

Heritage Project: *Engaging Youth*

The Heritage Project is more than a theatre program. Its strongest idea is that young people learn Jewish history by inhabiting it rather than simply reading about it.

Students might encounter an immigrant arriving in Minneapolis or Duluth, a Jewish shopkeeper on the North Side, a family establishing a congregation in a small Midwestern town, or a young person confronting antisemitism or questions of Jewish identity. Through dramatization, first-person storytelling, dialogue and historical material, those people become individuals rather than names and dates.

That gives the project several important dimensions.

It is regional Jewish history. Much Jewish educational material naturally concentrates on biblical history, Europe, Israel, the Holocaust, or major American Jewish centers such as New York. This project says something different: Jewish history happened here, too. Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, Fargo, Grand Forks, Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Rochester and smaller communities all have Jewish stories worth knowing.

It connects history with identity. For a sixth grader, discovering that Jewish children, families, merchants, immigrants, rabbis, activists, artists and community builders once walked streets they recognize can make heritage much more immediate. The underlying question becomes: *"Where do I fit into this continuing story?"*

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