



Ruth W. Messinger

SPEAKING TRUTH

Watershed Moments
in Global Leadership

High School Curriculum for Young Leaders



Ruth W. Messinger is the former president and executive director American Jewish World Service (AJWS), an international development organization providing support to more than 200 grassroots social change projects in Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

“Our mission statement says that we have a dual mission. The first part is the eradication of poverty, disease, and hunger, and the second is to educate the Jewish community about global social responsibility. Too often Jews are, or seem to be, focused on the Jewish community, and not on others in need...There were many Jewish organizations doing humanitarian or poverty work, but that was mostly within Jewish communities. There weren’t that many that had expanded the circle of obligation to the rest of the world.”¹ <http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/interviews/a-discussion-with-ruth-messinger-president-american-jewish-world-service>

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Messinger**



AJWS realizes this vision through strategic grant making and volunteer service in the developing world, and education and advocacy within the American Jewish community.

Prior to assuming her position at AJWS in 1998, Ms. Messinger was in public service in New York City for 20 years. She served 12 years in the New York City Council and eight years as Manhattan borough president. She was the first woman to secure the Democratic Party’s nomination for mayor in 1997. Known in New York City government as the “conscience of the Democratic Party”.

“I am a New Yorker born and bred. I walk fast, talk fast, think fast and, most importantly, stand up fast when the best interests of my city are being sold down the river.”²

Ms. Messinger is continuing her lifelong pursuit of social justice at AJWS, helping people around the world improve the quality of their lives and their communities.

Ms. Messinger graduated from Radcliffe College and received a Master of Social Work from the University of Oklahoma in 1964. Ms. Messinger is a visiting professor at Hunter College, teaching urban policy and politics.³

¹ <http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/interviews/a-discussion-with-ruth-messinger-president-american-jewish-world-service>

² <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/messinger-ruth>

³ <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ruth-messinger/>

Sh'ma — listen, or hear and do

Transcript from http://ajws.org/who_we_are/news/archives/features/reframing_the_shma_to_repair_the_world.html (1:50-8:11)

Sh'ma moment #1: It's 1985, the height of the AIDS crisis in New York City. Following 15 years as a social worker and a community organizer, I joined the New York City Council. Thoughtful and steady [I hope] in my views about what was best for the city's people, I came to my own conclusions and then stuck to my guns. I actually changed my vote on an issue only once. It was during the debate over whether the city should fund needle exchange programs for drug users. My first instinct was that we should not enable drug users to abuse heroin. How could I support that? Why would I support that? After all, weren't illegal drugs undermining communities of color and poor neighborhoods?

Then, someone from an HIV organization invited me to visit an illegal needle exchange that he was running on a street corner in a very poor part of the Bronx. I visited the program at night. Person after person told me how gaining access to clean needles was helping them avoid infecting their friends and other drug users. My resistance softened as I listened. All of the opposing arguments that had been so clear to me dissolved as I heard the truth of these people's lives. My perspective shifted. I now understood why these programs were so important, and I decided to vote in their favor. The decision was a good one because these programs are working and are saving lives every day.

Listening can be an antidote to judgment. Listening matters.

Sh'ma moment #2: it's 1998, and I am the president of American Jewish World Service, an organization that works to end poverty and realize human rights in the developing world. International development was a new world for me, far different from city politics. I had a lot to learn.

Early on, I traveled to Zimbabwe to visit an impoverished rural settlement with no government services. I met a teacher working with 80 children outside under a tree and asked him what he wanted most: was it desks and chairs, books, pencils or perhaps a chalk board? He replied, "I don't need any of those things. I just need the children to have breakfast."

I had come to Zimbabwe thinking that my solutions were the key to helping Zimbabwean children get a better education. I thought I had all of the answers. But it turns out that the people whom I had perceived as powerless – the people I was trying to help – were the ones who knew best what they needed. They were the ones with the answers, and it was up to me to listen.

Listening can be an antidote to judgment. Listening matters.

These moments I've just shared, among many others, opened up my heart and mind to human struggles experienced by "the other." They exposed hidden injustices that were far from my consciousness. And they show the humanity that's at stake when global problems like hunger, violence, and discrimination go unchecked. But these stories are just two of a universe of stories that too often fall on deaf ears.

Transcriptions of YouTube segments by Shayna Solomon

Content Objectives

Students will examine the strength derived from a person's connection to his/her faith.

Students will connect the values derived from beliefs to action.

Students will take action to explore the concepts of empathy and global poverty.

Synopsis of Lesson

Ask the class what they know about global poverty. Write key concepts that emerge on the board.

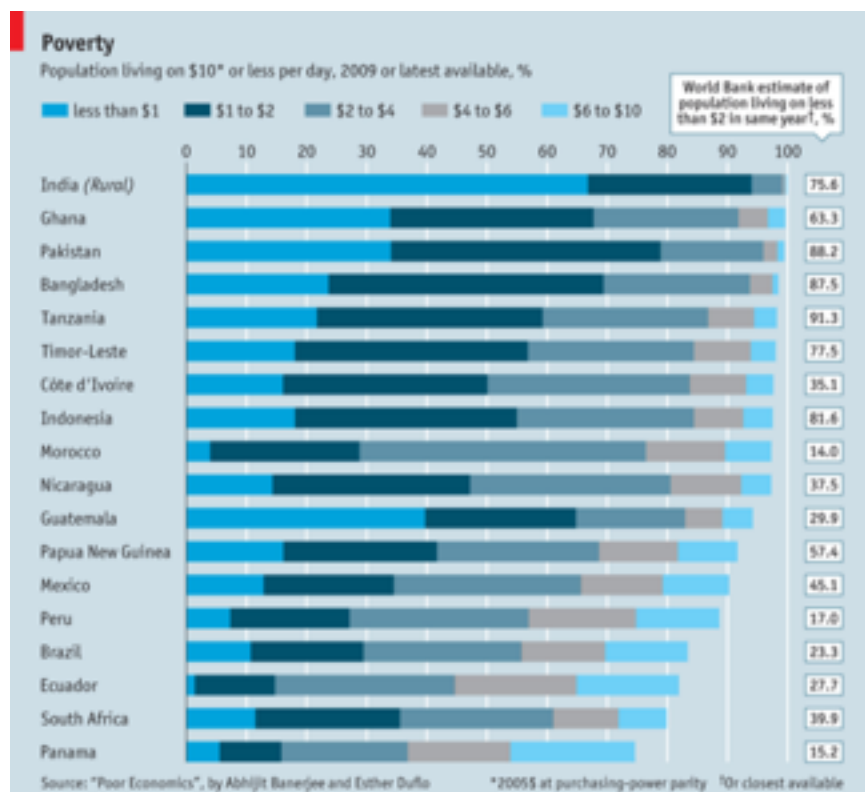
Share the following with the class:

Almost half the world — 45% or over three billion people — live on less than \$2.50 a day.

The poverty line in wealthy countries, such as the United States, is considered to be living on less than \$10 a day, rather than \$2 a day.

The World Bank does not define international poverty by this measure because, "Learning that (possibly) 95% or more of the [global] population is poor by such a standard is unlikely to have much relevance, given that U.S. standards of living are not within the foreseeable reach of most people in a typical developing country."⁴

Have Faith



⁴ Ravallion, Martin, Shaohua Chen, and Prem Sangaula. "Dollar a Day Revisited." Policy Research Working Paper 4620. The World Bank. May 2008. 11 Feb 2010 <http://www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSCContentServer/IW3P/IB/2008/09/02/>

⁵ http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/05/poor_economics

Provide students with the following quotes from Ruth Messinger on global poverty:

So, if you think about stories in the Torah, we're told to leave food in the corners of our fields so that the poor can come in and harvest it at the end of the harvest. And some of the rabbis commenting on that said specifically, we are not telling you to do this out of the goodness of your heart; we're telling you that the proceeds from the earth, the produce from the earth really belong to everybody.

Service is my way of encountering God in the world, since God can only be found in our response to the needs of others.⁶

Why is ending global hunger a Jewish concern? It is an effort that hearkens back to one of the most frequently cited Biblical commandments: Remember the stranger, the orphan and other vulnerable people because we, too, were once strangers in the Land of Egypt. Our sages wrote that "without sustenance, there is no Torah (no learning), and without Torah there is no sustenance."⁷

What I learned from Living on \$1.50 a Day

With Passover just behind us, I've been reflecting on the essence of the Exodus story—the journey from a narrow place of constriction to an expansive place of liberation. I'm reminded that this journey manifests in our consumption habits. Some of us are enslaved by scarcity: a lack of clean drinking water or a lack of healthy food. Others are enslaved by excess: too many super-sized sodas and too many hours on the Internet. In my role as president of American Jewish World Service, I am reminded, quite regularly, of the sobering fact that the richest 85 people in the world share a combined wealth that is equal to that of the poorest 3.5 billion people on the planet. Now that I have completed my five-day challenge of living below the poverty line, I am grateful that I survived but know that no one should have to live this way—on too little food, with a lack of nutrition, and with the chronic yearning to feel sated. I have renewed empathy for those who never feel healthy, in body and in mind. And I am recommitted to closing the gap between those who have too much and those who never have what they need; to building a world in which all can experience the sweetness of having enough.

Introduce students to the \$2/Day Challenge. When Ms. Messinger took the challenge she was required to live on \$1.50/Day. Provide them with the handout on the Rules and \$2/Day Resources. As a community agree to the parameters of this challenge.

The United Nations defines poverty as living on less than \$2 a day. Nearly half the world's population lives below this international poverty line. Many more live just barely above it. That is just \$2 a day for food, housing, school, transportation, medical emergencies, and all other expenses. With such limited income, many people struggle to meet basic needs such as food and medical care. Hunger alone affects over 1 billion people and is linked to many other forms of poverty, including insufficient income, malnourishment, and weakened immune systems.⁸

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkyyA3K3qiU>

⁷ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ruth-messinger/will-congress-act-on-world-hunger_b_2067211.html

⁸ <http://worldrelief.org/document.doc?id=820>

This is your Two Dollar Challenge:⁹ a personal journey that will confront and challenge you with a few of the many constraints faced by the 45% of the world that lives on less than \$2 a day. You choose which rules to follow. You choose the level of difficulty for each individual rule. You are free to choose different levels of difficulty for different rules. As you increase the level of difficulty you increase the level of interdependence among participants. In turn, you hasten the formation of community. Community is the key ingredient that adds depth and value to your group discussions.

Two Dollar Challenge

RULES

1. All goods and services consumed during the Two Dollar Challenge must be newly purchased out of your \$2 a day income. These items include, but are not limited to: personal hygiene products, cosmetics, and any stored food or drinks.

Beginner: You receive your daily income in one lump sum (for example, if you choose to live on \$2 a day for 5 days you get \$10 up front)

Intermediate: Your daily income is limited to \$2 per day. You are allowed to carry over any savings from one day into the next day or days.

Advanced: Your daily income is determined randomly with it averaging \$2 per day for the duration of the exercise. You are allowed to carry over any savings from one day into the next day or days.

Expert: Your daily income is determined randomly (see above). Moreover, your income and wealth (any accumulated savings or stockpiles of food) are susceptible to adverse shocks throughout the week.



2. With a few exceptions (see below), you cannot use any part of the wealth you enjoyed before the week.

- Gasoline consumption for students and those who drive to school, work or internships.
- Consumption of all health related goods and services.
- Uniforms for work or extracurricular activities.
- Refrigeration
- Pots and Pans for boiling water
- Reusable Water Bottle
- Backpack for carrying items

3. Duration of the Two Dollar Challenge:

Beginner: You participate for 3 days and 2 nights.

Intermediate: You participate for 4 days and 3 nights.

Advanced: You participate for 5 days and 4 nights.

⁹ Adapted from <http://twodollarchallenge.org/rules/>

4. Shelters:

- Beginner:** You can choose to sleep in your room or in the shelter throughout the Challenge.
- Intermediate:** Construct shelters out of free and/or discarded materials in your community and reside in the shelters for at least two nights. (This could be pitching tents in front of the school)
- Advanced:** Construct shelters out of free and/or discarded materials in your community and reside in the shelters 3 or 4 nights.

5. Gasoline must come out of your income if you are using your car for recreational purposes (going to the movies, out to eat- keep track of mileage and multiply by the cost of a gallon of gas)

6. No showers. You can bathe from a public water source (for example, a common sink); however, you are not allowed to use the hot water tap. You can use other means to heat water to a desired temperature for bathing.

7. Access to Water:

- Beginner:** You can access water from both private and public taps. (But hot water can only be created by boiling the water)
- Intermediate:** Your access to water is limited to public water sources.
- Advanced:** Your group chooses one designated water source (a spigot). This is your community's well. All water must be fetched from this water source.

8. Access to Restroom Facilities:

- Beginner:** You can access both private and public restrooms.
- Intermediate:** Your access is limited to public restrooms.
- Advanced:** Your access is limited to one designated public restroom.

9. Your consumption of electricity should coincide with nature. For example, lights can come on when the sun rises but must go out at sunset.

10. Use of Electronics:

- Beginner:** You may choose to use electronics (cell phones and computers) during the day in any location and inside a university building after dusk
- Intermediate:** You may not use your cell phone at night, but can use your computer all day in any location during the day
- Advanced:** You may not use your cell phone, tablet or computer during your participation in the challenge with the exception of work or class related activities.

11. You are allowed two complete outfits of clothing. Both complete outfits must be kept on your possession for the duration of the Challenge. Layering is encouraged.

12. Bartering for additional goods and services that you wish to consume outside of your \$2 a day income. You must provide a service in exchange for these goods (for example, raking the yard for a meal).

- Beginner:** You can ask friends or family members, but are encouraged to seek out individuals within your immediate community for assistance.
- Intermediate:** You cannot ask friends or family members, but are encouraged to seek out individuals within your immediate community for assistance.
- Advanced:** You must barter with individuals outside of your immediate community.

13. Any monetary assistance you receive during the five days must be donated to the cause that your fundraising efforts are going towards. It cannot be used to supplement your income.

Do's and Don'ts

1. Do refrigerate all perishables.
2. Do not skip taking medication.
3. Do not participate if ill or become ill.

\$2 A Day Resources

Sample Shopping List¹⁰

Potato (1 lb) - \$2.98
Bread (loaf) - \$1.41
Peanut butter (16 oz) - \$2.47
Black Beans (cup) - pre-cooked beans: \$0.60 dry beans: \$0.25
Eggs (1 dozen) - \$1.98
Salt (26 oz.) - \$1.89
Oats (42 oz.) - \$3.98
Rice (1 lb)-\$.74
Pasta (1 lb)-\$1.27
Milk (1 gal.)-\$3.62

Breakfast:

Option #1 – Oatmeal
¼ cup dry oats with 2 T raisins with ¼ cup of milk
Option #2 – Toast and Egg
2 slices of toast with 1 tsp butter and 1 egg (any style)

Lunch / Dinner:

Option #1 – Peanut Butter Sandwich
2 pieces of bread, 2TBS. peanut butter
Option #2 – Egg Salad Sandwich
2 pieces of bread, one egg, small portion of mayo, and salt with 2 slices of bread
Option #3 – Rice and Beans
½ cup rice, ¼ cup of dry black beans with half onion, salt and cumin
18 tips for minimizing your food costs + a final \$2 a day menu
[5 ingredients | 10 minutes]

<http://thestonesoup.com/blog/2010/07/18-tips-for-minimising-your-food-costs-a-final-2-a-day-menu-5-ingredients-10-minutes/>

¹⁰ Prices from <http://www.bls.gov/ro3/apmw.htm> United States Department of Labor Mid-Atlantic Office

For homework have students read the following by Ms. Messinger:

What We Can Learn From the Developing World to Help Us Fight Poverty at Home

Ending poverty in America has always been a passionate concern of mine, and doing so is an ethical obligation of my Jewish religious tradition. I began my career as a social worker supporting low-income women of color in the South Bronx and then worked on child welfare issues in rural Oklahoma. Years later, as a government official in New York City, reducing poverty and fighting racism were always at the top of my to-do list. These commitments were bolstered by my late colleague, Michael Harrington, who, in 1962, published *The Other America*, an indelibly influential book that shed light on the extent of poverty in the U.S. Fifty years later, in the richest country in the world, more than 46 million Americans live in homes below the poverty line. We clearly still have lots to learn and do.

Now, I am the leader of American Jewish World Service, an international development and human rights organization that works to end poverty and advance human rights in the developing world. For the past 14 years, I've worked with grassroots activists in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, who have taught me vital lessons about rooting out poverty. Without exception, our partners in the developing world -- where 1.4 billion people live on less than \$1.15 a day -- remind me what we need to do to end poverty and build healthy, safe and economically independent communities anywhere in the world, including the U.S.:

- 1) **Invest in and empower women and girls.** First and foremost, women everywhere bear the brunt of poverty, earn less, own less, have less access to health care, enjoy fewer rights, and are held back by outmoded thinking and traditions. The U.S. is no exception. In 2009, more than 16.4 million American women lived below the poverty line.

Investing in women is the key to ending poverty and building a just future. Empowered girls grow up to be healthy, educated and financially stable women who anchor their communities. A 2010 World Bank Study demonstrated that when women earn an income, they reinvest 90 percent of it into their families, as compared to only 30 to 40 percent reinvestment for men. Furthermore, women invest smartly, spending their income on nutritious foods, school fees and health care for children. An extra year of primary school raises a girl's lifetime wages by 10 to 20 percent, and an extra year of secondary school raises her wages by 15 to 20 percent.

Women, given half a chance, organize to make meaningful social change as well. For example, in Liberia, women were the pioneers of a movement to end a 14-year civil war that exacerbated poverty and unemployment. On a trip to Liberia last June, I was inspired to learn that these same women taught countless young people -- especially girls -- about the importance of education and training as antidotes to poverty. Liberian women's organizations also play a key role in rebuilding Liberia's workforce. An organization called Imani House, Inc. promotes women's empowerment through adult literacy programs, and the Liberian Rural Women's Association offers trainings to help Liberian women become farmers and local business owners to support themselves and their families.

- 2) **Provide necessary resources for low-income people, so they can shape their own future.** In the developing world, those who fight poverty focus sharply on protecting the rights to land and water. These rights are often ignored and leave poor people without the basics for building

a secure life. Land and water rights may not make immediate sense in the U.S., but they are equivalent to the right to have a roof over one's head and access to food, education, and health care. When we make poor people move in and out of shelters, deny them basic Medicaid benefits, fail to invest in their neighborhood schools, it is as if we have denied them ownership of the land they farm. Without the basics, poor Americans, like poor people in the developing world, won't be able to take control of their lives and provide for those they love.

Activists in Kenya are taking control of their lives in a bold way by safeguarding Lake Turkana, a vital resource for rural, indigenous communities to access clean water and grow food. Long marginalized, Lake Turkana's indigenous communities have Kenya's highest rates of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. Unfortunately, the government of neighboring Ethiopia began constructing a dam along the Omo River, which provides 90 percent of Lake Turkana's water. When a Kenyan activist named Ikal Angelei learned about the construction of the dam, she was outraged that no effort had been made to consult with the communities that would be directly affected. So, she successfully mobilized opposition. We need to recognize the parallel efforts of poor people in America to demand much-needed changes in our laws.

- 3) **Ensure human rights to help people help themselves.** Our grassroots partners in the developing world consistently make the case that giving people the resources they need is not enough. To create lasting change, we must ensure that marginalized people have the skills to advocate for themselves and build just societies. An organization in India called Kislay, which promotes the rights of urban communities in the slums of New Delhi, is doing this work brilliantly. Kislay uses participatory theatre to teach Delhi slum dwellers how to advocate for equitable food and housing, and how to be their own agents of social and economic change.

I am not in the business of creating domestic policy planks for the U.S., but I firmly believe that we can strengthen our efforts to end poverty at home by taking some tips from leaders in the developing world. People in Liberia, Kenya and India have shown that we must empower women and girls, enable marginalized people to advocate for themselves, and promote human rights and justice for all. To me, this combination is as American as apple pie.

Ruth Messinger is the president of American Jewish World Service.¹¹

Begin class for the next ____ days (this number will be determined by the group) asking students to journal about the experience they are having, attempting to live on \$2 day.

What are you eating? How is this different than what you ate before the challenge?

How does it feel to wear the same clothes you had on the day before?

Check in with yourself: physically, emotionally, spiritually. How are you coping with the challenges that you face on your limited budget?

Do you have a greater understanding of what it would be like to be the 45% of the world's population that has to live on this budget?

¹¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ruth-messinger/fighting-poverty-in-america_b_1855244.html

At the end of the challenge you may want to ask students what their highs and lows were. Then have them respond to the following prompt: Were there any days when you did not meet the challenge? If yes, why do you think those days were more difficult?

What do you think it would be like to live on even \$10 a day - for food, housing, school, transportation, medical emergencies, and all other expenses - for the rest of your life? Assign the article "Could You Live on \$2 A Day?"

Could You Survive on \$2 A Day?

Nearly 1.4 million American households live on that much per person. Gabriel Thompson reports from one of the nation's poorest areas.

By Gabriel Thompson | Thu Dec. 13, 2012 7:03 AM EST

This story was produced with support from the Economic Hardship Reporting Project.

Two years ago, Harvard professor Kathryn Edin was in Baltimore interviewing public housing residents about how they got by. As a sociologist who had spent a quarter century studying poverty, she was no stranger to the trappings of life on the edge: families doubling or tripling up in apartments, relying on handouts from friends and relatives, selling blood plasma for cash. But as her fieldwork progressed, Edin began to notice a disturbing pattern. "Nobody was working and nobody was getting welfare," she says. Her research subjects were always pretty strapped, but "this was different. These people had nothing coming in."

Edin shared her observations with H. Luke Shaefer, a colleague from the University of Michigan. While the income numbers weren't literally nothing, they were pretty darn close. Families were subsisting on just a few thousand bucks a year. "We pretty much assumed that incomes this low are really, really rare," Shaefer told me. "It hadn't occurred to us to even look."

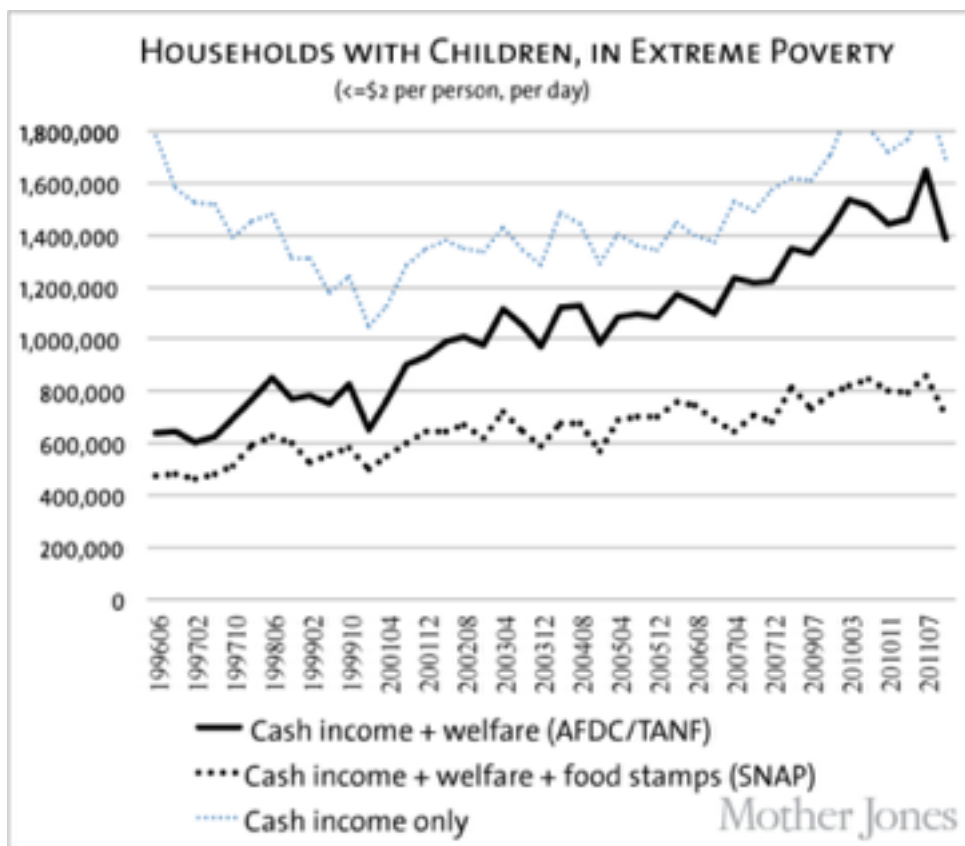
The number of US households facing "extreme" poverty (less than \$2 a day per person) has more than doubled since 1996.

Curious, they began pulling together detailed household Census data for the past 15 years. There was reason for pessimism. Welfare reform had placed strict time limits on general assistance and America's ongoing economic woes were demonstrating just how far the jobless could fall in the absence of a strong safety net. The researchers were already aware of a rise in "deep poverty," a term used to describe households living at less than half of the federal poverty threshold, or \$11,000 a year for a family of four. Since 2000, the number of people in that category has grown to more than 20 million—a whopping 60 percent increase. And the rate has grown from 4.5 percent of the population to 6.6 percent in 2011, the highest in recent memory save 2010, which was just a tad worse (6.7 percent).

But Edin and Shaefer wanted to see just how deep that poverty went. In doing so, they relied on a World Bank marker used to study the poor in developing nations: This designation, which they dubbed "extreme" poverty, makes deep poverty look like a cakewalk. It means scraping by on less than \$2 per person per day, or \$2,920 per year for a family of four.

In a report published earlier this year by the University of Michigan's National Poverty Center, Edin and Shaefer estimated that nearly 1 in 5 low-income American households were living in extreme poverty; since 1996, the number of households in that category had increased by about

130 percent (118 percent if you use the latest numbers available). Among the truly destitute were 2.8 million children. Even if you counted food stamps as cash, half of those kids were still being raised in homes whose weekly take wasn't enough to cover a trip to Applebee's.



From data provided by Kathryn Edin and H. Luke Shaefer; dates are approximate, as data were collected over several months.

In the researchers' eyes, it was a bombshell. But the media barely noticed. "Nobody's talking about it," Edin gripes. Even during a presidential campaign focusing on the economy, only a few local and regional news outlets took note of their report on the plight of America's poorest families. Mitt Romney told CNN that he wasn't concerned [3] about the "very poor," who, after all, could rely on the nation's "very ample safety net." Even President Obama was reticent to champion any constituent worse off than the middle class. As journalist Paul Tough noted [4] in the *New York Times Magazine* this past August, the politician who cut his teeth as an organizer in inner-city Chicago hasn't made a single speech devoted to poverty as president of the United States. (Paul Ryan has [5].)

IF YOU WANT to explore the dire new landscape of American poverty, there's perhaps no better place to visit than Fresno, a sprawling, smoggy city in California's fertile Central Valley. Heading south on Highway 99, I pass acres of grapevines and newly constructed subdivisions before reaching the city limit, where a sign welcomes me to California's Frontier City. Ahead, no doubt, is a city, but all I see is brown haze. It's as if a giant dirt clod had been dropped from space. The frontier looks bleak.

In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina briefly focused the nation's attention on the plight of the poor, the Brookings Institution published a study looking at concentrated poverty. Only one city fared worse than New Orleans: You guessed it, Fresno. Earlier this year, the US Census identified Fresno County as the nation's second-poorest large metropolitan area. Its population has nearly doubled over the past three decades, which means more competition for minimum-wage farm and service-sector jobs, and a quarter of the county's residents fall below the federal poverty threshold. With fewer than 20 percent of adults 25 and up holding bachelors degrees, there's little prospect of better-paying industries flocking here.

Crossing the tracks, I find myself in a virtual shantytown, with structures of pallets, plywood, and upended shopping carts.

For those living on the margins here, daily life can be a long string of emergencies. "There's this whole roiling of folks," says Edie Jessup, a longtime local anti-poverty activist. "They are homeless, move in someplace else, lose their jobs and are evicted, maybe end up in motels."

If I want to see how bad things are, Jessup advises, I should check out the area southwest of downtown. She gives me directions, and after crossing some train tracks near a pristine minor-league baseball stadium, I find myself in a virtual shantytown. Amid boarded up warehouses and vacant lots, the streets begin to narrow. They are filled with structures made of pallets, plywood, and upended shopping carts. A truck pulls up filled with bottles of water, and a long line of thirsty people forms.

Amid the makeshift shelters, one section of pavement has been cleaned up, fenced off, and filled with more than 60 Tuff Sheds—prefab tool sheds brought in to provide emergency housing for Fresno's growing street population. "It's not ideal," concedes Kathryn Weakland of the Poverello House, the nonprofit that oversees the encampment and doles out 1,200 hot meals a day. "But like one of the homeless told me, it beats sleeping in a cardboard box."

The collection of sheds even has a name: "Village of Hope."

IN THE WEE HOURS of the following morning, I pay a visit to Josefa, a 37-year-old single mother from Mexico who lives in a low-slung apartment complex just north of downtown. She's awake and ready by 3 a.m. when the first family knocks on her door. A Latino couple hands off two children and a sleeping baby and then disappears into the dark, heading for fields outside of town. Over the next half hour, two more farmworker families do the same. The small living room is soon filled with kids in various states of somnolence. Some nestle together on couches; others spread out on blankets on the floor. Josefa heads down the hallway to her bedroom, cradling the baby girl and walking quietly to avoid waking her 10-year-old daughter in the next room.

Lowell is among the poorest stretches of real estate in America. Nearly two-thirds of its children live in poverty.

Four hours later, she has accomplished the morning's major chores: Five of the six kids are awake, fed, and dressed. The only holdout is a feisty toddler who is waging a mighty fuss over the prospect of wearing a T-shirt. Josefa gives the edges of the boy's shirt a sharp downward tug and smiles, winning a small but important battle. After pulling her curly black hair into a ponytail she looks at her watch. "Let's go!" she calls, waving her hands toward the door. "We're going to be late."

The group heads down a dirt alleyway, led by a tiny girl wearing a pink Dora the Explorer backpack that looks big enough to double as a pup tent. The school is three blocks away. Along the way, we pass modest but tidy single-family homes, a few shoddy apartment complexes, and two boarded-up buildings. On the surface, there's little to distinguish this neighborhood—known as Lowell—from other hardscrabble sections of Fresno. But Lowell is, in fact, the poorest tract in the city and among the poorest stretches of real estate in America. More than half of its residents, including nearly two-thirds of its children, live in poverty. One in four families earns less than \$10,000 a year.

In a county where unemployment now hovers around 14 percent, Josefa is lucky to have work. Even better, she loves her job, and 10 minutes in her company is enough to realize she's got a gift with children. "They run up on the street and hug me," she says, beaming. "What could be better?"

"How can I charge more" for childcare, Josefa asks, "when no one has any more to give?"

What she lacks is money. Her farmworker clients are barely scraping by, so she only charges them \$10 a day per child. At the moment it's late September, the heart of the grape season, so she's got a full house. But at times when there's less demand for farm work, or the weather is wet, she gets by largely on her monthly \$200 allotment of food stamps. "I don't even have enough to pay for a childcare license," Josefa says. (Because of this, I've agreed to change her name for this story.)

Josefa estimates that her childcare business brings in \$7,000 a year. She visits local churches for donated food and clothes, and has taken in relatives to help cover her \$600 rent. Until earlier this year, Josefa and her daughter shared their small apartment with her niece's family. It was hardly ideal – some days, there were 12 people sardined in there. "Of course I need more money," Josefa tells me, pushing a stroller and holding the toddler's hand as we arrive back at her place. "But how can I charge more when no one has any more to give?"

Her niece, Guillermina Ramirez, is sitting in the apartment complex's small courtyard and overhears Josefa's last comment. "The key is to learn English," she announces. Guillermina, like Josefa, is undocumented, but she's married to a US citizen and says she will be a legal resident soon. She recently enrolled in English classes and anticipates securing "a really good job" once she's done. "That's what you need to get ahead."

"You can't pay \$800 in rent making \$8 an hour," says Gary Villa, 23, who had to move in with his mother after he was evicted.

Gary Villa and Jim Harper speak English and both are American citizens—as a member of the Northern Cheyenne Nation, Harper's lineage goes way back—but neither would say he's getting ahead. I run into the two men outside a temp agency three miles from Josefa's apartment. They've been waiting around since well before sunrise in hopes of finding something.

Villa, a stocky 23-year-old with a shaved head and goatee, tells me that he was pulling in a decent paycheck installing phone boxes for an AT&T subcontractor before he got laid off in 2008. He was evicted from his apartment and now lives with his mother—"It's kind of embarrassing," he mutters—while his girlfriend and two kids moved in with a relative. "You can't pay \$800 in rent making \$8 an hour."

Villa peers inside the job office, trying to discern any movement.

"At least we have family to fall back on," says Harper, 33, who keeps his long brown hair tucked beneath a red-and-blue Fresno State cap. After being let go from his job delivering radiators, he tried starting a handyman business called Jim's Everything Service. It didn't work out, so now he begins each day by calling seven temp agencies. But Fresno was slammed hard by the housing bust, and it remains a tough place for unemployed blue-collar workers. Harper, who is staying with his stepfather, says he's lucky to pull in more than \$200 a month. His monthly food stamp allotment tacks on another \$200, for an annual income of \$4,800.

By now the sun is well above the horizon and it's shaping up to be yet another day without a paycheck. "The working class isn't the working class if there's no work, right?" says Harper, who is wearing paint-stained Dickies and a faded T-shirt. "We're getting pretty desperate out here."

"I like to joke that I'll take any job short of being a male whore," he adds.

Jim Harper could leave Fresno to look for work elsewhere, but without his stepdad's place to rely on, he could end up homeless.

True enough, when the temp office clerk announces that there's a job available, Harper leaps at it even though the gig starts at 2 a.m. and he knows he'll have to arrive at the work site in the early evening, thanks to Fresno's limited bus service. He shrugs off the six hours he'll waste "twiddling his thumbs." What matters, Harper says, is to keep knocking on doors and making the calls, because "you never know when you might get your foot in the door."

Fleeing Fresno's hostile job market might seem like the logical solution, but it's never that simple. As frequently happens with the very poor—especially in light of the restrictions put in place with welfare reform—the informal safety nets that help keep people afloat also tend to keep them rooted in place. Losing his delivery job left Harper homeless. For a few months he lived out of his car or in a room in Fresno's "motel row," notorious for drugs and prostitution. But since moving into his stepfather's house, he's been able to use food stamps in lieu of rent. Leaving town would mean running the risk of being homeless again. And given Harper's income, there's no room for error.

Neither is there a clear path out of deep poverty for Josefa. She puts in 12-hour days six days a week, so there's not much room to increase her workload. By allowing six other families to work, she plays a small but key role in making Fresno an agriculture powerhouse, but her cut is minuscule. "That's why it's so important for my daughter to study," she says.

The last time I speak to Harper, he tells me he's landed a stint working overnight at a series of grocery stores that are overhauling their freezer compartments. "It looks like it will be a 10-day job," he says, excited. In Fresno, that counts as a big success. I ask where he hopes to find himself in five years. He pauses and takes a deep breath. "Best-case scenario, as sad as it sounds, is to be no worse off than I am right now," he says. "That's about all I can hope for."¹²

¹² <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/extreme-poverty-unemployment-recession-economy-fresno>

Now what? After completing the Challenge ask students what they believe they can do to impact hunger in their community. Support them in whatever action they choose to take.

Some options:

Canned food drive for a local pantry

Volunteering at a homeless shelter

Starting a community garden

Content Objectives

Students will develop a list of qualities that depict positive role models.

Students will identify positive role models relevant to their life experience.

Students will examine the role of mentors/role models in the experiences of Ruth Messinger.

Lesson Synopsis

Positive role models are important because they set examples for people to observe and pattern positive behaviors from. As people increase positive behaviors they also increase their feelings of self-worth. Patterning behaviors from positive role models can also help people build morals and positive values, teach them to set attainable goals, and provide direction in achieving those goals. Most importantly, positive role models provide a sense of hope and examples to prove that dreams and goals can be fulfilled.¹³

Begin class by explaining to students that today's topic is role models. Ask if anyone has a role model and why he/she is someone they look to for inspiration. What are the characteristics of a role model?

Have the class brainstorm a list of qualities after several students have shared their examples. Be sure to have an example in case students are reluctant to share.

Divide students into groups of 3-4 have the group decide on someone that meets the class's criteria for being a role model. Have each group write a series of 7 statements about the person without revealing who that person is. Access to the internet will assist students in creating interesting bio sketches of the people their group's select. Have each group share their profiles, one statement at a time. The other groups will have a chance to guess who the group is describing after each statement is read. The statements should begin with more obscure facts and build up to an obvious conclusion.

Example:

Nelson Mandela

1. His birth name meant troublemaker.
2. His favorite sport was boxing.
3. He was on the US terror watch list until 2008.
4. "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul," is a line from one of his favorite poems "Invictus".
5. He was in jail longer than most of us have been alive.
6. Stood up against unjust government policies.
7. He was the first leader of color this nation ever had, with the initials NM.

Role Models

¹³ www.siue.edu/SIPDC/Library/lesson%20plan/global6.pdf

After completing this activity students should have a list of characteristics and a list of individuals who embody those characteristics. Ask the class to reflect on why these people are important to us and how they serve as role models.

Some of the characteristics that should come from this activity and others that can be discussed with students. Role models are people who:

- Feel a sense of duty to better "society" or work for the common good of the community
- Are compassionate
- Have developed powerful and effective habits of the mind and soul
- Can work through challenges
- Are committed to what he or she does regardless of consequences
- Have the capacity to achieve goals and obtain self-fulfillment
- Possess high standards and values
- Are admired for courage and strength
- Serve as models forgiveness
- Are trustworthy
- Demonstrate humility, admit when they are wrong
- Are wise
- Understand the whole situation¹⁴

Students will now take a look at the impact role models had on the life of Ruth Messinger. Provide them with the following reading and either independently or in groups students should apply their understanding of role models to the inspiration Ms. Messinger found in Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Rabbi Heschel, her parents and grandparents.

I pay particular tribute and respect to Nelson Mandela. I was extraordinarily privileged, because I was in government in New York City at just the right time, to be part of the welcoming ceremony for him in New York City... so I've been privileged to meet him...to stand in his cell in Robin Island, and to be aware of this man as a human rights prophet of his time.¹⁵

Archbishop Oscar Romero, In the same spirit, he wrote once...'we may never see the end result, but that is the difference from the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders.¹⁶

Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez (August 15, 1917 - March 24, 1980) was a prominent Roman Catholic priest in El Salvador during the 1960s and 1970s becoming Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977. After witnessing numerous violations of human rights, he began to speak out on behalf of the poor and the victims of repression. This led to numerous conflicts, both with the government in El Salvador and within the Catholic Church. After speaking out against U.S. military support for the government of El Salvador, and calling for soldiers to disobey orders to fire on innocent civilians, Archbishop Romero was shot dead while celebrating Mass at the small chapel of the cancer hospital where he lived. It is believed that those who organised his assassination were members of Salvadoran death squads, including two graduates of the School of the Americas.¹⁷

¹⁴ www.siu.edu/SIPDC/Library/lesson%20plan/global6.pdf

¹⁵ www.youtube.com/watch?v=VU3v01Idz5M (5:07-8:06)

¹⁶ www.youtube.com/watch?v=VU3v01Idz5M (39:25-40:25)

¹⁷ <http://www.un.org/en/events/righttotruthday/romero.shtml>

Oscar Romero: Bishop of the Poor

By Renny Golden

In 1980, in the midst of a U.S. funded war the UN Truth Commission called genocidal, the soon-to-be-assassinated Archbishop Oscar Romero promised history that life, not death, would have the last word. "I do not believe in death without resurrection," he said. "If they kill me, I will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people."

On each anniversary of his death, the people will march through the streets carrying that promise printed on thousands of banners. Mothers will make pupusas (thick tortillas with beans) at 5 a.m., pack them, and prepare the children for a two-to-four hour ride or walk to the city to remember the gentle man they called Monseñor.

Oscar Romero gave his last homily on March 24. Moments before a sharpshooter felled him, reflecting on scripture, he said, "One must not love oneself so much, as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us, and those that fend off danger will lose their lives." The homily, however, that sealed his fate took place the day before when he took the terrifying step of publicly confronting the military.

Romero begged for international intervention. He was alone. The people were alone. In 1980 the war claimed the lives of 3,000 per month, with cadavers clogging the streams, and tortured bodies thrown in garbage dumps and the streets of the capitol weekly. With one exception, all the Salvadoran bishops turned their backs on him, going so far as to send a secret document to Rome reporting him, accusing him of being "politicized" and of seeking popularity.

Unlike them, Romero had refused to ever attend a government function until the repression of the people was stopped. He kept that promise winning him the enmity of the government and military, and an astonishing love of the poor majority.

Romero was a surprise in history. The poor never expected him to take their side and the elites of church and state felt betrayed. He was a compromise candidate elected to head the bishop's episcopacy by conservative fellow bishops. He was predictable, an orthodox, pious bookworm who was known to criticize the progressive liberation theology clergy so aligned with the impoverished farmers seeking land reform. But an event would take place within three weeks of his election that would transform the ascetic and timid Romero.

The new archbishop's first priest, Rutilio Grande, was ambushed and killed along with two parishioners. Grande was a target because he defended the peasant's rights to organize farm cooperatives. He said that the dogs of the big landowners ate better food than the campesino children whose fathers worked their fields.

The night Romero drove out of the capitol to Paisnal to view Grande's body and the old man and seven year old who were killed with him, marked his change. In a packed country church Romero encountered the silent endurance of peasants who were facing rising terror. Their eyes asked the question only he could answer: Will you stand with us as Rutilio did? Romero's "yes" was in deeds. The peasants had asked for a good shepherd and that night they received one.

Romero already understood the church is more than the hierarchy, Rome, theologians or clerics—more than an institution—but that night he experienced the people as church. "God needs the people themselves," he said, "to save the world . . . The world of the poor teaches us that liberation will arrive only when the poor are not simply on the receiving end of hand-outs from gov-

ernments or from the churches, but when they themselves are the masters and protagonists of their own struggle for liberation.”

Romero's great helplessness was that he could not stop the violence. Within the next year some 200 catechists and farmers who watched him walk into that country church were killed. Over 75,00 Salvadorans would be killed, one million would flee the country, another million left homeless, constantly on the run from the army—and this in a country of only 5.5 million. All Romero had to offer the people were weekly homilies broadcast throughout the country, his voice assuring them, not that atrocities would cease, but that the church of the poor, themselves, would live on.

“If some day they take away the radio station from us . . . if they don't let us speak, if they kill all the priests and the bishop too, and you are left a people without priests, each one of you must become God's microphone, each one of you must become a prophet.”

By 1980, amidst overarching violence, Romero wrote to President Jimmy Carter pleading with him to cease sending military aid because he wrote, “it is being used to repress my people.” The U.S. sent \$1.5 million in aid every day for 12 years. His letter went unheeded. Two months later he would be assassinated.

On March 23 Romero walked into the fire. He openly challenged an army of peasants, whose high command feared and hated his reputation. Ending a long homily broadcast throughout the country, his voice rose to breaking, “Brothers, you are from the same people; you kill your fellow peasant . . . No soldier is obliged to obey an order that is contrary to the will of God . . . “

There was thunderous applause; he was inviting the army to mutiny. Then his voice burst, “In the name of God then, in the name of this suffering people I ask you, I beg you, I command you in the name of God: stop the repression.”

Romero's murder was a savage warning. Even some who attended Romero's funeral were shot down in front of the cathedral by army sharpshooters on rooftops. To this day no investigation has revealed Romero's killers. What endures is Romero's promise.

Days before his murder he told a reporter, “You can tell the people that if they succeed in killing me, that I forgive and bless those who do it. Hopefully, they will realize they are wasting their time. A bishop will die, but the church of God, which is the people, will never perish.”

The twentieth century has been the bloodiest century in history. In what Jose Marti called the “hour of the furnaces,” Oscar Romero, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King, Fannie Lou Hamer, Dom Helder Camara, Maura Clark, Dorothy Kazel, Ita Ford, Jeann Donovan, and Ella Baker accompanied those who were in the sights of the men with guns. They burned brighter.¹⁸

“I come to this right through my DNA” (21:25-23:05)

I was raised in a household where the prevailing mantra was to give something back. As Jews we were lucky to be living in America in the twentieth century. My dad started his own successful business, and we lived comfortably. So my family did give back. My maternal grandfather was the first executive director of the Jewish Federation of New York, my mother chaired both the Surprise Lake Camp and Jewish Child Care Association boards, and my dad was on the board of the Jewish Home and Hospital for fifty-five years. Our dinner-table conversation was always about

¹⁸ <http://www.uscatholic.org/print/1750#sthash.ziWyop6C.dpuf>

local issues, national politics, and Jewish organizational life. So Jewish activism was something I understood from a very young age.¹⁹

Even before she began her professional life, Ruth Messinger was involved in the Jewish community and knowledgeable about its commitment to social justice. Her mother worked for media relations at the Jewish Theological Seminary, a large Jewish graduate and rabbinical school in New York City. This gave Messinger the opportunity to meet many key figures in Jewish social justice.

I literally grew up here [at Jewish Theological Seminary]. Take your daughter to work day didn't exist in the 1940s and 50s. But my mother was ahead of her time...I actually had the opportunity to know Rabbi Heschel. (Heschel was one of the most famous 20th century rabbis. He published eloquent and erudite works on Jewish texts, but also was involved in a variety of social justice movements. He joined Martin Luther King, Jr. in several of his initiatives and was involved in the anti-Vietnam war movement. He also published works in favor of a more social justice oriented Judaism.) I can only compare this to a young child interested in music being able to take violin lessons from Yitzak Pearlman.²⁰

I was raised in New York City in the 1940's and 50's on the West Side of Manhattan. My mother worked in the Jewish community. My family was serious about their Judaism, although not Orthodox, observant. And, from the very beginning, I would say that our Judaism was a social justice Judaism. The single most repeated commandment in the Torah, in the first five books of Moses, is remember that you were strangers and so meet the needs of the other and the stranger. And that's a very good base for social justice work. It means you don't just help Jews, you help the people in greatest need because you know what it was like, historically, to not be able to receive help. And my favorite bible quote or observation... is when Esther is told by her uncle that she needs to go to the king and say this guy has a plot to kill all the Jews. She says you have to be crazy if I go to my husband, the king, uninvited, I'm asking to be put to death. Her uncle, Mordechai, says basically, how do you know that this is not the moment that you were put on this earth to deal with? This is clearly an imperfect world and we... might think of ourselves as partners with God in doing what we can to help heal the world. Among the many, many brilliant things that Rabbi Heschel wrote, he once said, 'In a free society where terrible wrongs exist, some are guilty but all are responsible.'²¹

¹⁹ <http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=1091>

²⁰ http://ajws-sandbox.pub30.convio.net/who_we_are/news/multimedia/leading_for_change.html

²¹ <http://on.aol.com/video/2-minutes-of-wisdom-with-ruth-messinger-517126539>

The word tzedakah (Hebrew: **צדקה**) comes from the Hebrew word tzedek, meaning righteousness or justice. It refers to the Jewish practice of giving money in order to help those less fortunate—using personal financial resources to create a more just and righteous world. Practices similar to tzedakah can be found in many other cultures and religions, such as zakat in the Muslim tradition or tithing in Christianity. Tzedakah is different from the idea of “charity” or “philanthropy” in that it is not understood as a nice thing to do when you feel moved, but rather as an obligation of every community member to give to those in need. In fact, Jewish law requires giving 10% of one's income to tzedakah, and even one who receives financial assistance is required to give to others.

Design and Activism

Content Objectives

Students will explore ways to represent ideas about giving to charity through designing a receptacle for donations.

Students will think about the idea of “giving” and the role it plays in their own lives

This activity is based on a competition sponsored by the American Jewish World Service
<http://wheredoyougive.org/the-competition/>

For more information on the project:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ruth-messinger/9-designs-that-challenge-our-notions-of-philanthropy_b_1441553.html

Synopsis of Lesson

Introduce students to the concept of ritual objects that remind us of our faiths. Ex. Rosary beads for Catholics, steel bracelets for Sikhs, Tallit (Prayer Shawl) for Jews. Ritual objects have different forms that typically reflect their purpose.

Introduce students to the Tzedakah Box by showing them images of some examples.



The root of tzedakah comes from the Hebrew word "tzedek," meaning justice.

"Tzedakah suggests giving on behalf of other people, not to tide them over, but to help them and others move toward justice," Ruth Messinger said.

After looking at examples of Tzedakah boxes ask students what they have in common and how the design can influence how we feel about the act of giving. Then have them select their favorite boxes and explain why that box appealed to them.

This Tzedakah won the AJWS competition. It was designed by Doug Burnett. He envisions donors inserting a coin, selecting a beneficiary, then viewing a video on the back side of the box showing the individual in need and the benefit he or she could receive because of the donation.

"There is so much power in seeing someone in poverty smile," he said. "For some reason, it breaks this difference, and you think, 'Wow. If he had been born my neighbor, this person could have been my friend.' It's just someone who did not happen to win the geographic lottery."²²



A World Of Change

Artist: Yoni Binstock

It is in the shape of a sphere with a round base. On the base, it reads, "Small change can make a world of difference".

After exploring examples of Tzedakah boxes students will design their own. Consider the following while designing: Does your box provoke critical thought about the obligation to give, where to give, to whom and why? What is its potential to motivate people to give, especially to those in the developing world and is it aesthetically pleasing and creative?

Have students display their work at a "gallery opening" for their peers.

²² http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-06-12/news/ct-met-mormon-jewish-20120612_1_mormons-jewish-tradition-art-director

Content Objectives

Students will experience the importance of individuals coming together to accomplish a goal.

Students will connect the collective action of individuals to change.

Synopsis of Lesson

The following activity will introduce students to action and their individual roles in making something happen.



Take Action

Rainmaker

Have students sit at their desks or on the floor, with their hands free and the feet firmly planted on the floor. Introduce the activity by saying that the group is going to create something greater than each individual could on his/her own.

Split the group into 6 sections and explain that each section will have a task to do. Going around the room, model for each section what they are to do, give them an opportunity to practice, then move on to the next section until all 6 sections have practiced.

Section actions:

1. Say “Shhhh...” like the wind blowing through trees
2. Rub your palms together
3. Snap your fingers
4. Clap your hands
5. Slap the tops of your legs
6. Stomp your feet.

Tell each of the 6 sections to do their action when you point to them and to keep doing it until you point to them a second time. Begin with section 1 and work your way to section 6, then end the “rainstorm” in reverse.

Once the rainstorm has subsided, debrief with students on the importance of each individual in accomplishing the task. Ask them if they have ever cooperated with others to get something done they couldn't on their own.

Can you name moments in history when people have gotten together to initiate change?

Examples: Anti-apartheid movement, Arab Spring, Civil Rights Movement, women's suffrage

Provide students with a copy of ...

In groups of 3 to 5, ask students to read _____ and then respond to the questions:

Have you ever been moved to act because of something you believed?

What are the risks that come with taking action?

Are those risks easier to manage if you act as a member of a group?

The following conversation can occur as a whole class or by dividing the class up into smaller groups and then having those groups report out. Have students brainstorm issues that they care about. Why do they care? What can they do to impact that issue? Do they have any role models who can serve as inspiration for their action? Why haven't they done anything before about this issue?

Create a master list of concerns; offer students the opportunity to "make a difference" on one or more of the issues. At this point, the class may begin working in smaller groups or tackling one concern collectively. Remind students to consider why they have this concern, if there are role models whose actions can help them plan their own courses of action, and what resources they can draw upon for strength as they move forward to make a difference.
