

JCS Class Summaries--November 8, 2015

Littles

Today at JCS we learned about mitzvot, and role-played ways that we could help each other. We drew pictures of some mitzvot we could do for each other, and shared them with each other. We also sang songs that helped us learn the names of body parts in Hebrew! At the end of the day, Ari made us all some rock oatmeal outside.

Middles

In November, the Middles had a great time learning about Shabbat. We reviewed what Shabbat is all about, played a game to help us remember, and had our own candle-lighting and Kiddush ceremony. We sang “Shabbat Shalom” and learned body parts in Hebrew with Sarah. Awesome! Then each student decorated a trivet with a picture of her or his family, to remind us what Shabbat is all about.

Juniors

[Coming Soon]

Bat/Bar Mitzvah Prep

After reviewing the Jewish history we’ve learned about so far this year, we turned our attention this lesson to the Talmudic Era. During this period in Jewish history—after the destruction of the Second Temple—the Oral Law grew quickly, people collected it together in the Talmud, and Jewish people across the diaspora began to use the Talmud to guide their daily lives. Students read a little about the Talmud and this period in history in a selection from *The Veterans of History* course text. Then we read an actual piece of the Talmud in translation; the excerpt, from Mas. Baba Kama 113a, is filled with arguments between rabbis about “dina de’ malkhuta dina”—whether Jewish people should have to follow the laws of the non-Jewish lands where they live. After reading, students split into two groups and debated the question themselves in true Talmudic style! We learned a song with words that come from the Talmud along with Sarah, and then we talked

about how the Talmud includes lots of discussions about blessings and rules for saying blessings. Students learned the traditional Shabbat blessings—for Jewish literacy’s sake—and then transliterated, learned, and practiced the Humanistic Shabbat blessings. We wrapped up class by creating Shabbat candleholders out of clay (imprinted with Star of David shapes made with Torx screws) and decoupage-ing plastic Kiddush cups with decorative, colorful tissue paper patterns. It was another full morning!

[JCS Class Summaries--October 4, 2015](#)

Littles

[Coming Soon]

Middles

In October, the Middles learned all about Sukkot. Sarah taught us some great songs to help us celebrate. We played a Sukkot game to review the history of the holiday, and did one of our favorite projects—making candy sukkahs!

Juniors

[Coming Soon]

Bat/Bar Mitzvah Prep

During our October class, we did a mix of reading, critical thinking exercises, discussion, and creative, hands-on activities as we continued to study the start of the Jewish diaspora. Our lesson began with a brief history “lecture” outlining the Babylonian Exile and changes in Jewish life post-Exile, Judea under Greek rule, the Maccabean Revolt, and the Hasmonean dynasty. Then students turned to their course text, *The Veterans of History*, to read about the Pharisees and the Sadducees. We discussed the reading, watched a short video about famous

Pharisee and famous Sadducee Hillel and Shammai, and did an activity where students read a mix of quotes from the more lenient, understanding Hillel and the comparatively strict, rule-bound Shammai and had to draw on their knowledge of each rabbi to identify who said what. After singing a Sukkot song and learning some holiday vocabulary with Sarah, students used cut vegetables/fruits and paint to make decorative stamps on decorations for the sukkah. We spent the rest of class learning about Judea under Roman rule and the Judean revolts. The class looked at images of coins minted by Jewish rebels during the Great Revolt (66-70 CE) and at the beginning of the Bar Kokhba War (132 CE) and compared them to a Roman coin from this broad time period. We talked about coins as symbols and the symbolism that appears on these coins in particular—including a very Sukkot-appropriate lulav and etrog on the Bar Kokhba War coin! Then students had the chance to get their hands dirty, creating scaled-up clay models of the coins of their choice. We packed in a lot of learning this lesson!

JCS Class Summaries--September 20, 2015

Littles

What a great first day back! This week we saw some familiar faces, and were introduced to some new ones. The biggest thing that we learned about was forgiveness, forgiving, and making amends. We read a story about telling the truth and earning trust, and drew pictures of situations where “making it right” might be in order. We brainstormed what “making it right” might look like in each situation. At the end of the day, the beautiful day was calling us so we played outside.

Middles

For the first JCS session of the year, the Middle class learned about the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We talked about what each holiday is and how we observe them. Sarah taught us to how to say “happy new year” and

“I’m sorry” in Hebrew, and then led us in a Rosh Hashanah song. To celebrate the holidays, we decorated candles, something we use on important Jewish days. Many thanks to Ben Drucker, our excellent assistant!

Juniors

In September, the JCS Juniors class began to explore the idea of the Jewish diaspora, discussing reasons why populations move. We began with the fall of the Second Temple as it pertains to Jewish history, and then broadened our discussion of diaspora to include other ethnic populations. Students were invited to mark on a world map where their Jewish (and non-Jewish) ancestors came from and then we looked for migratory patterns. We did a very quick skim of European Jewish history and talked about the differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. We finished up playing a game where we learned about different High Holiday traditions throughout the Jewish diaspora.

Bat/Bar Mitzvah Prep

For our first class, we dove right into the ancient Jewish history leading up to our focus for the year—the history of the Jewish diaspora. After a quick warm-up, we reviewed the biblical/ancient Jewish stories and history we covered last year, and I introduced *The Veterans of History: A Young Person’s History of the Jews*, by Mitchell Silver, which will be our main text this year. Students did a short reading from the text that talked about the era of the prophets that came before the Babylonian Exile, and then each used a guide to the aleph-bet and Hebrew vowels to transliterate famous lines from the prophet Isaiah (“Lo yisa goy el goy cherev; v’lo yil’medu od milchamah”). Next students used a mini Hebrew glossary to come up with a rough translation of the lines (“Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore”), and we connected these lines to the song “Lo Yisa Goy” that we regularly sing at Or Emet. Our music and Hebrew lesson with Sarah followed; she taught the class Hebrew vocabulary for the High Holidays along with the appropriately reflective song “Im Ein Ani Li, Mi Li?” that’s based on Rabbi Hillel’s famous words. After Sarah’s lesson, we touched very quickly on the intervening span of history and then talked about celebrated Jewish thinkers Hillel and Shammai and the following quote from Hillel: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? And if not now, when?” Students brainstormed High Holidays resolutions to align with the first two questions—ways that they can improve themselves, and ways that they

can better support their families and/or communities and make the world a better place. To cap off the activity they posed for pictures with these resolutions posted on big cartoon speech bubbles—making their resolutions bold and public! Thanks for a great first lesson, students!

JCS Class Summaries--May 31, 2015

Littles

[Coming soon]

Middles

In May, the Middles class discussed what we do every day to celebrate that we are Jewish. We looked at pictures of something many families use for this: mezuzot! Each student made a clay mezuzah to take home, with a special mezuzah message hidden inside. They all turned out beautifully! Sarah led the class in singing the Alef-Bet. We learned even more about Hebrew by coloring Hebrew letters as a thank you to Richard. Thank you to Ben Drucker for his help in class this month. Teacher Renee also sends a big thank you to all the students, parents, teachers, and volunteer helpers who made this a great year at JCS!

Juniors

In May, the Juniors class learned about Ketuvim—or Writings—the final book in the Tanakh, closing out our year of Tanakh and ancient Jewish historical study. After reflecting on the year with JCS, we turned our attention to Psalms (Tehillim). Students read and discussed Psalm 92, listened to it sung to a popular tune for the traditional Kabbalat Shabbat service, and then individually rewrote the psalm to give it a humanistic meaning. Then we looked at Proverbs (Mishlei), reading over a list of proverbs from the book that resonate with Humanistic Jews. (Some highlights? “Better a meal of vegetables where there is love / Than a

fattened ox where there is hate.” - Proverbs, 15:17 & “Seven times the righteous man falls and gets up...” - Proverbs, 24:16) We each took turns acting out proverbs from the list in pantomime for the group to guess, and then the class split into two groups to create more elaborate skits that illustrated proverbs. Very brief introductions to the Book of Job and the Book of Ruth bookended a discussion of The Song of Songs (Shir Hashirim); students used great dramatic voices to read excerpts from this biblical love poem aloud, and then talked about the meaning of its symbolism and how it compares to modern love poems. Music and Hebrew with Sarah was a lesson in chanting Torah. Then the class decorated part of the thank you banner for outgoing Or Emet president Richard Logan, and listened to JCS grad Ben Drucker talk about his experience preparing for his bar mitzvah with Or Emet. We finished the day by gathering with all the other JCS classes to take a photo of everyone with the “Todah rabah, Richard!” banner. Thank you for a great year, Juniors!

JCS Class Summaries--April 19, 2015

Littles

This week at Or Emet’s JCS, we learned a little bit about Shabbat from teacher Sarah, we colored, and we did a fun activity to practice tikkun olam. At the end of the day, we read a short story that the kids liked so much, they asked me to read it again.

Middles

The Middles class did a review of Passover in April. We watched the ‘90s classic, “A Rugrats Passover,” played a game called “Pharaoh, Can We Go Free,” and then acted out the 10 plagues. It was a fun and active class this month! We practiced humanistic Hebrew blessings for wine, bread, and candle lighting with Sarah. She also taught us a beautiful song in Hebrew. At the end of class, we joined other JCS students in creating a model of Kibbutz Aleph, the first kibbutz in Israel. A huge

thank you to Jack, our volunteer helper this month!

Juniors

Our April lesson focused on learning about the food of ancient Israel through studying the Book of Prophets and cooking ancient Israeli-inspired recipes. After a class discussion about how we can study a text—any piece of media like a book, picture, song, or video—from any time and place, ancient or modern, to learn about the beliefs, customs, and daily lives of the people from that time and place, we turned our attention to Nevi'im, or the Book of Prophets. Students received and read different quotations or short summaries from Nevi'im that mention food, and then shared their selections with the group. Highlights included stories about the parched grain, bread, wine, fig cakes, et cetera sent to feed Saul's and later David's armies in *I Samuel*, and the prophet Elisha's transformation of a wild gourd stew from poison to something palatable with the addition of flour in *II Kings*. We discussed what, based on our reading, are the foods we can guess that people ate in ancient Israel, as well as what we can hypothesize about their beliefs and attitudes. Then the whole class moved to the kitchen to cook up an ancient Israeli-style feast! Students worked in teams to prepare "Elisha's gourd stew" (a non-poisonous adaptation!), parsley and barley salad, cucumber salad, and pressed fig cakes, and then enjoyed a meal of these dishes. After our fun lunch together, we closed out the day by helping other JCS students to create a model of Degania Aleph, the first kibbutz in Israel, for the MNIIsrael display at the St. Paul JCC's Yom Ha'atzmaut event.

JCS Class Summaries--March 8, 2015

Littles

This week at JCS was all about Purim. We learned the story of Purim, colored Purim pictures, and sang songs about Purim. Our classroom day ended early, as we had our yearly Purim carnival. We sang songs for our families, played games,

won prizes, and made arts and crafts.

Middles

In March, the Middles class learned the story of Purim. Sarah taught us a great Purim song. Then, we worked together to make delicious Hamentaschen fillings before joining in the carnival. A HUGE thank you to this month's Middles classroom helpers for their excellent work in the kitchen - Ben Drucker, Dan Gladen, and Naomi Rockler! Filling recipes are available below:

[Poppy Seed](#)

[Caramel Apple](#) (A big hit! Dulce de leche is available at World Market, Trader Joe's, and Kowalski's)

[Apricot](#) (dairy free)

Juniors

In March, the Juniors class connected Purim celebration with their Torah and Tanakh study, reviewing the Purim story and Esther's role in it while also learning about other strong women prophets—or prophetesses—in the Jewish tradition. We opened class with a brief joke-telling session in honor of Purim, and then moved on to talking about how, in stories in the Tanakh, a prophet(ess) is "...a spokes[wo]man for G-d, a person chosen by G-d to speak to people on G-d's behalf and convey a message or teaching. Prophet[esse]s were role models of holiness, scholarship and...set the standards for the entire community" (<http://www.jewfaq.org/prophet.htm>). We talked about how, according to the Babylonian Talmud, 48 prophets and seven prophetesses preached to Israel, and reflected on why, when the Torah/Tanakh focuses on stories about men, we as feminist, progressive Jewish people would want to study women's stories in the Bible more closely. Then students split into three groups, rotating through three stations where they learned about the prophetesses Deborah, Hannah, and Esther in more detail. At each station, students read a book excerpt retelling the story of one of these prophetesses, discussed the story critically, and then creatively illustrated key characters, events, and themes in it on a large add-on drawing before rotating to the next station. Discussions touched on Deborah's powerful leadership qualities, Esther's courage (overlooked by many who focus on her beauty), and understanding Hannah's struggles with infertility. Finally, we wrapped up the lesson with a brief music lesson with Sarah, learning a Purim song about a little clown, "Leitzan Katan," before we dismissed class to celebrate

with the whole congregation at the Purim carnival!

JCS Class Summaries--February 8, 2015

Littles

Today at Or Emet's JCS we learned about Tu B'Shevat. Teacher Sarah taught us a song, and then we got to color. After snack, we read a story and then participated in a Tu B'Shevat seder with our families. Everyone loved our song!

Middles

In February, the Middles class learned the story of Noah's Ark. We decided that, even though it may not be true, the story can remind us to act in the face of climate change, even if other people don't believe in it. Sarah taught us a great Humanistic version of "Rise and Shine" as well as a great Tu B'Shevat song, "Tree of Life". We celebrated the New Year for Trees by making collages of trees to hang in the window. At the end of class, students joined in the annual Tu B'Shevat seder. Also, a big thank you to Jack, our volunteer helper of the month!

Juniors

During our February lesson, the class focused on wrapping up our Torah study for the year and tying it to our celebration of Tu B'Shevat, aka "The New Year for the Trees." After a brief tree-focused improv warm-up, students split into groups and tackled the last two books in the Torah—Numbers (BaMidbar) and Deuteronomy (Devarim)—using their critical thinking skills to sequence the names and descriptions of key events from each of the books' parshiyot/Torah portions. Then the class focused in on "Korach," an interesting parsha from Numbers, doing a dramatic reading of the *Sedra Scenes* skit that retells the story of Korach and discussing it afterward. Students analyzed Korach's reasons for challenging the leadership of Aaron and Moses, weighed the legitimacy of his beef, and

considered, as humanists, why the Torah talks so much about people challenging God and then being punished by God. Finally, the class did a fun art project that connected our Torah study and Tu B'Shevat. Riffing on the idea that the Torah is often called the Tree of Life, or Etz Chaim, we created Tree of Life sun-catchers, decoupage squares of colorful tissue paper behind a round cut-out design featuring a tree and the Hebrew word "chai." Then class learned to sing "Ha'Shkediya Porachat," a classic Tu B'Shevat song, with Sarah, and we ended the lesson early to join everyone in the gym and take part in Or Emet's annual Tu B'Shevat seder!

JCS Class Summaries--January 11, 2015

Littles

This week at Or Emet's JCS we welcomed some visitors (that we will hopefully see again). We learned about Tikkun Olam, read a story about tzedakah, drew pictures of different ways we can help one another, and had a great discussion about what we drew!

Middles

In January, the Middles class learned about Social Justice - an important value for many Humanistic Jews! Sarah led us in a beautiful song on this theme. We learned the story of Prophet Amos, who fought for social justice way back in the time of the Torah. Then we played some games to remind us why equality is important. We finished up by drawing our "inside" and "outside" selves, to show that the inside is what really counts!

Juniors

Because Eva Cohen (that's me—hi, everyone! ☺) was out of town attending a wedding, the Juniors class had Eva's dad, Barry, as a substitute in January; Barry

did a great job with the day's lesson, getting the class to think critically and humanistically about Exodus and Leviticus. Continuing to use *Sedra Scenes* as their core text, students split into groups and did dramatic readings of skits for the final Torah portions in Exodus and of skits for selected Torah portions in Leviticus. After each reading, students took part in small group or class-wide discussion, debating thorny issues raised by their reading—including whether “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” is a good rule for societies to live by. Hands-on activities broke up the reading; after learning about the Torah's instructions for building a Tabernacle for “God” to dwell in, students created mini Tabernacle models using Tinkertoys, Lincoln Logs, Duplos, and craft supplies. Sarah Berman-Young taught the class some Torah story-focused Debbie Friedman songs after break, and then students played “The ‘Kosher or Treyf’ Game!” Divided into two teams and racing the clock, students used their reasoning skills and lists of kosher rules drawn from the Shemini Torah portion in Leviticus (as well as from elsewhere in the Torah) to sort images of food and animals into “kosher” and “treyf” piles. Then the class reflected on the origins of kosher rules, and modern efforts to expand the definition of kosher to require ethical treatment of farm and food workers. Finally, before wrapping up for the day, the class discussed the following powerful line: “You shall not stand by your neighbor's blood” (Leviticus 19:16), thinking about its connection to #BlackLivesMatter and talking about ways that Jewish people can get involved in this important contemporary movement. The Juniors certainly had an eventful and learning-packed lesson!

JCS Class Summaries--December 7, 2014

Littles

This week at JCS, we learned about Chanukah. We learned Chanukah songs for our party, and read a great Chanukah book. We lit a real menorah and colored some Chanukah pictures. As a special bonus, Kai told us some hilarious jokes, such as this gem:

Knock Knock!

Who's there?

The cat in the balloon.

The cat in the balloon who?

The cat wanted to live in space.

Thanks Kai! Kid jokes are the best.

Middles

In December, the Middles learned about Hanukkah and family history. We started with the story of the Maccabees. Sarah taught us the Hanukkah blessing to share at the JCS Hanukkah celebration. We made family tree felt menorahs to take home and "light," and students shared where their families came from. For special holiday fun, we finished up by playing dreidel. Naomi Rockler-Gladen helped out in our class this month - thanks Naomi!

Juniors

In December, the Juniors class continued with their humanistic study of the book of Exodus while also getting into the Hanukkah spirit! To open the lesson, students played a warm-up game of dreidel in small groups. Then, after a brief review of the Torah stories we studied in November, the class began a group dramatic reading of the short, funny *Sedra Scenes* skits for the Vayera through Yitro Torah portions. As usual, students had fun playing around with voices and expressive reading styles to make the stories come to life. We discussed provocative questions raised by each Torah portion, ranging from possible science-based explanations for the Ten Plagues to opinions on the morality and modern relevance of each of the Ten Commandments. After a break for snack and a bit more dreidel play, Sarah Berman-Young came to teach the class two Hanukkah songs- "Mi Y'malel" and "Chanukah, Chanukah." Students listened to a short talk connecting the seven-branch menorah first described in the Torah to the Chanukah menorah, and then they looked over scripts and chose their roles in this year's Hanukkah play! This year's play (written by me, Eva) tells the story of Hanukkah and the Maccabees from a historical perspective with a humorous twist. The class had time for one run-through of the play; students look forward to rehearsing more and then performing at the Or Emet Hanukkah party!

JCS Class Summaries-November 9, 2014

Littles

This week at JCS we discussed Shabbat. We lit candles, ate challah, and learned some Secular Humanistic prayers. We read a Shabbat story, and drew some pictures of what we like to do during our “rest time.” Kai told some hilarious jokes, and we played an excellent game of Simon Says.

Middles

In November, the Middles class learned about Shabbat. We had a brief discussion of what Shabbat means. We learned what a traditional family might do on Shabbat, and what they might not do, and played a game to review. We then began our own “mini” Shabbat with a Kiddush and candle lighting. We read a story about how to have fun without technology and played a game of charades to practice. Students made their own spice pouches for Havdalah, and we closed the lesson with our own Havdalah ceremony.

Juniors

In November, Juniors class students continued with their humanistic Torah study. After a quick icebreaker/warm-up, students reviewed the famous Torah-focused artwork covered in October, choosing a favorite piece and then sharing the Torah story it represents along with their reasons for choosing it. Then the class split into two smaller groups, doing reader’s theater-style readings of summaries of the Vayetze and Vayishlach Torah portions, of the *Sedra Scenes* for the Vayayshev and Mikaytz portions, of summaries of the Vayigash and Vayechi portions, and of the *Sedra Scenes* skit for the Shemot portion—it sounds like a mouthful, right? □ Basically, students did dramatic readings of short, funny *Sedra Scenes* skits retelling the rest of Genesis and the very beginning of Exodus along with some quick summaries to connect the narrative dots. Groups briefly discussed each Torah portion after completing the reading for it; discussions touched on how

Jacob, Leah, and Rachel must have felt when Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah instead of Rachel, the source and value of Joseph's dreams, the ethics of Joseph's treatment of his brothers, and comparisons that can be drawn between Moses and different fictional characters/historical figures. When we returned from a quick break, we moved to our "Midrash Manicures" activity! Taking inspiration from the popular "Midrash Manicures" website, whose founder, Rabbi Yael Buechler, has decorated her nails with creative, symbolic art to match the week's Torah portion for the past ten years, students painted decorative nail art on their fingernails to represent Torah stories they have studied so far this year. Student who didn't want to paint their nails decorated pin-back buttons instead. It was a creative, fun, messy, and smelly—lots of open bottles of nail polish sure smell!—end to the lesson!
