

קשרים

Kesharim:

**A Jewish Cultural
Program for Children**

Weekday
Curriculum

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Why a Cultural Program?

Today, there are more options for Jewish Education than ever before. There have never been as many Hebrew readers and Hebrew speakers as there are today. Yet, very few of us understand it. Words like “tradition” and “culture” are used so often that it is often difficult to associate meaning with them. Whose culture – Jews from Poland, Morocco or Yemen? Whose tradition – which point on the spectrum from which movement?

The *Kesharim* Cultural Program at Darchei Noam offers children a way to face these challenges by building connections to our past and present. Through studies in modern Hebrew and our collective past, participants will develop a true feeling of *Klal Yisra’el*: the unity of Israel.

Mah Nishtana?

How is this different than a Sunday program?

The *Kesharim* program runs independently of our Sunday Hebrew program. Although we recommend that children sign up for both, it is not required. The goals of the Sunday program are to enable our students to integrate into synagogue and Jewish ritual life. This includes celebrations for Shabbat, Holy Days and life cycle events like Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The Sunday program provides a basic background in Torah Values, Celebrations & Commemorations, Social Action, Israel and Prayer Readiness. *Kesharim* adds depth to these areas of study by structuring its program around modern Hebrew, Our National Journeys, and family genealogies. Although the *Kesharim* program stands alone, it is designed to enrich and enhance the children’s Sunday experiences.

Kesharim is informal in style and is divided into two components. “Ivrit: Our Common Tongue” is a study of our contemporary connection to Jews around the world through modern Hebrew, and “Nesi’ot: Our National Journeys” is a study of our historical connection to Jews around the world. We use drama, visual arts and active learning to lift our Jewish connections out of a traditional classroom setting and bring them to life. Each class also engages in projects that are aimed at fostering connections to Jews in Israel and elsewhere.

Kesharim is offered on Wednesday afternoons from 5:00pm to 7:00pm on a four-year cycle to children starting in Grade Three.

Enduring Understandings & Essential Questions

Our curriculum for Nesi'ot is built around an innovative model that starts with broad, “big picture” goals and then identifies specific questions or avenues of enquiry to get there. The broad goals are called “Enduring Understandings” because they are the basic concepts that remain with a student long after s/he has completed a program of study. “Essential Questions” are the avenues of enquiry that lead to the Enduring Understandings.

The Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions used here are based on the model adapted for use in Toronto-area supplementary schools by UJA-Federation’s Center for the Enhancement of Jewish Education (Mercaz). It is based on the “Understanding by Design” theory by American public educators Grant Wiggins and Jay McTigh.

To illustrate, here is an example of an Enduring Understanding from our curriculum. Note that the Essential Question for each grade level leads into the Essential Question for the next grade level. Taken together, the Essential Questions form a line of enquiry that satisfies the Enduring Understanding.

Subject: Nesi'ot – Our National Journeys

Enduring Understanding: Our shared historical experiences give Jews a connection to one another.

Essential Questions:

- Year 1: What do you think the family of Israel had to do to keep their identity while in Egypt?
- Year 2: How did the Israelite religion have to change in order to survive in exile?
- Year 3: How is *midrash* an art form? How does interpretation keep a culture alive?
- Year 4: How to modern movements continue the art of interpretation?

Ivrit: Our Common Tongue

Throughout most of our history, Hebrew was the language of prayer and study. Its mastery was limited to academics, rabbis and scholars. Today, it is a living language that is spoken by millions of people. A Jew can go to any community in the world, visit any synagogue, and find someone who speaks Hebrew. It truly is our lingua franca – our common tongue.

Language is a strong unifying force for the Jewish people, so a basic understanding of its forms and vocabulary will enable our students to build connections with Jewish communities around the world. The *Kesharim* program focuses on communication skills and active learning; as such, there is less of an emphasis more traditional modes of classroom-based learning. Our style is based on some of the techniques currently being used in ESL/EFL environments.

Enduring Understandings: Hebrew is the living language of the Jewish people. Hebrew is a link among Jews around the world.

By the end of Year 4, our students will:

- know hundreds of basic vocabulary words related to everyday life;
- know how to use the interrogative forms;
- be able to use simple responses to basic questions;
- be able to carry on simple conversations in Hebrew.

Year 1

Vocabulary topics include: classroom, school, parts of the body, numbers, food, restaurants.

Ongoing projects have included creating skits, dramatizing dialogues, and creating picture books.

Year-End Project: to be determined by the class

Textbooks:

Daber Ivrit Units 1 and 2, Torah Aura Productions.

See teacher resources.

Year 2

Vocabulary topics include: Shabbat, family, colours, clothing, places, jobs, transportation, seasons.

Ongoing projects have included creating skits, dramatizing dialogues, and creating picture books.

Year-End Project: to be determined by the class

Textbooks:

Daber Ivrit Units 3 and 4, Torah Aura Productions.

See teacher resources.

Year 3

Vocabulary topics include: kibbutz, zoo, park, in the home, pronouns.

Ongoing projects have included creating skits, dramatizing dialogues, and creating picture books.

Year-End Project: to be determined by the class

Textbooks:

Daber Ivrit Units 5 and 6, Torah Aura Productions.

See teacher resources.

Year 4

Vocabulary topics include: interrogatives, basic I/You statements, neighbourhood, locations.

Ongoing projects have included creating skits, dramatizing dialogues, and creating picture books.

Year-End Project: to be determined by the class

Textbooks:

Daber Ivrit Units 7 and 8, Torah Aura Productions.

See teacher resources.

Nesi'ot: Our National Journeys

Judaism is a wide spectrum of beliefs and traditions. No matter where we choose to place ourselves on that spectrum, we are all connected. Insular Chasidic communities and outgoing liberal communities may appear to have very little in common, but they in fact share a proud legacy. By exploring this legacy, our students will develop a sense of inter-connectedness with Jews in Canada, Israel and around the world.

Our history is rife with journeys. Abraham and Sarah journey from Ur to Canaan, the arrival in Egypt and the Exodus that followed, the Exile to Babylonia, and the scattering of the Diaspora are just a few examples. By studying these journeys, our students will answer certain fundamental questions: if Israel is our homeland, how did we end up scattered all over the world? What kind of connection does this shared history give us?

Enduring Understanding: Our shared historical experiences give Jews a connection to one another.

By the end of Year 4, our students will be able to:

- distinguish between Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews and note similarities;
- understand the inter-connectedness of the global Jewish community by exploring and sharing their family journeys to Canada;
- understand the significance of Jewish history and the role it plays in the decisions we make today as Jews;
- see Judaism as a fluid culture that survives and thrives through the process of revision and reconstruction.

Year 1

Essential Questions from journeys from the time of the Torah:

- Our ancestors move from the land of their birth to Canaan: How did it feel to move to a new land where nothing was familiar? What did Canaan look like?
- Our first family travels to Egypt: How did it feel to be reduced from a family of wealth to one that had to beg for food? How was Egypt different from Canaan? What do you think the family of Israel had to do to keep their identity?

- The Exodus and return to the Promised Land: How did it feel to return to a homeland that no-one had ever seen before? What new challenges did the people of Israel face in their new homeland?

Ongoing projects have included creating skits, dramatizing stories, creating picture books and board games.

Year-End Project: to be determined by the class

Textbooks:

Torah and You, Ktav Publishing.

See teacher resources.

Year 2

Essential Questions for journeys through Biblical and Classical times:

- Journey to nationhood: How is having a king different than having tribes that vote? How did having a king change the way people practiced the religion?
- Exile of Israel and Judah: How did the religion have to change in order to survive? What challenges did the people of Israel face when they arrived in their new home? How do you think the people of Israel adapted Babylonian and Assyrian culture to serve Jewish purposes?
- Redemption and rebuilding: Why did most Jews choose to remain in exile when given the chance to return to Israel? What challenges did the returning Jews face when they arrived in Israel? Why did they rebuild the Temple? Given the changes that happened in Babylon, how was the second Temple different from the first?
- The Greco-Roman world and the destruction of Jerusalem: How did Jews adapt Greco-Roman culture and art to serve Jewish purposes? Why did some Jews rebel? Why were there such deep splits within the Jewish community? What effect did the Temple's destruction have on the Jewish people in Israel and outside of Israel?

Ongoing projects have included creating skits, dramatizing stories, creating picture books and board games.

Year-End Project: to be determined by the class

Textbooks:

Prophets, Writings and You, Ktav Publishing

See teacher resources.

Year 3

Essential Questions for journeys through Medieval times:

- Development of the Talmud: Why was there a need to write down the Oral Law? How is the Talmud like a conversation across the centuries? How does the Talmud connect us to our past?
- Art of interpretation: what is *midrash*? How is *midrash* an art form? How does interpretation keep a culture alive?
- Jews in Muslim lands: How did the Jews adapt Muslim art and poetry to serve Jewish needs? What was the relationship like between Muslims and non-Muslims?
- Spanish Golden Age and Expulsion: Why do some people call it a “golden age”? Where did the Jews go after the expulsion?

Ongoing projects have included creating skits, dramatizing stories, creating illuminated manuscripts, and writing commentaries and poetry.

Year-End Project: to be determined by the class

Textbooks:

Atlas of Great Jewish Communities, Behrman House

The Cardinal's Snuffbox

See teacher resources.

Year 4

Essential Questions for journeys in early modern and modern times:

- Land of Po-Lin: the Golden Age of Eastern European Jewry: How did the Jews adapt local cultures to serve Jewish needs? How did Jews maintain a distance from their neighbours? How was this need for distance different than during the Golden Age of Spain?
- Our families move to Canada: What drove our families to cross the Atlantic? How are we related to each other? How are we related to Jews around the world?
- From tradition to modernity: reconstructing Judaism: How to modern movements continue the art of interpretation?
- Journey through fire: Europe and Arab Lands during the Holocaust: In what ways was the Holocaust a new challenge for the Jewish people? In what ways was it similar to previous events in our history?

- Journey to hope: the state of Israel: In what ways was the establishment of the state of Israel a new challenge for the Jewish people? In what ways was it similar to previous moments in our history?

Ongoing projects have included creating skits, dramatizing stories, creating a family coat of arms, researching genealogies, and mapping the family journeys to Canada that are represented in the class.

Year-End Project: to be determined by the class

Textbooks:

Atlas of Great Jewish Communities, Behrman House

Mah La'asot unit 3, Torah Aura Productions

See teacher resources.