“Lemony Snicket: The Man Behind the Misfortune” (Pages 6–7)

Lesson Plan by Amy Heller

After reading an interview with the mysterious author of “A Series of Unfortunate Events,” students will consider how Lemony Snicket demonstrates hakarat hatov, appreciation, even at times of adversity. In this lesson, students will engage in a drama activity to help them identify what they are thankful for in their daily lives. They will then explore how daily instances of hakarat hatov are expressed in traditional berakhot and tefillah.

Concepts and Objectives

► Students will explore the topic of thankfulness and hakarat hatov through dramatic self-exploration.

► Students will analyze Jewish prayers and explore the importance of thankfulness in their daily lives.

Key Quotes and Questions

“Like all people of integrity and imagination, I appreciate the members of my family who are still alive, the books that are still on my shelves, and the handful of honest and fascinating people who are still my friends.”

Why do you think that Lemony Snicket begins his comment with, “Like all people of integrity and imagination”? What connection do you think these two characteristics have to appreciation?

“To help us recognize that God is the ultimate source of life’s goodness, we say a blessing either before or after experiencing one of God’s gifts of goodness.”

What examples of “God’s gifts of goodness” are cited in the sidebar of the article? What other examples come to mind?

Can you think of an unfortunate event, time, or other instance for which Jews traditionally recite a blessing?

Why do you think we traditionally recite a berakhah on those occasions?

“So you see, although Klaus, Violet, and Sunny experience unpleasantness (who doesn’t?), they still have much to be thankful for.”

If you have read any of Lemony Snicket’s books, what do you think the Baudelaire children could be thankful for? (each other, the help of trustworthy adults, the wisdom of books, etc.)

Why does this passage from the sidebar include the parenthetical phrase, “who doesn’t”? What message does that phrase send to readers?

Motivation and Development

1. Conduct the following “Day in a Life” activity. Instruct the students to walk around the room, filling the entire space. (Encourage them not to walk in one big circle but in various pathways.) Explain that when you say “freeze” the students should stop as they are and listen to the time of day you call out (e.g., “Freeze, 10 a.m.”). They should take a position that represents what they would be doing at that exact time. (For example: walking to class, reading a book, sleeping, etc.) Do this several times calling out various times of day.

Do the activity again. Now when the students freeze in their positions, instruct them to think about what they might be thankful for at that specific time. (For example: at 7 a.m. they may be thankful for food.)
N O T E
As an option you can have half the class watch while the others participate and point out what they see.

What kinds of actions were represented in the frozen positions?

For what were you thankful?

Did you anticipate what you’d be thankful for at a particular time?

2. On a large piece of paper, list what the students are thankful for. Brainstorm with your students general categories that represent what they listed. (Categories may include: world affairs, relationships, material items, environmental concerns, personal well-being.)

Introduce the Jewish texts to your students. For each berakhah or tefillah, ask students to consider how it thanks God and for what occasion.

What kinds of prayers exist that are an expression of thanks?

3. Once the class has generated categories of what they are thankful for, write each category on a piece of construction paper. Lay the construction papers throughout the room (or hang them on the wall). Give each student three Post-it notes with a berakhah written on each one; use the sources in this lesson or the additional sources available online at www.babaganewz.com/teachers. Instruct the students to place each of the berakhot on the category to which they think it applies. (For example, the prayer for the State of Israel matches with world affairs; the blessing for opening eyes fits into the personal well-being category.)

How did you go about placing the berakhot in specific categories?

Do you agree with the way your classmates have categorized the berakhot? Would you move any? Why?

Does the class agree with the placement of the Post-its? Do some berakhot or tefillot overlap several categories?

J E W I S H  T E X T S

Birkhot Hashahar
Praised are You, God our God, Ruler of the universe, who strengthens the people Israel with courage.

Praised are You, God our God, Ruler of the universe, who gives the heart understanding to distinguish between day and night.

Al Hanissim
We thank you for the miraculous deliverance, for the heroism, and for the triumphs in battle of our ancestors in other days, and in our time.

Modeh Ani
I am grateful to You, living, enduring Ruler, for restoring my soul to me in compassion. You are faithful beyond measure.

How do these prayers fit into the categories we created? Can you think of other berakhah that fit into these categories?

How do these prayers relate to you and your daily life?

Think about the things you were thankful for in the “Day in a Life” activity. Are these represented in any prayer or blessing that you know? (Refer to the categories and the list.)

Why is it important to be thankful for these things?

Why do you think that there are so many specific berakhot for so many different situations? Why not have fewer general berakhot?

RELATED WEB SITES/ADDITIONAL SOURCES
A guide to blessings
www.torah.net/eng/kids/brachot/index.htm

V O C A B U L A R Y  F O R  Y O U R  S T U D E N T S

ברכה blessing
לבך to bless
🎁 nature
גוף body
לא壽 misfortune
נסfortune