

Introduction

Introduction to the Textbook

Count Me In: Jewish Wisdom in Action invites students to explore Jewish values. It does so by focusing on the everyday relationships and decisions that are integral to their lives; for example, when to help a friend and when to care for themselves, what to do when they feel jealous of a sibling or classmate, and how to make sound judgments in difficult situations. It teaches students to use the wisdom of Jewish sacred texts—Torah, Prophets, Writings, and Talmud—as the lens through which to view these concerns.

Through a rich array of stories, source material, critical-thinking activities, and opportunities for students to apply what they have learned, the textbook not only invites students to explore the ethical underpinnings of Judaism, but also to explore the relationship between knowledge and action. Students learn that the purpose of Jewish study—*talmud Torah*—is to guide our behavior so that each of us can contribute to the fulfillment of our people’s Covenant with God. In the process, students are encouraged to reflect on their personal values, their goals, and their relationships with others.

Structure of the Textbook

The first chapter—“Wisdom and Action”—introduces the premise that the purpose of Jewish study is to provide guidance for our actions. Each chapter of *Count Me In* that follows presents a specific value, among them free will, community, and peace. Every chapter opens with a quote from *Pirkei Avot* and closes with a quote from Psalm 119. To enrich the authenticity of the learning experience, Hebrew (along with English translation) appears in several of the chapter features. You may have the students read the Hebrew or simply acknowledge that the text was originally written in Hebrew.

Throughout each chapter there are a variety of sidebars with interesting enrichments and opportunities for student interaction and reflection. For example, in the chapter “The Value of Free Will,” students are given the opportunity to reflect on what life might be like if humans didn’t have free will and to discuss what helps

them make good choices (treat others with respect) when they are tempted to make poor ones (gossip). In addition, each chapter that explores a specific value includes the following special features:

- * **Opening Story** Each chapter's value is introduced through a story. These stories come from a variety of sources, including biblical and Talmudic texts, Jewish folklore, and modern literature.
- * **Bible Bio** A biblical character is portrayed in light of the chapter value. For example, the chapter "The Value of Argument" presents the story of Abraham arguing with God about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- * **The Extraordinary Acts of Ordinary People** Here the spotlight is on modern Jews who exemplify the tradition of living Jewish values. Examples are philanthropist Jacob Henry Schiff, political and social activist Bella Abzug, and workers' rights organizer Clara Lemlich.
- * **Ancient Stories for Modern Times** Drawn from a variety of traditional Jewish sources, these stories are followed by questions that help students apply the values they teach to their own lives.
- * **Learn It & Live It** These closing activities help students reflect on and integrate what they have learned and help them take actions based on their new knowledge.



Structure of the Teaching Guide

This teaching guide is designed to help you use *Count Me In* easily and effectively. It includes a variety of activities that engage a full range of learning modalities: probing questions that stimulate critical thinking and class discussion, step-by-step directions for art projects, collaborative learning environments, and creative activities for family participation. Where appropriate, the guide also provides answers to questions in the textbook.

Most importantly, the suggestions in the guide can be easily adapted to your personal teaching style, and to the strengths and interests of your students. To help you succeed, before selecting an activity, consider the many factors that come into play in your class, such as time constraints and students' abilities and maturity level.

Each chapter in the teaching guide beyond the introductory chapter complements a chapter in the textbook and includes the following elements:

- * **Core Concept** A brief summary of the chapter's central, governing idea
- * **Learning Objectives** Goals for students to achieve by the end of the chapter
- * **Chapter Overview** A brief statement about the chapter content
- * **Key Vocabulary** Definitions of key words that appear in the chapter



Getting Started: Unpacking the Text A set induction that introduces the chapter through activities that are based on the opening quote from *Pirkei Avot* and the opening story. The set induction is followed by suggested



teaching techniques for the chapter, including small group and class discussions, artwork, creative writing, and role playing.



Artist's Corner A theme-related art activity. In most cases, the only art supplies you will need are those commonly found in schools. Feel free to customize the materials to suit your class. These activities can be used to create classroom or school displays.



Teaching Enrichment An opportunity for students to engage in a thought-provoking conversation that challenges a concept or value that is presented in the chapter.



Photo Op A discussion that uses a photograph or artwork in the textbook as a jumping-off point.



Family in Action Suggestions for how students and their families can plan actions they can take based on the Jewish value explored in the chapter.

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 the “Learn It & Live It” and “Teaching Enrichment” activities—to encourage open discussion and the sharing of personal opinions, ideas, and experiences.

Finally, remember that it is the relationship your students have with you and their classmates that will largely determine the success of the learning process. Create a positive environment by developing a comfort level with the book's contents, welcoming the ideas of all your students, and creating an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance. Most importantly, model the Jewish values you are teaching.

Wishing you and your students every success.

Introducing *Count Me In* to Students

Introduce your class to *Count Me In* by building on students' existing knowledge. Begin by distributing the book and asking students what the title, subtitle, and cover images suggest the book will be about. (*Jewish values, Israel, peace, Torah*) Ask: What does the expression “count me in” mean? (*I want to participate.*) What might the book be about participating in? (*Jewish life, Jewish values, Jewish activities*)

Invite students to read the table of contents. Brainstorm a definition of “value.” (*priority, something worthwhile, a good way to behave*) Ask: What makes a value a *Jewish* value? (*It's taught in the Torah. Jewish people think it's important. Rabbis teach it.*)

Give the class a few minutes to skim *Count Me In* and to offer additional thoughts on what the book is about. Then have them turn to page 5 (immediately following the table of contents). Invite several volunteers to each read a paragraph. Ask: Do you think that studying the wisdom of sages from centuries ago can help us live better lives today? (*Yes: because their wisdom has been tested by time. No: because we live in a very different world.*) Tell students that as they read *Count Me In*, they will have many opportunities to consider when and how they might benefit from the lessons our sages taught.