



The Jewish Special Needs/Disability Inclusion Consortium of Greater Philadelphia

Presents

Jewish Disability Awareness & Inclusion Month (JDAIM) Lesson Plans

Presented in collaboration with the Jewish Special Needs Consortium which includes:



Jewish Learning Venture innovates programs that help people live connected Jewish lives.

7607 Old York Road / Melrose Park PA 19027 / 215.635.0360 / jewishlearningventure.org

Partners with Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia

INTRODUCTION

Jewish Disability Awareness & Inclusion Month (JDAIM) is a unified national initiative during the month of February that aims to raise disability awareness and foster inclusion in Jewish communities worldwide.

In the Philadelphia area, the Jewish Special Needs/Disability Inclusion Consortium works to expand opportunities for families of students with disabilities. The Consortium is excited to share these comprehensive lesson plans with schools, youth groups, and early childhood centers in our area.

We appreciate you making time for teachers to use these lessons during February—or whenever it's convenient for you.

For additional resources, please email me at gkaplan-mayer@jewishlearningventure.org or call me at 215-320-0376.

Thank you to our contributors Faye Benshetler, Suzanne Gold, and Ellen Walters, and to our Whole Community Inclusion Intern Mikey Hess Webber for her hard work on this project.

Sincerely,

Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer,

Director, Whole Community Inclusion

JDAIM Lesson Plan: Grades PreK – K

Created by Ellen Walters, Jewish Learning Venture, Director, Learning Initiatives in Early Childhood Education

Adapted from [Anti-Defamation League Curriculum – Getting to Know People with Physical Disabilities](#)

Book: A Very Special Critter by Gina and Mercer Mayer

Synopses of story: Little Critter is nervous when his teacher announces that a new student who uses a wheelchair will be joining his class. After realizing that the new student enjoys doing a lot of the same games and activities as the rest of the class, Little Critter and the other students are happy to have a new friend and classmate.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the Jewish value of *b'tzelem elohim*.
- Students will learn the term disability and physical disability.
- Students will understand and recognize the *International Symbol of Access to People with Disabilities*.
- Students will discover the various abilities of people who use wheelchairs.

Jewish Value: *B'tzelem Eloheim* (in G-d's image). At the end of the lesson(s), students will recognize that we are each created in G-d's image. Every human being faces different challenges and has different families, friends and ideas.

Materials:

- At least one copy of A Very Special Critter by Gina and Mercer Mayer.
- A copy of the *International Symbol of Access to People with Disabilities*.
- Blackboard or chart paper with picture frame drawn upon it.
- Each child receives a large puzzle piece to decorate.
- Markers/crayons and any additional materials of your choice to use for decorating the puzzle piece.
- Bulletin board and tacks to display puzzle pieces.

Introduction (5 minutes)

“Today we are going to be thinking about a Jewish value called *b'tzelem elohim*. When we say *B'tzelem elohim*, we mean that every person is “made in G-d's image”.

1. What does it mean to be made in G-d's image? What do you think this says about you and your friends? (We were all created in goodness. We are all good just the way we are.)
2. Is everybody the same? No, everybody is different and unique. Those things that make us different and unique also make us special and interesting.

Disability Introduction:

1. **SHOW** students the [International Symbol of Access to People with Disabilities](#) for all students to see. (follows the lesson plan)
2. **ASK** students:
 - a. Have you seen this sign before? Where have you seen this sign?
 - b. What does this symbol look like to you?
(EXPLAIN: this symbol is a picture of a person who uses a wheelchair, and is for people who are disabled. This sign can be found in parking spaces close to the entrance of a store, or a park, or a school so that people who use wheelchairs or who have trouble walking do not have to travel far to get inside. Sometimes it can be found on seats in buses or trains and means that those seats are reserved for people with disabilities.)
 - c. What is a disability?
(EXPLAIN: a disability is a condition that limits a person in being able to see, hear, walk, or speak. Some people with disabilities may be blind, or deaf, or may use a wheelchair if they are unable to walk.)
 - d. Have you ever met a person with a disability?

Read the book (10 minutes)

- **SAY:** *Now we are going to read a book called A Very Special Critter. The book is about a new student at school who has physical disability - he can't walk - and so he uses a wheelchair. Some of the students are nervous because he is different and has some special challenges. Soon, they realize that the new student enjoys a lot of the same games and activities as the rest of the class. The students are happy to have a new friend and classmate! Let's see if any of the people in the book remind you of you or anybody you know.*
- **READ:** As a class, read A Very Special Critter by Gina and Mercer Mayer. You can also watch this video as a class (a link to the book being read aloud): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHec30tFCRQ>

Follow-Up (5 minutes)

- **ASK** some or all of the following discussion questions after you read the story aloud to students:
 - a. Why do you think Little Critter was scared to meet Alex, the new student who uses a wheelchair?
 - b. Why do you think Alex felt scared on his first day at school?
 - c. How would you feel if you were the one who was different the way Alex was?
 - d. How did Little Critter and the other students make Alex feel welcome?

- e. What could Alex do using his wheelchair?
- f. Was there anything that Alex could do using his wheelchair that surprised you?
- g. How did the other students help Alex?
- h. How did Alex help the other students?
- i. If a person who uses a wheelchair joined our class, how could we make him or her feel welcome?
- J. After reading the book, do you have anything more to say about being made in G-d's image?

- **SAY:** *In the book, we see that people might appear different from us when we first meet them, but on the inside there are lots of hidden surprises that connect us and make us special! We should appreciate all the differences in the world. Our differences make the world an interesting place to live!*

Picture Frame Activity (10-15 minutes)

SAY: *Everybody in this class has things about them that are very special and that make them unique. Now is our chance to show appreciation for the things that make our friends unique.*

- Draw a picture frame on a blackboard or chart paper. Allow each child to stand in front of the picture frame. Have each child in the class say something nice about the child.

(ie: he is tall and can reach high shelves for me, she is really smart and helps me understand in class, she is fast and I like when she is on my team, he is quiet and I always feel like he is listening when I speak)

WRAP-UP

SAY: *When we talk about b'tzelem elohim, being made in G-d's image, we are remembering that we are all important and we all deserve love. Our differences make us special and when we come together, all our differences make the world a beautiful place.*



JDAIM Lesson Plan: Grades 1 – 3

Created by Suzanne Gold, Inclusion Coordinator, Ohev Shalom of Bucks County

Book: It's Okay to Be Different by Todd Parr

Synopses of story: *It's Okay to Be Different* cleverly delivers the important messages of acceptance, understanding, and confidence in an accessible, child-friendly format. The book includes child-friendly, colorful drawings and limited text on each page to appeal to young children.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the Jewish value of *B'tzelem Elohim*.
- Students will understand how everyone is different. There are lots of ways that we are different and these differences make us special and unique.
- Students will understand that when we put all our differences together, we create a very beautiful world.

Jewish Value: *B'tzelem Eloheim* (in G-d's image) At the end of the lesson(s), students will recognize that we all face different challenges and have different families, friends and ideas. Every human being faces different challenges and has different families, friends and ideas.

Materials:

- At least one copy of *It's Okay to Be Different* by Todd Parr.
- Blackboard or chart paper with picture frame drawn upon it.
- Each child receives a large puzzle piece to decorate.
- Markers/crayons and any additional materials of your choice to use for decorating the puzzle piece
- Bulletin board and tacks to display puzzle pieces.

Introduction (5 minutes)

"Today we are going to be thinking about a Jewish value called *b'tzelem elohim*. When we say *B'tzelem elohim*, we mean that every person is "made in G-d's image."

1. What does it mean to be made in G-d's image? What do you think this is saying about you and your friends? (We were all created in goodness. We are all good just the way we are.)
2. Is everybody the same? No, everybody is different and unique. Those things that make us different and unique also make us special and interesting.

Read the book (10 minutes)

- **SAY:** *Now we are going to read a book called It's Okay to Be Different. Together we will see all kinds of ways that we can be special and unique. Let's see if any of the people in the book remind you of you or anybody you know.*
- Feel free to invite the class to read along with you!
- As a class, read It's Okay to Be Different by Todd Parr.

Jewish Learning Venture innovates programs that help people live connected Jewish lives.

7607 Old York Road / Melrose Park PA 19027 / 215.635.0360 / jewishlearningventure.org

Partners with Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia



- You can also watch this video as a class (a link to the book being read aloud):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shYf3prwXJU>

Follow-Up (5 minutes)

- **ASK:** *Did anything stand out to you in the book? Do you have anything more to say about being made in G-d's image after reading the book together? What's the title of the book? All the ways to be different listed in the book (and even more that weren't listed) are all okay! We should appreciate all the differences in the world. Our differences make the world an interesting place to live!*

Picture Frame Activity (10-15 minutes)

SAY: *Everybody in this class has things about them that are very special and that make them unique. Now is our chance to show appreciation for the things that make our friends unique.*

- Draw a picture frame on a blackboard or chart paper. Allow each child to stand in front of the picture frame. Have each child in the class say something nice about the child.

(ie: he is tall and can reach high shelves for me, she is really smart and helps me understand in class, she is fast and I like when she is on my team, he is quiet and I always feel like he is listening when I speak)

Puzzle Piece Activity (20 minutes)

SAY: *Now we have heard what other people think make us unique. Now is our chance to think about ourselves and what makes us special. On your puzzle piece, draw yourself. Be sure to include the things that make you unique!*

1. Distribute one puzzle piece to each student.
2. The students are to draw themselves on their puzzle piece and decorate the puzzle with lots of color and detail. Perhaps have yarn available for students to attach hair or cleaners for students that wear glasses. Also, have material available for students to attach a kippa if they wear them in shul. Refer to the pictures in the book to assist the children with ideas.
3. Attach the complete puzzle pieces as a bulletin board. The title of the board can be: "It's Okay to be Different" or "B'tzeloheim Eloheim."

ASK: *What do you guys think about this class of awesome, unique people!? What do you notice? Like the puzzle pieces, each of you is one-of a-kind! When all your differences get put together, you turn into a beautiful, interesting masterpiece.*

WRAP-UP

SAY: *When we talk about b'tzelem elohim, being made in G-d's image, we are remembering that we are all important and we all deserve love. Our differences make us special and when we come together, all our differences make the world a beautiful place.*

Additional Activities: These activities are meant to add an additional layer to *b'tzelem elohim*. They are meant to help the students identify and empathize with some of the challenges that come with being different.

Activity #1

Materials:

- Sunglasses smeared with Vaseline making it difficult for the child to see properly.
- An area on the floor, with colorful tape for the child to walk along.

Instructions:

Children take turns wearing the sunglasses that are covered with Vaseline. Wearing the sunglasses, each child walks around the designated area following the line.

Purpose: the child experiences the difficulty of seeing with impaired vision.

Activity #2

Materials:

- Headphones to demonstrate difficulty hearing directions.

Instructions:

Teacher/adult whispers directions to the group. Child is instructed to wear the headphones while the directions are given.

Purpose: the child experiences the difficulty of understanding with hearing loss.

Activity #3

Instructions:

Divide class into two groups to play a game (i.e. tic tac toe or a race). The game must have one clear winning team. After the game, ask the teams to express their feelings about losing and winning. Did they feel like the results were fair?

JDAIM Lesson Plan: Grades 4 – 5

Created by Faye Benshetler, Inclusion Coordinator at Beth or and Temple Sinai

Film: Including Samuel by Daniel Habib

Synopses of story: In Including Samuel, we meet a family whose son has cerebral palsy. The family makes great efforts to include their son in every facet of their life. In Including Samuel, we discover the ways in which people in Samuel's community treat him with respect. We also see the barriers to inclusion that make Samuel and his family feel like they are not being treated with respect. The film can help us imagine how we would like to be treated if we had cerebral palsy or another disability.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the Jewish value of *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha* (Love your neighbor as yourself).
- Students will consider the impact on a family when a child has a disability.
- Students will learn the terms disability and cerebral palsy.

Jewish Value:

- *V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*: Love your neighbor as yourself. The Jewish value of *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha* teaches us that we should respect one another and treat every human being as we wish to be treated.

Materials:

The documentary: Including Samuel by Daniel Habib (can be downloaded from Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Including-Samuel-Dan-Habib/dp/B0052WC5MW/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1482166163&sr=8-1&keywords=including+samuel)

The video runs 60 minutes. For the purpose of the lesson, portions of the documentary that involve other people with disabilities can be skipped

Sections to be skipped- approximately min 6:16-9:05; 16:28-25:55; 31-43; 49-51

You can also watch a movie clip here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xfg1pswiOgM>

Introduction (5 minutes)

SAY: "Today we are going to be thinking about a Jewish value called *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*. When we say *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, we mean that we should love our neighbors as ourselves.

1. How do you like to be treated? (With respect, with dignity, included in fun activities.)
2. When we treat someone the way we want to be treated, we include them and make them feel important. When we include someone, we are being **inclusive**.

We should try to live in a way that is inclusive so that we do not leave others out or make them feel small and ignored.

Disability Introduction:

It is important to be **inclusive** of all people, even if they have different challenges than us, or if they look or act differently from us. Everyone wants to feel cared about and everybody wants to feel important.

1. **ASK** students:
 - a. What is a disability?
(**EXPLAIN:** a disability is a condition that limits a person in being able to see, hear, walk, or speak. Some people with disabilities may be blind, or deaf, or may use a wheelchair if they are unable to walk.)
 - d. Have you ever met a person with a disability?
 - i. If you have, can you think of a way that you included them and treated them the way you would like to be treated?

Cerebral Palsy Introduction:

1. We are going to watch a movie about Samuel, a kid who has a disability that is caused by Cerebral Palsy.
2. **ASK** students:
 - a. Do you know what cerebral palsy is?
(**EXPLAIN:** Cerebral Palsy (pronounced seh-ree-brel pawl-zee) is commonly referred to as “CP.” Often, people who have CP have a hard time controlling their muscles and because of this, they have a more difficult time walking. Many people with CP, like Samuel, look a little bit different and use a wheelchair to get around but they like to have fun and do the same things as you and me.
 - b. Have you ever met a person with Cerebral Palsy?

Watch the Film:

Before viewing ASK:

- How do we want the people around us to feel about themselves?
- How can our actions help others feel good about themselves?

SAY: Now we are going to watch a movie called Including Samuel. Pay attention to the different ways that his family and his community work to make him feel special, important, and included.

After viewing the movie:

ASK: Samuel’s dad wondered about “how the world would see Samuel.”

1. How do the different people in Samuel’s life see him (his parents, his brother, his classmates and teachers)?
2. How do you see Samuel? When you first saw Samuel, did you focus on him and his personality or his wheelchair? It is normal to recognize differences! That’s okay. But let’s look at what you have in common with Samuel. What could you do together? What could Samuel bring to your life?

Jewish Learning Venture innovates programs that help people live connected Jewish lives.

7607 Old York Road / Melrose Park PA 19027 / 215.635.0360 / jewishlearningventure.org

Partners with Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia

WRAP-UP

SAY: When we say *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho*, we mean that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves...this also teaches us that the dignity of other people should be as precious as our own. We are all responsible for one another - including making sure that our neighbors are being cared for and included.

JDAIM Lesson Plan: 6-7th grades, also works well for teen groups

Created by Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer, Director, Whole Community Inclusion

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the Jewish value of *Kol Yisrael Araveem Zeh Le Zeh*.
- Students will describe their preconceived ideas about peers with disabilities.
- Students will identify ways that they can reach out to people in their schools, synagogues, and communities who have disabilities.

Jewish Value: *Kol yisrael araveem zeh b'zeh*: All of Israel is responsible for one another. This Jewish teaching makes us consider the way that each Jewish person can support one another—and know that we can receive support from community members.

Materials:

- Copies of the text study (attached)
- Copies of the [Jacob Artson article: *Opening the Gates of Torah*](#) (attached)
- Video: *I'm Tyler* (hyperlink below)
- Laptop and projector to show video
- Art Gallery Sheet: One Way That I Can Be Inclusive (attached)
- Markers and other art materials

Introduction (5 minutes)

SAY: February is Jewish Disability Awareness & Inclusion Month (JDAIM for short). During February, the Jewish community works to raise awareness about disabilities and to foster inclusion for people with special needs.

ASK: Does everyone know what I mean when I say “inclusion”?

DEFINE: Inclusion - Involvement and empowerment of all people. Their worth and dignity are recognized. An inclusive community promotes and sustains a sense of belonging; it values and respects the talents, beliefs, backgrounds, and ways of living of its members.

SAY: During February, teens all over Philly will be doing today's lesson. We are trying to raise your awareness about how you all feel about people with disabilities. We want to identify our preconceived ideas about disability and think of ways that we can feel better equipped to reach out to and befriend peers with disabilities.

Text Study: Jacob Artson “Opening The Gates of Torah”

- Introduce the article. **SAY:** this text was written by a teenager named Jacob Artson, who has autism. Jacob communicates through typing—he is non-verbal.
- Hand out the article to read in pairs or out loud as a group.
- Invite the teens to turn to the person sitting next to them and discuss:
 - What are your reactions to Jacob's writing?

Jewish Learning Venture innovates programs that help people live connected Jewish lives.

7607 Old York Road / Melrose Park PA 19027 / 215.635.0360 / jewishlearningventure.org

Partners with Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia

- What is Jacob's experience in the Jewish community? Does he feel included or excluded?
- Have you ever been in a situation when you weren't sure how to interact with a person who has a disability?
- If you were to meet Jacob at a teen event, what could you do to welcome him?
- After teens have had a chance to talk to their partner, share back as a whole group. Write down on the board the ideas that the teens share about how they might welcome Jacob.

VIDEO: I'm Tyler

- **EXPLAIN:** "You're going to watch a video that was created by a teen who has Cerebral Palsy. Cerebral Palsy (CP) is a disorder that affects muscle tone, movement, and motor skills. Often, people with CP use a walker or a wheelchair to get around." Ask the teens if they know anyone with CP and what they know about it.
- Show them [the video](#).
- Ask the teens:
 - What is your reaction to seeing the actor playing Tyler vs. the real Tyler?
 - Which teen would you be more likely to greet or want to hang out with? Why?
 - How does watching the video and reading Jacob's article change your perception about teens with disabilities like autism and cerebral palsy?

WRAP-UP

Hand out the *Kol Araveem* text and read it out loud. Ask the teens how this text can guide our attitude towards people with disabilities in our communities.

ASK: teens to think about a way that each of us can welcome, include, and support people with disabilities.

Hand out the Art gallery sheet and invite teens to create their response with art and/or writing. If time allows, share their work. Please take photos of the students' art and email to gkaplan-mayer@jewishlearningventure.org. The art will be part of an online gallery about disability awareness!

Text Study: Talmud Shavuot 39a

Kol yisrael arevim zeh b'zeh שכל ישראל ערבים זה בזה

“All of Israel is responsible for one another.”

Q: How does this text from the Talmud guide our attitude towards people who have special needs in our community?

Art Gallery Sheet

One way that I can be inclusive towards people with disabilities is...

Opening The Gates of Torah

by Jacob Artson

You have probably never met anyone like me before who cannot speak but who can communicate by typing. I am a perfect example of how someone can be very impaired in one area but have great strength in other areas. Actually, I think that is true of all people, but it is especially true about people with autism. When I was diagnosed with autism at age 3, I could not speak or move my body properly, and 12 years later that remains true. However, if success and worth are measured by being a *mentsch* and giving back to others, then I would classify my life as a success. You can be the judge.

When I moved to Los Angeles at the age of 6, I was a classic case of severe autism. My behavior was so awful I hated myself. Almost everyone I met gave up on me almost immediately and believed I would never amount to anything. But there was one doctor who saw the gem locked inside my prison of autism. She smiled at me in a way that reflected her belief that I was a worthy person with the ability and desire to engage, and she waited the very long time it took for me to smile back. That was the beginning of my long and wonderful relationship with Dr. Ricki Robinson, who has been my guide as I struggle to reach my goals of becoming a productive member of society and a person worthy of respect.

Many purported experts claim that individuals with autism are not interested in socializing. This is totally ridiculous. I love people, but my movement disorder constantly interferes with my efforts to interact. I cannot start and stop and switch my thinking or emotions or actions at the right time. As a result, I am often very lonely and this is the worst thing about autism. I get very sad when I watch my wonderful twin sister going off to do fun things that I cannot do. At moments like that, I passionately hate autism. So next time you see someone like me at your synagogue or at your event, remember that

they probably feel really lonely and you could be the person to make their day by smiling at them and letting them know that they exist.

Although I have often felt invisible because I can't speak, I have also learned that autism is not entirely negative. For example, I get a VIP pass at Disneyland, and I also get to kiss all the beautiful counselors at camp and pretend I don't know any better. On a serious note, not being able to speak means that you spend lots of time listening. In fact, most of what I know I've learned from listening to conversations that other people didn't think I could hear. I've also observed that people with autism support each other in ways that typically developing people do not. My friends and I have all known the horrible embarrassment of having an autistic episode, so we really understand and support each other through triumphs as well as tribulations. Finally, because I have had to struggle every day of my life to do things that other kids take for granted, I think that I have experienced God's love in a way that most kids have not. I used to get very offended at the notion of being someone's community service project. But then I realized that while my buddies were teaching me how to be like other kids, I was teaching them how to appreciate the beauty of God's world in a new way. All in all, who gets the greater benefit?

All of you here made a commitment to come today and spend an afternoon and evening understanding what it is like to live with a disability. To be honest, it is hard. It is an enormous effort for me to do the simplest tasks like writing my name or tying my shoe. In my daily struggle, Judaism has been a constant source of hope, comfort and guidance. From my earliest experiences in our synagogue preschool to my more recent experiences at Jewish summer camps and youth groups, I have had wonderful peers who have seen me as a person made in God's image, with the same dreams and concerns as other kids. And while everyone else may be sleeping during the rabbi's sermon, I am always listening because I need all the help I can get in finding the strength to make it through each day.

I want to thank all of you for inviting me to participate today and for being pioneers because I have never been a keynote speaker before. It has often been my experience that people with disabilities, especially those of us who are nonverbal, don't

get an opportunity to speak for ourselves. Our parents or our therapists or self-proclaimed experts speak for us. By including me as a presenter today, you are already light years ahead of many other communities. So thank you for believing in me and all the other kids like me.

For the past two years, I have been part of a musical theater program for kids with special needs called the Miracle Project. It was very aptly named because many miracles happened there that make the parting of the Red Sea pale in comparison. For one, I met my wonderful girlfriend Lexi, who also has autism and has the most beautiful voice and smile in the whole world. For another, I wrote a song that we used in the show and Lexi sang it. Most miraculously of all, we all accomplished far more than we ever expected because we were a team - autistic kids, siblings, volunteers and acting coaches. People with special needs don't need to be spoken to like dogs with good job and good listening and similar phrases used to train animals to do tricks. All we need is someone patient who believes that we can fly and notices our hard-earned little accomplishments. When all those little accomplishments accumulate over days and weeks and months and years, the results can be truly miraculous!