

Intro to Halacha Mini-Color War

“Halacha Mini-Courses” at Kohelet Yeshiva High School

Last year, Kohelet Yeshiva High School piloted a new Halacha program called “Halacha Mini Courses”. Unlike in the past, when Gemara teachers had been given the responsibility to incorporate Halacha into their Gemara classes, students would now sign up for 4 different multi-age single-gender week-long Halacha mini-courses that were taught instead of Gemara that week. Each teacher was given two Halachic topics and would have to create two week-long courses. Each course would be taught twice - once to girls and once to boys. One of the topics that I chose was Hilchot Shabbat, specifically practical applications of the 39 Melachot.

The Idea behind Halacha Mini-Color War

Designing a week long course on Hilchot Shabbat was going to be a challenge. The 17 9th-12th grade boys who signed up for the course all had diverse levels of skills, motivation and religious commitment. There were 12th graders suffering from senioritis, some 9th graders who were coming from the advanced Gemara shiur, other students coming from a lower level Gemara shiur with limited Hebrew skills and other less motivated students who were not afraid to say that Jewish studies were not their favorite subjects.

I wanted to find a way to create an environment where every student, no matter his background, could learn and experience the what and the why of some of the 39 melachot that they encounter on a weekly basis. This is when I thought of color war, which had happened a few weeks earlier at Kohelet. Color war at Kohelet is one of the highlights of the year for many students. Color war empowers students to take risks without fear of losing grades, fosters teamwork and collaboration among diverse peer groups, and creates a high level of school spirit and energy - exactly the environment my students needed in order to achieve the course goals. I starting taking some of the games student know and love from color war and tinkering with them to give them a

Hilchot Shabbat-twist. Color war games became IBL(Inquiry Based Learning) units where students would have to learn practical halachot in order to win. I could use color war points to motivate students to read sources and brief articles, prepare and deliver divrei Torah, and experience real-world applications of Hilchot Shabbat in a way that I couldn't have achieved without the competitive nature of color war. I divided the roster into 3 teams of 5-6 students, strategically choosing 2 captains for each team.

Break-out

Here is what I shared with the students immediately after Halacha Mini-Color War (henceforth known as HMCW) break-out:

Welcome to HMCW!!			
Team Names	מלאכה Melacha	שביתה Shvita	מלאכת מחשבת Melecheth Machshevet
Team Captains	<i>Student names</i>	<i>Student names</i>	<i>Student names</i>
Roster	<i>Student names</i>	<i>Student names</i>	<i>Student names</i>
How this is actually going to work (and it will):			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Absolutely necessary from ALL of you: Incredible competitive energy and unbridled motivation to learn practical Hilchot Shabbat in a fun and unique way!!! 2. We will be learning Hilchot Shabbat this week and the Halachot/concepts learned this week will be assessed through fun and competitive events and games. 			

3. Grand Prize: 100% in the class (though slackers on winning teams will get lower scores)
4. 2nd and 3rd place will get 95 - as long as everyone is invested, competing in their events, doing all the work required, etc.
5. There will be rubrics and/or handouts for most events in order to assess your Halachic knowledge
6. Sometimes there will be sources for you to help you prepare, sometimes you will need to search for your own sources.
7. Every day there will be around 2 events - every team member will be required to take an active role in at least one of the events. Otherwise points will be deducted.
8. Team Colors - wear during HMC class (wear your CW T-shirt or a T-shirt of your choice!)

Just a quick note on #3 and 4: Students are supposed to receive a grade at the end of the week-long course, and all 4 Halacha mini-course grades are averaged into about 10% of a student's Gemara grade. As you will see, the games and competitions were designed in a way that if you took them seriously and competed to win, which almost 100% of the students did, you had to master the halachot we were learning. It was easy for me, as judge, to assess their knowledge and gauge their level of participation while we were playing. After teaching this course twice, there were only 2 cases where I had to lower a student's grade because of a lack of participation in the events.

Attached Documents, pictures and videos

I attached the following files to my entry:

- 2_HMCW Schedule of Events
- 3_Short summary of games/events

- 4_ Example of KahooTorah Bowl readings
 - Links to Kahoots:
 - KahooTorah Bowl #1
 - KahooTorah Bowl #2
 - KahooTBT Chazara Bowl
- 5_Hungry Hungry Halachic Hippos
- 6_Iron Shabbat Chef
 - Pictures and videos
- 7_Minute to Win It
 - YouTube videos explaining games
- 8_Amazing Shabbat Race
 - Pictures and videos
- 9_Chayav Patur Mutar
- 10_Reflection
- HMCW Virtual Scoreboard (Google Sheets file)