

School

Judaica at CJP: It's More Than Just Holidays

Our Judaica curriculum is holiday driven. As we approach the holidays, from Rosh Hashanah to Shavuot and all that's in-between

you can experience Judaism simply by walking through our hallways and observing the art projects on our bulletin boards or

listening to the songs sung in music class. You have not witnessed the future of the Jewish people until you have attended one of our weekly CJP Shabbat celebrations. Our students are animated as they sing traditional prayers like Shalom Aleichem and the Shema and they remain captivated through the D'var Torah of the week led by a visiting rabbi from either synagogue.

But our preschoolers know that Judaism is not just what happens in preparation for or during the holidays and Shabbat. In our classrooms Jewish values are present. The Charlotte Jewish Preschool Judaica curriculum encompasses the chagim (Jewish holidays), Torah teachings, and Judaic concepts; we emphasize five core Torah teachings and Judaic values that all preschoolers should live by:

1. Tikkun Olam – Performing acts of kindness to help repair our world.
2. Hachnasat Orchim – Welcoming visitors and treat them nicely.
3. Derech Eretz – Being polite and respectful.
4. B'tzelem Elohim – Everyone is created in God's image.

5. Tzar Ba'alei Chayim – Being kind to all of God's creatures

Tikkun Olam

Our students are charged with leaving the world a better place than they found it. One of the ways they achieve this is by recycling in their classroom. After a unit in Judaica where students learn what items are for the trash and what can be recycled, students bring signs back to their classrooms to remind themselves that we are partners with God. Our students actively participate in caring for our garden in the outdoor learning center. Last spring each student released a ladybug in the garden and learned from our parent volunteers how ladybugs keep our garden healthy. This experiential education gives our students a hands-on experience that they will never forget.

Hachnasat Orchim

Our children love visitors. At Chanukah we have our annual Latkes, Lights, and Love program for parents or close family friends to do a special activity with their child. Before the program, our students create personalized invitations to bring home to their parents to cordially invite their parents. When parents arrive, students greet their special visitors and must be on their best behavior while they are there. While separating can be difficult for our younger students, we find that hosting Latkes, Lights, and Love and other special programs instill in our kids the Judaic value of hachnasat orchim.

Each week at Shabbat we welcome a visiting rabbi to our Shabbat service led by Morah Becca and Miss Patty. After the Torah service, Morah Becca prepares the students for the D'var Torah by saying "please keep your listening oznayim (ears) on and your peh (mouth) closed for our Rabbi." This teaches our students that when we have a visitor we exer-

cise our respectful behavior to show that we are grateful they came and we are interested in what they will teach us. Hachnasat orchim is a weekly, if not daily, practice for all of our students.

Derech Eretz

If you were to spend a day in one of our vibrant classrooms, no doubt you would hear the phrase "make a good choice" more than once. Our job as early childhood educators is not to give students the right answer all the time, but to guide them toward making their own right decisions. We do not tell our students what the "good choice" is, rather we instill in them the confidence and wherewithal to make their own right decisions.

B'tzelem Elohim

Early childhood education is imperative to teach socialization starting at a young age. Starting from 12 months, our students are learning to be good citizens and friends through sharing, respectful communication, collaboration, and more. But, we all know that a child's favorite question is "why?" At CJP, it's easy. We teach our students that each one of us has a piece of God in our heart; we are made b'tzelem Elohim. Not only must we nurture and care for God inside of us, but we are kind to our friends because God is inside of them, too. This explanation turns an abstract concept into something physical that a child can understand.

Tzar Ba'alei Chayim

So many of our CJP friends have a pet that is part of their family. These pets are a great way to teach young children about the responsibility of taking care of a living being. At home, they can help to feed, play, and snuggle with their furry family members. This is their first exposure to true responsibility and caring for another living being. For our students without a pet at home, we spend an entire month learning Torah stories about our Bible heroes who performed tzar ba'alei chayim and our three-year olds take a trip to the "farm." There they have an opportunity to take care of animals in the petting zoo and enjoy their experiential education in which we turn an abstract concept into a physical activity.

At CJP we instill a love of Judaism in the children, not only through the Chagim but by being a mensch. And that is how together we Learn. Grow. And Connect. ✪

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