



Stories from Our Closets

An Educational Program Guide by Diane Zimmerman



**THE JEWISH
EDUCATION PROJECT**

Developed in partnership with The Jewish Education Project

Overview

In this 75-minute intergenerational program, families with children ages 10–13 will explore the value of telling family stories inspired by a personally meaningful and treasured object found in their own closets — and brought to this program.

Grandparents will actively participate (in person or from a distance) by sharing their own important object, while their family records this storytelling experience.

Enduring Understanding

Telling and retelling family stories links us to the generations that came before us, to the generations to come, and to our collective Jewish narrative. According to [research](#) from Dr. Marshall Duke and Dr. Robyn Fivush, the more children know about their family's history, the stronger their sense of control over their lives and the higher their self-esteem.

Goals

- Understand that rich and meaningful family objects can provide prompts for sharing family stories, family history, and even world events.
- Experience that storytelling, for the listener and the teller, is a powerful tool for connection.
- Understand that knowing our family's story can help us to grow more confident and resilient.

Materials

O: Organization provides

F: Families bring

F	Charged devices to connect with extended family members (cell phone, iPad, laptop, etc.)
F	Devices to record the grandparent's storytelling (audio and/or visual)
O	Copies of text study on each table
O, F	Object from your closet to help tell a story — each family
F	Object from your closet help tell a story — each grandparent
O	Name tags for participants, pens/markers

Suggested Room Setup

- Large room with good cell reception and strong Wi-Fi, outlets for charging
- Clear directions to connect to Wi-Fi
- One table with 8–10 chairs (for two families)
- Microphone, if needed

Timing (75-minute program)

O: Organization's facilitator does

F: Families actively engage

O	Welcome, outline of agenda, text study	15 minutes
F	Sharing objects from our closets Activity 1: Family shares Activity 2: Grandparent shares, parent records	45 minutes
O	Wrap-up	15 minutes

Program

0:00–0:15 Welcome, outline of agenda, text study

Two families per table

Facilitator: Welcome families, ask them to introduce themselves to the other family at the table and to connect their devices to their loved ones who are at a distance.

Read aloud the following text from the Talmud, Eruvin 54b, 11–13 (condensed) to the participants. Consider having copies out on the tables.

The Talmud relates that Moses taught the Torah (all of its stories and laws) to the Children of Israel in the following manner: first to his brother Aaron, while all of the Children of Israel listened. Then Aaron restated the text to his sons; and everyone listened. Aaron's sons repeated what they had heard to the seventy elders, and everyone listened. Then the elders restated the story to all of the people once more.

Therefore, all of the Children of Israel heard the verse four times: once from Moses, once from Aaron, a third time from his sons, and a fourth time from the elders. (*Eruvin 54b, 11–13, edited*)

In table groups, discuss what this text teaches us about storytelling using the guided questions below. Remind families to encourage their loved ones on screen or phone to share their thoughts.

- Why was it important to hear the words of the Torah so many times? (*demonstrates the importance; to remember accurately*)
- Why is it important to tell the story or say the words aloud to someone else? (*helps you remember; lets you process the information in order to restate it*)
- Why do you think telling stories is important to the Jewish people? (*passes on traditions; teaches each generation about those that came before it; helps Judaism endure*)

Ask a few participants to share their answers to the last question with the entire group.

0:15–1:00 Sharing objects from our closets

Explain that today, like grandmother Ruth in the video [Family Stories from Your Closets](#) (see sample preparation email near end), participants will share stories about treasured objects from their own closets.

Model sharing these stories by telling a very short story about a treasured object you brought from your own closet.

Activity 1: Family table sharing (15 minutes)

Ask participants to do the following at each table of two families:

- A parent from Family 1 reveals their treasured object and tells its story (1–2 minutes). And just like the Israelites, everyone at the table listens.
- A child from Family 1, just like Aaron and the elders after hearing Moses share a verse from Torah, retells the story of the object (1–2 minutes). And just like the Israelites, everyone at the table listens.
- Repeat with Family 2. (*Note: Grandparents will share later.*)
- Encourage table members to ask questions about the objects and their stories after all objects have been shared (3–4 minutes).

Reflect with the group by asking the following questions. Invite volunteers to answer. (5–7 minutes)

- A parent: How did you feel when you told your story?