

## **PURIM, ESTHER, AND BELLA ABZUG: WEARING COSTUMES AND CHOOSING ROLES**

### **Lesson plan for families**

*This lesson plan is part of a larger Go & Learn lesson entitled “Queen Esther and Bella Abzug: Costumes, leadership, and identity,” which can be found at <http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/feb07/>.*

### **In preparation for this lesson/activity:**

- **Pre-assign** two adults to act out the story of how Bella Abzug began to wear hats. This story is provided on the **TEXT SHEET** at the end of this lesson. Be sure to have the Bella Abzug character dress in clothing for the role as a 1940s office woman—in a knee length skirt and blouse or suit, if she can. Also she should bring in a hat and gloves.
  - **Tell** parents to bring in clothing for dressing up as the varied roles they play in life, such as: business professional, athletic coach, musician, stay-at-home parent, etc. Also, they should bring in hats and other clothes for their children (and possibly other children) to dress up in. These could be costumes or simply clothes that different family members usually wear.
  - **Bring in extra hats or accessories**, so people can experiment with how hats can change their personas.
1. **Collectively** tell the biblical story of Esther – going around the room, with each person (both kids and adults) adding a sentence at a time. The leader can fill in details during the telling or afterwards retell the story, adding in pieces the group has forgotten. Make sure everyone knows it is okay to pass on their turn and explain that you are retelling the story so everyone will have it fresh in their minds.

**2. Ask** the group the following questions:

- Who was Vashti? What happened to her and why? Was her punishment just?
- How did Esther become the new queen?
- Why did she hide her identity as a Jew?
- What risk did Esther take in order to save the Jews?
- Why did Esther ask that all the Jews in Shushan join her in fasting for three days and three nights before she went before the king?
- What role did Mordecai play in helping and advising Esther?
- Who is your favorite character in the story and why? Who is your role model?

**3. Explain** how Bella Abzug and the biblical Esther were both important Jewish women leaders who stood up for their people in different ways.

Using the introductory essay for this “Go & Learn” lesson

(<http://www.jwa.org/teach/golearn/feb07/>) as background, talk about the different roles Esther and Bella Abzug played.

**4. Share** a brief biography of Bella Abzug with the group. You can read the biography from <http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/abzug/bio.html> or you can summarize it.

**5. Have the pre-assigned parents** act out the first scene of the story of how Bella began to wear hats. (See TEXT SHEET.) In this scene, Bella Abzug, as a young lawyer, is mistaken for a secretary.

After the scene, **ask everyone** why Abzug is not being accepted as a lawyer, and whether they have any suggestions for what she could do in order to be taken seriously. Ask if they think her clothing makes a difference to what role she is expected to play.

**6. Have the parents act out the second scene**, with Abzug wearing a hat and gloves and being immediately accepted as a professional. Ask the

audience what made the difference and why. Ask people to think about the differences between how women dress today and how they dressed when this story took place? Do women still have to dress in a particular way so they are taken seriously?

Optional: The parents can act out the suggestions that people made about other ways Bella Abzug could have been taken seriously.

- 7. Fashion Role Show** (this is instead of a regular Purim costume parade) Have everyone get changed into the dress-up costumes they brought in (or using the extra hats and accessories that have been brought in) to create a persona they enjoy being or pretending to be. Then invite people up, one by one, to process across the front of the room or the stage while people try to guess what they are dressed as. People can come up more than once, but they can't have a second turn until everyone has had a first turn. Before each person steps down, invite them to respond to the group about who or what they are actually dressed as, and how they feel about the group's guesses about them. Encourage people to try on different hats so they can see if simply wearing a hat changes how they appear or feel.

**8. Closing Discussion**

If time permits after the fashion show, have a group discussion about the relationship between clothing, roles, and identity. Ask the young people how they decide what to wear every morning, and what clothing to choose in a store. Are there brands or styles that "everyone else" is wearing which they feel they must own and wear? Where do these styles come from? What happens when they wear clothing that is different from what everyone else is wearing? Invite adults to share stories of the role clothing has played in their lives, and those of their parents. Ask the young people, how are their experiences similar to or different from those of their parents?

## **Text Sheet**

### **for the *Go & Learn* lesson plan “Purim, Esther, and Bella Abzug: Wearing costumes and choosing roles”**

#### **Bella Abzug and her hats**

From Bella Abzug, Interview with Global Education Motivators, April 24, 1997.

When I went to represent my law firm anywhere -- I was a young kid just out of college -- I said, “How do you do? I'm Bella Abzug from the law firm of such and such,” and people would say, “Yes, fine, fine, sit down.” So I'd wait and nothing much would happen, so finally I'd clear my throat and say, “I'm Bella Abzug from the law firm of such and such,” and they'd say, “Yes, we know, but we're waiting.” I'd say, “What are we waiting for?” And they'd say, “We're waiting for the lawyer.” They thought I was the secretary. So I had this identity crisis.

I went home and discussed it with my husband, Martin. In those days professional women wore hats -- and gloves, so I put on gloves and a hat. And every time I went anywhere for business, with the hat and gloves, they knew I was there for business. And I jokingly often say, as you can see, I've taken off the gloves. But I like wearing hats and I continue to wear it. When I ran for Congress and got to Washington, they made such a fuss about the hat instead of what was under it that I didn't know whether they wanted me to take it off or keep it on. I decided that they wanted me to take it off, which made me determined to keep it on.