

JCC Manhattan
Room 2
3s classroom

From JECEI Accreditation Portfolio 2010

Indicator 6

A Fear and Bravery Curriculum with a Relation to Hanukkah

One day during morning meeting several children started mentioning the nightmares they were having. As they told their stories we noticed most children had a comment or story to add to the discussion. We realized being scared was a common feeling among the children.

After the meeting we took a small group aside to discuss: "What is a dream?"

"M- "A dreams most are kinds of skeletons."

Teacher-"Are there skeletons in a good dream?"

M- "No."

A-"it's something like bones in the middle of the night for me."

O-"Umm... like a big monster came and it's gooey."

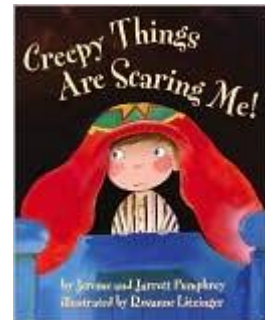
M-"At the Halloween night I saw the flying Dutchman and a robot dream."

J-"all the nights when its really late I'm in my bed and a dinosaur comes in and I hide under my covers in my bed and I hear footsteps going that way and I peek. I get outta my bed and lock the door so he can never come in again."

After looking back on these quotes, we thought about the different strategies children used to overcome their fears. Over the next few weeks we continued to encourage children to share their stories, fears, ideas, and feelings. We read books like: *There's Something There* by Mercer Mayer, *Dreams* by Ezra Jack Keats, *Only in Dreams: Bedtime Story* by Paul Frank Industries. We also had them dictate stories in the writing center that went along with their drawings, and they began to tell stories with the puppets in the puppet theater.



Children acting out stories in the puppet theater.



Fear and bravery books we read.

With Hanukkah approaching, we realized this was a perfect opportunity to delve deeper into this idea of being scared and overcoming bravery, just like Judah and the Macabees.

As a Hanukkah gift to the families in our class, we had each child tell a story of being scared. Here is the letter in the beginning of the book explaining the initial connection between the story of Hanukkah and the themes and curriculum emerging in our class.

Here is the letter:

December 17, 2009

Dear Families,

Happy Hanukkah! We would like to present this book to you as a gift from the class. We have worked very hard for several weeks on this book.

What does Hanukkah mean to us? Hanukkah is a time to celebrate Jewish uniqueness, family, food, and a celebration of light. It is also a time when we celebrate the Macabee's bravery. In the Hanukkah story, Judah Macabee showed great bravery in the face of adversity. Times were scary for the Jewish people. King Antiochus and his army were forcing the Jews to denounce their religion. We have chosen to make the connection between the Hanukkah story and the children's acts of bravery in this book, which is a gift to you in honor of each child.

All children naturally have fears. Some of these fears include the dark, monsters, being alone, trying something new, and the unknown. Children need to confront their fears in order to overcome them. The act of talking about their fears helps to get it out in the open, and makes the fear less scary. Children also overcome their fears by acting them out. We see this in the dramatic play area and on the roof. Notice your child playing stranger, monster, and ghosts? This is why!

We hope that this collection of stories helps you better understand your child's fears, as well as appreciate their acts of bravery.

May you have a very happy holiday and a restful vacation. See you all in 2010!

Love,
Lisa, Jen, and Sheri

Here is an example of a page from the book we created for the families:



This is a picture of the giant Buzz Light Year balloon being blown up outside of Daniela's window.

"I was scared when I was at the big parade. I didn't know it was really going to be nice. It was near my window and it was giant."
- Daniela

Here is an excerpt from the reflection we concluded our book with:

Trying Something New and the Unknown:

Fear of the unknown, or new situations, are naturally intimidating for young children. This is an instinct we all have in order to keep us safe. This year in particular we have been focusing on trying new things, such as food, mixing friends, and new experiences. We challenge the children daily with new projects and materials. At first, the children can be apprehensive; however, we highly praise and encourage the efforts the children make in order to overcome their inhibitions. The children's ability to be brave is internalized when they can look back and realize, "I made it through this!"

These moments of pride and discovery contribute to their growth in courage and bravery. They will be more willing to try new or unfamiliar things when looking back at their accomplishments.

In addition to the books, we invited parents to perform a puppet show of the story of Hanukkah. Four parents volunteered to write and perform the story of Hanukkah to be acted out during our party. In the script we emphasized both the theme of bravery, as well as, the importance of the miracle, the Jewish symbols, and traditions of Hanukkah (such as, the oil, the menorah, and the eight days of celebration). We included the script in the books, as well as, a latke recipe (we told the children about "the importance of cooking in oil in honor of the holiday"), songs, and pictures of the children making olive oil with special guest, Rabbi Fried.

Here are clips from our script highlighting the bravery theme and Jewish symbols:

Jewish people: We want to be Jewish! We will go! But we don't have any weapons or animals. How can we win the battle?

Judah Macabee: We have to be brave! We will trick them! When they are sleeping, we will dump out all their food and water so they are hungry and thirsty. They won't have any energy left to fight us with.

6.9 Teachers make Jewish learning foundational by exploring the JECEI lenses such as the ideas, values, symbols, stories, and/or practices embedded in them.

6.10 Teachers explore with parents the why of Jewish symbols and practices.

6.11 Teachers connect the stories and ideas in torah and/or other Jewish sources to daily experiences.

6.12 Teachers utilize a variety of Jewish sources such as stories, materials, artifacts, symbols, food, music, and/or Hebrew to deepen children's learning experiences.

6.13 Teachers share with parents evidence of the JECEI lenses in the children's learning experiences.

6.14 Teachers get to know children and their families by gathering stories or symbols about their histories, hopes, and/or dreams.