

Overcoming Fear: One Purpose of Freedom Music

Lesson plan for Families (3rd Grade and up)

This lesson plan is part of a larger Go & Learn lesson entitled “Sing a New Song,” which can be found at <http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/apr10/>. Visit this website to download the featured letter by activist Heather Booth, and to access the lyrics and audio clips of “This Little Light of Mine” and “Kol Ha’olam Kulo.”

Using the introductory essay for this edition of *Go & Learn*, (which also can be found on the above website), provide the group with a brief overview of the history of Jewish participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Explain who Heather Booth is, her involvement the Movement, and where she was when she wrote the letter.

Read:

- Distribute copies of Heather Booth’s letter to her brother so visual learners can follow along as they listen, and everyone has the chance to revisit and take home the text.
- Have one or two people read aloud just the first two paragraphs of Heather Booth’s letter.

Questions for discussion:

- How does music make us feel? Based on her letter, how did it make Heather Booth feel? (You may want to write responses on a board or chart paper.)
- Look back to this line of the letter: “But the type of fear that they mean when they, when we, sing ‘we are not afraid’ is the type that immobilizes... The songs help to dissipate the fear.” What do you think she means when she says “the songs help to dissipate the fear”?
- Are there songs that you have heard and/or sung that have made you feel safe?
- What are some different kinds of fear? What might make you feel safe from these different types of fear? (You may want to write responses on a board or chart paper.)
- Have you ever done something even though you were afraid? What helped you get through your fear?

Divide the group:

- Have the parents remain in the original meeting space with a teacher or group leader. This group will continue with the “Fear and Our Role as Parents” activity immediately below.
- Have the students go to a separate area or separate room with a teacher or group leader. This group will continue with the “This Little Light of Mine: Part I” activity below.
- Both groups will come back together for “This Little Light of Mine: Part II.”

PARENTS: Fear and Our Role as Parents

Using the introductory essay for this edition of *Go & Learn*, provide the parents with a brief overview of some of the dangers that civil rights activists faced, especially during Freedom Summer.

Read:

- Have one or two people read aloud the last two paragraphs of Heather Booth's letter.

Questions for discussion:

- During Freedom Summer, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner were murdered while investigating the bombing of an African American church in Mississippi. This is just one example of the kind of dangers facing civil rights activists. What, if any, other stories come to mind of violence against the people who participated in the Civil Rights Movement?
- Based on Heather Booth's letter and what we've discussed about the Civil Rights Movement, how do you imagine parents responded to their children's participation in Freedom Summer? (Be sure to discuss a range of responses.)
- How did Heather Booth seek to protect her parents? Why do you think she wanted to protect them?
- When do we want to protect our children? From what kinds of things do we want to protect them? (Again, be sure to discuss a range of responses from within the group.)
- When do we let our children feel the fear but do it anyway? When do we intercede so they don't get hurt?
- Jewish history is full of persecution. For that reason some Jews feel it is important to stand up for what is right despite the risks. Do you agree or disagree? If you agree, as a parent, how would you balance this with concern for your child(ren)'s safety?
- Do you think you would have been able to let your child(ren) go to Mississippi for Freedom Summer? Why or why not?
- (If anyone in the group was involved in activist movements as a young person, how did your parents feel about the danger it might be putting you in? How does this relate to what you imagine you would let your own child(ren) do?)
- How are the dangers that our children face in the 21st century similar and/or different from the dangers that Heather Booth and other civil rights activists faced?

STUDENTS: “This Little Light of Mine”: Part I

Sing:

- Distribute copies of the “This Little Light of Mine” song lyrics. (http://www.gilderlehrman.org/historynow/06_2006/interactive.php) Have the students keep their songs sheets through the next activity.
- With the help of a song leader and/or the audio clip (or the full version you downloaded), teach the children the freedom song, “This Little Light of Mine.” (<http://www.folkways.si.edu/albumdetails.aspx?itemid=2269>)

Discuss:

- This is a song that many people think is very “catchy.” Do you agree, and if so, what do you think makes it catchy?
- What kind of feeling do you get from this song?
- Why do you think this song makes you feel this way? How would you describe the relationship between the words and the music? What else about the song affects the way you respond to it?
- If you were in a situation in which you were scared, like Heather Booth was in the letter we read, do you think this song might make you feel better? Why?
- This song began as a spiritual and was later adopted by civil rights activists as a freedom song. Based on the lyrics, what are the civil rights activists fighting for? Where are they when they are fighting?
- The song refers to a “light” that we all have. Based on the lyrics of the song, what do we know about this “light”?
- What do you think “this little light of mine” is? (Be sure to get a few responses.)
- Imagine that each of us is a candle. Consider: How much light would we shed if we were standing in the dark alone? How much light would we shed if all of us were standing in the dark together?
- If we say that the darkness is like things that are wrong with the world or things that we are scared of, what do you think this song means? Do you think this is still true today? Does anyone have a different interpretation of the light and darkness?
- Light is an important symbol in Judaism. What Jewish “lights” or stories about light can you think of? What does each of these lights represent in Judaism? (Give as many students as possible a chance to respond to this question. Some possible responses might include: the *ner tamid* (eternal light); Shabbat candles, Chanukah lights which symbolize freedom and a miracle; the *midrash* in which God creates fire for Adam during the first night so Adam wouldn’t be afraid.)

“This Little Light of Mine”: Part II

Groups come back together:

- Have the students’ teacher or group leader bring them back to where the parents are meeting.
- The following activity is done with parents and children together.

Discuss:

- Based on our discussions in our separate groups, why, if at all, do you think it is important to talk about the Civil Rights Movement in a Jewish setting like this? What can we learn from the history of the Civil Rights Movement? What can we learn from the history of Jews and the Civil Rights Movement?

Listen:

- Distribute the song lyrics to the parents so visual learners can follow along with the opening lines and everyone has the chance to revisit and take home the text.
- Play the audio clip of “This Little Light of Mine” (or full version you downloaded).
- If possible, get everyone (parents and children) singing together using the song sheets.

Singing was an important part of the Civil Rights Movement. Congregational singing was used to draw people together as a community at the beginning of meetings and rallies. Since singing helped raise spirits and bound people together, it reminded people of the importance (even holiness) of what they were doing and the importance of working together. In the face of taunts and angry crowds, or even when people were getting arrested, singing was a way to show those around them that they were not afraid and would not respond with anger of their own. Joining voices together in song also demonstrated their power as a group (much louder than one voice singing alone).

“This Little Light of Mine,” like many freedom songs, was based on a Christian gospel sung in many African American churches, but its message of God and freedom was universal. The way the song was constructed, with many repetitions, made it easy to learn and easy for anyone to sing. This structure also meant that new verses could easily be composed and added. After the Civil Rights Movement, other groups fighting for different types of freedom adopted this song and added new lyrics. Today, we’re going to add some lyrics of our own.

Song Writing:

- Based on the discussions that the families have had during the program, have each family group write a new verse for “This Little Light of Mine” that

shares something that they've learned about the Civil Rights Movement, freedom songs, and/or ways to confront fear.

- If there is time, have a few families share/sing their new verses to the whole group. You might also want to ask each family to pair up with another family and share/sing their new verses with one another.

Optional Activity (Adults & Children)

Listen:

- Distribute copies of the “*Kol Ha’olam Kulo*” song lyrics so visual learners can follow along as they listen, and everyone has the chance to revisit and take home the text. (<http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/apr10/GoLearnApr10-Kol-Haolam-Kulo.pdf>)
- Play the audio clip of “*Kol Ha’olam Kulo*.” (<http://image.aish.com/misc/05KolHaOlam.mp3>. Various videos of this song also can be found online.)

The text of this song is based on a famous saying by Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav (1792-1811) who lived and taught primarily in the Ukraine. Like other great Hasidic rebbes, Reb Nachman used stories and sayings such as this one to teach important lessons.

Discuss:

- What’s scary about crossing a narrow bridge?
- How do you think the world is like a narrow bridge? What about the world do you find frightening sometimes?
- This song says “the main thing is not to be afraid.” Why might it be important not to be afraid? Are there times when it is ok to be afraid?
- What kinds of things help you not be afraid? Can you think of specific examples from Jewish tradition that can help us when we feel scared?

End by singing the song together.

Can also ask:

- How did you feel singing this song together? How do you think it might feel different if you were singing it alone? When do you imagine you might want to sing this song?
- Did it feel any different to sing “*Kol Ha’olam Kulo*” together vs. “This Little Light of Mine”? If so, how was it different?

Copyright © 2010 Jewish Women’s Archive

Contact JWA at: education@jwa.org