



JFest StoryMachine Engagement Resources

WELCOME TO THE STORY OF HOME: JFEST STORYMACHINE

LET THE ADVENTURE BEGIN!



“By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding established.” Proverbs 24:3

The [JFest StoryMachine](#) helps inspire creative thinking, personal reflection, and community-building. It invites us to recall and share our personal stories, and how they impact us and those around us. The StoryMachine prompts discussion around three main themes:

How You Tell Your Story
How Others Tell Your Story
How History Tells Our Story

How You Tell Your Story: As you enter the machine, you choose how to tell your story. We all carry memories; we may even think about them over and over and over. However, we don’t often make the time to commit them to history in some way, putting them down in writing so they are not lost and can continue to be shared.

How Others Tell Your Story: The machine offers an opportunity for multiple community members, for example an immediate or extended family, to share the machine with one another. As participants return to read the anthologies in the [Digital Library](#), they will discover one another's narratives and see crossovers where stories are repeated in different ways, through different points of view, and with different takeaways or meanings depending on who is the teller, the keeper, and the owner of the spirit of the story. This process alone can be beautiful and illuminating, adding to the richness of the story or the memory itself.

How History Tells Our Story: As multiple communities and individuals add to the narrative, we will start to see and understand what matters to our communities. What makes us similar? What makes us different? What are the ongoing themes or repeated tropes? What is meaningful? Valuable? Honorable? What is uniquely yours? Is something uniquely yours *less yours* if someone else holds a similar memory? If we use the same word to describe a feeling does that make the feeling any less rich?

With these ideas in mind, the JFest StoryMachine can be used to spark discussions, enriching each individual and their journey as well as bringing families and communities closer through the power and magic of storytelling, a tradition that runs deep in our collective history.



How to Use the JFest StoryMachine

Jfeststorymachine.org

The machine can be used in a group setting or gathering, either virtually or in person. Participants might be directed to one or more of the volumes in the Digital Library to read, add, or reflect on the various themes presented. The sources below help to debrief the experience and widen the conversation.

Ways to engage:

- Use as a prompt to engage at a gathering, or over an upcoming holiday or community event.
- Partner with other organizations: use this ready-made collaborative program opportunity to engage families and encourage the sharing of stories about same and differing histories.
- Create an ongoing series of sessions with active older adult members, to help them capture their stories.
 - Possibilities include an intergenerational session where the stories are read together and discussed between kids and grandparents/entire families, or kids teaching their elders how to “click” and view the stories/add their own.
 - Possibilities include working with your diverse population, inclusively, and highlighting one animation segment, and one Story of Home question prompt, and choosing to write a collective story, together.
- Use at a staff meeting or gathering as a creative framework for a “getting to know each other” session.
- Staff week at camp – both as an ice breaker, and to set the tone for what happens at camp: creating personal journeys, passing down camp lore, how stories are part of Shabbat and tradition, both in camp and for the greater community; building a sense of the collective.
- Train staff members to solicit stories from ECE students to add to the Digital Library.
- Include as part of a genealogy activity.
- Work with your lay leaders and committees to build community connection and a shared vocabulary around what is important.



Holiday Engagement Prompts

The themes of storytelling, community, family, and resilience are central to so many of the Jewish holidays, as well as secular celebrations in North America, and abroad. Think back to memories of these holidays and/or moments where these themes are most present for you, and then make your way through the StoryMachine. Below are suggested holiday questions, some of which have been paired with StoryMachine prompts so you can easily share your stories with us.

General holiday and gathering prompts:

- If you could, who from your past would you like to invite into to your holiday table? Is there a special food you would share? (StoryMachine Prompt C) Is there something you would ask or tell them? (StoryMachine Prompts N and O)
- Welcoming guests to our tables to share food is a powerful act – a *mitzvah*.
Below are prompts to reflect on the importance of this practice.
 - Name three ways that you open your home to others.
 - If a stranger walked into your home, what would they learn about your family just from looking around? (StoryMachine Prompt A)

Tu B'shevat/Earth Day

- Describe a favorite memory of being outside in nature. What makes this memory so precious? Who was there? You can include plants and animals as you remember them. (StoryMachine Prompt I)

Passover

- As Jews sing *Dayenu* at the seder table each year, we are reminded of our own resilience and also gratitude for the ongoing work of liberation. Who has inspired you in the work towards a more just and freer world, in little or big ways? (StoryMachine Prompts F and O)

Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur

- Who are you most grateful for this year, and why? Is there something that they would say to you to inspire a sweet new year ahead? (StoryMachine Prompt F)
- What are three words to describe who you are/aspire to be in the new year. (StoryMachine Prompt J)
- Who are you remembering this year, and why? (StoryMachine Prompts C and N)
- Describe a time you made a mistake and learned something you never would have expected from “the detour”. (StoryMachine Prompt E)



Sukkot/Thanksgiving

- Harvest holidays make us reflect on being guests ourselves, and being grateful for the generosity and hospitality of others.
 - Think of a time you were invited to a meal, into someone’s home, or another foreign place where you were made welcome. Was there something special that made you feel safe, accepted, even loved? What was it and why did it make all the difference in that moment? (StoryMachine Prompt I)

Hanukkah/New Year

- Is there a gift you received or a special object that brings you joy at this time of year? Share a bit about the significance of this object and the memory it holds. (StoryMachine Prompt A)
- As we reflect on the miracle of light in the darkness, share a family tradition, or one that you have created, that brings light into your life. (StoryMachine Prompt M)

You can explore other prompts in the following pages for year-round engagement.

A Few Resources and Prompt Questions to Further Enrich the JFest StoryMachine Experience

1. **“By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding established.” Proverbs 24:3**
 - How do you interpret this quote?
 - Does it resonate with you?
 - What is an example of wisdom that you gained from your “house”?
 - How is that the smallest bit of wisdom from home, that we carry with us forever, may be as impactful as profound “proclamations” from leaders or thinkers?
 - Why do you think this quote is placed on the roof of the JFest StoryMachine?
 - Proverbs, as demonstrated by its very name, is a collection of Jewish wisdom. What is another source that would be fitting?
 - This quote also connects wisdom, home, and the collection of stories we gather in those homes – and the people who help us understand that wisdom – the essence of the entire JFest StoryMachine experience.



2. Let's talk about storytellers:

“And so, faithful to his promise, the storyteller does nothing but tell the tale. He transmits what he received; he returns what was entrusted to him. His story does not begin with his own; it is fitted into the memory that is the living tradition of his people.”

Elie Wiesel, “Messengers of God.”

“By making the Israelites a nation of storytellers, Moses helped turn them into a people bound by collective responsibility – to one another, to the past and future, and to God. By framing a narrative that successive generations would make their own and teach to their children, Moses turned Jews into a nation of leaders.”

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

- In the Wiesel quote, Who is the storyteller? What is their “promise?”
 - What is the responsibility of the storyteller?
- In many cultures there was an “assigned” storyteller; we all learned of families or clans sitting around the fire, listening to stories.
 - Who plays that role today?
- The storyteller was “entrusted” – meaning that the story was something of value, to be kept safe. Who holds that responsibility today? Do we all share it?
 - Rabbi Sacks underlines the idea of the collective responsibility to pass our stories from generation to generation. He also infers that storytelling is a kind of leadership.
 - Do you agree with his sentiments?
 - Do you think the “big” stories of our people are more important than the smaller, more intimate stories of our families? Why or why not? How are the two connected?
- Who are today's storytellers in the public sphere?



3. Look at the two quotes that follow:

“There are men who travel far to look for something they can find in their own homes.”

Mishle Yehoshua, Jewish philosopher

“A man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it.”

George Moore, Irish novelist

- Look at the similarities between them; they are virtually identical, though from dramatically different-sources, times and places.
- Do you think the latter was inspired by the former, or is it possible that the concept of “home” is simply a basic, human need and desire, that cuts across all cultures and eras?
- How do you define “home”?
- Can you think of any other sources or stories (in literature, popular culture) that echo this theme of “home” (ex. The Wizard of Oz) – either working to get home, or hanging on to our memory of home to sustain us while we are far away?
- Do you have examples in your own family history that relate to this idea of yearning for home?

4. “Make your home an assembling place for the wise and drink their words with zeal.”

Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), 1:4

- How does this quote relate to our lives as members of a community at your JCC/Camp?
- The word “zeal” is so evocative – if you close your eyes and think of scenes that run through your JCC/Camp daily – what do you see (or hear)? What other words describe those scenes?

These are just a few prompts to ignite conversation and storytelling.
The possibilities are endless!

Read on for additional ideas and inspiration, and keep checking jfeststorymachine.org for additional resources.



“I couldn't help but think of the Talmud as Rube Goldberg machine for cultural transmission -- whimsical, technical, unnecessarily complicated, using multiple sources of power and materials (as in literary genres), and in the end...it's not about quickly offering advice or a legal opinion, but engaging and modeling a way of thinking...”

Dan Schifrin, StoryForward

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”

Joan Didion

“Religious communities also need these shared stories. They are the driver for the purpose of the community from generation to generation. These stories are how communities “dream of something bigger and better.”

Rabbi Sharon Brous

