



Thursdays with Rabbi Zach Sitkin and Morah Molly Kalisch

During this trimester, Rabbi Sitkin facilitated a class called “Biblical Bad Choices,” focusing on stories from the Bible with a narrative that allows us to explore challenging decisions to be made. Each week, we discussed different narratives in the Torah and the difficult or “bad” choices that our biblical ancestors made. We then discussed the key ideas behind these choices and how they reflect similar social dynamics in middle school, helping the students feel connected to the Torah and to each other. We focused on the values of *bitachon* (trust), *haginit* (honesty), *savlanut* (patience/controlling one’s emotions), *kavod habriyot* (preserving human dignity), *emet* (speaking truthfully to those in power), and *kivun ruchani* (spiritual direction/giving critical feedback). I’m looking forward to teaching again next semester with a focus on *midot* or characteristics that different biblical ancestors had, looking at the Torah through a different lens.

In Morah Molly’s class, we focused in looking at Ancient Biblical Heroes. We explored characters like Noah, Avraham, Sarah, and Rachel. We investigated the different values that each of these heroes had and discussed ways in which we could learn from each of them. When discussing Avraham, we talked about the mitzvah of welcoming guest into your home; we then decorated our classroom for our weekly Shabbat celebration and welcomed the second half of the class to join us, just like Avraham did. We talked about how good it made us feel doing something nice and kind for someone else and how one act of kindness can be passed on and can lead to more acts of kindness, connecting these experiences to our time at Beth El Religious School and in our real lives outside of Beth El. When learning about Sarah, we looked at her selflessness and the sacrifices she made so that her husband, Avraham, could have a child. We then continued with this theme of selflessness when learning about Rachel. We discussed how her love for her sister, Leah, was so great, that she sacrificed her own true happiness and desire to marry Jacob, to let Leah marry him because she is the firstborn. We will begin to explore Modern Jewish Heroes in the next trimester, with influencers like Theodor Herzl and Golda Meir.

In the second hour on Thursdays, we have a chance for some elective-style learning with our Shinshinit, or Israeli Emissary, Yuval, or with Morah Beth in Art. When possible, we learn about different areas of Jewish culture – we have even had a chance to learn about how to make challah, making our very own challah dough and watching it rise. We look forward to exploring more opportunities like this on Thursdays next trimester!



Sundays with Morah Ann Zisser and Morah Sigal Fanning

During the fall, we have been broadening our middle schoolers Jewish experiences in a number of ways. We are listening to them when it comes to what interests them, staying in line with the goals that we too have for their learning.

In the first hour, we have explored *tefillah* in order to make it a personal experience for us, creating quotes that are meaningful and noticing relevant themes in the *tefillot* we say together regularly. We have also explored Torah texts – to analyze them and relate them to our personal lives and to notice differences and similarities about the text in the actual Torah.

In the second hour, we split into two groups to spend some time learning Hebrew at our respective levels; Morah Ann's class is finishing the Phonetic Hebrew Decoding program and Morah Sigal's class is focusing on a more intermediate level of Hebrew. There our middle schoolers are reviewing Hebrew script, building sentences, and having simple and short conversations. We have also learned the names of countries, occupations, parts of the body, clothing, and personal pronouns. As we work through *tefillah* and Torah in the first hour, where we read in Hebrew, we are giving the students a chance to look at Hebrew in many different ways, enhancing what they are learning and absorbing.

In the third hour, we have studied about Israel in order to help create a love and deep understanding for Israel in our students as they emerge in this b'nei mitzvah time as Jewish adults. Here, we have looked at the map, symbols, and flag of Israel, analyzed Hatikvah, and learned about the U.N. Resolution leading to the establishment of the State of Israel.

We look forward to splitting up into two classes for the third hour next trimester so that Morah Ann can focus on *tikkun olam* or repairing the world and Morah Sigal can continue Israel education.