-00:10: Review of last session

- Because this session is connected to the creation story that the kids learned last session, it is important to review it. Give the kids the creation story again without the day numbers (Reference 2.2.1) but cut each line into a separate piece of paper. Give the kids some time to try to order the story based on memory. Once every group has a good faith guess, reveal the final answer and have them re-arrange their story in order.
- You can also have the students look back at their God portfolio and explain their entry to a neighbor to review God's role in the story of creation.

00:10-00:35: B'Tselem Elohim

- Say: “Last time we were together, we read and acted out the story of creation. We also talked about God’s role in the story. There was also a part at the end of the story that said that humans were created ‘*B’Tselem Elohim*,’ in the image of God. I want to spend some time thinking about what it means to be created in the image of God. However, before we can talk about being in the ‘image of God’ we should think about what it means to be in the image of something else.”
 - “In a moment, you’re going to get to choose an object from around the room and try to draw it the best you can. It does not have to be perfect, but this activity will work best if you try. You’ll have 10 minutes, so do the best you can, and don’t be afraid to mess up.”
 - Pass out objects from around the room or have students choose objects from around the room to draw. Give students access to paper and drawing supplies and give them time to draw an object the best they can. If they finish early, they can add more details or try to make it more accurate or draw something else.
- Then, when they’re finished, say: “Alright, now that we all have some sort of image of our reference objects, I want you to compare and contrast the real object and the image you have of it.”
 - Have the students silently take notes on Reference 2.2.2
 - Possible answers:
 - *My object is 3d, but the image is 2d*
 - *The lines are straight in my object but they’re shaky and curvy in my picture*
 - *The object is many colors, but my picture is all blue*
- Ask: “What is the same about your drawing and the real object? What is different?”
 - Take some examples of similarities and differences from the students.
 - Say: “We just spent a lot of time thinking about the difference between an image of something and the actual thing. In the Torah, it says that we are in the image of God. Now that we’ve done this exercise where we have looked at the image of an object and the actual object, what do you think it means to be in the image of God?”
 - Possible answers:
 - *God is big and powerful, and humans have a little bit of that power but not all of it.*
 - *We’re different copies of God with different imperfections*
 - Ask: “What is the same about us and God and what is different about us and God? You can use examples from God in the story or in the names for God that we learned about. You can also think about other things you know or think about God. Whatever we come up with doesn’t have to be what everyone thinks, or even what you think about God.”
 - Possible answers:
 - *God judges if things are good and bad; we can judge if things are good and bad*
 - *God creates with words; we can create things with words.*
 - *God can create an entire world, but we can only change what’s in the world*
 - *God speaks in the story, and we can speak*
 - *We exist, God doesn’t*
 - Note: this is a valid answer! It might feel off-putting in the moment, but it’s valid for students to not believe in God. If the students get “stuck” on this answer, remind them that even though it’s okay not to believe in God, there still can be interesting values and lessons we can learn when studying God.
- Ask: “If we believe that everyone is created in the image of God, how should that affect how we should act in the world?”
 - Possible answers:
 - *We should be nice to everyone because they are like God*

- *We need to be careful with how we use our power because we can create a lot of things just like God*
- *Like God, we can decide when things are good and bad, so we should try to do good things.*

00:35-00:40: Scientific and Biblical Views

- Say: “We have spent a long time thinking about this story—we have thought about what God did in the story, the value of *B’Tselem Elohim* and how we can act in the world because of this story, but I want us to think: what does this story mean for us today?”
 - “This was the biblical view of creation. Does anyone know how scientists today think the Earth was created?” *Answer: the big bang!*
 - “If you haven’t heard of it, the big bang refers to a time when everything in the universe was compacted into one small point and then it started to expand.”
- Ask: “According to the big bang theory, what is God’s role in the universe?” *Answer: it doesn’t say, it’s not in there.*
 - Ask: “According to the big bang theory, how should we act in the world and treat one another?” *Answer: it doesn’t say, it’s not there.*
- Say: “There are people who think that these stories completely contradict each other. However, as you can see, the stories serve different purposes: while they both tell a story of how Earth was created, one helps explain some of the physics that we see today while the other one can teach us about God, ourselves, and how we should treat each other.”

00:40-00:50: Scientific and Biblical Views Group work

- Say: “There might be other ways that we can think about the creation story and the big bang together. In small groups, I want you to think about a creative way that the two stories can intertwine. This doesn’t have to be what any of you believe; it just must be a way where both can exist. For example, you could say that God pushed off the Big Bang. Or you could say that the days of creation were long, so God created each thing over a long time.”
 - Break the kids up into groups of 3-4. Give them each about 5 minutes to come up with an idea. If they finish early, they can create a drawing or other creative way to present their idea.
 - Spend about 2 minutes allowing groups to share their ideas.
- Wrap up: “As you can see, there are many ways that the two stories can work together. At first, we might think that these stories contradict each other. However, we can see that we don’t need to choose one over the other all the time.”

00:50-1:00: God Portfolio Entry

- Say: “Over the past two sessions, we have thought about a lot of different ways we can think about creation; how we can think about creation with the big bang, what it means to be created in the image of God and what God’s role was in the creation story. However, I want you to spend some individual reflection time on what *you* believe.”
 - Say: “I’m going to hand out a paper for you to write or draw some reflections. There are some questions at the top to guide you. There are no right or wrong answers. You don’t have to share this with the class if you don’t want to. Unless you mark it private, I will read through them so I can help you with future projects or check in with you privately, but I won’t judge you for what you believe or don’t believe.”
 - Pass out Reference 2.2.3 and give the students some time to write or draw.

REFERENCE 2.2.1

The First Creation Story

An adaptation of Genesis 1:1-2:3

In the beginning, God began to create heaven and Earth. God said “let there be light!” and there was light. God saw that that light was good and God separated the light from darkness. God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.”

God said “Let there be a sky. God made a big sky and separated it from the waters below.”

God said, “Let the water on the Earth be gathered into one area so that dry land may appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land “Earth” and the water “Seas”. And God saw that it was good. God said: “let the Earth sprout plants. Let the Earth have fruit trees and plants with seeds.” And the Earth sprouted fruit trees. And God saw that this was good.

God said, “let there be lights in the sky that separate the day from night. These lights should show the time. Let those lights shine upon the Earth.” And it was so. God made a great light to shine during the day (the Sun) and lesser lights to shine at night (the stars). And God saw that it was good.

God said “let there be fish in the sea and birds in the sky.”

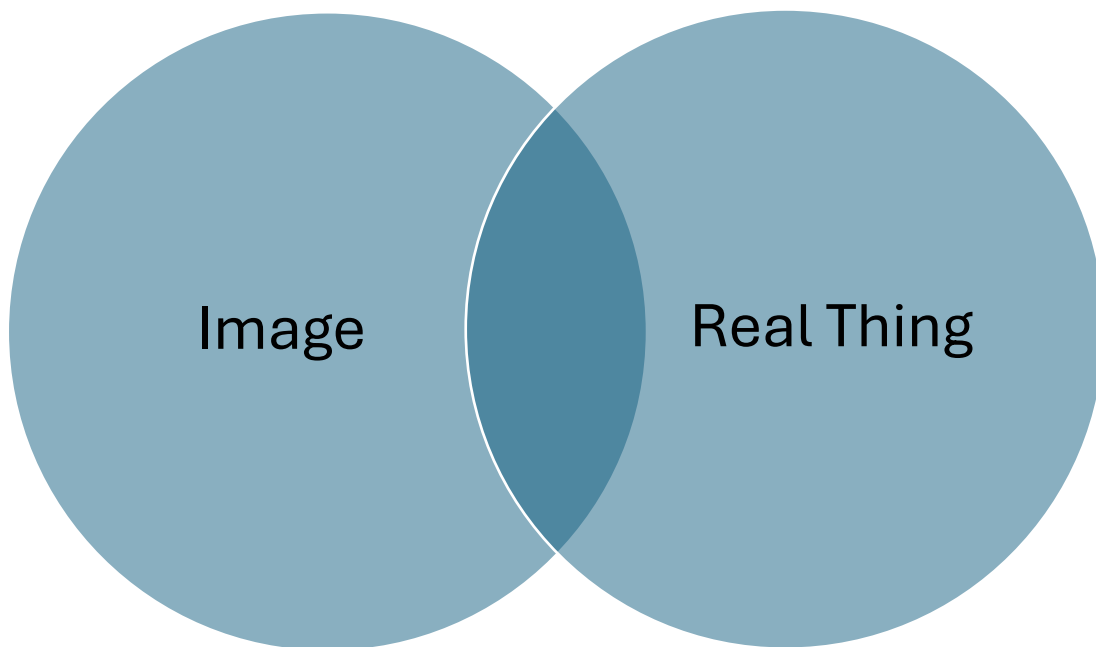
God said, “let there be beasts and animals of every kind.” So God made every type of animal, beast, and insect. And God saw that it was good. God said, “let’s make humankind in God’s image” And it was so. God said to the human, “you can eat all of the seed-bearing plants, fruits and animals on the Earth.” And God saw all that had been made and found it very good.

The heaven and Earth were finished, and so God rested.

REFERENCE 2.2.2

Name: _____

Date: _____



REFERENCE 2.2.3

Name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Take some time to reflect on what you think God's role was in creation. You can write or draw your thoughts. There are some questions below to guide you. You don't need to answer all of them.

- How do you think the world was created? Do you think God had a role in it?
- What does it mean to be created *B'Tselem Elohim* (in the image of God)?

LESSON 2.3: GOD IN THE NOAH STORY (GENESIS 6:1-9:17)

The students will examine the Noah story and begin to think about: What does it mean for God to have this much power? God floods the Earth and then decides God will never do that again, which could be interpreted that God made a mistake. What does it mean that God makes mistakes?

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Guide students through the Noah story and God's role in it
- Allow kids to think about a God who makes mistakes and reflect on times they have made mistakes

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Articulate the values God makes decisions by in the Noah story
- Evaluate if they believe God can make mistakes

Potential Activities:

1. Have the children act out the Noah story.
2. Have the students think about God's mistakes.
 - a. Explain the four-step apology:
 - i. "I'm sorry for..."
 - ii. "This was wrong because..."
 - iii. "In the future I will..."
 - iv. "Will you forgive me?"
 - b. Have the students act or write out how God may have given that four-step apology.
3. **God Portfolio Entry:** Does God make mistakes in real life, or just in the Noah story? If you think God makes mistakes, do you think we need to forgive God?

LESSON 2.4: HUMANITY ARGUING WITH GOD (SODOM AND GEMORRAH: GENESIS 18:20-33)

After looking at a story where God created the world and another story where God destroyed the world, the students will bridge these two ideas and think about humanity's partnership with God. They will think about how, when God was creating, humans were partners with God, tending to all of God's creations. They will look at some of the stories where humans argue with God, and even stop God from destroying, such as Abraham's argument with God over Sodom and Gomorrah. They will think about what it means to argue with God and win. They will reflect on their power in the world-- how can humanity cause and stop destruction?

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Guide students through Abraham's argument in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah
- Help the students think about what it means to argue with God

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Recall the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham's argument
- Reflect on what it means to argue with God

Potential Activities:

1. Read or tell the story of Abraham's argument with God in Sodom and Gomorrah. I scripted the story below. After learning the story, have the students split into two groups: one group acts out what it might be like for Abraham to keep arguing with God and not give up at 10; another group will act out what it might be like for Abraham to not argue at all.
 - a. *Note:* As you can see from the story scripted below, there is not a good reason why God wanted to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah—the Torah just says that they were wicked. This is a great place for students to use their imaginations and fill in the gaps in the story!
2. **God Portfolio Entry:** What does it mean to argue with God? Do you argue with God? If so, what is it like? If not, why not?

Scripted Sodom and Gomorrah story:

Say: "In the Torah, God was mad at the people who lived in two cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. The people in the cities were doing bad things. The Torah doesn't say what bad things they were doing, but whatever it was, God was very upset by it and wanted to destroy both cities. People for thousands of years have tried to figure out what wicked things they were doing that would make God want to do this. What do you think they were doing that was so evil?" Possible answers: lying, killing, stealing, etc.

Say: "Those are all good answers, but we don't know what they were doing! Some people think it's because they weren't very hospitable, meaning they did not welcome guests well. Some people say there weren't nice or fair. Others think they didn't treat the poor people well. There's no way to ever know, so whatever you believe happened there could be correct.

Say: "Anyway, God was angry and wanted to destroy the cities. But God didn't act right away. God told God's friend, Abraham, that God was planning to do this. Abraham said: 'What if there's innocent people in the cities? Will you destroy them also? Shouldn't the Judge of all Earth judge fairly?'"

Say: "So, God responded, 'Ok, you're right, Abraham. If I find 50 people in Sodom who are innocent, I will forgive the entire city because of them.'"

Say: "But Abraham wasn't satisfied. He said, 'Look, you're the ruler of the world and I am just a small human. But I still must ask: what if there's 45 innocent people?' Will you save the city then?' and God said, 'I'll forgive them if there's 45 innocent people.'"

Ask: "What do you think Abraham was feeling at this point?" Possible answers: scared, nervous, bold, angry, etc.

Say: "Abraham was probably feeling nervous. He was worried God was going to get angry if he kept asking. But he still said 'God, please don't get angry with me, but what about if there's 30?' and God said, '30 is fine, I'll save the cities if 30 innocent people are there.'"

Say: "Abraham asked for 20, and God said okay, then Abraham asked for 10 and God said okay."

Ask: "What do you think Abraham asked next?" Possible answer: He asked to save the city if there were just 5 people who were innocent.

Say: "Abraham just stopped there. He walked away."

LESSON 2.5: GOD IN THE TEN PLAGUES (EXODUS 7:14-11:10)

The students imagine God as a puppet master-- someone who is controlling our actions and thoughts. The students will look at the plague story and debate-- was it Pharaoh in the story who is responsible for the slavery and the plagues? Or God for hardening pharaoh's heart? After thinking about God's role in that story, they will think about the role of God in their lives-- are they fully responsible for their actions? Are there times when they do things because they must, not because they want to? Where does God fit into our free will?

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Show students the role of God in the story of the 10 plagues
- Discuss with the students what it means to harden Pharaoh's heart
- Guide students as they grapple with their idea of free will and God's direct actions in the world

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Tell the story of the 10 plagues
- Develop an argument that shows who is responsible for the plagues
- Articulate if they believe God is responsible for actions in the world.

Potential Activities:

1. Debate who is responsible for the death and destruction caused by the plagues. One group can argue that God is responsible (because God gave Moses the powers to bring the plagues to the Egyptians and hardened Pharaoh's heart) and another group can argue that Pharaoh is responsible (because he held the Israelites in captivity).
 - a. After the debate, have students reflect on each role, and discuss:
 - i. Are there times when you do things because you must, not because you want to?
 - ii. Are we responsible for what happens in the world or is God?
2. **God Portfolio Entry:** Students can reflect on the question: Are we responsible for what happens in the world or is God?

LESSON 2.6: GOD AS A MIRACLE MAKER (RED SEA: EXODUS 14:21-29)

The students will study the miracle of the parting of the sea. They will define what a miracle is and describe if they have seen any miracles in their lives. They will reflect on if they believe God is responsible for those miracles.

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Guide students through the story of the parting of the red sea
- Allow students to reflect on miracles and the role of miracles in their lives

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Describe what a miracle is.
- Imagine who makes miracles happen in the world.

Potential Activities:

1. Have students define a “miracle.” Create a miracle jar where students can submit slips of paper that describe a miracle they have seen or heard of.
2. **God Portfolio Entry:** Do you think that miracles exist? Do you think that God creates miracles in the world? If yes, what do you think they are? If not, why not?

UNIT 3: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL AND GOD

UNIT 3 ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- According to the Torah, God has a special relationship with the Jewish people.
- The Jewish people are in a covenant with God; however, people disagree on the terms of that covenant.
- Jews can uphold the covenant and their relationship to God by doing good deeds.

UNIT 3 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How is the relationship between the people of Israel and God described in the Torah?
- What does it mean to be chosen? (i.e. What does it mean to be in a special relationship?)
- What is a covenant? What does it mean to be in a covenant with God?

UNIT 3 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Allow students to grapple with the idea of being chosen.
- Explore different ways that God has relationships with the Israelites throughout the Torah
- Introduce students to mitzvot as one way express being in a relationship with God

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Create their own definition of what it means to be chosen
- Explain different ways that God can have a relationship with the people of Israel
- Reflect on how mitzvot do or do not contribute to their own relationship with God

LESSON 3.1: UNDERSTANDING CHOSENNESS AND COVENANT

The students will define a covenant and evaluate if both parties need to agree to be a part of a covenant. The students will analyze God's covenant with humanity after the flood to illustrate a covenant with God as everlasting and something that God imposes.

The students will then contrast God's covenant with their own covenants. The students will create (or re-evaluate) their class *brit* and decide on the norms and standards of behavior that they want to promise to each other.

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Guide students through what it means to be in a covenant
- Show that God's covenants are one-sided promises that God makes to people. The people do not always choose if they can be in the covenant.

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Describe what a covenant is and what it means to be in covenant with God
- Name the differences between the class covenant they created and the covenants God makes.

Potential Activities:

1. Re-read the story of the covenant God makes with Noah and evaluate if both parties need to agree to be a part of a covenant.
2. The students can create (or re-evaluate) their class *brit* and decide on the norms and standards of behavior that they want to promise to each other. Have the students reflect/contrast on what it means to be in a covenant with each other and a covenant with God.

LESSON 3.2: ABRAHAM'S COVENANT

In this lesson, the students get to define what it means to be “chosen.” The students will study Abraham’s blessing and how he was chosen to have a special relationship with God if he chooses to “go forth” (Genesis 12:1-3). The students will evaluate if Abraham’s relationship with God and Abraham’s special promise was good or bad. The students will debate this question, looking at the good parts of Abraham’s relationship with God (promise, blessing, etc.) and the bad parts (almost killing his son in the *Akeida* (Genesis 22:1-19), new responsibility, leaving his home). At the end, the students will evaluate for themselves: Is being chosen good? Is it good all the time? Were there hard things that Abraham had to deal with because he was chosen? At the end of the lesson, the students will add a page to their theology portfolio that answers the question: what does it mean to be chosen?

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Guide students through the idea of being the “chosen people”
- Suggest to the students the good and bad parts of being chosen

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Describe the good and bad parts of Abraham’s relationship with God
- Describe if being chosen is good or bad

Potential Activities:

1. Have the students look at God’s order to Abraham in *Lech Lecha* (Genesis 12:1-3). Have the students take the role of Abraham and act out what they would do if they were put in that role. Would they go forth? Would they stay put? Why? You can also discuss how they might feel when God kept testing them.
2. **God Portfolio Entry:** What does it mean to be chosen? Is it always good to be chosen? Why or why not?

LESSON 3.3: ISRAEL'S COVENANT WITH GOD

After the students studied Abraham's covenant, the students will study the covenant that was given to the Israelites as a whole. While Abraham's covenant was to "go forth" to become a blessing, the Israelites were commanded to follow a series of mitzvot (613!!) in exchange for the blessings. Unlike the previous covenants, this one could be revoked at any time.

The students will be introduced to the idea that there are multiple ways that people view this relationship with God. Some Jews believe that they must follow every commandment in the Torah exactly how it is written, including some of the ones that don't have an explanation (like not mixing fabrics; see Leviticus 19:19 or Deuteronomy 22:11). Other Jews (i.e. most Reform Jews) believe that we need to be good people and follow the commandments that are meaningful to them. However Jews view mitzvot, Jews have a responsibility to act with goodness and kindness in the world.

The students will spend the rest of the class analyzing some of the mitzvot in the Torah and thinking about what benefit it could add to the world. For example, the students might look at the ten commandments and think about what commandments they would add.

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Introduce the people of Israel's special relationship with God
- Examine the Israelite's responsibilities and God's responsibilities
- Explore different ways that Jews fulfill the responsibilities of the covenant

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Explain the Israelite's covenant with God in the Torah
- Name 1-2 ways that people uphold the covenant today
- Explain what a mitzvah is.

Potential Activities:

1. Rather than examining all 613 mitzvot, focus on the 10 commandments as a major (but not only!) part of the covenant. Have the students make their own list of 10 commandments and then compare it with the list in the Torah. Ask the kids: What was left out? What was missing? What would you change or add to the commandments if you could?
 - Alternative: You can print out a list of as many mitzvot as possible and have the children choose ten that they would make as their "top ten list."
2. **God Portfolio Entry:** What does it mean to be in covenant with God? Do you think the Jewish people are in covenant with God? If not, why not? If so, what does that covenant mean to you?

LESSON 3.4: CREATING A PERSONAL DEFINITION OF COVENANT

While the lesson before was about the mitzvot that were directly in the Torah, in this lesson, the students will get the chance to perform a mitzvah by doing some sort of mitzvah project/act of *chesed* (kindness) for the community/for the Temple.

After they perform the project, the students will get to discuss: How did it make them feel to do something good for the community? Did they feel like God was present in the work that they did? Why is it our responsibility as Jews to do good deeds and give back?

The students will then add another page to their portfolio answering the question: What do I want my covenant with God to look like? What do I think God demands of me?

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Introduce students to the idea of a mitzvah project to connect with God by putting together a mitzvah project
- Connect mitzvot/good deeds to being in a covenant with God

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Participate in some sort of mitzvah project
- Explain if they felt a relationship to God through good deeds

Potential Activities:

1. While the lesson before was about the mitzvot that were directly in the Torah, in this lesson, the students will get the chance to perform a mitzvah by doing some sort of mitzvah project/act of *chesed* for the community or for the Temple. This could be volunteering at a soup kitchen, making lunches to donate, running a bake sale for charity, tying blankets for animal shelters, or something else.
 - a. After they perform the project, the students will get to discuss: How did it make them feel to do something good for the community? Did they feel like God was present in the work that they did? Why is it our responsibility as Jews to do good deeds and give back?
2. **God Portfolio Entry:** Do you feel like you have an agreement with God? If so, what do you think God expects me to do to keep your part of the agreement? Do you think God has a special relationship with the Jewish people? What do you think God wants the Jewish people to do or say that's different from what God might want other people to do?
 - a. These questions may not work for all students. Here is an alternative question to offer students who don't believe in God or are struggling with the question: What do you think your responsibility is to the world? Do you think the Jewish people have a special responsibility in the world? If not, why not? If so, what does it look like?

UNIT 4: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

UNIT 4 ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- I can have a personal relationship with God if I so choose.
- I can find God in many places and situations.

UNIT 4 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to have a personal relationship to God, according to the Torah?
- Is it still possible to have a personal relationship with God? What are ways that we can have a personal relationship with God today?

UNIT 4 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Explore ways that someone can have a personal relationship with God and understand God
- Introduce the idea of prayer and allow students to reflect on its meaning in their lives

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Explain a time when they felt personally connected with God or the world around them
- Describe what prayer means to them

LESSON 4.1: GOD AS AN ANSWER TO PRAYERS (HAGAR: GENESIS 21:9-21)

In this lesson, the students will think about God as a recipient and answer to their prayers. They will look at the story of Hagar, a time when God did respond to someone's cries. Then they will reflect on if God answers their prayers, or what the role prayer plays in their lives.

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Introduce the story of *Hagar* as a time when God answered someone's cries
- Allow students to reflect on the role of prayer in their lives

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- To name at least two reasons why people pray
- To articulate a blessing in their life they can show gratitude for

Potential Activities:

1. Take a big piece of butcher paper and write "Prayer is..." Have students write or draw what it means to pray but save part of the butcher paper for later.
2. Tell Hagar's story to the students (Genesis 21:9-21). Explain that God heard Hagar and her son's cries and reached out.
 - a. Ask: Do prayers always need to have words?
 - b. Say: "Even though Hagar didn't pray the way we might think of prayer, we can think of her cries and despair as a method to reach out to God. By her and her baby crying, they both were saying 'please, help me!' After she was helped, she thanked God, even giving God a new name."
 - i. "From this story, we can see that prayers can be personal, prayers can be things we wish for, and prayers can be things we are grateful for. Although it isn't in the story, prayers can also be a way to ask for forgiveness from God or say sorry."
3. Discuss what "thank you" prayers might look like. Create a large tree out of butcher paper and cut out leaves. Have each child decorate leaves with things they are thankful for and make a "gratitude tree."
4. There's a Jewish tradition that one should say 100 blessings a day. Show some of the blessings that a person can say (over a rainbow, over creation, over trying something new, over receiving bad news). Ask the kids to write their own blessing.
5. **God Portfolio Entry:** Do you like to pray? Have you ever prayed for something and gotten it or prayed for something and not gotten it? What did both of those experiences feel like to you? Do you think that something is more likely to happen because you prayed for it?

LESSON 4:2: MOSES' ENCOUNTER WITH GOD PART 1: GOD AS AN EXEMPLAR OF VALUES (EXODUS 34:6-7)

In this lesson, the students will begin to look at Moses' encounter with God in the Exodus story. They will think about and learn about the different attributes of God and come up with examples of ways that they can bring those attributes into their lives.

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Introduce Moses' encounter with God after the golden calf (Exodus 34:6-7)
- Work with the students to relate God's values to everyday life

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Recall the values Moses uses to refer to God
- Name times when they have seen someone practice one or more of the values mentioned in Exodus 34.

Potential Activities:

1. Make posters around the room that represent the values in Exodus 34: 6-7, using the words in the translation and their definition if needed (see below)
 - a. Write "What does it look like when humans act this way?" Have students go around and put sticky notes or drawings underneath each column to find ways to represent those values.
 - i. Values:
 1. Compassion (being concerned for others)
 2. Gracious (kind, pleasant)
 3. Slow to anger
 4. Kindness
 5. Faithful
 6. Extending kindness to generations to come
 7. Forgiveness
2. Break the kids into groups and give each group a value. Have the kids act out a skit that shows the value being demonstrated.
 - a. Alternatively, print out scenarios that demonstrate the values. Have the kids read over the scenario and try to name which value it represents.
 - i. Example scenarios:
 1. All day, you were looking forward to eating your leftover cookies when you got home. When you arrived home from school, you opened the cookie jar and found it empty. You realized your little sister got home before you and had raided the cookie jar. You felt angry, but you took a deep breath and counted to 10 before talking to your sister (*slow to anger*).
 2. You planted a tree in your backyard before you move. Even though you won't get to enjoy the tree, you know the people who move in after you will get to enjoy it (*extending kindness to generations to come*).

3. **God Portfolio Entry:** Do you think God holds the values that Moses says (compassion, graciousness, slowness to anger, kindness, faithfulness, extending kindness to future generations and forgiveness)? Why or why not? What values do you hope or wish God has? What values do you want to have?

LESSON 4.3: GOD AS UNKNOWABLE (MOSES' ENCOUNTER WITH GOD PART 2: EXODUS 33:23)

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Explain Exodus 33:23, when Moses can see God's back but not God's face
- Introduce the students to multiple interpretations of Exodus 33:23
- Help students think about what parts of God we can know and what parts are a mystery

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Name a way that an individual can what God does without seeing God
- Describe Exodus 33:23 and a way to understand what that line could mean

Potential Activities:

1. Read Exodus 33:23. Put a few interpretations of the verse throughout the room and have the students read them all and stand by the one they most agree with. *Note: students should go to the one they like the best, not the one they think best matches the verse.*
 - a. Possible interpretations:
 - i. Moses saw a vision of God as a person. God shielded Moses from God's face, which would have been dangerous to look at.
 - ii. Moses could only see God after God left. Sometimes, we only see that God was present in a situation after the situation is over.
 - iii. Moses got to see some of God's creations, but not how God made them.
 - b. Have the students explain why they chose the one they did.
2. Allow students to write their own interpretation of the line.
3. Have the students fill in the following sentences (*Adapted from Partners with God, Gevirtz, 1995*)
 - a. When I see _____, I know it is windy outside. (*Possible Answers: Trees swaying, leaves blowing, etc.*)
 - b. When I see _____, I know someone is happy. (*Someone smile, laugh, etc.*)
 - c. When I see _____, I know it is morning. (*The sunrise, the light through my window, etc.*)
 - d. When I see _____, I know it is time to celebrate Passover. (*The seder plate, the matzo at the grocery store, etc.*)
 - e. Discuss how there might be ways that we can see God's ways without really knowing God.
 - f. Have them answer the question:
 - i. When I see _____, I know God is here. (*Possible answers: my family, my dog, a sunset, my team win at soccer, etc.*)
4. **God Portfolio Entry (Option 1):** Write the sentence, "When I see ____, I know God is here." This sentence may not work for all students (especially those who don't believe in God), so here are some alternative sentences they could write:
 - a. When I see ____, I know love is here.
 - b. When I see ____, I know there's goodness here.
 - c. When I see ____, I feel holiness around me.
5. **God Portfolio Entry (Option 2):** In addition to option 1, or possibly instead of option 1, have the students draw places where they find God. They may draw their family, or a sunset, or a soccer game, or something else.

UNIT 5: ON GOOD AND EVIL

UNIT 5 ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- There is not one clear reason why evil exists in the world.
- Parts of the Torah show God as a judge. The idea of God as a judge can be comforting sometimes and it can be hurtful at other times.
- I can help spread goodness and combat evil in the world.

UNIT 5 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How does the Torah explain why bad things happen to good people?
- Why does God allow bad things to happen?
- How can I help make the world better?

UNIT 5 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Show the students that ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is not always clear categories
- Give students a space to grapple with theophany (the idea that evil happens in the world when God is supposed to be good)
- Allow students to think about their role in reducing evil

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Define “good” and “evil” and explain why these are difficult categories
- Reflect on God’s role in evil in the world
- Describe how they can help spread goodness and combat evil

LESSON 5.1: WHAT IS EVIL?

The students will begin to explore this topic by thinking about what “good” and “evil” mean. The students will examine certain values and evaluate if they are good and evil in every context. For example, the students may define “lying” as evil but might need to reckon with the idea of lying to save someone from embarrassment. At the end of the class, the students will try to define “good” and “evil” in all contexts.

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Show the students that good and evil are not clear categories
- Allow students to reckon with their definitions of good and evil in various contexts

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Define goodness and evil
- Evaluate goodness and evil in different contexts

Potential Activities:

1. Break the students into pairs and give each pair a stack of cards with different words on them and have them sort them into piles of “good” “evil” and “don’t know.” Potential card topics:
 - i. Lying
 - ii. Stealing
 - iii. Beauty
 - iv. Exercise
 - v. Candy
 - vi. Homework
 - vii. Friendship
 - viii. Honesty
 - ix. Doing a mitzvah
- b. Have the kids compare their lists and justify why they put certain words in certain categories. They should probably find that not everyone ranked things the same way. For example, one person might say candy is good because it tastes good—others may say it is evil because it causes cavities.
2. Have the kids read some kid-friendly ethical dilemmas that put their categories to the test. Then, let the kids re-examine their categories and change things around. Potential examples:
 - a. Should you lie to protect a friend from embarrassment?
 - b. You are hanging out with a friend who isn’t very popular. You run into a group of popular kids who invite you to hang out with them, but they say the friend you’re with can’t come. What do you do?
 - c. A 7-year-old girl and her dad are going to a carnival, and the girl is really excited about riding the rides. They get to carnival and the dad realizes he left his wallet at home. It’s too late to go back and it’s the last day of the carnival. The dad tells the daughter that he found some cash in the car, and he has enough money for two entrance tickets, but not enough for rides. The dad says she can tell the ticket sellers she’s 5 so that they get her ticket half-off. Should the family lie about her age to be able to ride the rides?

LESSON 5.2: GOD AS JUDGE (DEUTERONOMY 11:13-21)

In this lesson, the students will think about what it means for God to be a judge by looking at Deuteronomy 11:13-21. In this Deuteronomy passage, God says that God will only provide rain and a plentiful harvest if the people of Israel follow God's mitzvot. After learning about this passage, the students will think about the limits of this role, and how it can be both comforting and not comforting to think about at times. For example, it can be comforting to think when you do a good deed, good things may happen to you. It can be saddening to think that if something bad happened to you, it was your fault.

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Help the students explore the role of God as a judge
- Illuminate how God's judgment can be hurtful sometimes.

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Explain what it means for God to judge
- Determine when it might be good for God to be a judge and when it might be bad
- Describe what it feels like to be judged

Potential Activities:

1. Play the unfair game: break the students into teams and give them questions to answer like "best movie" or "best color." Allow the students to answer. Assign points randomly. Discuss with the students if the game was fair and what it felt like to be treated unfairly. The students can also share times in their lives when they felt they were judged fairly and unfairly and what it felt like.
2. Present a kid-friendly version of Deut. 11:13-21. Connect it to the unfair game; say: "We just talked about what it felt like to be judged. How do you think the Israelites felt when they heard they would be judged? Do you think the Israelites would feel like they were being judged fairly all the time?"
3. Connect the Torah passage to their lives: Do they believe that God intervenes in the world and makes good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people? Why or why not?
4. Discuss: Do we want a God like this? Make a pro-con list or a debate for why it might be good to have a God who intervenes and rewards and punishes and why it might not be.
 - a. Some potential answers:
 - i. Good:
 1. Life becomes fair
 2. People can't just do evil things
 3. Good people can live a good life
 - ii. Bad:
 1. People are doing things because of the reward and punishment not because it's good
 2. People don't get to choose their own decisions and grow
 3. We wouldn't get the freedom to do things
 4. It might still feel unfair because we don't know the larger picture
 5. God is meant to be forgiving, not punishing

6. If something bad happens to someone good, it can feel like it's their fault, even when it's not. Then, the person can feel hurt by a situation and feel guilty for causing it, even though they didn't cause it.
5. **God Portfolio Entry:** Do you think God judges people? Why or why not? Do you wish God judges people? Why or why not?

LESSON 5.4: LIVING AS PARTNERS WITH GOD

The previous lesson discussed God’s role responding to evil and discussing if God judges people or not. This lesson, the students will focus on their role in the world and how they can respond to evil.

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Help students think about how to respond in the world where evil happens
- Empower kids to see how being helpful and kind can help overcome evil

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Explain what it means to live as a partner with God
- Articulate ways that they can act in response to bad things

Potential Activities:

1. Tell this story (adapted from Wolpe (1993)):
 - a. A person was really upset with the world. They looked around and said “God, there’s so many bad things happening around me! Why didn’t you send help?” God replied: “I did send help. I sent you.”
 - b. Discuss what it means to be God’s helper and work to do good in the world.
2. Read a fairy tale or hero story together. Analyze how the main character sees some sort of obstacle and must find ways to overcome it. Ask them about ways they can be superheroes: what evil thing would they need to overcome? What obstacles are in their way?
 - a. Discuss if they have ever felt like they were a hero—when did they help someone or something else? When did they help make the world better?
3. **God Portfolio Entry 1:** Students write 10 things they want to do to help make the world a better place in their God portfolio.
4. **God Portfolio Entry 2:** In their God portfolio, students should finish the sentence: “Some people say that God responds to evil by...” “I think there might be evil in the world because...” “I think that God responds to evil by...”

UNIT 6: DEVELOPING A PERSONAL THEOLOGY (AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT/MEMORABLE MOMENT)

UNIT 6 ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- The Jewish religion is based on the idea of a single God. However, there are many ways to define and understand that one God.
- There are multiple, valid ways to believe in (or not believe in) God. One does not need to prescribe to a specific idea of God to be Jewish.
- There is not a right or wrong way to believe in God. However, there are Jewish and non-Jewish ways to believe in God.
- Even though God is one, there can be many facets to God.
- An individual's relationship to God can change and evolve over time.

UNIT 6 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What does the word "God" mean to me? Does my definition of God change in different contexts?
- Does my view of God change depending on the circumstance?
- What are the Jewish ways to believe in God?

UNIT 6 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Help students create and write a piece of their own theology
- Show off parts of the student's theology to the community

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Create an entry into the 'God Museum' that shows a piece of their theology or what they learned throughout the year
- Write a letter to their future selves about their current theology

LESSON 6.1: PERSONAL THEOLOGY: LETTER WRITING

Through an interactive review game or activity, the students will get to review their God portfolio from the entire year. The students will then get to decide which facets of God speak to them and which do not. They will also get to revisit and re-read the letter they wrote at the beginning of the year.

The students will then work on writing a letter to themselves to open at some point in the future (the ‘best’ time for this might depend on the specific congregation. Some good times might be at a child’s bar or bat mitzvah, at confirmation, or at high school graduation.)

The students will have sentence starters that they can finish, including (but not limited to) “I find God when...”, “to me, God means....”, and “When I was younger I thought God was....Now I think God is...in the future I might change my idea of God because....” Many of these sentence starters are from portfolio entries in the previous units. Students are encouraged to revisit and revise their previous answers.

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Help the students reflect on their portfolio entries from the year
- Guide students in writing down their own theology

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Select which items in the portfolio describe their current beliefs and disbeliefs in God.
- Write a letter to themselves to open in the future

Potential Activities:

1. They should re-read the letter they wrote to themselves at the beginning of the year and see if they would change anything.
2. Before this lesson, print out a copy of a list of each portfolio entry from the year.
3. Give the students time to read through their portfolio entries from the year. If a student has extra time, they can refer to the master list of entries from the year and write on a topic they missed or re-write or re-draw answers that may have changed.
4. After they have read over their entries, have them mark specific entries based on the following prompts. There are multiple ways for them to mark each entry; they can draw a star directly on the portfolio on the page with the entry and add a word describing why they added the star, they can add sticky note that has a word on it that describes why they are marking it, or they can use different colored stickers or flags for each entry (be aware that this option can be confusing as the students need to remember what each color represents and can be difficult for color blind students).
 - Mark an entry that was interesting for you to learn or think about.
 - Mark an entry where you wrote something you believe in.
 - Mark an entry where you wrote about something you do NOT believe in (maybe you wrote about something you believed in when you wrote it, but you don’t believe in now, or maybe you wrote about something you never believed in).
 - Mark an entry (or entries) that frustrated you to write or think about.
 - Mark an entry that you still have questions about.

5. Using reference 6.1.1, have the students create a letter to themselves where they write down their own ideas about God. Have the students stick their letter in an unsealed envelope with their name on it and put the unsealed envelope in their God portfolio (or possibly attached to the portfolio with a binder clip) so that they can refer to it over the next few lessons.
 - On the last day of school, have the students put their finishing touches on the letter, seal it, and give it back to you or to another staff member to send out later (possibly at their bar or bat mitzvah or confirmation). If your synagogue does not have the capacity to collect the envelopes and send them back out, then have the children take them home and write on them “do not open until (your bar mitzvah, you turn 16, some other deadline).”

LESSON 6.2: PERSONAL THEOLOGY PART 2: CREATING A THEOLOGY MUSEUM (AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT)

While the student's theology letter is for themselves, this lesson allows the students to create a public view of their theology in a 'God Museum' that will be displayed on the last day of class.

Students will get the opportunity to turn one of their ideas about God from their letter into a creative form to share with the class or a broader audience. The students can create poetry, sculptures, art, music, or any other creative means to represent one facet of their understanding of God. Each entry will have a placard describing their work, which will describe the idea they are representing, how it is represented, how that idea relates to the Torah, and what they personally think of the idea. While this should be fun for everyone, it should also be an assessment if the students are able to represent what they learned from the year and its relationship to Torah. Students may have their own ideas of God they want to share but encourage students to create at least one museum entry that relates to their learning from the year.

This lesson should take multiple sessions to complete.

Goals (as an educator I aim to...)

- Help students choose one theological idea or question they have about God from their letter or God portfolio
- Work with the students to put together a "God Museum," or a public display to show off their theological beliefs and ideas
- Encourage students to feel proud of their work and what they've learned

Objectives (students should be able to...)

- Choose one of their ideas about God that they want to show off
- Create a piece of poetry, art, music, or writing that represents something they wrote about in their letter (or God portfolio)

Activity: Create a God Museum

- **Step 1: The teacher introduces the project:**
 - Ask: "Does anyone know what a theologian is?"
 - If you haven't used the word from throughout the year, define it: a theologian is someone who studies God.
 - Say: "You all have been theologians all year. You have been studying about God and writing down your ideas about God. However, theologians usually don't write just for themselves, they share their work with other people! Many adult theologians will write books or essays about their ideas; we are going to do something a little more creative together."
- Explain the project:
 - Say: "You all are going to get to create a God Museum that we will show off on the last day of class."
 - Name who the audience is going to be for. Share if you're going to invite parents, clergy and/or another class to come see the museum. You can also do the museum just with the class—much of the work they've done has been personal, so this is a way to show off their beliefs to their classmates.

- I highly recommend inviting outside people. Rabbis, educators, lay people all spend a lot of time thinking about God. Many of these people will be interested in the ideas that the students come up with!
- Say: “For this museum, each of you will get to choose one idea of God that we studied throughout the year and find a creative way to represent that idea. You can create a drawing, sculpture, original song, curated playlist, poem, comic, story, Lego structure, or something else. I just need to approve of it to make sure we have all the materials for it.”
 - Say: “When you go to a museum, it doesn’t just have the art or the object on display, it also has a little description, called a placard, that describes the object. You’ll also be creating your own placard that describes the object. We’ll go into more details on what should be on that placard when it is time to make it.”
- **Step 2: The students choose a theological idea to represent.**
 - Say: “To start this project, before we think about the art we want to do or the way we want to describe it, we need to think about the idea we have about God that we want to share.” Give them some time to look through their God portfolios or letter and underline or star something they might want to share with the community. They can pick more than one (if there’s time, they can make more than one museum entry), but they should have a top choice of something they want to work on first.
- **Step 3: The students propose their project to the teacher for approval before getting to work.**
 - Pass out proposal sheets (see reference 6.2.1 for an example), which have a description of the project and a place for them to propose the idea for their entry. Have them work on filling it out.
 - Adapt reference 6.2.1 to your synagogue before handing it out. Every option that they circle as a potential project should relate to the learning of the year and be something they can do. For example, if you don’t have Legos, don’t give the students an option to create with Legos. If you never got to the unit about God’s role in evil, don’t put it as an option for the students.
 - They should each have an entry (and not work in groups) as this is their belief and their theology. They can help each other work on their entries, but in the end, each person should hand in an entry with their name on it that represents their ideas.
 - You may want to give yourself time between when they submit their proposal and when they start working so that you can gather the exact supplies the students will need for their project (i.e. you may want them to submit their proposal at the end of one week and start working the next week).
 - The students may push back because they don’t believe in God. If they don’t believe in God, that’s okay! One of the options for the project is to create an entry about a conception of God they don’t believe in. If they choose this option, they should name a type of God that they disagree with and focus on why they disagree.
- **Step 4: The students create a museum entry.**
 - Once the student has proposed an idea that you approve of, let them get to work.
 - Here’s some factors you might want to consider when you decide to approve or deny a project proposal:
 - In theory, if they circled options, it should be an automatic approval. You may want to ask them more about what their ideas are.
 - If they choose the “other” category, consider:

- Materials or feasibility (e.g. did the student want to create a life-sized clay structure? Maybe that's not feasible with the timing and materials you have).
- Is it something that the students learned about this year? Although this project is not designed to be graded, it should reflect their learning from the year. If they choose to write about something you all have not learned or has no connection to Torah, you will not be able to tell what the student learned in class. Depending on timing, you might allow students to get creative on their second museum entry, but not their first, to make sure everyone has an idea that relates to class.
- **Step 5: The teacher approves the museum entry for display.**
 - Approve of their entries before putting them in the museum. If a student gives you a project, review it and either give it back to them with specific things they should edit or put it somewhere safe so that it can be displayed when you put together the museum.
 - Here are the criteria you should consider when approving museum entries:
 - The entry should have all its components. Specifically, the project should have:
 - A creative piece that represents their theology
 - A placard on its own piece of paper, written neatly. The placard should have:
 - Their name
 - Project type (Lego structure, sculpture, drawing, etc.)
 - What the project is representing (For example: How they talk to God, God's response to evil, etc.) and how it represents it (For example: They drew someone with their hands together to show that they like to pray).
 - A connection between your project and the Torah (For example, if you talk about how God responds to evil in the world, explain how God responds to evil in the Torah)
 - An explanation of your beliefs on the topic (For example, if you talk about how God responds to evil in the world, explain how you think God responds to evil)
 - *See reference 6.2.1 for example placards.*
 - General ideas and facts should be correct. Help the students change incorrect Torah references or general ideas.
 - While facts can be correct or incorrect, there is no "correct" or "incorrect" belief in God. However, there might be beliefs you don't want to share in the museum.
 - For example, there's a chance that a student would share their belief of God in a way that contradicts Jewish faith. For example, a student may say there is a sun and a moon god or may say that Jesus is the son of God (especially if they are from an interfaith family). Consider what to do in this situation carefully, try to be consistent, and do not discount a student's beliefs. You may choose to allow the entry if they explain that their ideas are outside of the scope of Judaism. You may ask them to choose a part of their theology that fits with Jewish belief because it is a Jewish space. Never say their beliefs are wrong or incorrect.

- The entries should be neat and presentable. Consider having students re-write or type placards to make them clear and legible.
 - The artistic ability of the student should not matter for the project to be approved to put in the museum. However, the student should feel proud of the work they put into it.
- Depending on timing, allow students to create multiple entries. Each entry should have its own placard.
- **Step 6: The class creates and shows off the museum.**
 - Choose a place to put together the museum. You may choose to make the space special with special snacks, flowers or other decorations.
 - Have the students help you put together the museum by finding places to display their projects and putting up placards.
 - Bring in invited guests.
 - Give students time to present their project orally if they would like to. For example, if they have a poem, you can designate a time for them to read their poem aloud.
- **Step 7: The class spends time reflecting and wrapping up the year.**
 - When the exposition is done, give the students an opportunity to reflect on the experience. Ask questions such as:
 - What was hard about defining what God meant to you? What was easy about it?
 - What are you hoping to learn more about in the future?
 - What did you learn when seeing each other's entries?
 - What is something about the museum that you are proud of? What (if anything) would you change if you created it again?
 - Allow the students to take their God portfolios home. Have them read over the letter they wrote to themselves, put their finishing touches on it and seal its envelope. Determine when you will want the students to look at the letter again and have the students write on it "do not open until [insert date]". You'll want the students to read the letter again in a few years. There are a few ways to make this happen:
 - Collect the letters and give them to a trusted staff member to hold onto them and hand them out at a specified time (like their bar or bat mitzvah)
 - Take them home and set a reminder to mail them out in a few years. Don't address the envelopes yet as the students may move around in the years to follow.
 - Send the students home with the letters and tell them to put them somewhere safe and to promise to hold onto them and not open them for a few years.
 - None of these methods are perfect, but hopefully, in a few years the students will get to see what they believed in fourth grade and think about how it changed.

REFERENCE 6.1.1: LETTER FORMAT

Now that we have spent the year learning about different ways of knowing God, we get to think about how we get to know and understand God. Please write a letter to yourself that you will open in the future. You should try to answer as many of these questions as you can:

- What were the idea(s) of God that related to you the most this year? Why?
- What idea(s) of God did you relate to the least? Why?
- When do you find God?
- When do you feel far away from God?
- What does “God is one” mean to you?
- Do you communicate with God? If so, when and how?
- In the past, what did you think God was? What do you think God is to you now?
- Why do you think that God lets bad things happen?
- What questions do you still have about God that you are still wondering about?

Dear _____ (your name),

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Sincerely,

_____ (sign here)

REFERENCE 6.2.1: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND EXAMPLES

Step 1: Project Proposal (Get the teacher's approval on this before you start working)

Format for my project (circle the one that applies):

Song	Drawing
Song lyrics	Story
Poem	Letter
Lego creation	Sculpture

Other: _____

I'm representing my ideas of (circle one):

An idea of God that I believe in

An idea of God that I don't believe in

Where I find God

Where I don't find God

How I talk to God

How God responds to evil

A question I have about God

Other: _____

Step 2: Get the teacher to initial here to show that they approve of your project idea: x_____

Step 3: Create your project!

Step 4: Make a museum placard for your project

Write your placard on a **separate piece of paper**. At a minimum, it should have:

- Your name
- Project type (Lego structure, sculpture, drawing, etc.)
- What the project is representing (For example: how I talk to God, God's response to evil, etc.) and how it represents it
- A connection between your project and the Torah (For example, if you talk about how God responds to evil in the world, explain how God responds to evil in the Torah)
- An explanation of your beliefs on the topic (For example, if you talk about how God responds to evil in the world, explain how you think God responds to evil).

Examples:

1. My project is a drawing that represents where I find God. I find God in nature because I think nature is very beautiful and all the parts of nature work well together. This makes me think that God helped in the creation of nature. My project relates to the Torah because the Torah begins with God as the creator. In the beginning, there was nothing. Then God created everything, including the trees and the plants and the animals. I think God helps make everything in nature work well together. That's why I think God can be found in nature.
2. My project is a clay sculpture that represents an idea of God I don't believe in. I don't believe in a God who created the world. In the Torah, it says that God created the world in 7 days, however, modern science shows that the world was created over billions of years. My clay structures show each of the days of creation as they are written in the Torah. Even though I do not believe this happened, I like that this story teaches about *B'Tselem Elohim*, which means being in the image of God. This teaches us that we should be nice to everyone because they are special and holy in their own way. I think it is important to treat other people nicely.

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