

Megilat Esther

Courage in Crisis: Elementary School

ABSTRACT:

In this lesson, we will discuss leadership and courage in times of crisis. The students' study will focus on chapter four in which Esther is empowered to use her unique position to take positive action to help others in a time of danger. Students will meet Rachel Goldberg Polin who, like Esther, has become an activist and spiritual leader during our current crisis.

LESSON GOALS:

- Review the basic storyline of the Megilah
- Understand Esther's dilemma and her courageous action
- Meet a woman who is acting as a courageous leader during the current crisis in Israel.
- Use comics as a tool to summarize and internalize dialogue and events of the Megila.
- Feel inspired by the courage of women - both biblical and contemporary - to move beyond their personal comfort in order to take an active and vocal stand for what they believe is right.

LESSON PLAN:

I. Review the storyline of Megilat Esther (15 minutes)

For younger students: **Story-telling** is an engaging way to remind students of the general plot of Esther's narrative. Below is child-friendly version of the story that can be presented along with images or puppets, depending on age group:

Once in a town called Shushan, there lived a man called Mordechai. Mordechai lived with his niece Esther, and they were Jewish. In the same town there was a king called King Ahashverosh. He lived in a big palace but he needed a new queen to come and live with him. He looked everywhere and eventually he decided that the one person he liked most of all was Esther. So Esther said goodbye to Mordechai and went to live in the palace with the King and become his queen. Mordechai told her not to reveal that she was Jewish so she kept it a secret."

There was a man who worked in the palace named Haman. He expected everyone to bow down to him when they saw him, and he - became extremely angry if someone didn't do exactly what he wanted. But Mordechai refused to bow to Haman so Haman became very angry and he went to the King and said, "There are some people who do things differently from other people, and we should destroy them."

The Jewish people were very sad but what could they do? Mordechai sent a message to Esther at the palace, and the message said "Esther we need your help! Don't stay silent! You are in a special position and you should try to convince the king not to listen to Haman!"

Queen Esther was scared because she had not received an invitation to speak to the king and because she would have to reveal that she was Jewish - both of these things might anger the king. But, Esther decided that she had to be brave in order to help her people. She made a special dinner for the king, took a deep breath and with great courage spoke up and said "Please spare my life and that of my people because Haman plans to destroy us!"

The King chose to punish Haman instead of the Jewish people and Mordechai, Esther, and the entire Jewish people celebrated the fact that they were saved.

For older students:

Have students pair up to create a **comic strip** that summarizes the main storyline of the Megilah (either based on memory or text). You can direct them to include all story elements: characters, setting, problem, event, and resolution. Encourage them to include landscape, props, and captions.

II. Esther's Dilemma (10 minutes)

Once the students are reminded of the basic sequence of events, they can focus on the dilemma that Esther faces. The problem of course is that Haman plans to destroy the Jewish people. Staying with the comics theme, ask students to articulate Esther's dilemma by writing in the **thought bubble** above her head in their own words (examples: "What should I do? Should I try to save my people but risk my own life and reveal my identity? Or, should I just stay silent, continue hiding, and protect myself?") You can use a graphic organizer for the student to discuss the conflicting values at play in her **moral dilemma**. It is important for students to understand that Esther could have made an alternative decision.

Mordechai responds with a powerful message to help Esther come to a decision:

***"Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis."* Esther 4:13-14**

וַיֹּאמֶר מֶרְדֳּכָי לְהִשָּׁיב אֶל־אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־תְּדַמִּי בְּנִפְשֶׁךָ לְהַמְלִיט
בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִכָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים
כִּי אִם־הִחַבֵּשׁ תִּחְרָשִׁי בְּעֵת הַזֹּאת הַנּוּחַ וְהַצֵּלָה יֵעָמֹד לַיְּהוּדִים
מִמְקוֹם אֲחֵר וְאַתָּה וּבֵית־אָבִיךָ תֵּאבְדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם־לֵעֵת כְּזֹאת
הִגַּעַת לְמַלְכוּת

Depending on student level, these two verses can be read to the students by the teacher or read by the students themselves. Ask the students to write Mordechai's message in their own words briefly in the **speech bubble** above his head (example: You can't just save yourself! Do something!)

III. Esther's decision (10 minutes)

Referring back to student comic strips, what decision did Esther make and what actions did she take?

- 💡 She get the people to pray and fast
- 💡 She makes a plan
- 💡 She herself fasts
- 💡 She reveals her Jewish identity
- 💡 She approaches the king
- 💡 She asks for the king's support

Esther chooses to speak up, to publicly take a stand, to rally her people, to face adversity, to be vulnerable and honest, and to use her position to call attention to her peoples' plight. (Alternatively, Esther could have chosen to remain silent and passive, not call attention to herself or her people, protect herself, etc.). Sometimes we only think about physical courage, but in her actions, Esther displays moral courage.

IV. A Contemporary Esther (10 minutes)

Today the Jewish people, and especially the people in Israel, are in a similar crisis. But, like in the Megilah, there are people who display amazing moral courage - they take action, speak up, lead, and inspire despite fear and uncertainty. Just one of many examples is **Rachel Goldberg-Polin**. Rachel's 23 year-old son, Hersh, is one of the people taken hostage to Gaza. In response to this crisis, it would be understandable if Rachel closed herself up in her home, remained silent and frozen, gave up hope or stayed angry or depressed. However, Rachel has made a different decision, she has chosen a different way to respond to this crisis. Rachel was a soft spoken teacher and mom. Although she had never before been or wanted to be a public speaker, or a politician, or a spiritual leader, she has become all of those things in this time of need. She has become the voice, face, and conscience of the hostage crisis sharing her profound wisdom and righteous anger on the international stage. She has met with Joe Biden, Elon Musk, the pope and she spoke at the UN (teachers can show a [1 minute clip here](#), minute 8:40-9:40). While of course her focus is on her own son, she advocates for all of the hostages and has even been able - on multiple occasions - to empathize with the suffering of the Gazan people. Rachel has said about herself: "All the public speaking, all that stuff would have – before – made me very nervous. My voice would have been shaking, I would have been panicked for weeks beforehand. That does not exist anymore. When you've been so traumatized and so terrified, nothing scares you anymore...I'm not a diplomat. I'm not a politician. I'm not a military strategist. I'm a mom,"

Like Esther, she has used this challenging moment to publicly call for solidarity, morality, and faith. Rabbi Audrey Marcus-Berman said of Rachel: "She is a very important leader of the Jewish people right now. In my mind she is a neviah (a prophet)... where does she get the strength not only to do everything to bring her son home, but to speak so powerfully and to lead us, to lead humanity, to fight this evil with such resilience and goodness."



Think-Pair-Share

In what ways is Rachel's bravery and leadership similar to that of Esther's?
In what ways is it different?

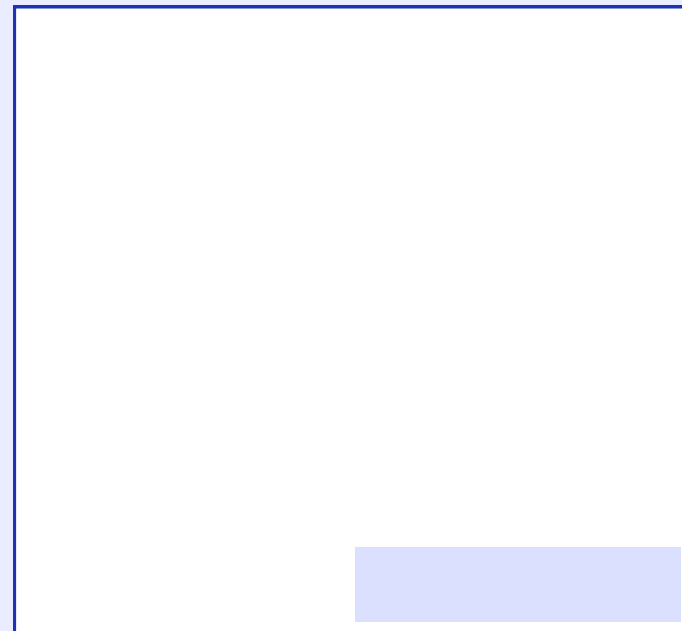
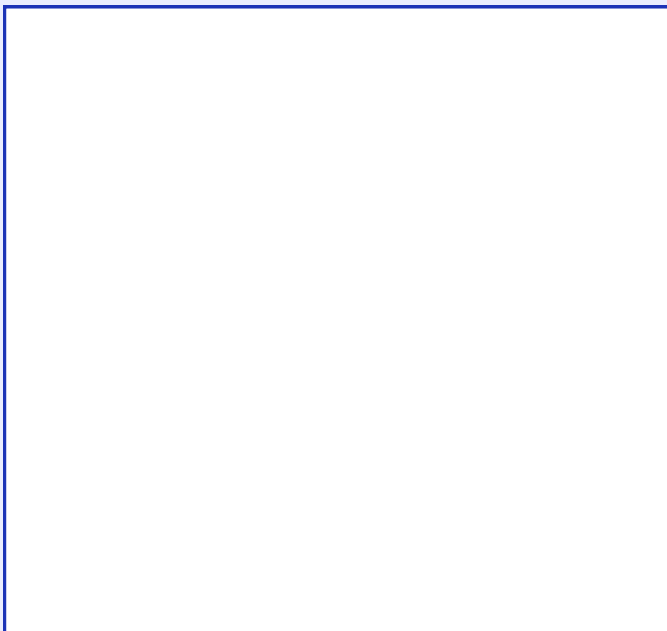
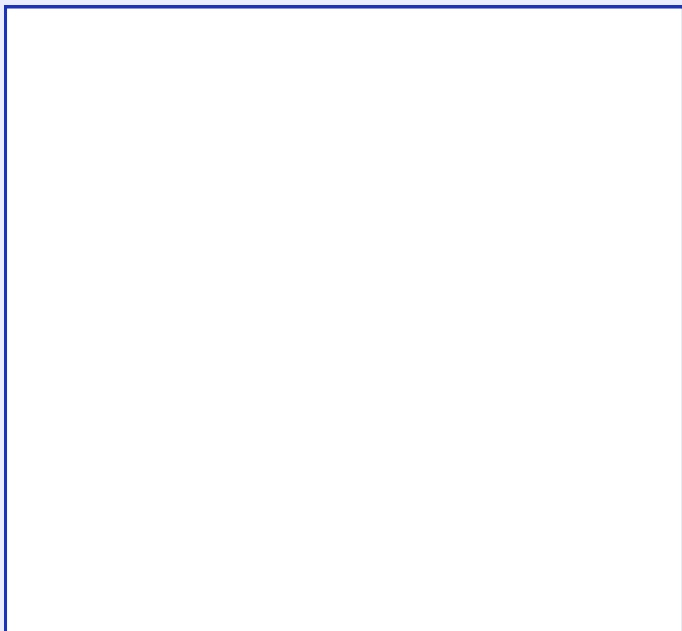
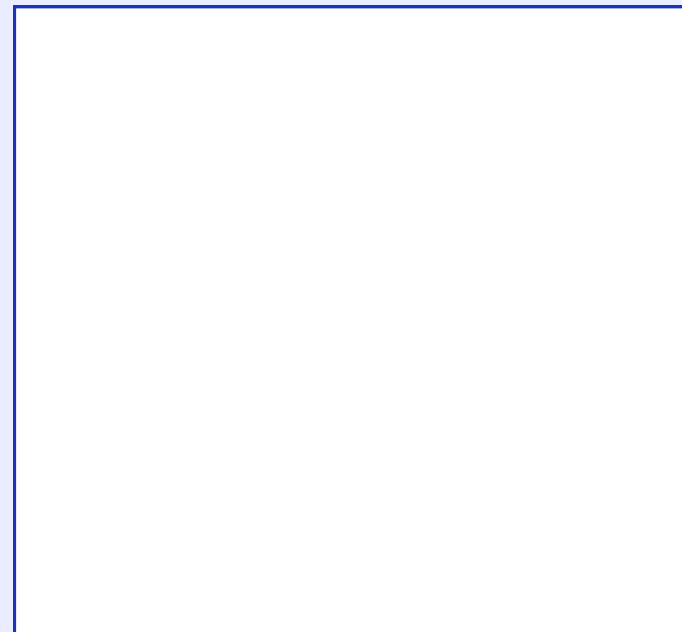
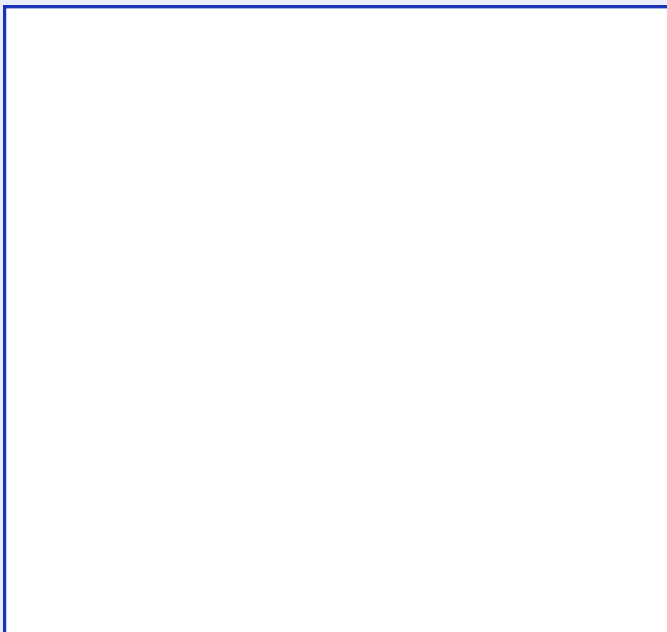
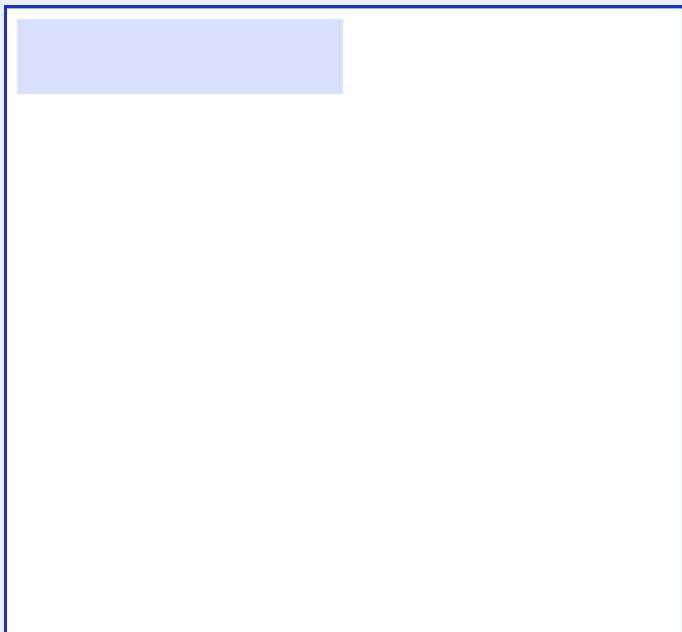


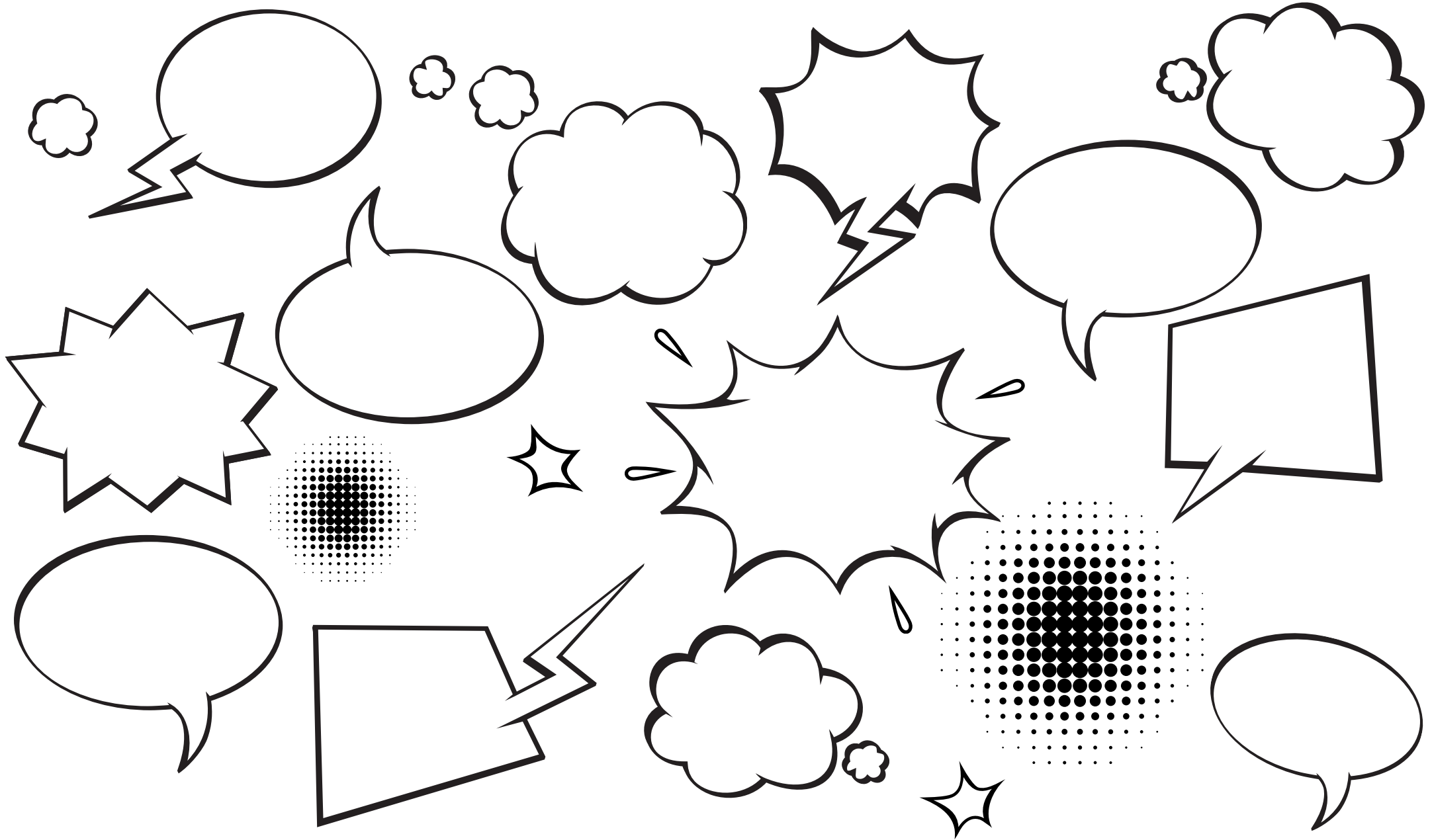
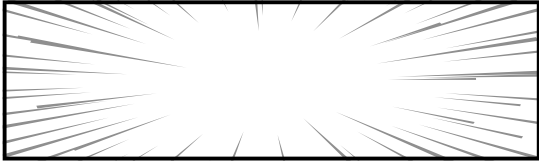
VI. Exit Ticket (5 minutes)

Referring back to the comic strip from the beginning of the lesson, you can close the lesson with a comic theme **exit ticket**. The exit ticket should include an opportunity for students to reflect on how they themselves might be able to act with moral courage during the current crisis.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

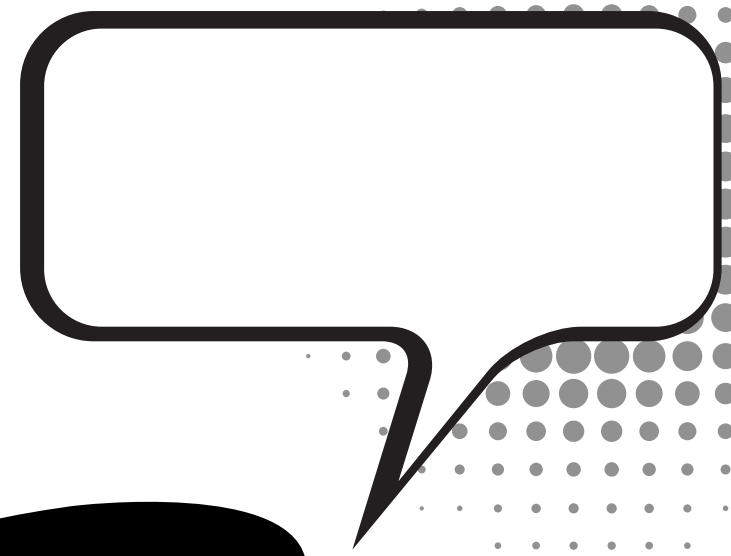
All materials can be found in the following file. They can be copied and edited by the teacher or student. They can also be printed either as small cards or large posters.







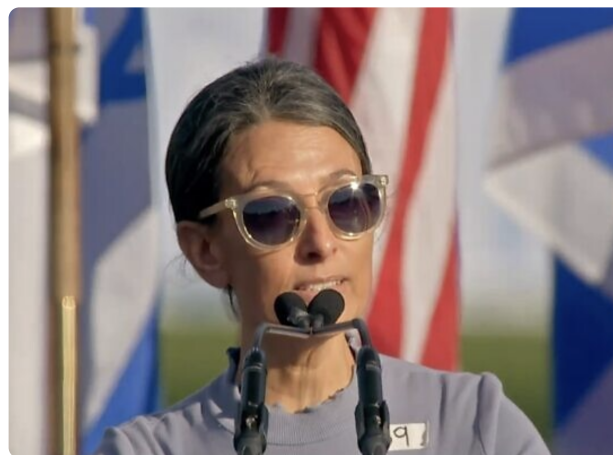
Esther



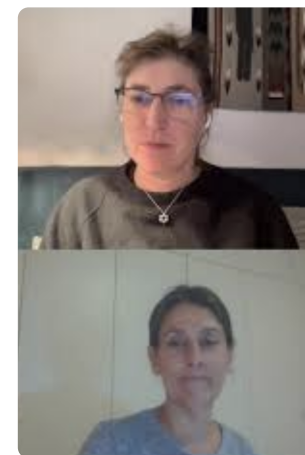
Mordechai



Rachel speaking at the UN



Rachel at the Washington rally



Rachel with Maya Bialik



Rachel meeting the pope



Rachel on the cover of Time magazine



Rachel and Hersh

One question you
have from
today's class

What is one new
thing you learned in
today's class?

Think of something that you
could do that would
demonstrate your own moral
courage or leadership during
this crisis?

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