QUEERING THE JEWISH HOLIDAYS

A RESOURCE GUIDE
This resource guide was created on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. It is also important for individuals—as settlers, immigrants, or as displaced peoples to think about our responsibilities to those first stewards—the Indigenous peoples—of this land including those who were brought here involuntarily as a result of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade. We commit to actively work in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, for justice, and towards changing and disrupting the ways in which we live upon this earth.
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Bringing queer theory in the classroom is an excellent way to challenge your students’ thinking and the societal norms that are taken for granted in terms of concepts such as race, gender identity, class status, and ability. Employing queer theory can be a liberatory practice and have an extremely positive influence on schools, classrooms, and students. Analyzing and challenging social structures and hierarchies works to deconstruct harmful power dynamics that impact ourselves and our students in a variety of ways. Queer and liberatory pedagogies empowers educators to challenge previously taboo topics and creates space for students to challenge oppressive power structures and hierarchies.

This guide was created with support from the Morris Winchevsky Centre in Toronto/Tkaronto and can be used by anyone interested in queering their holiday celebrations. It contains a variety of sources including planning guides, articles, and blog posts. Each entry’s title is a hyperlink to the original source. You are encouraged to use these resources in whatever way works best for you and your group. This is a living document. It may change over time to include new resources and holidays. If you have any ideas for it, please let us know!
SHABBAT
QUEERING SHABBAT
VANESSA FRIEDMAN • ARTICLE • 2018

This series on Queering the Jewish Holidays looks at Shabbat in terms of the ways LGBTQ+ individuals and communities can make it their own. The author highlights Torah and other personally significant learning as a major focus of Shabbat. Educators can use this resource to encourage students to take the time to learn about queer Jewish history and life, current events, and social justice initiatives. Queering Shabbat in this way promotes lifelong learning, which in itself is a tenet of Jewish culture. Tzedakah is also a focus in this article, which the author takes care to note does not directly translate to ‘charity’, but is more closely related to social justice. Using Shabbat as a medium for engaging in social justice initiatives and organizations through learning and action is another way to introduce LGBTQ2S+ issues in a Jewish classroom.

REST IS A JUSTICE ISSUE
RABBI DANYA RUTTENBERG • ARTICLE • 2022

Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg explains that Shabbat is a fluid concept. She argues that even in the traditional texts, there is not a singular set rule of what Shabbat should look like, leaving it open to much interpretation. Rabbi Ruttenberg comes to the conclusion that to guard the Sabbath, as it is specifically written in Deuteronomy, means to hold space for the preciousness of rest. It also means that we must guard the right to rest and freedom for others to create a just society. Rabbi Ruttenberg argues that in the exploitative culture we live in, a Shabbat practice of rest is crucial to our collective survival and wellbeing. Classroom discussions of privilege and power can be bolstered with these historical backgrounds in Jewish texts to the sanctity of rest.

QUEER SHABBAT SUPPLEMENT
ELI GALE AND REN WEINSTOCK • GUIDE • 2020

Gale and Weinstock provide a comprehensive guide to creating a queer Shabbat, including finding queer meanings in the rituals, prayers, and food. This guide includes specific ideas to create queered, intentional spaces to welcome Shabbat, such as including plants to acknowledge queerness as natural. The authors provide blessings that are gendered for masculine and feminine entities, but the elimination or changing of these blessings does not change the meaning of the rest of the guide. They can be changed or removed based on individual belief and comfort. Gale and Weinstock's suggestion to use the challah strands as a symbol of interweaving queerness, Jewishness, and a third strand that is uniquely important to the individual would make an for a impactful lesson on identity and finding oneself within different communities. This supplement can act as a guide for teaching queer Shabbat rituals and sparking conversation about identity, community, and tradition.
The Nap Ministry is a website dedicated to the power of naps and resting as a form of resistance. Rest is a vital tool of self care, and Shabbat is a day in which we are given the time to do so. Taking the time to rest and considering what it means to rest is a radical practice. Shabbat is a time to put this into practice. The Nap Ministry provides workshops, lectures, blog posts, and coaching for those learning how to reclaim rest. Viewing Shabbat as a queered practice of rest can provide those who partake in it with a deeper personal connection to the weekly holiday that allows any Jewish person, no matter if or how they practice Judaism, a chance to reflect and refresh. The Nap Ministry argues that resting is more than naps; it is about liberation and healing in a way that calls upon people to set aside time for oneself. Encouraging students to think about the power of rest gives more meaning to the ways we engage with Shabbat each week. The world is heavy and tiring, and everyone, especially children, whose spiritual needs are often overlooked, needs a space where they can take time to rest.

Radical Rest Healing Justice Manifesto
Healing Justice for Social Change • Website • N.D.

As mentioned in the above resources, shabbat is meant to be a day of rest, however rest is undervalued and ignored in our current neoliberal capitalistic society. The Radical Rest Manifesto argues in favour of resting as a liberatory practice as oppressive structures in society such as white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism are working to separate us from connecting to our needs, bodies, and the earth. Rest is a vital part of self-care and healing. A queer and social justice focused Jewish classroom would greatly benefit from discussing and engaging in rest as a method of healing, recharging, and mindfulness. Shabbat gives us this opportunity to rest each week, and despite different approaches, it is an important part of a queered classroom. A queered classroom is mindful of the different experiences students have and actively welcomes and celebrates this diversity through concrete action, which in this case can look like exploring the meaning of Shabbat in the context of reclaiming one’s right to their body and mind. This manifesto notes the different ways rest has been taken away from marginalized peoples and communities. Therefore, this resource argues in favour of reclaiming rest for what it is; an intrinsic human right and method of connecting to each other and the earth.
ROSH HASHANAH, YOM KIPPUR, & SUKKOT
QUEERING THE JEWISH HOLIDAYS

QUEERING ROSH HASHANAH AND YOM KIPPUR
VANESSA FRIEDMAN • ARTICLE • 2018

In this installment of her series on Queering the Jewish Holidays, Vanessa Friedman provides examples of the ways she approaches queering the High Holidays. Friedman suggests creating intentional new years resolutions. This resource can be used in the classroom as a way to set intentions for the new year that involve doable, social justice-oriented actions. Friedman's other suggestions in this article in the classroom makes for a queered Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur by way of making the holiday personally significant. She states that the act of gathering as a queer community to observe and inhabit your body can be a sacred practice because of the way queer identities often involve perceptions of the body, both one’s own perception and the way others view it. When students have the space to feel these emotions in a Jewish setting, it can provide a stronger connection to the many facets of their identities and how they are interconnected.

WELCOMING QUEER ANCESTORS TO THE SUKKAH
ALEX CARTER • BLESSING • N.D.

Sukkot is a time for welcoming family, friends, and guests to celebrate the harvest season. In educational settings, students are often called to welcome biblical figures to be honoured guests in our Sukkahs, but in this ritual, Alex Carter gives a new meaning to honouring ancestors and historical figures. This ritual welcomes queer figures, such as biblical figures like Ruth and Naomi and more recent figures like Harvey Milk, from Jewish histories to celebrate Sukkot. Queerness and Jewishness are beautiful identities that are greatly meaningful both on their own and together. Creating space for queer Jews during the holidays is empowering and revolutionary through honouring those who are historically marginalized within their own communities as an act of love and resistance. Students can use this ritual as a framework for creating their own means of welcoming honoured guests into their celebrations, whatever that may look like.

FOR A WORLD OF RADICAL BELONGING - DEVON SPIER
DEVON SPIER • POEM • N.D.

Like the previous entry of welcoming queer ancestors into the Sukkah, this blessing argues that community means everyone is welcome because it is vital in creating a world where every person is valued and celebrated. Loneliness is a powerful force, and for queer people it is both more common and very dangerous. Having a place where a person feels they belong for who they are is a powerful force. Queering Sukkot involves looking at the broader community and celebrating each person for who they are. This blessing calls for ensuring a radical belonging among the communities of which we are a part of. Students can use this as a tool for thinking about the effects of oppression and marginalization, and how they can build the world they want to live in.
HINENU: HERE WE ARE
DORI MIDNIGHT • ESSAY • 2020

This blog post discusses an experience the author had organizing a radical, queer High Holiday celebration. Midnight highlights the power of presentness and belonging in the celebration. Creating a space for oneself and acknowledging your presence within it is a radical notion; society was not created as a place for queer and Jewish people to claim space. Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the Jewish calendar, and with it is the chance to refresh ourselves and reimagine our identities and how we want to live within them. Midnight intended to create a space in which she could put the call of “Hineni” and “Hinenu”, meaning “here I am” and “here we are” into practice. Using these affirmations as a way of celebrating each person and all of their complex identities, needs, and traumas and assert everyone’s right to be there. Educators hold immense power in how we act as guides for our students’ knowledge and understanding of the world around them, and we can use this power to teach them radical inclusion, acceptance, and celebration of themselves and others.

WHY THE JEWISH HIGH HOLIDAYS OFFER A PERFECT QUEER, RELIGIOUS INTERSECTION
ZIMRA CHICKERING • ARTICLE • 2021

In this article, Zimra Chickering argues that Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot are holidays in which queer identity can be explored through a Jewish lens. Chickering explains that Rosh Hashanah is about community togetherness and belonging, as well as resilience, inclusion, and celebration. She argues that the new year is the perfect time to put the Jewish adage of repairing the world into practice. She goes on to argue that Yom Kippur is a chance to return to yourself, your identity, and your values; a blank slate for the new year. Fasting is a practice some participate in, but for many it is not a significant part of the holiday. No matter what a person does to commemorate the holiday, it is a chance to acknowledge and connect to their bodies. Chickering also discusses Sukkot in her article, explaining that the idea of a time set for radical inclusivity and belonging can act as a centrally queer theme in itself, highlighting the vulnerability both queer and Jewish communities face and using this time to create joyful, safe places to be one’s whole self. Educators can use this article to consider how they want to discuss the high holidays with their students, and how they can use it to bring in themes of queer joy, resilience, and trauma.
PASSOVER
DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER NIGHTS: A QUEER PASSOVER HAGGADAH
BRONFMAN CENTER • HAGGADAH • 2013

This Haggadah ties queerness and Jewishness together by highlighting the ways they intersect, especially in the context of Passover. To ‘queer’ something is to question the norms that underpin common concepts of what is accepted without question in society. By highlighting different rituals like lighting the candles for Jewish traditions and connecting them to contemporary aspects such as lighting candles at AIDS vigils, we can make more connections to our own lives as well as transgress the norms of Passover by connecting it to LGBTQ2S+ history and culture. This Haggadah encourages seder participants to question what we know and don’t know about the story of the Exodus. As educators, we want our students to be curious, to ask questions, and to try to connect with the material in ways that are meaningful to them. This Haggadah can be used to give students a new lens through which to think about Passover by providing chances to re-centre our seders and consider how we can connect different identities through Jewish ritual.

THE QUEER FREEDOM OF PASSOVER
RABBI NIKKI DEBLOSI • ARTICLE • 2021

Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi argues that the seder itself is a queer practice because of the way it does not follow traditional cultural norms, such as acting more playful at the table, moving our bodies in certain ways, and tasting different foods for symbolic reasons. The traditional Haggadah states quite clearly that this night is not like other nights, and spends the rest of the night explaining exactly why that is. This article gives strong examples of queerness as a concept within traditional ways of having a seder. For students, this queer view of Passover that does not necessarily require any part of the traditions to change gives a way of understanding the uniqueness of Passover for any Jewish person who celebrates. This article can be used as a think piece for older students, or used as a resource for educators for younger students. Rabbi DeBlosi’s perspective of Passover as a queer holiday goes beyond the table customs and notes the ways we are meant to engage in radical empathy for those who are oppressed, which in an educational context would be a good resource for educators to teach about oppression and marginalization. Queering Passover opens the door to social justice education for Jewish youth in a meaningful way by giving it a deeper and more relevant meaning.

THE PASSOVER SEDER’S FOUR CHILDREN AND LGBTQ INCLUSION
RABBI DARA LITHWICK • ARTICLE • N.D.

The four children mentioned within the seder script are traditionally categorized as the wise one, the contrary one, the simple one, and the one who does not know how to ask. This article suggests looking at the children as a way of bringing LGBTQ2S+ inclusion to the seder table, connecting them to LGBTQ2S+ and Jewish history. There is an addition of a fifth child in this scenario, the one who is not there because they do not feel that they belong. Asking our students to ask and answer questions that each of these children might wonder about different concepts brings deeper meaning and awareness to these issues. Additionally, highlighting these hypothetical children’s role in the seder provides students a chance to think about their own roles in Jewish rituals as children are often left out of them. The fifth child honours those who feel marginalized and left out by their families or communities, and makes space for queer people to honour their emotions and identities during a holiday of togetherness.
This Haggadah contains beautiful poetry, notes, and calls to action to seder participants in an effort to create a Passover ritual filled with individual and collective meaning. The authors outline the meanings behind newer additions to the seder plate, which in the classroom can be used to supplement our traditional understanding of the seder plate and how we can make it meaningful to our own diverse lives. Throughout the different steps of the Haggadah, participants -- and to a further extent, students -- are given a chance to examine the rituals from a social justice lens and make connections between the seder and the world around them. In the classroom, this Haggadah gives students an opportunity to view Passover as a holiday that connects to their own lives and the outside world through the different ways it connects the traditions to the outside world. The queering of Passover comes from challenging the norms, such as highlighting the collective role of the people rather than just Moses’ leadership in their freedom. Therefore, showing students the power of collective leadership where members of a community are equally valued and appreciated. Expanding our students’ knowledge of what the seder traditionally means and what we can make it mean gives them a greater opportunity to connect with the holiday for themselves and understand it in a larger world context. Students are given the chance to engage with the holiday in a way that teaches that the Jewish community is what they make of it; students can think about what is important to them in the contexts of their own lives and make it personally important.

In this article in her series of queering the Jewish holidays, Vanessa Friedman shares her suggestions for queering the seder as a list of suggestions. Friedman begins by noting that as a Jewish lesbian woman, any way she celebrates Passover would be queer by nature of her queer identity and lived experience. Queer theorists would disagree on the basis that as a queer white Ashkenazi woman, her existence at this time in world history is not as disruptive of societal norms as it once was, and her creation or participation in a seder may not in itself do the work of questioning or transgressing societal norms and ideals of white supremacy, ableism, and cis heterosexism. Her approach of queering the seder, however, goes beyond her presence at the table. She suggests editing the Haggadah to match your own concepts of Jewishness and queerness, such as choosing a meaningful theme, such as the Love & Justice Haggadah focuses on social justice. Educators can use Friedman’s suggestion to revisit the traditions to teach the story of Passover as it has been observed throughout history, as well as consider how they want their students to learn these traditions.