

Class Update - Juniors Oct. 2010

Or Emet Juniors' Class Summary-October

At the October session, the juniors' class learned about Yiddish literature and Yiddish writer Sholom Aleichem. After some opening games/icebreakers, students watched an excerpt from a documentary focusing on the history of Jewish life in Eastern Europe—the milieu in which both modern Yiddish literature was born and the majority of its stories are set. They learned about Jewish shtetls in Russia, the restriction of Jewish settlement to “the Pale,” and the other restrictive laws and periodic pogroms that made 19th and early 20th century life so difficult for Jewish people in Russia. After discussing what they learned from the film, students listened to a presentation with accompanying PowerPoint that provided a short history of Yiddish literature and more background regarding Sholom Aleichem's biography and writings.

Returning from break, the class split into small groups and began to discuss “Kaporos,” one of the Sholom Aleichem stories students had read in preparation for the session. One group drew pictures of story characters and diagramed their characteristics, while another group mapped out the story's plot using string and descriptive markers and discussed story themes. Students were struck by the story's humor, laughing at the narrative of a group of chickens that rise in revolt against a shtetl's human residents because of their barbaric Kaporos practices—and ultimately carry the day. Segueing from here into a discussion of how many modern Yiddish stories provided the narrative basis for Yiddish theater classics, students participated in a series of theater games and improv exercises. The day closed with an extended improv sequence; students performed an improvised version of “Kaporos” and another Aleichem story they had read—“The Simchas Torah Flag”—with guidance from a student director.

Teen Crew Update - Oct. 2010

Wow! How exciting to have such wonderful folks in our new youth crew! Our first session was a lot of “getting to know you” and brainstorming for what our program will look like over the next year. After a fun chat about who we are, what we’re into, and specific fun questions like “what reality show would you be on if you could?” the crew chuckled our way into a conversation about Teen Rights. We made a list of what rights teens DON’T have and how they relate to the basic human rights; life, liberty, and happiness. This led to a powerful discussion about individual decisions and personal autonomy. We decided as a group that our rights when we’re together will be: safety (we are in a safe place and will be free to express ourselves without judgement), respect, and freedom of opinion. After a short break for chewy candy we decided as a group what kinds of activities we would like to do this year. There will be a focus on anti-bullying (which the youth seem to be in to) and we will potentially bring our service work to a global scale- Susan, Lili’s mom, came to check in with the group’s interest about working on a global project and will be bringing us several resources to look into at our next session. The teens (and myself) are very excited for our mixture of fun adventures (including a snow fort winter revert to childhood and potentially a friendly painball game in the spring) and educational/fundraising activities, (sock monkey creations to sell- maybe baked goods) we also briefly touched on our volunteer opportunity to usher for the Jewish Humor Festival, happening in January, which the youth agreed to be a part of! Our first session seemed to fly by and we were out of time before we even had a chance to talk about our Hebrew themes for the year, Lo Ta’amod al Dam Rayecha (not standing idly by) and La Shon Ha-ra (not to have an evil tongue). I plan to incorporate these ideals into our lessons for the year as we continue to talk about anti-bullying. Again- I’m super excited for our youth program and feel like the teens are just as stoked as I am (or close at least) I look forward to building trusting relationships through out the year, and having some REAL FUN while we do so.

Class Update - Preschool Oct. 2010

Last Sunday, Oct. 10th, the littles continued to talk about the fall holidays. We started by going for a little walk around the building and observing signs of fall. Then when we got to our classroom, we shared our observations with each other. We learned about Sukkot, and talked about the Sukkah, the structure the Jewish people build during the harvest season. We made our own Sukkah out of a cardboard box and decorated it together. We learned the Hebrew word "Tov" (meaning good), and sang the Hebrew song "Hiney Ma-Tov" in the Sukkah, and we talked about the meaning in English (how good it is to be together...). We made little edible sukkahs with graham crackers and peanut butter.

We read 2 books: One entitled Houses and Homes, which showed pictures of different types of homes from all over the world, some of which resembled a Sukkah. The other book we read was entitled Fly Away Home, which was about a family that was homeless. We talked about this problem a little bit, and then discussed things we can do to help with this issue, and the importance of appreciating what we have. It was another beautiful day, so we also were able to enjoy a little time on the playground at the end of class.

Preschool Curriculum Planner

For this year, "littles" will focus on the students' understanding of how they are Jewish, and how secular humanistic Jews live their values. The children will learn about the practices, customs, and symbols for the secular celebration of the Jewish holidays and observances. They will talk about customs in each child's family to start building bonds with their classmates, and to learn about the acceptance of differences. They will explore how to be good family members, friends, and classmates. The teacher will incorporate songs, stories and crafts with Jewish themes, and introduce some Hebrew words in the classroom.

Class Update - Preschool Sept. 2010

During the September 12th Sunday School session, the class and I focused on learning about Sunday School, the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur holidays, and getting to know each other a little bit.

First we did some drawing: a Rosh Hashanah coloring page, and a picture of our families to help us get acquainted with each other. Then we read two books: Engineer Ari and the Rosh Hashanah Ride, which taught the students about a few different Rosh Hashanah symbols, like apples, honey, and a shofar, and the concept of “making things right.” Then we read the book The Lion Dancer, which is a story about the Chinese New Year. We talked about how different cultures had different celebrations for the new year. Then we made our own shofars, and each child took a turn creating a New Year’s dance, and teaching the other children the steps.

We had apples and honey for snack. We sat in a circle and talked about hopes for the new year, and how we would each work on being good helpers in our families in the coming year.

We sang “Zum Gali, Gali,” with hand motions many of the children had learned and remembered from last year. This was a real favorite. We talked about the Hebrew word Shalom, and how it means Hello, Good-bye and Peace. Finally, we were able to have a little time on the playground, and enjoy the beautiful day, before we said Shalom to each other until next week.

Middles Class Curriculum Planner

Curriculum Planner for Middles 2010

Class Update - Middles Class Sept. 12

We started the Middles class out with introductions, then the children learned how to say “how are you?” (“ma sholmcha” for boys and “ma shlomech” for girls), and a few responses in Hebrew. We went around the room and each responded to the question in Hebrew.

Then we talked about our theme for the year: Tradition. We talked about the meaning of the word, watched a clip from the movie Fiddler on the Roof, and discussed some of the traditions that we observe in our families.

We had a brief Hebrew lesson from Muriel Stern, in which the children learned about the Hebrew calendar, how to say “Happy New Year” (Shana Tova) in Hebrew, and how to say mother and father.

We then briefly discussed the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as well as Sukkot. The students learned both the traditional and the Humanistic meaning of the holidays, and learned some Hebrew words associated with each one. On the topic of Rosh Hashanah, we learned the song “Apples and Honey” in both Hebrew (Tapuchim u-d’vash) and English, and then ate apples and honey. As part of the discussion of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we talked about Tashlich, and the theme of forgiveness. For Sukkot, we learned about the lulav and etrog, and how to shake the lulav.

Finally, we made origami shofars out of construction paper, and then practiced blowing them!

Class Update - Juniors Class Sept.

12

The juniors class spent the September session getting reacquainted, welcoming some new classmates, and learning about the High Holidays. After a few icebreakers, the class played a High Holidays trivia game and learned about teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah, three concepts that are central to the observance of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Students had the opportunity to guess the Hebrew spelling of each word using phonetic Hebrew alphabets, and then to guess the meaning of each word. This led into a discussion of how Humanistic Jews can approach teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah at the new year, thinking about their important values and rededicating themselves to these values, spending time reflecting on their behavior in the past year, and working to act as righteous people—giving of their time, money, et cetera to help others. Students brainstormed a list of their important values, thought about techniques they could use to self-reflect, and came up with a list of different ways that they could help others.

After our break, students gathered outside to learn about tashlich and create a tashlich art project. Because we were far away from a real body of water, the class made a watercolor-resist mural of a river with fish swimming in it, and performed tashlich by throwing crumbs onto our symbolic 'body of water.'

Back inside, the class rounded out the lesson with some rapping and reading. Students listened to a Rosh Hashana rap written by a yeshiva student that focused on the Jewish New Year as a time for self-reflection and self-improvement, and then wrote their own Rosh Hashana raps—both individually and as a group—and took turns performing them to a beat. Class wrapped up with a discussion about plans for the Or Emet school year, and students agreed to participate in a book-club type class format. **Three weeks before each month's class, reading will be posted for students on the Or Emet wordpress site; they should do this reading before the upcoming class. (Reminder emails will also be sent out to parents.)** Getting into the spirit of this focus on Jewish writing and storytelling, the class read the Yiddish short-story "If Not Still Higher" (by I. L. Peretz) aloud, learning about a mysterious rabbi and the ways that he performs tzedakah in the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

[%22Kaporos,%22 by Sholom Aleichem](#)

[%22The Simchas Torah Flag,%22 by Sholom Aleichem](#)

Class Update - Juniors, April 2010

The April session of the Or Emet juniors' class was devoted to learning—as per student request—about notable Jewish people throughout history, from the ancient to the modern. The class split into two teams and engaged in an in-depth trivia game, answering questions about everything from Hillel the Elder's observations on the Torah (“What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn”) to the poems of crypto-Jewish writer M. Miriam Herrera to the role of Jewish-Americans in the Civil Rights Movement. Other questions touched on topics ranging from Jewish-American gangsters to Sholom Aleichem to modern pop singer Regina Spektor and her Jewish family's emigration from the USSR during the Perestroika period. After the game's end, the class discussed characteristics of these notable Jewish personalities and responded to the question of who among them they would consider to be Jewish heroes. We debated whether someone could be both a hero and a villain, talked about the difference between heroes and specifically Jewish heroes (is there any?), and concluded the lesson with a discussion of our own Jewish heroes.

Class update - Middles, April 2010

We began our class by talking about where Jews live in the world today. The kids were amazed to realize how Jews make up such a small portion of the entire population and also while there are nearly the same number of Jews in the US and Israel (around 5-6 million), Jews make up a much higher percentage of the population in Israel than in the US. I think they were also surprised to find out that the country with the third highest Jewish population is France (500-600 thousand). We also talked about how Jews have moved all over the world, especially in Europe and about how many Jews ended up settling in Eastern

Europe, where many of the students ancestors are from.

Muriel visited our class and showed us photos from "A Vanished World" by Roman Vishniac of Jews in Eastern Europe in the 1930s. We also learned a song in Yiddish about children studying in the cheder. The students sang very well...in both English and Yiddish!

Continuing our discussion of Jews in Eastern Europe, we learned about Shtetl life; how these were tight knit communities made up mostly of Jews where they would speak Yiddish on the streets and in homes and would use Hebrew in synagogue and when studying the Torah and Talmud. The marketplace was the center of the Shtetl where many people made their living selling the wares and where people would come to buy their food. We talked about how most people in the shtetl did not have a much money and made just enough to get by, but that it was important to help others in need within the community.

We finished up the class with the students starting to make their own dioramas of a shtetl. They were so involved, they are not yet complete, so we will continue the work in may.
