

THE LONG GAME: SUSTAINING YOUR COMMITMENT TO REPAIR THE WORLD

How can we maintain our hope and energy for making a difference over time?



This lesson explores an important challenge we all face when trying to make a difference: maintaining our hope and commitment over time. Many middle schoolers have probably felt super inspired to start a project, but staying motivated when they hit obstacles or progress seems slow can be tricky. Through this lesson they will learn some useful strategies that can help them stick with their goals!



OPENING HOOK: 5 MINUTES

As students enter, they will each write on a slip of paper something that gives them hope when feeling discouraged about making a difference in the world. For example, a saying like “I don’t have to fix everything I just need to help”, or a person like a climate activist or role model.

They should not put their names on the paper as these will be anonymous. After putting the paper in a jar, the teacher will read several aloud to the class then prompt students to think about how these represent our collective wisdom about staying hopeful. Notice how different people find hope in different places: some in relationships, some in stories of change, some in personal practices. Discuss:

- What themes do you notice among our sources of hope?
- When have you borrowed hope from others during times you felt discouraged?

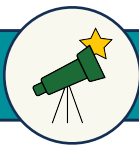


JEWISH ANCHOR: 5 MINUTES

In Jewish tradition, there’s an important concept called *shmita*, the sabbatical year. Every seven years, farmers in ancient Israel would let their fields rest completely, forgive debts, and allow the land to heal itself naturally (Leviticus 25:3–4). Unlike *Shabbat*, which renews us each week, *shmita* teaches that even the land itself requires rest in order to keep giving. It challenges us to see rest and reflection as an essential part of sustainable growth and renewal, not as giving up.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks emphasized the need to balance action with reflection, noting: “*We renew ourselves, as individuals and as a people, by stepping out of the ceaseless rush of creation into the stillness of Shabbat and reflection.*” Sacks spoke of Shabbat’s weekly renewal, but the same principle guides *shmita*, that rest sustains both growth and hope. Just as land becomes barren if worked without pause, our hope too can wear thin when we push ourselves too hard. Taking time to step back, breathe, and reflect restores not only our strength but also our capacity for hope. *Shmita* reminds us that lasting change is fueled not only by action, but by the renewal of hope that comes through genuine rest.

- What do you think Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks means when he says “renewal comes from stillness,” and why is rest important for making lasting change?
- How might the concept of *shmita* change how we think about “taking breaks” to make a difference?



ACTIVITY: 10 MINUTES

Making a real difference means working hard but also taking breaks. Today we'll explore how to sustain hope and stay engaged in changing the world without burning out.

Step 1: On your paper, make three columns and fill out three bullets in each section:

What helps me hold onto hope even when I'm feeling drained?	What problems make me feel hopeless?	What helps me renew my hope and feel refreshed?
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Step 2: Talk With a Partner: When did working too hard make it more difficult to help a cause you cared about? What's one thing that helps you recharge?

Step 3: Invite some students to share their biggest challenge from column 2 and one strategy for navigating it that they wrote in column 3.



VALUES IN ACTION: 5 MINUTES

Choose one of these sustainability challenges for the week:

- **Hope Journal:** For three days, write down one small sign of positive change you notice in an issue you care about. It might be a news story, a conversation with a friend, or something you did yourself.
- **Rest and Reflection Ritual:** Create a short end-of-day ritual to help you acknowledge your efforts, like writing in a journal, saying a short blessing, or taking three deep breaths.
- **Celebration Practice:** Think of one small victory related to a cause you care about and find a way to celebrate it. For example, share the news with a friend or create a small piece of art about it.
- **Story Collector:** Interview an adult who has been involved in social action for many years. Ask them how they've maintained their commitment and what helps them continue when progress feels slow.

Closing Thought:

The Jewish tradition of *shmita* reminds us that sustainable change requires rhythms of action and rest. By building these cycles into our efforts to repair the world, we can nurture the hope that sustains us, ensuring it lasts beyond the initial excitement of starting a project. How might you honor both your drive to make a difference and your need for renewal this week?

NOTE FOR TEACHERS:

- Be sensitive to students who may be feeling discouraged about issues they care about
- Help students identify age-appropriate, sustainable ways to make a difference
- Emphasize both the importance of action and the importance of rest and celebration