

## Torah Story Lesson Plan for 3rd Grade - Joseph

This activity should take half an hour and introduce one of the stories that we will be studying at an upcoming Family Education Field Trip with the third grade.

Materials: Print out enough copies of the script for everyone to have one. Highlight all the lines for one character in each script.

Framing: "So far, we have been discussing the Torah as being full of the rules that help us to be good people and good Jews. We call these rules *mitzvot*, or commandments. But the Torah is also the story of the Jewish people. We will be having a field trip soon to a museum called the Ratner Museum in North Bethesda, where we will learn more about some of the people in the Torah. Each week until we go, we'll be learning a bit more about those people so that we will recognize them when we meet them at the museum. Today we're going to talk about a man named Joseph."

Assign roles. Some have more lines than others. Not everyone will be comfortable reading out loud, so teachers can help feed students their lines or set up the scene and let them improvise. Also include non-speaking roles like sheep, grumbling brothers, people in Pharaoh's court. If more people are interested in speaking roles than there are roles, you can switch who's playing Joseph and/or Jacob part way through, or divide up the brothers differently. If there are multiple adults in the room, and students are less comfortable reading, more adults can take roles. This should be an activity in which students can move around. Encourage them to get up and really act out all the dramatic moments, especially the dreams. Teacher should go off-script to help with that (i.e. What would it look like for all the bunches of wheat to bow to Joseph, try it)

After the play, debrief with discussion questions.

# The Story of Joseph

## Parts

Teacher

Joseph

Jacob

Brother #1

Brother #2

Brother #3

Brother #4

Brother #5

Cellmate #1

Cellmate #2

Pharaoh

Magician #1

Magician #2

Teacher: Once upon a time, there lived a young man named Joseph. He had ten older brothers, one sister, and a little brother named Benjamin. He lived in a faraway land called Canaan, and his job was taking care of sheep. Joseph's dad was named Jacob.

(Joseph takes care of some sheep. The sheep walk around and make sheep noises. Jacob comes up while Joseph is taking care of the sheep)

Jacob: Joseph, I love you most of all my children. Here is a coat I made just for you with lots of colors.

Teacher: Joseph's brothers got very jealous because their dad had given him a coat of many colors. They started to say mean things behind his back.

(Joseph's brothers whisper)

Joseph: Brothers, I had a dream that we were all gathering wheat, and I had a bunch of wheat, and so did each of you. But my bunch of wheat stood up straight, and yours were all bowing to mine.

Brother #1: Does that mean that you think you will rule over the rest of us?

Joseph: Dad, brothers, I had another dream! This time, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.

Jacob: What a dream! Do you want your whole family, I, your mother, and your brothers, to bow to you?

Teacher: Joseph's brothers were getting very jealous and angry toward him. They took their sheep out to a faraway field.

Jacob: Joseph, will you go check on your brothers and their sheep?

Joseph: I'm ready.

Teacher: Joseph went to look for his brothers. When they saw him coming, they remembered how jealous and mad they were about his fancy coat and his dreams, so they decided to kill him.

Brother #2: We should kill him and throw him in a pit!

Brother #3: Yeah! Good idea! His dreams won't help him then.

Brother #4 (Reuben): We shouldn't hurt people! We can throw him in the pit, but not hurt him.

Teacher: Joseph's brothers took his fancy colorful coat, and threw him into a pit. His brothers all sat down to dinner, and while they were trying to decide what to do with him, a caravan of merchants took him out of the pit. The brother who convinced the others not to hurt him, Reuben, went to check on him.

Brother #4 (Reuben): Hey, guys? Joseph's gone... What should we do now?

Teacher: The brothers had taken Joseph's fancy coat, so they tore it up and covered it in blood, and brought it back to their dad.

Brother #5: We found this coat, Dad. Is it Joseph's?

Jacob: Oh no! Woe is me! My son Joseph was eaten by a wild animal.

Teacher: Jacob was very very sad and upset. He mourned for Joseph for a long time. Meanwhile, the merchants who took Joseph brought him all the way to Egypt, where they sold him to a man named Potiphar, who was very powerful and Pharaoh's right-hand man. Potiphar really liked Joseph, and quickly trusted him and gave him important jobs to do. Potiphar's wife became jealous of Joseph and lied so that he was put in prison. But everybody always liked Joseph, and the chief jailer even gave him jobs to do in prison. One day, his cellmates were upset about something.

Joseph: Hi, guys, why are you upset today?

Cellmate #1: We had dreams, but there is no one to tell us what they mean.

Joseph: I can tell you what your dreams mean!

Cellmate #1: I dreamed that there was a vine with three branches, and bunches of grapes grew on the branches. I had Pharaoh's cup, and I pressed the grapes into the cup and gave the cup to Pharaoh.

Joseph: That's a good dream! In three days, Pharaoh will let you out of prison and you will bring him his cup. Remember me after you leave prison, and tell Pharaoh that I shouldn't be in here.

Cellmate #2: I also had a dream. I dreamed that there were three baskets on my head, full of food, and birds were eating the food in the baskets on my head.

Joseph: Ooooh, bad luck. In three days, Pharaoh will have you killed.

Teacher: Three days later, Pharaoh let Joseph's first cellmate out of prison, and had the second cellmate killed. Joseph understood both dreams exactly right. But his first cellmate did not remember to tell Pharaoh about Joseph. Two years later, Pharaoh had his own dream, and he told his magicians about it.

Pharaoh: What strange dreams I had last night! In the first, I was standing next to the Nile River, and seven fat and happy cows were next to me, eating grass. Then seven thin cows came and ate the fat cows! In my next dream, there were seven ears of grain, growing very well on the same stalk, but then seven sad and thin ears of grain grew on the same stalk, and ate up the good grain.

Magician #1: I have no idea what that means!

Magician #2: I don't know either!

Cellmate #1: Um, I forgot to tell you. When I went to prison, I met this guy, Joseph, and he understood all our dreams perfectly.

Pharaoh: What are you standing around for! Go get Joseph!

Teacher: They went and got Joseph out of prison, and gave him a haircut and a change of clothes so that he would be ready to meet with Pharaoh.

Pharaoh: I have had a dream, and no one can tell me what it means! But I heard that you can tell what dreams mean.

Teacher: Pharaoh told Joseph about his dreams

Joseph: Those dreams both mean the same thing. For seven years, the harvests will be good and we will have lots of food. But for the seven years after that, the harvests will be bad and there will not be enough to eat. We need to start saving food now.

Pharaoh: Wow! I've never met anyone like you before. I will do what you told me to, and I am going to put you in charge of my court!

Teacher: Pharaoh gave Joseph nice gifts: a ring, nice clothes, and gold. He found him a wife. And Joseph spent seven years travelling around Egypt making sure that everyone was saving enough food and that they were ready for seven years of bad harvests. He and his wife had two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. When people were hungry, Pharaoh sent them to ask Joseph what to do. He made sure everyone had enough food. Meanwhile, Joseph's family still lived far away in Canaan, and they did not have enough to eat.

Jacob: I'm getting really hungry, and you're all just sitting around looking at each other. I heard there is food in Egypt. Go to Egypt and bring food back.

Joseph's brothers: Yes, Dad!

Teacher: All of Joseph's brothers, except his little brother, Benjamin, went to Egypt to ask for food. Only they didn't know that they would be asking Joseph for food. Joseph recognized them, but pretended not to, and decided to be harsh with them.

Joseph: Where are you from?

Brother #3: Canaan. Can we get some food?

Joseph: You are spies. I won't give you anything.

Brother #2: No, we promise. We're really hungry. Please just give us some food.

Joseph: No, I'm pretty sure you're spies.

Brother #1: No, we are all brothers. There used to be twelve of us. Our little brother, Benjamin, stayed home with our dad, and one of our brothers is no more.

Joseph: I still think you are spies. The only way I will believe you is if your little brother comes to Egypt too.

Teacher: Joseph kept one of his brothers with him in Egypt, and sent the other nine home with bags of grain for his family. He had to keep one of his brothers to make sure that the others would come back with Benjamin. When they got home, they explained to their dad what had happened.

Brother #5: We got food, but there was this Egyptian guy who was really rude to us. He kept calling us spies and said we had to bring Benjamin to Egypt.

Jacob: NO WAY am I letting you take Benjamin to Egypt. We've already lost Joseph, and you left one of your brothers there. How do I know that you will bring him back safely?

Brother #4 (Reuben): I promise I will bring all my brothers home safely.

Teacher: Jacob was very nervous to let his sons go back to Egypt. He made them wait until they were out of food again before he let them go. When they got back to Egypt, with Benjamin, Joseph was very excited to see them, and invited them to his house for lunch. The brothers still didn't know that the Egyptian official who was taking care of them was Joseph, and they were worried about their meeting.

Brother #5: Hi, we just came back so we could bring some more food home. We have plenty of money to pay.

Joseph: Don't worry about it. I'm going to go get your brother that I kept. Let me get you some water and food for your donkeys.

Brother #3: We brought you lots of gifts from Canaan - Here you go!

Joseph: Thanks so much! Tell me, how's your dad doing? I hear he's getting old.

Brother #2: He's doing well. He's still healthy.

Joseph: And did you bring your little brother, Benjamin?

Brother #1: Yes, here he is!

Teacher: Joseph became so emotional when he saw his brother Benjamin that he had to leave the room to go cry in private. He washed his face, pulled himself together, and came back.

Joseph: It's lunch time!

Teacher: After lunch, Joseph sent his brothers on their way to Canaan with food to take home, but he asked one of his servants to hide a silver cup from his house in Benjamin's bag. He let his brothers get a head start, and then chased after them.

Joseph: WAIT! Someone stole something from my house! I gave you food and this is how you repay me? Whoever took the cup will have to stay at my house.

Teacher: Joseph went through all the bags, and found the silver cup in Benjamin's bag, where he had planted it.

Joseph: Well, it looks like Benjamin will have to stay with me.

Brother #5: Please don't make Benjamin stay with you! Our dad is old and it will break his heart. Let me stay instead!

Joseph: I can't hide it anymore! I am your brother, Joseph! I don't want to break dad's heart. I forgive you for throwing me in the pit. I have a really good life in Egypt, and I was able to help everyone prepare for seven years of bad harvests. Go back and get Dad. Tell him how well I'm doing, and that I will take care of him from now on. The whole family should move to Egypt.

Teacher: The brothers went back to Canaan and brought Jacob and their whole family to Egypt. They were all very happy to be reunited, and they were successful in Egypt.

Discussion questions for debrief:

1. Why were Joseph's brothers jealous?
2. How did Joseph become important in Egypt?
3. Would you have forgiven your siblings if they had treated you the way Joseph's brothers treated him? Why do you think Joseph did?
4. We've been studying the Ten Commandments. What are some commandments that are honored in this story? What are some commandments that are broken in this story?  
(Possible answers: Joseph honors his father by inviting him to come live in Egypt. The brothers break the commandments not to lie or be jealous.)