

GEMILUT HASADIM: AN INTERGENERATIONAL SOCIAL ACTION PROJECT

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Grade Level:

8-11

Number of Sessions:

Three in supervised class discussion and exercises; two in independent study outside the classroom.

Description of Project:

This multi-disciplinary and experiential project enables students to study classical Jewish texts concerning the elderly and aging and to integrate that information into their daily lives through action.

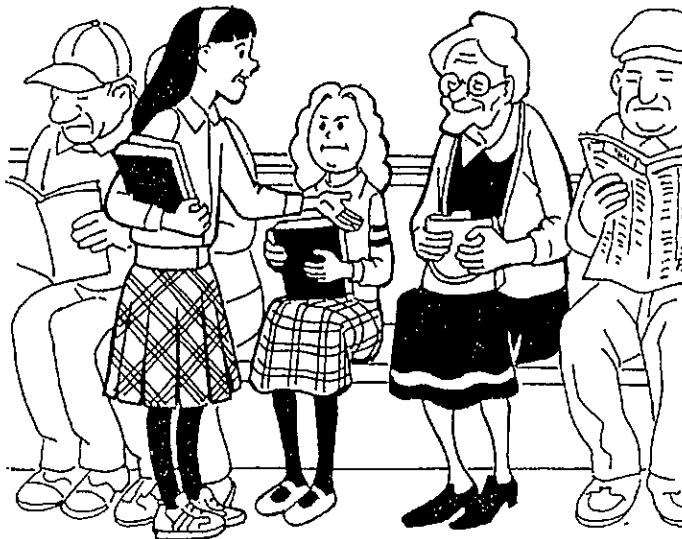
Teacher's Goals:

The student will gain awareness, understanding, appreciation, compassion and a feeling of giving toward the elderly within their own families and the community at large.

Instructional Objectives:

After learning what traditional Jewish texts say about honoring the elderly, students will be able to:

- Explain what Judaism says about responsibility toward the elderly.
- Explore, and attempt to eradicate, stereotypes about aging.



- Simulate, for a 24 hour period, at least one physical challenge which may affect the elderly.
- Plan a project to visit a senior citizen center to deliver food, serve lunch and interact with the members.
- Raise funds to purchase food for the project.
- Cook, pack and label kosher food and write personal notes to the recipients.

Selected Resources:

The author drew on her extensive personal and professional experiences while working at the Philadelphia Geriatric Center. She utilized excerpts from the Tanakh, Pirke Avot, and *Aging and Judaism* by Kerry M. and Lee Olitsky. She also created handouts for the various learning activities.

Sample Learning Activities:

This experience enabled Jewish teens to overcome discomfort and apathy toward the elderly, and to substitute compassion and understanding when interacting with them. This was accomplished through workshops and discussions, simulation exercises, fundraising for the purchase of food, cooking kosher meals with parents and siblings and, finally, visiting a senior center to assist in serving the food. The project began in the classroom, where students considered such questions as, "How many seniors at the age of 85 are living in retirement centers, nursing homes, or are undergoing long-term hospitalization?" Or, "How do the Jewish elderly compare to the general senior population in the United States?"

From the secular, students moved to the Jewish perspective on aging. The Ten Commandments were analyzed according to Rabbi Eliahu's interpretation and their relationship to the aging process. ("You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old. I am God; I am the Lord.") The students then committed to undertake a simulation of a physical change that may challenge older people. Choices included placing corn kernels in shoes to simulate arthritis; wearing a patch over one eye to simulate loss of sight; and placing cotton in one or both ears to simulate hearing loss. This enabled the students to empathize with older people through direct experience of their problems.

Teacher's Evaluation:

[Student evaluation forms were completed and returned after the cooking experience. Through discussion, it became evident that the lesson and cooking, which were required as part of class time, were most effective. Those students who chose to simulate and raise money were empowered even more.]

"It may be more effective for students to commit to the entire project by signing up and perhaps earning a certificate of completion. Since parental involvement provides a dynamic example, an option to enhance the project would be to include more parents and grandparents. The few parents who did volunteer their services as drivers, delivery people, sharers of recipes, etc., were a valuable asset." ■