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## *Circles*

### *For Grade 4-7*

*This lesson plan was developed by Deborah Fripp for the Teach the Shoah Foundation.*

*Objective:* Learn how Jews were able to maintain their religious practice during the Holocaust.

*Estimated time:* 15 to 30 min per week for 4 to 6 weeks

### *Essential lessons:*

- Some practices had to be modified but Jews in the Holocaust continued to celebrate religious holidays, even in the ghettos and camps.

### *Materials:*

- *Circles Kit*

### *Procedure:*

- *The best procedure will vary depending on the size of the class:*
  - For a large class, choose 2 to 3 booklets to work with in each week.
    - Divide the class into 2 to 3 groups
    - Allow each group to go over the booklet together and discuss it
    - Have the groups come back and report to the complete class
  - For a smaller class, choose 1 booklet per week and go over it as a class
- For each booklet, read the sections of the booklet and discuss.
  - Discuss how different people responded differently. For instance, some people will say they loved the holidays, even when it was difficult to celebrate them. Others will say the holidays reminded them of all they had lost.

### *Comments and considerations about individual booklets:*

- *Shabbat* and *Tu B'Shvat* provide a good way to discuss how people in the ghettos had to modify their practice in order to continue their celebrations.
- *Chanukah*, *Purim*, and *Passover*, being freedom-oriented holidays, had particular resonance with the Jews of the Holocaust. Be sure to talk about how a celebration of freedom changes when you are not yourself free.
- The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* booklet can have particular resonance with students preparing for their own b'nai mitzvah.



- The booklets on *Prayer* (which discusses the High Holy Days) and *Kaddish and Commemorations* need a slightly more mature audience. Although they are age-appropriate for these students in terms of Holocaust content, the religious concepts may be over their heads. Go over these booklets carefully before choosing to use them.
- The *Circumcision* booklet should be used judiciously, depending on the age and maturity of the students. *We do not recommend using this booklet with 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> graders.*
  - The Holocaust-related issues of circumcision require a certain level of maturity on the part of the students. Circumcision was one of the ways that Jewish men could be identified as Jews. Jewish men were often found shot with their pants around their ankles, their identity as Jews having been confirmed by their circumcision. The question of whether to circumcise boys born during the Holocaust was therefore a major issue for parents. While this dilemma could make an interesting discussion with older students, it is likely to be too complex and disturbing for younger students.
  - If you do choose to use this booklet, one suggestion to make this easier is to start by showing the students Mel Brooks' circumcision scene from *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (search the internet for "Robin Hood Men in Tights circumcision" and you should find a 2 to 3-minute video). This will allow you to get the giggles out and move on to discussing the issues in a serious way.

*ISJL note:*

- The ISJL 4<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum concentrates on holidays. This unit is therefore a good match for that curriculum and we recommend using it in 4<sup>th</sup> grade with the ISJL.
- In this situation, rather than doing this unit over 4 to 6 continuous weeks, bring out the appropriate booklet when discussing a holiday. Spend 15 minutes discussing how the holiday in question was celebrated during the Holocaust.

*Notes on staying age-appropriate:*

- Never ask the students to think about what they would do in if they were in the ghetto or camps. Ask instead what they think the people in the booklet did.
- Be sure to stay within the children's normal attention span and not try to do too much each week.
- See the *comments and considerations about individual booklets* section above for age-related considerations for particular booklets.