



B'resheet: Acting Out the Bible

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Institute for Informal Jewish Education

Brandeis University
Community Hebrew High Schools Curriculum Development Initiative

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COURSE INTRODUCTION:

B'resheet: Acting Out the Bible is a course of Biblical text study which integrates creative dramatics, role play and improvisation. Drama, a creative experiential modality that appeals to students, brings to life the biblical characters and events that may be vague, ambiguous or unreal in their minds. By acting out biblical text and interpretations, students gain a deeper understanding of the text, a greater sense of community, and are truly engaged in their learning.

The course "B'resheet: Acting Out the Bible" values the process of interpretation and the artistic/subjective/personal nature of dramatic role play while respecting the questions, opinions, and beliefs of each individual. Beginning with primary readings (*p'shat*) of the biblical text, students learn what is actually written. This primary reading and discussion of the text are followed by dramatic exercises which explore the questions, issues and conflicts raised in the text. Traditional midrashim and modern interpretations are read aloud in class. Through discussion and additional improvisational role play, students search for meaning, interpret and fill in the gaps of knowledge in the text (*d'rash*), creating their own new *midrashim*.

The students attending community Hebrew high school usually come from variety of backgrounds, informal Jewish experiences and formal Jewish education. Students who chose this class will vary in their text study skills, knowledge of the biblical stories, and experience in dramatic activity. This course can be adapted to fit the students' needs, skills, knowledge and comfort level.

Each lesson begins with a question for meaning or understanding and objective/intended outcomes. The questions for meaning focus the teacher on the goals of the lessons, they strive to reach the core concept, the essence of the teaching. The lesson plan is an example of teaching a specific question of meaning. Each question of meaning is explored through text study and a variety of dramatic activities. Without grasping the 'question of meaning' and using it to instruct, the class will simply do creative dramatics without understanding its connection to the Jewish text. For example, the students can role play the snake's conversation with Eve or act out the argument between Cain and Abel. These can be imaginative improvisations which highlight specific aspects of the text. However, it is the 'question for meaning' which focuses the goals generating understanding, insight, and other views; and inspiring connections with what the students already know and have experienced in their own lives.

Throughout the course assessment is constant. Who is participating? Who is ready with an opinion or answer? Who waits to be called upon? Who loves the dramatic reading? Who prefers not to have to read out loud? How focused and productive are the students as they work in small groups? What is the quality of their responses to the text questions of the role-plays? – serious, silly, imaginative, humorous, shallow, thoughtful, inventive, introspective? How well do the students articulate their impressions, insights, and interpretations?

"B'resheet: Acting Out the Bible" is a course designed to unleash the drama inside every student. It is written for teachers who enjoy text study and would like to integrate drama in their classes. It is important to read through the instruction completely, making sure that each lesson is understood. Some activities require more reading, preparation, materials and resources than others. The teacher's guide (written along side each lesson) includes tips, ideas, and helpful suggestions. Resource books on dramatic improvisation are listed in the bibliography. Skilled drama teachers will find the biblical resources valuable for the text study segment in each lesson.

Because of the creative nature of this curriculum and the breadth of resources available, this is a flexible course. A teacher may choose to rearrange the lessons in this curriculum, especially with the interconnectedness of some of the stories and the nature of doing interpretive text work (*Midrash*). The order of the lessons can be shuffled, depending upon teacher's style/direction and students' questions, queries and insights. Teachers may also choose to modify or adapt within each lesson; this flexibility allows for using a range of teaching methods, appropriate to students' different learning styles.

This curriculum can be a blueprint for integrating other creative art modalities (drawing, painting, printmaking, collage, mixed media, sculpture, textiles, creative writing, playwriting, photography, video/film making, dance, music). Hebrew language could also be incorporated.

There is so much drama in the Bible. This course uses that drama, the tools of creating drama, and the creative spirit of every student to integrate, in a natural and spontaneous way, the subject matter of this curriculum and the wonder and awe of Jewish life.

TOPIC/SUBJECT AREA:	Bible Studies
NUMBER OF SESSIONS:	14
LENGTH OF EACH SESSION:	50 min.

PURPOSES AND GOALS OF THIS COURSE

To develop students' intellectual curiosity in biblical texts, to inspire an appreciation of Biblical literature and *Midrash*, and to encourage students to add their own insights and interpretations through dramatic readings, improvisation and role playing of the text.

INTENDED BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES

1. The students will identify the characters and stories of creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, and Noah, through dramatic, out-loud readings directly from the Torah (the *Etz Hayim*¹ text, *recommended for class use*) and scripted text versions of these stories (from *Make a Midrash Out of Me* by J.L. Grishaver²).
2. The students will recall their memories of the stories of Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, and Noah.
3. The students will discuss interpretations of these biblical stories including children's versions of the stories and scripted scenes (from *Sedra Scenes* by Stan Beiner³).
4. The students will compare and contrast what is found in the actual text and what is *midrash*.
5. The students will be able to define the Torah study terms: *midrash*, *p'shat*, *remez*, *d'rash*, and *sod*.
6. The students will express their approaches/ interpretations of the text through creative drama according to their individual capabilities.
7. The students will create dramatic *midrash* of the biblical text through improvisation and role-play (of the biblical text).

¹Lieber, D. & Harlow, J., editors. (2001). *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*. New York, NY: The Rabbinical Assembly.

²Grishaver, J. (2004) *Make a Midrash Out of Me-Volume 1 :From Chaos to Egypt*_Los Angeles, CA: Torah Aura Productions.

³Beiner, S. (1982) *Sedra Scenes*. Denver, CO: Alternatives in Religious Education, Inc.

UNDERSTANDINGS

1. The students will develop a deliberate and reflective approach to reading biblical text that deepens their learning experience.
2. The students will better understand that biblical text and *midrashic* literature are not the same texts but relate to each other.
3. The students will gain an understanding of the many dimensions and challenges inherent in creating *midrash*.
4. The students will develop personal connections with the biblical texts: the stories, the characters, and values.
5. The students will feel empowered to explore their own meanings for the text, recognizing the personal meaning and significance of their own interpretations, while integrating the insights of previous generations.

Syllabus

SESSIONS	TEXTS, MATERIALS TO BE USED	QUESTION OF MEANING OR UNDERSTANDING	ASSIGNMENT DUE FOR NEXT SESSION
Session #1 Acting Out the Bible	<i>Etz Hayim</i> biblical text in Hebrew and translation 'What is <i>Midrash</i> ' from myjewishlearning.com Torah Study Definitions	What topics will be explored in this course? How do we read and interpret Bible stories? What is the difference between <i>Drash</i> and <i>pshat</i> ?	"Think about" assignment: Are the Bible stories that you recall Torah text or <i>Midrash</i> ?
Session #2 <i>Midrash</i>	<i>Etz Hayim</i> 'What is <i>Midrash</i> ' from myjewishlearning.com or 'Torah Study Definitions' <i>Sedra Scenes</i> pages 1- 5	How are our dramatic readings and improvisations <i>midrashim</i> of the biblical text?	
Session #3 Creation of Adam & Eve	Genesis 1.1-2.4, 2.4-3.23 Make a Midrash pages 5-8 and 12-15 Selected traditional <i>Midrashim</i> of the creation story	What do we learn about the two versions of the creation of Adam and Eve from the text and a simple reading (<i>P'shat</i>)? How does reading traditional <i>midrashim</i> enrich our understanding of the text?	"Think-about" assignment: role plays: snake, Adam, Eve.
Session #4 Interpretations of the Adam & Eve story	Role-Play/ Improvisation Guidelines	How do we understand and interpret the stories of Adam & Eve and the relationships between God, Adam, Eve, and the snake by acting out the <i>midrash</i> ?	Bring to class children's books about creation and Adam & Eve stories.
Session #5 Adam & Eve Story: Interpretation and Characters' Relationships	Selected children's illustrated books Selected contemporary <i>midrashim</i>	How have others (writers and illustrators) understood and interpreted the creation stories and the characters of Adam, Eve, God, and the snake?	

Session #6 Cain & Abel: Siblings Relationships	Genesis 4.1-16 <i>Sedra</i> Scenes pages 5-6	What do we learn and understand about Cain & Abel and their relationship from a dramatic reading of the biblical text?	Think about Cain & Abel's relationship with each other and with God.
Session #7 Cain & Abel and God	Make a <i>Midrash</i> pages 19-21 Cain and Abel <i>Midrashim</i> Sasso, Sandy, Eisenberg. <i>Cain and Abel: Finding the Fruits of Peace.</i>	What made Cain kill Abel and why?	"Think-about" assignment: improvisations & role plays
Session #8 Cain & Abel and God	Genesis 4.1-16 Cain & Abel <i>Midrashim</i>	How do we understand the relationships between God & Abel, Cain & Abel, and God & Cain?	
Session #9 Cain & Abel: Family/Parent Relationships	Genesis 4.1-26 Cain & Abel <i>Midrashim</i>	How do we understand Cain's punishment by God and the absence of Adam and Eve?	
Session #10 Noah: The text story	Genesis 6.9-9.19 <i>Sedra</i> scenes pages 7-11	How do we understand the story of Noah's ark from a primary (<i>pshat</i>) reading of the Noah text?	"Think-about" assignment: role plays: Noah and God
Session #11 Noah & God	Bill Cosby's "Noah" tape and transcription scripts Traditional Noah <i>midrashim</i>	How does reading <i>midrash</i> and other interpretations of the text engage us, the readers of the Bible, in an active way? Why did God choose Noah? And how did being chosen impact Noah and his family?	Think about your Noah <i>Midrash</i> Monologue

Session #12 Noah' Voice	Make a <i>Midrash</i> pages 26-31 Genesis 6.9-9.19	How does Noah respond and react to God and the Flood?	Bring children's books about Noah story "Think-about" assignment: Family role plays-what is it like on the ark?
Session #13 Interpretations & <i>Midrashim</i> of the Noah Story	Traditional Noah <i>midrashim</i> Selected children's illustrated books	How does children's literature of the Noah story compare to traditional <i>Midrashim</i> and enhance our insight of the story?	Assignment: Work on assigned role plays, giving voice to the point of view/perspective of Noah's wife, sons, the son's wives, animals
Session #14 Noah's family and the animals	Genesis 6.5-9.19 Make a Midrash pages 26-31	As members of Noah's family, how would you respond to the flood's destruction and God's covenant not to repeat the flood?	
Conclusion	Possible presentation for school of favorite scenes and improvisations		

Bibliography

Books

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Grishaver, J. (2004) *Make a Midrash Out of Me-Volume 1: From Chaos to Egypt*_Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions.

Beiner, S. (1982). *Sedra Scenes* Denver, CO: Alternative in Religious Education, Inc.

Online Resources

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www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Midrash/PrimerMidrash.htm

Midrash: Midrash Aggadah-Midash Today, retrieved 7/2006 from
www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Midrash/MidrashAggadah.htm

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Spero, Shubert, (1999) The Biblical Stories of Creation, Garden of Eden and the Flood: History or Metaphor?, Retrieved 9/2006 from http://www.lookstein.org/articles/history_or_metaphor.htm

Sinclair, Alex. (2002) "An Exercise in the Theory of Practice: The Hermeneutics of Bibliodrama in the Sinclair Classroom." Retrieved 7/2006 from
www.bibliodrama.com/BibliodramaandHermeneutics1.pdf

Lilith Evolved: Writing Midrash, retrieved 10/2007
A "Go & Learn: Primary Documents and Lesson Plan"
© 2007 Jewish Women's Archive
<http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/sep07/>

Noah: Righteous or Regular?

A script By Rabbi Aaron Alexander, retrieved October, 2007

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<http://judaism.ajula.edu/Content/ContentUnit.asp?CID=896&u=6948&t=0>

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Inc.

Cohen, Deborah Bodin (2006). *Lilith's Ark: Teenage Tales of Biblical Women*. New York, NY. Jewish
Publication Society.

Fields, Harvey J. (1990). *A Torah Commentary for Our Times, Volume One: Genesis*. UAHC Press.

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Gold, Penny Schine (2003).
*Making the Bible Modern: Children's Bibles and Jewish Education in Twentieth-Century
America*. Cornell University Press.

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Gorgias Press.

Holtz, Barry, editor. (1984) *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*. Simon & Shuster.

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Cosby, Bill. *Best of Bill Cosby*. [ORIGINAL RECORDING REMASTERED].
ASIN: B0007N19EQ
Label: Rhino / Wea, Audio CD (March 1, 2005) Original Release Date: September 1, 1969.
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Specific Children's books for use in class

Brett, Jan. *On Noah's Ark*. Putnam Juvenile, 2003.

The biblical story from the perspective of Noah's granddaughter. (Pre K-2)

Kimmel, Eric A. *Why the Snake Crawls on Its Belly*. Illus. by Allen Davis. Pitspopy Press, 2001.

A story loosely based on rabbinic commentary that attributes several aspects of snake anatomy to the reptile's punishment for tempting Adam and Eve.

Kuskin, Karla. *The Animals and the Ark*. Illus. by Michael Grejniec. Atheneum, 2002.

Noah's Ark story, from the animals' point of view.

Pinkley, Jerry. *Noah's Ark*. Seastar Publishing, 2002.

Sasso, Sandy, Eisenberg. *Cain and Abel: Finding the Fruits of Peace*. Illus. Joani Keller Rothenberg. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001.

Retells the story of two brothers, who after years of sharing everything, become angry enough to lose control and bring violence into the world. (Gr.2-6).

Sasso, Sandy Eisenberg. *A Prayer for the Earth: The Story of Naamah, Noah's Wife*.

Illus. by Bethanne Andersen. Jewish Lights, 1996.

Sasso, Sandy Eisenberg. *Adam & Eve's First Sunset*. Illus. by Joani Rothenberg. Jewish Lights, 2003.

This is the story of Adam and Eve's first test of trust and faith and how they learned to find hope and light—even in the dark.

Sasso, Sandy Eisenberg. *But God Remembered: Stories of Women from Creation to the Promised Land*. Illus. by Bethanne Andersen. Jewish Lights, 1994.

Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Why Noah Chose the Dove*. Illus. by Eric Carle. Farrar, Straus & Griouz, 1991.

This is the story of the modest dove which Noah chooses over all the boastful animals on the ark to bring back the message that the flood is over. (K-3).

On-line resources

www.myjewishlearning.com

www.pardes.org.il

<http://learn.jtsa.edu>

This is the Jewish Theological Seminary's Jewish education through distance learning website.

www.lookstein.org

<http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/6174/jewish-children.htm>

An excellent website for books and videos/DVDs for Jewish children and teens.

Session 1, B'resheet: Acting Out the Bible

I. Teacher's Preparation

UNIT QUESTIONS OF MEANING:

- What topics will be explored in this course?
- How do we read and interpret Bible stories?
- What is the difference between *d'rash* and *p'shat*?

SELECTION OF TEXTS:

- *B'resheet* 1:26-2:25. If using the *Etz Hayim*, pages 9-23.
- Role play "Activity Verse Assignment" index cards (appendix 1C)

OBJECTIVES/INTENDED OUTCOMES:

1. What will the students *do*?

- The students will read the stories of the creation of Adam & Eve out loud and dramatically, directly from the Torah.
- The students will identify the two versions of the creation of Adam & Eve in the text.
- The students will learn/review the concept of *midrash* (*p'shat* and *d'rash*).

Teacher's Guide

I. Teacher's Preparation

SELECTION OF TEXTS:

As part of this course, students become familiar with using an actual biblical Torah text with commentary, explanations, and midrashim. I use the *Etz Hayim*, as copies are available in school for classroom use. Please use the Torah text in your school and/or one with which you are comfortable.

B'resheet 1:26-2:25 includes the two different versions of the creation of man and woman. It gives us the opportunity, right at the beginning of our reading of *B'resheet*, to synthesize the two stories of the creation of man and woman with accompanying *midrashim*. Many students will now become aware of the two versions and how they impact our understanding of the story of creation.

- The students will demonstrate the basic skills of improvisation.

2. The students *will be able to*:

- Compare and contrast the 2 versions of the creation of Adam & Eve.
- Present improvisations of verses 1:26-2:4 and verses 2:4½-2:9 & 2:15-2:25.
- Articulate the distinction between 'text' and '*midrash*'.

3. The students *will understand*:

- There are two distinct versions of the creation of Adam & Eve in the biblical text.
- The dramatic *midrashim* created through improvisation contribute to a deeper appreciation the text.

ASSESSMENT OF INTENDED OUTCOMES:

- Monitor their answers to questions regarding the two versions of the story of Adam & Eve.
- Assess their understanding of the difference between the biblical story (*p'shat*) and *midrash*.
- Evaluate the quality of the improvisations they develop and perform in small groups.
- Assess how the Torah text which was read at the beginning of class is reflected in the improvisations/ dramatic *midrashim* the students created and presented.

Because of the students' various Jewish educational backgrounds in a community Hebrew High school, it is vital to review their knowledge of the concept of midrash and Torah study terms.

Appendix 1A: What is Midrash?; Appendix 1B: Torah Study Terms and Definitions; and selected chapters in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, edited by Barry W. Holtz are useful teacher reference/resources that can be incorporated in the first lessons and throughout the course.

ASSESSMENT OF INTENDED OUTCOMES:

Following this first session and the initial drama activity, think about future improvisational role-plays; specifically, giving clear directions, format, structure, and parameters for these creative drama activities.

II. The Lesson Plan

A. INTRODUCTION (5 min.):

1. *Welcome* to the course called *B'resheet: Acting Out the Bible*. In this class we will be reading biblical text (the *actual* text in English) and *midrashim* (scripts, stories and children's books) and creating our own dramatic *midrashim* through role playing and improvisation.

B. MOTIVATION (10 min.):

Name Alliteration Introduction (Alliteration is the repetition of the initial consonant. There should be at least two repetitions in a row. For example: Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. The first letter, p, is a consonant. It is repeated many times. If you use a syllable rather than a consonant, it is assonance.)

1. In a circle, a player starts the game by introducing himself/herself by making a gesture and alliterating to his/her name, e.g. "I'm Wonderful Wendy" or I'm Smart Steve."
2. The next player points to the first, repeats the previous player's name, attribute and gesture, and does his/her own alliteration introduction. And so on.
3. The activity ends with the first player having to do each other player's gesture, repeating their names and attributes.

C. TEXT STUDY (30 min):

1. Hand out *Etz Hayim* (or other) Torah texts. Explain: this will be the primary text we use. It contains the Biblical text, commentaries and *midrashim*. We will use it to create dramatic *midrashim*!

II. The Lesson Plan

MOTIVATION:

This warm-up activity is an ice-breaker. Students meet, learn each others' names, and we begin to create our community of learners.

TEXT STUDY:

Use the Torah text you prefer to use or the texts you have access to in your classroom.

2. Ask the students questions about the Torah:
 - Are you familiar with this book?
 - When have you used it?
 - Have you used other Torah texts (other versions and Torah/*Tanach* books)?
3. Ask the students to find the story of Adam & Eve.
4. Once the students find the story, ask them:
 - On what page, what chapter and what line do we first read about creation of MAN? (*Page 9, chapter 1, verse 26*)
 - On what DAY of Creation was man created? (*The 6th day*)
5. Assign readers for the parts of Narrator and God, then have students read through 2:4. Begin reading from the text 1:26 out loud and dramatically.
6. Discuss: what is going on here?
7. Assign new readers for the parts of Narrator, God and Man. Now read 2:4½-2:9 & 2:15-2:25.
8. Discuss: what is going on in this section?

Option: As they search, ask questions that connect the current activity to previous knowledge, such as: in what grade do you think you learn this story? How did you learn it? What do you remember about the story?

Before the students read, explain that “reading dramatically” means—with DRAMA, using their voices to express emotions, feelings, and action. If necessary, demonstrate and ask them to do the same. I usually begin, as narrator, reading articulately with much expression, and then assign students for the specific parts of God and narrator, instructing them to read with expression. In text study, when reading the text out loud and expressively, the students are more engaged.

6. & 7. The ‘start and stop’ nature of this type of read-through may be frustrating for the students (especially the more dramatic readers in the class); however, this plots out of the story in the actual text.

As the reading continues, reassign the reading roles so that everyone has an opportunity to read out loud and dramatically. If a student is uncomfortable reading out loud, allow them to pass.

9. Compare 1:26-2:4 with 2:4½-2:9 & 2:15-2:25 using the following discussion questions:
- When you first learned this part of the creation story, do you remember reading or learning about these 2 different stories?
 - Is this the same story? Explain.
 - How is the second telling of the creation of man and woman similar/different from the first telling we read?
 - Is the second story a deeper retelling or a more expanded version of the 6th day?
10. Discuss/explain the terms “*Midrash*”, “*P’shat*”, “*D’rash*”, “*PaRDeS*”.

At this point, the students have many questions about the text story. Before beginning the discussion, explain that in order to explore, search for meaning and understand the text, we are going to review the terms we will use in our text study and process of interpretation: the concepts of *midrash*, *p’shat*, *d’rash*, and *Pardes*.

If you are using the *Etz Hayim* Text, (or another Torah and Commentary text, i.e., *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* by W. Gunther Plaut, URJ Press), at this point you may want to explain the format of a page of text. By doing this, in this first lesson, the students will become familiar with how to use a Torah with commentary text and grasp what an amazing, remarkable resource it is.

In the *Etz Hayim*, the *P’shat* (the first commentary on the page under the Bible text) is the contextual (background) meaning of the text. It is explained by the finest contemporary scientific scholarship on the Torah.

An optional exercise before moving on to the improvisations is to provide additional instruction/direction by reviewing the set up of the *Etz Hayim*. You will find some *midrashim* (the *D'rash*) in the *Etz Hayim* (the 2nd commentary on each page) below the text for more information and understanding.

11. Improvisation Activity:
- a. Divide the class into groups of 4 students.
 - b. Give directions to the groups:
 - Each group will prepare an improvisation on a section of the text. Your improvisations will only be a few minutes long.
 - Once you are in your small group, assign roles. Use the lines from the Torah text if you want or create your own lines.
 - You will have 5 minutes to create and improvise, and then you'll perform for the class.
 - c. Assign 2 groups to review and create an improvisation with verses 1:26-2:4. Assign 2 groups to review and create an improvisation with verses 2:4½ -2:9 & 2:15-2:25. Do this by handing out a "Verse Assignment on Index Card" to each group.
 - d. Give 5 minutes to prepare improvisations.

The second commentary on the page is the *D'rash*, the *midrashic* commentary. It presents an eclectic range of insights, from the classical *midrashim* to the medieval commentators, from Hasidic masters to contemporary religious leaders and secular thinkers. Also included at the bottom of many of the pages is a section on Conservative *halakhic* practice (*halakhah l'ma-aseh*), indicating how contemporary Conservative *halakhah* is linked to the biblical text. Prior to teaching this, you may want to review the *Etz Hayim* Introduction on pages xvii-xx beginning with "Key Features of This Book" for further explanation.

There are additional resources listed in Appendix 1A and Appendix 1B. You may want to use these to create your own "mini-lecture" to explain the basic concepts of *midrash*, *p'shat*, and *d'rash*.

For the improvisation activity, refer to "Role Play and Improvisation Guide" (appendix 1D), if needed.

Make group assignments or let the students divide themselves for this first improvisation activity.

Use this role play activity or develop your own improvisation activity in which the students will present the two versions of the creation of man and woman.

As the groups are working, walk around to listen in, give encouragement, or direction, if needed.

The energy and noise level may rise as they work on their improvisations. Remind them to work constructively

- e. Present the improvisations. Each improvisation will take about 2 minutes, so allow 10 minutes for the presentation.
- f. Briefly discuss and reflect upon the improvisations - responses/reactions/thoughts/insights.

C. CLOSURE (5 min.):

1. Here is what we did today:
 - As we become familiar with using the Etz Hayim, we read the actual text of the two creation stories of Adam and Eve.
 - We learned about *midrash*, and *PaRDeS*, particularly *p'shat* and *d'rash*.
 - Let's do: A quick review—what is *midrash*? What is *p'shat* and *d'rash*?
 - We created our own interpretations—dramatic *midrashim*—of the story of creation of Adam and Eve by role playing.
2. Your assignment for next week is a “Think About”—What is a “Think About?” It is ‘thinking homework’ –that is, when you spend some time over the next week thinking about the questions I ask at the end of the class. This week, “think about” this: Are the bible stories that you recall from your youth Torah text stories or *midrash* stories? How can you find out? Do you have an *Etz Hayim* or Torah text with commentary at home?
3. Next week, we'll continue the comparing and contrasting the two version of the Adam and Eve story and some accompanying *midrashim*. We have the opportunity to do more improvisations and role-plays, too.

yet quietly, without disturbing the other groups and other classrooms. Prior to the presentations, explain: As an audience, please be attentive and respectful.

Following the presentations, share “what new ideas or interpretations were offered?” After they state their observations, highlight the ideas and interpretations that may relate to future discussions and were not mentioned by the students. Make note of their ideas which relate to traditional *midrashim* to be read and discussed in the next weeks.

CLOSURE:

Compliment their willingness to share their recollections of the story of the creation of Adam and Eve; their reading the text dramatically; their knowledge of *midrash*, *p'shat*, and *d'rash*; and creative enthusiasm in their improvisations.

“Think-About” assignments let the students know that it's important to integrate their previous knowledge with what they learned in class today. It is an informal homework assignment directing the students to think about a specific topic which will be incorporated in our work as we discuss, read *midrashim* and do more acting-out.

What is *Midrash*?

Resources:

There are numerous resources available for definitions of terms to be used in this course. I have used the following from MyJewishLearning.com for additional information and discussion on *Midrash*, *midrash* today, and creating *midrash*:

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Midrash/MidrashAggadah/Midrash_Today.htm

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Midrash/MidrashAggadah/MidrashMethods.htm>

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Midrash/MidrashAggadah/FillingGaps.htm>

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Midrash.htm>

<http://www.faqs.org/faqs/judaism/FAQ/03-Torah-Halacha/section-25.html>

Rabbi Elyse Goldstein of Kolel:

<http://www.kolel.org/torahstory/module4/page1.html>

Torah Study Terms and Definitions

Note: I have used this in my classes; however, you may choose to use a simple glossary of terms or review the concepts quickly with the class.

Excerpted from: <http://www.kolel.org/tastytreats/mod3.1.html>

Midrash means "imaginative interpretation of Scripture." The word comes from the Hebrew *darash* which means "to search for" or "to seek out". *Midrash* is about searching in the words of the Bible to find meaning for ourselves.

There are two kinds of *midrash*, because there are two kinds of Jewish teaching in general: **halakhah** and **aggadah**.

Halakhah is connected with the word *halakh* which means "to walk". *Aggadah* comes from the word *l'hagid* which means "to tell."

So *halakhah* can be translated as "walking the walk" and *aggadah* can be translated as "talking the talk". More prosaically, *halakhah* is the guidelines or rules of Jewish living -- "Jewish law", and *aggadah* is everything else -- ethical teachings that go beyond specific practical rules; wise sayings; advice of various kinds; and especially stories. (In modern Israeli Hebrew the meaning has narrowed, so that *aggadah* is used to mean "legend", but we will use the wider, classical meaning.)

So there is *Midrash Halakhah* and *Midrash Aggadah*.

Midrash Halakhah

Midrash Halakhah was once extremely important in Judaism. It is a process of reading the Torah very very closely to work out the rules of Jewish living in great detail. This was the specialty of the Rabbis who created Judaism as we know it (beginning, very approximately, 2000 years ago in the land of Israel).

The Torah is full of rules and instructions, but you couldn't just read them and follow them, for two reasons:

- 1) The Torah often leaves out information, or appears to contradict itself.
- 2) Various ways of doing things were well-established as traditions but weren't actually mentioned in the Torah.

The Rabbis studied the Torah to "search out" (*darash*) ways in which the traditions of how to do things were already hinted at, and answers to questions they still had about the right way to do things. By reading closely and carefully, they found answers: for example, the Hebrew letters of the word *sukkah*, *Samekh*, *Khaf*, and *Hei*, tell us that a *sukkah* can be completely enclosed, like a *Samekh*, or have three walls and an open side, like a *Khaf*, or have two full walls and a partial wall, like a *Hei*.

The Decline of Midrash Halakhah

As more and more *halakhot* (plural of "*halakhah*", "rules") were worked out, *Midrash Halakhah* became less important. It wasn't necessary to **do** it -- searching the Torah for answers to *halakhic* questions -- because the rules were already established, and it wasn't necessary to **study** it because it was more important to know what the rules were than how they could be found in the Torah. For many centuries now, rabbis have essentially stopped using *Midrash Halakhah* to work out *halakhah*.

Finding halakhic answers today

Today, if a question arises, a rabbi will look first in the *Shulchan Arukh*, and if the answer is still unclear, at other rule-books of *halakhah* and at *responsa* of earlier rabbis, looking for precedents. The final stop will be the *Talmud*, which is the authoritative source for *halakhah*.

Midrash Aggadah

Midrash Aggadah is what happens when the imagination runs wild with Scripture, playing with stories, words, missing words, contradictions, letters, punctuation -- whatever is there or isn't there. Our Sages of blessed memory who created the classic works of *Midrash* were immersed in the Bible. They knew it by heart, they lived and breathed it, and they were uniquely qualified to notice what was unusual or missing in it and to talk in its own language. But we can make *Midrash Aggadah* too, if we read the Torah with attention and imagination and creativity.

Resources:

<http://www.kolel.org/tastytreats/mod3.1.html>

<http://www.kolel.org/tastytreats/mod3.2.html>

Index Card 1

Improvisation A

-Review verses 1:26-2:4 and create an improvisation.

You may use the lines in the text

OR

You may ad-lib the lines of the text.

-Assign roles

You can decide if you want a narrator or not.

Opening line: "God said:"

Closing (last) line: "God said."

Index Card 2

Improvisation B

-Review verses 2:4½ -2:9 & 2:15-2:25 and create an improvisation.

You may use the lines in the text

OR

You may ad-lib the lines of the text.

-Assign roles

You can decide if you want a narrator or not.

Opening line: "Now... here's another creation story"

Closing (last) line: "And that's how man and woman were created."

Role Play and Improvisation Guide

Using Drama, Improvisation and Role Play

Using dramatic techniques as a teaching method is not the same thing as teaching theater. Theater is an art form which focuses on a product, a play production for an audience. Drama in the classroom (such as role playing and do improvisational games) is informal and focuses on the process of dramatic enactment for the sake of the learner, not an audience. It is the process of learning through dramatic play. Doing improvisations and role plays increases creativity, originality, sensitivity, fluency, flexibility, cooperation, and examination of moral attitudes, while developing communication skills and appreciation of literature. By using such improvisational exercises such as 'character prompts' and 'scenario prompts' students can "experience" the situations and stories we are reading. Being able to act out ideas or become characters also adds the additional benefit of making people (and situations) come alive even for such subjects as biblical characters and their stories. There is no 'right or wrong'—it is an exposure to new ideas and perspectives.

For specific guidelines to use in class, see Appendix 4A

A Short History of Improvisational Theatre

Improvisational theatre is as old as time. It pre-dates the invention of writing, since long before we started writing scripts we were telling stories by acting them out.

Over the centuries, there have been many different improvisational styles. The most direct ancestor of modern improv is probably the *Commedia Dell'Arte*, which was popular throughout Europe for almost 200 years starting in the mid-1500's. Troupes of performers would travel from town to town, presenting shows in the public squares and on makeshift stages. They would improvise their own dialog, within a framework provided by a set "scenario".

After the *Commedia* died off, improv theatre faded into obscurity until it was separately and spontaneously re-invented by two people who have shaped the craft as it exists today -- Keith Johnstone and Viola Spolin.

Keith Johnstone started formulating his theories about creativity and spontaneity while growing up in England, and later brought them into his teaching at the University of Calgary. He felt that theatre had become pretentious, which is why the average man in the street didn't even consider attending it. Johnstone wanted to bring theatre to the people who went to sporting and boxing matches, the same audience that Shakespeare had written for in his day. Johnstone decided that one approach would be to combine elements of both theatre and sports, to form a hybrid called Theatresports. The trappings of team sports were adapted to the improvisational theatre context; teams would compete for points awarded by judges, and audiences would be encouraged to cheer for good scenes and jeer the judges ("kill the umpire!"). Through Theatresports, Johnstone's ideas have gone on to influence (directly or indirectly) almost every major improv group.

Back in the 1920's and 1930's, a woman named Viola Spolin began to develop a new approach to the teaching of acting. It was based on the simple and powerful idea that children would enjoy learning the craft of acting if it were presented as a series of games. Spolin's son, Paul Sills, built on his mother's work and was one of the driving forces of improvisational theatre centered around the University of Chicago in the mid-1950's. Along with people like Del Close and David Shepherd, Sills created an ensemble of actors who developed a kind of "modern Commedia" which would appeal to the average man in the street. As with Theatresports and the original Commedia, the goal was to create theatre that was accessible to *everyone*. The group that sprang from the work of Sills, Shepherd and Close, called The Compass, was extremely successful. It brought people to the theatre who in many cases had never gone before, and eventually led to the development of a company called Second City. Through The Compass and Second City, Spolin's Theatre Games have gone on to influence an entire generation of improvisational performers.

Resources: On-line

Note: On the web, you can find number websites which explain and list out improvisational exercises and games. Here is a list of a few of those sites:

<http://www.learnimprov.com/>

<http://www.childdrama.com/lessons.html>

www.improvcyclopedia.org

<http://www.pantheater.com/BetterImproviser.htm>

http://www.unexpectedproductions.org/living_playbook.htm

Resources: Books:

Note: If you prefer to use or have a book as a improvisation resources, the following books are highly recommended. You may want to check out your local bookstore to find a book with which are comfortable using.

Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques (Paperback)

by Viola Spolin

Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook (Paperback)

by Viola Spolin

Theatre Games for Young Performers: Improvisations and Exercises for Developing Acting Skills (Contemporary Drama) (Paperback)

by Maria C. Novelly

Improv Ideas: A book of games and lists (Paperback)

by Justin Jones and Mary Ann Kelley