

My Prayer

This exercise is designed to help your students align Jewish liturgical poems and prayers with contemporary concerns. This will be best suited to those students in the sixth grade and up and will take two sessions to complete.

SESSION ONE:

- 1.) Ask your students to think about something that is going on in our society that currently concerns them or about which they have questions. This could be related to racism, antisemitism, policing, climate change, or another subject of their choosing.
- 2.) Now, invite them to write their concerns, observations, and questions down on a sheet of paper.
- 3.) Use the rest of the session for an open discussion, encouraging the students to share their thoughts.

IN BETWEEN SESSIONS:

4.) FOR THE STUDENTS:

Ask your students to do some research connected to what they wrote down. Encourage them to use the internet, talk to their parents, and to watch/listen to programs related to the topic. Throughout its collection, the students should take notes and make lists of important things they hear, read, and see.

FOR THE TEACHER(S):

As the teacher, choose a prayer or liturgical poem that you wish to teach or that you think is particularly resonant with what has been discussed by your students.

SECOND SESSION:

- 5.) Share the prayer you chose with your students and open a discussion about its history, its structure, and its meaning. It is especially important to spend time on the structure and how the prayer operates.

6.) Now, ask the students to consider the topic they have been exploring and to think about what they want to say about it/how they feel about it. Invite them to write a first line to a new prayer about their topic that borrows the structure of the first line of the prayer you have just discussed.

For example, if you have chosen the Unetaneh Tokef, and its first line is:

"We shall ascribe holiness to this day."

And a student has chosen climate change as their topic, they might write:

"We shall make sacred our future."

7.) Once they have this first line, give them the next 20-30 minutes to create their own version of the prayer you discussed, using its structure to write a prayer about their subject matter. Encourage them to use the names, facts, and figures that they found in their research throughout the piece.

8.) The workshop can end here with a sharing of the prayers out loud.

Or

9.) Ask all students to submit their prayers and put them together in a booklet to share back to the students at a later date as a collection of their thoughts.