

TEACHING GUIDE

The Time of Our Lives

A Teen Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle

by Deborah Bodin Cohen



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Introduction

Introduction to the Textbook

The Time of Our Lives guides your students along a path through the major Jewish life cycle events: birth, bar and bat mitzvah, marriage, and death and mourning. While exploring customs and practices—both traditional and modern—that accompany life’s climactic moments, *The Time of Our Lives* invites your students to explore their own values, identity, life goals, and unique roles in the Jewish community.

With *The Time of Our Lives*, you can provide your students with the knowledge and understanding to help build Judaism into the important moments of their lives. At the same time, the textbook will enrich your students’ Jewish identities and strengthen their connection to the Jewish community.

Structure of the Textbook

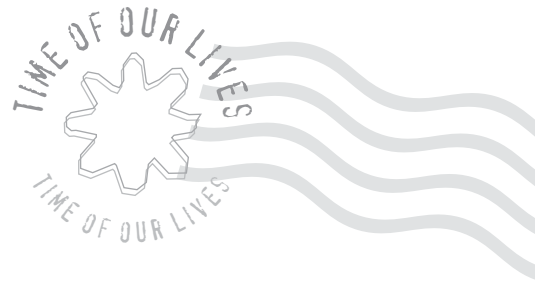
The Time of Our Lives is divided into four main chapters: birth, bar and bat mitzvah, marriage, and death and mourning. The textbook begins with an introductory chapter that presents the book’s subject matter and theme, and concludes with a short chapter that revisits each main topic. In addition, a “Moving Along” section, which appears between each main chapter, highlights other life cycle events—including Consecration, confirmation, and divorce—to help stu-

dents see the Jewish life cycle as a continuous whole.

Each main chapter begins with an introduction that personalizes the topic for students and places it in a Jewish context. A *midrash*—a rabbinic story—then illustrates the chapter’s message. The body of the chapter includes an outline of the life cycle event’s history and development, as well as an explanation of its ceremonies and customs.

The main chapters also include the following features:

- **Back to the Sources** Classic Jewish sources strengthen the link between the chapter’s topic and Jewish texts.
- **Step by Step** Clearly sequenced summaries—how-to manuals—of each life cycle event.
- **What Do You Think?** Thought-provoking questions exercise students’ critical-thinking skills.
- **Spark of a New Tradition** A modern custom or practice helps students visualize how they can contribute to new Jewish life cycle events, and to modern Jewish life.
- **Be a Give-Your-Best Guest** To-do checklists help students become gracious guests at the life cycle events of friends and family.



- **Fast Forward** Exercises that invite students to envision their own Jewish life cycle events.
- **Teen Profiles** Stories and interviews of real-life Jewish teenagers make the Jewish life cycle more accessible and relevant to your students.
- **From Generation to Generation** Worksheets for students to complete with their parents or grandparents encourage family learning while sharing memories of past life cycle events and dreams for those to come.
- **Core Concept** A brief statement summarizing the chapter's central, governing idea.
- **Learning Objectives** Specific goals for each chapter that answer the question, "What concepts and ideas should my students understand when we complete the chapter?"
- **Chapter Overview** A summary of the chapter's contents.
- **Vocabulary** Key terms and definitions from each chapter to use as oral review, or on flash cards.
- **Getting Started** A kick-off thought or activity based on core concepts from the chapter, to use as a set induction or to begin teaching the chapter materials.

Structure of the Teaching Guide

This Teaching Guide will provide you with teaching suggestions and techniques that correspond to the features in the textbook. Each section of the Teaching Guide indicates the corresponding page number in the student text.

NOTE: There is likely to be more material in this Teaching Guide than you need. Use the material that is helpful to you and your class. Feel free to adapt it to fit your teaching style, your students' interests, and the time constraints and educational goals of your school.

Each chapter in this Teaching Guide begins with the following features:

In addition, each chapter in this Teaching Guide contains many of the following features:

- **Expand the Conversation** Questions to encourage students to further explore ideas and information presented in the textbook.

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- **Bring It to Life** Supplemental activities to reinforce and extend textbook learning.

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- **Using the Photograph** Ideas and techniques for using the textbook's photographs to stimulate conversation and reflection on the chapter's content.

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- **Q&A** Answers you might expect to receive to critical-thinking questions posed in the textbook.

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NOTE: Many of the questions posed in the textbook and Teaching Guide are open-ended and personal in nature, and lend themselves to a multitude of appropriate responses. Use these questions—such as those posed in “Fast Forward” and “From Generation to Generation”—to encourage open discussion and the sharing of personal opinions, ideas, and experiences.

- **Hands On** Instructions for simple art projects to reinforce student learning.

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- **Sound Advice** Suggestions on how to approach emotionally charged or difficult topics.

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Before You Begin...

Here are some thoughts to keep in mind as you begin to teach using *The Time of Our Lives*:

- *Foster a sense of security and fellowship.* Make it clear that your classroom is a safe space where students will be heard with respect and be guided—not judged. When a student prefers not to share, please respect his or her privacy.
- *Be a role model.* Talk about life cycle moments of your own. Bring in pictures from your bat or bar mitzvah or the video from your cousin's baby naming. Share how it felt to lose your grandmother.
- *Be aware.* Your students will come to class with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, as well as a range of emotions and maturity levels. Some of your students may have experienced the death of a loved one or the divorce of their parents. Encourage all of your students to see Judaism as a supportive guide along life's path, including its difficulties.
- *Include your students' parents along the way.* Many of the discussions and exercises in *The Time of Our Lives* lend themselves to parent participation and family learning. The “From Generation to Generation” family worksheets, which appear near the end of each main chapter, provide ideal opportunities to “close the circuit” between class and home. You may wish to send a letter to parents at the beginning of the year, inviting them to complete these sheets with their children. A Sample Letter to Parents may be found on page 7.

Sample Letter to Parents

Dear Parent:

This year, our class will be taking a journey through the Jewish life cycle. Using our new textbook, *The Time of Our Lives: A Teen Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle*, we will explore how Judaism marks the most important Jewish milestones in our lives: birth, bar and bat mitzvah, marriage, and death and mourning.

Periodically, we will send *The Time of Our Lives* home with your child with instructions to complete one of its family exercises, “From Generation to Generation.” These exercises include an interview to learn about your child’s English and Hebrew names, an exercise to plan or reflect on your child’s bar or bat mitzvah, and a worksheet to create an “ethical will” that will help you to discuss values you’d like to pass on to your children—and values they might like to pass on to theirs.

We hope that these family exercises bring back sweet memories, provide an opportunity for meaningful dialogue, and enrich your child’s understanding of our Jewish tradition.

Thank you.

L’Shalom,