



Minecraft* in the Jewish Classroom

Why Minecraft on a Jewish Teacher Resource Website?

You've likely arrived here because you're looking for new ways to engage students. Minecraft is a wildly popular computer-based game, especially among elementary school aged children. It has won numerous awards and is often in the top 25 on lists of best computer games of all time. If you search Minecraft on YouTube, you will come up with more than 44 million results and many dedicated channels with hosts who regularly upload new material. Since its launch in 2009, it's been downloaded more 100 million times.

Ali Carr-Chellman, an instructional designer and lecturer at the Penn State College of Education, speaks on the benefits of bringing gaming into the classroom. You can watch her TEDtalk here: http://www.ted.com/talks/ali_carr_chellman_gaming_to_re_engage_boys_in_learning . Many of your students, both boys and girls, could talk about Minecraft for hours. Now, you can bring it into the classroom and transform a Hebrew or history lesson into an adventure.

A Minecraft Primer

Minecraft is a videogame in which players build with textured cubes in a 3D computer-generated world. Each of these worlds is different and may contain mountains, caves, trees, water, or other types of land formations as the canvas on which players can build. There are no specific goals or achievements in Minecraft, allowing the player a great deal of room for creativity in designing and building a world of their choosing.

The game is played in two modes:

In **survival mode**, players search their environs for resources necessary to build (such as stone and wood) and to eat (such as cows and chickens). Players can build creatively, but they also must build for safety as this version includes zombies which attack at night.

In **creative mode**, players have use of all building materials and tools without having to find them. In creative mode a player is simply free to build whatever types of structures they might choose.

It is possible to play Minecraft as a **single player** or to join a **multi-player game**. Sometimes, groups of people come together to build elaborate structures, such as the Eiffel Tower or the Great Wall of China. Games can be saved for future play which makes this possible. Players can access the game on a number of platforms and devices including Apple iPad and iPod products, PCs, and Xbox.

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Minecraft in the Classroom

Here are a few suggestions for using Minecraft in the classroom. As it's an open-ended building game, the possibilities are endless:

- Have students build various structures or ritual objects. In each case, students can work in the classroom or bring in devices such as iPads or laptops to take classmates on virtual tours, or take screenshots to be printed out and hung around the classroom.
 - Hold a virtual sukkah building contest. Give points for both creativity and knowledge of the laws of sukkah construction.
 - Hold a *hanukkiyah* challenge. As things are built on a grand scale in Minecraft, challenge them to craft a *hanukkiyah* that they might light outside their synagogue or in the center of their town.
 - Have students design synagogue buildings in various locations, i.e. the rain forest, the moon, on a desert island, at the North Pole. Explore the common elements of each building.
- Use in a lesson about building community or as the culmination of an immigration unit. Ask students to construct a Jewish community in their new home. What kinds of structures might they need? Where would they live, work, and worship?
- Use to study American Jewish History. Have students create replicas of synagogues, cemeteries, and Jewish community centers of the past and present. Use these models to talk about changes in American Jewish life and culture.
- Use as a visual aid while studying the construction of the *Mishkan*. Give students specifications and ask them to build a replica.
- Have students join games and try to recreate the Tower of Babel, first communicating freely and then trying to work together silently.
- Visit the Holy Temple without leaving your seat (or going back in time). There are a number of Holy Temple projects in the world of Minecraft. Here are a few:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0XuZTT2aVY>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4rtKNryv68>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Xjyiy6k0M>

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How do I get Minecraft?

If you allow students to bring in personal devices, such as iPads and iPods, some may already have the game downloaded. If you have access to PCs, students who have previously purchased the game can play on any computer with a login name and password. Please note: Students who have Minecraft: Pocket Edition for either Android or Apple devices will be able to work collaboratively; however, the Pocket Edition and PC/MAC Edition do not work together.

The game can be purchased here:

For Mac or PC, \$26.95

<https://minecraft.net/store>

App Store (for iPad and iPod), \$6.99:

<https://itunes.apple.com/en/app/minecraft-pocket-edition/id479516143?mt=8>

There is a free version, Minecraft Lite, also available on the App Store. It has limited features but may be adequate for small building projects.

Google Play \$6.99

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.mojang.minecraftpe>

Xbox, \$19.99

<http://marketplace.xbox.com/en-US/Product/Minecraft-Xbox-360-Edition/66acd000-77fe-1000-9115-d802584111f7?nosplash=1&DownloadType=Game>

Playstation, \$19.99

https://store.sonyentertainmentnetwork.com/#!/en-us/games/minecraft-playstation3-edition/cid=UP4433-NPUB31419_00-TRIALUPGRADE0001

Happy Crafting!

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