

Stories of the Hebrew Bible

Lesson 1: Introduction and Overview

1.22.2017

Objectives: Introduction to community and overview of the course.

Materials: flipchart, tape, nametag materials, Post-It notes, paper/pencils, lesson attachments, map of region.

Time allotments suggested and meant to be adapted for **75 minute class**.

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ What was the best thing you did over winter break?
 - ▶ What is one story you know from the Hebrew Bible or Jewish faith?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: What’s your favorite comfort food? (5 minutes max)

Each person secretly writes a favorite comfort food on a Post-it note – food that most people would likely know, please! Each person sticks their Post-it note on another’s forehead, and everyone walks around the group trying to guess the comfort food item on their forehead. Each person can only ask ONE “Yes or No” question PER PERSON at a time. The first ones to guess take their seat, until everyone has guessed correctly.

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith, the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from Rachel Naomi Remen, author and teacher of integrative medicine.)

“The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention... A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words.”

4. Sharing Joys and Sorrows (10 minutes)

Listening is a precious gift that we offer one another at church. Using the balance scale and the blue (sorrows) and yellow (joys) stones, invite youth to share a joy and/or a

sorrow from the past week, as a way of *meeting* one another with our lives and *sharing* in community. You will want to set limits (e.g. two stones max per person) so that no one monopolizes sharing time.

Each Sunday, a copy of the congregation's *Embracing Meditation* will be made available to your class. Share this information, putting in stones for those whose names are being spoken in the Sanctuary.

5. **Community Time: Getting to know each other** (20 minutes)

For this very first class, please take time to get to know one another. In the manner of the television show *Inside the Actors Studio*, each youth will be interviewed by a teacher and respond to as many questions within 60 seconds. A second teacher will keep time. Teachers get interviewed, too! (See attachment list of interview questions.)

6. **Important Agreements** (15 minutes)

Extend community sharing to discuss what community practices/agreements will help "learning together." Because this class, unlike many other classes, is not just about learning new information but learning about ourselves, how do we create a community where our best selves can emerge? Write these agreements up on flipchart and tape on the wall to refer back as needed in future classes.

One important agreement for Junior High youth: youth will attend worship *at least once a month* with their families/friends (at either a *Story Sunday* or *Family Sunday* that occurs once each month). Unlike their younger siblings who may exit after the children's story moment in worship, Junior High youth will stay for the whole worship. Youth should think about interesting/meaningful moments during worship and be prepared to briefly share at the following Sunday class.

7. **Introduction to Stories of the Hebrew Bible:** (10 minutes)

Teacher facilitates: As an introduction, invite youths to share anything they may already know about the Hebrew Bible prompted by the following questions. Facilitate discussion:

- What is the Hebrew Bible (or Hebrew Scriptures)?

The Hebrew Bible or Tanakh (tā-nach) is the canonical collection of Jewish texts, composed mainly in the language of Biblical Hebrew or some in Biblical Aramaic. This collection is known in the Christian tradition as the Old Testament, consists of 24 books and was written at some time between 700 and 450 B.C.E. (Before Common Era). Many of these stories, mainly those pertaining to Adam, Abraham, and Moses along with the Psalms are found in the Qur'an as well.

- Who were the Hebrews and where did they live?

The Hebrews, also known as the Israelites or the Children of Israel, were the descendants of Jacob who was the grandson of Abraham. Both men's lives are chronicled in the Hebrew Bible. Today, the term can refer to anyone who follows the Jewish faith. The Hebrews lived in what is modern Israel and their borders stretched into modern Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. (Refer to the map provided.)

- What's the big deal about believing in one God?

*The concept of one God (**monotheism**) was revolutionary (!) and largely did not exist until put forward in the Hebrew Bible. Some popular beliefs at the time included **henotheism** – belief in one god while recognizing the existence of other gods – and **polytheism** – the belief in many gods.*

- Why learn about these stories from the Hebrew Scriptures?

- *Values and Ethics: These enduring stories often address very human problems and relationships, drawing people and communities again and again to reflect on our own perceptions, relationships, and values that shape our human journeys.*
- *Cultural Significance: Even with modern cultural diversity, our culture is still derived from a predominantly Judeo/Christian ethic. By becoming more familiar with these stories, we can better understand that heritage and worldview. In fact, popular culture is full of references to the Old Testament. The following trivia game may help us see this.*

8. Game of “Yay!” or “No Way!” (10 minutes)

- Split youth into two teams. Each team will have a set of 10 cards (see attached). Each card has a phrase which may or may not be a reference to the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. Teams will take turns reciting aloud a phrase for the other team to collectively decide if it's “Yay!” (a reference) or “No Way!” (not a reference). If groups seems like they can handle some friendly competition, a point can be awarded for each correct answer.
- After the game is done, ask youth if there were any surprises.
- Can youth think of any additional references – in movies, books, characters, something in a magazine? Some examples:
 - Serpent as representative of evil (Harry Potter) – a reference to the Book of Genesis
 - Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and Tree of Life – reference from Genesis
 - “Am I my brother's keeper?” – reference to Cain and Able from Genesis
 - *Indiana Jones & the Raiders of the Lost Arc* – reference to the Arc of the Covenant built by Moses to contain the tablets of the Ten Commandments.

- In *Star Trek*, Mr. Spock's "Live long and prosper" hand gesture was taken from a Hebrew blessing gesture dating back to the Old Testament.

9. How We'll Do This Course (5 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: Every week we will consider a different story or set of stories that pertain to various topics. We will explore how these stories relate to our UU faith and how they help us to understand our cultural heritage. We will also use these stories to examine our own values and relationships.

Many of these stories are well-known, familiar stories that have shaped our wider culture. So everyone is encouraged to seek out references to these stories in books, movies, in school, and in conversation!

10. Say goodbye until next time: Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

"May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."

11. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- return blue/yellow stones to containers
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets