

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.