

CURRICULUM SPOTLIGHTS Nº1

THiNK

THE
LOLA
STEIN
INSTITUTE
JOURNAL

INTEGRATED JEWISH EDUCATION AT THE TORONTO HESCHEL SCHOOL



GRADE TWO

Integrated learning describes a theory and process of cross-disciplinary thinking that gives students the skills they need for a complex world. It bridges academic disciplines and silos of knowledge. It develops flexible and critical thinking skills. Children understand their integrated Jewish-Canadian identity and their individuality within community. Thinking Jewish and Jewish thinking combine academic excellence with the wonders of an integrated mind, body, and spirit.



I love teaching Grade 2. There is something amazing to me about the heart and mind of a seven year-old. By seven, children have a developed sense of empathy and understand what it means to be a part of a community. They have learned, in albeit simpler terms, that social justice is about being kind and thoughtful, about giving and sharing. By spring my students are eagerly starting to grasp the vastness of the world and to see the pursuit of social justice as an act of *Tikkun Olam*, the rabbinic term for repairing the world; each child is learning how individual actions can make the world a better place.

By Passover, my students are ready to explore their connection to the world beyond their immediate surroundings. Suddenly, the atlas—displayed on the shelf all year—becomes the most popular book in the class. With anticipation, the children discuss what country they want to study for their final research project on lives of children around the world. I love the energy when my students converse about the beauty of diversity and their desire to do something good through their bond with children around the globe.

The research project takes its title from the Book of Genesis: *Etzem Mi'eztmi*—Bone of My Bone: “And the Adam said: This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (2:23).

From their Chumash lessons over the years, the children know that in the text God takes a bone from the Adam and with it forms the Woman. They can now go deeper into the story. We ask, “What does it mean to you to think about the fact that the man and the woman were created from the same bone?” Their responses vary, but all agree that, while boys and girls are different, deep down we are very connected.

We revisit the Genesis text during social science lessons as we introduce concepts of race and ethnicity. We read a book about race and look at images of people of a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and we discover that people from different parts of the world look different. One group

With this feeling of connectedness comes compassion
and the inspiration to create a just society for all.

Finding the Familiar in Grade 2

WHAT DO WE HAVE IN COMMON?

BY ANDREA SCHAFER

of students define race as something God gives to us to make us special and to make the world more “colourful.”

The students literally feel the bones under their own skin, and—after asking nicely—under the skin of their friends. They conclude that beneath our skin we all feel the same; we are made of the same bone. “If we take off our skin,” I suggest (to a classroom full of “ewws”), “would we not all look exactly the same?”

The next question is crucial, “What else do we share with children around the world?” To answer, we immerse ourselves for the next month in stories about children from Kenya, Malawi, Tel Aviv, and elsewhere. We explore their lives, their games, and the subjects they learn at school. We even make a soccer ball from plastic bags, guided by a video of a Kenyan boy doing the same.

The second graders then undertake individual research, choosing one country to study in detail. They notice that, while life in each place appears inherently different, the interests and dreams of children who live faraway are not so very different from their own here in Toronto. Through direct focus on what they have in common with other children, my students begin to sense a connection to people from different walks of life. This is my key to teaching social justice to young children. I help them find the familiar among the unfamiliar. With this feeling of connectedness comes compassion and the inspiration to create a just society for all.

Grade 2 students crave fairness and their research introduces the hard lesson that life is not always fair. They discover that a child who wants to attend school, just as they do, might be prevented if her family needs her help at home; children with dreams similar to theirs may not have equally similar privileges or the resources to make their dreams a reality.

We extend the lesson to our math classes and consider the concept of value; we discuss how value can be determined by a situation. We read *Beatrice’s Goat*, a picture book

that tells the true story of a Ugandan girl who dreams of attending school, but whose family cannot afford to have her spend her days learning. When her family receives a donated goat, all this changes; they have milk to sell and at last her parents can afford to enroll her in school. After reading the story, we discuss how valuable a goat can be to a child, who, like them, wants to learn. One group of second graders used the \$60.00 they raised for their class *tzedakah* (charity) box to buy and donate a goat through the Save the Children Foundation.

Similarly, another Grade 2 class was inspired to act after seeing photos of Jewish day school students in Uganda. They saw torn mosquito nets dangling over the beds where the children, who were boarding, slept. By selling popsicles, our students raised enough to send new nets to the community. The nets cost \$5.00 apiece but have lifesaving value as protection from mosquitoes that carry the deadly disease of malaria. Months later, the Heschel class received a photo of the nets arriving and had a Skype conversation with Rabbi Gershom of the Abayudaya community and his seven-year-old daughter, who thanked the students personally for their contributions. The pride that the students felt was heart warming.

A seven year-old craves and appreciates meaningful relationships, wants the world to be fair, yet can learn how this is not always the case. With pleasure and gusto, seven year-olds want to offer a helping hand to someone in need. At The Toronto Heschel School, Grade 2 students comprehend that the world is decorated with people who look and act differently. They also know that it is our responsibility to respect these differences and to celebrate and acknowledge the values, the hopes, and the dreams that we all share.

Andrea Schaffer teaches Grade 2 at The Toronto Heschel School.

The Elements of Creation in Grade 2

A COMPLEX CREATIVE PROCESS

BY JUDITH LEITNER

In Grade 2 we ask: What do we learn about creativity from the sequence of the days of creation and the connections between them? Which element of artistic practice does each day reveal? As artists, how might we emulate God's creative process?

To answer, we wonder what the beginning of an idea looks and feels like—how does it emerge and unfold. We think of God as an artist “just like us” and we set out to navigate the six days of God's creative process. We start with a large blank canvas and assume the mindset of artists illuminating a biblical text. Slowly and thoughtfully, we construct our vision. We layer day upon day, adding the new “elements” that are created for each.

We see that the practice of self-reflection appears as an important aspect of creative work; the words of the Torah describe what is being created but also reference thinking about process and technique. When the work of art is complete, God stands back to observe and reflect: “And God saw all that God had crafted, and behold, it was very good! And thus there was evening and there was morning—the sixth day” (Genesis 1:31).

As they reflect and plan, the children learn first to differentiate concepts from physical objects. They notice the use of light as both abstract and concrete; it is abstract when it divides “light” from “darkness” and concrete when it organizes the flow of time, dividing day from night, defining seasons and years. God says, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and years” (Genesis 1:14). The process of learning about distinctions includes the opportunity for students to see how an artist likes to classify and

assign titles and names to work that has been accomplished; it is yet another way to make work one's own and communicate creative intention.

Creating art is always some kind of “self-portrait.” God declares, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). The creative process draws from what an artist knows, as well as what an artist observes.

As the days of creation follow on from one another, the students notice that creative ideas and designs instigate and perpetuate further ideas and designs. They see how creativity becomes a flow. Art begins with an empty space, a blank canvas, onto which ideas, materials, techniques, and working steps are envisioned. The artist builds the artwork step-by-step, in layers—imagining, exploring, crafting, standing back, reflecting, and fine-tuning. God makes artistic choices in a cumulative creative process over six days. Each day supports and makes the next step possible. First God makes an environment to hold all. The words of Genesis tell that the waters then brought forth swarms of creatures and birds; and that God commands the creatures and birds to increase their own numbers and fill the waters and the earth (Genesis 1:1–31).

The materials matter. Watercolour paint emphasizes the properties of water, an essential theme of the text. Students explore watercolour techniques that speak to those particular days. The paint colour can be diluted and shallow or deep and dark and each can imply a different message. Later, they use earth, otherwise known as ceramics, to create the first human from clay, as described by Genesis 2:7.

The following pages share the process the young artists pursue in mirroring creation as told by the Book of Genesis.

What do we learn about creativity from the sequence of the days and the connections between them?



Day 1

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

When, at the beginning, as God was creating the heaven and the earth

וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תְהוֹ וּבְהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—

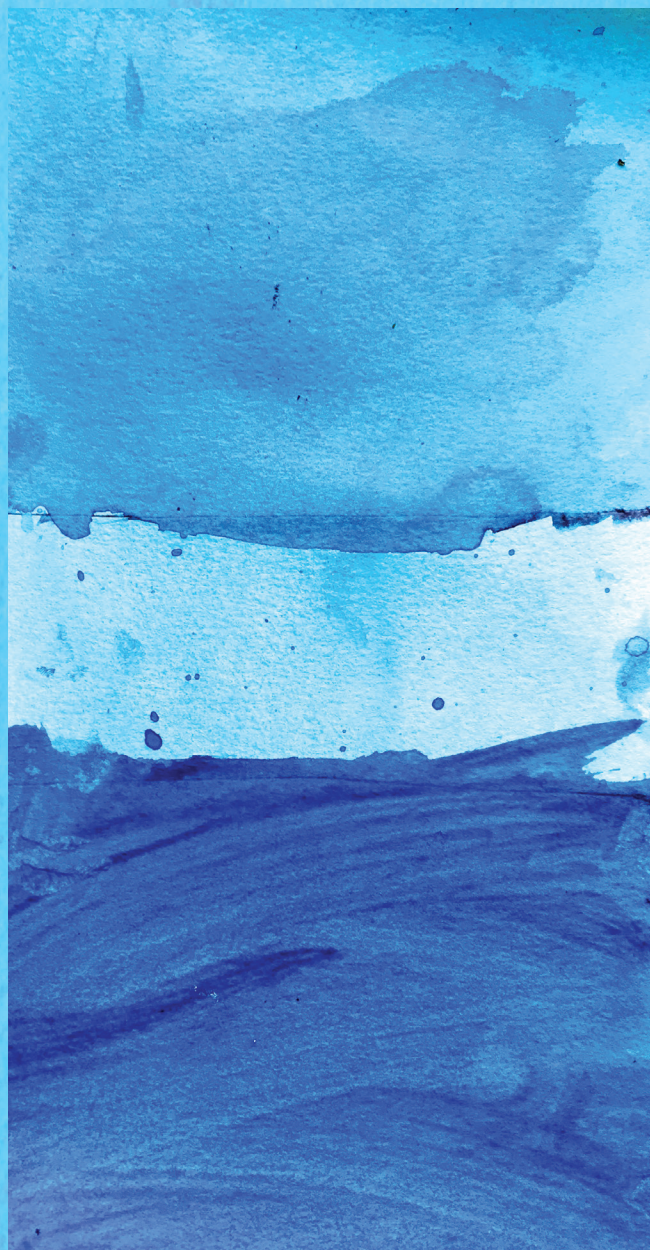
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי אוֹר וַיְהי־אוֹר

God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאוֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ

God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. (Genesis 1:1–4)

ARTISTIC PROCESS: watercolour wash



Day 2

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָרָקִיעַ וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לָרָקִיעַ וּבֵין

הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לָרָקִיעַ וַיְהי־כֵן

God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse.

And it was so. (Genesis 1:7)

ARTISTIC PROCESS: graded watercolour wash

Day 3

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקּוּוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד
וַתֵּרָאָה הַיַּבֵּשָׁה וַיְהִי־כֵן

God said, "Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear." And it was so.

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים | לַיַּבֵּשָׁה אֶרֶץ וּלְמִקְוֵה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים וַיֵּרָא
אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב

God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good.

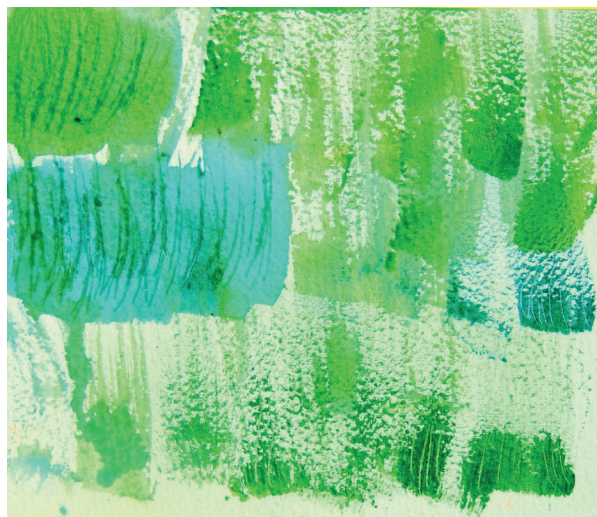
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאֶרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזִרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי
עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינֹו אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ־בֹו עַל־הָאֶרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן

And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so.

וַתּוֹצֵא הָאֶרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזִרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֹשֶׂה־פְּרִי
אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ־בֹו לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב

The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. (Genesis 1:9–12)

ARTISTIC PROCESS: drawing, masking, stippling
wet-on-wet, subtractive technique: saran wrap
on wet canvas, etching, dry brushing



Day 4

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־שְׁנֵי הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת־הַמָּאֹר
הַגָּדֹל לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־הַמָּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת
הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים

God made the two great lights, the greater light
to dominate the day and the lesser light to
dominate the night, and the stars.

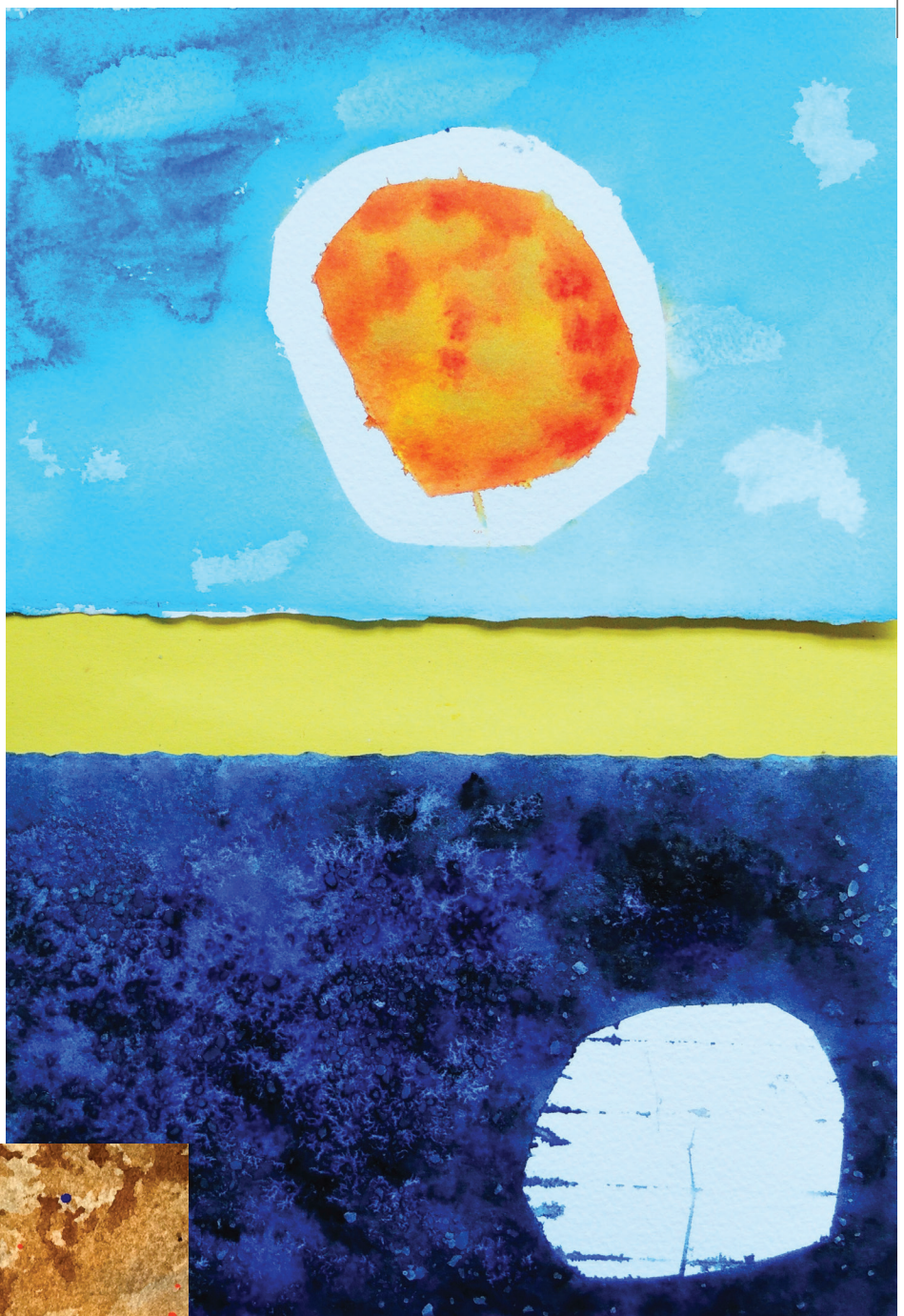
וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בִּרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל־הָאָרֶץ

And God set them in the expanse of
the sky to shine upon the earth,

וּלְמַשֵּׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ
וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב

to dominate the day and the night, and to
separate light from darkness. (Genesis 1:16–18)

ARTISTIC PROCESS: drawing, masking,
stippling wet-on-wet and wet-on-dry, salting



Day 5

וַיֵּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַתַּנִּינִים הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֵת כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה |
הָרֹמֶשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינָהֶם וְאֵת כָּל־עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינָהוּ
וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב

God created the great sea monsters, and all the living
creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters
brought forth in swarms, and all the winged birds of every
kind. And God saw that this was good. (Genesis 1:21)

ARTISTIC PROCESS: stamping

Day 6

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת־
כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב

God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every
kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth.
And God saw that this was good. (Genesis 1:25)

ARTISTIC PROCESS: drawing and stamping

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ
זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם

And God created man in His image, in the image of
God He created him; male and female He created them.
(Genesis 1:27)

ARTISTIC PROCESS: the art of ceramics:
sculpting in low relief and glazing



Judith Leitner co-founded The Toronto Heschel School in 1996 and since then has served as the Director of Arts, team-designing and teaching the integrative Judaic arts curriculum. In 1991 she founded the Integrated Arts Programme at She'arim Hebrew Day School. Judith is equally passionate about documentary photography; her recent exhibitions include "Serene Passage: A Traveller's Prayer at Ground Zero, Madrid and Shanghai" (Arta Gallery, 2011 and Darchei Noam, 2014); "My Voice, Through My Lens" (MaRS Discovery District, June 2014), and "Embedded: Personal Identity through Job:19" (Contact Photography Festival, 2015).

Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement...get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.

—Abraham Joshua Heschel

The Big Grade 2 Wow

RADICAL AMAZEMENT EVERY DAY

BY ANDREA SCHAFFER

Rabbi Heschel reminds us that when God created the world, God looked at each day's work with appreciation, "And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:10) "אֵרָא וְיָיִן בְּיָהוּא יֵשׁ בֹּשֶׁת."

In the Grade 2 community at The Toronto Heschel School, we learn to appreciate the good in all creation, to notice the miracles in everyday life, and see the world through eyes of awe and wonder. When we educators think carefully about this teaching, we see it is a lesson that we must consciously and intentionally teach our students. Why? Why is it important to see the world with appreciation, through eyes of awe and wonder?

In short, to be amazed is to notice and appreciate. With appreciation comes the desire to be considerate and responsible. Our young ones will more likely become socially conscious and responsible adults if they understand the cause and effect of their actions and if they notice and appreciate their natural surroundings.

The school year in Grade 2 begins with all this in mind. Summer comes to an end; fall paints our landscape with shades of red; and Rosh Hashanah celebrates the creation of the world. Effortlessly we have the perfect opportunity for a unit on awe and wonder. The new crop of children enter a new classroom in a different part of the school; they are already awed to be learning with the "big kids." They start the year with great curiosity and wonder, eager to get learning and implement the skills they developed the year before.

This stage of child development is the perfect time to open children's eyes to the miracles of the world. The only words hanging on the classroom walls set out the year's first generative topic: God teaches us to see the world through eyes of awe and wonder. It is a singular message that the fresh students read as they enter. The English words are followed by the Torah text in Hebrew—*Vayera Adonai ki tov* (transliterated)—"And God saw that it was good."

What I love most about starting the year this way is that it allows me to build on the children's natural abilities and innate strengths. Adults often go through their days not noticing the miracles around them, overlooking the beauty of the flowers and missing the shapes of the clouds floating above. Children notice, and when they are encouraged to notice, they pay even more attention.

A child walking through a garden will stop to take a moment to stare at the giant sunflower growing taller and taller as a sight to behold. It might be because he has never seen such a flower before or because the flower is extra large compared to his short stature. But also, a child may stop simply because she can focus on what is truly amazing about something right in front of her very eyes. Whatever the reason, children are more eager, more capable, and more willing than adults to look at the world and notice the miracles within it.

Children can look at the beauty in nature and just say, "Wow," when the "wow" is truly appropriate. This innate ability is something on which I build. My challenge, though, is how to teach the children to treasure this essential childhood capacity and how to orientate them to hold onto it as they grow up. As a teacher I find "how" to be the greatest question. It is easy to tell the students to focus on the beauty of the world, but how do we bring them to do it habitually? How do we teach them why it matters?

We learn best by doing. With this in mind and this early in the year, I engage my students in authentic experiences in beautiful natural settings and open their eyes to awe and wonder.

At The Toronto Heschel School we are blessed with a beautiful natural space outside the school. We have an enormous playing field with a tall strong willow tree as a centrepiece. At the back of the field lies our Heschel Garden

where all grades plant garden beds and, over the year, see and taste the fruits of their labours. The garden is a place for exploration and, of course, amazement. So naturally, my unit on awe and wonder begins in the garden.

My students probe through the garden searching for “wow” moments. They shout out a loud “wow” when they spot something amazing. To help them discover awe-inspiring artifacts in nature, I teach the children to be human cameras.

It takes two people to snap a picture with a human camera. One student, the camera, closes her eyes while the other student, the photographer, leads the “camera” to a point of interest. Human camera pictures are taken on a micro setting, so the photographer needs to take the “camera’s lens,” her friend’s eyes, as close to the object as is possible. When the photographer says “snap,” signalling the photo has been taken, the “camera” opens her eyes to focus in awe on the amazing piece of nature.

When we return to our classroom we sketch our “wow” moments and our photographs taken with the human cameras. We are also studying poetry and we learn that beautiful language helps us describe what we see in the world; we discover that poetry comes through the unique set of a poet’s eyes. One student, wowed by the branch of a perfect climbing tree growing through the fence into our garden, described what he saw as an “outstretched arm lifting me up.”

By the second month of school the students are constantly sharing their “wow” moments with me. They have

come to understand that Torah teaches us to see what is good in creation. Towards Yom Kippur we visit the Shoreside Kavannah Garden to perform *Tashlich* by the river bank and experience the sights and sounds of a small running river. The children also investigate the garden and learn blessings for encounters with nature.

The science component of this unit of awe and wonder sees the students exploring the Earth’s great water cycle, the interconnectedness of bodies of water, and the power of air. By the end of the unit not only can my students explain the scientific terms and properties of water and air but they also show a real appreciation for nature and that which they encounter daily. Fresh water becomes a precious commodity, the stillness of air becomes something noticed, and the power of wind, which amazes us as we run outside capturing it in large garbage bags, becomes a means to create electricity—this is learning that gets a big Grade 2 WOW!

At Toronto Heschel, Grade 2 students develop many important skills. For me, it is their ability to focus on the beauty of the natural world and their learning how to see the miracles in the every day. I hope they carry these with them over their lifetime.

Andrea Schaffer is an alumna of the DeLet Program for Jewish Educators at Brandeis University and its Masters of Teaching Program. She taught in Boston at the Jewish Community Day School, lived in Israel, and is “thrilled” to be at The Toronto Heschel School.



We learn to appreciate the good in all creation.



CURRICULUM SPOTLIGHTS shine on our classrooms, school-wide programs and educational approach. They come from THINK, a semi-annual journal produced by The Lola Stein Institute (LSI), the research and publication arm of The Toronto Heschel School. THINK presents contributions from educators, parents, and community members on integrated Jewish education, critical themes on raising children today, and the interactivity of school and community.

There are many activities described in the Curriculum Spotlights, some of which may not be in current practice. The Toronto Heschel School's activities and curriculum evolve constantly as its educators continue to add wisdom and inspiration, but the ideas and philosophy remain constant.



The Toronto Heschel School
בית הספר על שם השל

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