

JECEI

Principle of Excellence - 2 ***Indicator - 5***

Class Name: Classroom 5
The Saul and Carole Zabar Nursery School at The
JCC in Manhattan

Age of Children: 4-6 Year olds

Teachers Names: Joyce Portnoy-Eisman, Peggy Limongi, Theresa Neville

5A.1 Children help each other

In the beginning of the year our team of teachers talked with the children about how we are a community and that it is our responsibility to take care of one another and help each other. (*B'rit-Belonging and Commitment, Tzelem Elokim- Dignity and Potential, Tikkun Olam-Responsibility*)

During the holiday of Sukkot one child decided he wanted to use the waffle blocks to build his own model sukkah. After having some difficulty with it he decided to ask a friend to help.

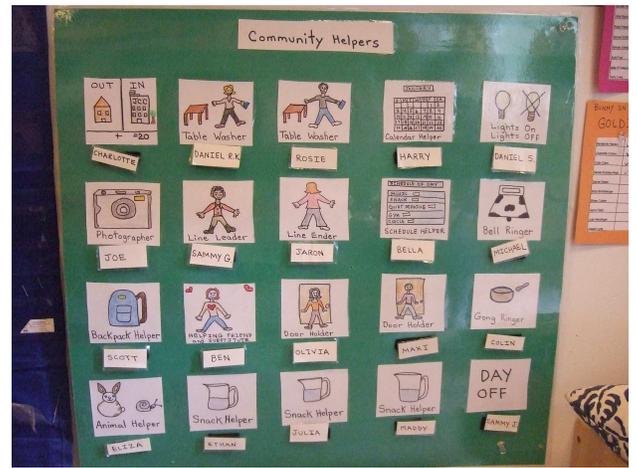


In our class we have a child who is visually impaired. The rest of the children are well aware of her disability and have been extremely helpful and understanding to her issues. They volunteer continuously to help her through daily activities.



5A.2 Children carry out classroom routines

Everyday as the children arrive to school they are responsible for checking the job chart to see what their job for the day is. The job chart is changed daily. The list of jobs was chosen by the children in the beginning of the year. (*B'rit-Belonging and Commitment*)



The children have individualized plastic cups that they use everyday for snack and they are responsible for rinsing them out and putting them back in the drying rack. The children have learned that we are helping to protect our planet by reusing cups. (*Tikkun Olam-Responsibility*)



Two of the jobs that we have on the job chart are washing tables. Here two children are wiping the tables after snack.



5A.4. Children explore relationships through interacting with other children.

The children have many opportunities to interact with each other within the classroom and with other children throughout the school.

As a summer project the children were asked to bring in a photo album with pictures of family, friends and favorite moments. Our team of teachers felt this would help to facilitate their home - school connection.



During the day our class has a ‘quiet reading’ time during which the children independently look at books of their choice. In the beginning of the year the children spent a lot of time looking at their own albums and soon they began to take interest in looking at each other’s photo albums. This sparked group discussions about their families and why the pictures they choose to put in the album were so important to them. This act was initiated by the children’s own interests in sharing a part of themselves with their peers as well as learning about each other. This was a wonderful beginning of learning about each other and building relationships with new friends.



The children have many opportunities to interact and play with other children in our school on a daily basis. such as gym and roof times. In addition we also share special occasions, such as Shabbat sing along. This is when all the children in our age group come together to sing Shabbat songs and reconnect with old friends. Additionally, for Thanksgiving we invited children from another class to share in our feast.

(B’rit-Belonging and Commitment)

5A.5 Children engage in tzedakah (acts of righteous), chesed (acts of kindness), and mitzvot (commandments/deeds) that demonstrate caring for others.

5A.8 Children are involved in helping others in the general community

Throughout the year our team of teachers has talked with the children about what it means to help others. We introduced the idea of Tzedakah in October. We began the discussion by asking the children “**What is Tzedakah?**”

Here is what some of the children said:

Ben: “It’s for poor people.”

Colin: “It’s so you can like buy a toy for little kids.”

Daniel R.: “That’s a Tzedakah box and you put money in it for poor people who don’t have enough money to buy things.”

Eliza: “It’s a time when you get money and bring it to school to put in a special kind of box.”

Jaron: “It’s a special kind of present.”

Maxi: “It’s a special time because people have no money and you are collecting money for people so they can buy something.”

Michael: “It’s how you can buy something.”

Scott: “It’s when you can give out the money to people.”

Each Friday as a part of Shabbat we have the children contribute a few pennies to our class Tzedakah box.



During the holiday of Thanksgiving we talked with the children about what it means to ‘give thanks’ and how we could use words as a way of showing kindness. We talked about how we can give the gift of kind words to each other in our own Room 5 community. This led to a conversation about what we could give to our friends from Room 2 at our communal Thanksgiving feast. The children had the following ideas:

Ben: “We could make them a book.”

Maxi: “We can make them special cards saying “we love you” and “thank you for coming to eat.”

Maddy: “We can give cards to their teachers.”

Eliza: “We could thank them for coming.”

Bella: “We can say thank you for the music and thank you for the cake.”

Daniel S.: “We could give them credit cards.”

Daniel R.K.: “We could make cards that look like stuff, like a bat or superheroes.”

Michael: “We could give them a metro card.”

Jaron: “Metro cards so they could have tickets to come in.”

Colin: “We could make them a pie.”

Sammy J.: “We could fold some paper up and draw pictures on it and give it to them.”

Harry: “We could make cards for ourselves.”

Rosie: “We could give them flowers.”

In the end the class decided to go with Sammy J's idea and turn them into Classroom 2's name cards for the feast to help them feel welcome.

In our school there are numerous opportunities to do Mitzvot (good deeds for others). Each week we collect Tzedakah with the children in the classroom. The children in our class participated in putting together Haiti Hygiene Kits to send to Haiti. They took a walking trip to the local Westside Senior Center to deliver Shalach Manot baskets. The children also helped to create the school's 'Mitten Menorah'. The Mitten Menorah was created to collect mittens that would be donated to the Intergenerational Women's Shelter which serves homeless woman and children. The Mitten Menorah was put out in an area where the entire school would be able to participate. Many of our school-wide Mitzvah opportunities come from our Mitzvah Committee which is made up of parents within the school.



After learning about the Earthquake in Haiti a mom in another class put together a Haiti Collection for Hygiene Kits. Our class was eager to participate. Each family signed up to bring in the necessary items for the drive. After everything was collected the children helped to put the kits together.



(Tikkun Olam-Repair of the World)

5A.7 Children are involved in helping others in the Jewish community.

For the holiday of Purim the children explored the meanings behind the giving of Shalach Manot baskets. We talked with the children about how we have a responsibility to repair the world, Tikkun Olam , by taking care of others and by helping those who are less fortunate.

As part of learning about this holiday we went to the West Side Senior Center (sponsored by a local Jewish organization) to deliver baskets that the children had filled with a fruit, treats and hamantaschen. This center is part of a neighborhood synagogue and serves breakfast and lunch to predominantly Jewish senior citizens. The center also offers Jewish holiday celebrations and other activities for seniors. The center serves mainly Jewish seniors.



When we returned from our visit we asked the children “Why was it a mitzvah to deliver baskets?”

Here is what some of the children said:

“Because they are old.”

“Because it’s a good thing.”

“It makes them happy.”

“They are lonely.”

This led to a discussion of why, in addition to the gift of the baskets, our presence and intentions were equally (if not more) important. Ben: “They really liked seeing us because we were singing and happy.”

(K’dushah- Holiness)

Indicator 6: Jewish living and learning, ideas and values, are part of the everyday learning experiences.

Indicator 7: Small group project work and documentation are part of the curricular process of teachers engaging students in constructing the learning experience.

The introduction to “Our Journey Toward Passover: A Yearlong Process,” includes our approach to Jewish living, learning, and the JECEI lenses, 6a. It is followed by our example for Indicators 6 and 7.

Our Journey Towards Passover: A Yearlong Process

In thinking back over our school year, our team of three teachers realized that since September our children have been on their own personal and collaborative journey, reflecting the lens of *Masa* or “journey.” In many ways we feel that this is not unlike the Jews as they embarked on the Exodus from Egypt into a new stage of their life. The transition from the three year old class to the more rigorous and demanding 4's-5's class requires a great deal of growth, change and trust on the part of the children as well as their parents. As with most types of change, this has not always been easy, and there have been inevitable struggles along the way. However, during the past few months we have had the opportunity to look back and see where the journey began, where it has taken us, and where we are headed. We have realized that throughout our journey, the lens of *D'rash* has been most evident. The initial seeds of exploration and discovery that were sown in the fall have blossomed into a bouquet of inquiry as the year has progressed; threads intertwining and intersecting; connections made, revisited and enhanced. The process has been exciting and invigorating and we have all learned a great deal along the way.

One of the hallmarks of our school year, as well as a developmental milestone, is that our children have begun to see themselves as “citizens of the world.” Through ongoing studies of other people and cultures, they have embarked on the journey that has taken them beyond the more self-centered nature of a three year old to the “looking outward” perspective of a four or five year old child. They now identify themselves as members of many different communities: the community of our classroom, the community of their extended family, the community of our city and country and the community of the world. This evolving autonomy and vision of the world is what allows all of us to be “free,” in our thinking, in our relationships and in our choices. It is through the discovery and expression of their own unique “voice” that our children have gained the willingness, confidence and capability to tackle difficult tasks and to achieve wonderful accomplishments. It is also by learning that we are members of a larger community that we become willing to take on the responsibilities that come along with freedom. When we see ourselves as members of a larger community we learn that it is necessary to take care of others and to repair the world to the best of our ability. Our children have been directly involved with projects that help other people and communities, and they have come to embrace the lense of *Tikkun Olam*. It is also out of this sense of belonging and commitment, *B'rit*, that the children can develop the strength to leave the JCC and embark on the next adventure that life will present to them. And so their journey will continue.

As we began our study of Passover we could truly see the growth that had occurred within our children. The lens of *Tzelem Elokim*, Divine Image, was evident in all aspects of their work. They had evolved into investigators, deep thinkers, and researchers, ready to tackle difficult questions and ideas and eager to embrace different points of view. We observed how each child had become so much more independent, in all aspects of their life, and how this independence informed their relationships with their parents and peers, as well as having an impact on their work.

.In this example, we will show how our journey towards the study of Passover actually began in the fall with the children’s early conversations about death and G_d, through our study of Native American customs and in a small group discussion about languages and other countries. This example will then take you to the world of jazz music, where the children continued to think more deeply about other cultures through the world of music.

Our study of jazz also taught the children and parents about inspiration, individuality and differences. As we studied the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. we continued to learn about how we are similar and how we are different. Studying the Civil Rights movement led to many discussions about courage and the importance of standing up for what you believe in, which of course created a natural transition to our celebration of Purim. Finally, after many twists and turns, our journey led us to Ancient Egypt and the story of Passover. Although our journey was a winding one, we had many opportunities to learn about what makes each of us unique and also what we have in common. Along the way we fully embraced the lenses of *K'dushah and T'zelem Elokim*, learning together about beauty, courage, heroism, and holiness.

Our Journey Begins

During our daily circle time the children wanted to talk about the recent death of a classmate's grandfather. The ensuing dialogue planted the seeds for further inquiry and reflection on the subjects of G_d, death and heaven. These topics were revisited in many different ways throughout our school year

October 5, 2010

Eliza: "I think it is sad that Michael's grandfather died. When people die it's very sad."

Teacher: "Yes it is. It sounds as if you have been thinking a lot about that."

Eliza: "Yes. I have and I think it is sad."

Maddy: "My mom's mom died on Long Island."

Julia: "Softa died. Softa was very, very old."

Maxi: "Actually, when you die you get buried. They put you in a box. It's very sad. You're never alive again."

Jaron: "My grandpa died but he's behind a wall. He's not buried. Do you have to be buried when you are dead?"

Sammy G.: "Why couldn't the angels fix Michael's grandpa?"

Scott: "When you die you go to the hospital with an ambulance. There are no angels there to fix you."

Maddy: "When you die I think you go to heaven. I know you go to heaven because my cat died and he went to heaven."

Joseph: "What do they do at heaven?"

Daniel R.K.: "When people die they dissolve in the ground and after they go to G_d and G_d tells them to help people. He tells them to help people who needs help and he says, "After you are done come back and I'll make you part of me." And the more people who die the bigger G_d gets. They become G_d's angels and they help the people on earth. That is the angels that fix people. They can't fix you when you are dead but they fix people who need help."

It immediately became clear to us that we were working with a group of children who were eager to talk about and investigate some of the "big questions" that life presents. In addition to asking many ongoing questions about life and death, the children began to express a desire to learn about how other people live, the languages that they speak, and the music that they listen too. This interest informed many of our curricular choices. (*D'rash*) Several children were eager to talk about different languages that they knew how to "speak." Although English is the primary language of all of the children in this particular class, many of them are familiar with other languages or speak other languages at home. To encourage this interest, and to see if it attracted any attention, we put the book, Hello World! Greetings in 42 Languages Around the Globe! Several children immediately noticed the book and the following conversation took place:

November 2, 2009

Scott: "I know how to say hello in Spanish...Bueno Di."

Sammy G: "No. It's not Bueno Di. It's Buenos Dias."

Scott: "I don't think so."

Maddy: "You can also say Shalom. We say that on Shabbat. Why do we say that on Shabbat?"

Sammy G. "It's not just Shabbat. It means hello in Hebrew I think. You can say it anytime."

Maddy: "Joyce, does it mean hello in Hebrew?"

Teacher: "Yes. It does mean hello in Hebrew. And I also think it means goodbye."

Maddy: "That's silly. How can it mean hello and goodbye?"

Scott: "Because it's both things. Front and back."

Maddy: "What do you mean, front and back?"

Maxi: "He means that you can say it coming and going. Hello and goodbye. I know how to say hello in Hungarian. I'm Hungarian."

Maddy: "What does that mean, Hungarian?"

Maxi: "My grandma lives there and my father was born there. It is not here. It is another country."

Sammy G.: "How do you say hello in French?"

Teacher: "Let's find that page in the book. There it is. You can say, "Bon Jour."

Maxi: "I can bring in a map and show you where Hungary is. They have a lot of cars in Hungary. Should I bring in my map? It's the whole world and it would cover the whole table"

Maddy: "That would be too big I think."

Teacher: "I think it would be cool to see Maxi's map. I can also show you another book that has a lot of maps."

Teacher goes to get an atlas and the children begin to pour over it.

Joe: "Where are we? Where is New York?"

Teacher: "Let's find the page that has a map of the United States and I can show you where New York is."

Sammy G. "Why is it so small if the city is so big?"

Teacher: "That's a great question. What do you think?"

Maxi: "It's so small because the book is so small. If it was on my big map it would be bigger."

After this conversation several children continued to look at the atlas while others wanted to continue to look at Hello World! After a few more minutes the conversation continued:

Maddy: "I think Jen (our music teacher) knows a song about hello. We sang it before."

Joyce: "I think you're right Maddy. We sang it last year. Would you all like to learn it again?"

Children: "Yeah. Tell Jen."

Joyce: "You can tell her. Maybe we can start to learn it next week. Is that a good idea?"

Children: "Don't forget."

Joyce: "You don't forget!"

Children: "O.K."



A small group of children investigated the book, Hello World! A teacher then asked if they would like look at another book that could teach them about other languages and countries. The children were very enthusiastic about this and proceeded to study the book, Can You Say Peace.

After this discussion the small group approached Jen before our next music class. She was excited about their interest in learning the song, Hello to All the Children of the World, and it became a regular part of our weekly music session. The children began to use their new knowledge in a variety of ways, including welcoming parents in different languages when they joined us for Shabbat and saying "shanti" to each other during the quieter moments in our day.

Learning About Native American Culture

As we began to think about the holiday of Thanksgiving we were curious to hear what the children already knew. We recognized that the children had very strong stereotypes about Native Americans, based mainly on movies. We realized that we had a terrific opportunity to “shift” this by introducing the children to several Native American customs. In addition, we felt that this would be a good extension of their interest in other languages and cultures.

First Conversation About Thanksgiving:

November 18, 2010

Teacher: “Next week many people will be celebrating the holiday of Thanksgiving. I was wondering what you knew about this holiday.”

Ben: “There were Indians there. They rescued the other people...I don’t remember their names.”

Eliza: “We eat special food on Thanksgiving.”

Scott: “I eat turkey for dessert!”

Rosie: “We eat chocolate turkey for dessert.”

Bella: “Some people don’t have food to eat and some people do. Sometimes I share with my brother and sometimes I don’t.”

Joe: “Do you know why it’s called Thanksgiving? Because you say “thank you” to everyone.”

Olivia: “What are Indians?”

Jaron: “Indians are people.”

Daniel R.K.: “They’re like Egyptians. They’re naked but they have stuff on top. They don’t just wear shirts or pants. They wear funny stuff on top of them.”

Michael: “The pants they wear are tu-tu’s.”

Harry: “Some Indians wear hats with feathers on them.”

Danny S.: “Indians have red skin and they kill people....a lot.”

Scott: “Indians almost have like black pants but they don’t because it’s really blue.”

Rosie: “Indians wear lots of tattoos on their arms.”

Eliza: “Indians wear different kind of clothes everyday. I don’t think they’re naked.”

Daniel R.K.: “Yes, they are.”

Olivia: “There were no pyramids in Thanksgiving so how can they be Egyptian?”

Maxi: “Actually, Indians were like trillions of years ago. They lived in the jungle before America was made. Maybe in the 80’s and then the Indians started to live in America.

Scott: “I think Indians had American stuff with them so they could welcome Americans when they came.”

November 18, 2009

LEARNING MORE ABOUT NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE



Washing grapes and cranberries to create our dyes.



Peeling onion skins and putting them in a pot.



Our three natural dyes: onion (orange/brown), cranberry (red) and grape (purple).

As we learn more about Thanksgiving, we continually refer back to the Jewish value of Tikkun Olum, “healing the world.” By learning about other cultures, sharing our thoughts about giving and friendship, and through discovering how we can help each other and our planet, we are becoming caretakers of the earth.

Today we learned more about some of the customs of early Native American people. We talked about how they used plants and flowers to create dyes which could color their clothing or could be used for painting or writing. Using cranberries, concord grapes and onion skins, the children prepared natural dye baths. Tomorrow we will use these dyes to decorate pieces of cloth.

We also learned that Native American people used all parts of a plant or animal, wasting very little out of respect for the earth. Following this model, we cooked corn, one of “the three sisters.” After husking the corn, we cooked it and ate the kernels with our lunch. We plan to dry the husks and will then use them as paint brushes. We also learned that Native Americans even used the corn silk for their baby’s diapers!

Daily Reflection Sent To Parents: November 18, 2010

November 19, 2009

OUR CONTINUING STUDIES

The class had a discussion about the importance of names in Native American culture. We learned that names were given based on personal traits and characteristics and that they were often related to nature.

The children thought about what name they would give to themselves if they were Native American. It was interesting to see what was important to them and what they identified with. This is the list of the names that they chose:

Bella: Disco Girl
Benjamin: Boy who likes to hug
Charlotte: Star Girl
Colin: Football Indian
Daniel R.K.: Basketball Boy
Daniel S.: Boy who can hear all over the earth
Eliza: Flower Girl
Ethan: Bat Boy or Boy Who Wants To Be With Pirates
Jaron: Boy Who Plays With Dogs
Julia: Girls Who Loves Everyone
Joseph: Boy Who Loves To Build Safety Boats
Harry: Speedy
Maddy: Moon Girl
Maxi: Boy That Can Run Fast
Michael: Costume Boy
Olivia: Butterfly Girl
Rosie: Rainbow Girl
Sammy G.: Boy Who Likes To Fix
Sammy J.: Boy Who Plays With Blocks
Scott: Security Who Loves To Build

Today we also started to dye our cloth using the natural dyes that we created yesterday. We also learned a new technique of painting using eye droppers. Several of the children said that their colors looked like "rainbows" and "stars shooting in the sky."



Daily Reflection Sent To Parents: November 19, 2010

Expanding our Community: Introducing The Children To Jazz

Since the children seemed very interested in the connection between music, culture and language, our teaching team began to talk to our Music and Jewish Life specialist about meaningful ways in which we could extend this interest. At the same time we were approached by a parent in our class who works at the organization, **Jazz at Lincoln Center**. One of the purposes of this organization is to educate people about the history and origins of jazz and about its links to the history of African-American people in this country. Mary wanted to know if there was a way in which we could integrate the study of jazz into our curriculum. Since we knew that our children were already interested in investigating other cultures we enthusiastically said, "Yes."

Our Music Specialist began this study by asking the children in a small group work period what they already knew about "jazz."

January 4, 2010

Scott: "You listen to jazz."

Sammy G.: "Jazz is lots of different kinds of songs and lots of different kinds of instruments."

Michael: "The beats are different than the things he sings."

Daniel S.: "Each song has a different rhythm and a different beat."

Daniel R.K.: "There can be different types of jazz."

Bella: "We listen to jazz all the time. When we're here we do it. When we're not here we don't do it."

The teacher then had the children listen to "Soulful Strut" by Grover Washington. She explained that jazz musicians put their feelings into their music. Each child then took a turn doing their own "feeling strut," reflecting their individual and unique mood.

Jaron: "It feels different. You have to keep the beat."

Maxi: "It's faster, like rock and roll."

Harry: "Jazz is A LOT like rock and roll."

Teacher: "In what way?"

Harry: "It's fast but also fast and slow. Rock and roll is like that. Sometimes you have to move fast to it and sometimes very fast to it and sometimes you have to move slow to it."

Scott: "Jazz is like a different beat."

The teacher asked the children how they could turn a familiar song, "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" into a jazz song given what they know. Scott decided that he wanted to try this out and he proceeded to create his own jazz interpretation of the song. Other children then followed suit, experimenting with different variations of familiar melodies.

In the weeks following this initial discussion we continued to explore jazz in both large and small groups.

On January 25, 2010, our class welcomed several very special visitors. Jazz musicians, Wynton Marsalis, Walter Blanding, Vincent Gardner and Ali Jackson joined our class for a “jazz jam.” It was exciting for the children to hear “real” jazz musicians and it was also an interesting and enlightening way to broaden our classroom community. The children had the opportunity to interview the musicians and they also listened to several pieces of music.

Daily Reflection Sent To Parents: January 25, 2010

Our special Jazz Visit!

Monday, January 25, 2010



Today we had a very special treat! Jazz Musicians visited our class. First, they each explained how their instruments worked. (Below, Scott was feeling the air come out of the trombone.) Then we got to hear them play. What a treat!



Wynton Marsalis
w/ Trumpet

Walter Blanding
w/ Saxophone



Vincent Gardner
w/ Trombone

Ali Jackson
w/ Snare Drum



A special Thanks to Mary for putting this all together and also to Brad! This was truly a very special afternoon for us all!



It was such
a
BLAST!!!



One of the questions that the children kept asking during our “interview” of the jazz musicians was, “What makes you play jazz?” In small groups, we began to talk to the children about where they find inspiration.

Danny: “I like to go outside and see things.”

Ben: “Trains inspire me because I like them.”

Joe: “Inspires means when something makes you want to do something.”

Maxi: “Like inspire. You get inspired when you like something.”

Danny: “I’m going to make a sunflower because I love sunflowers. They inspire me.”

We decided to explore further where inspiration and imagination begin to blend together. In both large and small groups, we listened to different pieces of jazz music and drew while we listened. We then shared our pictures with each other, discussing why we had made certain choices in our work. The children were eager to share their unique visions with each other in small group presentations. Using the children’s work as inspiration for a Parent Night, we asked the parents to bring in something that inspired them. Our evening was truly “inspiring,” as parents shared family photos, poems, quotations and memories.

Daily Reflection Sent To Parents: February 1,2010

Monday, February 1, 2010

Today, during music with Jen, the children drew pictures with oil pastels while listening to “Take The A Train” by Duke Ellington. Before they drew we talked about what it means to be “inspired” by something. Jen encouraged the children to draw any images or feelings that the music brought to mind. We then shared our drawings with each other, reflecting on what we had created.



Rosie: “I drew a picture of a girl playing a trumpet and windows and a train.”

Joe: “It looks like the girl playing the instrument is the conductor.”

Bella: “What part is the windows?”

Rosie: “Over here.”

Jen: “How did the music make you feel?”

Rosie: “Good.”



Jaron: “This is the A train and the conductor sits right there. It’s going to Times Square through 59th Street.”

Jen: “Why did you choose to just use black?”

Jaron: “I don’t know. I just wanted too.”

Maxi: “I used black because one time I went on a train and it had a lot of black. My picture is the inside of the A train. Some are benches and some are not benches and this is a map with all of the stops.”



Using the children's work as inspiration for a Parent Night, we asked the parents to bring in something that inspired them. Our evening was truly "inspiring," as parents shared family photos, poems, quotations and memories.

Excerpts from email letters received from parents after our Parent Night. The focus of the Parent Night was: Inspiration, Imagination and Interpretation. This theme came out of our large and small group investigations of jazz and other forms of inspiration.

Joyce-

I just want to thank you again for a wonderful evening. It was just incredible to see everything that the children have been doing this year -- from jazz to Purim, (and everything in between). Classroom 5 is truly a very special place.

Danny was especially excited to hear about his Sunflower picture. Thank you for sharing it!

By the way--just want to give you a "heads up." Danny will not be in school next week. Glenn has a show opening in London, and we have decided to take the boys to the opening. We wouldn't ordinarily take them out of school, but we may never have opportunity like this again.

Thanks...

Wendy

Dear Joyce, Peggy and Theresa,
What a magnificent night you three created for us parents. From the minute I walked into the classroom there was a sense of beauty, of welcome, of the room and you 3 being prepared and ready, the walls were FILLED with amazing images, drawings, children's words, teachers thoughts and insights. So much intelligence, care and love was felt immediately. As the parents then gathered and shared I experienced a sacredness to the sharing. There was trust and there was a feeling that parents dug deep. that they took the assignment seriously and that they were also deeply moved and inspired by one another.
Then the video was so beautiful and so professional! I was in awe of the children. I was in awe by what you all noticed and clearly highlighted, I was in awe of the seriousness that you created for the children and that while on the one hand there was so much structure, order, calm, intensity and focus and on the other SO much room for the children to be expressive, to feel inspiration, to go into their own worlds of thoughts and ideas.
The whole thing was wonderful and you should feel so very proud - I did!

Thanks for creating such a beautiful evening
Ilana

Dear Joyce,

I can't let this week end without writing to you about how moved I was by the open classroom night this week. I was moved from the moment I walked in and read the first bulletin board where you laid out the work the class did, through the videos and the "what inspires you" exercise. The classroom looked gorgeous - the children's pictures, the beautiful fruit and cheese and wine, the castle, and it set the stage for a glimpse of the magic that my son is so fortunate to experience at school every day. This was so clearly felt by everyone there and it was manifest in the level of deep emotional sharing that took place between the adults present.

I truly thought that the evening was magical. It is amazing to see Joseph write his name. I loved seeing my daughters go through this stage of development. They, however, were not asked to think or draw or speak about what inspired them. Joseph loves going to school each and every day. He understands how special his classroom is. His is inspired by what takes place there - and so am I.

Please pass this on to Theresa and Peggy - I don't have their email addresses.

Best wishes for a relaxing weekend. I hope you find some inspiration in it for the week ahead!
Jenny Lyss

Learning About Slavery: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and The Civil Rights Movement

In addition to studying jazz, we had begun to learn about the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. These two areas of study complimented each other in many ways. One of our goals in our Pre-K/K class is to help the children to understand that we are members of many different communities: the community of our classroom, our family community, the community of our city and country and the community of the world. We had already talked about this through our discussions of language and by studying maps (as well as in many other ways) and we felt that they were ready to learn about community from a more historical perspective. (*B'rit*)

Daily Reflection Sent To Parents: January 12, 2010

Tuesday, January 12, 2010

Our class has been studying the Civil Rights Movement. As part of our discussions we have learned about the life and work of Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ruby Bridges (a young child who was involved in the first efforts to integrate schools in the south). We have read many books on this topic and had many conversations about laws, rules, freedom, standing up for what you believe in and what feels fair and unfair. In order to give the children a more direct experience of what it feels like to be discriminated against (based on an external features) we conducted a brief social "experiment." When we were about to get ready for story time we lined the children up and said that only the children with blonde or black hair could hear the story and the other children would have to sit quietly in another part of the room. At first the children were confused and then dismayed. The children who were included expressed ambivalence about having this "special" reading time while the children who were excluded were upset. After several moments we announced that we had changed our minds and we all joined together. We then talked about what had occurred and how it made them feel. This is what the children had to say:

Ethan: "I don't like this at all."

Ben: "It's not fair because they can't hear the book if they have to sit far away. It's ok to read to the whole group but not just us."

Joe: "It's not fun."

Daniel R.K.: "He said it's not fair because IT IS NOT FAIR. Everything has to be the same."

Eliza: "It's boring just sitting there. We felt sad."

Scott: "You need to wait until Sunday to hear the story because you said that we could all hear it together in a few days."

Michael: "You tricked us. I thought you were joking."

Danny: "It made me feel like I didn't want to go to school anymore. I was mad."

Joyce: "What do you think we were trying to teach you by doing this?"

Rosie: "It's like the story about the woman on the front of the bus...who couldn't sit there. Rosa Park. It was like her."

Daniel R.K.: "Some things people say are not fair. That was not fair!"



Rosie was interested in finding photos of Dr. King on the computer. She then used these pictures to create a collage



Thursday, January 14, 2010



In honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday (which is actually tomorrow) the children baked "Rainbow Cookies" to eat at Shabbat. When asked why they thought this was a good snack for his birthday this is what they had to say:

Ben: "Because we are all different colors and we live together."

Jaron: "And nobody is pink."

Sammy J.: "And rainbows are beautiful."

Joe: "And they are all different colors."

If you would like to make these cookies at home here is the recipe:

Ingredients:

*1/2 cup unsalted butter (softened)

*1/2 cup confectioners' sugar

*3/4 teaspoon vanilla extract

*1 cup flour

*food colorings

1. Using an electric mixer cream the butter, sugar and vanilla in a bowl.

2. Add the flour and beat with the mixer for several minutes until a smooth dough forms.

3. Divide the dough into 7 pieces. Put each piece in a separate bowl. Add several drops of food coloring to each bowl. Make each piece of dough a different color: red, yellow, orange, green, blue, dark blue (indigo) and violet.

3. Now press all the dough balls together. Roll them into a log. The log should be about 8 inches long. Chill the log in the refrigerator for 15 minutes.

4. Slice the log into pieces. Each slice should be about 1/4 inch thick. Bake the cookies for 8-10 minutes at 350 degrees.



January 14, 2010

During a small group music period, we listened to the CD (and read the book), It's A Beautiful World, It's A Wonderful World by C.C. Winans. We then had the following conversation:

Teacher: "What did you think of that book?"

Scotty: "It's healing the world. They were all doing good stuff in the book. They were giving high 5's and they were going to school and they were all different colors and they were friends."

Benjamin: "They are all colorful and it's wonderful. We are all colorful too and it can be a happy world with lots of colors."

Sammy J.: "And it has rainbows and flowers and they are so beautiful."

Eliza: "It makes the world feel happy...the song part. When it's colorful like that. G_d likes all different kinds of color. The author likes all different kinds of color. Flowers are not only blue or pink or yellow. They are lots of colors, just like we are and we can all be together like the flowers are together."

Teacher: "You know, that's true. Look at our hands. Do they all look the same?"

Bella: "My hand is very white."

Danny S.: "Nobody is just white."

Teacher: "What do you mean by that?"

Danny S.: "Well it's not white. It's more brown than white."

Teacher: "That is an interesting comment. Can you say a little more about that?"

Eliza: "He means that we are not black and white. We are all a little of both but mostly light brown and dark brown."

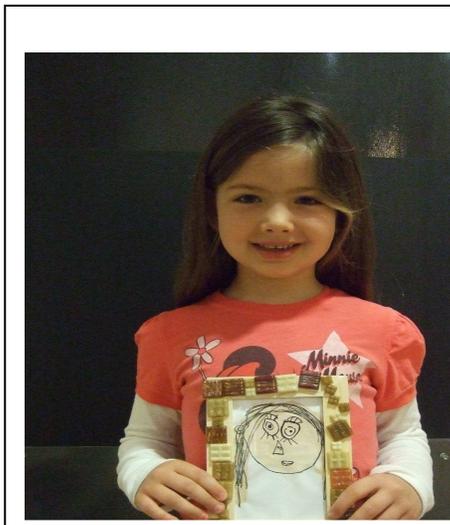
After this small group work, we decided that it might be interesting to explore this topic further through the creation of individual self-portraits.



Using the mirror and experimenting with different shades of paint to create the skin tone that we want to use on our self-portraits.

Using tiles to design our individual frames.

Maddy wanted to share her self-portrait with the class: "I used different colored tiles to match my skin. You can see that I am not white but more pink. My eyes look SO big in this."



The following is the documentation that was used on the bulletin board displaying the self-portraits that the children created:

As an extension of a year long study, we decided to integrate self portraits with our investigation of what makes us different and what makes us the same. Very often we tend to describe people on terms of "black and white." We wanted to encourage the children to think outside of these limited stereotypes so that they could see that we are made up of many different "shades."

This project took place over several months and in several stages. First the children drew their individual portraits while looking in a mirror so they could see all of their features. When they were satisfied with their drawing, they began to work with paint. The children used paint that resembled different shades of skin. They experimented with the paint by mixing and testing colors until they had created the skin tone that they wanted to use. After they had completed their paintings, the children began to work on frames. Using tiles that corresponded to the paint colors, the children carefully chose which tiles they wanted to use. The children have been spending time looking at their portraits. They are noticing details in their different drawing styles, as well in what shades of paint they chose to use.

The Meaning of Courage: Making Purim Personal

Our conversations about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks and the Civil Rights created a natural bridge to our studies of Purim. We focused a great deal on the courage of Esther, Vashti and Mordechai in standing up for what they believed in. The children understood this connection.

February 23, 2010

After listening to the story of Purim a small group had the following conversation:

Maddy: "I don't think the King was nice to Vashti. He was mean."

Ben: "It's like Martin Luther King. People were mean to him too."

Maddy: "But not the same. They didn't make him dance or anything."

Rosie: "But Esther had to be brave to tell the king."

Joe: "And Rosa Parks had to be brave. To go on the bus."

Ben: "Vashti was like Rosa Parks. Vashti was banished but Rosa Parks had to go to jail."

Olivia: "What do you mean? What jail?"

Rosie: "Remember they made her go to jail when she wouldn't get off the bus."

Olivia: "Did they hurt her?"

Rosie: "A little."

Ben: "They shot Martin Luther King."

Maddy: "That is so mean to do that. Did they put the man in jail who did that?"

Teacher: "We can read more about that or look it up on the computer. Would you like to learn more about how he died?"

Maddy: "Yes. Let's do it on the computer. Is he in heaven with G_d?"

Teacher: "What do you think?"

Maddy: "I think so because G_d would love him."

The following day we decided to investigate this topic further.

Daily Reflection Sent To Parents: February 24, 2009

Wednesday, February 24, 2009

THE MEANING OF COURAGE

Part of what makes Purim such an interesting story for young children is that it gives them the opportunity to think about some "bigger" ideas...what is the difference between good and evil and why is being "wicked" sometimes so very intriguing, what makes us scared and how do we find courage in the face of our fears and what it means to stand up for what you believe in even if it might get you into very big trouble. Yesterday several children had a spontaneous conversation about who they thought was brave in the story of Purim. Several of the children thought that Mordechai was the brave "one" because he told Esther about the plot to hurt the king while others thought that Esther "had" courage because she had to actually tell the king. Eliza felt that "Vashti was the one with courage because she didn't listen to the king!"

Today we asked the group what the word courage meant to them.

Rose: "It means that you try to do something and then you know how to do it."

Olivia: "You don't eat for three days. She didn't eat for three days." (this is referring to the fast that Esther undertook as a way to gather her courage before she went in front of the king)

Jaron: "Like Queen Esther. She went to courage."

Danny: "It means bravery."

Maxi: "It means you are very brave but you try to do it but you're a little scared."

Colin: "It's Queen Esther. She was praying for courage."

Eliza: "You try to do it, you're scared and then you don't want to do it anymore."

Daniel R.K.: "Courage is when someone loves you and someone cares about you a lot."

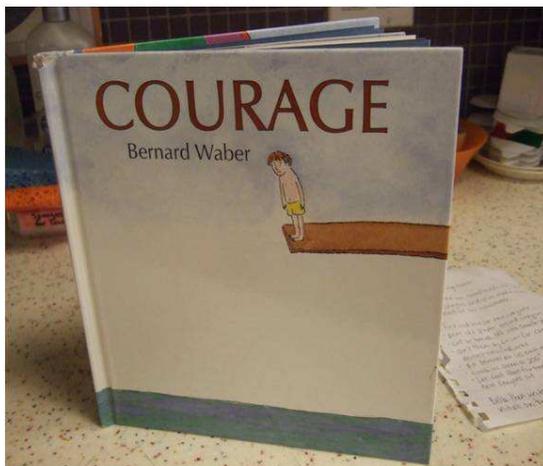
Scott: "It means you are going in a swimming pool and it's really warm."

Joe: "It means that you're happy."

Michael: "It means when someone is in danger and you are going to help someone."

Ben: "It really means that you're scared to do something but you finally do it."

After our discussion we listened to the book Courage by Bernard Waber.



Our Journey Continues: What It Means To Be Members Of A Larger Community (*B'rit*)

Throughout the school year our children have been involved in many mitzvah projects reflecting the lens of *Tikkun Olam*. For example, each child contributes tzedakah every Shabbat, we created a “mitten menorah” at Chanukah to collect mittens for homeless children, the parents and children created hygiene kits for survivors of the earthquake in Haiti and we have baked cookies to raise funds for a foundation that funds research in pediatric cancer. At Purim we decided to create Shalach Manot baskets for senior citizens who had breakfast in a community center down the block from our school. We were excited about this opportunity since it provided another way to enhance the children’s ideas about community and responsibility for the world that we live in.

Daily Reflection Sent To Parents: March 1, 2010

Monday, March 1, 2010

Today, in honor of Purim, we went to deliver Shalach Manot baskets to senior citizens at the West Side Senior Center. With the help of a few chaperones, we walked to 76th street (between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenue) to distribute the baskets. They were filled with a fruit, a treat and something made from wheat (hamantashen)! When we arrived there were a few seniors having breakfast. We handed them a basket and placed the rest of the baskets on the tables so it would be a nice surprise as more people came for breakfast. We also sang them a Purim song! They looked delighted to have us visit!



During the same week we had another opportunity to expand our classroom community. Our class has several children with special needs, and throughout the year this has been part of our ongoing discussion about “differences and similarities” and what it means to be an inclusive community. Adaptations, a program offered at the JCC, provides social activities and educational and work opportunities for adults with special needs. A teacher had become friendly with a member of the Adaptations program and she asked the children if they would be interested in meeting someone new. They were very enthusiastic about this opportunity and they thought carefully about how they would welcome our special visitors. (*Tzelem Elokim-Dignity and Potential*)

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

MAKING NEW FRIENDS

Our class had several very special visitors today. Jenny, a member of the JCC Adaptations Program, came to talk to the children. Her mother, Ann, and her assist dog Indie came with her. The children had many great questions for Jenny and we had a mini-interview. We found out that Jenny and Indie live in the Bronx. Indie is named after Independence Day because that is her birthday. Maddy was very excited about this since it is her birthday too! Jenny and Ann explained how Indie learned to be an assist dog. Jenny also told us that she uses an electric wheel chair and that her home has stairs and an elevator and sometimes the stairs are hard for her. We learned that Jenny was born not being able to walk but that with the help of physical therapy she can now walk up stairs. Indie was very comfortable in our classroom and she let us pet her and rub her belly. Jenny was very happy too and she said that she loved us. We all sang, “You Are My Sunshine Together,” before we said goodbye. We hope that Jenny and Indie can come to visit us again soon...for more friendship and singing.



We Finally Arrive in Ancient Egypt: The Threads Of Our Year Come Together

Throughout the year our children have expressed a desire to learn about different cultures, customs, languages and people. In addition, we have had many thought provoking conversations about the role of G_d in our lives, as well as about death and heaven. We decided to create a context for our study of Passover by beginning with an exploration of Ancient Egypt. We brought many books in about the subject, as well as replicas of Ancient Egyptian artifacts. These provoked many interesting questions and conversations. We explored these in both large and small groups. In addition, several children used pictures that they saw in the books as resources for the creation of their own “Egyptian buildings” in both the block area and in our art center. *(D’rash-Interpretation)*

Daily Reflection Sent To Parents: March 11, 2010



**Thursday, March 11, 2010
LEARNING ABOUT EGYPT & PASSOVER**

Every day our room is filled with investigations of Egypt and Passover. The children have been working in large and small groups, studying books, learning new recipes, creating holiday crafts and designing their own projects.



Colin and Ethan looked at a book about Egypt and then worked on recreating a building that they were studying. Colin: “The top of the building is like the bad guy’s hat. The bad guy in Egypt. Pharaoh.” Ethan: “It was an Egyptian house in the book and then it got bigger and bigger.” Colin: “We put in lots of Egyptian stuff. You know they’re Gods because they’re holding the big stick and also that other thing (an ankh). When a man is holding that it’s a God from Egypt.”



Jaci, Charlotte’s mom, came in to cook macarons with the class. Joyce was curious about why this is a traditional Passover treat. Jaci wasn’t sure but she immediately went home and found out the answer. On Passover we do not eat food that has leavening or that has anything in it that would make it “rise,” since the Jews did not have a chance to let their bread rise when they fled Egypt. Macarons are a type of cookie that is made without baking powder or baking soda, in other words “rise free!”

Ben is sewing his own afikomen bag. It is a Passover tradition to hide a piece of matzah at the seder. This is called the dessert matzah and the seder cannot end until it is found! In some families the grown-ups hide the matzah and the children have to find it, while in other families it is the other way around.



The children have been enjoying looking at pyramids, discussing the different types of structures and how they were built. We are working on our own model magic pyramids. In addition many of the children have been drawing their own renderings of pyramids. Sammy used a stencil to trace a pyramid and cut it out, and then he carefully drew the “bricks” in on his own.

The following is an excerpt from a Parent Newsletter that was sent home at Passover. We feel that these conversations reflect the journey that we have taken, and reflect the spirit of inquiry that has been present throughout our entire year. (*Masa-Reflection, Return, and Renewal; D'rash-Inquiry, dialogue, and transmissio; Hit'orerut-Awakening*)

March, 2010: "Our Passover Newsletter

Our children have been asking many "big" questions all year long. These questions have led to many thought provoking conversations. It has also been interesting to listen to the theories that the children are beginning to develop to address these questions. Through this process of questioning and reflection, the children begin to find their own individual answers. The following are samples of some of the discussions that have taken place in our room.

Small Group Conversation About The Existence of G_d – January 11, 2010

Daniel S.: "I have proof that G_d does not exist."

Joyce: "That is an interesting statement."

Danny S.: "Well, the proof is that you can't see him, so he doesn't exist."

Daniel R.K.: "I don't believe G_d is real because you can't see him."

Joe: "I believe that G_d IS real but we can't see him because he lives way up in the sky where we can't see him."

Asking Questions and Having Conversations About Passover and Ancient Egypt

March 8, 2010

Joseph: "How did G_d make the river into blood? I think there's a part of him that can rain blood down. That's how he did it."

Scott: "That was in Egypt. Where is Egypt?" "I know that there was a man and he held his hand over the water. The ocean. And it opened up."

Rosie: "That was Moses who held his hand up."

Scott: "I know another place where there are pyramids but they are different. Not like Egypt. In World 2 in Super Mario World. They have pyramids."

Maxi: "In Egypt most Pharaohs are boys not girls. But this is a sphinx with a lion body and a girl's head. This girl wanted to be a Pharaoh. Why did she want to be Pharaoh? Did she want to be strong?" (referring to Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt)

Maxi: "Were there more men than women in Egypt time? I think they were because most of the pictures are men in the books."

March 9, 2010

Small Group Investigations: Studying Egyptian Artifacts and Books About Ancient Egypt

Michael: "I think this one looks like a cat. This one has nothing in it (referring to an empty model of a sarcophagus). A dummy is supposed to go in this. I watch a lot of Scooby Doo and I watched one about a dummy. The dummy went in there. I think it's a coffin. Which one has more power?"

Bella: "They're not dummies. They are mummies. Mummies go in there."

Michael: "They come out of the coffin and they hurt people. They try to grab people."

Bella: "They aren't real."

Benjamin: "A mummy is a dead person wrapped and put in a sarcophagus."

Sammy J.: "I wrapped up the person with a lot of toilet paper and tape and I'm going to put it in that mummy case."

Colin: "A mummy is real. But he gets dead first and they wrap him in toilet paper and put him in a mummy case. When someone opens the mummy case he turns into alive."

Bella: "Are mummies real?"

Harry: "I actually saw a mummy before and it's like Egyptian and it's a dead person wrapped with like skin."

Olivia: “The other day I went and saw people dressed up and they had a blue blanket over them with glasses and it looked like an old mummy who was wrapped up in bandaids and tape bandaids.”

Sammy G.: “I saw that too!”

Charlotte: “I’m going to make a temple with a lot of doors and windows and I’ll put a mummy in it.”

Sammy J.: “You can use my mummy in tissue paper.”

Maddy: “I’m going to put jewels on my mummy. Do you think mummies had jewels? Maybe the girl mummy had jewels. Was she a princess?”

March 11, 2010: Small Group Conversation

Joseph: “Joyce, do you think G_d has a family?”

Joyce: “That’s a really interesting question. What do you think?”

Joseph: “I think so. I think he has a mommy and a daddy and children.”

Joyce: “Many people believe that.”

Joseph: “I think that because I think that G_d is real and he lives in the sky and doesn’t want to be lonely so he has a family to be with.”

March 15, 2010 (part one)

Jaron: “Did G_d really turn the Red Sea into blood?”

Benjamin: “Is that why the Red Sea is called the Red Sea?”

Michael: “I think it’s called the Red Sea because the dirt is red, not the water.”

Eliza: “G_d didn’t make the Red Sea into blood. G_d did it to the River Nile.”

Jaron: “Did he really turn the River Nile into blood? How?”

Eliza: “Do you think there is anyone who has ever gone to Egypt?”

Maxi: “How did they make a pathway with the staff? How did he do it?”

Rosie: “How did Moses’s staff open up the Red Sea? Did he have to hit the water?”

Joyce: “How do you think he did it?”

Olivia: “G_d did it.”

Rosie: “But how did G_d do it?”

Daniel R.K.: “I have another question. If G_d was nice, why did he make the Pharaoh to be a bad guy if he doesn’t like bad guys? Why wouldn’t he make them all good?”

Colin: “I know why. It’s because you can’t just have all good guys. You have to have bad guys and good guys. If G_d didn’t make bad guys then the good guys wouldn’t be good guys. They would just be guys.”

Benjamin: “I think G_d wanted both. Then they could fight and the good guys could win.”

Joyce: “So you think G_d wanted them to fight?”

Colin: “No, he doesn’t want them to fight. G_d likes the good guys, but if the bad guys fight them then they have to fight back.”

March 15, 2010 (part two)

Michael: “How did G_d put the light on the person (the Jews) and not on the other people? How did he make light in some places and not on other places?” (referring to the plague of darkness)

Daniel R.K.: “How did the Angel of Death get made? And if it is an angel then why is it the Angel of Death? Angels are nice. Why would it want people dead?”

Michael: “Maybe the light was for the Angel of Death. So the angel would know who to hurt.”

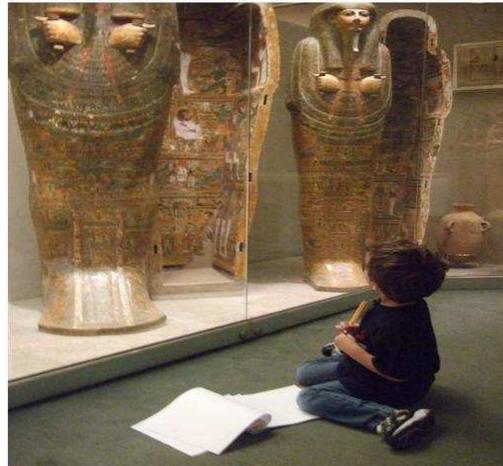
Maxi: “When you die you go to heaven and your soul can go to stores and do stuff.”

Olivia: “My mommy’s Hebrew name is in the Purim story...Esther. My Hebrew name is after my grandpa. Do they have Hebrew names in Egypt?”

Daniel R.K.: “Do everybody put a stone on top when people die? Did they do that in Egypt?”

As the culmination of our study of Ancient Egypt, we took a class trip to The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Egyptian wing. (*D'rash*)

Wednesday, March 24, 2010
Scenes from our trip to The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Involving The Parents: THE PASSOVER PROJECT (*Covenant-Belonging and Commitment*)

In planning for Passover, we wanted to invite the parents of the children to become more integrally involved in what we were studying. We decided to call our endeavor "The Passover Project." The result was less about the holiday and more about traditions...how we create them, how we maintain them, and how they evolve and change.

The following are the "instructions" that were given to the parents about this project, followed by a sample of what one parent contributed.

TRADITIONS AND MEMORIES: THE "PASSOVER PROJECT"

During our last Parent's Night, we invited parents to talk about something that inspired them. What they chose to share was so thoughtful and poignant...truly inspiring in and of itself. We realized that we wanted to create a way in which we could continue to "hear" the stories of our parents, and "The Passover Project" began.

We asked our parents to share memories, stories, questions, conversations, artifacts, photographs and traditions that related to Passover or to other spring holidays that their family celebrated. While many parents chose to focus on childhood memories, others talked about more recent traditions. In reading what people contributed, questions began to arise about how traditions are formed. Do we follow traditions that are handed down through the generations or do traditions get shaped by current practice or by what is most meaningful to us at this moment in time? Do our traditions change to incorporate what is important to our children? Do our memories shape the traditions that we include in our lives? Which traditions will we choose to embrace and which traditions will we choose to abandon and why?

Through the examination of memories and traditions, we create links to our past and to our future. We also have the opportunity to reflect on what is most meaningful to us...where our personal journey began, how it has evolved and where we may go in the future. It is through this ongoing questioning and examination of "what was" and "what will be" that we generate our own unique histories and stories.

One Parents Story: From Wendy, Daniel Slater's mother

Our Passover celebrations have always been pretty standard---a traditional Seder on the 1st and 2nd nights with family, extended family and family friends. There is almost always an over-abundance of food, and many, many pages of the Haggadah skipped over.

I was very touched by Danny's excitement of learning about this special holiday at school this year. He really understood the meaning of Passover in a very basic and real way.

Which brought about a NEW family tradition, that Glenn and I have decided to continue every year. This year, after we had our traditional Seders on the 1st and 2nd night, we decided to have a Slater family "Sleder" (pun is VERY intended, and created by Danny's older brother, Ben).

The four of us had a very long and enjoyable dinner, and talked about the story of Passover---no Haggadahs or books, just talking. It was truly wonderful to connect to the history, to our ancestors, and to the meaning of this very special holiday in a very accessible way. The conversation took many turns, and I look forward to the many twists and turns that lie ahead in the years to come!

As an extension of “The Passover Project” a parent asked is she could come into the class to share her unique family tradition with the children. Our classroom is an inclusive one. We value all religions, points of view, differences and similarities. By embracing different family customs, we continue to broaden and enhance the children’s point of view.



Thursday, April 8, 2010
SHARING FAMILY TRADITIONS

Marcella, Maxi’s mom, came to talk to us about a holiday tradition that her family enjoys. Maxi’s dad, Tamas, is Hungarian. At Easter the family likes to hang decorated eggs from the stems of forsythia bushes. This is a traditional Hungarian custom. Marcella told us that she calls these “Easter Egg Trees” which made us all laugh. She also showed us other Hungarian Easter decorations. The children had many questions about how the eggs became hollow. We decided to do some experiments to see if we could figure out this special technique.

We poked a hole in each end of a raw egg. Then Joyce tried to blow into one hole to see if the egg would come out of the other end. This did not work too well.



We decided that we needed to use a “tool” to help us. Joyce then used a coffee stirrer to blow out the raw egg. This worked much better and we were able to hollow out two eggs. The children thought that the raw egg looked like snail slime!



Using our bamboo plant as a base, the children created their own “egg tree” for the classroom.



The Journey Continues: Our Study of Lag B'Omer and Shavuot

As with any journey, there truly is never an end. Beginning in October, with their early conversations about G_d, and continuing throughout the year, the children have been on a journey of self-discovery. They have learned about themselves and about the world that they live in. They have investigated what it means “to be Jewish” in a deep and truly meaningful way. As one of our culminating projects, we asked the children if they would like to create their own “Class Ten Commandments” (or in our case it would be “Twenty Commandments”). We felt that this would be a fitting way to “tie up” our year, reflecting the deep thinking, spiritual development and community awareness that has permeated all of studies.

See following page for documentation.

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS IN COUNTING AND MARKING TIME: THE COUNTING OF THE OMER

After we finished counting and recording the first 100 days of school, the children expressed a desire “to count something else.” Happily an opportunity immediately presented itself in the Jewish holidays of Shavuot and Lag B’Omer. Shavuot (which means weeks in Hebrew) commemorates the moment when G_d gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Shavuot occurs seven weeks after Passover. The counting of the 49 days between the second night of Passover and Shavuot is referred to as “the counting of the Omer.” The Omer is a measure of grain. In ancient times, the Omer would be counted out every day until they reached the 49th Omer, at which point the celebration of Shavuot would occur. These seven weeks are observed as a period during which Jews are encouraged to meditate and reflect on their lives and to embrace the blessings of each day. Some Jewish people even “give up” things during these 7 weeks, such as haircuts, shaving and getting married.

Since the children were so interested in continuing to count in a concrete way, we introduced our own “Counting the Omer” chart. Each day a child places a sticker on another number, until we reach the top of Mt. Sinai, which is when Shavuot will occur. They also add another measure of grain or Omer (in our case a straw) into our glass jar.

When we first introduced the “Counting the Omer” chart to the children, we asked them what they noticed:

Maxi: “I see a lot of numbers going up and there are numbers up to 50. Who is the little man on top?”

Sammy J.: “I think that’s Moses.”

Eliza: “Yeah, that’s Moses. He’s standing up on top.”

Joyce: “Why do you think that is Moses?”

Sammy J.: “Because he has a very long beard and he looks very old. It’s Mt. Sinai.”

Joyce: “What is Mt. Sinai?”

Ben: “It’s when they left Egypt and they went to this mountain and Moses had to climb up it.”

Sammy G.: “I see numbers all the way to 50. Ten’s all the way to 50.”

Maddy: “The numbers go around and around and up and then Moses is at 50.”

The children were also curious about the tablets that they saw at the top of the mountain and about the stickers we were using:

Olivia: “What is on the top. That doesn’t look like a mountain.”

Ben: “It’s what G_d gave to Moses.”

Michael: “Why are all the stickers people?”

Joyce: “Why do you think about that?”

Rosie: “Because people with different colors can be friends.”

Eliza: “Because it’s like Moses; each one is Moses going up and up the mountain.”

Maxi: “Because no matter what your skin color is, we are altogether and we are different and we are the same.”

Sammy G.: “Because the Jewish people were waiting for Moses and they each sat on a rock waiting.”

Ben: “Why is one day in a different color?”

Joyce: “What a good observation. Which day is a different color?”

Danny: “33.”

We then talked about the holiday of Lag B’Omer, which falls on the 33rd day between Passover and Shavuot. Lag B’Omer is a day of celebration and levity, suggesting that even within the darkest of days, we must always have hope. In Israel many people celebrate Lag B’Omer with bonfires and all night picnics. The children had many ideas about how we could celebrate Lag B’Omer, including having lunch on the roof, eating ice cream, blowing bubbles on the roof and making paper hats.

Each day our “Omer counter” has one final “job,” which is to add to our class “commandments.” Throughout the year we have talked at length about what we can do to make our world a “better” place. Since this period of time is supposed to be a reflective one, we thought it would be interesting to put our thoughts down on paper, creating our own version of the Ten Commandments. So far these are our “commandments::

Colin: “If someone needs help you should help them.”

Jaron: “If someone falls down you should tell a teacher that someone needs help.”

Scott: “If someone is hurt really bad you should get an ice pack to help them.”

Joe: “Don’t make yourself go to jail.”

Some of the children have expressed a desire to create our own “tablets” out of papier mache...as with life, this will clearly be a work in progress. Please ask your child to show you our “Counting the Omer” chart and jar.



Our “Counting the Omer” chart.



Our “Omer” jar.

Indicator 6.1 – Children share their feelings, ideas, questions, and/or experiences with their peers and/or adults

Indicator 6.2. – Children have access to a variety of materials to explore Jewish life.

Indicator 6.3 – Children work on projects in small groups

Indicator 6.4. – Children and teachers both explore and celebrate moments of blessing, transition, and thanks.

Indicator 6.5 – Children learn about their identities or uniqueness e.g. developmentally, culturally

Indicator 6.6 – Children explore their ideas and/or feelings through art or nature experiences

Indicator 6.7 – Children and teachers explore the why of Jewish symbols and practices.

Indicator 6.8 – Teachers create a culture of inquiry in the classroom; this cycle involves multiple steps such as dialogue, reflection, investigation and action

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

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

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

Indicator 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

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

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

Indicator 7.1 – Engaging children in constructing the learning process.

Indicator 7.1.1. – Children’s ideas, interests and/or feelings inform curricular choices.

Indicator 7.1.2 - Children are given choices of what to do in the classroom.

Indicator 7.1.3 – Teachers use provocations to encourage children’s exploration.

Indicator 7.1.4 – Teachers use their observation of and/or conversations with children to inform learning experiences.

Indicator 7.1.5 – Teachers and children map out/brainstorm directions that exploration of a topic can go

Indicator 7.1.6 – Teachers tap into real life experiences/happenings of children, their families and/or themselves to foster learning.

Indicator 7.1.7 – Children’s play is a source for learning.

Indicator 7.2 – Using small group project work.

Indicator 7.2.1 – Children’s learning occupies multiple sessions.

Indicator 7.2.2 – Children use a variety of media to explore a subject.

Indicator 7.2.3 – Children’s work is expressive of their individuality and viewpoints.

Indicator 7.2.4 – Children learn from one another.

Indicator 7.2.5 – Children’s discussions and work with one another informs the direction that a project takes

Indicator 7.2.6 – Teachers design strategies to show children how exploration of a topic might continue.

Indicator 7.2.7 – Children work in small groups.

Indicator 7.3 – Documenting children’s learning.

Indicator 7.3.1 – Teachers regularly engage in the process of observation and documentation as a way of facilitating learning and growth.

Indicator 7.3.2 – Teachers use documentation as a tool for reflecting on and planning the learning experience.

Indicator 7.3.3 – Teacher’s documentation of learning takes place in multiple forms.

Indicator 7.3.4 – Teacher’s documentation incorporates multiple perspectives and voices such as that of children, parents, teachers, and others as appropriate.

Indicator 7.3.5 – Teachers document children’s exploration of Judaism and Jewish life.

Indicator 7.3.6 – Teacher’s observation and documentation of children’s work are used in assessing children’s growth.

Indicator 7.3.7 – Teachers use documentation to help children reflect on their ideas and/or questions.

Indicator 7.3.8 – Teachers use documentation to celebrate accomplishments and growth.

Indicator 7.3.9 – Teachers use documentation as a vehicle for communicating with parents about their child’s learning experience.

Indicator 7.3.10 – Teachers use documentation as a way of making visible the children’s learning experiences throughout the time that they are in the program.

