

Temple School 7th Grade Curriculum

We are very proud of our 7th grade innovative curriculum. 7th grade is characteristically a challenging age group to teach because students of this age are experiencing hormonal changes, are often focused on social interactions, are likely to be very discerning, and demand that they be challenged by and interested in what they are learning. We have created a program which strives to be relevant to the students, presenting them with tools for drawing connections between what they have learned about Judaism and Torah and their own lives. 7th grade teachers have developed a unique 7th grade curriculum which is fun, interesting, and encourages self-expression. The 7th grade curriculum has had two major components which are designed to help them develop an adult Jewish identity; Jewish Life and Jewish History.

Our Jewish Life component begins with Advanced B'nai Mitzvah Training with Rabbi Shifra, and our adaptation of the URJ Sacred Choices curriculum with Heidi Winig and Scott Sandler. In Advanced B'nai Mitzvah Training we explore the daily interpersonal choices that people make and the Jewish communal values often called *derech eretz* or *menschlichkeit*, that support making good social choices. Students discuss the relevance of Jewish tradition and wisdom in modern day situations. Rabbi Shifra leads discussion of Jewish values, how to live as caring, responsible, and ethical human beings now as teens, and going forward with a solid foundation for their life as adults. We also review Hebrew reading, the b'nai mitzvah prayers and blessings, and teach cantillation to those who have mastered these skills. This segues into Sacred Choices, which addresses the personal choices that people make for their bodies. Sacred Choices has been adapted from a middle school curriculum created by the Union for Reform Judaism. This class will address many life issues that students at this age may find challenging, such as learning how to advocate for themselves, how to establish boundaries, how to respond to situations in which there may be peer pressure, and how to develop and nurture healthy relationships. All of the lessons are anchored to Jewish values and are informed by driving questions, such as:

- What does it mean to view my life—my body and soul—as well as that of others as gifts from God?
- What is the guidance that Jewish tradition provides when it comes to protecting our bodies and souls?
- What are the consequences of my choices? How does Judaism help me cope with those consequences?
- How can I evaluate the wide range of messages I receive?

This class will involve discussions and interactive lessons in a safe, supportive environment. Our hope is that students will come away from this program with a deeper understanding of how to listen to their own internal moral compasses and to

know what is right for themselves in many of these new and exciting life experiences.

Our Jewish History component begins with a course on Tolerance with Scott Sandler, and continues with The History of Modern Israel with Ilana Goldstein and Benjamin Flatauer. In our Tolerance class, Scott Sandler leads an exploration of the Holocaust and, more generally, issues that impact all of our lives: tolerance, stereotyping, and propaganda. These matters are grappled with through personal reflections, group activities, storytelling, skits, and film. This class looks at how issues of scapegoating and the “fear of other” surface in our lives and in the lives of those around us. A section of the class focuses on peer pressure and bullying that takes place on our school campuses. The class looks at what it means to bully or oppress another, motivations for bullying others, what we should do when we see someone being bullied, and what we should do if we become a target of bullying.

In terms of the Holocaust, this class focuses on segregation and the Nuremberg Laws. It looks at what led to the Holocaust, central events like Kristallnacht (the night of broken glass), and personal stories: stories of those children whose lives were saved as a result of the Kindertransport, stories of resistance, and stories of figures such as Anne Frank. Through an excerpted version of the Diary of Anne Frank, students act out the roles and work to understand the emotions/actions within the play. Towards the end of the term, students get the opportunity to interact with a guest speaker. In the past, speakers have included Eda Balsam, a Holocaust survivor and author of *Escape from Antwerp*, and Rosemary Schindler, niece of Oskar Schindler and founder of Schindler’s Ark, an organization devoted to the promotion of unity between Christians and Jews.

The Tolerance course segues nicely into the History of Modern Israel with Ilana Goldstein and Benjamin Flatauer. In the late 19th century, persecution of Jews, particularly in Europe, led to the creation of the Zionist movement. This class covers key aspects of the *historical* events of the last century that led up to the establishment of the *modern* nation of *Israel* and the many ways in which we as Jews today are connected to the state of Israel.

Seventh Grade students meet concurrently with Hebrew High. We hope that your children will continue through our 10th grade Confirmation class. Our Hebrew High program is designed to help deepen their Jewish knowledge and promote Jewish involvement for the rest of their lives.