

JCS Class Summaries--October 12, 2014

Littles

The Littles class enjoyed dancing with Shira Schwartz for the first half of our time together, learning songs and dances that were about the harvest festival of Sukkot. Once back in the classroom, we learned more about the holiday of Sukkot, and sang a song about shaking the lulav. Then we colored a picture of a lulav, and had some free time outside!

Middles

In October, the Middles class had a blast with Israeli dancing. In class, we learned about Sukkot. Sarah led us in some great songs, including a rousing practice on our imaginary shofar horns. We played a game to remind us that at Sukkot we practice being generous, and then celebrated by making candy sukkahs to take home. Many Middles families also enjoyed celebrating at the annual Sukkot party.

Juniors

After enjoying a fabulous intergenerational—and Sukkot-themed—Israeli dance program with visiting artist Shira Schwartz, the Juniors class spent the rest of their lesson time studying Torah (humanistically!) and learning to recognize when Torah stories are represented in visual art. We reviewed the portions of Genesis that students learned about in September, and then read the short, funny plays from *Sedra Scenes* for the Chayei Sarah and Toledot Torah portions. After each reading, the class engaged in lively discussion. Students considered why one portion might be called “Chayei Sarah” when it concerns events that unfold after Sarah’s death, and debated whether Rebekah did the right thing by helping Jacob to trick his father and receive his blessing instead of Esau. We considered what qualities make for good matriarchs and patriarchs, and students also compared the relationships between oldest and youngest in their families to the relationship between Jacob and Esau. Then we moved on to our art activity! Students split into two groups, and each group received a set of 28 images of famous artworks that illustrate or represent Torah stories studied so far this year in class. Each group also received a set of descriptive title and artist labels for the artworks. Group

members worked together to match the labels to the artworks, drawing on their detailed observational skills and Torah knowledge. At the end of the activity, we checked to see how many matches were correct, and each group got at least half right! As the morning closed, we talked about how countless artists—around the world, throughout history, both Jewish and non-Jewish—have made art incorporating or representing stories from the Torah, and how we can't really understand this art unless we know the stories.

JCS Class Summaries--September 14, 2014

Littles

This week at Or Emet's JCS program we got to explore our new space, welcome a new face to our class, and welcome back some others. We learned our "good morning" song with teacher Sarah, and spent some time coloring Rosh Hashanah pictures. At the end of the day, we read a Rosh Hashanah story while enjoying the nice weather on the playground. It was a great kick-off to a new year!

Middles

In September, the Middles class learned about Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We learned about the shofar and had our own Tashlich. Sarah taught us a song for Rosh Hashanah, and how to say our names in Hebrew. We also learned about creation myths and the Torah. We looked at examples of creation stories from around the world, including the Torah, to see how people explained the world before they had science to help them. Then we made our own creation myth pictures and stories.

Please have your Middles student bring a canned good to donate in October, when we learn about generosity in celebration of Sukkot.

Juniors

During our first session of the school year, our class focused on getting to know visitors, reconnecting with classmates after the summer break, and beginning to delve into Torah study. After a couple of icebreaker activities, students listened to a short talk focused on the Torah, how it can be divided into five books and into weekly readings or parshiyot, and how Humanistic, Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews all believe different things about the Torah and to what extent events and characters described in it are true. Students briefly discussed who they believe wrote the Torah and why, as well as why we would study the Torah as Humanistic Jews—even when facts/evidence tell us that the stories in the Torah either aren't true or can't be proven. Then we moved on to doing performances from *Sedra Scenes*, a book of short, funny skits based on the weekly Torah portions. Students chose roles for each scene and then performed the skits for the Bereishit, Noah, Lech Lecha, and Vayeira portions, using costumes and props made of foam. In the middle of the skits we took a break for our music and Hebrew lesson with Sarah, who taught the class a variety of Hebrew vocabulary for the High Holidays along with the traditional shofar blasts and two holiday songs—"Apples and Honey (for Rosh Hashanah)" and "B'Rosh HaShanah." We returned to our skits afterward, and then discussed the stories that students performed. Students compared the creation story described in the Torah to creation stories in other religions/cultures, talked Torah and sexism, discussed whether they would have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, and critically examined the stories of Noah and the Binding of Isaac. We wrapped up the morning with an all-school sing-along in honor of Harold, and I'm excited to regroup with this fun and thoughtful class in October!

JCS Class Summaries--May 18,

2014

Littles

[coming soon]

Middles

[coming soon]

Juniors

Our ninth and final lesson of the school year gave students the opportunity to consider Humanistic Judaism and its place on the “Jewish spectrum,” and to learn more about notable Jewish figures of the 19th-21st centuries. After signing “JCS yearbooks,” students took a look at the new Society for Humanistic Judaism website and talked about Humanistic Judaism’s place on the spectrum vis-a-vis Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and other branches of Judaism. Then the class split into two teams and played “Notable Jewish Folk-The Trivia Game!”, a trivia game created by me (Eva) with questions designed to encourage critical thinking and learning about important Jewish figures of the 19th-21st centuries. Question subjects ranged from poet Emma Lazarus to Yiddish theater and film star Molly Picon to polio vaccine developer Jonas Salk. Students put good energy into the game, and because Sarah wasn’t able to join us for the usual Hebrew and music lesson, we used our extra time to continue the competition! To close the lesson, the whole class adjourned to the Middles classroom and joined Josh and Renee’s classes in a clay humanorah-making activity. Juniors students helped the younger kids to sculpt their visions of the humanorah out of clay. It was bitter-sweet to say goodbye at the end of the day. Thank you to my students for a great year!

JCS Class Summaries--April 13, 2014

Littles

This week we learned all about Passover! We studied the Seder plate, learned songs, and watched a cool music video about the afikomen. At the end of the day, we put the finishing touches on our mitzvah book.

Middles

[coming soon]

Juniors

Our eighth lesson of the school year focused on Israeli geography and life in modern Israel. After reviewing each other's names and recalling what they had learned about Zionism, Israeli culture, and Israeli history so far this year, students located and labelled important cities and other geographical features (like Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, the Negev Desert, etc) on a large map of Israel. Then they split into two teams and played a geographical bean bag toss game, taking turns throwing bean bags at the Israeli map and trying to hit the labelled geographical features. Students read aloud some interesting facts about each location that they hit and earned points for their teams. When we returned from break, Sarah Berman-Young led the morning's music and Hebrew lesson, reviewing Passover vocabulary with the class as well as "Ma Nishtana"/"The Four Questions" and the Humanistic version of "Dayenu." During the remaining class period, students participated in a Jerusalem marketplace simulation. Playing the roles of regular people you might encounter in a crowded Israeli marketplace—like an IDF soldier, a Palestinian cafe-owner, a Jewish peace activist, an old-time kibbutznik, a Chassidic Judaica seller, an Ethiopian Jewish artist, et cetera—each student learned about her/his character and their opinions and donned any relevant costumes/props. Then students gathered in the "marketplace" together to converse and debate in character, developing an appreciation for the cultural and ideological diversity that characterize modern Israeli life, as well as for the big conflicts around peace and treatment of Palestinians, Judaism's role in the state, diversity and prejudice, and Israel's

changing economy that are central to the national conversation.

JCS Class Summaries--March 16, 2014

Littles

This week at Or Emet's JCS, we learned a hilarious Purim song in both English and Hebrew with Mrs. Sarah. We watched a Shalom Sesame video about the story of Purim, and continued work on our Mitzvah Book. While we worked, Aayush sang "Let It Go" from the movie "Frozen" to great effect. At the end of the session, we sang for our parents and had our fun Purim carnival.

Middles

[coming soon]

Juniors

In March, during our seventh lesson of the school year, students prepared for Purim, learned about Jewish values, and helped to make the Or Emet Purim carnival a success! Students began the lesson by watching a short, funny animated video retelling of the Purim story entitled "The Purim Story for Kids and Other Double Dutch Jumping Hipsters." Then the class brainstormed a list of Jewish values expressed by Esther and Mordechai in the Purim story. Next, students looked at a list of Jewish values with predominantly humanistic overtones. Each student considered six different values and determined the most important in her/his opinion. After splitting into small groups, students took turns sharing their most important Jewish values and then comparing them to more theistic Jewish values, considering whether and how a theistic Jewish value can still be meaningful to Humanistic Jews. Finally, members of each group worked together to sort all of their group's values into group-defined categories, and then

everyone came together to share their values discussions with the larger group. To close the activity, students looked at some examples of symbols that represent Jewish values and beliefs, and then used ink on paper to draw their own creative symbols to represent the Jewish values of their choosing. Sarah joined us toward the close of the lesson to teach some Purim songs, including “Chag Purim” and “Little Purim Clown,” and then the class went downstairs to join the Purim carnival! Juniors students led some carnival games and assisted with the hamantaschen-making activity; their assistance was a big help!

JCS Class Summaries--February 9, 2014

Littles Class

This week was super fun! We sang songs in the beginning of class, and we read our favorite ABC book on helping out and doing mitzvot. Then, inspired by the book, we began working on an ABC book of our own!

Middles Class

In February, the Middles class learned about the importance of respecting people of all religions. We read *The Sandwich Swap*, which reminded us to focus on all the things we have in common instead of the differences between us. The Holocaust was introduced as a time when people forgot about what they had in common. We learned a little bit about Anne Frank, and decorated our own diaries in Anne’s honor.

Juniors Class

During our February lesson, the sixth of the school year, we learned how to cook some delicious Israeli food! To open the lesson, students shared their favorite Jewish foods to eat. Then we returned to the timeline activity we began last

lesson, and students worked to match undated episodes leading up to the founding of Israel with their correct dates. We corrected mismatches and talked about the flow of this history, from the First Zionist Congress and arrival of chalutzim (early pioneers) to Israeli independence, and discussed some of the struggles and conflicts between Jewish settlers, Palestinians, British colonial rulers, and others that characterized the period. After this introduction to Israeli history, the class read aloud a short reading on Israeli food from *Jerusalem: A Cookbook*, by Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi. Then we got down to business with cooking! Students worked together to prepare sabih, a popular Israeli street food introduced by Iraqi Jewish immigrants to Israel in the 1950s. Sabih combines fried eggplant and chopped hard-boiled eggs with tahini sauce layered on pita, with the classic Israeli salad of chopped cucumber, tomato and parsley served alongside and zhoug, a Yemenite Jewish green chili sauce, drizzled over the top. The class did a great job of cooperating on all the different food prep tasks needed to create this treat and the hummus that we served alongside. We enjoyed our Israeli meal with a great sense of accomplishment, and I was pleased to have several students ask to take home copies of the recipes!

JCS Class Summaries-January 12, 2014

Little's Class

This week at Or Emet's JCS we celebrated Tu B'Shevat. Mrs. Sarah taught us a Tu B'Shevat song, and how to do a yoga tree pose.

We read *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, an annual favorite. We also colored some pictures while engaged in an excellent, ADORABLE discussion about the moon, gravity, and where on earth it was currently night. We topped off our day with an excellent Tu B'Shevat seder.

Middles Class

In January, the Middles class learned about Tikkun Olam. We made art projects showing how we can help to repair the world. We also learned about Tu B'Shevat. Our class decided right away that taking care of nature is an excellent way to practice Tikkun Olam. Tree-planting isn't very realistic in January, so we had fun planting parsley and forget-me-not seeds to take home. Then Sarah taught the class two songs, which the students performed at the Tu B'Shevat seder.

Juniors Class

Our fifth lesson of the school year focused on Zionism and the founding of Israel. We began the morning with a few rounds of "Maklot," an Israeli game that challenged students to jump over three sticks spread increasingly far apart. From here we began our introduction to Zionism and Zionist ideas; students selected roles, donned costumes, and performed a short play presenting Theodor Herzl's vision of a Jewish state and the Jewish community's responses to it in dramatic form. After the performance, the class had a great discussion that explored Herzl's reasons for wanting a Jewish homeland and the opposition he faced from many gentiles as well as Orthodox and Reform Jewish leaders. Imagining that they were alive during the late 19th/early 20th century, students reflected on whether or not they would have been eager—like many young Jewish people of the period—to join the Zionist movement. Next, Sarah came to teach the regular music and Hebrew lesson. She reviewed the Israeli pioneer song "Zum Gali Gali" with the class, and then taught students to sing "Hatikvah," Israel's national anthem. We closed the lesson with a timeline exercise that required students to match undated episodes leading up to the founding of Israel with their correct date. Because the exercise was cut short for students to participate in the Or Emet Tu B'Shevat seder, we will return to it at the beginning of next session.

JCS Class Summaries--December

8, 2013

Littles Class

This week The Littles discussed Shabbat, and the need for rest days. We discussed how Shabbat is similar to vacations, and how it is different. We read a Shabbat story, we drew pictures of how we like to spend our rest days, and we discussed them as a class.

As I often do, when each student finishes their task for the day, they can look through the stack of JCS books that we have. This time, Manny grabbed a book and began to read aloud to the other students. It was a great moment.

Also, there was a tiny sweatshirt left behind at the end of class. It will be returned at the next session.

Middles Class

In December, the Middles class focused on tradition. We reviewed Chanukah by watching the Rugrats Chanukah Special. We followed this up by discussing who passes the traditions and stories down from one generation to the next in the movie, as well as in our own families (here's looking at, you, moms and dads!). We thought about different kinds of traditions and enjoyed one of the best - food! Together we made some very delicious rugelach. We also had a great music and Hebrew lesson with Sarah.

Juniors Class

In December, during our fourth session of the school year, we focused on learning about the Holocaust and different forms of resistance to the Nazis. Students recalled facts that they already knew about the Holocaust and listened to a short talk (with accompanying slideshow) that outlined the historical conditions that gave rise to Nazism, many of the Holocaust's tragic events, and the varied ways that people responded to the horror and tragedy. For the remainder of the lesson, students learned about Jewish and "righteous Gentile" resistance to the Nazis. After returning from break, Sarah taught us to sing "Zog Nit Keynmol," the anthem of the Jewish partisans' movement. Then the class split into groups and rotated through learning stations that focused, respectively, on Jewish armed

resistance, Jewish cultural resistance, and “righteous Gentile” solidarity resistance efforts. At the first station, students read about partisans and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and then listened to another Yiddish partisan song. At the second station, they made realistic and imaginative drawings and then compared them to drawings made by children at the Terezin concentration camp, reflecting on how the children’s art constituted a form of cultural resistance. At the third station, students learned about “righteous Gentiles” who helped to hide, protect, or smuggle Jews to safety during the Holocaust, and created collages in honor of the “tzedeck” or “tzedecket” (righteous man or woman) of their choice. Students left the classroom with an understanding that even in the face of Nazi terror, brave Jewish people and their Gentile allies fought to save Jewish lives and preserve hope in the future.

JCS Class Summaries--November 10, 2013

Littles Class

This week we learned about Hanukkah. We learned about the menorah, the letters on a dreidel, how to play the dreidel game, and practiced our Hanukkah party songs. We also made wonderful cards expressing our condolences to one of our classmates who lost a loved one between sessions.

Middles Class

In November, the Middles class learned about Hanukkah. We read *Maccabee! The Story of Hanukkah* and played a game of Freeze (when the music stops) to remember how the Jews hid their studies from the Romans. Sarah taught us two Hanukkah songs, including Or Emet’s Hanukkah blessing. Then we found out why Hanukkah is so early this year by learning about the Jewish calendar. We played a matching game with the Jewish months, and found our Jewish calendar birthdays. For our craft project we drew turkey-themed menorahs in honor of “Thanksgivakah.” We wrapped the day up with a game of dreidel.

Juniors Class

During our third lesson of the school year, students learned more about the factors that caused so many Jewish people to emigrate from the Russian Empire to the U.S. between 1880 and 1920, and then prepared to sing and perform a short play at the Or Emet Hanukkah party. Class opened with a discussion comparing and contrasting the experiences of Jewish immigrants to the U.S. a hundred years ago and immigrants to the U.S. today. Then we watched a selection from the Minnesota-made documentary *Ida's Story*, which explores how Or Emet member Donna Sherlock's mother survived a 1918 pogrom and made a long and treacherous journey with her siblings from their small town in the Ukraine to Ellis Island. The class discussed how they would have felt in Ida's position and ways that people can prevent the kinds of mass violence that caused such suffering for Ida's family and millions of other Jews. Then we enjoyed a snack of Streit's matzo and Dr. Brown's Cel-Ray soda, classic NYC Jewish foods that Jewish immigrants like Ida's family enjoyed after settling on Manhattan's Lower East Side. After break, we learned to sing "Mi Y'Malel" and "Oy Chanukah" with Sarah, and then started work with our Hanukkah play. The play, called *Hanukka Gelt: A Short Play for Hanukka*, by Leon Levenson, takes place at Hanukkah time in a shtetl in Russia ~100 years ago; it focuses on a Jewish family in the midst of deciding to immigrate to America in search of safety and opportunity. Students chose characters and then did a read-through of the play. Then the class split into two groups, and for the last half hour of the lesson one group made their own edits to the play script while the other group painted a backdrop for the performance. Students are excited to rehearse and perform the play!

Juniors Class Summary--October

13, 2013

For our second lesson of the school year, we focused on Jewish immigration to the US through Ellis Island and Jewish immigrant life on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the late 19th and early 20th century. The Juniors class had several visitors this session, so we took time at the beginning of class to introduce ourselves and “introduce” Humanistic Judaism to our guests. Next, we talked about America’s history of immigration, and students shared where their ancestors came from before arriving in this country. After a short lecture describing how pogroms, discrimination, and lack of economic opportunity caused millions of Jews to immigrate to the US from Russia in the late 19th/early 20th century, the whole class took part in an Ellis Island simulation. Students played the roles of medical examiners, primary line inspectors, and Jewish immigrants entering the US, and reflected afterward on what the experience felt like and whether the immigration process was truly fair. After break, the class learned some Yiddish vocabulary and sang part of the humorous and nostalgic New York Yiddish theater song “Rumania, Rumania!” with Sarah. Then students split into groups and looked at old photos depicting Jewish immigrant life on the Lower East Side, sharing their impressions. We talked about the average dimensions of the tenement apartments that NYC Jewish immigrants lived in, and then used a tape measure and string to mark out these dimensions in our classroom. Students piled into the makeshift “apartment” that we created, and discussed what it must have felt like for Jewish immigrants to live together in such tiny spaces. After learning some other tenement facts, the class watched a short clip from the documentary *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews*, learning about Yiddish newspapers, Yiddish theater, and other aspects of immigrant Jewish cultural life on the Lower East Side. The whole lesson gave students insight into the hardships Jewish immigrants to the US (including many of their ancestors) faced, as well as the strength and community ties of support that made Jewish immigrant survival possible.
