

Jewish Heritage Month Discussion Guide

The 2026 Jewish Heritage Month poster celebrates the significant contributions and lasting impact of Jewish Canadians in communities across the country. The artwork focuses on this theme of celebration by featuring people united in a horah as an expression of Jewish joy.

The horah is a traditional, energetic dance in which participants hold hands or shoulders and dance in a circle. During Jewish weddings or bar/bat mitzvahs, the people being honoured are lifted on chairs in the centre of the circle. In the poster, dancers pay tribute to and encircle the Hebrew word *henaynu*, as their shadows form the word in English, which translates to “here we are.”

Celebrating Jewish Canadians Making a Positive Difference

The poster’s title, *Henaynu – Here We Are*, is more than a declaration of one’s physical presence. In Judaism, the phrase is a proclamation of one’s readiness and motivation to act with meaning, intention, and purpose. The following Jewish Canadians, and others like them, embody this notion of linking their presence with meaningful action, as exhibited by their dedication to social activism and justice.

Dr. Philip Berger

In his 40-year career as a family doctor, Dr. Philip Berger has been an advocate for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. He has been an ally and activist for refugees, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, those living with HIV/AIDS, individuals who use drugs, and people experiencing poverty. He has been recognized for removing barriers to ensure access to medical care. Among his many accomplishments, he founded the Amnesty International Canadian Medical Network and co-founded both Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care and the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture. Dr. Berger has been named as an officer of the Order of Canada for his strong advocacy on behalf of vulnerable patients.

The Right Honourable Bora Laskin

In 1970, Bora Laskin became the first Jewish justice appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada. Three years later, he was named Chief Justice of Canada. Known as the “Great Dissenter,” he often took more progressive positions than his colleagues, writing judgments that disagreed with the majority but were later adopted in Canadian law. Throughout his career as a scholar, teacher, and judge, Laskin focused on protecting individual rights and advocating for disadvantaged groups. He worked to combat racism and antisemitism, develop human rights legislation, advance civil liberties, and support labour rights. He presided over landmark cases, such as *Murdoch vs. Murdoch*, and introduced legal concepts that were incorporated into Canadian human rights law.

[Nate Leipziger](#)

Holocaust survivor Nate Leipziger has dedicated over 30 years to education. Through lectures, school visits, guided trips, and his memoir *The Weight of Freedom*, he emphasizes the importance of standing up to racism and intolerance. Leipziger shares his first-hand testimony as a survivor, choosing to highlight messages of resilience and hope while discussing the consequences of othering and hatred. In recognition of his leadership in education, he has been appointed to both the Order of Ontario and the Order of Canada.

[Jennifer Podemski](#)

Jennifer Podemski, of Anishinaabe and Jewish descent, is a celebrated Canadian actor, producer, and advocate. Her work and activism over 30 years has broken barriers for Indigenous creators and explores themes of identity, systemic oppression, and resilience. As the granddaughter of both Holocaust and residential school survivors, Podemski beautifully blends these distinct yet parallel histories of trauma through meaningful television shows, movies, and an upcoming documentary, entitled *Proof of Life*, that encourages dialogue and facilitates healing.

Classroom Connections

[Henaynu – Here We Are, Jewish Heritage Month Poster](#)

As a class, encourage students to describe what they see. How do the pictures, words, colours, and symbols communicate the poster's message?

[Explore the horah dance](#)

Watch videos of traditional horah dancing. As a class or in smaller groups, discuss the cultural significance of the dance and how it expresses joy, community, and celebration. Use the following guiding questions from the Ontario Dance curriculum to focus your discussion:

- What elements and conventions of dance are used in this work, and how do they communicate the theme of togetherness?
- How are the movements, including variations of steps and repeated patterns, organized, combined, or arranged to create meaning?
- How does the work evoke ideas, feelings, and images, such as joy or connection?
- What dances do you and your family participate in at special occasions in your life, and how do they express connection and cultural traditions?

[Research a featured individual](#)

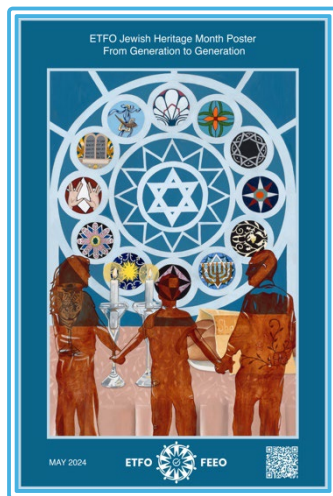
Read the brief biographies of the individuals highlighted in the poster. Choose one person to research in greater depth. After learning more about their life and work, write, present, or discuss how they embody the concept of *henaynu*: being present with intention, purpose, and meaningful action.

[Discover more Jewish Canadian leaders](#)

Research other influential Jewish Canadians to explore additional contributions to Canadian society and culture. Share your findings, highlighting how their actions impact the greater community.

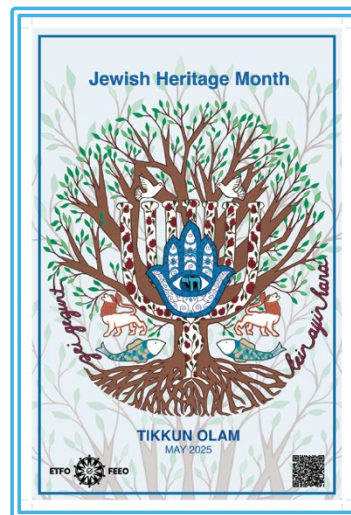
[Explore ETFO's Jewish Heritage Month posters](#)

Compare [Jewish Heritage Month posters](#) from 2024 to 2026. Have students note any similarities they find in the visual or thematic elements. While each poster focuses on a specific concept, there are commonalities to explore.



2024: L'dor va dor

Thinking about what we pass from generation to generation



2025: Tikkun olam

Healing the world with one's positive actions

2026: Henaynu
Here we are: meaningful and purposeful presence



Suggested prompts:

- How do these ideals inspire positive change in our communities?
- Create your own artwork or poem showing what these ideas mean to you. Think about acting with purpose, sharing histories from one generation to the next, and helping make the world a better place.
- Reflect on how your actions, big or small, can make a positive difference in your classroom, community, and beyond.