

AN EYE ON JEWISH AMERICAN IDENTITY

-A 30 MINUTE LESSON-

Have you ever thought about how many different pieces make up who you are? It's more than just what you look like. It's about your beliefs, your background, and your experiences.

By examining the experiences of some Jewish Americans, students will learn to recognize the interplay between visible identity markers (such as skin color) and invisible aspects (like religious practices, cultural traditions, and personal values). They will analyze how these factors contribute to both an individual's self-understanding and how they are perceived by society. Furthermore, this analysis will highlight the pitfalls of a 'single story' narrative, demonstrating the necessity of acknowledging the rich and varied identities within the Jewish American community.

Essential Questions

- How are Jewish Americans an ethnic group?
- What visible and invisible components make up each person's unique identity?
- How do the multiple components that make up identity help us understand the diversity of Jewish Americans?

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Understand what makes Jewish Americans an ethnic group
- Identify the ways in which Jewish Americans are diverse
- Grasp the concept of Jewish peoplehood and how it unites Jewish Americans across diversity
- Recognize the various ways Jewish identity is expressed
- Learn about the geographic origins of Jewish communities
- Develop empathy and perspective-taking skills

Materials Needed

- [Pre-Instruction Student Self-Assessment](#) (you will be instructed to make a copy)
- [Identity Iceberg Activity](#)
- Videos:
 - [Diverse Jewish Voices: Jonah Tobin's Bar Mitzvah](#)
 - [Actor and Singer Ben Platt Reflecting on His Jewish Identity](#)
 - [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The Danger of a Single Story \(beginning at 13:37 - end\)](#)
- [Videos Analysis Document](#)
- [Post-Instruction Student Self-Assessment](#) (you will be instructed to make a copy)

Lesson Plan

1. PRE-LEARNING STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

Have students complete the [Pre-Instruction Student Self-Assessment](#).

2. IDENTITY ACTIVITY

1. Provide students with the [identity iceberg worksheet](#) and explain that only a small part of an iceberg is visible above the waterline, while most of the iceberg's mass lies below the waterline and is invisible. Tell students that like an iceberg, some parts of identity are visible to others, while other parts are invisible.
2. Explain that they are going to investigate various components of an individual's identity. For this activity, students may choose to focus on their own identity, an imaginary student identity, or a celebrity's identity. Emphasize that it is optional to use themselves as the subject in this activity, and that no one should disclose private information unless they would like to do so. Either in small groups or as a whole group, students can brainstorm categories that will be used on the identity iceberg worksheet, or you can share suggested categories below, that include visible, sometimes visible, and invisible aspects of identity.
 - **Suggested categories include:** gender, race, ethnic appearance, and visible religious signs: religious head coverings (kippah, yarmulke, hijab, turban); tzitzit (Jewish ritual fringes); cross, Star of David necklace, kirpan (Sikh religious knife), other), age (child, middle schooler, teen, young adult, middle age, elderly, etc.), body type, ability/disability, sexual orientation, clothing (casual, formal, brands, ethnic clothing), language(s) (accent, second language, regional dialect, formality of speech), religion/level of religious practice/spirituality/philosophy, family's national origin/immigrant/refugee/forced migration, nationality/citizenship, violence, trauma, or intergenerational trauma, activity, passion, or a job that is an important part of identity, other cultural or group or family aspect of identity
3. With the list of identity categories handy, ask students to add them onto a blank identity iceberg worksheet that indicating those that are:
 - usually visible to others above the water line, in the top third
 - sometimes visible, and sometimes invisible, close to the waterline
 - usually invisible to others, in the bottom third of the iceberg
4. Ask for student volunteers to share their identity icebergs with the class. Identify commonalities and differences across the student examples.
5. Extension questions for class or small group discussion:
 - Think about groups whose identities are sometimes visible and sometimes invisible.
 - What happens when members of these groups publicly express their identities?

3. VIDEO VOICES OF DIVERSE IDENTITIES ACTIVITIES

1. Have students watch the videos of [Jonah Tobin](#) and [Ben Platt](#) and use the [analysis document](#) to capture notes and respond to the questions.
2. After watching both videos, hold a class discussion, or have students share in small groups, about the observations and analysis of the two videos.
3. Have students watch the excerpt from [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The Danger of a Single Story](#) (beginning at 13:37 - end) and use the [analysis document](#) to capture notes and respond to the questions.

4. After watching the video, hold a class discussion, or have students share in small groups, about the observations and analysis they have of her message.

4. LEARNING ASSESSMENTS

- Informal Assessments:
 - a. Have students complete the [Post-Instruction Student Self-Assessment](#).
 - b. Observe students' participation in class discussions and their completion of activities.