

# Beth-El Religious School Curriculum

## Toddlers (two's and three's)

Did you know that our youngest students have a superpower? Unlike adults, they process information through EIGHT senses: hearing, smell, taste, sight, touch, the vestibular system (movement and balance), proprioception (joints and muscles), and interoception (internal body signals). Our early childhood curriculum focuses heavily on experiential learning through all of these senses and includes learning through play as well as music, art, dance, food and celebrations. Throughout the year, students study all of the Jewish holidays with a heavy emphasis on Shabbat and Havdalah, Bible stories, Jewish values, and Hebrew letters and basic vocabulary.

**Content Areas:** Joy of Jewish Holiday Traditions Through Art, Shabbat/Havdalah, Bible Stories, Jewish Values, Hebrew Alphabet, Holiday Vocabulary

### **Big Ideas:**

1. Judaism offers us a variety of joyous holidays that we celebrate each year.
2. Each week, we celebrate Shabbat, our sacred day of rest.
3. Havdalah is a short but sweet ceremony we do to say goodbye to Shabbat and welcome in the new week.
4. Each Jewish holiday comes with its own traditions, foods, songs, prayers and lessons.
5. Stories from the Hebrew Bible can teach us many important lessons in our lives.
6. Judaism teaches us how to be mensches, good human beings.
7. Hebrew is made up of letters that make different sounds.

## **Pre-K**

Our Pre-K curriculum continues to focus heavily on experiential learning through all of the senses and includes learning through play as well as

music, art, dance, food and celebrations. Throughout the year, students study Jewish holidays including Shabbat and Havdalah. Students explore Bible stories and how they teach us to live as a Jewish people. Students learn Jewish values including but not limited to Hachnasat Orchim (Hospitality), Shomrei Adama (Caring for the Earth), Tzedakah (Righteous Giving), Bikkur Cholim (Visiting the Sick) and Tzar Ba'alei Chayim (Caring for Animals). Students also focus on T'fillot (Prayers) and Blessings.

**Content Areas:** Jewish Holiday Celebrations, Shabbat/Havdalah, Bible Stories, Jewish Values, Hebrew Alphabet, T'fillot (Prayers), Blessings

**Big Ideas:**

1. Judaism offers us a variety of joyous holidays that we celebrate each year.
2. Each Jewish holiday comes with its own traditions, foods, songs, prayers and lessons.
3. Each week, we celebrate Shabbat, our sacred day of rest.
4. Havdalah is a short but sweet ceremony we do to say goodbye to Shabbat and welcome in the new week.
5. Stories from the Hebrew Bible can teach us many important lessons in our lives.
6. Living our lives guided by Jewish values helps us to be mensches, good human beings.
7. We say blessings in order to say “thank you” for all that we have.
8. Hebrew is made up of letters that make different sounds.

**Kindergarten**

Our Kindergarten curriculum continues to focus heavily on experiential learning through all of the senses and includes learning through play as well as music, art, dance, food and celebrations. Students study Jewish holidays including Shabbat and Havdalah, Jewish symbols, Jewish values, T'fillah (Prayers), Shabbat Blessings, Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), weekly Torah portions and Hebrew Alphabet. Kindergarten students are honored at the beginning of the school year on Simchat Torah in a lovely Consecration ceremony during which students make the transition to more sophisticated Jewish learning.

**Content Areas:** Jewish Holiday Celebrations, Shabbat/Havdalah, Jewish Symbols, Jewish Values, T'fillah (Prayers), Shabbat Blessings, Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), Weekly Torah portions, Hebrew Alphabet.

**Big Ideas:**

1. Judaism offers us a variety of joyous holidays that we celebrate each year.
  2. Each Jewish holiday comes with its own traditions, foods, songs, prayers and lessons.
  3. Each week, we celebrate Shabbat, our sacred day of rest.
  4. Havdalah is a short but sweet ceremony we do to say goodbye to Shabbat and welcome in the new week.
  5. As Jewish people, it is important that we participate in Tikkun Olam (repairing the world).
  6. Each week, we read a special portion from the Torah.
  7. Hebrew is made up of letters that make different sounds.
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## **ISJL CURRICULUM OVERVIEW (Grades 1-7)**

The ISJL Education Curriculum is a **spiraled curriculum**, in which students revisit key content areas with increased sophistication as they progress through the curriculum. We continually update the curriculum not only to add content, but also to ensure it's in line with current educational best practices and ever-evolving pedagogical understanding.

The ten key content areas are: **Community, Culture and Symbols, God, Hebrew and Prayer, Israel, Jewish History, Jewish Holidays, Jewish Lifecycle Events, Mitzvot and Jewish Values, and TaNaKh (Torah, Prophets, and Writings).**

The curriculum is developmentally appropriate, nurturing students' Jewish identity, equipping students to live rich and meaningful lives. There are a variety of activities in each lesson that implement the idea that students have different learning styles. **Visual, Auditory and**

**Kinesthetic** learning activities are used throughout each lesson. Throughout the curriculum, students will continue to be exposed to these key content areas:

### **Community**

- By being part of the religious school experience, students will feel a particular pride for their heritage as southern Jews and identify with the larger American and global Jewish community.

### **Culture and Symbols**

- The ISJL curriculum provides students with the opportunity to experience the colorful culture of Judaism and the symbols. The students will develop a deeper understanding of Jewish culture as their religious school education builds.

### **God**

- Religious school is a place where students can openly discuss their thoughts and feelings about God. Students will learn that throughout history Jews have explored their relationship with God.

### **Hebrew and Prayer**

- During religious school students will have the ability to participate in synagogue prayer services and find personal meaning in them, recognizing Jewish worship as an essential facet of Jewish life and as an opportunity for self-discovery, self-assessment, and self-development.

### **Israel**

- Throughout the curriculum, students learn to identify with Israel as the Jewish homeland, understanding its history and recognizing our obligation to visit and support the State of Israel, and consider participating in an educational program there.

## **Jewish History**

- Students will develop a meaningful identification with Jews past and present through the study of Jewish history, culture, Hebrew language, liturgy, music, literature, arts, and texts.

## **Jewish Holidays**

- Whether it is with the entire religious school at an All School Program or in each grade, students will familiarize themselves with the many rituals and traditions that are celebrated during Jewish holidays.

## **Jewish Lifecycle Events**

- The spiraled curriculum allows students to mark the passages of time and seasons through Jewish lifecycle ceremonies using the symbols, rituals, prayers and traditions of their Jewish heritage.

## **Mitzvot and Jewish Values**

- The ISJL curriculum provides students with a chance to view *mitzvot*-both ritual and ethical-as opportunities to build a relationship with God.

## **TaNaKh (Torah, Prophets, and Writings)**

- Through the religious school experience, students will recognize that Jewish education is a lifelong endeavor, one that involves a critical and inquiring approach, whereby the process of questioning is as valued and important as the quest for answers.

## **First Grade**

The First Grade portion of the ISJL Curriculum focuses primarily on Jewish Holidays and מִצְוֹת (*mitz'vot*, commandments). The curriculum illuminates how מִצְוֹת (*mitz'vot*) play a role in daily life and continues to build the knowledge of Jewish holidays established in Kindergarten. Using the two main content areas as a backdrop, the lessons touch on the concept of God as well. The activities are designed to be developmentally appropriate, enabling the students to begin recalling information about the content they learned. In First Grade Hebrew, letter recognition continues from where students left off in the Kindergarten curriculum.

**Content Areas:** Hebrew & Prayers, Jewish Holidays, מִצְוֹת (*mitz'vot*) & Jewish Values, God

### **Big Ideas:**

1. מִצְוֹת (*mitz'vot*) are commandments that can be applied to our everyday lives.
2. God is a central part of Judaism and we all explore God in our own way.
3. Judaism is filled with many celebrations.
4. Hebrew is made up of letters that make different sounds.

## **Second Grade**

The Second Grade ISJL Curriculum focuses primarily on values, community, lifecycle, and Israel. The curriculum connects students to Israel by teaching about its people, places, and traditions. It explores life cycle events from birth through death, and how these rituals can build a meaningful Jewish life. It focuses on Jewish values, specifically kindness. Lastly, it familiarizes students with the synagogue/temple and the community it creates. Students also review Jewish holidays as they occur. Activities are designed to be developmentally appropriate, enabling the students to recall information about the content they learned in previous grades.

**Content Areas:** Community, Jewish Holidays, מצוות (*mitz'vot*) & Jewish Values, Hebrew and Prayer, Israel, Jewish Lifecycle Events

**Big Ideas:**

1. Judaism gives us many values by which to practice kindness and live our lives.
2. Jewish communities support us even though they may look different from one another.
3. Meaningful Jewish rituals enhance each part of the Jewish Lifecycle.
4. Israel is a welcoming country with its own customs, people, and places.
5. Hebrew is a language made of special characters that we can use to read, write, and pray.

**Third Grade**

The Third Grade ISJL Curriculum Spiral focuses primarily on God, תורה (*torah*, Torah [instruction/scroll of the five books of Moses]), מצוות (*mitz'vot*, commandments), Jewish values, and Jewish holidays. The curriculum explores Torah and investigates God through a different word or characteristic in several lessons. Every lesson connects students to a mitzvah or Jewish value of the week. Lastly, it familiarizes students with Jewish holidays through art. Activities are designed to be developmentally appropriate, enabling the students to recall information about the content they learned in previous grades.

**Content Areas:** Jewish Holidays, מצוות (*mitz'vot*) and Jewish Values, Hebrew and Prayer, God, Torah.

**Big Ideas:**

1. The Torah has many characters who can teach us an array of valuable lessons.

2. מצוות (*mitz'vot*, commandments) and Jewish values connect to Jewish Holidays.
3. Hebrew is a language made of special characters that we can use to read, write, and pray.
4. God can have a role in our everyday lives.

## **Fourth Grade**

As students continue to develop and grow in their Judaism, they will be guided to think critically about concepts such as God and Jewish text. This curriculum focuses on prophets found in the תנ"ך (*TaNakh*) by giving an overview of their actions and impact on Judaism. Through the lens of different Jewish holidays, students will explore God and the role that God plays in their lives. Holidays will be studied with increased sophistication to build on knowledge from previous years, as students learn the history of different Jewish holidays and the values they express.

**Content Areas:** God, Hebrew, Holidays, and תנ"ך (*TaNakh*, Torah, Prophets, and Writings/Hebrew Bible).

### **Big Ideas:**

1. Studying the prophets can teach many important lessons and Jewish values.
2. The Jewish people have a sacred partnership with God.
3. There are unique customs and values associated with each Jewish holiday.

## **Fifth Grade**

During the fifth grade, we see a clear maturation in students; they are ready and able to explore concepts of an intellectual and emotional nature. This curriculum meets their abilities and developmental stage with discussions, games, crafts, and activities focused on their own lives as Jewish people.

The students are taken on a “Jewish Journey” through the lens of eight important Jewish values. Students develop an understanding of these values and are asked to explore them in order to apply them to their lives.

Not only are these values the focus of their own unit, the lessons and guidance they provide are carried through to the units on the lifecycle and Israel.

The lifecycle unit concentrates on the entirety of the Jewish lifecycle, from birth to death. Students have the opportunity to discuss these milestones that link all Jews. Using a variety of sources, students continue to build a historic understanding of the land of Israel. By going on a remote tour of cities and regions in Israel, students are able to picture themselves there.

**Content Areas:** Hebrew and Prayer, Israel, Lifecycle, מִצְוֹת (*Mitz'vot*) and Jewish Values

### **Big Ideas:**

1. Jewish values help guide our behavior and inform our choices.
2. Our lives are journeys marked with events from the Jewish lifecycle.
3. Every Jew should have a knowledge of the modern State of Israel and the history of the land.
4. Jewish values help us connect to every aspect of Judaism, including the lifecycle and the State of Israel.

## **Sixth Grade**

As students continue to develop intellectually and spiritually, and as they begin to prepare to become בַּר (*bar*) or בַּת מִצְוָה (*bat mitz'vah*), they will delve deeply into Jewish sources to critically examine the Torah.

Every week, students will study either one or multiple Torah portions. The lessons follow the order of the Torah, beginning with Genesis and ending with Deuteronomy. As they read, students will use a worksheet to identify what we have established as five main themes in the Torah: Family Relations, Leadership, Miracles and Revelation, מִצְוֹת בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבֵרוֹ (*mitz'vot bein adam l'chaveiro*, mitz'vot between people and people), and מִצְוֹת בֵּין אָדָם לְמָקוֹם (*mitz'vot bein adam lamakom*, mitz'vot between people and God).

**Content Areas:** God, תנ"ך (TaNaKh): Torah

**Big Ideas:**

1. The Torah is a sacred text that can speak to us today.
2. There are themes that recur throughout the Torah that help us understand patterns in our history.
3. We interpret Jewish texts to look for meaning in our modern lives.
4. מצוות (*mitz'vot*) are commandments.
5. God established a covenant with the Jewish people and we continue to work as partners with God today.

**Seventh Grade**

With the students' increased maturity comes an ability to understand abstract concepts and to learn through processes of inquiry and discovery. The Seventh Grade curriculum responds to this intellectual, social, and emotional development. Through an in-depth exploration of the Prophets and Writings, the Seventh Grade Curriculum provides an opportunity for students to visualize their role in the greater community. As students prepare to become בְּנֵי מִצְוָה (*b'nei mitz'vah*, children of the commandment) they explore how closely connected prayer and service were for the prophets found in the Hebrew Bible. This curriculum contains an element of self-exploration in the form of several options for Long-Term Projects that allow students to become intimately connected to specific content areas. Students continue to develop their Hebrew reading skills and vocabulary, and learn to read and recite the Torah service and concluding prayers.

**Content Areas:** Community, Hebrew and Prayer, תנ"ך (TaNaKh): Prophets and Writings

**Big Ideas:**

1. Judaism values learning and service.
2. The prophets spoke out against injustice in their time and can guide us in our own times.
3. We have an obligation to act justly in our community and the world.
4. The Writings contain a variety of wisdom literature.

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## **Eighth and Ninth Grades Reinvented**

Kol HaKavod to our amazing students who choose to continue their Jewish education beyond B'nai Mitzvah! Jewish learning is forever, and here at Beth-El, we are revamping our 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade program to meet the needs and interests of our post-B'nai Mitzvah students. We will begin the school year with a powerful team-building experience where students will work together to build community and trust that will help guide them on their learning journey through the school year and beyond. Each Sunday morning will be divided into two parts: Core Class and Electives. Core Class will focus on a variety of key topics including Comparative Religion, Anti-Semitism, Holocaust, Israel and Social Justice. Students will select elective courses based on their personal interests several times throughout the school year. Elective choices include but are not limited to Jewish Food For The Soul (aka Jewish Cooking), Krav Maga (Israeli Self-Defense), Jewish Art, Jewish Ethics Through Harry Potter, and Jewish Adventures With Rabbi Zimmerman.

## **Confirmation**

Our 10<sup>th</sup> grade students are in for quite a treat! Rabbi Zimmerman and Red Goldstein co-teach this unforgettable year of Jewish learning and exploration complete with a one-of-a-kind interfaith dialogue, a Jewish Austin trip, individual confirmation projects and a powerfully memorable confirmation ceremony. Confirmation students will experience what promises to be a year of Jewish studies unlike any other year before!

If your teen did not attend 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> grade and is interested in attending Confirmation, the door is always open. We'd love to welcome your teen back!