INCLUDED IN THIS MODULE:

- Three fully scripted, timed lesson plans
- Song lyrics
- Student journal answer keys
- Reproducible word cards

INTRODUCTION

Sh’ma is central to Jewish religious practice and belief. It is recited in the evening and morning services, and as a personal prayer before bed and sometimes even when we are scared. In the first lesson students learn the who, what, when, where, and how of the שְׁמֵעַ, and the traditional melody. The second lesson focuses on the blessings before and after the שְׁמֵעַ and their connection to love, as well as כּוֹהֵן שְׁמֵעַ, the line directly after the שְׁמֵעַ. In the third lesson, students will use games, art, discussion, and music to explore the meaning of אחת, “God is One.”

MUSICAL SELECTIONS

“Sh’má” by Salomon Sulzer, recorded by Cantor Lisa Levine
“Sh’má” by SviKA Pick, recorded by Cantor Lisa Levine
“Blessed Is the Name” by Eliana Light
“One” by Billy Jonas

DIGITAL ACTIVITIES:

The following online activities expand on those found in the journal:

- Prayer read aloud and student voice recording
- Video about how to sing the שְׁמֵעַ
- Video showing the שְׁמֵעַ in the Torah scroll
- Video about how to concentrate on the שְׁמֵעַ
- Downloadable songs
- Music Melody Game
- Trivia Game
ENDURING UNDERSTANDING:
The שְׁמַע defines us as the Jewish people.

LESSON OBJECTIVES:
Students will be able to:
1. Read the שְׁמַע in Hebrew.
2. Sing the שְׁמַע with the traditional tune.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:
Why is the שְׁמַע so important to the Jewish people?
How do we say the שְׁמַע?

MATERIALS:
• Dry-erase markers or chalk
• Poster board or large Post-it notes
• Flip chart or large sheet of paper (optional)

LESSON ACTIVITIES:

1. Choose a Motto  5 minutes
Write on the board or a flip chart, “Turn to page 2 in your journal, and complete ‘Choose a Motto.’” Have students complete the activity on their own or with a partner when they arrive. You will review it together later in the lesson.

2. The Main Idea  5 minutes
Ask students:

What do you think is the main idea of Judaism? Think about it for a minute, then discuss it with the person next to you.
Give students a minute to discuss, then ask for their answers. (going to synagogue; helping others; praying; believing in God) Say:

Judaism is big! It is a religion, with prayers and rituals. It is a people with a long history. It is a culture with its own languages, foods, music, and expressions. It is values, like welcoming guests and feeding the hungry. It would be hard to summarize all of that in one line. But there is a prayer that has become that line, Judaism’s main idea: the שְׁמַע.

Write שְׁמַע in Hebrew in the middle of the board, on a flip chart, or on a large sheet of paper so there is space around it. Ask:

What do you think of when I say שְׁמַע? Come up and write your reaction here. (covering my eyes; one line; synagogue; bedtime; first prayer I ever learned; important prayer)

Discuss similarities and differences among students’ answers. What is surprising? What do they have questions about? What themes, if any, come up? After discussing for a few minutes, say:

Today we are going to focus on the שְׁמַע. Why is it the motto or the main idea of Judaism?

Together review students’ answers to “Choose a Motto” on page 2. Then tell students they are now going to learn how to chant the שְׁמַע.

3. Singing the שְׁמַע 20 minutes ♫

Ask students to turn to page 1 in their journals for the words of the שְׁמַע.

Play Cantor Lisa Levine’s recording of the traditional שְׁמַע tune. Ask students to sing along if they know it. Then ask:

Have you heard this melody before? Where? I’m going to play it again. Close your eyes; this time don’t sing along. Build a mental picture: Whom do you imagine singing this prayer? On the bimah, or in a seat, or somewhere else? What is this person wearing? Listen a few times, then write or draw this person on page 4 in your journal.

Have students share—and show one another—whom they imagined singing this melody for the שְׁמַע. Then have students complete the activities on page 5 in their journals and review their answers together. Say:

The traditional tune is only about two hundred years old. It is based on a more complicated composition by Salomon Sulzer, who lived in Austria. He wrote it to be performed by a choir. Now Jews all over the world sing it, in the evening and morning services, and individuals too in private prayer.
4. Learning about the שָׁמַע
Continue:

We’re going to learn more about the שָׁמַע, and you are going to teach us!

Break students into four groups called “Who,” “What,” “When,” and “How.” Explain that each group will have ten minutes to think of a way to present their information to the others. They can write a skit, run a discussion, make a poster, write a poem, create a movement activity—anything! Tell them that at the end there will be a lightning-round quiz; they should make sure to deliver all the information in a fun, complete way. Present the following information to each appropriate group on a sheet of paper or an index card.

Who says the שָׁמַע?

Jews all over the world, throughout history. The שָׁמַע first appears in the book of Deuteronomy (6:4), the last of the five books of the Torah, as part of a speech by Moses to the people Israel. Midrash, stories by the rabbis interpreting the Torah, says that Jacob’s children said the שָׁמַע to him before he died. The second word, “Israel,” could be a reference to Jacob, whose other name was Israel, so the sons are saying, “Hear us, Israel (Father). . . .”

What are we saying?

שָׁמַע — hear, listen
ישראל — Israel, people of Israel
יְהוָה — Adonai
ארה — our God
אחד — One

When do we say the שָׁמַע?

We say the שָׁמַע in the evening Ma’ariv service and in the morning Shacharit service. It is also a custom to say the שָׁמַע before going to sleep at night. Some Jews say it when they are scared or when they are very ill, perhaps even dying.

How do we say the שָׁמַע?

Some congregations stand for the שָׁמַע; others sit. Some people cover their eyes to help them concentrate, either with the whole right hand, or with three fingers to look like the letter ש for one of the Hebrew names for God: שֵׁם.