

Values Curriculum:

Justice/Tzedek

OVERVIEW	This session explores the Jewish value of <i>Tzedek</i> , Justice. Through object lessons and games, children will explore the idea of fairness and how to make rules that are fair for everyone. They will also be introduced to the idea of advocating for justice when something is not fair.
OBJECTIVE	To experiment with fair and unfair rules in order to better understand justice. To be inspired to speak up for justice when necessary.
VALUE(S)	<i>Tzedek</i> (Justice)
STORY	"As Good As Anybody" by Richard Michelson
MATERIALS	Scale materials, M&Ms, tug of war rope, a soft ball
AT HOME CHALLENGE	Students will be challenged to notice unfair rules and respectfully suggest changes where they are warranted. Families will be challenged to talk about where unfairness exists in the world around us and consider one or more things they can do to make a more just world.

Materials List

Opening/Closing Circle

- M&Ms
- Book: As Good As Anybody by Richard Michelson
- Big pad of paper and markers
- At Home Challenge Sheet

Activity One

- 10-yard long rope with a knot at the center
- 2 markers (cones, chairs, large rocks)

Activity Two

- A soft easily throwable ball (like a nerf basketball)

Gathering Activity

- Heavy book (encyclopedia volume or dictionary)
- Foot-long ruler or paint stick
- Pencil
- A binder clip
- 2- 8" pieces of string
- 2 paper cups
- Masking tape
- Bowl
- One cup dried pinto beans, rice, lentils or other grain
- Objects of different weights: cotton ball, paper clip, rock, 3 crayons, scissors, eraser

Gathering Activity: Balancing Scale (15 Minutes)

Children will balance objects on a homemade scale.

1. Assemble the scale in advance or with children who arrive early.
2. Poke holes in two paper cups and tie strings to them to make two buckets..
3. Hang the cups on opposite ends of the ruler or paint stick, and secure the string along the ruler or paint stick with tape.
4. Attach a binder clip to the middle of the ruler or paint stick. Dangle it from your fingers and work the clip back and forth on the stick until the stick or ruler hangs level.
5. Lay a heavy book on top of a pencil so that the pencil pokes out beyond the length of the table.
6. Hang the binder clip from the pencil so that the scale hangs off the edge of the table.
7. Lay out a bowl full of the grain children will use to measure the weight of objects on the scale.
8. Lay out the objects to be measured (cotton ball, paper clip, crayons, rock, etc).
9. Gather children around the scale.
10. Has anyone used a scale like this before? What is it for?



11. Show the children how the scale works by weighing an object.
12. Allow the children to take turns weighing objects or comparing the weight of objects to each other. Which is heavier, the rock or the cotton ball? How do we know?
13. At least once when the weight is unequal pose the question of how to create more balance. One solution would be to add more weight to the light side. But also point out that a person could tip the scale, either make it more equal or making it unfairly weighted.

Opening Circle (10 Minutes)

Gather everyone into a circle and begin with a melody, a niggun or a greeting song such as Hineh Ma Tov.

Tell about today's theme:

- Show the children your bowl of M&Ms.
- I am wondering how to share these M&Ms. I have some ideas. Maybe you can help me decide which of these ideas is fair.
- Everyone put your hands in front of you palms upwards as if your hands are the cups on the scale we were just using. If you think what I say is unfair, you can move your hands up and down as if one side is getting more than the other. If you think what I say is fair, you can hold them level to each other.
- I think I'll give five M&M's to kids here who have long hair and three M&M to kids with short hair.
- I think I'll give five M&M's to kids who haven't had any candy in a long time, and three to those who had some recently.
- I think I'll give five M&M's to everyone.
- I think I'll only give M&M's to kids who want them.
- I think I'll give five M&M's to kids who are bigger, and three to kids who are smaller since their stomachs are smaller.
- Today we are learning about Justice or Fairness.
- What do we already know about fairness?

Introduce today's Hebrew words: *Tzedek, Tirdof*

- Everyone hold both of your hands in front of you, palms upward, and move them up and down as if they were scales, until you place them level to each other. As you do that, say "tze--deck." (Practice this a couple of times.)
- Tzedek means justice.
- Everyone make your hands into fists and lift them up and down like you are running. Say "tir-dof."
- Tirdof means to pursue or run after something.
- Jewish tradition teaches us, "Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof." "Justice, justice, you shall pursue." Justice is so important we should chase after it.

Story (20 Minutes)

Introduce the Story — As Good As Anybody

- Have you ever felt like something was unfair? Either to you or to someone else?
- What did you do about it?
- The story we are going to read is about two people, one named Martin and another named Abraham. They both had a lot of experience with unfairness. And they both found a way to pursue Tzedek/Justice. Let's eat our M&Ms now and find out what they did. (Distribute the M&Ms in one of the ways you all decided was fair; children can eat them during the story.)

Read the Story. Ask some good Questions.

- **Check for Understanding**
 - ◇ What were some of the rules Martin encountered that were unfair?
 - ◇ What were some of the rules Abraham encountered that were unfair?
 - ◇ How were they alike and how were they different?
 - ◇ What actions did both Martin and Abraham take to change the rules around them?
- **Get Curious**
 - ◇ What are kids wondering about the story?
 - ◇ Encourage kids to wonder about WHY something happened in the story, WHAT might happen next, or HOW someone did something.
 - ◇ Record these questions on the big pad of paper.
 - ◇ These questions don't have to have answers – though kids are welcome to try and answer each other's questions.
 - ◇ Have kids respond to each other's questions with "good question!" and a thumbs up
- **Give one more Question to Ponder**
 - ◇ I'm wondering: What did Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel mean when he said "I feel like my legs are praying?"

10 Minute Break

Activity One: Making a Mezuzah (25 Minutes)

Children will play tug-of-war. The game will be made deliberately uneven/unfair and children will be challenged to make it more even or more fair.

Introduce the Activity:

Both Martin and Abraham encountered situations where things were not fair. They worked hard to make the world more just or more fair. They pursued tzedek everywhere they found unfairness. We are going to play Tug-of-War but the goal isn't just to be the team that pulls the rope from the other team. Our goal is to make the game fair. We'll try it a few different ways and each time we'll try to find a way to make it more fair, and more fun, for everyone.

1. Lay the rope out in an open space. Put each marker a yard or more away from the center knot.
2. Explain to all of the children the basics of tug-of-war. You'll have two teams, one pulling each side of the rope. The object is to pull the knot toward your side. When the knot gets passed the marker on your side, your team wins.
3. Divide the children into two groups. Start based on a category. It could be by gender, by height, or by color clothes they are wearing. It's better if the division is uneven in some way. If the kids notice the inequality just acknowledge it and tell them we'll see how it goes.
4. Play.
5. Ask the children to reflect on the game. Was it fair? How would they make it more fair? Let them re-organize the teams in a way that seems more fair.
6. This time move the knot closer to one marker at the start. If the kids notice the inequality just acknowledge it and tell them we'll see how it goes.
7. Play.
8. Ask the children to reflect on the game. Was it fair? How would they make it more fair? Move the knot back to the middle. But decide you are going to join one team. If/when the kids object, tell them we'll see how it goes.
9. Ask the children to reflect on the game. Was it fair? How would they make it more fair?
10. Play. (with no obvious impediments)
11. Ask the children to reflect on the game. Was it fair? Could they make it more fair?
12. Challenge the children to organize teams of equal strength and see if they can both pull but this time hold the knot in the middle, between the markers, for 10 seconds.
13. Play. Count 10 seconds aloud.
14. Ask the children to reflect on the game. Was it fair?

Activity Two: Shema Scroll (15 Minutes)

Children will play fire ball, which will challenge them to figure out what a fair throw is.

Introduce the Activity:

There are a lot of different ways something can be unjust or unfair. Sometimes the rules are unfair from the start (like when we play Tug-of-War with uneven teams). Sometimes one group of people has an unfair advantage (like when a teacher helps one team but not the other) or an unfair disadvantage (like when the knot in the middle is moved farther away from their marker). In order to make something more fair first you have to figure what's making it unfair.

In this game we are going to practice what makes for a fair throw. Each one of you will have a chance to throw the ball and see if you can throw it fairly and to catch the ball and decide if the throw to you was a fair one.

1. Have the children stand in a circle.
2. Explain that the object of the game is, on your turn, to throw the ball as hard as you can to another person across the circle and have the other person catch it (and not get hurt).
3. If they catch it, they throw the ball next.
4. If they don't catch it, the thrower and catcher both have to make a decision.
 - ◇ The thrower has to decide: Was my throw fair? If they think it was, they stay in the game. If they think it wasn't, they step out of the circle and sit out for the rest of the game.
 - ◇ The catcher has to decide: Was it a fair throw and I just didn't catch it? Or was the throw not fair? If they decide it was fair and they just missed it, they step out of the circle and sit out for the rest of the game. If they decide it was unfair, they stay in the game.
5. We play the whole game in silence. So there is no commenting on each other's throws or catches or discussing if we think it's fair or not. It's up to each of you to decide whether the throw was fair.
6. Play!
7. The game is over when one child is left. But our goal is for everyone to throw and catch successfully.

After the game is done, sit in the circle and talk about it:

- What is a fair throw?
- Does everyone have the same definition of what a "fair throw" is?
- What was it like to get to decide whether something was fair or not? Was it clear to you or was it hard to know?

Note: "Fire ball" is a traditional Native American game that teaches youth about honesty and fairness in a way that is self-reflective.

Closing Circle (10 Minutes)

Stay together in the circle for one last closing circle activity.

Introduce the Activity: Team Lift

We've learned a lot about justice/fairness/tzedek today and how to tell whether something is fair and how to work on making it more fair if it isn't. The other part of our story about Martin and Abraham is about working together to pursue tzedek. Sometimes something is fair or good for you but not for your friend or neighbor. Judaism teaches us to pursue tzedek not just for ourselves but for everyone we encounter. So when we see an unfairness, even if it's not about us, we are called to act to make the world more just.

1. Ask for a volunteer to get lifted by the rest of the group.
2. Have that child lay down in the middle of the circle.
3. Tell the children that our volunteer is injured and can't get up. They need to be moved to safety. We see they need help; it's our job to help them.
4. Ask for a volunteer to help lift them by themselves.
5. Have them carefully try it. Does it work? Why not?
6. Have the helping volunteer ask other children for help. How many people do we think we will need to lift our classmate and move them to safety without hurting them?
7. Together, devise a strategy that will make sure the child is lifted and returned to the ground safely. Make sure the person's head is supported well.
8. What made our team lift work?
9. In our story it took lots of people working together to change the unfair rules that Martin and his people faced. If we commit to pursuing tzedek whenever we see injustice/unfairness, we can be a part of making the world a more fair place.

Review the Hebrew Words of the Day:

1. Have the children practice the Hebrew words with their bodies: Put both of your hands in front of you, palms upward, and move them up and down as if they were scales, until you make them level. Say "tze--deck."
2. Make your hands into fists and lift them up and down like you are running. Say "tir-dof."
3. Have the children say what Tzedek Tzedek Tidof means (Justice. Justice. You will pursue.)

Pass out the At Home Challenge Sheet. Sing a goodbye song like *Shalom Chaverim* or *Oseh Shalom*.

At Home Challenge: Tzedek/Justice

Today we explored what fairness/*tzedek* means. Through games and activities we noticed that there are lot of different ways that something can be made unfair and that we each have some power to make it more fair. Judaism teaches “*Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof.*” “Justice, justice, you will pursue.” When we see unfairness, whether it is directed at us or someone else, we need to do what is in our power to make it better.

Here are the next steps to take at home to pursue justice/*tzedek*:

1. Help your child notice unfair rules they might encounter and practice respectful requests for change. Start by thinking about rules around the house and consider whether they are fair and what would make them more fair.

Here are some suggestions:

- ◇ Sharing toys: What are some rules your family has around sharing toys? Are they fair for everyone? Do you take turns or have time limits? Does that feel fair for everyone?
 - ◇ Cleaning up: What about cleaning up and putting away things when you're done using them? Is that fair for everyone?
 - ◇ Bedtime: How do you decide who goes to sleep at which time? Does it keep everyone healthy? Is it fair for everyone?
2. As a family talk about unfairness that you see in the world. Are there steps your family can take to pursue *tzedek* in your community?
 - ◇ Consider donating to or volunteering at the food bank. The food bank helps shift food from people who have more than they need to people who don't have enough.
 - ◇ Consider donating extra toys, books, or clothes if your family has them. You may have more of something than you need and other people may not have enough.
 - ◇ If there are initiatives in your community around school equity, racial equity, housing equity or more, think about whether you could write a letter or place a call to a representative asking them to work on those issues. Or think about working as a family to write a letter to the editor about what fairness means to you and what it might look like on one of those issues.