

Pirkei Avot Lesson, Jenny Lewis, Teacher (T).
Sharon Feiman Nemser's transcript of lesson

Kids make name tents.

INTRODUCTION

T: I will try to use your names. My name is Jennifer Lewis, call me Jenny. Here with a bunch of teachers who are all trying to learn more about getting good at teaching. We designed lesson to try out. Everyone is watching lesson. We're interested in how you think about the ideas. Really not watching you, they are watching the lesson and the lesson design. It may feel weird at first to have so many people watching, but I hope it will not after time.

M: Is the lesson related to Judaism?

BACKGROUND

T: Yes the lesson is related to Judaism and it also goes with other things you are studying. This will answer your question even more. We're going to learn about how our rabbis and people before us thought about essential values for living, things that we can't live without. Then we're going to think about what we think are the essential values for living. We'll be studying Pirkei Avot to do that. I will tell you about that. So that is something Jewish.

We're going to start this way. I have a bunch of names of people from our tradition. I'm placing them here on the floor. Come and pick up one of the cards and stand in line that is the order of history that these people came in. I'll put them out and you come and get them, just grab one.

[Kids go pick up card from floor.]

T: Did everybody get one? Now try to figure out how to stand in order holding name. Let's do the newest people, people from now – [kids starting to huddle and compare cards] You will be at the other end. That's perfect. See if you agree that Adam and Eve should come first in history. [Yes] We might not have it perfect but let's make a guess. Looks like the people from "now" are worrying what order they should be. Show each other your names and see if we need to adjust.

[Adam/Eve – Abraham/Sarah- Moses – Judah Maccabee – My grandparents – Cantor J?. Dr. Goodman, My parents].

T: Move Noah after Adam and Eve. Remember we just read about Noah's ark and that came right after the creation story. Picks up Joseph, Joshua, So in the order of history. This is like the chain...We're going to read about two rabbis who came right in between here – between Hillel and your grandparents. Can you all see that? We are going to be learning about these two people. Want to be sure you can see. Can you see where Rav Shimon ben Gamliel and Rav Shimon haTzadik fit? They come after Hillel and before your grandparents because they had ideas about the essential values for living a good life. One more person we want to put in this chain of Jews – don't peek –[passes out cards] Turn it over and tell me where you would stand in line – [all move to present]

You can take your cards back to your seats. So it's these two people [holding up cards with Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel and Rabbi Shimon haTzadik] in the line of Jewish history. They were part of a group of people who thought about essential values for living. All these ideas were collected in a book called *Pirkei Avot*, Chapters of our Founders. That's what we're going to be learning about today, ideas of Shimon haTzadik and Shimon Gamliel.

LAUNCH

Here's what I want you to do. Imagine that you are in a room full of rabbis like Shimon ben Gamliel and Shimon haTzadik – who lived 2000 years ago, not at the same time but a long time ago. They are sitting around, not a bunch of teachers behind you, a bunch of rabbi thinking. What are the essential values for having a good life? What does the world need? If you were one of those rabbis or you were listening to one of those rabbis, what is one of those essential values that they would say?

I want you to think of one word that would say one essential value that these rabbis 2000 years ago, that these rabbis would say the world needs. If you think you have one – [thumb up] –

Adi: Peace.

T: Is this something those rabbis would have said? What do people think?

Elie: Family to teach.

Max: Organization.

Eva: Blessings.

Kathryn: True friends.

T: Such interesting and important ideas. I feel you are channeling our rabbis. So what I'd like you to do, put one on each post-it. Write it big on a post it so we can see it when we put them up. I am giving you fat dark markers so you can write in way that everyone can see.

[Kids fill out post-its with their essential values.]

When you have one, stick it on the white board and then come back and write another one. [Kids go up to the board and post their values.] Write at least 3.

[Kids go up to the white board and post their values.]

On white board: Torah, peace, safe place,

T: Push away post-its and markers so they don't distract you anymore. Take a minute to read over what it says there – the ideas people had, because you had some good hunches about what rabbis 2000 years ago thought were essential values for living.

TEXT STUDY

T: Now we're going to look at a text. Both of the Shimons said that the world stands on three things. [Shows stem - Al shloscha devarim ha olam omed. The world stands on three things;

passes out sheet with stem] I bet you are curious about what Shimon ha Tzadik said and what Shimon Gamliel said.

[Passes out one text to half of class and other text to rest of class. Take one and see what they said.]

Here's what I want you to do once you have a paper. [divides kids up into pairs] Here's what I want you to think about.

Read text out loud in Hebrew, English of both. Get inside your Shimon's head – what does each value mean to your Shimon. Make sure you understand what the other person thinks by asking them, 'Is this what you meant? Explain to them what you think they meant and check with them to be sure you understand what they meant. Check to see if you understand what your partner said meant. Does someone want to show us what this looks like?

Silence.

T: I'm thinking out loud. Shimon said "Torah." I think Torah means "books." I think the world needs books as an essential value. Lauren, how could you check if you understood me, if you were my partner? Say it loudly so your friends can hear.

Lauren:??

T: I think when he says the world stands on the Torah, he means books.

Laura:

T: Yea you really understood what I was thinking. I want you to do that kind of work to be sure that you understand what your partner is thinking. Doing what Laura modeled for us. We'll know what the rabbis said and we'll talk about it.

Partner Work (what I overheard from girls sitting in front of me):

G: We're supposed to get inside Rav Shimon's head.

T: What do each of those things mean? Sort of have to make a guess. What does Shimon mean by truth?

G: And then peace so that combines lots of order, the golden rule. 3 things combined -

T: We are really interested to hear about your Shimon. We're going to do one from Shimon haTzadik and one from Shimon Gamliel. Lets hear what you thought Shimon meant by Torah –

Cole: I thought he meant something like education cause Torah is sort of like books.

T: You said education and learning. So glad you expanded.

Max: I said.. added it means it's like a path to guide you, something to lead the way.

T: Did you hear what Max said?

Al: A way of expressing (?)

T: Say why?

Al: Cause we as Jews have a given path and can express it through Torah.

T: Catherine, did you hear what Al said?

Jordan: I think whoever wrote the Torah, like Al said, they want us to live.

T: Way to live life. Does that capture what your Shimon was thinking. Lets go to “service” or *avodah*.

Dillon: Something to believe in like a government.

T: Why government?

Dillon: Because there needs to be some kind of boundary.

T: You meant that about worship or service/avodah? That reminds me of what one of you said about organization. We need some framework. Wonder if that’s similar or if I’m not understanding.

Eli: I thought respect because we’re all different and people believe in their God and we believe in ours.

T: What about deeds of loving kindness?

Max and Jordon: I thought it is exactly, you don’t need to explain anything about it. It means so much by just saying it. You don’t need to explain it.

T: Like it’s self-explanatory. Says what it means. Jordan?

Jordan: I’m looking at loving kindness as a way to show how much you appreciate and love someone.

Alex: Similar to what Jordan said, acts of loving kindness are like the ways that you appreciate something and why you appreciate it.

J: Adi, ready to go on? Going to say something else?

Adi: I was thinking about appreciation

J: Did people hear what Adi said. Say it again, not sure all head.

Adi: Appreciation and worshiping God is the same.

J: All three are a form of appreciation and worshiping God. Let’s go down to the other Shimon. You were thinking – this other Shimon had another set of values. Can you tell us what justice might have meant?

? We combined them all to make “law and order.” We felt as though he believed strongly in that and that’s why he chose those three things.

J: What do people think of that idea? Dillon?

Dillon: ...at first trying to get truth out of people and that's justice and that creates peace.

J: Did you say it's like a court? Not sure the teachers could hear you.

Dillon: If create justice, get peace.

J: So you see these going around in a cycle, one thing leads to another. Super interesting.

Adi: I thought about all of them – really what all are about. The first three are about ??? the other set is about...

J: These are all about treating others the way you want to be treated. Big idea – v'ahavta l-rayacha kamoachah. These three things add up to that idea. Then Adi said something else. Any one want to say what you heard Adi mentioning?

Adi: 1st set about appreciation for God, second appreciation for people.

J: Say what you heard Adi say. Say one more time.

Adi: 1st set appreciation of God, 2nd set appreciation for other people.

Eli: I think she's saying one is from a religious standpoint and other is from a non-religious standpoint.

J: These are about God – a religious perspective; and these are about

Eli – everyday things.

Adi: How did you say it?

Adi: Other people in general .

J: Turn to the person you studied with and talk about what you think about that idea.

[Talking to partner about Adi's idea]

T: I want you to think about the qualities that you thought the rabbis would think about and what you thought Shimons thought about. Take a pen and write on the table cloth your three essential values. The three things for you – what you think, not what a rabbi before you thought. What are the three things that the world stands on?

[Students write on table cloth their 3 essential values.]

WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSION

J: Everyone have a chance to write down 3? Now what I want you to do – tell us what those 3 things are. You can use this sentence frame say –

I Rabbi Jenny think the world stands onWho wants to try that first?

Dillon: I Rabbi Jenny – I Rabbi Dillon, think the world stands on justice, opinions and technology.

J:

Max: I kind of just wrote one because, I wrote values because everything surrounds values.

J: I Rabbi Max think the world stands on one thing – belief in values. Did I understand you right?

Max: Can't just talk about values, they are a pair.

Kathryn: I Rabbi Kathryn think the world stands on family, friends and faith.

Lauren: I, Rabbi Lauren, think the world rests on safe place, family, home.

Jenna: I, Rabbi Jenna, think the world stands on family, hope and peace.

Adi: I think the world stand on peace, kindness and learning.

Cole: I Cole think the world stands on education, mistakes and amount of money have.

T: You are describing the world as it is not what it should be.

Alex: Hope, love and forgiveness.

Jordan: Rabbi Jordan believes love, peace and beliefs.

Eli: I think family, peace and values.

T: It's interesting to hear the overlaps and the differences.

Faren (?):

T: Cool to

Faren: ?, ?, peace

T; I think that means everyone got to share. So here's what I'd like you to do when finish. We've been thinking alot about the way different people and people from our tradition think about these ideas. [passing out] Spend five seconds on each essential value here. Write one word or one meme or picture to say what each means. So where it says, the world stands on Torah, draw a picture or write one word. So Dillon just drew a picture and Lauren said "education." Go through all six, whatever comes to your mind quickly.

[Kids filling in worksheet – drawing or offering one word] Good job, zooming through. All six

Jenny: Put your name at the top. Eli will you go around and collect these.

One final thing I'd like you to do. Final word – put pens away so you can just think. One final thing want you to do. Be sure to put name on it. OK go into yourself, close out everyone around you, the teachers, the people around you, center yourself. Think of one word to say that summarizes what you are thinking about this essential values conversation. One word that represents your thoughts about our conversation about essential values. Take a minute....

Who has one? (thumb up to show has one) Start with Alex

Alex – Togetherness

?

Eli: Life

Equality

Family

Fairness

History

Loving

Kindness

Together

Belief

Truth

T: Such a beautiful moment to end on, to hear your thoughts. Round of applause.

ASSESSMENT