



celebrate series

# What is Jewish Music?

A lesson plan by Rabbi Phil Warmflash

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What is Jewish music? What makes music Jewish? Is it the language? Is it the subject? Is it the tune? Is Israeli music Jewish? This lesson will expose students to a spectrum of music that might fit into a definition of Jewish music and challenge them to create their own definition of Jewish music.

### Supplies:

Paper  
Pencils  
Post-It Flip Chart  
Markers  
4-5 CD Players  
4-5 CD's of "Jewish Music"

### Objectives:

Students will be exposed to different genres of Jewish Music.  
Students will write and refine a definition of Jewish music.  
Students will explore the role of Jewish music.

### Part 1a: (15 minutes)

Take out a piece of paper. Write down the words that come into your head when I say the following: "Jewish Music."

Divide class into 4 small groups, ask each group to compare the words that they wrote, and on a Post-It Flip Chart page, write the words that came up most often.

Have groups share the words. Together, look for common themes. From the common themes, ask each group to write a definition of **Jewish Music** on a piece of Post-It Flip Chart paper and hang them on the walls (no discussion is necessary).

### Part 1b:

Once they have done that, give them a copy of these verses from Psalm 98. Have them read it together and then answer the questions at the end. **Note:** The book of psalms is found in the Bible. Psalm 98 is traditionally said each week as part of the Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday night).

*O sing to Adonai a new song*

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.*

*Sing to the Lord with the lyre; with the lyre, and the voice of a psalm.*

*With trumpets and the sound of a shofar make a joyful noise before the Lord, the Ruler.*

*Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world, and those who dwell in it.*

*Let the rivers clap hands; let the mountains sing for joy together,*

*Before Adonai, who comes to judge the earth with righteousness and the peoples with equity.*

□

- What words or phrases would the author of the psalm add to your list?

- How do you think the author of the psalm would define Jewish Music?

**Part 2: (15 minutes) - Jigsaw**

Now each group is going to become “reviewers.” Give each group a CD player, each with a different type of Jewish music (you can download the songs from [www.craignco.com](http://www.craignco.com) and burn to a CD). Tell each group which track to listen to. Each song represents a different style:

1. Modern Teflilah (*L’Cha Dodi* by Craig Taubman)
2. Ethnic/World (*Motherless Child* by Israeli group the Sheba Choir)
3. Hip Hop (*Muslim and Jew* by Remedy)
4. Cantorial (*Mimamakim* by Shirona)

After they have listened to the song, ask them to answer the following. Tell them that after they have answered these questions they will have to share their song reviews with the other groups.

1. Where would you expect to hear this song (think of as many places as possible)?
2. Who would be listening to this song?
3. Who would be singing this song?
4. How would you describe the song?
5. How does this song fit in your definition of Jewish Music?
  - a. How would the psalmist respond to it?
  - b. If not, is it Jewish Music? If it is, how would you change your definition?

**Part 3: (15/20 Minutes) Sharing the Reviews, Refining the Definition.**

- Collect the CD Players
- Have groups mix. That is: if you have four groups (alef, bet, gimel, dalet) of four people each, have one alef, one bet, one gimel, one dalet group come together in a new group. If you have more kids you can have two alefs, two bets, and so on.
- Play 30 seconds of one of the songs.
- Give the “reviewers” two minutes to share their answers with the group.
- After 2 minutes stop and go on to the next song. (Don’t go over time)
- Once all of the reviews have been shared, ask the groups to check their definition of Jewish Music. Is it still valid? Should it be changed? If it should be changed, then change it now.
- Have students stay in these groups. Play one cut from Celebrate Hip Hop.
- Using the questions they used above, discuss their definition of Jewish Music.
- On a piece of Post-It Flip Chart paper, have each group write a final definition of Jewish Music and, when they are done, put them up on the walls.
- When all are on the wall, ask each group to read and explain their definition.

**Part 4: Conclusion**

Go around the class quickly and have each student share a few words, up to a sentence, to complete this statement: *In our class today, one thing that surprised me most about Jewish music was...* If there is time, do another: *A word I would use to describe Jewish music is...* Put the music back on as they clean up and end the class.



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