

Eco Drama: The torah as a users guide for life on earth

Instructions:

- Before the group comes, set up a nice “stage” area, or use an actual stage or bima if there is one. Tell everyone that they are going to each get a chance to bring some incredible stories to life by learning, practicing and then acting out these amazing skits.
- The first thing to do in groups is to read the story out loud together and make sure everyone understands it.
- The teacher/adult will hear who wants to be which parts, and then decide who is what (kids over 4th grade can generally pick their roles). EVERY ROLE IS INCREDIBLE, even and especially if you are a rock! Because in these skits, if you are a rock, you have to BE the rock (show them what that looks like), or BE the tree (Become a tree!!).
- They will have 10 minutes to learn and practice their skits. (if the group seems really young, or if some group is having trouble, you can have one person narrate the story and everyone act without having lines).
- Split into groups. Ideal sizes are 4 to 6, but they can be more or less. And there are creative ways to get into groups. If possible, assign an adult to each group to facilitate. Hand the adult one of the stories.
- When the groups get together and start practicing, your job is to roam around the room, going group to group, and seeing how you can be helpful. This means motivating unmotivated kids or adults, reminding them of how much time they have left, telling them that at a certain point that they need to just assign roles and start practicing (if they haven't already), encouraging groups that are done early to rehearse again or find props/costumes...)
- Call everyone back together. Give rules for being an audience. We applaud and cheer every group, and there can be zero talking during a performance.
- Let the audience know that the question you are going to ask at the end of each performance is “Why do you think the rabbi’s gave us THIS story?!”
- Introduce the first group! You can give the ensemble a name or ask them for their groups name~
- When they get into position, very quickly and if time permits, interview each person to ask them who or what they are so that the audience has a sense that the rock is a rock. Remind the actors to talk loud and proud and face the crowd.
- After the performance, encourage lots of cheering. If you at all think the performance was not clear, do a quick 10 second recap of the story.
- Ask the group “Why do you think the Rabbi’s gave us this story!” Your job (staff) is to make sure that the/a underlying moral/value is crystal clear.
- You can close by saying “isn’t it amazing that these are OUR stories... Your stories! Passed down for so many generations and brought to life here and today.

Skits to print and distribute to each group

1. Land Ownership

Two people were fighting over a piece of land. Each claimed ownership and bolstered their claim with proof. To resolve their differences, they took their problem to rabbi. The rabbi listened to both people, but could not come to a decision since both seemed to be right. Finally the rabbi said, "Since I cannot decide, let us consult the land." The rabbi put an ear to the ground, and after a moment straightened up. "Friends, the land says that it belongs to neither of you, but you belong to it."

2. Bein Adam L'Chavero – Between people and their neighbors

Two people were sailing on a boat when one of them began taking out animal skins to let them dry. The skins stank and the second person asked the first to put the skins away. The first replied, "What I do in my seat is none of your business." The second person thought for a moment and then removed a drill from her bag and began to drill a hole under her seat. The first person jumped up and screamed, "Are you crazy, you're going to kill us both!" The second person replied, "What I do in my seat is none of your business."

3. Honi

Once Honi was walking along a road when she saw a person planting a carob tree. Honi asked, "How long till it will bear fruit?" The person replied, "70 years." "70 years?" asked Honi, "Are you sure you'll be here in 70 years to eat from its fruit?" The person answered, "I found this world full of Carob Trees. Just as my ancestors planted for me, so I plant for my children."

4. The forest is our friend

The child of a certain rabbi used to wander in the woods every Saturday morning during services. At first the rabbi let the child wander, but over time became concerned. The woods were dangerous. The rabbi did not know what lurked there, besides that the child was missing the service.

One Shabbat the Rabbi followed the child into the woods, over a hill, through a valley, until they reached a stream. At the stream the child pulled out a prayer book and began to recite the entire service. As the child finished the parent asked:

"Child, I have noticed that each Shabbat you walk in the woods. I wonder, why do you go there?"

The child said to his father, "I go there to find God."

"That is a very good thing," the rabbi replied gently. "I am glad you are searching for God. But, my child, don't you know that God is the same everywhere? You could find God in the synagogue with us."

"Yes," the child answered, "I know God is the same, but here I am different."

Here is a resource for you, the educator,

to help unpack each story after each performance

1. Land Ownership
 - a. How long has this (point) peice of land been around for, and how long will it be around for? How long has a person with a piece of paper that says "i own it" going to live for? What chutzpah (arogance) to say it is ours!
 - b. What is the physical material of your ear lobe made of? (food....earth...worm poop). We are earth!
 - c. What does it mean to belong to the earth, how do we know that we belong to it?
 - d. What do you think the Rabbi heard when she listened to the Earth; can we still hear it today? How can we listen to the Earth?
 - e. In Israel land is not owned, but rented for 99 years. How does this relate to the concept of the land owning us?
2. Ben Adam L'chavero- Between people and their neighbors
 - a. If my name is William Penn, and I own all of Pennsylvania, can I cut down every tree in the state?
 - b. If I own this land, can I put a factory down that will churn out tons and tons of toxic smoke over all of my neighbors every day (play bad-cop and say "but I have a peice of paper that says I own this land? Shouldn't I be allowed to do whatever I want?)"
 - c. What are our responsibilities to other people? Is it true that what we do in 'our seat' is none of their business?
 - d. How do our actions affect others? What can we do to have less of a negative impact on others?
 - e. Biggest take home is, "what we do matters". Possibly even what we think! Its not a matter of IF we are going to change the world...but what kind of change are you going to make!
3. Honi
 - a. What is our responsibilities to future generations? Do you know anyone like the person planting the tree?
 - b. What can we do in our own lives to help ensure that the planet 'bears fruit' for our grandchildren.
 - c. Could you imagine if when every big political and buisness decision had to be made, the question of "how will this effect people/planet in 7 generations from now" was considered?
4. The Forest is our Friend
 - a. Do you feel different in Nature? What makes you feel that way?
 - b. Why do you pray? Do you have to be in synagogue to pray?