

Purim and Feminism

or "That Vashti Thinks She's the Queen of the Neighborhood"

The following lesson includes far too many activities for one class. Pick and choose what works for the age group and classroom culture!

Age: 6th grade through 12th grade. Great for a Rosh Hodesh group, as well as mixed-gender classes.

Objective: Students will be able to define "consent," "coercion," and "empowerment."

Goals: Students will use consent language to retell the story of Purim.

Supplies needed:

- 2 colors of sticky notes
- Writing utensils
- Sheets with the names of Esther, Vashti, Moredchai, Ahashverus, Haman, Haman's wife on separate pages, taped to a wall
- White board, or large sheet of paper for vocab
- Projector and computer

1 Who are you? Who is Vashti?

1a Facilitator opens by handing students a pack of sticky notes.

- "Before we get started, take the next 3 minutes and write out every personality trait you have that you're proud of, and those you're not so proud of, on these sticky notes. Don't stop writing!"
- *For children who cannot yet write, brainstorm traits as a class.*

1b Tell the story of Purim. Facilitator instructs students: "As I tell the story of Purim, write out the values that each character has on more (different colored) sticky notes, and put them below each character.

- Give a [Bibliodrama](#), taking students through the emotions that Vashti, Esther, and Haman's nameless wife may have felt.
- Read a book: *The Story of Esther*, for example.

1c Discuss: Now, look at your own traits. Which characters exemplify you? Which parts of you? How do you think you might have acted if you were [character.]

2 Vashti character sketch

- Facilitator will write on the board (or have a student write) answers: Who is Vashti? What do we know about her? What are her motivations? How does she compare to Esther's bravery?
- What are the traits you saw in her? How does she act in her situation?
- Do you think you would have done the same?
- What traits did you see in Vashti that you also saw in yourself?

3 Why is Vashti often so villainized?

- Watch: Target Women, "[Story Time](#)."
- Discuss: What is Vashti's crime? How is Esther imagined as her counterpart? Answer, hopefully among answers given, that Vashti did not consent to the demand of her by the King, and because she stuck up for herself, was expelled from the kingdom!
- Define: Have students define the terms "consent," "informed consent," "coercion," "empowerment." Discuss these terms. How can they apply to our own lives? What do you consent to—can it be a hug (yes)? Can it be more than that?
- Watch: "[Vashti Was Right](#)."
- Tell: Have students retell the story of Vashti with the language of consent, from the first person. "I chose to not dance before the King and his friends, because..."

4 Where are women in the Story of Purim?

- Discuss Goddess symbolism in the story of Purim with "[The Womantash Triangle](#)" from Lilith magazine (and make some delicious Hamentaschen!)
- Read verses for Esther to repeat aloud, in the tradition of reading aloud verses that discuss Mordechai's bravery, from [Ritualwell](#).
- How can we change the narrative of Purim to celebrate the heroics of Vashti and Esther?