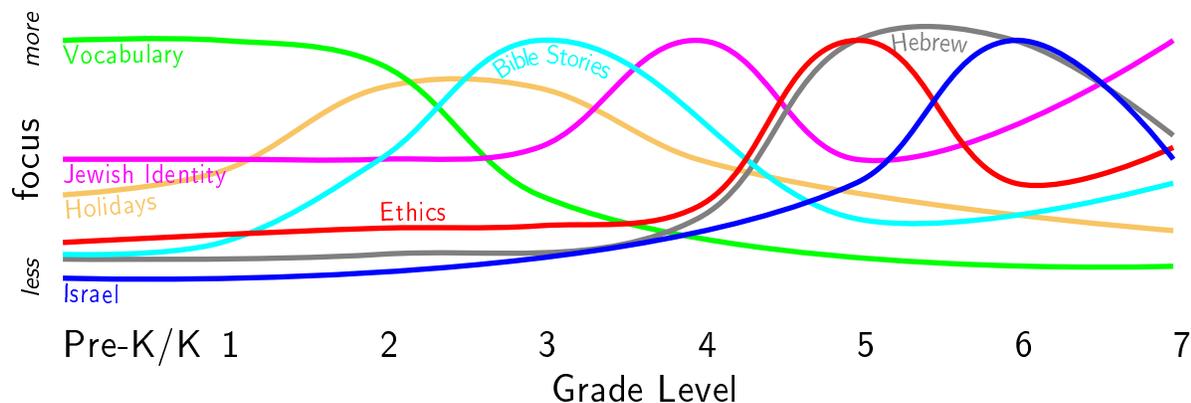


Gates of Jewish Learning: Curriculum Overview

August, 2018

Introduction

Gates of Jewish Learning, the flagship Sunday morning program at the Jewish Center of the Hamptons, focuses on seven major curricular elements: Jewish vocabulary, holidays, Bible stories, Jewish identity, ethics, Israel, and Hebrew.



The seven major curricular elements of Gates of Jewish Learning, as they are integrated into a student's path from pre-K to Grade 7.

Jewish vocabulary is the basic set of words we use to talk about everything we do, from “Shabbat” to “Yom Kippur,” from “Torah” to “Kiddush.” We teach these words early on, so the children will be equipped to use them as they progress through the program and through Jewish life.

Holidays are the cornerstones of Jewish time and the centerpieces of most Jewish celebrations. We teach their significance, and offer a range of traditional and modern ways to celebrate each one.

Bible stories are the common literacy of Judaism, and the conceptual basis for both introductory and advanced Jewish thought. With a major push in Grade 3, we teach the stories and the characters in them, so students can take part in the ongoing millennial Jewish conversation.

Jewish identity is a student’s sense of relationship to the Jewish community, and the way in which classroom material is not merely an academic curiosity. Twice in our program — once in Grade 4 and then again in Grade 7 — we focus on helping each student explore the role that Judaism plays in his or her own evolving sense of self.

Ethics covers everything from widely accepted tenets (say, murder is bad) to legal matters (like compensatory and punitive damages, both of which are in the Torah) to murky questions like how to balance peace and self defense, or the interplay between

honesty and kindness. We emphasize Jewish ethics in Grades 5 and 7, both times delving into the constellation of modern ethics, ancient prophetic vision, and evolving Jewish tradition.

Israel is both the eternal metaphor of God’s presence in our lives, and, since 1948, the physical Jewish state — which is why we end the Passover Seder hoping for “next year in Jerusalem” and why the Israeli flag flies in the Jewish Center alongside the American one. We present both aspects of Israel in detail in Grade 6, guiding students as they discover Israel and all that it represents.

Hebrew is the language of our sacred texts, of Jewish prayer, and of the modern State of Israel. We introduce students to Hebrew throughout our program, with a more focused approach starting around Grade 5.

Grade-by-Grade Highlights

School-wide Content:

Jewish holidays. Jewish rituals. Jewish music. Tikkun olam. Jewish ethics and values. Jewish heritage. The joy of being Jewish. Hebrew language.

School-wide Key Questions:

Why should I be Jewish? What does it mean to be Jewish? What is my obligation to Judaism and what do I get in return? What is the focus of each Jewish season? How do I combine my Temple life with my life outside the Temple?

Pre-K – Grade 2

- **Primary Content:** Jewish ritual objects. Synagogue life. Jewish vocabulary. Basic Jewish ethics. Jewish food.
- **Key Questions:** What objects do we use to celebrate Judaism? What does the Jewish year look like?
- **Primary materials:** Handouts. Art supplies. Story books.

Grade 3

- **Primary Content:** Bible stories. Biblical characters.
- **Primary Materials:** Textbook: *Explorer’s Bible Volume 1*.
- **Key Questions:** Who are some important people from the Bible? Why are they important? What can we learn from them and their actions?

Grade 4

- **Primary Content:** Jewish identity — looking inward.
- **Primary Materials:** Textbooks: *Building Jewish Identity* and *Explorer’s Bible Volume 2*.
- **Key Questions:** What does it mean to be a Jew? Why is the Jewish community important, and where does it come from? What is the role of Hebrew in our community? What do our Jewish symbols represent?

Grade 5

- **Primary Content:** Jewish prophets and their demands for social justice. Real-world application of Jewish principles. Intensive Hebrew instruction, with an emphasis on the alphabet and the vowels. Modern Hebrew vocabulary.
- **Primary Materials:** Textbooks: *The Prophets: Speaking Out for Justice* and *Judaism's Great Debates*.
- **Key Questions:** Who were the prophets? What was their message, and to what degree is it still relevant today? Why does the ancient prophetic vision lie at the core of modern Judaism? What are some ways to continue the prophets' mission? What is the relationship between God and humans? How do we translate belief into action?

Grade 6

- **Primary Content:** Israel. Jewish history. Reading Hebrew without vowels. More Hebrew vocabulary.
- **Primary Materials:** Textbook: *Experience Modern Israel*.
- **Key Questions:** What was Israel like in antiquity? What is it like now? What key events connect the past to the present? How and where did Jews live during the Exile? What is life like in modern Israel? How does Israel connect to life in America?

Grade 7

- **Primary Content:** Jewish identity — looking outward. Bar/bat mitzvah.
- **Primary Materials:** Articles, essays, readings, and movies.
- **Key Questions:** What does it mean to be Jewish in the modern world? What does it mean to become a bar/bat mitzvah? How is being a Jew different than following another religious path? What are some of those other paths like? What does Judaism have to offer modern Americans? How do I develop into my own person in a Jewish context?

Post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah

- **Primary Content:** Topics in Judaism.
- **Primary Materials:** Ad hoc.
- **Key Questions:** "So I'm a Teenage Jewish New Yorker... Now What?"

Textbooks

With its low student-to-teacher ratio, and an attentive clergy to augment the teaching staff, Gates of Jewish Learning gives students first-hand access to deep and authentic Jewish expertise. In addition, we use the following textbooks:

- *Explorer's Bible Volume 1: From Creation to the Exodus* — Grade 3. Where most authors focus only on the nuances of the Bible's text, Scott E. Blumenthal expands his attention. In his book, *The Explorer's Bible Volume 1: From Creation to the Exodus*, Blumenthal delivers a sequential narrative of the Torah, because, in his words, "[the Bible] allows you to explore who you are and how to become the best possible you." Given the nature of most commentary and scholarship, this approach promises a more functional scriptural education than many others. With relatable moments such as

Joseph's plea for Pharaoh's forgiveness, Blumenthal uses the Torah to teach ethical behavior in addition to conveying the essence of our people's timeless stories.

- ***Building Jewish Identity*** — Grade 4. In her two-part series, *Building Jewish Identity*, author Judy Dick explores what it means to be a part of the Jewish community, starting with a sense of unity with those around us. She examines our ancient and unique history through the lens of stories, integrating the Hebrew language, symbols, rituals, and mitzvot. She includes the specifics of some of these rituals, such as Rosh Hashanah and the yearly cycle, Bar/bat Mitzvah and coming of age, and mourning a loss. And she guides readers as they build a sense of Jewish identity.
- ***Explorer's Bible 2: From Sinai to the Nation of Israel*** — Grade 4. In the second volume of his powerful students' Bible, Blumenthal follows up on the usual canon with less commonly read passages, and addresses tricky issues like King David's guilt and the importance of honesty — once again helping the reader merge our holy texts with the timeless lessons they offer.
- ***Judaism's Great Debates*** — Grade 5. According to authors Rabbi Barry L. Schwartz and Rabbi Mark H. Levine, "argumentation and debate is the lifeblood of Judaism." And their book *Judaism's Great Debates*, brings just that to the classroom: the presentation and exploration of some of the most influential arguments in Jewish history. From Abraham's plea that God spare Sodom and Gomorrah to Herzl and Wise's debate over Zionism and the Jewish homeland, the Jewish tradition has evolved around dialectic. Education in this pervasive aspect of Judaism broadens students' perspective and deepens their knowledge of why our customs and faith exist as they do today.
- ***Prophets Speaking out for Justice*** — Grade 5. Preparation for Bar/Bat Mitzvah includes increasing familiarity with biblical stories and how they relate to everyday life. In *The Prophets: Speaking Out for Justice*, Gila Gevirtz exposes students to the moral tenets of Judaism through a series of prophet-specific explorations — from Jonah (a "runaway messenger of mercy") to Jeremiah ("a persistent voice of repentance"), from Isaiah ("righteous spirit of worship") to Elijah ("zealous critic of the king").
- ***Experience Israel*** — Grade 6. Soon-to-be adults of the Jewish community learn more than just prayers and holiday traditions; at the heart of the Jewish faith resides a sense of belonging, community, and national identity. Aviva Werner's *Experience Modern Israel* is a lens that exposes Israel as a land pulsating with life and verdant with culture. Known for Tel Aviv's pristine beaches, the snowpack that frosts the Mount Hermon ski resort, desert species like the ibex that run by the Dead Sea, and the famed intersection of the three Abrahamic religions in Jerusalem, *Eretz Yisrael* is defined more by its majesty and its marvels than by its mistakes. As a result, Israel exists for us both as a homeland and as an inexhaustibly enriching topic of discussion.

These are supplanted by a wide range of materials prepared specifically for Gates of Jewish Learning.