



Essential Jewish Questions IDEAS FOR HOW TO USE THE QUESTIONS POSTER

We Have More Questions

Hang two pieces of poster board next to the Essential Jewish Questions poster, one titled "Other Important Jewish Questions" the other "Our Jewish Questions." Record these as they come up. Once a month, answer questions or invite clergy or the education professional to do so.

Top Three to Five

Have students look at the poster and choose the top three to five questions in a number of categories:

Which questions have the most religious significance?

Which are the most culturally significant?

Which are the most difficult questions to answer?

Which are the easiest questions to answer?

Which five, if taken together, sum up the Jewish experience?

Questions throughout History

Split students into small groups. Assign each group a question. (You don't have to use all of the questions if your class is small or if you feel as though some questions might be more relevant than others). Give students 15-20 minutes to research the historical context of each of the questions. Ask questions such as:

- Where were the Jewish people living when this question was asked?
- What was their relationship with the majority community among whom they were living?
- What can we learn about their social status from this question?
- Can you think of an additional question they might have asked?
- In your opinion, would the question asked have been different if their social status had been different?

Invite groups to report to one another.

Table Talk

Provide copies of the questions and their sources, attached, to each child. Encourage them to bring them home and quiz family or adult friends as to the origin of each question.

Rhetorical Questions

Explain the idea of a rhetorical question; a question that isn't meant to be answered. Have students look at the poster and divide the questions into those that are meant to be answered and those that are not. Challenge students to think of, or make up, three rhetorical questions that they might ask or be asked in their lives, and three that pertain to Jewish belief or observance.



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Read A Book

The following books provide answers, at an age appropriate level, to some of Judaism's essential questions:

Freedman, E.B., Jan Greenberg, and Karen. A. Katz. What Does Being Jewish Mean? Read-Aloud Responses to Questions Jewish Children Ask About History, Culture, and Religion. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.

Answers to questions commonly asked about the daily practices and beliefs of Judaism. (Elementary)

Kolatch, Alfred J.; illustrated by Jarry Araten. The Jewish Child's First Book of Why. Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David, 1992.

Presents thirty-two questions and answers relating to Jewish holidays and customs. (Preschool, Primary)



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Essential Jewish Questions and Sources

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות (Passover Haggadah) Why is this night different from all other nights?

Am I my brother's keeper? (Genesis 4:9)

Is this the little girl I carried? Is this the little boy at play? (Sabbath Bride, *Fiddler on the Roof*)

Mai nafka mina? (Literally: What goes out from it?) What is the *halachic*, or practical, difference? (A common Talmudic expression or question)

Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? (Genesis 18:23)

Who is a Jew? (This question can't be traced to a specific source, but has been spoken about in the Jewish community for centuries. It is a question about authenticity and belonging, often related to lineage, conversion, and religious practice.)

From when may one recite Sh'ma in the evening? (Mishna Berachot 1:1)

I am Joseph; is my father still alive? (Genesis 45:3)

If you prick us, do we not bleed? (Shylock, *Merchant of Venice*, William Shakespeare)

מִי כָמוֹךָ בְּאֵלֵם יְהוָה Who is like you among the gods, Adonai? (Exodus 15:11)

If I am not for myself who will be for me? If I am only for myself what am I? If not now, when? (Pirke Avot, Ethics of the Fathers 1:14)

What's bothering Rashi? (Popularized by Torah scholar Nechama Leibowitz, this question informed the style of study of many modern students. It asks that we dig deeper, not only looking at Rashi's explanation of a word or phrase, but why he was drawn to further explication in the first place.)

What does Adonai require of you? (Micah 6:8)

איך אתה? Where are you? (Genesis 3:9)

Nu? (A singular Yiddish word understood colloquially in many different ways: So...? What?! Really? to name a few.)

Vos Macht a Yid? (Literally, "What does a Jew make?" the phrase, is much better understood to mean "How are things?" or "How are you doing?")

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? (Isaiah 58:5)