

SESSION 4: DON'T BUY IT!

LET THERE BE...STUFF?
A SPIRIT-FILLED RESPONSE TO A CONSUMER-CRAZED WORLD
A Faith-Based Program for Jewish Teens



created by

THE STORY OF
STUFF
PROJECT


GreenFaith
Interfaith Partners in Action for the Earth

www.storyofstuff.org

www.greenfaith.org

version 1.0

SESSION 4: OVERVIEW

ENTER AND CONNECT (8 MIN)

- Opening prayer
- Promise Poster
- Check-in
- Homework

INTRODUCE (3 MIN)

THINK (5 MIN)

- Story of Stuff Clip

ENGAGE (26 MIN)

REFLECT (5 MIN)

- Jewish Source Text

INSPIRE (1 MIN)

- Teen Activist Story

ENACT (5 MIN)

- Action Plans

EXIT (5 MIN)

- Circle and Blessing

Preparing for Session Four

Facilitation Preparation

This Session is an opportunity to channel the natural rebelliousness of teens toward Earth stewardship. Help them see that there is a whole industry that sees them not as people but as consumers and is working hard to control their thoughts and behavior to make them buy things they don't need. You're inviting students to wake up out of a trance and that can be hard. They might resist the idea that ads really influence them or that wanting and getting stuff isn't the source of true happiness. You can help them see this by providing examples of times when you've bought something because the ad looked so good and it turned into a big disappointment either because it was poorly made, end up sitting in a box in the corner, or just didn't fill the God-shaped-hole. Be transparent about your own challenges, how you are also vulnerable to ads.

Overview

In this session we explore the ways in which ads manipulate us into wanting things we don't need and how things are designed to break so we have to keep buying more new things. It helps students see through these manipulations and think for themselves so they can put their focus on the source of true happiness, their relationships with each other and God.

Goals

- Reveal the ways in which we are manipulated by the media
- Help us resist temptation
- Focus on the source of true happiness our relationship with God and others
- Give more time to the things that matter in life, rather than on consuming

Themes

Religious:

- Temptation
- The true source of happiness

Secular:

- Our consumption habits are fueled by two sneaky concepts; perceived obsolescence and planned obsolescence.
 - Perceived obsolescence is when we think our stuff is un-cool even when it works just fine.
 - Planned obsolescence means it's so poorly made that it's "designed for the dump."

Religious Text

- Exodus 20:14,
- Ecclesiastes 4:1,7-8
- Psalm 128

Materials for Session 4

- Promise Poster
- Right Stuff Action Board Session 4
- The Story of Stuff* clip
- Logos and Leaves activity
- Popular magazines
- Large piece of flip chart paper or whiteboard
- Thick colored pens
- Hand-outs
 - Session 4 Readings Sheets- 1 for every 2-3 students
 - Session 4 Action Plans- 1 for every student

Session 4 To Do List

- Have Session Readings sheets copied and ready to hand out (1 for every 2-3 students)
- Have Bible Text sheets copied and ready to hand out (1 for every 2-3 students)
- Post promise poster on wall
- Prepare Right Stuff Action board for Session 3 homework
- Set up *The Story of Stuff* clip cued for extraction to manufacturing (10:06-16:43)
- Have Logos and Leaves sheet printed and ready to share
- Have 5-10 good popular magazines relevant to teens
- Have Action Plans ready to hand out

Jewish Source Texts

Exodus 20:14

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Ecclesiastes 4:1,7-8

I further observed all the oppression that goes on under the sun: the tears of the oppressed, with none to comfort them; and the power of their oppressors – with none to comfort them. . .

And I have noted this further futility under the sun: the case of the man who is alone, with no companion, who has neither son nor brother, yet he amasses wealth without limit, and his eye is never sated with riches. For whom, now, is he amassing it while denying himself enjoyment? That too is a futility and an unhappy business.

Psalm 128

A Song of Ascents.

Happy is everyone who fears the Lord,
who walks in his ways.

You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.

Thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the Lord.

The Lord bless you from Zion.

May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life,
And live to see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!

Healing Chant

Takein Olam (Heal the world)- from the text of the prayer Aleinu - Call out things that need fixing over the chanting of the group.

Takein olam . . .

Takein Olam . . .

Takein Olam, b'malchut Shaddai.

Heal the world,

Heal the world.

Heal the world, with the power of
Shadda

Notes on Jewish Source Texts

Covetousness and envy are complicated and difficult emotions. Theologians across the centuries have written about the damage that they cause both to the person who envies and the person who is the object of envy. From a pastoral perspective, our society is a complicated place when it comes to covetousness and envy, for the simple reason that there is so much advertising designed to make us covet. As Jesus taught, being tempted in this way is a dangerous thing.

Consider a study by California State University in Northridge, which reported that the average US child watches television for 28 hours each week and sees 20,000 30-second commercials every year. These figures have risen consistently since the 1950's. According to the same study, the average US child spends almost twice as much time watching television than being in school (900 hours per year in school, and 1,500 hours per year watching television). While ads promote the benefits of different products, their basic message is identical: Getting stuff brings fulfillment, the more stuff the better. We live in a culture that is constantly making our children covet material things and, engendering envy. We and our children are facing the same temptation that Jesus faced, but thousands of times each month.

So is there any truth to the message we're being bombarded with night and day? Does consuming stuff have anything to do with happiness? Derek Bok, the former president of Harvard tells us "no." Consumption has risen over 50% since the 1950's. Yet, his research shows that "since the early seventies, the percentage of Americans who describe themselves as either "very happy" or "pretty happy" has remained virtually unchanged." The truth is, we aren't any happier than we were with half the stuff we have today.

Ecclesiastes (Kohelet, in Hebrew) is considered "wisdom literature," because it's one of the books of the Hebrew Bible that focuses less on theological considerations than on how human beings can pragmatically live a good, fulfilled life. The writer was certainly a sage who had seen a lot of life. Tradition attributes it to King Solomon himself. The book thoroughly explores the seeming paradox of the human condition – that we all work hard, strive for things in this world, and someday must die, and comes to the conclusion that a lot of what we strive for is "vanity," and that we'd all do better to relax a little and try to enjoy this world more. He says in chapter 4, verses 1 and 7-8:

I further observed all the oppression that goes on under the sun: the tears of the oppressed, with none to comfort them; and the power of their oppressors – with none to comfort them. . .

And I have noted this further futility under the sun: the case of the man who is alone, with no companion, who has neither son nor brother, yet he amasses wealth without limit, and his eye is never sated with riches. For whom, now, is he amassing it while denying himself enjoyment? That too is a futility and an unhappy business.

Notes on Jewish Source Texts Cont.

Psalm 128 is also from the “Wisdom” tradition of the Hebrew Bible. It is part of a series of psalms that were sung by pilgrims on their way to the Temple in Jerusalem; hence the title: A Song of Ascents since one always went “up” to Jerusalem. In this Psalm, the definition of happiness is seen within the context of a concept called the “Fear of God.” This does not mean fear in the ordinary sense of the word but having awe of and respect for God. It can also mean having a moral consciousness; knowing what is right and good from what is wrong and evil. In this psalm, having a moral consciousness leads to happiness which is defined as: enjoying the things that you have earned for yourself, the blessings of family (including living to see one’s grandchildren born) and peace in the land. Material possessions are not the source of happiness, morality is. Happiness is not an end in itself but the product of a life lived with morality and respect for God.

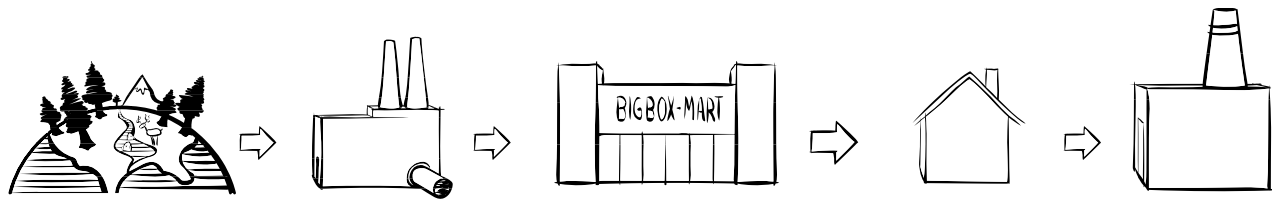
It’s not our intention to deny the blessing that material comforts offer. May we all have the pleasure of listening to music on iPods and enjoying other beautiful things! But we also don’t want to forget what our faith teaches about the basis of true happiness. The Bible tells us that enduring fulfillment exists in the expression of service and compassion, faith and friendship, meaningful vocation and loving relationships. We’re left with a tension between cultural pressures that equate consumption with happiness, and religious teachings that see fulfillment issuing from very different sources and behaviors. Instead of seeking happiness by buying more stuff, we can find happiness by helping to end the unconscious, compulsive need for more stuff and the systems that perpetuate it.

Covetousness and consumerism fit well together, but ethics and envy, justice and jealousy don’t. Perhaps God warns against envy because in the end, it can’t deliver the happiness it promises. Living in a world that barrages us with this lie, leaves us with the question, “What do we believe about the claims that advertisements make, and what are we going to teach our youth about this?”

What’s your response?

In the end, we have offered the chant “Takein Olam b’malchut Shaddai” – “Heal the world with the power of Shaddai.” This text is taken from the second paragraph of the prayer Aleinu, which is sometimes read silently and sometimes omitted altogether. The prayer envisions a time when all of humanity will be unified in service to God. It acknowledges that the work of bringing about redemption is “aleinu” – “upon us.” We invoke the power of Shaddai – one of the oldest, most powerful names of God – in order to strengthen us in our work of healing the world.

SESSION 4 – Don't Buy It!



Enter and Connect - (8 min)

Opening prayer (1 min)



Creator of the Universe, Source of All Life, you know better than we do what makes us happy, and you understand the ways that we are so vulnerable to being misled and confused. Help us to gain a deeper understanding of what really makes us truly happy, and to shape our lives to make that real for ourselves. AMEN.

- Look at the Promise Poster together and ask students to raise the hand with the promise string on it if they intend to keep the promises during this session..
- Check-in: What was it like for you this week to know the secret life of your everyday stuff?
- Homework Check – Ask who did their homework. In pairs (not their buddies), have them tell each other what they did and how it went. (2 min each) Back in the large group, have them each say how many points they earned that week (tally the points on the tally sheet) and choose a highlight to share. Have them post any pictures they brought on the Right Stuff Action board.
- Hand out Session 4 Readings and Bible Text sheets.

Introduce (3 min)

Recap the previous week, if needed.
Ask the students:

SAY THIS

*What did we do last week?
What did we learn?*

Have students take turns reading, one reader per paragraph:

READ ALOUD

1.1 - When we consider major Biblical characters we admire, such as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Miriam or Deborah, there are a lot of traits they all express: a sense of Justice, the ability to speak truth to power, charisma, courage, even fierceness. But not one of them thought his possessions or appearance was an important expression of who he really was or what he came to say. Moses even left his position as a son in Pharaoh's household (which must have been pretty cushy) to go organize a slave rebellion! Think about that! God gave them what they needed. Not Prada. Not Gucci. Not Banana Republic, or American Eagle, or Gap. Just enough: enough food, shelter, water and clothing when they needed it, and friends on their journeys.

1.2 - If our obsession with stuff didn't come from our traditions where did it come from? What made us want designer labels and cell phone apps? What made us think we were lame if we didn't have the fastest computer or the hottest jeans? And what made us spend more time consuming the world than caring for it and each other? In this session we're going to talk about how we're being bombarded by messages that try to manipulate us into feeling bad about ourselves and wanting things we don't really need, which don't give us true happiness, and which are trashing the planet. And we're going to show them we're smarter than they are. That we see through their lies and that we're capable of making our own choices to find real happiness focusing on the things that really matter and taking better care of Creation while we're at it.

Think (5 min)

Prep: Set up Story of stuff clip on extraction and production (10:06-16:43)

- Tell students they're going to watch a section of the video with the themes you'll be focusing on in this session.
- Watch the clip.
- Debrief (1 min) – What do you think?

Engage (26 min)

Part 1 - Logos and Leaves (1 min)

Prep: Have Logos and Leaves image ready

Instructions:

- Show the large group the Logos and Leaves sheets without labels.
- Ask the group to identify what each one is? What kind of plant does the leaf belong to? What company is the logo representing? Most groups have a hard time identifying the plants but no problem identifying the logos.


Ask:



- *What do you think that means about how businesses have taken your attention from Creation?*
- *How do you think they manage to get so much of our attention?*

Engage (26 min.)

Part 2 - Ad-busting (5 min.)



TRY THIS

If the add uses a model it implies that you will be more like him/her, or more desirable to him/her if you buy the product. Have the students describe the qualities that the images or models in the ad convey and how they make it seem like the product will endow anyone who owns it with those qualities.

Prep: Have magazines ready to hand out.

Instructions:

- Pass out magazines
- Invite students to select ads that they think are particularly manipulative.
- Have one of them hold up an ad while the whole group explores how the ad is manipulative. There is time for about 3 ads.

Ask the following questions:



- *What does the ad imply the person will get, feel, or have by buying the product?*
- *Who does this ad imply a person will BE if they have the product?*
- *How does the ad do that?*
- *What does the ad imply you don't have enough of without the product?*
- *Is the product really necessary? What will it really give you?*
- *What does God think about the message the advertisement is sending?*

Part 3 – Skits (20 min)

Prep: It's nice but not required to bring any costume elements, hats, scarves, bags, etc. for this.

Instructions:

Divide the group into 3 smaller groups.

Instruct students make up a fake commercial selling anything they want. They won't have time to memorize lines, so have them decide on an outline instead of a script and make it up as they go along. The skit should include the commercial and the response of someone watching it, who sees right through the manipulation and doesn't buy it. Tell students to show the advertisers that they don't control you, that you have a mind of your own and can buck the trends. (7 min)

Have them perform the skit for the whole group. (3 min/group).

Tip: to make it go quickly, have students go around and count off in threes (one, two, three, one two three...)



TRY THIS

Tip: Give them a warning a minute before their time is up so they can wrap up.

SESSION FOUR: DON'T BUY IT!

Reflect (15 min)

Part 1 – Coveting (5 min)

Prep: Hand out Session 4 Reading sheets

You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour. (Exodus 20:17)

Have students take turns reading, one paragraph each:

READ ALOUD

1.3 - If we were to summarize the Ten Commandments in kid's language how would you say it? The first ones are easy: "Don't lie" and "Listen to your Mommy and Daddy." But what about the last one? Exodus 20:17 says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (it's safe to assume that includes his stereo equipment and car). How would you communicate that to a child? One answer is, "Be happy with what you've got." God wants us to appreciate all that we have; to be thankful, not greedy.

1.4 - Getting something new can feel really good. Who doesn't love the thrill of opening presents? Spirituality doesn't mean denying yourself the things that bring you joy. Judaism doesn't have anything against the simple pleasures of life. They are exactly the point of Creation! Each of us can fulfill humanity's destiny in Creation by living a bigger life, one that has more joy and meaning and less negative impact on the world, by taking pleasure in what we already have, and really appreciating the things that make us happy.

Have students read Ecclesiastes 4:1,7-8 and Psalm 128.

Part 2 - What Makes You Happiest? (10 min)

Prep: Notepaper and pens, a big piece of paper and colored pens.

Instructions:

1. Pass out notepaper and pens.
2. Ask students to privately list all the things that have made them happy in the last week, which didn't cost money? (2 min)
3. Then, invite two students to serve as scribes, writing on a two separate large pieces of paper in front of the room.
4. One scribe will title his sheet "Favorite Possessions." The other scribe writes, "Sources of Happiness" at the top of their list.

Reflect (15 min)

- The scribes then invite students to take turns adding one item to each list as they write them down, alternating between lists.
- Once the pages are full, ask students the following questions:

SAY THIS

- What are the most important things on these lists? What would be the hardest to live without?*
- What kinds of happiness do you get from having possessions? What doesn't this list of possessions give you?*
- What kinds of happiness do you get from having the things on the other list? How long does that usually last? What don't those things give you?*

TRY THIS

Tip: It's normal to find a form of happiness in possessions. Make sure to observe that this kind of happiness can be pretty short-lived. Compare that to how enduring the happiness is that comes from our connections to each other, God, and Creation, and in expressing ourselves without spending money.

Inspire (1 min)

Prep: Have students ready to read from the **Session 4 Readings sheet**.

Instructions:

- Read this:

SAY THIS

We all know it can be really hard not to covet thy neighbor's brand new awesome hoody or whatever it is that week and to be thankful for the one we got handed down from our older brother or sister. But some people are defining and making their own fashion.

- Have students take turns reading, one paragraph each:

DIY Prom

<http://www.youthradio.org/news/no-cash-prom-fash>

READ ALOUD

1.5 - The walls are plastered with prom pictures and clippings from newspapers and fashion magazines. And at 10:15 at Lincoln High School in Stockton, California, dozens of fashion design students take their seats and go to town on sewing machines...

REFLECT

INSPIRE

Inspire (1 min)

1.6 - One girl alters a friend's jeans for a few extra bucks, and others are making hoodies. Stephanie Hernandez is one of six students designing her own prom dress. She's an outside-the-box fashionista who's known in the class for pulling off inexpensive fashion feats, like the dress she designed for winter formal. "My parents told me they had a budget for my dress and all the dresses I wanted were really expensive," so Hernandez decided "To make my own out of teen vogue magazines. And it was really cheap, it only cost me \$10."

READ ALOUD

1.7 - Ten dollars for the packing tape she used to assemble magazine cut outs into a strapless cocktail dress. Now Stephanie Hernandez is splurging a bit for the prom by making a duct tape dress for 20 bucks!" I think when you spend less money and are more resourceful your dress ends up being more unique and memorable than if you spend a lot of money and you tuck it behind your closet and never see it again."

3. Ask students how it inspires them.



Enact (5 min)

Prep: Hand out Action Plan sheet and Another Way sheets.

Instructions:

1. Tell them about the Group Mission.

Group Mission: Spending Freeze!

Tell the group that you're going to all do an action together this week: Spending Freeze. The challenge is to reduce their consumption for the week by not spending any money on non-essentials – everything except what they need for school, nourishment, and safety. Tell them to bring a list of all the things they normally buy but didn't that week.

Enact (5 min)

Prep: Hand out Action Plan sheet and Action Plan Instructions.

Instructions:

Review the instructions.

Action Plan Instruction Sheet

Read and think about the actions:

- Which actions would you like to do?
- Which seem like you could do them?
- Which seem like fun?
- Which seem as if they will really make a difference?

Decide which actions to take.

- Decide which actions you will do with your buddy and which you will do by yourself.

Remember to:

- Show your parent(s)/guardian(s) your action plan when you get home and ask them to support you. Think of what support you want from them. Ask them how they want to support you.
- Check in with your buddy at least one time this week.
- You can change your action plans.
- You can catch up on any unfinished actions at anytime.
- Take pictures or document what you do so you can share it!

Exit (5 min)

Closing Circle: Palms Up and Down Prayer

Gather the participants in a circle. Give each participant an opportunity to share one thing that he or she learned in today's session. Go around the group a second time and give each person an opportunity to share on thing that he or she would like to have lifted up in prayer. Ask them to hold out their left hands with palms facing up. Then ask each person to place his or her right hand (palm down) on top of the hand of the person on his or her right. Say the following to the group:



The circle represents our community of faith. In this community we are always supporting people around us (call everyone's attention to their left hands) and we are letting community support us (call everyone's attention to their right hands).

Exit (5 min)

EXIT

If desired, recite the healing chant, Takein Olam, or Heal the World, from the text of the prayer Aleinu. Participants can call out things that need fixing over the chanting of the group.

Blessing



God, thank you for the chance to learn about the ways we get tricked into thinking that certain things will give us the happiness and fulfillment that only you can really provide. Now help us to put this knowledge to work to build strong, good lives for ourselves. AMEN.

WE WANNA KNOW...

Congratulations on completing Session 4! How did it go? How much time did the exercises actually take? What worked? What didn't? What do you think would work better?

Let us know at: www.storyofstuff.org/teach.php

Session 4: Readings

1.1 - When we consider major Biblical characters we admire, such as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Miriam or Deborah, there are a lot of traits they all express: a sense of Justice, the ability to speak truth to power, charisma, courage, even fierceness. But not one of them thought his possessions or appearance was an important expression of who he really was or what he came to say. Moses even left his position as a son in Pharaoh's household (which must have been pretty cushy) to go organize a slave rebellion! Think about that! God gave them what they needed. Not Prada. Not Gucci. Not Banana Republic, or American Eagle, or Gap. Just enough: enough food, shelter, water and clothing when they needed it, and friends on their journeys.

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Session 4: Readings

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Session 4: Action Plan

Group Mission

- Spending Freeze - The challenge is to reduce your consumption for the week by not spending any money on non-essentials – everything except what you need for school, nourishment, and safety. Bring a list of all the things you normally buy but didn't this week. (3 pts)

Create

- God's Ad - Make your own ad for God to get people to spend more time taking care of Creation and spending time doing things that make them really happy. (3 pts)

Communicate

- Catch the lies - Go to the mall with your buddy and take pictures of some of the worst ads you can find, take pictures and /or tell us why (3 pts)
- Wake up a friend - Tell your friends what you've learned the next time you pass an ad or they say they absolutely have to have something new. (2 pts)

Worship

- Real happiness - next time you feel like shopping or like someone else has something you absolutely have to have, imagine you're seeing yourself through God's eyes and ask yourself why you want it and if it really fills the need you think it does. What do you really need in order to be happy? Pray to God that you remember that! (1 pt).

Get Smart

- Research this! Get more information about how businesses market to teens by watching Merchants of Cool online here: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/>. (2 pts)
- Make a note in your notebook of 3 times you noticed the media trying to manipulate you without even leaving the house. (1 pt)

Try Something New

- Organize a clothing swap with your friends. You can trade clothes, bags, shoes, jewelry, etc. (3 pts)
- Instead of buying something new, make it from something you already have, but aren't using anymore into it (i.e. turn an old pair of jeans into a bag). (3 pts)
- Catch yourself every time you think you need to buy something in order to feel better about yourself, and what else you can do to feel good about yourself outside of shopping. (1 pt)
- Take an ad break. See how hard it is to avoid ads. (1 pt)

Session 4: Action Plan Cont.

Have Insights

- Don't Buy It! – Next time you think you want something, see if you can identify the ways in which you have been manipulated into wanting it.
- Take an Inventory - Go through everything you normally buy during a month and take an honest look at how many of those things you buy in order to feel like you're cool. Cross off everything you don't need. (2 pts.)
- Find your soft spot - Where you are personally susceptible to being manipulated? What is the cost to you? To the world? (1 pt.)
- Write On! - Choose an object you really like that you bought recently. Reflect on and write your responses to the following questions:
 - What difference did I think this would make in my life?
 - How did I think it would make me feel?
 - How did I think other people would see me because of it?
 - Did it work?
 - How long has it lasted?
 - Has the feeling changed since I first got it?
 - What does it do for me now?

Share any insights with the full group at the next session

Tips and Tools... **TRY THIS**

- Instead of buying something on impulse, put it on layaway for a few days and see if you can live without it.
- Don't fall for the latest trends. Buy clothes that will last and stay in style.
- Next time you go clothes shopping, instead of hitting the mall, try going to Goodwill or another place that sells previously worn clothes. You'll be amazed what you find.
- Use old clothes to make one-of-a-kind items like handbags and quilts.
- Before you buy a new electronics gadget, check to see how much your desire for it comes from the "Golden Arrow" of consumption *The Story of Stuff* talks about. Set a new trend by using technological dinosaurs until they really bite the dust.

Be a Leader

With peers

- Take a new direction - when you're with friends and they want to go shopping, convince them to do something outside or play a game together – something that engages and connects you (not just zoning out in front of the TV) (3 pts.)

In your family

- TV fast - Turn the TV in the living room off for the week (3 pts)

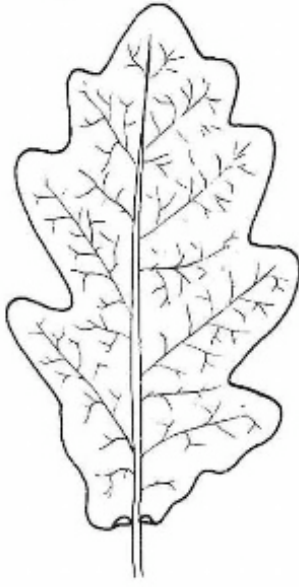
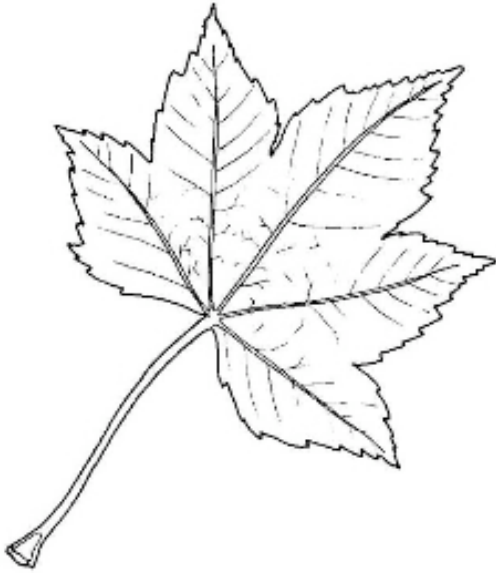
In your school

- Anti-ad campaign - Brainstorm ideas for an anti-ad campaign in your high school and create a poster (2 pts)

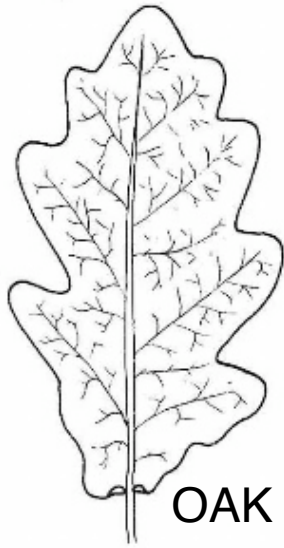
In the Congregation

- Stuff swap - Talk the people at your synagogue about having a congregation-wide stuff swap and set a date (3 pts)

Total # of Points _____



LOGOS AND LEAVES

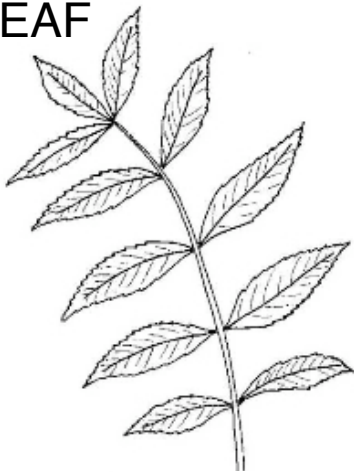


OAK LEAF

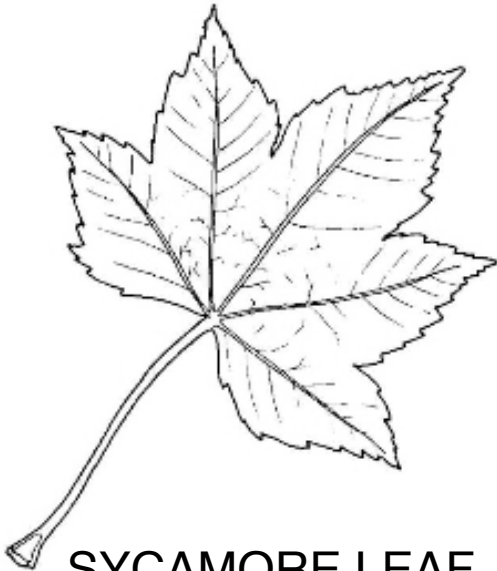


NIKE

ASH LEAF



MCDONALDS



SYCAMORE LEAF



APPLE