SpeakEasy Connects

A seriously smart comedy about family, faith, and legacy.

NEW ENGLAND PREMIERE

BAD JEWS

BY JOSHUA HARMON

DIRECTED BY REBECCA BRADSHAW

OCT 24 - NOV 29

SPEAKEASYSTAGE.COM

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Prepared by Jake Alexander and Walt McGough
Teacher’s Note

We are so excited to welcome you and your students to a special Student Matinee performance of BAD JEWS. As you prepare to see the play, please use the Curriculum Packet to get involved in a thoughtful discourse on faith, family and legacy both before and after your trip to the theater.

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Synopsis & Biography of Joshua Harmon

Synopsis
BAD JEWS tells the story of two cousins who wage war over a coveted family heirloom after the death of their beloved “Poppy”, a holocaust survivor. At odds are the annoyingly devout Daphna Feygenbaum, a young woman who wears her Jewishness like a righteous badge of honor, and her equally self-centered cousin Liam Haber, an entitled young man who has spent much of his life distancing himself from his cultural traditions. Liam’s brother, Jonah wants to avoid confrontation, and Liam’s girlfriend, Melody just wants everyone to get along. When the combatants are forced to spend the night in close quarters, the result is a vicious brawl and thoughtful discourse on family, faith, and legacy.

Joshua Harmon’s plays have also been produced and developed by Hangar Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Ars Nova, The Lark, The O’Neill, and Actor’s Express, where he was the 2010–2011 National New Play Network Playwright-in-Residence. He held fellowships with MacDowell, Atlantic Center for the Arts, SPACE at Ryder Farm, and the Eudora Welty Foundation. A Graduate of Northwestern (BA), and Carnegie Mellon (MFA), Josh is currently in the Playwrights Program at Juilliard and under commission from Roundabout and Lincoln Center Theater.
An Interview with Joshua Harmon

Below is an interview that SpeakEasy conducted with Joshua Harmon about his work with BAD JEWS and the themes present in the play. Share these quotes with your students pre-show so they can get a sense of the perspective from which the play is written.

SE: The big one first: what was the genesis of this play?

JH: I think a seed for this play was planted in college when I attended a Yom Hashoah service. I’d been to many such services in my childhood, and at each one, a survivor would speak about her experiences, which was always powerful. But at this particular service, the theme was "Grandchildren of Survivors." Instead of hearing from someone older, speaking English with a thick foreign accent, my peers got up and spoke about their grandparents' experiences. I found the event strangely unmoving. It was sterile and laden with clichés but it lacked power. It didn’t make me feel anything. I think that if you’re an eyewitness to an event, you’re forever imbued with the power to tell the story of what you saw. Even if you’re not a natural born storyteller, we want to hear from people who experienced something directly. Hearing about something in the third person was unmoving, and the fact of my being unmoved scared me. It forced me to reckon with questions about how my generation would remember the Holocaust, and whether or not we’re prepared to handle that responsibility. It probably laid the groundwork for this play.

SE: This play is obviously specific to the Jewish experience, but the conflicts resonate immensely with any number of other communities as well. To your mind, is there something that unquestionably makes someone a “bad” member of a family or cultural group?

JH: I can’t answer that question. All people are born with some cultural/ethnic/religious/national inheritance. What they choose to do with that inheritance is up to them. If everyone in a family shares the same point of view on a legacy, there’s no conflict. But more often than not, what happens is that different members of a family feel differently about their shared legacy, which makes for a lot of painful interactions. If something I value deeply is something you consider worthless, that’s painful. If something you cherish is something I find offensive, that’s painful. The "bad" member is all in the eye the beholder.

SE: Remembrance is of huge thematic import to this play: do you feel there is a way that we as a culture can best remember important historical events like the Holocaust?

JH: The mantra of all Holocaust memorials is "Never forget." Embedded in that notion is the very real understanding that almost everything that happens on this planet is ultimately forgotten. That’s what we’re up against…I would imagine as we move away from survivors giving first-hand accounts of the Holocaust into third-person accounts, the way we remember the Holocaust will change drastically. But already, in general, it seems fewer young people know about what happened than preceding generations, and what they do know is less detailed. That’s probably inevitable, but it’s very painful nonetheless.
Daphna Feygenbaum

"And so now, when it's easier to be Jewish than it has ever been in the history of the world, now when it's safest, now we should all stop? I can't. I can't. And if I know you at all, you don't want me to stop either. Because if I stop, if we all stop, it will be gone. And you can't get it back. Once it's gone, it's gone."

*In this production, Daphna is being portrayed by Alison McCartney.

**ABOUT DAPHNA:** Daphna is a wildly passionate, honest, and strong-willed young woman. She has never been and will never be afraid to speak her mind, even if that means offending people along the way. With her intensely wild hair, loud voice, and argumentative nature, she can often be found at the center of attention, which is a point of contention for her cousins, Liam and Jonah. There is little that matters more to Daphna than her family and the foundation that her religion provides her.

**Discussion Question:**
Daphna is passionate about her faith and her beliefs: how does that help or hurt her argument? How does she come off to people she interacts with?
ABOUT LIAM: Liam is a scholarly, aloof, and rather serious PhD candidate who prides himself on being open to cultures other than his own. He is equally as argumentative and strong-willed as his cousin, but believes that people are defined by their actions, not their history and religion. He is arrogantly intelligent, adventure-seeking, and passionate, finding solace in relationships with people very different than he. He loves his family, but wants to make a life for himself outside of the traditions he feels have been forced upon him.

Discussion Question: Liam describes himself as non-religious. Do you agree with his argument? Why is the Chai so important to him?

“I’m sorry, but I can’t get worked up about preserving a totally watered down version of something that wasn’t even true to begin with, and I’m not going to allow it to dictate how I live my life or who I choose to live my life with so I can genetically or biologically pass on something I don’t even believe in.”

*In this production, Liam is being portrayed by Victor Shopov.*
Jonah Haber

“I told you I don’t want to... be involved, in... this.”

*In this production, Jonah is being portrayed by Alex Marz.

**ABOUT JONAH:** Jonah, Liam’s younger brother, tends to be brushed aside by his more abrasive brother and cousin. He is soft-spoken, and frequently second-guesses what he believes and what he thinks he should say. He doesn’t want to fight, almost to the point of being afraid of confrontation. He would much prefer to remember and celebrate the past, specifically the life of his grandfather whom he loved, while being open and positive about the future. He simply wants everyone to get along, or at least to stop fighting, and take the path of least resistance.

**Discussion Question:**
Jonah appears very non-confrontational in the play: Does his passiveness help or hurt the situation and his “path of least resistance”?
Melody

“I don't talk that way. I just heard every single [thing you said]... and I'm not about to lash back at--because everyone in here, no matter whatever you think of them, is a human being, and you don't talk to human beings that way. If I ever did, I honestly couldn't live with myself. Promise me all that horribleness is over.”

*In this production, Melody is being portrayed by Gillian Gordon.

ABOUT MELODY: Melody is a kind-hearted, overly positive, and slightly naive individual who studied opera in college and now works in a completely unrelated field. She searches first for the good in people, trying to keep an open mind and understand one’s hardships, rather than jumping immediately to judgments. Although her innocence may suggest she is a bit boring or reserved, she will stand up for herself and her loved ones when pushed. She is in a serious relationship with Liam.

Discussion Question:
Melody just wants “everyone to get along” over the course of the play; do her actions reflect or contradict this desire?
Frequently Asked Questions: Jewish Customs

BAD JEWS, while a play about the universal ideas of faith and legacy, relies on Judaism and its customs to tell its story. Before seeing the show, go over these ideas and terms with the students so that they have some context to better understand the story that is being presented.

What is Judaism, at its most basic level?
Judaism is the oldest of the three Abrahamic religions, which also include Christianity and Islam. Jews believe in a single God, follow the teachings detailed in the Torah (also known as the Old Testament), and bring religious respect and reverence to their everyday lives.

Who is a rabbi?
The word “rabbi” translates from the Hebrew word for “teacher.” Rabbis are the spiritual leaders of the Jewish community, and offer religious counsel and support. They must receive ordination and be educated in halacha, or Jewish law.

What are the Jewish High Holidays?
Rosh Hashanah, a two-day celebration of the Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, are the most important holidays of the year. Most Jews attend services at a synagogue or temple on these days. The two holidays are separated by 10 days, and each begins at sundown. Rosh Hashanah is a time to spend with family, prepare for the coming year, and share large meals together. Yom Kippur is a day to reflect on past mistakes, make amends, and consider ways to better oneself in the future. People often fast, and then partake in a large meal with family and friends at night.

What happens during a Jewish funeral?
Jewish funerals traditionally take place as soon as possible after the person dies, as it is considered more respectful to the deceased to avoid unnecessary delays. The casket will be closed and there will be no viewing of the deceased during funerary services. The service includes readings from the Torah and a eulogy. The Jewish prayer for the dead, the Kaddish, is recited after the casket is lowered into the ground. Family members and friends will then place a few shovelfuls of dirt onto the casket as a symbolic assistance in the actual burial. A year later, the family returns to place a gravestone in honor of the departed.

What does it mean to “sit shiva”?
Shiva is the traditional mourning period of seven days where mourners receive condolence calls from family and friends. The term “sitting shiva” refers to the tradition of mourners sitting on low chairs, stools, or boxes, representative of how their loss has laid them low. A candle is lit when the family returns home from the cemetery, and is left burning for the week.

Why would a Jewish person want to move to Israel?
The word Aliyah is derived from the Hebrew word “laalot”, which means to go up or ascend, in a spiritual sense. When someone makes Aliyah, they have chosen to emigrate and live in Israel, a symbolic return home after the Biblical Diaspora. A person who makes this move is referred to as an Oleh, or someone who goes up (to Israel). People who make Aliyah are often looking to uphold their Jewish national identity.
A Historical Timeline of WWII and the Holocaust

BAD JEWS, at its core, is about how we honor our past. To better understand the arguments that Daphna and Liam are presenting, it’s important to understand how the Holocaust began, life in the concentration camps, the eventual liberation of the Jews, and how the Jewish culture coped with the aftermath of Hitler’s “Final Solution.” Share the timeline with your students below before seeing BAD JEWS, or use it as a template for a history lesson about the “Final Solution.”

Early 1930s: the Persecution

- Approximately 9 million Jews lived in the European countries that would eventually be occupied by Germany and the Nazis

- January 30th, 1933: Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany and the Nazi party rises to power. Hitler blames Germany’s economic hardship on the Jews, using them as a collective scapegoat

- Nazis spread anti-Semitic propaganda (print, radio), portraying the Jews as sub-human and supporting old stereotypes, to further their case against them

- Nazis cite widespread Jewish influence in finance, business, the press, and the arts, blaming that for the country’s economic and social downturn

- 1934: Hitler takes full control of Germany, issuing Anti-Jewish decrees to slowly strip the Jews of their rights: All Jews and non-Aryans are excluded from German society, and cannot hold government jobs, own property, or run their own businesses

- The rest of the population does nothing to support or protect the Jews, perhaps because of the few positive political changes the Nazi party has made, but mostly due to the widespread fear of Nazi brutality
1935:
- Nazis claim that pure-blood Germans are in a struggle for survival against the “inferior” races (Jews, Roma and Sinti [Gypsies], black people, and disabled people). Many Jews who fought to defend Germany during WWI still stripped of their citizenship and war medals
- **July**: A conference held in Evian, France discusses what is to be done with Jewish refugees – most countries refuse to accept any more for fear of “overpopulation, under-employment, and an increase in anti-Semitism”
- **September 15th**: The Nuremberg Laws are enacted as the legal basis for removing Jews from German societal proceedings

1936-1938:
- **March 9th**: An outbreak of violence in Przytyk, Poland in which 3 Jews are killed, and 60+ wounded. The violence continues into 1937, spreading to surrounding towns; 80 killed, and 200+ wounded
- German occupation of Europe begins with the annexation of Austria

1939: **The Start of the War**
- The occupation of Poland by Germany on September 1st triggers the start of WWII
- The Nazis establish a decree forcing Jews to wear yellow stars on their clothing in public

1940:
- Germany establishes ghettos in Poland for groups of Jews to live in, the Warsaw Ghetto being the most famous

1941:
- **June**: Hitler invades the Soviet Union. This period also marks the beginning of the “Final Solution”
- The 5.5 million strong German army (joined by the SS, Gestapo, Romanians, Ukrainians, Latvians, and Lithuanians) forms mobile killing squads (Einsatzgruppen) which are responsible for killing 2 million+ Jews and thousands of Roma and Sinti

1942:
- Nazis establish 6 death camps in Poland: Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek, and Auschwitz-Birkenau
1943:
- The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising leads to Jewish Revolts in Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz

1944: **End of WWII:**
- Germany is defeated and the discovery/liberation of Death camps begins
- **January:** An official decision is made by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to admit European Jews into the United States
- The U.S. establishes the War Refugee Board (WRB), assisted by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the World Jewish Congress; this helps with the relocation of thousands of Jews
- **May 8th:** The war in Europe officially ends with approximately 6 million Jews now dead
- **December 22nd:** The Truman Directive is issued by President Harry S. Truman designating an immigration quota for the U.S. Immigration itself does not increase, but more displaced persons enter the country. Legislation is passed to admit 400,000 displaced persons into the U.S.; approximately 20% are Jewish
- **May 14th 1948:** State of Israel is established
- 137,450 Jewish refugees settle in the U.S.

Discuss with your students the implications of the Holocaust, and how it might affect how Jewish people feel today about the world. After having seen the production of BAD JEWS, does the play reflect those feelings?
3G

“3G” is a term used to identify the third-generation of Jewish people living after the Holocaust. This is a generation whose grandparents were persecuted by the Nazis in WWII and may have survived the Holocaust and immigrated to America. The 3G organizations have a goal of honoring the legacy of their loved ones who may have perished in the Death Camps, while also keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive in our ever-evolving culture. In BAD JEWS, Daphna, Liam, and Jonah would all be a part of the 3G: knowing this, how does their behavior reflect or contradict the mission and goals of 3G organizations?

The Boston Chapter of 3G’s website states: “Our mission is to explore our shared history to keep the memories of survivors alive and to bring together anyone who is committed to ‘Never Forget’ and ‘Never Again’.”

“TOGETHER WE PROMISE. We are the children and grandchildren born out of unspeakable tragedy when the Nazi regime murdered six million Jews and millions of other innocent victims. Our parents and grandparents bore witness to this Holocaust and we have been witnesses to their lives.

We are the first generations born out of this darkness. The Jewish people were not destroyed. Those who survived were not silenced. Those who were lost have not been forgotten. Our collective Jewish memory, Jewish history and Jewish tradition lives on.

As our parents and grandparents grow older and the generation of survivors disappears, this legacy of memory becomes ours. We have a solemn obligation to remember those who perished and those who suffered. We will remember their names. We will tell the stories of their lives. We will speak out to ensure that the truth of these stories is not denied.

The history of the Holocaust must be as a warning to humanity of the danger and evil that is possible when we are indifferent to the suffering and persecution of others. We will teach these lessons to our children. We will share them with our neighbors. We will honor the memory of those lost by working to build a world where genocide can never happen again.

In one voice we proclaim that generations will remember, l’dor v’dor.

That is our promise.”
Testimonials of the Holocaust
BAD JEWS deals with personal stories and connections to Jewish history; Daphna and Liam’s grandfather had a story of how he survived the Holocaust and held onto the object that meant the most to him. Millions of Holocaust survivors have similar stories, and it’s important to hear them to better understand the context in which BAD JEWS is set. Share the following quotes/testimonials with your students and discuss how these stories help shed light onto the deeper issues of persecution and remembrance presented in BAD JEWS.

“The first area, where we had to undress, strip our clothing. There were hooks behind us. You put the clothing through a piece of wire, hang the clothing up, take our shoes off, put the shoes on the floor. Next table were the barbers, the camp barbers, where they shaved our head, they cut our hair, shaved the entire body. They said it’s for hygiene. Then we moved to another table where the tattooing was done. So, the tattoo was done on the left forearm. There was one person who would rub the...a little piece of dirty alcohol on your arm, and the other one had the...had the needle with the inkwell, and he would do the numbering. So my number is 65,316. That means there were 65,315 people numbered before me, tattooed before me. After the tattoo...tattooing was done, they put us where they gave us the clothing, but not what we came with”. –Miso Vogel, Survivor

“In fact, in all of Germany you were either very religious or you weren’t aware of your Jewishness at all--you were very, very Reform. Conservative Judaism had not been invented yet. [Laughing] So, yes, we were very religious and, um, interestingly enough, um, the...the...the religion was state-supported. In other words, we always had to mark on, on taxes or on any forms--on birth certificates, wedding forms, or anything--on birth certificates, wedding forms, or anything--our, our affiliation. It was always "Jewish" because the state paid for the upkeep of the synagogue. The state paid for the salary of the rabbi or the hazan [synagogue official; cantor] or the shohet [person licensed by rabbinic authority to slaughter animals for use as food in accordance with Jewish laws]. So, there was never a question that we were very Jewish, and everybody knew that and everybody, up to a certain point, respected it too.” –Gerda Haas, Survivor

“The men, the SS men were standing outside with a Red Cross wagon and they had the gas can...cans in the truck, in the...in the ambulance. He put a mask on, had to put a mask on, tore the lid off of the gas...of the...of the, um, the gas canister, threw it down the chute, through the chimney into the gas chamber. The crematorium two and...and three had two gas chutes. And as soon as he threw the gas in he slammed the lid shut, so the gas wouldn't escape. And all you could hear is one loud sound, "Shema..." [the Jewish declaration of faith] and that was all. And that took about five to ten minutes. In the door they had a little peephole with four or five layers of glass in between, and it was with bars so nobody could break the glass through. And when they turned on the light into the...in the...in the bunker, you could see whether the people were already dead or not.” –Sam Itkowitz, Survivor
Holocaust Memorial in Boston

The New England Holocaust Memorial was completed and officially dedicated on October 22, 1995. At its dedication, the architect, Stanley Saitowitz, had this to say:

“...Six pits are dug and lined with black concrete. At the bottom of each pit is a glowing fire. Six glass towers are raised above. Etched on the glass towers are SIX MILLION numbers that flicker with light. On the walls of each tower, a memory of a survivor from the camp is etched. Between the towers, a line of text locates the Holocaust in historical context. At the two entries are didactic panels, one outlining the chronology of events ... the other quoting Pastor Martin Niemoller, who placed responsibility for such events in the hands of every individual. As visitors walk along this path, entering the towers, they are tattooed with the shadows of numbers, and trapped momentarily in a theater of horror. On the black granite ramps is incised REMEMBER. Each of the six burning chambers is named after one of the six death camps constructed in Poland, factories whose product was death: CHELMNO. TREBLINKA. MAJDANEK. SOBIBOR. AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU. BELZEC...These six towers are emblems of faith, a covenant of trust that memorializes a collective evil. They are towers of hope and aspiration.”

Elie Wiesel, famed Jewish author and poet said: “We must look for hope. There is a marvelous saying by a great Hasidic master: 'If you look for the spark, you will find it in the ashes.'
Memoirs and Novels
Many authors and poets have written memoirs and novels about surviving the Holocaust and the cultural aftermath of the persecution of the Jews. What is interesting is that despite their similarity in content, each of these pieces of literature varied in style. This speaks to the idea that BAD JEWS brings up: it doesn’t matter how we remember the Holocaust and our culture, it’s just important that we remember at all. Share these quotes with the students and discuss how these different styles of writing about the same event beneficial in their own ways.

Eli Wiesel’s Night is an autobiography/memoir of the author’s time spent in a concentration camp. His story follows his real-life experiences and memories of suffering, persecution, and as the title might suggest, darkness. He believed that he had to write this autobiography because it was the only honest way to honor the survivors of the Holocaust. Here’s what he had to say about why he wrote his memoir: “I wrote it, not for myself really. I wrote it for the other survivors who found it difficult to speak. And I wanted really to tell them, ‘Look, you must speak. As poorly as we can express our feelings, our memories, but we must try. We are not guaranteeing success, but we must guarantee effort.’ I wrote it for them, because the survivors are a kind of most endangered species. Every day, every day there are funerals. And I felt that there for a while they were so neglected, so abandoned, almost humiliated by society after the war.”

The Book Thief, a young adult novel, takes a more allegorical approach to Jewish Culture during WWII and honoring those who were persecuted by the Nazis. Told from the perspective of Death, it follows the story of a young girl, Liesel, who lives in Germany during the time of Hitler’s reign. The book is more episodic than other stories of its kind. The author, Markus Zusak had this to say about writing from Death’s perspective and the nature of his novel: “The identity of Death was there from the beginning, and there were two turning points when it came to tone and style. The first was nine months into writing, when I went back to the beginning and wrote the first aside: ‘Here is a small fact: You are going to die.’ That gave me the tone I wanted... The second turning point was when I realized that Death should be afraid of humans, because he is on hand to see all of the incomprehensible things we do. It gave me the idea that he tells this story to prove to himself that humans are actually worth it. Also, the irony that Death is afraid of humans really appealed to me.”

Lois Lowry’s Number the Stars tells the story of a young Danish girl who witnesses the Jewish persecution in Denmark right before the end of WWII. Lowry focuses on an outside perspective to the Holocaust, and how many Europeans were unaware that the Holocaust was happening. Lowry said, after finishing the novel, that the idea of writing about innocence is best told through innocent eyes, which is why her novel is written from the point of view of a child. She says this about the style of writing: “I never consciously choose a point-of-view. Some books, or stories, seem to need to be written from one viewpoint, some from another... The idea for NUMBER THE STARS came from the remarkable and wonderful history of Denmark during the Nazi occupation, as told to me by my Danish friend Annelise, who was a child there at the time.”
Tattoos

Jewish religion is based on the first half of the bible, the Old Testament, also known as the Torah, which outlines the Jewish Law. One of the most-talked-about controversies, between what the law says and the way in which Jewish people follow it, is the ability to get a tattoo. Jewish law states “You shall not make gashes in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:28). Daphna in BAD JEWS talks about how she cannot get a tattoo, despite Melody’s urging. She says:

“Jewish law prohibits tattoos of any kind but even if it didn't that wouldn't be a problem for me because just for like me personally, when I like step back and reflect on all the things that had to occur in the universe over billions of years so that I could be alive, in my body, right now, like, we're made of the same things as stardust, that's how connected we are, to everything, so to be like, who cares about the natural, larger-than-life mysterious universal reasons why my body was designed the way it is, like, screw that, I'm just gonna permanently etch this doodle onto my body which is composed of the same things that are in stars!?!? Poppy had a tattoo, but that was different, obviously. That wasn't by choice. B-14312. I memorized it...”

Daphna’s opinion on tattoos, while perhaps extreme, is one of devout faith. While the Torah prohibits “etching” on one’s body, many Jewish people have adopted a more liberal sense of Judaism, and allow themselves to get tattoos. During WWII, Jews in concentration camps were marked by a tattoo (typically a letter followed by five numbers). The purpose was not only for tracking, but also a tactic of humiliation: purposely forcing the Jews to go against Jewish law. While the generation of Jews who suffered in the concentration camps see these tattoos as symbols for the pain and suffering they experienced, they also serve as a reminder of the Jewish persecution, and remembrance of those lives lost during WWII.

The Importance of the Chai:

Chai is the Hebrew character for life. Judaism emphasizes the importance of life, and Jews are encouraged to be good, ethical people, and enjoy the time they have on Earth. Because it means “life,” the Chai is consequently a symbol that captures an important aspect of Judaism: according to the gematria (a mystical tradition that assigns a numerical value to Hebrew letters), the Hebrew character Het has a numerical value of 8 and the Yud has a numerical value of 10, giving the Chai a numerical value of 18 (the Het and the Yud make up the Chai). As a result, 18 is often a number that means “good luck,” and to give gifts in multiples of 18 is often considered giving the gift of “good luck” or “life.”
“Being Jewish”

BAD JEWS deals a lot with how Jewish tradition and culture have been assimilated into global and American cultures. The idea of degree of Jewishness as something to take great pride in has been a popular debate among religious leaders and Jewish celebrities. Here’s what some of them have to say about the matter:

Mel Brooks: “I may be angry at God or at the world, and I'm sure that a lot of my comedy is based on anger and hostility. It comes from a feeling that as a Jew and as a person, I don't fit into the mainstream of American society. Feeling different, feeling alienated, feeling persecuted, feeling that the only way you can deal with the world is to laugh – because if you don't laugh you're going to cry and never stop crying – that's probably what's responsible for the Jews having developed such a great sense of humor. The people who had the greatest reason to weep, learned more than anyone else how to laugh.”

Jon Stewart: "Look, there's a lot of reasons why I hate myself — being Jewish isn't one of them" 

Sarah Silverman: “I think I maybe became funny because as a kid, I was a Jew in a town with no Jews, and being funny just instinctively came out as a way to put people at ease around me.”

Ruth Bader Ginsburg: “It’s a heritage to be proud of. And then, too, it’s something that you can’t escape because the world won’t let you; so it’s a good thing you can be proud of it.”

Share these quotes with your students, perhaps on another sheet of paper, and ask them to respond to any of the following:

Based on these quotes, does there seem to be some sort of consensus on how Jews feel about being Jewish?

Based on these quotes and your own personal experience/knowledge, how does the world feel about Jewish people?
Agree/Disagree Activity: Pre- and Post-Show

Applicable Common Core State Standards

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1c** Propose conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1d** Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

**Directions:** Place a piece tape across the length of the classroom, splitting the room in half; designate one side of the tape “agree” and the other side “disagree”. Read the following statements to the students and ask them to stand on either side of the tape based on whether they agree or disagree with the statement. Record the Number of Agrees versus Disagrees in the space below the questions. Lead a discussion about why the students agree/disagree with the statements. Have them give examples to support why they think that way. Remind them before the performance to keep this activity in mind.

Following the performance, repeat this activity; how are the responses different? Use these differences to have a discussion with the students about why they may have changed their opinions after the show. What changed their minds? Do they think Daphna or Liam would agree or disagree with these statements? Jonah? Melody? Have the students use examples from the show to support their arguments.

Total number of Students in the class: _______
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree/Disagree Activity: Tally Sheet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think culture is the most vital part of individual identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Show: Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Show: Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think faith is the most vital part of individual identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Show: Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Show: Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to not question or disagree with beliefs held by your whole family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Show: Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Show: Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural traditions must be passed down to future generations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Show: Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Show: Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would never want someone that is not in my family to be given a family heirloom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Show: Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Show: Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best way to deal with conflict is to suppress it and keep your opinion to yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Show: Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Show: Agree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Pre-Show Activity: Conversation Starters/ Journal Prompts:

Ask the students some of the following questions to help facilitate conversation about some of the themes in *BAD JEWS*:

1. Does your family have certain traditions that you carry with you in your own life?

2. How do you keep the memory of loved ones alive? In what ways do you honor their memory?

3. Does faith play a role in your life, and if so, why?

**Applicable Common Core State Standards**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1c Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1d Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.
Pre-Show Activity: Identity

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, Writing Standard 2 for Grade 12:

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

BAD JEWS deals with how culture can alter faith, and vice versa. Think of your own cultural or spiritual identity; how have either or both of these identities shaped who you are as a person? Daphna is strongly affected by her spiritual identity, while Liam is more in touch with his cultural identity and has dismissed his spirituality.

Directions:
Step One: On a separate sheet of paper, please respond to any or all of the following questions:

How have you been affected by your own cultural or spiritual identity and how have either or both of these identities shaped who you are as a person? Think about a time when your cultural identity and/or spiritual identity come into disagreement or interfered with something that you wanted to do: what was that struggle and how did you get past it? How does your culture influence your behaviors? Your values? Your relationships?

Step Two: When you have finished responding, switch papers with a classmate and read their response. Was their response a similar or different perspective from your own? (ex. Their cultural identity has impacted them more as a person than their spiritual identity, while you believe the opposite).

Step Three: Once you have read through your partner’s response, form an argument (premise, support, conclusion) in support of their perspective. Once you have done so, debate with your partner about which is a better perspective: cultural, spiritual, or combination of both. At the end, based on the arguments presented, decide a winner and state why.
Pre-Show Activity: Remembrance and Legacy

Objects that have “history” carry strong connections to our past and define who we are as people. In BAD JEWS, Daphna and Liam fight over a prized object that once belonged to their grandfather: a Chai. Poppy carried this Jewish talisman (see historical context for what it symbolizes) around with him through WWII and his time in the concentration camp. The Chai means a great deal to both Daphna and Liam, but in very different ways.

Directions: Think of an object that means a lot to you and that you would want to be passed down to future generations. What does this object mean to you or your family? And if it has been in your family for a long period of time, how has the meaning of that object changed? What legacy does the object have? In the space provided below, draw or describe the object. Then write a short passage about what the object means to you, what it might mean to other members of your family, and how its meaning has changed over time. Why would you want this object to be passed down to future generations? After you are done writing, meet with a partner and talk about your different objects. What similarities are there between what the objects mean to you or your family?

For Teachers: After the students have partnered and discussed their objects, lead a class discussion about how an object can gain or lose historical significance over time. How do objects define our past and who we are as people?
Post-Show Activity: Production Analysis
Name: _______________________

1. Which character do you relate the most to and why? Be specific.
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

2. Give specific examples of how the set and costume designs showed characterization or affected the action of the play.
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

3. What effect does Melody have on this play? What does she symbolize?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

4. Why do you think this play is called “BAD JEWS”? Is anyone in this play a “Bad Jew”? If so, who? If not, explain why you don’t think any of the characters are “Bad Jews.”
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, Reading Standards for Literature 3:
- Describe how a particular story’s or drama’s plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
- Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).
- Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.
- Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
Post-Show: Furthering the ideas

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, Writing Standard 7:
*Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.*

BAD JEWS focuses a lot on the struggle between culture and religion in our everyday lives, a theme which is universal. Despite that, Joshua Harmon focuses specifically on how Judaism has been affected (positively or negatively) by the culture in which it now exists.

**Directions:** Research and write a brief report (to be shared with the class) on any of the following topics/questions:

- Pick a specific religion or cultural background. How has it evolved over time? What are the ways in which a particular culture has been shaped by a new generation or location?
- What are some of the factors that facilitate change in a culture?
- How has culture changed the ways in which we remember and honor important historical events?
- Has culture affected the legacy we will leave behind to other generations? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How has culture and/or religion been affected by a specific historical event (i.e. Civil Rights debates, Vietnam War, 9/11, etc.)?

When you are done, share these reports with the rest of the class. Use pictures and other visual aids for your presentation, and cite the sources you used to gather your information.
BAD JEWS CURRICULUM PACKET

Interview with Rebecca Bradshaw, Director of BAD JEWS

Rebecca Bradshaw is making her SpeakEasy directing-debut with BAD JEWS; we sat down with her to talk a little about the project and hear about her thoughts on the piece.

**SE:** What is BAD JEWS about?

**RB:** BAD JEWS is about three cousins deciding who deserves their family’s heirloom. Simple, right? Now, add two people who would rather die than breathe the same air, the rawness of a very public funeral, and the weight of an object that defined one man’s ability to survive a situation that six million people did not. These characters are being asked to define their family’s legacy before knowing how to even talk to each other.

**SE:** What attracted you to the project? How do you connect to it on a personal level?

**RB:** This play is messy and unapologetic, which is so human to me. These people are far from perfect, but they are also young. Being in my twenties, I know what it feels like to be granted adulthood, but waking up and not knowing who I am or what I want to do. It’s a scary and vulnerable place. It is when I am forced to stand up and argue for what I believe in, that I see who I truly am.

**SE:** Why is this story important now?

**RB:** Changing people’s views or beliefs can be a never ending battle without success. This is what wars are fought over. Although we are seeing one family’s world views, they cover total opposite sides of the spectrum. We live in a world where we consistently need to remind ourselves to see each other from multiple perspectives even though we may never see eye to eye.

**SE:** What are some of the biggest challenges you face in bringing this show to the stage?

**RB:** At times I find this play very bleak. The comedy is key. Laughter can be many things: covering up our discomforts, rejecting someone for their stupidity, or accepting them because we see our faults in them. The hard realities and truths of this piece will land in the moments of silence. This play navigates that silence beautifully.

**SE:** Who does this story speak to?

**RB:** Although we are looking through the lens of a Jewish family, I believe we can replace Judaism with a number of religious or ethnic backgrounds and we’d wind up with a similar outcome. Although intolerable at times, I find this family extremely relatable through their flaws as well as their strengths.
Production Staff

Like any show, SpeakEasy Stage Company’s production of BAD JEWS has a lot of people working tirelessly behind the scenes to make sure that the best possible show is performed. Below is a list of our designers and production staff members, with brief descriptions of their positions. If your students are unfamiliar with the types of people who work on a theatrical production, share the descriptions with them.

**STAGE MANAGER - Tareena D. Wimbish**
The stage manager is the organizer: he/she makes schedules, runs the technical aspects of the show, manages actors and designers, and coordinates the rehearsals/performance.

**SCENIC DESIGNER - Eric Levenson**
The set designer creates the visual world, designing the physical surroundings to express tone, atmosphere, and location of the piece.

**TECHNICAL DIRECTOR - Alix Strasnick**
The technical director organizes all technical aspects of the theatre, coordinating the installation of lights and scenery, all while insuring the safety of everyone around.

**COSTUME DESIGNER - Tyler Kinney**
The costume designer outfits the actors after researching time period, location, and what the character would wear based on personality and action.

**FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER - Angie Jepson**
The fight choreographer designs and teaches a physical altercation that is preplanned and safe for the actors, but looks as though the characters are actually fighting.

**LIGHTING DESIGNER - Chris Bocchiaro**
The lighting designer creates the atmosphere of the piece through light, shadows, colors, and intensities to illustrate time of day, mood, and artistic concept.

**MASTER ELECTRICIAN - Julie Streeter**
The ME is responsible for implementing the lighting designer’s work. This includes hanging and focusing all of the lighting equipment.

**SOUND DESIGNER - Ed Young**
The sound designer creates the soundscape, providing effects for different noises, music, and the general atmosphere.
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