The Torah, also called the Five Books of Moses, contains laws and practical lessons for Jewish life. Early in the first book, biblical patriarch Abraham and matriarch Sarah set the standard for welcoming guests (Genesis 18:1-8). When Abraham notices three weary travelers at their always-open tent, he brings water to wash their hot and dusty feet while Sarah prepares a meal. Rabbinic scholars developed hospitality guidelines based on Abraham and Sarah’s behavior: Greet your guests at the door, offer food and drink, be cheerful during their visit, ask about your guests’ interests, and walk them to the door when they leave. How does this translate to the way we greet guests in the classroom?

For the teacher’s consideration

- How do you feel about welcoming guests to your home? What are the steps you need to take in order to prepare for the experience?
- In what ways do you model/encourage hospitality in the classroom?
- What are the rewards and challenges to visitors coming into your classroom? How do you remain positive?
- What changes could you make to your classroom’s routines or environment to help make the room feel more welcoming to guests of different ages and abilities?

Questions for children

- How do you feel when guests visit your home?
- What do you do to get ready for guests at home?
- Who are some of the guests that come to our classroom? What can we do to help our guests feel welcome? What does Bubba Brayna do?
Imagine
how values will come to life

Dramatic play
Let the children host small parties in your dramatic play area. Guide them in thinking through how to prepare for guests at home or at school. What toys do they like to share? What toys are hard to share with others?

Make welcoming tangible
What objects would your students like to make that create a welcoming atmosphere? Examples include welcome mats, comfy chairs, a welcome door sign, or snacks.

Classroom guest record
Ask children to create a system for remembering guests that visit your classroom, such as a guestbook or sign-in wall. Consider adding the position of class greeter(s) to your job chart. Not only can greeters welcome visitors to the classroom; they can ask the guest to sign the guestbook or wall before departing. A classroom photographer can add pictures, too.

Engage
families in conversations about values

How can you deepen home-school relationships?

Guest poetry
This is often a busy time for parties and travel. What are your families’ customs and traditions around welcoming guests – or being guests? Put up some easel paper in your lobby and invite parents to write a couplet or haiku about welcoming guests.

Hanukkah party.
Have I made enough latkes?
When can I panic?

Welcome surprise
Model welcoming guests at drop-off and pick-up times. Prepare some surprise snacks or games for your families as they come to school. Perhaps you can set up a mini-latkes station, coffee bar, or dreidel spin-off. Ask your students what they think would make their families feel welcome.

More on this topic

PJ Library books
Once Upon a Shabbos by Jacqueline Jules
Bubbe Isabella and the Sukkot Cake by Kelly Terwilliger

Web article
Is your classroom a welcoming place?
bit.ly/welcoming-classroom

What makes you feel comfortable in a new place?