



Unit 13: Courage to Question

through the lens of the Jewish Value "Ometz Lev" (Courage)

BIG PICTURE

This unit is about process more than content, to elevate the value of curiosity and active questioning into our students' learning.

Judaism is a religion and peoplehood that is rooted in action rather than belief - this allows and encourages us to actively engage with our practice, to question and to debate. One text teaches that "of all of the mitzvot (commandments), the highest one is Study, for it leads to all other actions." The history of Jewish learning (since roughly the 2nd Century) has existed in the [Beit Midrash](#) - the House of Learning. Whereas the Western equivalent - a library - is quiet and independent, the Beit Midrash is loud, collaborative, and about pushing back on each other in order to "sharpen" (strengthen) each other's ideas.

We live in a society that values test scores and "knowledge" above learning and growth. It is therefore incredibly brave in these circumstances to show vulnerability and to say "I have more to learn about that". *This scene from The West Wing (:55 - 1:44) highlights the importance of modeling this vulnerability and persistence to our students:* [west wing Galileo CJ Speech](#)

Relating Unit Theme to the Jewish Value of Ometz Lev (Courage): Help your students relate Questions and Curiosity to our value lens of Ometz Lev. Create learning moments to reinforce these ideas throughout the day at JKG:

- It's not easy to say "I don't know" in front of people you want to impress
- Negative stereotypes have been assigned to people who show they care and want to learn more (dork, nerd, teacher's pet..) so it can take courage to stand up against those stereotypes.
- Making mistakes can feel like a show of weakness, but owning a mistake and commitment to trying again is very brave.

RESOURCES (to be used during Shulchanot, Zman Kehilah, etc. as needed)

Terms/Vocab for This Unit

- [בית מדרש](#) Beit Midrash (bayt meed-rahsh) - "House of Study"
- Curiosity
- "What more can I learn about this?" as a response to "I already learned this."

Coloring Pages for This Unit:

- [Curiosity is the Essence of our Existence](#)
- [Mistakes are Proof That You are Trying](#)
- [Courage Does Not Always Roar](#)
- [Curious George](#)
- [Approach Every Day with Curiosity](#)
- [Q is for Question](#)
- [How Will You Find Out About Things?](#)

Videos/Songs for This Unit

- [Learning Hebrew - Lesson 2 - Question Words](#)
(does not include Mi/Who)
- ["Who, What, When, Where, Why" by The Bazilli...](#)
- [50 questions to ask kids printable](#)

Books for This Unit

- [Ada Twist, Scientist](#)
- [Clever Rachel](#)



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Learning Objectives for Full Unit:

A. Students will know that Judaism puts a high value on asking questions

(littles) We learn best when we ask questions and listen to the answers

(middles) We learn about the world around us through asking questions

(big) The Jewish tradition is built on rabbis asking questions

B. Students will understand that it takes courage to say "I don't know", and to be curious

(littles) It's brave to say "I don't know" and to ask for help

(middles) It's brave to say "what more can I learn about this?" instead of "I already know this"

(big) It's brave to show that you care through asking intentional and interesting questions



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LEARNING GOAL A: Students will know that Judaism puts a high value on asking questions



- (littles) We learn best when we ask questions and listen to the answers
(middles) We learn about the world around us through asking questions
(biggs) The Jewish tradition is built on rabbis asking questions

PEULAH OPTION A1: Hebrew Questions (recommended for littles and middles, *can double as a Hebrew lesson*)



HOOK (5 minutes)

[Frame: Connect lessons we're learning about curiosity and asking questions to Hebrew language]

Materials:

- Video player with audio
-  "Who, What, When, Where, Why" by The Bazillions
-  Hebrew Question Words - colors.pdf

Directions:

1. Tell students today we're playing games using Question Words - **WHO** can tell me what Question Words are?
2. Show  "Who, What, When, Where, Why" by The Bazillions video to review question words in English, and to put a catchy tune in their heads.
3. Teach the Hebrew words (below) for each question word, holding up the color-coded page.
 - a. Mi (who)
 - b. Mah (what)
 - c. Eifoh (where)
 - d. Matai (when)
4. Try attaching the Hebrew words to the same melody - [Listen to a sample](#)

ACTIVITY: Hebrew Question Bingo (15 minutes)

[Frame: Use BINGO to introduce students to the Hebrew words Mi (who), Mah (what), Eifoh (where), Matai (when) and code each word to a color as a mnemonic - the color coded pages match the colors used in their Bingo boards]



Materials

- [Bingo Boards](#), printed out for each student

- Bingo markers/stickers
- [Hebrew Question Words](#) - Color pages

Directions:

1. Pass out Bingo boards and playing markers
2. Explain that each picture on their board connects to one of the 4 Question words
3. Use an example of each on the board to demonstrate:
 - a. MI/who asks about a PERSON - find a person!
 - b. MAH/what asks about a THING - find a thing!
 - c. EIPHOH/where asks about a PLACE - find a place!
 - d. MATAI/when asks about a TIME - find a time!
4. You will call out a Hebrew question word, and they find a picture on their board that connects to that word
 - a. EX: Teacher calls out **MI** (who), students find a picture of a person. (both will be Purple)
5. As you call out the word in Hebrew, hold up the Color Code Page as a visual cue
6. As you call out the word in Hebrew, everyone repeats after you.
7. They only get one marker per call
8. Play until someone gets 4 across (vertical, horizontal, or diagonal)
9. Continue playing, let the winner/s from Round I call out the Hebrew words this round.

WRAP UP / CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING (5 minutes)

Review the Hebrew question words, and have each student ask a question starting with a Hebrew question word:

Ex: **EIPHOH** are you going on vacation?

MAH did you have to lunch today?

Correct them if they get it wrong, and help guide them to the correct one, then have them repeat it using the correct question word.

PEULAH OPTION A2: Pancakes or Waffles (recommended for all ages - see details below)

HOOK (5-7 minutes)

[Frame: What is a follow-up question and why are they important?]

Materials: None

Directions:

Question Toss – Teach children to answer a question while staying active with question toss. Ask a question then throw the ball to a student. The student answers the question then asks a related follow-up question. The student throws the ball to another student. The second student follows the same directions as the first student by answering the question and asking a related question. This continues until someone is unable to think of an answer, a question, or an on-topic response to a question.

ACTIVITY: Pancakes or Waffles (15 minutes)

[Frame: Play a low-stakes get-to-know-you game to illustrate how even the smallest questions can have big impact]

Materials: None

SIMPLE VERSION, best for Littles:

1. Sit them in a circle
2. Ask for a volunteer to go first, and ask them: **“Which would you choose, pancakes or waffles?”**
3. Student A answers, and moves on to continue the game with the next student beside them, Student B. If Student A had decided to keep waffles, then the new question they ask Student B is “Which would you choose, waffles or _____”.
4. The new category does not need to be breakfast food, or food at all! They could ask “waffles or puppies?” “waffles or rainbows?” “waffles or monkey bars?” The important thing is that it be something that person is likely to want, making the choice difficult!
5. Keep going around the circle, always replacing the first option with whatever that person chose, and adding something brand new as the second option.
6. Play until everyone has had a chance to play.
7. Now, go back to Student A. Tell them they can ask a follow-up question to anyone in the circle about their answer. *(They will most likely need some help remembering each other’s answers)*
EX: Samantha, you chose fireflies over slippers. What do you like most about fireflies?
8. Continue to go around, giving students the chance to ask each other follow-up questions.

UP THE ANTE VERSION, best for Middles and Bigs:

1. Play a quick round of the Simple Version steps 1-5 (above) to get their feet wet.
2. Now we’re going to mix that game with Eye Spy - so whomever is “it” thinks of something that’s in the classroom in their head, and the rest of the group tries to figure out what it is by asking the question: “Is it more like a _____ or like a _____?”.

- a. The first question must be “is it more like a pancake or like a waffle?” The person considers, and answers (this will require some creative and abstract thinking).
 - b. The next student takes their answer, and adds something else to the comparison - “is it more like waffles or like the sky?” And so on.
3. Just like in Eye Spy, they cannot directly ask “is it like the couch” until they’re ready to make a final guess. If they guess and guess wrong, they are “out”.
 4. Once they’re successfully guessed, a new student can be “it”.
 5. Once you’ve exhausted the game, gather the group back into a circle
 6. Invite discussion,
 - a. if you could have asked a followup question to the Spy/It, would it have helped you guess the thing quicker?
 - b. What follow-up questions, if any, would you ask? How would they have helped you?

WRAP UP / CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING (5 minutes)

For all:

- Who learned something about a JKG friend they didn’t know before?

For middles and bigs:

- How can asking follow-up questions help us know each other even better?
- What connections can you make between our Jewish values and these question games?

PEULAH OPTION A3: Nursery Rhyme Beit Midrash (recommended for bigs, can be amended for middles)

HOOK (5-7 minutes)

[Frame: Introduce “Beit Midrash” and compare it to a library]

This can be done through a variety of ways - group discussion, role play, venn diagram...

Materials: None

Directions:

1. Invite students to share what they know about a library (books, quiet, tables, computers, librarian going SHHH)
2. What skills do we learn in a library? (read, research, think independently, work quietly...)
3. Explain that there is something called a Beit Midrash, and it’s basically a Jewish Library - it has all the important Jewish books and texts and tables to study at, but there is one important difference - a Beit Midrash is LOUD. Because people are reading together in pairs, and they are asking each other questions and challenging each other’s answers

ACTIVITY: Nursery Rhyme Beit Midrash (15 minutes)

[Frame: Using a text that is very familiar to them, give students a chance to explore questions and interpretations they hadn’t considered before to show that we can always be learning new things, even about things we think we know everything about!]



Materials

- [Easel Chart Paper](#)
- Tape
- Pigmented Markers (a different color for each student)
- Timer
- Post it notes

Directions:

1. Write a popular Nursery Rhyme into the center of Easel Chart Paper, leaving plenty of room around the perimeter for students to write. (It does not necessarily have to be a Nursery Rhyme - it could be something else that most of the kids are familiar with, i.e. a song lyric, a paragraph from a popular book, a poem, etc.)

Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go;
He followed her to school one day-
That was against the rule,
It made the children laugh and play
To see a lamb at school.

2. Give each student a different color marker, and have them SILENTLY walk up to the paper, and write their questions that are unclear or left unexplained in the rhyme along the edges.
3. Then they underline the word/phrase from the rhyme itself that their question stems from.

"Little Lamb" - Does little mean in size, or in age? Was it a small lamb, or a young lamb?

"Mary" How old is Mary that she has a pet lamb?? Is it a pet?? Is it alive?

Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go;
He followed her to school one day-
That was against the rule,
It made the children laugh and play
To see a lamb at school.

"The lamb was sure to go;"
Why isn't the lamb being kept in a barn or a farm? Is it just walking freely in the street?

"That was against the rule"
Against whose rule? Mary's parents? The School?

4. Once everyone has had a chance to read and write a question, give the students post-it notes. Have them suggest an answer to SOMEONE ELSE'S question underneath it using the post-it notes.

"Mary" How old is Mary that she has a pet lamb?? Is it a pet?? Is it alive?
I actually think that the lamb is not real at all, but a stuffed animal - that's why the children are laughing, they're laughing at Mary for bringing a toy to school (says Samantha)

"Little Lamb" - Does little mean in size, or in age? Was it a small lamb, or a young lamb?
Felicity thinks it's a small lamb, otherwise it wouldn't be able to follow her around very easily.

Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go;
He followed her to school one day-
That was against the rule,
It made the children laugh and play
To see a lamb at school.

"That was against the rule"
Against whose rule? Mary's parents? The School?
Definitely against the school rule, says Molly.

"The lamb was sure to go;"
Why isn't the lamb being kept in a barn or a farm? Is it just walking freely in the street?
Kirsten thinks the lamb is so tiny that they don't realize it's there.

5. At this stage, depending on size, either break the students into pairs or have one discussion together -
 - a. Read the Nursery Rhyme, stopping at each highlight to read the question and answer. Do you agree or disagree with the suggested answer? Why or why not? What other answer would you suggest to their question?
 - b. Once you've reached the end of the rhyme, what new insights do you have about Mary and her lamb? What new questions?

WRAP UP / CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING (5 minutes)

This is how the rabbis have studied Torah and other Jewish texts for thousands of years - layering questions upon questions, and doing it out loud in the Beit Midrash. Why do you think the rabbis do this out loud, instead of quietly and independently like a library? What does it tell us about their values?

LEARNING GOAL B. Students will understand that it takes courage to say “I don’t know”, and to be curious

(littles)	It’s brave to say “I don’t know” and to ask for help
(middles)	It’s brave to say “what more can I learn about this?” instead of “I already know this”
(biggs)	It’s brave to show that you care through asking intentional and interesting questions

PEULAH OPTION B1: Toilet Paper Roll Binoculars (recommended for littles, can be amended for middles)

HOOK (5-7 minutes)

[Frame: Connecting looking glasses to the power of perception and exploration.]

Materials:

- [Rosie’s Glasses](#)

Directions:

1. Tell students we’re going to read a very special book - it doesn’t have any words!
2. Ask: *How can we read without words?* Take a couple of answers
3. Read “**Rosie’s Glasses**” and lead a discussion after:
 - How was Rosie feeling at the beginning of the book?
 - How do you know if the book didn’t tell you?
 - What questions did you want to ask Rosie at the beginning of the book?
 - What happens when she finds the glasses?
 - How did wearing the glasses change the world around her?
 - Do you think the glasses changed the world, or did they change Rosie?
 - What questions do you want to ask Rosie about her experience wearing the glasses?
 - When Rosie put on the glasses she looked at the world in a new way, and was able to see all of the joyful things around her. Sometimes we need help to remember there is a big wonderful world with so many things to explore and discover! **And it’s ok to say “I need help!”** Today we’re making our own special lenses to help us look at the world with new curiosity and excitement.

ACTIVITY: Toilet Paper Roll Binoculars (15-20 minutes)

[Frame: Encouraging students to think of curiosity and asking questions as an adventure, and providing them a tool to support their seeking]



There are a TON of different binocular projects online, each with little tweaks to how the rolls are connected, or how they decorate them - this is just one suggestion from a site dedicated to preschool age with the least amount of fuss. [Here is the link to her website to see her full project.](#) Feel free to choose a different model to make them more intricate! (Try using [this project](#) if you're doing this activity for "middles".)

Materials:

- [Toilet paper rolls](#), 2 per student
- String/yarn, to use as a neck strap
- Glue
- Hole Punch
- Crayons, markers, paint, stickers, [gem stickers](#), or [washi tape](#) to decorate
- *Optional:* beads or cut up paper straws for students to string onto their neck strap (*practices fine motor skills*)
- *Optional:* Clothespins to hold the rolls together while the glue dries (or just use a stapler)



Directions:

1. Have students decorate their two rolls - they can paint, draw, use stickers, washi tape, gems, beads, whatever you have on hand! (*paint will look the nicest, but take longer to dry - consider your time constraints*)
2. Glue the two rolls together, hotdog style. If using the clothespins, secure one at each end clamping the two rolls together to hold them in place while the glue dries. Or use a stapler instead.
3. While the glue is drying, make the binocular strap. This can be string, yarn, ribbon, wherever you have access to. Time permitting, students can decorate their straps by stringing beads or cut up straws onto the strand (this is excellent fine motor skill practice).
4. When ready, punch a hole onto either side of the binoculars and tie an end of the strap into each one.
5. Your binoculars are ready to go! What cool new things can you find when you look through them? What's something about your classroom that you've never noticed before? Something about one of your classmates?

WRAP UP / CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING (5 minutes)

Have each student go around and look through their binoculars to (1) notice something for the first time, and then (2) ask a question about it.

Ex: "I never realized that the curtains are purple. I wonder why they chose purple?"

"Felicity is wearing stars on her shirt. Do you like to look at the stars, Felicity?"

PEULAH OPTION B2: Paper Bag Drama (recommended for middles or bigs)

HOOK (7-10 minutes)

[Frame: Using a folktale to protect against acting like a “know-it-all”]

Materials:

- [Clever Rachel](#)

Directions:

1. Read “Clever Rachel” and lead the following discussion:
 - a. What was Jacob’s problem with Rachel?
 - b. Which do you think is more clever - knowing an answer fast, or taking time to think it through?
 - c. Are people born clever, or is it a skill you can develop?
 - d. If you can develop it, how? What sort of things do you need to do or learn?

ACTIVITY: Paper Bag Drama (15 minutes)

[Frame: Students must work together to think creatively about items in ways they may not have considered before]



Materials:

- Brown paper bags
- Random assortment of items that will fit in the paper bags
- Pre-fill the bags with 3-4 random objects that are not related to each other***
- Optional: prize for the group who works best together

Directions:

1. Break into teams of 3-4 people.
2. Give each team a paper bag
3. Their mission is to create a short skit using the items in the bag, but with a twist - the items must be used in a way that is different from its intended use

EX: a winter hat turned upside down can be used as a bucket
4. Teams have 7-10 minutes to work together to create their 1-minute skit, then perform them for each other.
5. Have everyone vote on the most creative use of a prop.
6. Award a special teacher prize to the group you observe working best together as a team.

WRAP UP / CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING (5 minutes)

- What was it like to have to think of an everyday object as something totally different?
- Can you think of other times it's useful to expand your way of thinking?
- How did Jacob and Rachel's story influence the way you worked together?

PEULAH OPTION B3: Group Riddle and Doodle (recommended for bigs)

HOOK (7-10 minutes)

[Frame: Using a folktale to protect against acting like a “know-it-all”]

Materials:

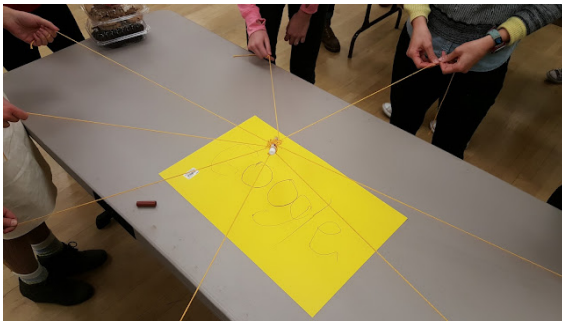
- [Clever Rachel](#)

Directions:

1. Read “Clever Rachel” and lead the following discussion:
 - a. What was Jacob’s problem with Rachel?
 - b. Which do you think is more clever - knowing an answer fast, or taking time to think it through?
 - c. Are people born clever, or is it a skill you can develop?
 - d. If you can develop it, how? What sort of things do you need to do or learn?

ACTIVITY: Group Riddle and Doodle (15 minutes)

[Frame: Students must work together to think creatively about solving and then writing the answer to a riddle]



Materials:

- Large sheets of paper
- Washable markers
- Heavy duty tape, or rubber bands
- String or yarn, cut into 3 ft length (one per student)

Prep:

- Cut a piece of string for each student that is 3 ft long
- Tape three-four pieces of string (based on your group sizes) to the base of one marker (or tie the string to a rubber band and wrap the band tightly around the marker) - [watch this video for a very clear tutorial if you would like!](#)

Directions:

Teams are going to work together to solve a riddle, and then work together to write the answer by each person pulling on a string attached to one marker (amended from “Marker Madness”, “Tug-o-Words”, and “Group Doodler” for reference)

1. Break into teams of 3-4 people.
2. Explain that we’re going to do a team writing challenge - Give each team a large sheet of paper and one of the taped up markers with as many pieces of string as there are members of the group.

- a. Each student takes one end of a string (they can only hold their string by the outer third, ensuring no one gets too close to the marker). Center the marker on the page, and everyone will work together pushing and pulling their strings to write on the page.
 - b. Do a test-run of the string-writing by having each group write “JKG”.
3. Now we’re ready for the real challenge - channeling Rachel and Jacob to see how clever we can be, and how well we can work together as a team.
 4. Teacher will read off a riddle; the team must first work together to solve the riddle , then work together to write the answer using their marker on a string.
 5. Use from this list of riddles, or include any of your own - key is that the answer only be one word or short phrase:
 - If I’m dropped, I’m sure to crack. But show me a smile, and I’ll always smile back. (mirror)
 - My hands have no fingers, my face has no eyes. I tick but can’t talk to tell you time flies. (clock)
 - I’ve caught many a kite, but my bark has no bite. (tree)
 - If you’re dirty and smelling sour, come stand near my trunk and I’ll give you a shower. (elephant)
 - I fall from the cliffs but never break. I drop from the skies, and I fill up lakes. (water)
 - I use a bank that has no money and a bed that has no sheets. I can run, but I have no feet. I have a mouth, but I cannot speak. (river)
 - I have eighty-eight keys but don’t need a lock. I have three pedals, and I’m shaped like a block. (piano)
 6. Repeat as many times as you like/as much room as they have on their paper!

WRAP UP / CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING (5 minutes)

- What challenges did you experience in this activity?
- What strategies did your team use to overcome them?
- If you’d been working by yourself, would you have been able to complete the task quicker?
- What new skills or ideas did you gain by doing this as a team?
- How did Jacob and Rachel’s story influence the way you worked together?