

Jewish Diversity

No community is monolithic. Even with shared memories, heritage, traditions, texts, and rituals all groups possess their own internal diversity. This is true for Jewish people whose longevity as a globally dispersed community living in diaspora has resulted in cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, and racial variation. Such complex and intersectional identities are evidence of cultural exchange and blending. Jewish people, like all people, participate in cultural exchange and diffusion, disagreement and debate, allowing for an array of authentically Jewish forms of expression to exist. This is evident in the ways holidays are celebrated, religious rituals, in cuisine, language and forms of communication, and aesthetics, among other types of dynamic change and fusion.

In this lesson, students will reflect upon and describe their own forms of cultural expression, collaboratively hone their skills of observation, and take on the role and responsibilities of a museum curator, all while examining multiple examples of Jewish diversity. All the while, the lesson creates space for students to engage in self-reflection as they consider their own complex, intersection, and evolving identities and forms of communal gatherings.

Essential Questions:

1. Why are collective identities complex and multifaceted?
2. In what ways are Jews diverse?
3. How has Jewish identity evolved?

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will be able to describe the various ways in which all forms of collective identity are diverse and dynamic.
2. Students will be able to make observations about the ways Jewish identity is complex.
3. Students will be able to articulate an understanding of their classroom's diversity by assuming the role and responsibilities of a museum curator.

Enduring Understandings:

1. All forms of collective identity are diverse and evolving.
2. Jewish people have shared customs and rituals with distinctive forms of expression that continue to change across time and place.
3. The complexity of collective identities is reflected in various forms of material culture, art, and cuisine.

Sources:

- [We Belong at the Table](#)

Materials:

- [Jewish Diversity Slide Deck](#)
- [Showcasing Jewish People Handout](#)
- [Jewish Ethnic Communities Handout](#)
- [We Belong at the Table Note Catcher](#)
- [Showcasing Our Diversity Handout](#)



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Lesson Procedures:

Gallery Walk: Observing and Discussing Jewish Diversity

Display the photos found in the [Showcasing Jewish People Handout](#) around the classroom and distribute the handout, inviting students to participate in a gallery walk exercise. Share that this is a curated set of images that provides a *glimpse* into Jewish diversity but is *not an exhaustive display* of diversity. As students silently view the images and take notes in their handouts, have them consider the following guiding questions, also found on [Slide 2](#):

What do you notice about the people on display?

After viewing all the images, have students complete the following sentence stems, found in their handout and on [Slide 2](#):

I observed _____ about Jewish people during the gallery walk.

I felt _____ during the gallery walk because _____.

I connected to the image of _____ because it reminded me of _____.

Discuss students observations as a whole class, generating a list of students' observations.

Small Group Discussion: Jewish Ethnic Communities

Show slides [3](#), [4](#), and [5](#) and explain that three different forms of diversity found among Jews are geographic, linguistic, and the denominations through which Jews engage in religious expressions and practices.

Next, have students work in small groups to expand their understanding of the diversity found within Jewish peoplehood, with each member of the group responsible for learning about one particular Jewish ethnic group. Distribute the [Jewish Ethnic Communities Handout](#) and show [Slide 6](#) with instructions and the questions each student will respond to the following questions for their assigned group:

Where has this community lived historically?

What language(s) has this community spoken historically?

What customs or traditions have developed among this community?



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After groups have read and discussed their findings for each Jewish ethnic community, allow time for students to share their findings. Consider showing slides [7](#) through [13](#) as students share out, allowing the class to see visuals of each community while being discussed.

Film Discussion: We Belong at the Table

Show [Slide 14](#) featuring Jews of Color. Explain that upwards of ten to fifteen percent of Jews in the United States identify as Jews of color and that this form of identification is increasing because of interracial marriage, adoptions, conversion, and other ways in which Black, Latinx, Asian, interracial Jews, and other people are entering into Jewish life.

Distribute the [We Belong at the Table Note Catcher](#) and screen [We Belong at the Table](#) using slide [15](#) to [18](#), featuring Jews of Color and their culinary fusions.

We Belong at the Table features Dr Shelly, Eli, Elija, and Rebecca LaPrince who demonstrate the blending of Jewish and African American cuisines while discussing the ways they make their Jewishness visible in order to be recognized as both African American and Jewish; Jackie Jonas who describes the intersection of the hospitality of Black Southern women and Judaism; Antoinette, Israel, Aubrey, and Autumn LaPrince who discuss their love of Judaism, Torah, and their family's long history with Judaism; and Tanya, John, and Brian Ungar and Elsie Alvarado who explain the ways they blend cultures and discuss the power of food as a reminder of home for immigrants.

Ask students the questions on [Slide 19](#) and have them discuss as a class:

*What do you **see** in these films?*

*What do they make you **think**?*

*What do they make you **wonder**?*

*Does anything in *We Belong at the Table* remind you of your family? Why?*

Creating an Exhibit: Showcasing Our Diversity

Distribute the [Showcasing Our Diversity Handout](#) and have students work in small groups, playing the role of museum curators creating an exhibit of the diversity found within their own classroom.

Show [Slide 20](#) with activity instructions. Explain that their task is to select ten images, using their own photos, whether printed ones that are brought from home in advance or digital images found on their phones or personal devices. Have students discuss their images in small groups, discussing the types of



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diversity they showcase about their classroom community. Next, have them arrange the photos, write captions for each, and produce a short overview description of the exhibit.

Once students have completed their exhibits, have groups showcase and present, explaining how they decided which images to select, how to arrange and caption them, and what they wished to communicate to the viewers of the exhibit.

