

# Class update - Juniors, March 2010

The juniors' class spent March's lesson learning about the Ethiopian Jewish community and Ethiopian Jewish observance of Passover. Because Ethiopian Jews, or Beta Israel, practice a pre-Talmudic form of Judaism, they celebrate Passover and other holidays in some ways that are different from other Jews. Students participated in a role-playing activity where they acted the parts of Beta Israel people living in a village in Ethiopia in the 1970s. The activity walked students through the different stages of a Beta Israel Passover celebration, from the cleaning and inspection of homes for chometz to the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb to the Kes's (rabbi's) oral retelling of the Passover story. Students 'broke the fast' in character afterward, eating pieces of injera spread with hot pepper sauce just as Beta Israel people would to enjoy their first taste of leavened bread at the holiday's end. Through the role-playing, students also learned about the challenges and discrimination Beta Israel people faced in Ethiopia, and discovered how tens of thousands of Ethiopian Jews were rescued from civil war and famine and brought to Israel by airlift in the '80s and '90s. Acting the parts of Beta Israel people, students learned, additionally, how these Ethiopian Jews see strong parallels between the ancient Jewish exodus from Egypt celebrated in the Passover story and their own exodus from Ethiopia to Israel. The lesson concluded with an opportunity for the class to write a final act for their characters, in which these characters reflected on the opportunities and challenges presented by their new lives in Israel. We wrapped up the morning with some time outside; the class played some games and reflected on the things they had learned so far as well as the things that they wanted to do in the remaining time this year.

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## **Class update - Juniors, February 2010**

The February lesson for the juniors' class focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We began the morning with a short history lesson, and students learned about the conflict's origins in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that paved the way for the founding of the state of Israel and made refugees out of the millions of Palestinians displaced by Zionist forces. Students wrote and performed short skits about this history, and then did some more in-depth thinking about the effects/consequences for Israelis and Palestinians of different developments stemming from expanding occupation of the territories. After this, the class watched selections from a 2001 documentary film called "Promises," which looks at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the perspective of seven children—Jewish and Palestinian—who live in Jerusalem and on the West Bank. Students discussed the clips, their feelings about the Jewish and Palestinian children's experiences, and their thoughts about what could help achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians. After the film discussion, we shifted gears, and students split into teams and wrote some Jewish trivia questions; then teams posed questions to each other Or Emet-quiz-bowl style! Class wrapped up with a visit from Miriam Jerris, and students had the opportunity to share some thoughts about Humanistic Judaism and the day's lesson with the rabbi.

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## **Class update - Pre-School, March 2010**

March's class focused on Passover. We started the day by working through our Humanistic Judaism packets. We will finish these next class and everyone will take them home! Everyone has learned a lot about what Humanistic Judaism means through these coloring books, both by reading through it and by making up our pictures to illustrate it. After that, we read a book explaining what the holiday

of Passover is and different objects or words that we all should know when we celebrate Passover. Once we learned all of those great words and objects, the students did a scavenger hunt for many of those objects. I'd hidden pictures of the contents of a seder plate, along with some pictures of matzo, around our classroom. Everyone searched the room for the pictures, and once we found them and identified all of them, we made a big seder plate together with the pictures. It was a great way to introduce the students to the different foods they would see on their seder plates at home or in friends' homes. After learning all about our seder plate, we went upstairs and worked with the Middles group to make matzo covers for the Or Emet seder. Hopefully everyone enjoyed seeing our students' great artwork on their tables during the Seder!

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## **Class Update - Middles, March 2010**

We worked on phase II of our Mezuzot project...painting! The painted mezuzot are ready to be filled with their scrolls and mounted to doorways. Muriel Sterne provided our Hebrew lesson while also teaching us about Passover. For the last portion of class, we were joined by the pre-schoolers. We all worked side by side making beautiful Matzoh covers for the Or Emet seder and to take home.

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## **Class Update - Middles, February 2010**

In our last session we enjoyed learning and singing new songs with Rabbi Miriam and the rest of the adults...although the students may not have enjoyed hearing Scott singing "Peace Be With You" over an dover again throughout the class, but

he just couldn't get it out of his head!

Once again, we learned played a trivia game. This time the focus was on Purim. See the PowerPoint presentation to see all of the interesting things we talked about related to Purim; from foods we eat to the Babylonian origins of the characters in the Purim story.

The students had a great time making their own Mezuzot out of clay and our looking forward to painting them during our next class. Each student was asked to work with their family to decide what they would like to put on their scrolls that will go inside their finished Mezuzot. In the [PowerPoint](#) are some ideas families could use to decide what to write on their scrolls.

While working on our craft we had a visit from Rabbi Miriam. It seems the kids were excited to meet a real Rabbi!

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## **Class update - Pre-School, February 2010**

Today our class had a wonderful day learning about Purim! We started the day off, as usual, by singing with the group. We then went downstairs to say our "shaloms" to one another. It's so nice to have six of us now because our greetings are that much louder!

After that, we worked on two pages of our Humanistic Judaism coloring books. Today we talked about what it means to be a humanist and a part of the world family. We talked about how we care about other people, even ones that we haven't met. We also talked about the "power of people" and everyone came up with some things that people have the power to do, like building things, making people happy, helping sick people, and reading and writing books. We also learned the Hebrew word adam, meaning people, and colored the hebrew letters of that word.

We then started to celebrate Purim together! We talked a little bit about the holiday in general, then we made our own groggers. After we made those

groggers, we put them to good use! We read the story of Purim and everyone learned to cheer and make noise when the names Esther and Mordecai were read and to boo loudly when the name Haman was read. Everyone certainly had fun with that activity!

We took a little break after that and enjoyed some Hamantaschen and started to work on coloring and making masks of Esther and the King. I hope everyone will have lots of fun with the groggers and masks when they celebrate Purim at home or at next week's carnival.

Note: The Purim story in class had a few sections that the children may have questions about, but sections that were a bit above our preschool and kindergarten level were taken out. The story began with Esther becoming the queen, therefore excluding any mention of Queen Vashti, Vashti being kicked out of the kingdom, and the contest before Esther was chosen. Additionally, Haman asked that Mordacai be sent away in this version (not hung) and Haman was sent away in the end (not hung). However, there were mentions in the story of Haman not liking Jews and that he wanted the King to order to have them killed. In class, the children understood this issue on a basic but clear "Haman=bad guy" and "Esther=hero" level and we discussed it in that way. Please let me know if you would like help in answering any questions your child has about this topic.

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## **Class Update - Pre-School, January 2010**

Today we got to celebrate Tu B'shevat together! We started the day with song, of course, and then went to our classroom to say our "shaloms" to one another. We then worked on our Humanistic Judaism coloring books and talked about what it means to be a Humanist. We talked about how we are all connected to one another, in a big world family, just as we have a family in our own home and a Jewish family. We found it helpful to talk about the "chain" of connection that we learned about when discussing our Jewish family.

After that, we moved on to celebrating the earth. We learned the hebrew word olam, meaning earth, and practiced the word by playing our very fun “olam, olam, world” version of duck duck goose. We always have a good time with that game! We then went downstairs to read a story about appreciating the earth and talking about what we can do to make the earth a better place. Then we go to doing just that- we planted some seeds- basil, thyme, and a flower- and hopefully we’ll all see them grow big and tall soon enough!

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## **Class Update - Juniors, January 2010**

At the January juniors class session, students learned about Yiddish and the persistence of many Yiddish terms in contemporary English speech. Students received copies of these Yiddish words/terms commonly used in English-written out in standard Yiddish orthography-and transliterated them using a phonetic guide to the Yiddish alphabet. Then members of the class took turns sharing their work, reading aloud words like “schlep,” “shpiel,” “bagel,” and “mazel tov” to the group, and we played a large-group matching game to pair the Yiddish words with their definitions in English. Afterward, students wrote humorous short stories/monologues incorporating all of the Yiddish vocabulary discussed, and read completed work to the class. The morning wrapped up with more service-project discussion; the group voted on different project options and moved forward with plans to volunteer at a Twin Cities soup kitchen (details forthcoming-project is planned for April).

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# [Class Update - Middles, January 2010](#)

The focus of the session was on Tu B'Shevat and trivia was back! We played Tu B'Shevat trivia to learn more about the Jewish holiday that essentially celebrates trees, nature and agriculture. We talked about everything from the ancient origins of the holiday (celebration and worship of the goddess Asherah) to the foods we eat (typically fruits and nuts that grow in Israel) and we even talked about what a Kibbutz is (a communal "village" in Israel).

After trivia, we read a series of poems about trees including one from Karen Shragg, a poet from Richfield, MN. The kids had the opportunity to share what they felt the poets were saying through their poetry. Each student then created their own tree poem. It was a combination of art and poetry, where they both wrote a poem and depicted an image of a tree on the page as well. Some drew a tree and wrote the poem n it, some wrote the poem around their tree and some wrote the words in the shape of a tree. If any parents would like to email us their child's poem, we can certainly post here on WordPress!

Before joining the adults for the Tu B'Shevat seder we spent a few minutes on some Hebrew words related to Tu B'Shevat. It would be great if the parents would spend a few minutes going over these words with their children prior to the next session.

This [link](#) includes our Tu B'Shevat Trivia, the poems we read and the Tu B'Shevat Hebrew words.

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## [Class update - Juniors, December](#)

# 2009

The December juniors class, organized around a Hanukkah theme, focused on the ways that historical explanation can differently inform how contemporary Jews celebrate and think about the holiday. Class started off with a game of dreidel; students played for gelt and had a chance to re-familiarize themselves with some Hebrew letters. Then the class worked to solve a riddle that engaged them in thinking about how the Hebrew letters on the dreidel connect to the rest of the Hebrew alphabet; taking the phrase “Nes Gadol Haya Sham,” the celebrated acronym that takes the dreidel-letters as its basis, they used phonetic principles to spell the words out in Hebrew, and employed a glossary of terms to discover that this phrase translates as “A great miracle happened here.” They discussed the significance of this phrase to the standard retelling of the Hanukkah story and its ‘miracle of lights,’ and then moved on to some theater activities. Two groups of students read two different accounts of the Hanukkah story—one a traditional retelling of the Maccabees’ triumph over Greek oppressors, while the other (supported by most contemporary scholars) an account suggesting that the Maccabees were actually involved in a civil war with more assimilated, Hellenized Jews in Jerusalem (and King Antiochus just intervened). Each group created a mini-play about their version of the Hanukkah story and presented it to the class, and their performances became a springboard for discussion about the reasons one historical explanation might be promoted by Jewish people as opposed to another, more historically true, explanation. The lesson finished with rehearsal and final planning time for the Hanukkah play “Herschel and the Hanukkah Goblins.”

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