

5 steps for engaging meaningful teaching of Scripture

The text: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21 (The Shema)

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy%206%3A4-9%2C%2011%3A13-21&version=NABRE;CEV;NRSVCE>

Note: Thank you to the participants in the January 12 2022 Professional learning session about teaching Scripture, who have co-constructed this resource with Beth Nolen. The resource is not year level specific but shows a sample of how this process can bring teaching Scripture to life.

1. Teacher readiness to teach the text

Resources: The Catholic Study Bible (there is a copy in every school); NABRE footnotes and front of each biblical book in the Catholic Study Bible; <http://mbfallon.com/>; [Core and complementary scripture texts - Appendix B \(bne.catholic.edu.au\)](http://bne.catholic.edu.au); any other resources at your school that support a contemporary Catholic interpretation of the Bible. [World of the Text A2 poster Middle School updated.pdf \(bne.catholic.edu.au\)](#)

Key understandings about the authorship of this text (who; when; where; why)

- <https://bibleproject.com/blog/what-is-the-shema/>
Note that the book of Deuteronomy has sayings attributed to Moses and many scholars now believe that Moses (and many other early OT characters) is a 'construct'. That is, not a real historical figure but a literary figure whose stories bring immense meaning for the Hebrew people and helped them form their strong Jewish identity. Therefore, contemporary Catholic scholarship would reject the notion that the book of Deuteronomy was written by Moses.

[Deuteronomy 6:4-9 – The Shema \(bne.catholic.edu.au\)](http://bne.catholic.edu.au)

Text type (sacred myth; narrative; parable...)

The Shema was written in Hebrew and is found in the book of Deuteronomy which is a book in the Torah (the first 5 books of the Old Testament. The Torah contains the laws for Jewish people).

What is known about the context of this text?

- This text is highly significant for Jewish people - See: [Translation of The Shema - Prayer \(chabad.org\)](http://chabad.org) and [10 Facts Every Jew Should Know About the Shema Prayer - Prayer \(chabad.org\)](http://chabad.org).

Key insights into this text (meaning for the time when the text was written; literary insights such as repeated words / phrases; images,

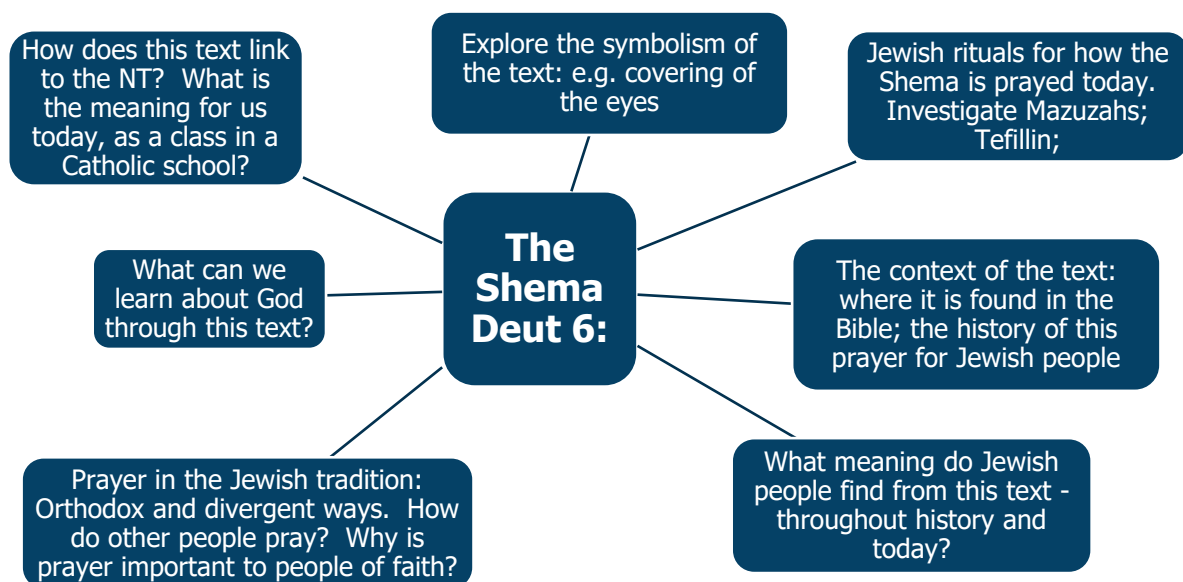
- Symbolism of this text – Orthodox Jews still wear special clothing for prayer when they pray this text every morning and night [Tefillin - Binding mind, heart and deed \(chabad.org\)](http://chabad.org). There is a special way to put on the Tefillin: https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/272666/jewish/How-to-Put-on-Tefillin.htm
- Jewish people believe The Shema is so important it needs to be a visual reminder of how they are called to live, so the prayer is

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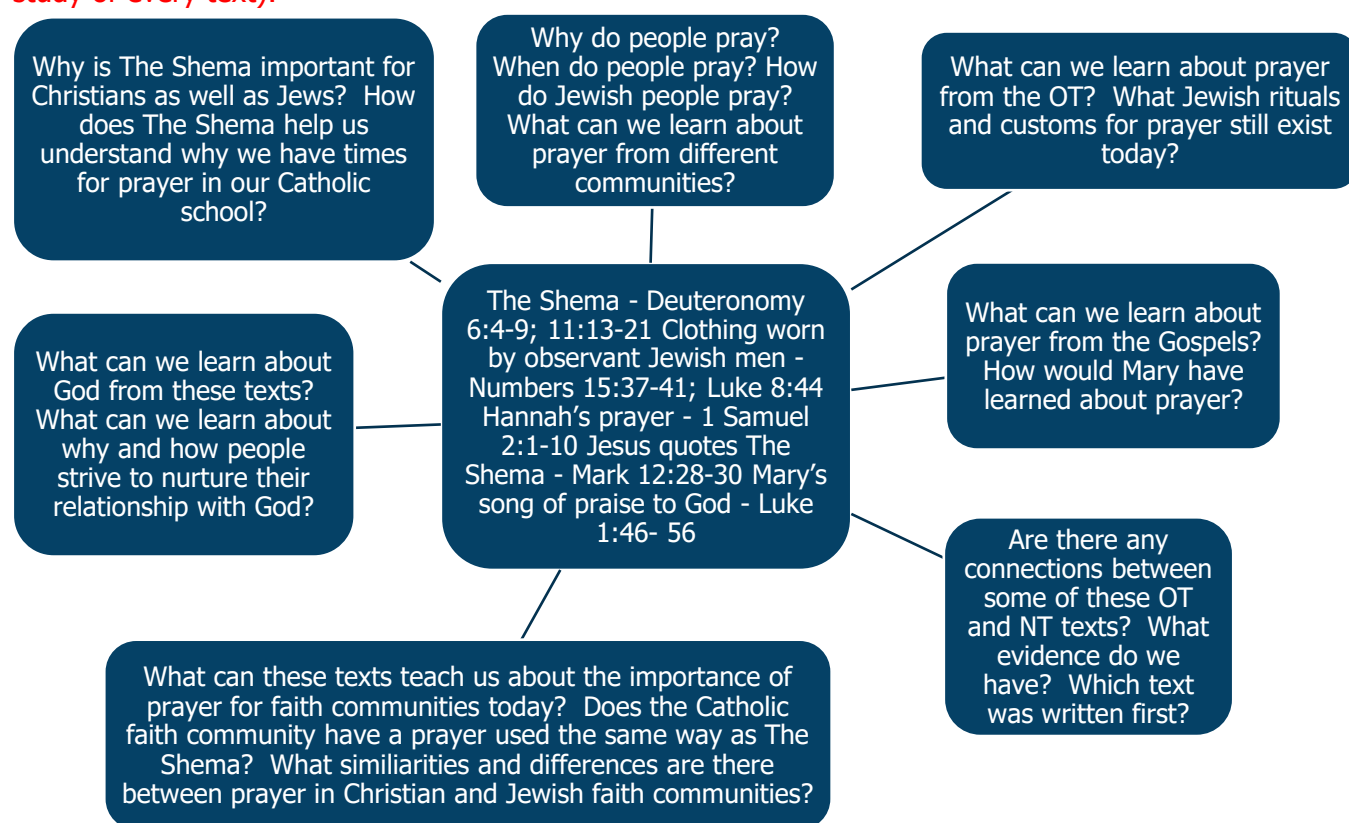
symbolism and metaphors;...)	<p>written on a scroll and placed inside a Mezuzah and hung on every door of their homes. Mezuzah - The Jewish security system (chabad.org)</p> <p>Jewish people pray The Shema by covering their eyes when they recite the first line of the prayer, as it is so important they do not want to be distracted by anything. This prayer commands 100% focus and calls Jewish people to rise above their challenges during the day, reminding them to always live with their focus on God, remembering the love God has for them.</p>
Are there explicit links to other texts?	<p>The Shema consists of 3 paragraphs two from Deuteronomy and 1 from Numbers. The Shema is so important it is not just mentioned once in the Bible but multiple times in the OT and there are many NT links to 'The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart'. At the start of the Good Samaritan story this is what the lawyer questions Jesus about – which is the greatest law?</p>
What do you think the author is trying to convey about God?	<p>God is above all; God is stable and can be trusted – a strong and loving God who is there for all. God is salvation - have faith in God. God is ever present, ever loving and our thoughts should return to God as often as possible.</p>
How does the text reveal God's dream for our world today?	<p>God wants to be in close relationship with people. How do people do that today? In what ways do we enable people do that at our school? Are there any ways we could do this even better?</p>

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2. Identify WHAT to teach about the text (if you were only teaching this text).



If you are a year 5 teacher and teaching multiple texts for students to learn about prayer then you could record 'WHAT to teach' like this (focusing on the connections between texts rather than an in depth study of every text):



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3. Identify strategies that learners need for enjoyable, engaging, meaningful Scripture learning

Key resources: [BCE Curriculum \(bne.catholic.edu.au\)](http://bne.catholic.edu.au)

[Strategies that Maximise Impact.pdf \(bne.catholic.edu.au\)](#)

[Supporting curriculum resources - Judaism \(bne.catholic.edu.au\)](#)

Narrative (the important role that stories play for people)



(All images from Pixabay license: free for commercial use)

- What meaning do Jewish people find from this text - throughout history and today? Reading and exploring the text together.
- Tell students the story of how identification of Jewish children being able to recite The Shema was able to save some children during the Holocaust:
[Shema Yisrael \(aish.com\)](http://aish.com)

Explicit teaching (ensuring that learners know why they are learning about this 'story' and ensure learning is purposeful)



- Teach students about where they will be going on their learning journey (learning intentions) and explain why this learning is important.
- Teach about background authorship or concepts that are not readily available in appropriate format for students.
- Conduct a KWL to see what learners already know; what they're interested in learning (and at the end of the learning find out what they did learn). Identify if explicit teaching is required from the gaps in student knowledge or the learning can be facilitated in other ways (as outlined below).

Challenge student's interpretation of the text if it is not appropriate, and explicitly teach what the student requires.

Collaborative (children and adults working together to deepen learning)








- Jigsaw strategy – expert groups to learn about the different elements of The Shema
- Sketch and scribble writing - students form a group of three and each is given a picture as a writing prompt. The images should allow them to use a narrative voice to describe a scene / verse and the other two students sketch and write in response.
- Conduct a 'hot seat' activity, with teacher and one or two students up on the seats in the same role. Teacher can support if the thoughts need more in-depth exploration.

Design something that shows people how prayer is to be a sacred time at your school.





Learner focused (recognising that learners bring their own spiritual, religious, cultural, social, intellectual perspectives and needs)

- Look at the different religious and cultural backgrounds of students. How do people in your faith tradition recognise the importance and centrality of God?
 - How do our families pray?
 - Why might some families choose not to pray?
- Invite students to interview a member of their family / family friend who believes in the importance of prayer.

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<p>Active (learning through movement and in different environments)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a gallery walk (walk around the room to find facts about what they've found) • Go on an excursion to a Jewish Synagogue • Make Mezuzah and scroll – (put the prayer in a box at the door of the classroom to show how we can be inspired by Jewish people while we're not pretending to be Jewish).
<p>Literacy rich (developing vocabulary, reading and writing skills)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing vocab about The Shema and Jewish prayer – e.g. Mezuzah etc • Conduct a detailed read of the text • Recite in Hebrew https://youtu.be/5oCri6q7wJM • Decode any unfamiliar words. <p>Comprehension fact sheets Comprehending (sharepoint.com)</p>
<p>Dialogue rich</p> <p>(learning to listen to different perspectives; question respectfully and respond to rich questions)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does reciting the Shema mean to a Jewish person? • What can we learn about God through The Shema? <p>How does this text relate to key texts from other religious traditions?</p>
<p>Responsive (ensuring the learning is meeting the needs and interests of learners, with both adult-led and student-led learning)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anchor charts to show what I've learnt and questions I can respond to • A curiosity table – whiteboards / tables with objects / texts related to The Shema – spend 5 minutes before recess listening to student views about what they've learned and what else they would like learn • Y charts – use words and photographs <p>I wonder mill - children walk around posing 'I wonder' statements to each other</p>
<p>Agentic (ensuring that learners have a voice in their learning and their ideas contribute to decisions about learning)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure learners have choices (e.g. writing tasks could include different options) • Exit pass – at the end of each class provide learners with an opportunity to share their thinking, insights and contributions

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a WOW box • Co-construct success criteria from learning intentions <p>Allow learners to have a voice in their assessment ("This is what you need to demonstrate – what ideas do you have about how you could show me what you've learned about this?")</p>
<p>Creative (fostering creativity and inquiry skills to deepen learning)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate how artists have depicted The Shema • Investigate clothing and rituals for The Shema • Find out when Jewish people pray this prayer today and why? • Find out about a Tallit and the Tzitzit: Tallit (The Prayer Shawl) My Jewish Learning • Set up a class blog. <p>Create a video / booklet / ebook about the meaning of prayer for this community, that could be given to parents of new prep students for next year.</p>
<p>Scaffolded (providing step by step support to extend learner's capabilities)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find any blocks in student's learning by asking students to complete this sentence: I understand ... but I'm not sure (why / how / when etc)... . Group responses on a wall according to categories of similar needs. Students find a 'learning partner' if apparent – someone who has communicated something they understand that the other person still has questions about. <p>Have reflection time at set points in the teaching sequence to identify where learners need extra support to move to deeper levels of thinking.</p>
<p>Imaginative / playful (creating opportunities for learning through imagination / creativity / play)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an artwork that represents the meaning of The Shema. • Design a Mezuzah that could be given to a Jewish person as a gift. •

4. Plan my teaching sequence:

The learning process	Strategies for teaching / learning	What would I need to do differently to respond to individual learner's needs?
1. Hook the interest of learners and find out what learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. Moana's 'You're Welcome' is good for Indigenous religions and creation stories, and the opening song from Aladdin is great because 	

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already know / what to learn more about	<p>it's probably many students' earliest exposure to Islam.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show a Youtube video of Jewish customs related to The Shema. <p>Create an inquiry setting – teacher could have head down for the first part of the day to provoke questions: Why is she doing that?</p>	
2. Build familiarisation of the text (identity unfamiliar words; people; places; concepts; authorship insights to teach prior to reading the text – only to the level that is appropriate for students to find appropriate meaning from the text during step 3).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show a map of Israel and locate Jerusalem. EarthCam - Western Wall Cam What are people doing? What are they wearing? Why? <p>Find out about the book of Deuteronomy (see Catholic Study Bible).</p>	
3. Engage in the story (read the text; retell the story in multiple ways)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read The Shema. Highlight important words and phrases. <p>Listen to The Shema in Hebrew. https://youtu.be/5oCri6q7wJM Why would people be reciting this text in Hebrew?</p>	
4. Explore the text (What can we discover about this text? What happens in this story? What surprises us? I wonder why the author may have written this story?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct storyboarding. • Dramatic conventions like- character profile, teacher in role and children ask questions, rumor mill- children pass what they have heard/ideas about around to other students and then draw upon this. What do we accept as truth and what do we reject? Why? • Explore how Jewish people have interpreted this text differently over time. 	
5. Deepen dialogue about the text (What does this text reveal about God? How does the story show us God's dream for our world? What would happen if no one lived this dream?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some questions that could be explored: What is our response to the Shema in our lives and the way we live? What challenge / inspiration does the text hold about our relationship with God (for a person of faith; for someone unsure about faith)? What might Jewish people think about how we pray at this school? Why? What do you think God thinks about the way we pray at this school? Why? Why do people bother to pray? If a Jewish person came to join our class, what would we need to consider / be respectful of? • What questions do learners want to dialogue about? • Visualisation – drawing what we have learnt so far and sharing their learnings in small group / whole group • Hot seat interview 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bus strategy (jump off the bus if you've got something you can share about these core questions) • Moveable debate • Comprehending factsheets (different ways to ask questions) <p>Thought tracking – what goes through the mind of a parent when they are teaching this prayer? What goes through the mind of a Jewish person when they are praying this prayer? What goes through the mind of a person reading the Bible for the first time when they read this text?</p>	
<p>6. Transfer learning to life. What ideas do learners have about how the text could be used for prayer; for a social justice action; for informing their lives at personal, class, whole school, family or community level?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we respect different ways that people pray? • How does this text call us individually, or as a class, or as a school or community to live? Do you have any ideas for how we could live even better than we currently do because the text has inspired or challenged us? • Create an ideas box where students can anonymously contribute their thoughts and ideas. • 	<p>Note: this is invitational with the teacher as facilitator. It is never forced. Ideas that lead to action need to come from students (we open the door to see if anyway wants to go through it – we will never see the full fruits of our work as they take place over a lifetime).</p>

5. Analyse the teaching and learning (the secret to even better teaching and learning next time).

What worked well and why?	
What didn't work and why?	
Therefore, for my next unit of work what do I need to do to ensure I facilitate Scripture learning that is enjoyable, engaging and meaningful for learners?	