



## **Kol Nidrei for Teens: Lesson Overview**

### **Objectives:**

Students will learn about the Kol Nidrei nullification of vows. Students will gain an appreciation of what Kol Nidrei means to the Jewish people, both at the literal and interpretive levels.

By the end of the project, students will be able to:

- Engage more meaningfully in the chanting of Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur
- Make connections between the role vows played in Torah times, and what they play in our times.
- Understand the context surrounding Torah text as a means to understand ancient Jewish life
- Be able to articulate the history of Kol Nidrei and its iterations and interpretations over time
- Use text to see connections in today's world
- Reflect on the practical life approach of Torah/Judaism, especially in the context of the High Holidays.

In detail: Goals are to learn about the Kol Nidrei nullification of vows and what it means to Jewish culture both at the literal and interpretive levels. Students can make connections to the role vows played in Torah times and what they play in our times. Students will look at the context surrounding Torah text as a means to understand ancient Jewish life and text, and apply/see connections in today's world. Students will learn how the Kol Nidrei was used against Jews in medieval times and how it was used by Jews to annul any vows taken during times of forced conversions. Students will also reflect on the practical life approach of Torah/Judaism which recognizes that we do our best, but aren't perfect! Kol Nidrei is a

form of self care! We made mistakes and we also made a way to acknowledge that mistakes don't keep us from living and moving forward into the next year with optimism.

This multidisciplinary project engages the following Jewish skills:

Hebrew Decoding: Students will read the text of Kol Nidrei in Hebrew (Aramaic), as well as p'sukim (verses) from Torah.

Hebrew Comprehension: Students will learn key Hebrew words

Text Skills: Summarize, interpret, restate, and engage with liturgical and/or Tanakh texts

Synagogue Skills: Students will understand the practice of reciting Kol Nidrei.

### **Connecting to our values:**

As with all projects, we incorporate the following big picture themes into this lesson.

Text: Students will read and interpret Tanach stories and commentary that include the making of vows.

Art: Students will view examples of Illuminated mahzorim with the Kol Nidrei text, and analyze the art styles and artistic choices.

Diaspora/Community: Students will compare Kol Nidrei texts from different time periods and culture to look for any differences. Students will read stories of Jews in different time periods and cultures experiencing Kol Nidrei

Culture and History: Students will understand the changing historical context about vows; looking particularly at Torah times, the Inquisition, and modern times.

Students will also gain empathy for Jewish communities living at different moments in history.

Personal Connections: Students will consider promises made, broken, and annulled in their own lives. Students will learn to relate to communities

This lesson will use a mix of modalities, including reading, discussing, listening, sharing experiences, asking questions, and answering questions.

## Materials:

Text of Kol Nidrei

Illuminated Manuscripts:

Catalan Mahzor from the NLI

Resources from the British Library Digital Collection

Comparative Oaths

Hippocrates

Citizenship Oaths

Unbreakable Vow: Harry Potter

Personal Examples

Stories:

Nicholas Donin and the Paris Disputation (via Beit Hatfutsot/ANU Museum)

Kol Nidrei in Auschwitz (via Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program)

Kol Nidrei with Anusim (via OUIsrael)

History of Text: Rav Amram Gaon (810-875)

Debates:

“The Controversy of Kol Nidre” 1966 Newspaper Article (via NLI)

Tanach Texts:

Noach/Yishayahu

Lech Lecha/Avraham

Chayei Sarah/Avraham and Eliezer’s vow

Naso/Nazir’s vow

Ki Tisa/Ibn Ezra on Keeping Shabbat

Yitro

Second Dibra

Additional Teacher Resources:

*Kol Nidrei: Its Origin, Development & Significance* by Stuart Gershon