

Using AI as a Planning Partner, Not a Shortcut

This year, I've used ChatGPT as a **planning and preparation tool** to support my middle school Judaic studies teaching. I turn to it while building lessons, developing materials, and thinking through assessments — but always as a collaborator, never as an authority.

To make it useful, I've learned three key principles:

- **Be specific and detailed in the request.**
I include my students' grade level, abilities, tone, goals, and often ask for specific examples. The more thought I put into the prompt, the more substantive the response.
- **Use it as a back-and-forth partner.**
I refine ideas, challenge responses, and reshape outputs until they reflect my voice and classroom needs.
- **Double-check everything.**
AI makes mistakes — especially with Jewish sources. I never rely on it for final sourcing, translations, or precise references without verifying them myself.

Lesson Planning and Explaining Big Ideas

One of the most valuable uses has been helping me clarify how to explain complex Judaic concepts at an age-appropriate level.

For example, I've used ChatGPT to:

- Break down big ideas in Tanakh and Jewish thought into accessible language
- Rewrite explanations until they match my students' maturity and background knowledge
- Generate discussion questions that move students from basic comprehension to deeper meaning

Sometimes I already know what I want to say — but asking AI to draft versions helps me refine clarity and tone.

Creating and Refining Classroom Materials

ChatGPT has also helped me draft materials that I then heavily edit and personalize.

Examples include:

- Worksheets and guided questions for Chumash and Navi
- Reflection prompts connected directly to the text
- Sample responses and writing models
- Rubrics and checklists for written assignments
- Visual ideas for slides, handouts, or graphics tailored to a specific topic or student interest

The key word is *draft*. Rarely is anything usable without revision — but starting from something concrete saves time and sparks ideas.

Making Classical Texts More Accessible

Teaching Judaic texts means helping students navigate dense language and layered commentary. AI has helped me think through accessibility.

I've used it to:

- Paraphrase Tanakh, Midrash, and Rashi into clearer English
- Reorganize source sheets so the flow of ideas is easier to follow
- Generate explanations that focus on conceptual meaning, not just literal translation

Of course, every source must be checked carefully. Accuracy in Judaic studies isn't optional.

Differentiation

One of the biggest benefits has been planning for varied learners.

ChatGPT has helped me:

- Write easier and more challenging versions of the same question
- Create alternative prompts for students who struggle with writing
- Adjust language and expectations for different grade levels

Differentiation often requires time I don't always have. AI has helped me expand options more efficiently.

Assessments and Assignments

AI has also supported assessment design by helping me:

- Create clearer rubrics with transparent expectations
- Draft reflection-based questions instead of simple recall
- Design assignments focused on understanding and textual connection

It pushes me to think: *What am I really assessing? Knowledge? Skills? Interpretation?*

Challenges and Limitations

Using ChatGPT has not been automatic or effortless. It requires trial and error.

Common challenges:

- Rephrasing prompts multiple times to get usable results
- Responses that are too vague, too advanced, or not age-appropriate
- Occasional misunderstandings of Judaic terminology or classroom context
- Incorrect sourcing or subtle inaccuracies
- Significant editing required before anything is classroom-ready

AI can assist — but it cannot replace professional judgment.

Responsible Use

In my classroom, ChatGPT is used primarily **behind the scenes** for planning. All materials are reviewed, edited, and adapted before students see them. It is a tool — not a substitute for teacher expertise, textual accuracy, or pedagogical care.

Overall Impact

This year, using ChatGPT thoughtfully has:

- Helped clarify complex lessons
- Improved efficiency in preparation
- Strengthened differentiation
- Freed up time for direct interaction with students

Most importantly, it has not replaced my thinking — it has sharpened it.

AI in Judaic studies education is not about automation. It's about intention. When used carefully and responsibly, it can support deeper teaching — while keeping the teacher firmly in the driver's seat.