



# **Purim – What Were They Thinking!?!**

## **Topic**

Purim

## **Grade Level(s)**

3<sup>rd</sup> grade and up

## **Goals for the Lesson/Activity**

### **Students will**

- Review the story of Purim
- Gain deeper insights into the Purim story by connecting with the emotions of the characters
- Have fun creating a *Shpiel*

## **Materials needed**

- Paper and pens/pencils or computers/tablets
- A copy of Purim Personalities and Purim Scenes cut into strips
- Two bowls or hats in which you can place strips of paper

## **Technology needed**

- A computer or smart board to watch the Blendspace
- A smartphone or tablet to record the skits

## **Background for Teachers**

The term “*Shpiel*” means “play” in Yiddish. It is used, as it is in English, to mean both the activity of playing and the theatrical custom. Many communities put on a special *Purim Shpiel*, a folk-inspired tradition in which the story of Purim is retold, often in a fanciful or silly way. In some communities, making noise during the *Megillah* reading is discouraged so that participants can fulfill the *mitzvah* of hearing the story. In these cases, the *shpiel* provides opportunities for crowds to cheer the heroes, Mordecai and Esther, and boo the villain, Haman.

## **Prepare in Advance**

- Review the story of Purim using the digital resources on the JTeach.org [Purim Blendspace](#).
- Download the sheet "Purim Personalities and Purim Scenes" and cut it into strips. Place these in two different bowls or hats so that students will be able to pick both a scene and a character during the activity.



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### **Description of Activities**

1. Share the story of Purim using the digital resources on the JTeach.org Purim Blendspace.
2. Tell the students that it is a custom to create a *Purim Shpiel* for Purim. Let them know that irreverence and silliness are part of the tradition.
3. Explain that each group will portray one scene from the point of view of one of the personalities from *Megillat Esther*.
4. Divide the students into groups of 4 or 5.
5. Invite each group to pick a scene and a character from a bowl. Some may end up with a character that is not in their scene. This is OK. As students progress through the activity, encourage them to think broadly; if they cannot find obvious connections, they might write *midrash* (an explanatory story) of their own.
6. Students should consider the following elements of their chosen Purim personality and write down their ideas:
  - a. A list of the personality traits. Encourage students to use their imaginations to make up character traits for more obscure figures like Bigtan and Teresh or Zeresh.
  - b. The figure's role (hero, villain, supporting player, etc.) as well as his or her relationships in the story.
  - c. The figure's emotional arc throughout the story; some progress through such emotions as: fear, anger, happiness, despair, jealousy, and relief. You may choose to give students these words as prompts.
  - d. Once students have a broad outline of the character and his or her emotions, they can narrow these down to fit the assigned scene.
7. Students will create a short play. The character assigned should be the narrator. They will add depth to the story by adding emotions and thoughts to the play as well as inner dialogue, struggles, feelings of frustration or fear or joy...
  - a. For example: When Esther was asked to go to the king her narration may have been; “*My uncle asked me to go to my dear husband, but I do not want to be killed; and, on the other hand, my people need me... What should I do? I am scared!*”



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8. After the students have written their plays, they can give them to other groups to act or they can film themselves.
9. Have a viewing party. Enjoy popcorn, hamentaschen, and other snacks if possible. Remember to have food options for all students.

### **Differentiation Options**

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

#### ***For learners who need more assistance***

- Discuss each scene and character in more detail in class.
- Ask students to portray the emotions of a character, but not write a scene.
- Use only Esther, Mordecai, Ahasuerus, and Haman as personalities to pick out of the hat or bowl.

#### ***For learners who need extension opportunities***

- Re-imagine the Purim story as a TV show. Write a new *shpiel*, based on the feelings expressed by the personalities in the Purim story, but updated for today's audience.
- Have students read through the first four chapters of the *Megillah* (in Hebrew or English), and see how many times they can find Esther, Mordechai and Haman's names mentioned. Have them create a chart showing their findings. You can find the *Megillah* online at [Mechon-mamre.org](http://Mechon-mamre.org), [Opensiddur.org](http://Opensiddur.org), or [Sefaria.org](http://Sefaria.org).