

On these pages you will find an outline of the course, with synopses of each chapter and the main points that are covered in the discussion questions for each session.

Growing-Up Stories:

Coming of Age in the Media and in Literature

Curatorial and Research Services Provided by the Jewish Museum

This course presents the stories of young people at a critical point in their lives, as they struggle to define their identities. It examines the search for self-definition, the place of Jews in contemporary society, intergenerational conflict, and the ways in which Jewish values are interpreted by successive generations. The curriculum also invites participants to read the works on which the films are based and to consider the differences between literary texts and screen translations.

The overall issues the course addresses include:

- The ways that community and personal experience shape identity.
- How values are conveyed from one generation to the next.
- The choices facing young people seeking to make their own way in life.
- How Jewish identity is defined and sustained in a secular culture.

THE INTRODUCTION describes the process of coming of age as a turning point in terms of self-knowledge, and coming of age as a Jew in terms of gaining awareness of one's Jewish identity. It discusses the search for identity on the part of North American Jews, and the work of Jewish writers and filmmakers who have explored this issue.

SESSION ONE

Reinventing Ourselves: *Marjorie Morningstar*

This 1958 film, based on Herman Wouk's bestselling 1955 novel, tells the story of a talented, attractive, and ambitious daughter of Jewish immigrants who worked their way up from the Bronx to Manhattan's Upper West Side. It explores second-generation Jewish life and the choices facing young women in mid-century America.

Key issues addressed in the discussion questions include:

- Ways a new generation may try to reinvent their lives.
- The role of rituals in American Jewish life.
- How stereotypes may influence our opinions and choices.
- The issues that divide and connect the generations.
- The choices for women, in the past and today.

SESSION TWO

Becoming a “Somebody”: *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*

This 1974 film, based on the 1959 novel by Canadian Jewish author Mordecai Richler, is the tale of an ambitious, driven young man coming of age in Montreal’s Jewish community during and after World War II. It examines continuity and change in an immigrant community through three generations of the Kravitz family – from the beloved *zeyde* (grandfather) to the rough-hewn father to fast-talking Duddy and his medical student brother.

Key issues addressed include:

- How the younger generation may interpret, and misinterpret, the values of their elders.
- The difference, if any, between “Jewishness” and Judaism.
- The pressures on young people to prove themselves.
- The price that may be paid for “success.”

SESSION THREE

Fathers, Sons, and Friendship: *The Chosen*

This 1982 film is based on Chaim Potok’s 1967 novel. It depicts the friendship between two boys, Orthodox Jews in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, in the 1940s. The film considers the relationships between fathers and sons and between Hasidim and non-Hasidim, as well as questions of Jewish identity in the wake of World War II.

Key questions addressed include:

- The changing roles of parents in determining their children’s life choices.
- The idea of Israel and its importance to American Jewish identity.
- The things we may admire and reject in different approaches to Judaism.
- Ways that young people may try to define their own relationship to Judaism.
- The meaning of the concept of the “chosen people.”

SESSION FOUR**Out of Brooklyn: *Biloxi Blues***

Based on a 1985 Neil Simon play, this 1988 film, directed by Mike Nichols, tells the story of a young man from Brooklyn at an army boot camp in Mississippi during World War II. It deals with issues of comradeship, sexual awakening, and prejudice against Jews and homosexuals in the military.

Key questions addressed include:

- The use of humor to treat serious subjects.
- The life experiences that may influence coming of age.
- How one arrives at a sense of Jewish identity in the secular American world.
- Whether antisemitism brings Jews closer together.

SESSION FIVE**Between Generations: *Sweet Lorraine***

In this 1987 film, a young woman from Arizona spends the summer at her grandmother's Catskill Mountain hotel, where she discovers Jewish food, Jewish humor, love, and connection with both the past and the future.

Key issues addressed include:

- The challenge of combining old and new cultures.
- The difference between memory, nostalgia, and history.
- The difference, and connection, between Jewish culture and Jewish religion.
- The relationship between identity and community.
- The interplay between generations that can lead to understanding and growth.

SESSION SIX**Wrap-Up**

This session presents questions that look across the films for common themes and experiences.

Key issues addressed:

- The value of telling a coming-of-age story, for young people and for adults looking back.
- The universality and variation among coming-of-age stories in different times and places.
- The relationship of the individual stories to the development of the Jewish community in North America.