



No Place for Hate® Activity Library

Fair Play, Full Hearts: Jewish Identity and Belonging in Sports

Lesson Plan and Overview

ADL Webinar: [“Safe at Home: Kevin Youkilis on Baseball, Belonging and Being Jewish”](#)

While sports often bring people together, they can just as easily lead to incidents of bias. Through the lens of a recorded ADL webinar with retired professional baseball player Kevin Youkilis and student athlete Morgan Zietz, students will explore Jewish identity through exploring experiences of athletes. Using a freely chosen picture book that explores similar themes, students will explore identity and ways to ensure that school athletics are inclusive for all.

Grade Level **Grades K-5**

Learning Objectives

- Students will develop a basic definition of identity.
- Students will reflect upon the experiences of two athletes on Jewish pride and identity.
- Students will explore ideas around identity, belonging and inclusion in sports through a selected book and discussion.
- Students will apply their learning (and Calendar of Observances, grades 3-5) to create visible reminders around the school that celebrate inclusion of all identity groups.

Materials Needed

- ADL Webinar Recording: [“Safe at Home: Kevin Youkilis on Baseball, Belonging and Being Jewish”](#)
 - While you are welcome to show the full webinar, aspects of the recording are not appropriate for younger audiences. We recommend showing the time stamps 18:26-22:47, which focus on Jewish joy and identity.
 - We encourage that, before showing any video to students, educators preview ahead of time and refer to any local policies regarding film/video content.
- A book that has themes about identity, athletics and bias. We recommend the picture book *The Yom Kippur Shortstop* by David A. Adler
- Grades 3-5: ADL's [Calendar of Observances](#)

- Educators can use this list of global religious holidays to prepare for discussion.
- Poster- or sign-making materials (paper, markers, etc.)

Words You Might Use

- **Ally:** Someone who speaks out on behalf of or takes actions that are supportive of someone who is targeted by bias or bullying, either themselves or someone else.
- **Antisemitism (for educators):** Prejudice, discrimination, or hostility directed at Jewish people. It is generally based on negative stereotypes, myths, or misinformation about Jews, Judaism, or Jewish identity. It manifests in harmful beliefs, attitudes, language, exclusion, harassment, and violence against individuals or Jewish communities. **(For students)** Hatred of Jewish people as individuals or as a group.
- **Bias:** An inclination or preference, either for or against an individual or group, that interferes with impartial judgment.
- **Identity:** The qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others.

Core Activity

- **First, explore what identity means.** Ask students: *What is identity?* Elicit/explain the definition of identity as follows: “The qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others.” This includes race, gender, age, appearance, religion, family, community, hobbies, opinions, etc.
 - For students in grades K-2, consider sharing a definition like: Identity means who you are. It’s what makes you special and different from others. It can include things like your skin color, how old you are, what you look like, what you believe, your family, your community, the languages you speak, the holidays you celebrate...
- **Transition by saying to students:** *Our identity is what makes us unique. We bring our identity with us wherever we go. We are now going to watch a short video where we learn about the experiences of two individuals and their experiences with identity.*
 - Before viewing, introduce the two athletes in the webinar. (A note: feel free to condense or shorten based on the age of your students!)
 - **Kevin Youkilis:** Kevin Youkilis appeared in over 1,000 Major League Baseball games in ten seasons with the Boston Red Sox (2004-2012), Chicago White Sox (2012), and New York Yankees (2013). He earned the nickname “The Greek God of Walks” from the book *Moneyball* for his relentless ability to get on base. The right-handed hitter

made his Major League debut in 2004 and was a member of the team who broke the Curse of the Bambino, ending an 86-year Championship drought in Boston. A Gold Glove Award-winning first baseman, Youkilis was a two-time MLB All-Star and a two-time World Series Champion. Beyond his baseball achievements, Youkilis has a rich family history rooted in Jewish heritage, marked by name changes and experiences of persecution in Eastern Europe. Raised in Cincinnati, he has proudly embraced his Jewish identity, fostering connections with other Jewish athletes. In 2023, Youkilis served as a coach for Team Israel in the World Baseball Classic and now serves on the Board of Directors of Israel Baseball Americas.

- **Morgan Zietz:** A sophomore at the University of Michigan from Boca Raton, Florida. Morgan is a dedicated Maccabi USA athlete who competed on the Girls Volleyball Team in the Maccabi Games in Israel in summer 2021 and again in the Pan American Maccabi Games in winter 2023. She was set to compete in the 2025 Maccabi Games in Israel before they were postponed due to the ongoing war. As a Jewish student navigating the current campus climate at the University of Michigan, Morgan offers a vital perspective on how sports participation strengthened her Jewish identity and helped prepare her to face experiences with antisemitism both on and off campus.
- Jewish Identity and Pride: Time Stamps 18:26-22:47)
 - After viewing, ask students: *Is it important that sports celebrate the different identities of athletes? Why or why not?*
- **Read a book that has themes about identity, athletics and bias.**
We recommend the picture book *The Yom Kippur Shortstop* by David A. Adler.
 - After reading the book as a class, engage students in a discussion. Ask them questions about how the character's identity impacted how they were able to play sports. Consider questions such as:
 - What do we know about the character's identity from the book?
 - How did the character feel when they experienced bias in their sport?
 - How could other students have supported the character to feel more included in their sport?
- **Transition to the next activity by asking students:**
 - *How does feeling like you belong on a sports team contribute to the work you're doing as part of No Place for Hate in your school?*

- **Activity**

- Grades 3-5: Using ADL's [Calendar of Observances](#) for reference, begin by discussing with the full group of students. Ask students what holidays they and their family observe. Ask if students have ever had issues with games being scheduled during holidays? How did they navigate that? After this discussion, break students into small groups of approximately 4. Ask them to discuss with their group the question: what challenges might student athletes face if holidays they observe aren't factored into sports/school calendars? What steps can we take to ensure all student athletes feel included in school sports? Bring students back together and allow each group to share the highlights of their discussion. If time allows, allow students to create posters to display around the school to promote kindness and inclusion in sports.
- K-2: Remind students that the focus of this activity is to make sure everyone feels like they belong in the sports at your school. To help remind everyone of this, ask students to create posters or signs that can be displayed in the hallways, gym, or athletic areas to remind everyone of the importance of identity, inclusion, belonging and kindness.

Optional Follow-Up/ Going Further

Note: These additional activities can be done as follow-ups to the core activity and they can also serve as an additional NPFH activity if the core activity is completed first.

- After students in grades 3-5 have completed the core activity, have those students read the selected picture book to the K-2 classes and lead the conversation with the younger students about the importance of identity and inclusion in sports.
- Once students in grades 3-5 have completed the core activity above, break the students into small groups of approximately 4. Direct each group to create a picture book or graphic novel that shares the importance of celebrating different identities and inclusion in sports. If possible, have students share their books with classes in grades K-2.
- After students in all grade levels have completed the core activity, ask them: How can we use what we learned from this lesson to make sure our sports, just like everything else in our school, are No Place for Hate? Create a list from student-generated ideas. Then, have students in small groups or pairs choose one of the ideas from the board to create a poster that illustrates the idea for the larger school community. Display these around the school for all members of the community to see.

Home Connection

Share ADL's Table Talk [Antisemitism Today](#) with families.

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

Students will reflect on the experiences of two Jewish athletes about pride in their identity and the importance of celebrating all identities through sports. Students will engage in conversations around these experiences and explore what they can do as student-leaders to ensure athletics, like all other parts of their school community, are inclusive for all students. This will contribute to a school community, including athletics, that is safe, inclusive and equitable.