

Classroom Activities, Section 2: Activities for Encouraging Student Questioning and Sharing

Activity Goals:

- Students will be prompted to suggest questions in the classroom.
- Students will practice asking both simple and complex questions.

Students often shy away from asking questions as they are concerned with what the response will be from others around them. As antisemitism is a challenging topic where questions are helpful in assisting students to process what they are thinking/feeling/experiencing, the tips below are meant to help teachers create a culture in their classroom in which students feel comfortable asking questions generally. The hope is that if this framework is created, it will provide students with a framework to utilize as their need for asking greater complex questions evolves.

Activity/Tip 1: Question Parking Lot

Teachers can provide the students with sticky notes at the start of the week/month. The teacher should explain to the students that the sticky notes are meant to be used for student questions. These questions can be about general ideas, ideas related to the content of the lesson, or about classroom culture. The teacher can explain that there is a question parking lot on the wall, where the sticky notes can be hung up by the students. *The teacher can develop his/her own system as to when these notes can be hung up and when these questions should be answered.* This system sends the message to students that their questions are encouraged, and will create a system of communication where students' questions are validated.

Activity/Tip 2: Wonder Wall

While similar in practice to the question parking lot, teachers can also create an "I Wonder Wall" where students can respond to the prompt of "I Wonder..." This prompts students to think more broadly about their classroom culture and the world around them. It encourages curiosity and creates a space where students can express random thoughts that enter their minds.

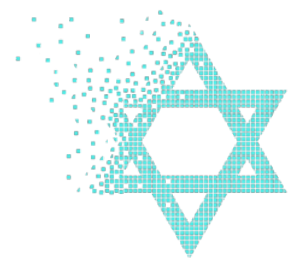
Activity/ Tip 3: The Answer is

The teacher should display an age-appropriate image on the board. The teacher should set a timer (around 3-5 minutes) where students should try to come up with as many questions as they can where the answer is the image. The teacher should then have the students reflect on how they can improve the questions that they asked or how to make them more complex/thoughtful.

For example, a teacher can place a picture of the Kotel (Western Wall) on the board with people praying at the wall.

Students can generate questions such as:

- What is the holiest place for Jews?
- Where do people *daven* for 40 days when they have something special to *daven* for?



- What is the last remnant of the *Beit Hamikdash*?
- Where can you put small notes with special *tefillot* to God?

As an extension to this? Have students come up with additional questions to learn more about the image. Some examples may be:

- Where is the wall located?
- How old is this wall?
- How many stones make up the wall?
- What are people doing at the wall?
- Why are people praying at the wall?
- Why is this wall important?

If the teacher would like to extend this activity even further, the teacher can do this activity ten times with ten different images. This can be done on the same day, or on different days. Once students have created questions for ten different images, students can create a “Jeopardy” type of game where they ask increasingly hard questions based on the questions they have developed.

Activity/Tip 4: Validate Student Questions

It is important for teachers to actively validate students' questions. Validation can be in the form of verbal feedback, stickers, or other incentives. Teachers should have a sticker bank in their room where they can immediately hand a sticker to a younger student or should have some pre-set verbal feedback phrases that they can use with their students. For example, “What an important question!” or “That is a very thoughtful question!”

Teachers should be sure that all the students in the class have the opportunity to receive validation, even students who do not ask questions out loud in class. The teacher can have sections on assessments where students are prompted to ask questions, or provide a text and have students comment with questions on the text. The teacher should be mindful to provide positive written feedback to students who typically do not ask questions out loud in class.

If the teacher wants to further this concept, the teacher can collect student questions in a jar to create a “Wow, that was a great question!” party when the jar becomes full of papers. This celebration should be something that students feel excited about, and students can prepare posters with their questions to hang around the classroom for the party.