



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?

- A grandparent: What were you thinking or feeling as you listened to your family member tell or retell their story?
- A child: When you listened to your parent tell the story, what were you thinking?
- Another child: What was it like retelling the story you just heard? Could you remember everything? Did you add other details?
- Anyone: What was the value in retelling the story you just heard? (*to help remember; to give the story value; to add your own interpretation*)

Activity 2: Grandparent sharing (30 minutes)

Have families move their chairs and spread out around the room, finding quiet spots to talk and video record. Parents should make sure their recording devices are ready. (5 minutes)

A parent in each family listens and records the grandparent telling the story of the object, the child asking questions, and the grandparent's responses. This allows the child to focus on the storytelling and the parent to take care of logistics.

Ask participants to do the following: (10–12 minutes)

- The grandparent reveals the treasured object brought from their own closet.
- The grandchild asks the grandparent to share the story of the treasured object, then asks follow-up questions such as:
 - Tell me more about _____ [a part of the story].
 - What other objects did you consider bringing, and what made you choose this one over those?
 - What would you like me to remember to tell my future child, family member, or friend?
 - Grandparent, how did you feel when telling the story? Grandchild, how did you feel hearing the story from your grandparent?

Families return to their original seats, and children retell their grandparent's story to those at their table. (5–7 minutes)

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

- A few grandparents: How did it feel to tell your story?

- A few children: Share something interesting you learned by listening to your grandparent share the story of their treasured object.
- A parent: How did it feel listening to the storytelling while being a recorder?

Summarize by connecting the value of the Israelites hearing the Torah verse four times and, today, families hearing the story more than once and being the retellers of an important story.

1:00–1:15 Wrap-up

Ask the groups to discuss the following:

- Please complete these sentences with those at your table (allow each person a chance to speak):
 - Sharing stories today made me feel _____.
 - Listening to stories today made me feel _____.
- Why do you think that telling family stories is important?

Ask a few people to share answers with the entire group. Thank everyone for coming and let them know that they will receive an email with ways to share the recordings from today. May you continue to tell and retell the stories of your family!

Sample preparation email

Dear Families,

On [day and date] at [time], [name of synagogue/organization] will hold an important family event for __ grade families.

Stories from Our Closets is an intergenerational program designed for children, parents, grandparents, and other close family members. During this program, each family and the grandparents will have the opportunity to share a story about an object of importance for your family. Parents will record (video and/or audio) the grandparent sharing their story with the child.

To prepare for this program, please:

- Watch the 3:44 video [Family Stories from Your Closets](#). This can help inspire you as you decide what object to bring to the program and think about the story you want to share about the object.
- *Object 1 (parent, child):* Choose one object that is important to your family (or a photo of that object if it is fragile or valuable). Perhaps it tells a story about someone who is no longer alive, a bit of family history, or a moment you'll never forget.

You might choose an object like one of those in Ruth's closet (in the video *Family Stories from Your Closets*), such as a Kiddush cup or the family Hanukkah menorah, or perhaps an object that represents your family's favorite pastime, such as a baseball cap, beach bucket, or deck of cards.

We will ask a parent to share the object and its story during our program.

- *Object 2 (grandparent):* Ask the grandparent to watch the video and to choose their own treasured object to bring to the program. Grandparents will have their own dedicated time to share their object and tell its story during the program.
- Bring a device to record (visual and/or audio) the grandparent telling their story.

We invite family members who are not local to join the program remotely. We encourage you to bring whatever device works best for your family. We'll make sure there's good cell

reception and strong Wi-Fi! If you have questions about how best to make this work for your family, please contact [name of contact].

We also suggest reading the following [short article](#) about the benefits of telling family stories to children.

If you have any questions, please reach out to [contact name].

We look forward to sharing and listening to the stories from your closets!

[signed]

Sample follow-up email

Dear Families,

We are so pleased that you joined us on [date] for the Stories from Our Closets program. We hope you found the program as meaningful and enjoyable as we did.

If you'd like to save the recording you made at the program, the Jewish Grandparents Network has put together information about a [few sites](#) for archiving stories.

You might be interested in trying [BublUp](#) as a digital scrapbook to easily store family photos, videos, documents, and stories. For details, see [Your Forever Digital Keepsake Box](#).

Looking for suggestions to encourage the telling of family stories? Check out ideas on the [Jewish Grandparents Network Family Room Family Stories section](#).

We also encourage you to explore [the Family Room](#) to find more opportunities and activities your family can do together.

As always, do not hesitate to be in touch if you have questions.

[signed]



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