

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.