

ETFO Jewish Heritage Month 2025

Discussion Guide

Tikkun Olam



Background and Purpose

In 2018, the government of Canada established the month of May as Canadian Jewish Heritage Month. By integrating Jewish heritage into classroom curriculum, educators cultivate understanding and appreciation of Jewish culture to foster deeper connections.

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Concept and Art Description

The Jewish people are made up of countless diverse groups and populations from around the world, tracing their customs back to community origins within the Jewish diaspora.

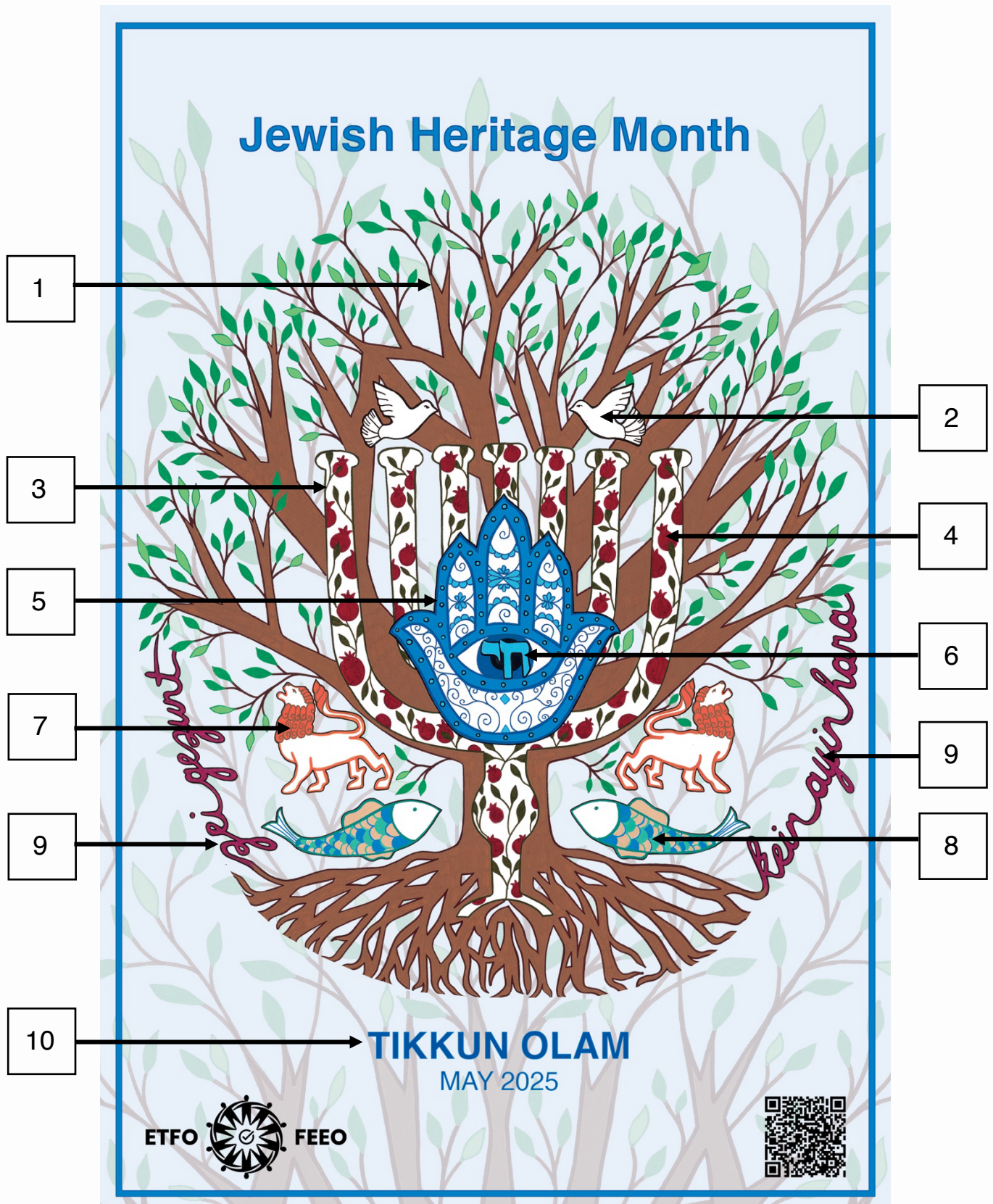
This year's poster, entitled "Tikkun Olam," celebrates Jewish diversity through symbols and images that represent the traditions of the main diaspora (Mizrachi, Sephardi, and Ashkenazi Jewish groups) as well as recognizing the history and origins of the other distinct subgroups (Beta Israel, Teimanim, and Bnei Menashe).

- Mizrachi: Middle East and North Africa
- Sephardi: Spain, Portugal, and North Africa
- Ashkenazi: Central and Eastern Europe
- Beta Israel: Ethiopia
- Teimanim: Yemenite
- Bnei Menashe: India

The symbols included in this year's poster represent this diverse heritage:

1. **Tree of life:** Has come to represent knowledge and wisdom.
2. **Doves:** Symbol of peace, hope and healing.
3. **Menorah:** The menorah is a candelabra with seven stems representing each day of the week.
4. **Pomegranates:** The many seeds within a pomegranate represent the many *mitzvot* – good deeds – one is expected to carry out.
5. **Hamsa:** A symbol of protection against bad intentions or actions.
6. **Chai:** The word *chai* means life. Its Hebrew symbol is חַי, which is a combination of the letters, *chet* and *yud*. In Judaism, a number is assigned to each letter. *Chet* represents eight and *yud* represents 10, so the word *chai* is represented by 18, which is linked to luck and life.
7. **Lion:** A symbol of strength and nobility.
8. **Fish:** Represents abundance and good luck.
9. **Zeï gezunt and kein ayin hara:** These two phrases are in Yiddish, a traditional language of Ashkenazi Jews. *Zeï gezunt* means to your health and is also a phrase to say goodbye. *Kein ayin hara* is a phrase of protection said after a compliment or positive comment.
10. **Tikkun olam:** Key concept in Judaism. It is the idea that through our actions and good deeds, we can work towards making the world a better place.

Poster Details



Classroom Connections 1: All Grade Levels

Introduce the ETFO Jewish Heritage Month Poster

Curriculum Connection: Language

Comprehension strategies

Apply comprehension strategies before, during, and after reading, viewing, and listening to resources created by individuals with diverse identities and perspectives to understand and clarify the meaning of text.

Lesson:

Observe and discuss the various elements within the artwork.

1. Create a three-column chart with the following headings:
 - My Observations
 - My Questions
 - My Discoveries
2. As a class, or in small groups, have students share symbols, images, and words they observe on the poster. List findings under “My Observations.” There are **10 items** to discover.
**As an alternative, play “I Spy” and have students locate each item.*
3. Move to the “My Questions” column and encourage students to share questions they have related to each image. Record their answers.
4. Read the Concept and Art Description included on page 2 of this guide. This will provide students with insights into the poster concept and use of specific images that may answer some of their questions.
5. Guide students back to the chart and have them record their discoveries in the third column.

Extension:

Encourage students to research items they discover to further explore their origins and gain a deeper understanding of their meanings.

Classroom Connections 2: Primary

TIKKUN OLAM: Doing Your Part

Review item #10 on the Concept and Art Description page.

Curriculum connection: Language

Transferable skills

Demonstrate an understanding of how the seven transferable skills (critical thinking and problem solving; innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship; self-directed learning; collaboration; communication; global citizenship and sustainability; and digital literacy) are used in various language and literacy contexts.

Lesson:

Create a three-tiered action plan. Draw a graphic organizer with three concentric circles.

1. In the innermost circle, students should record ways they can help people in their immediate surroundings: themselves, family, friends.
(e.g., chores around the house without being asked, eating lunch with someone new).
2. The middle circle should focus on good deeds around their neighbourhood (e.g., picking up litter).
3. The largest circle should include ways students can make a difference in their community or city (e.g., volunteering or writing letters to local officials on specific issues).
4. After students have completed their organizer, have them choose one or two items from each circle that they think they can achieve.
5. Create a chart with everyone's name.
6. Have each student share their goal(s) towards *tikkun olam* for the next week and record it beside their name.
7. At the end of the week, each student can share/write the actions they took to achieve their *tikkun olam* goal(s).
8. After every student has shared, provide them with an opportunity to reflect on their actions and explore next steps. Sample reflection questions:
 - *How did it make you feel when you did your good deed?*
 - *Do you think your actions made an impact? How so?*
 - *What are some things you may continue to do next week/next month?*

Classroom Connections 3: Junior

The Art of Symbolism

Curriculum Connection: Visual Arts

Creating and presenting

Produce two and three-dimensional artwork using elements, principles, and techniques of visual arts to communicate feelings, ideas, and understanding.

Lesson 1:

Create art using animals as symbols that best represent students.

Three animals are used in the poster to symbolize specific concepts:

- the **dove** represents peace and hope
- the **lion** represents strength and nobility
- the **fish** represents luck and good fortune

Students will brainstorm characteristics about themselves using the following guiding questions:

- *What is one adjective you would use to describe yourself? Why?*
- *What is one adjective your family or friends would use to describe you? Why?*
- *What is your favourite activity? Why?*

Once the students have created a concise description of themselves, they can research an animal (or two) that represents these qualities. They can then draw and decorate their animal mascot(s).

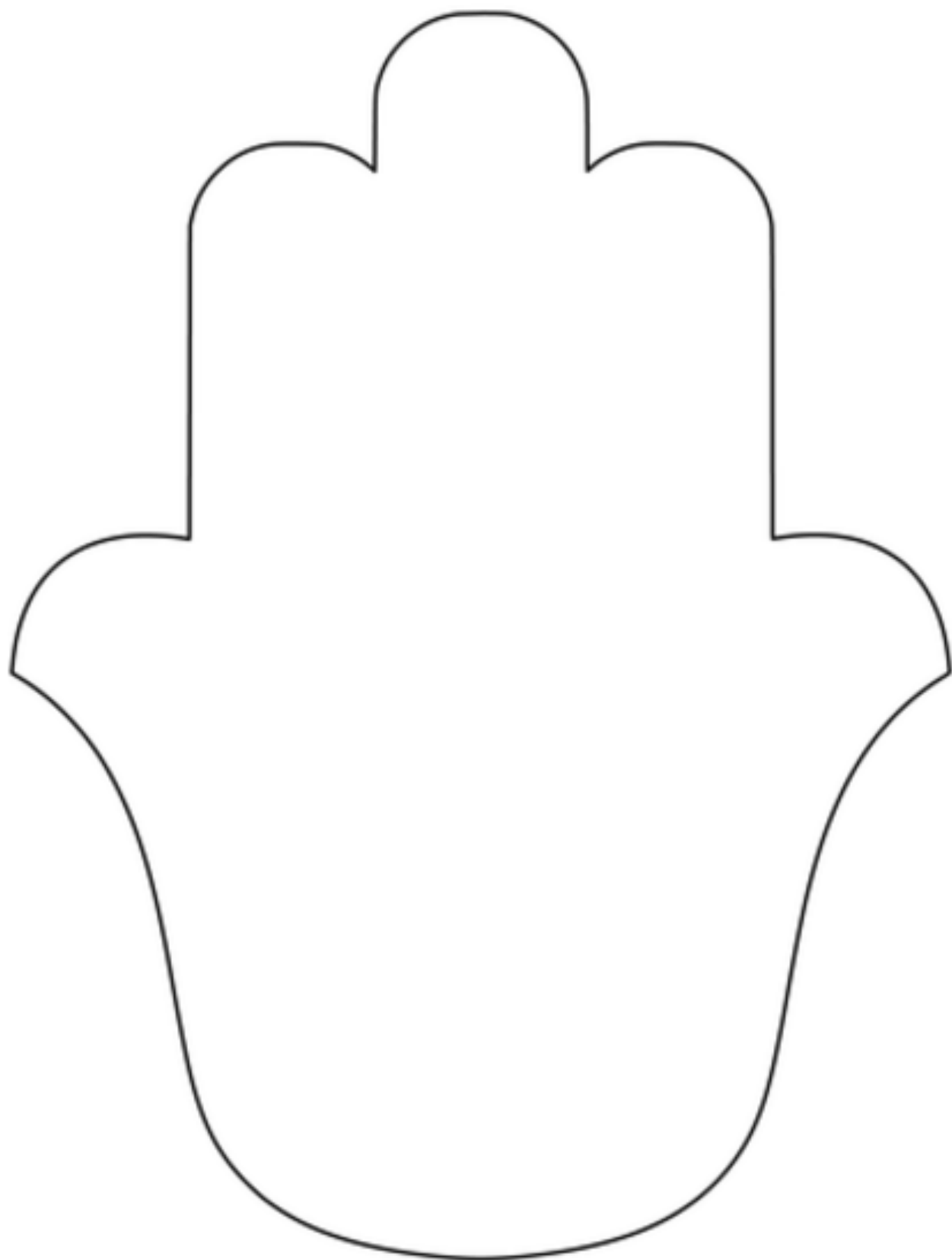
Lesson 2:

The *hamsa* symbol is in the shape of an open hand, often with an eye in the centre. It is used as a symbol of protection. It is often decorated with intricate lines, making it a beautiful decorative item used in jewelry and artwork.

Students can create their own *hamsa* artwork using the template on page 7.

Encourage students to focus on some elements of design:

- **line:** thick, thin, straight, jagged, squiggle
- **shape:** incorporate shapes and symbols that represent protection and hope
- **space:** use positive and negative space to create a balanced design
- **colour:** incorporate colour that conveys a mood or emotion
- **typography:** if they choose to add words, think about the font choice



Classroom Connections 4: Intermediate

Discover Prominent Jewish Canadians

Review item #10 on the Concept and Art Description page.

Curriculum Connection: Language

Applications, connections, and contributions

Apply language and literacy skills in cross-curricular and integrated learning. Demonstrate an understanding of, and make connections to, diverse voices, experiences, perspectives, histories, and contributions.

Lesson:

Learn about prominent Jewish Canadian figures and their contributions towards *tikkun olam*. There are many prominent Jewish Canadians who have helped the world through art, science, justice, philanthropy, etc. Students will focus on profiling these Canadians and their contributions to various fields.

Part 1: Research project

1. Provide students time to research a prominent Jewish Canadian of their choosing.
2. They will focus their research on how that individual contributed to the concept of *tikkun olam*.
3. Students can use the following categories to help guide their research:
 - **Introduction:** Introduce the individual and why they were chosen
 - **Background:** Where they grew up, early family life, and education
 - **Road to success:** How they became successful in their field
 - **Contributions:** Significant contributions in Canada and/or abroad
 - **Conclusion:** How their work applies to the concept of *tikkun olam*

Part 2: Create artwork celebrating a Jewish Canadian

Based on the research from Part 1, students select Option A or B to illustrate their new learning.

Option A: Create a word cloud

Using the research from Part 1, students brainstorm words that best describe their individual's:

- upbringing
- achievements
- personality traits
- strengths

Have students create a word cloud using all the descriptive words and the person's full name. This can be done by hand or using an app of choice.

Option B: Create a symbol-based artwork

Using the research from Part 1, students can use these guiding questions to brainstorm symbols, images, and words to best represent their individual:

- *What are some symbols or images that represent those words?*
- Think about the Jewish Heritage Month poster and how the animals represent certain qualities. *What animal would you use to represent this person?*
- *How did their achievements contribute towards tikkun olam?*
- *Think about what type of lines or colour you would use to represent their achievements. What style of lettering would you use for their name?*

Students will use their answers and images to create a unified image that represents the chosen individual and their contributions.