

SHALOM, SALAAM, AND MAY GOD BE WITH YOU: JEWISH IDENTITY FORMATION through INTERFAITH LEARNING

A Curriculum Guide for
Religious School Confirmation Students



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Curriculum Guide Rationale

“The whole world is a very narrow bridge and the most important part is not to be afraid.”

-Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

Our inhabited world grows smaller each day. Technology expands our access to worlds once beyond our reach. Media confronts us with stories and images from places barely identifiable on a global map. Today, a sense of belonging, individual and group identification, and collective cultural standards have become both prized possessions and contested arenas. In a world of decreasing privacy, there exists an essential need to establish one’s identity. Knowing who one is, and knowing who one *isn’t*, is a lifelong process; who we are, what we do, and where we come from are questions every individual must address.

The goal of this curriculum is to create a learning experience which blends Jewish identity formation with knowledge of world religious practices. This yearlong process will connect the learner both to Judaism *and* to the “global village” in which he or she lives. Students will focus on God, sacred text, prayer, and religion as they exist in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In-class learning will be enhanced by facilitated encounters with Christians, Muslims and other Jews.

This curriculum specifically targets tenth grade confirmation students. Each unit will ask questions such as: “What do Jews believe about God? How do Christians pray? What do Muslim holidays signify?” Students will pursue these answers through in-class learning and out-of-class activities, visits, and participation in events outside their synagogue. Students will learn about the common and differing values held by their peers and will consider what it means to be a Jew, a

Christian, or a Muslim in the twenty first century. Most importantly, students will be challenged to engage with their own personal connection to Judaism through exploring personal belief, cultural standards, and familial and communal rituals and obligations.

Tenth grade confirmation students have reached what may be their final year of formal religious education. Most fifteen and sixteen year olds are looking ahead toward leaving their family home for the first time. They are in the process of establishing an identity separate from their family unit, and Judaism can play a large role in this process. Through examining what it means to be a Jewish teenager in the twenty first century – paralleled by what it means to be a Christian or Muslim teenager in this same generation – a Jewish adolescent can grow and learn in unlimited ways. Additionally, articulating one’s religious identity alongside peers of other faiths can greatly impact a person’s growing sense of self. Altogether this learning process can contribute to a greater sense of understanding, respect, and compassion for the community at large. Each of these ideals can strongly influence this group of learners as they begin to prepare for a life outside their childhood cocoon.

This learning endeavor will take what students have studied in prior Jewish educational experiences and expand their knowledge. Learners will access in-class material through different avenues, including text, art, films, and guest speakers. Out-of-class learning will include visits to places of worship, facilitated dialogue, and exposure to the greater community. The entire program will be documented in a yearlong video journal project involving not only the students, but their families and friends, as well. The culmination of the program will be a unique, student-led confirmation ceremony at the conclusion of the school year.

The goals of this course are many. Its core aim is to better prepare Jewish teens for the adult world. Through this experience, students will grow as individuals, as Jews, as adolescents

on the verge of young adulthood, and as educated members of an increasingly diversifying society. This curriculum guides seeks to give them the tools and skills necessary for developing mature, articulate, and well-informed approaches to the world which awaits them.

Enduring Understandings of the Course

1. Religions have the potential to influence individuals in both positive and negative ways.
2. Diversity challenges individuals to explore who they are and what they believe.
3. Many Jews, Christians, and Muslims possess similar yet distinct interpretations of God, sacred text, prayer, and rituals and celebrations.
4. Tension exists between the desired practices of a religion and the actual practices of its followers.

Curriculum Guide Units:

This curriculum guide features six distinct units. In addition to the Introduction and Culmination Workshop, there are four units of solid content: God, Prayer, Sacred Texts, and Rituals and Celebrations.

Two constants will run throughout this curriculum guide. The first is the thread of **encounter**, which will take the form of memorable moments at the conclusion of each unit. The second is the assessment tool, which will be an online video journal taking place throughout five of the six units. (Excluding the Culmination Workshop)

The **encounter** thread will involve students interacting directly with members of a particular religious background, preferably their same age. The encounter sessions will be the highlighted “memorable moments” throughout the guide. Though the formula of each session is essentially the same, the content, food, participants, location, and responses to each prompt will undoubtedly vary. It is the goal of this curriculum writer that the encounter sessions leave a lasting impact on this course’s learners. These structured moments for facilitated dialogue should provide the greatest insight onto EU #4, above.

The **online video journal** will be the primary form of assessment in this guide. It will involve each participant filming him or herself at the beginning and end of each unit. Participants will be prompted with specific directions as to how, where, and when to film. At times, participants will be asked to film themselves with other members of their family and/or social circle. Specific guidelines will be provided by the instructor to ensure a successful submission to the journal.

Submissions to the online journal will be included in the culmination service, providing participants and their families with the opportunity to reflect on what has been learned and accomplished throughout this experience.

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Encounter: Rationale

At the heart of learning about cultures, religions, or communities separate from one's own is the imperative for face-to-face interaction. Additionally, for one to acquire full knowledge of that which is outside his or her comfort zone, learning cannot be isolated to the classroom. As this course is about learning to be a Jewish individual in a multi-faith world, the presence of facilitated dialogue is essential.

Four of the six units in this guide feature an "Encounter" session at their conclusion. The main goal of Encounter is to elucidate EU #4 of this course – *"tension exists between the desired practices of a religion and the actual practices of its followers."* Encounters will require all participants to approach sessions with mutual respect; respect not only for the host institution and its members, but also the decisions of those members to uphold their religious beliefs in their own personal ways.

The Encounter sessions will each take place at a house of worship or community center separate from the synagogue or religious school where this course takes place. The sessions will involve structured conversation time, engaging questions and conversations, shared meals, and prayers. Each session will take place in a different institution, feature unique, community-specific food, and undoubtedly feature varied answers to similar thought-provoking questions. Altogether, the Encounter sessions will provide a multitude of lasting memories for the students of this course.

The Online Video Journal Project

Starring: All Course Participants

Of the multiple enduring understandings of this course, perhaps the most significant message is this: “*Diversity challenges individuals to explore who they are and what they believe.*” By stepping outside one’s comfort zone, a person is introduced to a variety of ways of living. Studying those avenues while simultaneously exploring oneself can lead a person toward exponential growth, maturity, and empathy toward others. As this course seeks to imbue its participants with the sense that they can be active members of a global village, this particular message is woven throughout all six of its units. Hence, there exists a need for an authentic assessment piece which captures the process and enables its participants to express this endeavor creatively.

In the year 2012, posting videos online has become one of the most popular modes of creative self-expression. People from all corners of the globe have taken to the internet to amplify their voice in a diverse range of ways. From the simple (one person talking directly into the camera) to the complex (an elaborate, choreographed dance number or multi-person short film) there exists a wide range of possibilities for one individual to capture and promote their message to the masses.

For this course, students will be asked to submit two online journal submissions per unit; one at the beginning and one at the end. (Excluding the Introductory unit, where there is only one submission, and the Culmination Workshop, where there are no entries) For each unit, there will be prompts which will guide the student through the creation of their video. Students will be presented with questions to guide them, ranging from the clothing choice they make to the

location they choose in which to film themselves. Additionally, students will be asked to involve other people in the creation of their videos. This could mean family members, friends, individuals met through “Encounter” sessions, or strangers on the street.

The overall goal of this endeavor is to allow students to capture both what they are seeking to learn (in the pre-unit video) and the knowledge they have acquired (in the post-unit video). These videos will be public for the entire community – including parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and congregants – to view. It is up to the greater institution to decide how these videos will be featured: YouTube, Vimeo, or an invitation-only website for participants and their families are suggested avenues.

Finally, segments of these videos will be presented at the final, student-created and student-led Confirmation ceremony at the conclusion of the course. For more information on how this will be structured, please reference the Culmination Workshop unit.

Throughout the course, the instructor has the choice to show submitted videos at his or her discretion. These can be used to highlight recurring questions featured by participants, address pressing issues, or simply chart learners’ progress. **Additionally – instructor should take photographs throughout the course, particularly at Encounter sessions, to present during the Culmination Workshop and Confirmation ceremony.**

Assessment Rubric for the Online Video Journal Project

Name of Filmmaker: _____

Unit / Assessment #: _____

	Advanced Filmmaker	Intermediate Filmmaker	Emerging Filmmaker
Accessibility	Material presented is clear, featuring an easy-to-follow progression of topics. Scene cuts and dialogue are polished. Quality of filming is excellent.	Material presented is mostly clear, featuring a progression of topics that makes sense. May present some awkward cuts or dialogue; quality of filming is good, not excellent.	Material is either unclear or hard to follow, progression of sequences are difficult or impossible to follow. Cuts and dialogue are choppy. Quality of filming is poor.
Content	Filmmaker presents a clear representation of the unit’s content. Addresses questions posed in prompts with ease.	Filmmaker presents a mostly clear representation of unit’s content. Addresses questions posed in prompts accurately, if somewhat uncomfortably.	Filmmaker does not address the unit’s content. Questions posed in prompt are largely avoided.
Message	Filmmaker presents an intentional, enduring message through his or her video. Filmmaker teaches his or her audience something lasting and meaningful in this submission.	Filmmaker presents a message to his or her audience, yet the message may be unclear or hard to decipher. Filmmaker attempts to teach something lasting and meaningful in this submission.	Filmmaker presents a series of scenes or dialogue with no clear message or intention. Filmmaker does not attempt to feature a lesson or teach something in this submission.
(Aesthetic) Value	Filmmaker’s choices of dress, location, participants, and props are intentional and clear. Video features supplementary and well-thought-out extras, such as background music or text.	Filmmaker’s choices of dress, location, participants, and props are mostly intentional. Video does not feature many additional extras, such as background music or text.	Filmmaker devotes little to no energy to dress, location, participants, or props. Video features little to no artistic or creative additions.
Voice	Filmmaker portrays him or herself in a unique, authentic, and comfortable way. Filmmaker expresses him or herself with enthusiasm and displays a deep commitment to the unit’s content and the course. Filmmaker poses thought-provoking questions from an honest, raw place.	Filmmaker mostly communicates his or her personality and authenticity through video submissions, yet maintains a status-quo level of energy in the assignment. Filmmaker demonstrates an interest in the course and commitment to his or her own unique perspective.	Filmmaker’s voice is difficult to find in this submission. Filmmaker seems to be going through the motions to finish the assignment. Filmmaker demonstrates little to no interest in the unit’s content or the course.

A sample prompt for the Online Video Journal, including examples for the question prompts:

Assessment #3: God Unit

Pre-Unit Video

For this installment of your online video journal, you will be asked to express yourself on the topic of God. Looking ahead to unit as a whole, we will be looking at what Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each say about God. Does God exist in these three religions? How? Where does God exist for Christians, for Muslims, or for Jews? What does God look like? How are notions of God similar in these three religions? Where are they different? How is God used as a force of good? Where might God be seen as a source of negativity or pain?

Before starting this unit, **you** have the opportunity to think about your own personal conception of God. Do you have a relationship with God? Why or why not? What do you, as a student in this course, personally believe about God's role in these three religions?

By first clarifying your own personal beliefs and convictions, you can then dive fully into what these different religions say about the topic. Remember that **everything** is fair game, as long as you approach each topic with a sense of maturity and respect – for yourself, your religion, and the religious beliefs of others.

Videos should be no longer than ten minutes, maximum. However – preparing for the video, including gathering your supplies, picking your setting, and writing down your answers *before* answering them on-camera, should take between 45 minutes and an hour, if not longer.

Please save this prompt and your answers in your course folder. It will come in handy during our Culmination workshop at the conclusion of the course.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming:

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location?

For example: For the God unit, a student may want to film themselves in the sanctuary of their synagogue, or on a mountaintop where they feel peaceful or close to God, with the sun setting behind them. They may want to film themselves alone in a dark room, demonstrating their fear or ambivalence about God.

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit?

For Example: A student may want to wear all-white as homage to their time at summer camp and their closeness to God while there. Or, a student may want to wear an outfit of neutral colors to symbolize God's neutrality and acceptance of all human beings. A student may want to wear a colorful, zany outfit to showcase his or her curiosity about God, or God's acceptance of all humankind.

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you?

Example: A student may want to ask their parents to join them in the video to explain how he or she believes God is present in the creation of new life. Or, a student may want to go to a crowded supermarket or public area to showcase God's presence everywhere, at every time. A student may also choose to be alone, providing a convincing rationale for doing so.

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them?

Example: A student may want to use any number of ritual objects: a Bible, a tallit, T'fillin, siddur. Or, a student may want to use an empty jar to show his or her lack of belief in God.

Additional: What other additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell your feelings about God?

Questions to Address in Video #1:

- 1) Prior to the start of this unit, what do you personally believe about God?
- 2) Does God exist?
- 3) Where does God exist?
- 4) When do you feel/see/experience God?
- 5) Is your understanding of God a "Jewish" understanding?
- 6) What do you think Christianity says about God?
- 7) What do you think Islam says about God?
- 8) What are you most looking forward to learning about God in this unit?
- 9) What are you most apprehensive about learning about God in this unit?
- 10) What is one question you hope to answer by the end of this unit?

Assessment #4: God Unit
Post-Unit Video

Congratulations on finishing the “God” unit! For this video installment, you will be asked to reflect on what you learned during these lessons. First, please review your pre-unit submission to the Online Video Journal. This will help you answer some of the questions posed below. Next, sit down with these questions and really think about your answers. Look back over your notes and readings and recall some of the activities you did to help answer these questions.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming: _____

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous location? Why?

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous outfit? Why?

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you? Are they the same individuals or different individuals than those in your previous videos? Why?

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them? Are they the same props you used in the first video, or not? Why?

Additional: What other, additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell how you have progressed or not progressed in your understanding of God?

Questions to Address in your post-unit video:

- 1) Following the conclusion of this unit, what do you personally feel about God? Have your feelings changed?
- 2) What do most Jews believe about God? What is the Jewish conception of God?
- 3) Do Christians believe in God? How does God appear in the Christian tradition?

- 4) Do Muslims believe in God? How does God appear in the Islamic faith?
- 5) How is the portrayal of God similar for Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Name one example.
- 6) How is the portrayal of God different for Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Name one example.
- 7) What is one thing that surprised you in this unit?
- 8) What is one stereotype you confronted or preconceived notion you addressed during this unit?
- 9) Did you answer the one question you had moving into the God unit? If so, how?
- 10) What is one question you have moving forward into our next unit? (Prayer)

A Letter to the Instructor...

Shalom, Blessings, and *Marhaban!* (مرحبا)

First, thank you for opening this Curriculum Guide. Whether it was simply assigned to you or you chose it from a multitude of options, *todah rabah!* I hope that this course is as meaningful for you to teach as it was for me to write.

In this guide, I have provided you with a great many things. It is by no means an exhaustive list, and I am certain that with a topic such as this much has been omitted. But here's what's there: a table of contents, enduring understandings, lessons, activities, resources, assessments, and most importantly, a course rationale. The rationale seeks to address the questions, "*Why this course, and why these learners?*" It answers in a professional voice, addressing the needs of Jewish teenagers on the cusp of their religious school Confirmation and articulating the demand for interfaith dialogue, among other goals. Yet – it does not express my personal rationale for choosing to write this curriculum. Please allow me to provide that here, in this letter to you.

This past summer I was the Education Director at URJ Camp Newman in Santa Rosa, California. Within the first week of orientation, I learned that the *rashim* (unit heads) of our tenth and eleventh grade social justice unit, Hevrah, planned to focus their curriculum on the Arab/Israeli conflict; specifically, Islam. Despite my own personal passion for interfaith learning and interreligious dialogue, I initially balked at the idea. I claimed our fifteen and sixteen year old campers were too young to grasp the complexities of the subject, and too inexperienced to understand the nuances of the Arab/Israeli conflict. I dismissed the idea of teaching an entirely

separate religion at a Jewish summer camp, concerned that it would send the “wrong message” to our campers.

I am pleased to report that I was proven wrong.

After several conversations with the *rashim*, their incredible faculty rabbi, and the camp directors, I saw that this course could, in fact, be quite meaningful for these campers. We gave it the go-ahead and guided the curriculum designers as they crafted an extraordinary and transformative program. We watched as these tenth and eleventh grade students delved into the foundations and principles of Islam; as they listened respectfully to guest speakers and engaged whole-heartedly in an *iftar* (break-fast) during the holy month of Ramadan. The most poignant memory I can share is accompanying these campers to Sacramento for their Project Day. There, they lobbied for religious tolerance in California’s schools and increased awareness of Islamophobia in the public sphere. Fueled by passion and empowered by knowledge, these campers validated the tremendous impact of interfaith learning; of a unique, challenging, and dynamic educational experience.

Each day our world simultaneously grows and shrinks. As we expand our capacities to reach foreign shores, we also retreat ourselves into our own personal comfort zones. As Hevrah 2011 (also known as H2K11) taught me, engaging with the world outside your own bubble is an invaluable experience. It has the capacity to change you; to deepen your empathy and enhance your close, personal relationships. Most importantly, confronting the unfamiliar, or “the other,” to which it is often referred, teaches you to identify and articulate who *you* are. It is this reason, among many more, that I chose to embark on this curriculum for a degree in Jewish education. It is my sincere hope that this message resonates through your teaching of this course.

I consider the various components of this guide to be springboards. Please use them all as launching pads, capable of being re-constructed and enhanced by you, the educator. Take chances with this curriculum, and do not be afraid to reach out and contact me should you have any questions, comments, or suggestions. I am deeply grateful (and truly excited) that this curriculum guide has reached your hands. May it be, for you and your students, a sacred, meaningful, and fun endeavor.

B'hatzlacha, thank you, and *shukran*. (شكرا)

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Unit 1: Introduction

Here begins this year-long course, “Shalom, Salaam, and May God Be with You: Jewish Identity Formation through Interfaith Learning.” You, the instructor, and your community of learners (plus other invested parties, such as parents, friends, congregants, clergy, and fellow teachers) are likely all asking yourselves the same question: In a course like this one, where, exactly, do we start?

We start at the beginning. We start with providing all interested and invested parties with the rationale for why this course, and why now. We start by providing background information for learners so they have a base from which to jump into further learning. Most importantly – we start by providing ourselves with the resources and tools (emotional and physical) to engage in a meaningful, powerful, potentially transformative learning experience.

This introductory unit provides the instructor with three lessons, each of which attempts to satisfy these needs. The unit features one lesson on interfaith learning and an introduction to the study of religion, one lesson on the various odds and ends of this particular course, and one lesson on the basics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is the hope of the curriculum writer that this introductory unit serves as a launch pad for the remainder of the course, generating excitement and curiosity and providing learners with a base to begin their in-depth study of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Unit Enduring Understandings:

- As evidenced in their biblical roots, Jews, Christians, and Muslims share a mutual responsibility to one another.
- Facilitated interfaith dialogue provides meaningful opportunities for personal growth.
- Documentary filmmaking offers creative, engaging ways to capture messages.

Unit Knowledge:

- The study of religion is a worthwhile endeavor which can provide both personal meaning and engagement in the greater community
- Interfaith dialogue must be facilitated and carefully crafted to provide opportunities for personal growth
- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are often referred to as “Abrahamic Faiths,” as they can each be traced back to the patriarch Abraham
- Judaism and Christianity emerged from what is now the land of Israel
- Islam emerged from what is now Saudi Arabia
- The year-long Online Video Journal is the method of assessment for this course

Unit Objectives:

- Students will be able to recall that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all “Abrahamic Faiths”
- Students will be able to explain why interfaith learning is a worthwhile endeavor for a teenager in the twenty-first century
- Students will be able to compare the early roots of Judaism with those of Christianity and Islam
- Students will be able to formulate questions on what they can expect during this course
- Students will be able to compose a general outline for their first Online Video Journal submission
- Students will be able to compose a letter to themselves to be opened at the end of the course, expressing their excitement and/or ambivalence

Unit Evidence of Learning:

- Following the conclusion of this unit, students will submit their first entry to the Online Video Journal. This first entry will detail both the knowledge acquired through this introductory unit *and* the questions students have moving into this course.
- Students are not expected to contribute to their Online Video Journals at the beginning of this unit.

Lesson 1: The Whole Word is a Narrow Bridge...

Essential Question: What is this course all about?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify Rebbe Nachman of Breslov by name
- Students will be able to discuss the concept of a “global village” and describe how they are residents of that global village in the present day
- Students will be able to compose a “tweet” featuring the phrases “global village” and “not afraid”
- Students will be able to define “Abrahamic faiths”
- Students will be able to describe how “the whole world is a narrow bridge”
- Students will be able to interpret Genesis 12:1-3 in their own words
- Students will be able to hypothesize a personal rationale of the course
- Students will be able to compose a letter to themselves to be opened at the end of the course, capturing their feelings at its beginning and their questions for the future.

Resources Needed:

Talented songleader with guitar

Lyrics / chords for “Geshher T’zar M’od”

Copies of Genesis 12:1-3 text (in Resources)

Pre-printed *large* copies of quotes for the “Why Do This?” Activity

Notebooks for all students

Pens for all students

Paper for letter-writing

Envelopes

Timeline: (Assuming an 80 minute allotted instruction time)

00-05 – Set Induction

05-15 – Introduction

15-30 – Activity 1

30-50 – Activity 2

50-60 – Break: Snacking and Socializing

60-75 – Activity 3

75-80 – Closing

Core Learning Experiences:

Set Induction: Instructor will first welcome all students to class. Then, instructor will either have a songleader (preferred) or a recording of the song “*Geshher T’zar M’od*,” words by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, music by Baruch Chait. (Lyrics can be found in Resource 1.1) Instructor / songleader should encourage students to sing.

**Kol ha’olam kulo gesher t’zar m’od
V’ha’ikar lo l’fached k’lal.**

*The whole world is but a narrow bridge
And the most important part is not to be afraid.*

Introduction:

Following the conclusion of the song, **instructor will say:** do any of you recognize this song? (wait for a show of hands) Tell me... what do you think this song is about? (Possible student answers: *this song is about creating relationships between people from different places, it's about facing your fears, it's about the world being small, after all, etc.*) How do you think the whole world might be a "narrow bridge?" (*We're all connected, it's a small world, etc.*)

Instructor: Who knows who wrote this song? (*Rebbe Nachman of Breslov*) And who was Rebbe Nachman? Does anyone know? (*Rebbe Nachman was the founder of the Breslov Chasidic Movement of Judaism. Rebbe Nachman was from Breslov, in the Ukraine. Rebbe Nachman taught that a person can experience moments of joy in Judaism by dialing down all the "fuss." Rebbe Nachman believed you could get closer to your Jewishness by focusing on the relationship you have with God. Rebbe Nachman also believed that a life of study, simplicity, faith, and intimate relationships with those close to you was enough to create and sustain a person all the days of their life.*)

Instructor: In many ways, this one song captures what we are attempting to do in this course, this year. Does anyone have any ideas as to why that is? (*Because we are trying to live as citizens in this global village, and we should not be afraid of that. Because we are all connected. Because the whole world is such a small place, and we must encourage each other to go forth into it with faith, with strength, and with knowledge. Because it's cool*)

Instructor: Exactly. This course is all about identifying who we are as Jews, and who we are as citizens of a global village. What is a global village? (*It's a figure of speech / expression that means, even though we are a part of this gigantic world with all this crazy stuff going on, like the internet and such, we're still connected. Whether it's through the internet or our greater communities, we are a part of one great big community*)

Instructor: Okay, everyone. I am now going to give you your first assignment. Please take out your cell phones. Now, please take five minutes to write a tweet or a Facebook status update – 140 characters or less – on how this one song might capture the overall goal of this course, this year. The one catch? You have to use the phrases "global village" and "not afraid" in your tweet or status update. Ready? GO!

(allow for students to tweet/update statuses)

After five minutes, **Instructor:** Can we have some people share their tweets and updates?

(allow for student sharing)

Instructor: Excellent. Thank you all so much for sharing. You all captured beautifully the rationale for this course, in 140 characters or less!

This course has many different goals. First and foremost, this course will help us explore who we are as Jews in the twenty-first century. This course will help us explore who we are as members of this global village; a series of connected communities. It will also help us acquire knowledge about two other religions which are both connected to and different from Judaism: Christianity and Islam. This course will help us better understand our responsibilities to the greater world in which we live. And in order to start that learning process, we begin here, today, on the right foot! *(Pause for student applause, excitement, questions)*

Activity 1: In the Beginning...

Essential Question: Where did this all start?

Instructor will pass out copies of or project on a board the following passage: (Resource 1.2)

Genesis 12:1-3

¹ [God] said to Abram, “Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you.

² I will make of you a great nation and will bless you.
I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you,
those who curse you I will curse;
all the families of earth will be blessed because of you.^{1”}

Once all students in the room have the quote at the ready, **instructor will ask:** at first glance – who recognizes this piece of text? (*Wait for hands*) Does anyone know what Torah portion this piece of text comes from? (*Lech Lecha*) Great! Can someone please translate “*lech lecha*” for me? (*You, go forth; go, really go, etc.*)

Excellent. So this is from a passage in our Torah – from a portion which we know as the one where Abraham receives the divine call to go forth, where he will be a blessing. Now I ask – how do we interpret this final line of text? What’s the first thing that jumps out at you when you read this final line – “**all the families of earth will be blessed because of you?**”

(Wait time, then *it means all the families of the earth are connected to Abraham, all the families of the earth are connected to Judaism...*)

Say: This quote – all the families of earth will be blessed because of you – this is a universal quote. This quote does not say, “Only the Jewish families of the earth will be blessed because of you. Only the ones who keep Kosher will be blessed because of you. No – this quote clearly states that *all the earth’s families* – Christian, Islam, Buddhist, even Atheist – will be blessed because of Abraham.

This is where we begin our study of religion. Here, with this quote. In this quote we read that we are all connected; we are all a part of a divine fabric that stretches out generations before us. We are all blessed, together, in spite of our differences. As we will learn throughout this course,

¹ Common English Bible (CEB) translation

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are linked in more ways than one. We share more than we realize. These three religions are connected through Abraham – they are the *Abrahamic Faiths*. And it is our sacred task in this upcoming year to uncover what sets us apart – as Jews – and what unites us, as individuals in this great global community.

For the Instructor: This is an opportunity to briefly explain the Abrahamic Faiths – Judaism is connected through the patriarch Abraham, Christianity is connected through Jesus’ Jewish roots, and Islam is connected through Ishmael, Abraham’s son with Hagar.

Activity 2: Why Do This?

Essential Questions: Why are we doing this course? Why now?

Instructor will print out and tape around the room three different quotes from three different individuals, plus three separate images, each of which is an important site in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. (Quotes and images can be found in Resource 1.3. Instructor should feel free to add to or modify the quotes and images selected)

Instructor will distribute notebooks and pens for all students. These will be their notebooks for the duration of the course.

Instructor: I now invite all of you to put your “observer” hats on. You have entered a museum of sorts – a place where different images and quotes have been preserved and are on display for you to examine. You will now spend the next 20 minutes walking through this classroom/museum with your notebooks and pens, and you will write down the different observations, reflections, ideas, and ruminations that you encounter while looking at these different relics. What does each of these quotes make you think of? What do you think these images try to capture? For the places you don’t know – what do you think they are? How might they be symbols of the religions we will be studying? What are your hypotheses as to the significance of each piece?

(Ask for questions)

Snack: It is highly recommended that instructor plans for built-in snack and socializing time for students, for each session. This will give students the opportunity to build community while nourishing themselves. It will also provide moments of levity and decompression following more intense activities. Instructor should be present, speaking and socializing with students during this snack time. Instructor may want to begin each snack time with a prayer.

Activity 3: Debrief and Looking Ahead

Essential Question: What was the Purpose of our Previous Activity?

Instructor will begin by **saying**, “Welcome back. I trust you all had a delicious snack. Let’s discuss some of the observations you made while walking through our classroom / museum.”

(Allow for student sharing)

Instructor should **summarize** the various comments of students. Students will likely focus on a few different elements of the quotes and images represented, and instructor should feel free to add to or enhance the various comments made, providing a summative response to student observations. Instructor may also want to prepare the written rationale for the course, of which several quotes may be useful in this discussion.

Finally, instructor should pass out paper and pens to students and give them the following prompt:

We now embark on this journey; this year-long course on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It will be a year of many great insights and many challenging moments. We will push ourselves, as one community, to learn new things about ourselves *and* about others. We will explore what it means to be a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim in the twenty-first century. It will require an open mind, an open heart, curiosity, dedication, and above all else, *respect*.

I now ask that each of you take a few minutes to write yourselves a letter, which you will open at the conclusion of the course. What message do you wish to tell yourself nine months from now? What hopes do you have for this course? What fears or ambivalences? Take this time to write to the future version of yourself, and when you are done, put it in an envelope, seal it, write your name on it, and hand it back to me.

Conclusion:

Instructor should ask students to turn to one another and share one thing about which they are excited for this course.

For the very conclusion of the day's learning, instructor should return to the lyrics of Rebbe Nachman's "Gesher T'zar M'od" to bring the conversation full-circle. Leave students with the following message: "*the whole world is but a narrow bridge and the most important part is not to be afraid.*"