



Taking Photos — Telling Stories

An Educational Program Guide by Lisa Friedman



**THE JEWISH
EDUCATION PROJECT**

Developed in partnership with The Jewish Education Project

Overview

In this three-session educational course, learners use photographs to tell stories. The target age group is upper-elementary and middle-school students, grades 5–8. The first two sessions are for in-class use. They can be used independently or as preparation for the third session — an intergenerational family program.

Session 1: The Purpose of Photographs

Enduring Understanding

Photography is a tool that can help us tell stories and preserve memories. Photographs can also help us understand different perspectives, can recall events, and can convey messages.

Goals

- Identify various purposes for taking photographs.
- Learn the differences between objective and subjective observations.
- Understand a photographer’s intent and how that may differ from a viewer’s perspective.

Materials

- Variety of printed photographs, including Jewish images
- Whiteboard/dry erase markers or chart paper/markers
- Paper and pencils/pens
- Screen/projector (optional)

Timing (80 minutes)

Set induction	15 minutes
Types of photographs	15 minutes
Objective versus subjective	15 minutes
Objective versus subjective practice	20 minutes
Wrap-up	15 minutes

Learning Sequence

0:00–0:15 Set induction

Teacher/facilitator asks: When have you taken photos? Why do you take photos?

List responses on chart paper/whiteboard. Name different types of photographs one might see — for example, artistic photographs, news photographs, and photographs whose purpose is to persuade people, such as advertising or propaganda.

0:15–0:30 Types of photographs

Share different types of photographs, identifying each type. If possible, post them on a chart or whiteboard, and write the type of photo. Share additional photographs and ask students if they can identify each type.

0:30–0:45 Objective versus subjective

Explain that an objective observation is something that doesn't change from person to person. It is a statement of fact that usually does not leave room for debate or disagreement — for example, "There are X number of people in this photo," or "This photograph is in black-and-white," or "This photograph shows American flags." Objective observations may also refer to shapes, textures, or colors that can be seen in the photo.

A subjective observation, on the other hand, is an opinion, a feeling, or an interpretation based on what someone sees, such as "I think that person might be their father," or "It reminds me of the time I did X," or "I think they look tired," or "It looks like the Fourth of July." Different people looking at the same photograph can have different subjective observations.

0:45–1:05 Objective versus subjective practice

Project a photograph on a screen and/or give participants/groups a color copy. Give students a sheet of paper and ask them to write objective observations on one side and subjective observations on the other. Give students 5 minutes to do this on their own. Ask students to share their objective observations. Clarify the difference between objective and subjective as students share. Make sure all students have a turn if they so choose. Then ask students to make subjective observations, again ensuring that all who would like a turn get one.

Divide students into *chevruta* (study pairs). Give each pair a different photograph, and ask them to make lists of objective and subjective observations. Invite pairs to share observations with the group, if time allows.

1:05–1:20 Wrap-up

Ask the following questions to open up discussion:

- Why do you think it is important for us, as viewers, to understand the difference between objective and subjective photographs? (*possible answers: to seek to understand the purpose of the photograph; to recognize there are different points of view; to seek to understand others' points of view*)
- Return to the following question from the set induction: Why do you take pictures? Ask if any students now want to add other reasons. Plant the idea that a purpose of taking pictures can be to tell a story.

Session 2: Photographs Tell Stories

Enduring Understanding

Sharing stories links us to the generations that came before us, to the generations to come, and to our collective Jewish narrative. Photography is one way of telling stories.

Goals

- Understand that storytelling is a powerful tool for connection.
- Recognize that Judaism has a long tradition of storytelling.
- Learn that photographs can tell a story.

Materials

- Whiteboard/dry erase markers or chart paper/markers
- Variety of printed photographs, mainly Jewish images (different from session 1)
- Copy of Jewish text for each student
- Copy of [Taking Photos — Telling Stories](#) from JGN for each student
- Screen/projector (optional)
- Paper and pencils/pens

Timeline (80 minutes)

Set induction	10 minutes
Jewish storytelling	15 minutes
Photographs as storytelling	35 minutes
Wrap-up	20 minutes

Learning Sequence

0:00–0:10 Set induction

Review objective versus subjective and different types of photographs. Review reasons people take photos.

0:10–0:25 Jewish storytelling

Judaism has a deep and rich tradition of storytelling, passing down stories from one generation to the next.

Share the following Jewish texts with students. On the brink of the Exodus from Egypt, Moses tells the Israelites three times how they are to tell the story to their children in future generations:

1. “When your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to Adonai, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when Adonai struck down the Egyptians.’” [Exodus 12:26–27](#)
2. “On that day tell your child, ‘I do this because of what Adonai did for me when I came out of Egypt.’” [Exodus 13:8](#)
3. “In days to come, when your child asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say, ‘With a mighty hand Adonai brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.’” [Exodus 13:14](#)

Ask: Why do you think Moses told the Israelites three times to retell the story to their children? Why not just once? Who would like to share a time that you had to be told something several times before you understood it was important? Why do you think storytelling is so important to the Jewish people?

0:25–1:00 Photographs as storytelling

Say: Did you know that our brains process images and visual data 60,000 times faster than text? Write that number on a board or large piece of paper (for visual effect!).

Ask: So why do you think photos can be a great way to tell stories? (*We can see at a glance what the subject is; we don't have to think too hard; photos capture a mood, action, or interaction.*)

Explain that when telling a good story, some key aspects are having (a) an *engaging narrative* — to keep the listener or reader interested, (b) *relatable characters* — that the listener or reader cares about, and (c) a *meaningful setting* — that the listener or reader can visualize. A photograph can convey all of these, plus emotion, mood, ideas, and messages, which are also important elements of storytelling.

As a class, view a photograph together and determine what story the picture is trying to tell. Divide students into *chevruta* (study partners), and have them view another image to determine the story that it tells. As time allows, have pairs share back with the full group.

1:00–1:20 Wrap-up

Discuss various ways to take photographs in order to tell the story you want to tell. Use information from the Jewish Grandparents Network Family Room [Taking Photos — Telling Stories](#) to identify ways to take pictures that tell a story.

Session 3: Taking Photos — Telling Stories: An Intergenerational Program

Enduring Understanding

Sharing 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. Photography is one way of telling stories.

Goals

- Engage in a meaningful Jewish learning experience as a family (children, parents, grandparents, other family members).
- Understand that sharing our family's story helps us to grow more confident.

- Learn how to tell a story through photography.
- Learn that storytelling is a powerful tool for connection.

Materials

- Devices to take photos and to connect with extended family members (cell phone, iPad, laptop, etc.)
- Names tags for participants, pens/markers
- Screen and projector, computer to show JGN's [Taking Photos — Telling Stories](#)
- Printed copies of [Taking Photos — Telling Stories](#) for each family/table

Suggested Room Setup

- Large room with good cell reception and strong Wi-Fi
- Clear directions to connect to Wi-Fi
- One table with 4–6 chairs per family
- Table coverings, if desired
- Microphone, if needed

Timeline (90 minutes)

Set induction	15 minutes
Jewish text	15 minutes
Photographs as storytelling	40 minutes
Wrap-up	20 minutes

Program

0:00–0:15 Set induction

Have participants introduce themselves to one another and share one fun fact about their family. (*Our names all start with the same letter; our favorite cookie flavors are chocolate chip and oatmeal raisin.*)

0:15–0:30 Jewish text

Dr. Jane Shapiro says in her Eli Talk [The Torah of Bubbehood](#), “Tell them the stories of the people they never got to meet and times from the past they never knew to teach wisdom and help them connect with previous generations.” Moses is storyteller to the children of Israel, instructing them three different times to “tell the story of our exodus from Egypt to your children.”

In family groups, discuss: Who is (are) your family’s storyteller(s)? How can other members of the family become storytellers? Why is this important? How do our personalities influence our family’s story?

0:30–1:10 Photographs as storytelling

Project and share the [tips for taking photos that tell a story](#) from the Jewish Grandparents Network Family Room.

Begin by having students share what they learned with their families about how photos can tell a story. Family groups will decide together the story they want to tell in photos.

Examples include: how they all came to live where they do; special Jewish moments in their lives; the story of their family’s celebration of a specific Jewish holiday; how they relate to one another.

Direct families to walk around the building (inside and outside) to take photos that help tell their story.

Suggest the following:

1. Find specific objects around the synagogue that help tell your family’s story. For example, if your story is about celebrating Passover, you might take photos of a piece of art on the wall depicting a seder or a seder plate in the Judaica shop.
2. Use objects as representative images of your family’s story. For example, if you want to represent the warmth of gathering, perhaps take a close-up of a particular color that represents warmth to you. Or if you want to represent the family coming together, take a photo of chairs or a couch. Sit in them, if you choose.
3. Take photos of one another to weave your personalities into the family’s story. For example, take a photo of the child being serious/thoughtful and Grandma being silly/playful if that’s what you think represents them.

4. Come up with your own creative ideas for telling your family's story.

Family members who are physically distant can participate virtually by sending pictures to one of the family members participating in person. Families can designate a photographer or all take photos and share with one another if they know how (iPhone airdrop, text, etc.). If family groups are large, consider having them split into pairs for photo-taking and share photos with one another when they return to the program space.

1:10-1:30 Wrap-up

Discuss: What was your favorite part of the program and why? What was hardest? What surprised you? What is one thing you learned from this program? In what ways did sharing stories as a family help you feel more connected to one another? What did you learn about how photography can help you to tell your family's story?

Consider suggesting that families send their photos to one of the many online photo book services to make physical books to share. Or perhaps they can share them online, using captions.

Optional variation: Separate children and adult participants at this point in the program. Children can debrief and/or play a game, have a snack, or complete another activity in another room or in their classroom. With the adults, add the following to the discussion: How can we take what we learned forward with us? What are ways that we can extend the learning/experience at home?



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