



# **From Slavery to Freedom - מעבודת לחירות**

*A Toronto Heschel School Grade 5 Integrated Unit*

## **Context and Background**

### **About the Toronto Heschel School**

The Toronto Heschel School is a pluralistic Jewish Day School in Toronto, Canada. It has over 270 students (Junior Kindergarten through Grade Eight) from Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, non-affiliated, and secular families. Jewish thinking and ethics are integrated throughout the curriculum to deepen learning, enrich school culture and inspire social responsibility. In the spirit of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, our students are encouraged to think about global issues through a Jewish lens, and to take a "leap of action," for Tikkun Olam.

### **Integrated "Big Ideas" Curriculum**

At The Toronto Heschel School we believe that when we integrate Judaic studies with General studies, we add credence and value to the Jewish learning in the eyes of our young students. They come to experience their Jewish learning and knowledge as an intrinsic part of their day, in stride with and not isolated from the wider world of learning. When they see that Jewish values are inherent in universal values and reciprocally that universal values are reflected in Jewish traditions, our students begin to see their whole world fit together; both authenticity and relevance are part of their education.

An integrated curriculum intentionally helps the students learn through multiple contexts and varied methodologies in one coordinated framework. We find that this is best achieved through focus on an overarching "big idea" (generative topic) that students can relate to as they engage in all areas of their study. The Big Ideas integrate various subjects or disciplines, in a way that enhances the value of studying the theme in particular as well as deepening the learning in the various disciplines.

### **The Living Haggadah: A Pesach Spiral Curriculum**

An exemplar of the Integrated, Big Idea approach of the Toronto Heschel School is our "Living Haggadah" curriculum. The Living Haggadah is a spiral curriculum that comprises units of study from Kindergarten to Grade Six. Each year, children at The Toronto Heschel School approach this core text and narrative of the Jewish people from a different perspective, using diverse forms of expression. Consistent with the Toronto Heschel School's approach to interdisciplinary learning, the Living Haggadah curriculum is learned in a variety of subject domains, differently each year: these include not only the traditional Jewish subjects such as Hebrew and Torah, but also Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Music, Visual Arts, and Dance.

In each grade, the approach to the Haggadah is informed by a Big Idea, or Generative Topic, that reveals a new dimension of the journey from Slavery to Freedom. In Grade One students compare



the hiddenness of God in the Purim story with the different ways God is revealed to Moshe and the Jewish people through both the amazing events and human actions of the Pesach story. In Grade Two, where students learn about children around the world, different Jewish traditions of celebrating Pesach come to life in the Haggadah from Around the World; In Grade Three students create a Chalutzim Haggadah that compares the experience of Chalutzim who worked the land to become a free people in Israel with the journey to Freedom of Bnai Israel; In Grade Four a Hebrew grammar unit on questions becomes the pretext to create a Haggadah of Many Questions.

By Grade Five and Grade Six, students are ready to engage in more complex approaches to the Haggadah – both thematically and through an integrated curriculum. In Grade Six, students focus on the relationship between freedom and environmental responsibility. Students design and conduct an Eco-Seder that foregrounds environmental and ecological themes present in each stage of the Haggadah. The Eco-Seder is developed through learning activities in math, science, visual arts, and language arts allowing Jewish content to be infused in general studies learning.

## Current Submission

### **Grade 5 Living Haggadah Curriculum**

The Grade 5 Living Haggadah curriculum, which is the focus of this submission, is called The Dramatized Haggadah, but as you will see involves far more than just drama. Based on a close study of Sefer Shemot, the book of Exodus, the Grade 5 Dramatized Haggadah is based on the following Big Idea or Generative Topic:

מי היוצא מעבדות לחרות - המבחין בנס ועונה לו

Who goes out from slavery to freedom?

One who understands the meaning of a miracle and responds to its call.

By studying the Exodus narrative through the lens of this generative topic, students come to understand miracles such as the burning bush, Hamakkot – the plagues, or the parting of Yam Suf, not as isolated, irregular events – but as signs revealed those to those who might understand and respond to them as opportunities to advance the cause of freedom. Viewing Exodus and the Haggadah through this more sophisticated lens allows students to see a deeper ethical meaning in the Pesach story, and to apply this meaning to their own lives as well as to the experiences of others.



Included in this submission are teaching materials and evidence of student learning from the following disciplines: Chumash/Torah study, Visual Arts, Hebrew language, Dance, Music, Language Arts and Social Science. Learning in all disciplines contributes to the final project, the Dramatized Haggadah performance.



## Torah (Chumash)

The uniqueness of The Toronto Heschel School approach to integration is how serious text-based study is deepened by thematic study of Big Ideas. The Grade 5 Living Haggadah is rooted in focussed and rigorous text-based study of Sefer Shemot, The Book of Exodus. Students read the original text of Sefer Shemot, without translation, in an Ivrit b'Ivrit environment. Students develop the ability to independently read and understand the text using a variety of classic and innovative tools such as identifying phrase breaks indicated by cantillations, using biblical to modern Hebrew word lists, answering guiding questions, learning relevant biblical grammar, and referring to Rashi and other classic parshanut.

Student time-on-task is maximized through a structured approach to chaveruta study, which ensures that each student is engaged directly with the text a majority of the time.

After mastering the peshat- the plain meaning of the texts, the students look more closely at the text using innovative approaches that enhance understanding, encourage interpretation and plant the seeds for art-integrated projects.

One of these approaches is to look at the text as a series of “knots and loops.” Knots are those moments in the story where the path to freedom narrows, tightens, and is blocked. Loops are those moments in the story where opportunities for freedom open up. For instance, students may regard the rising of a new king in Egypt who didn't know Yosef as the first “knot” in the Jewish experience in Egypt. By contrast, the courage and awe of the midwives who refused to listen to the King may be understood as a “loop” in the path to freedom. By engaging with the text through this reading strategy of looking for knots and loops, the students simultaneously demonstrate their understanding of specific pasukim and phrases, while at the same time offering their own interpretations of the path from slavery to freedom.

Identifying and demarcating the text as a series of knots and loops is more than just a reading strategy. As students build their collection of verses that refer to knots and verses that refer to loops, they are assembling the textual material that will serve as the basis for a textile art project later in the year.

Work for the culminating Dramatized Haggadah begins in the Torah class. As a culminating task for each section of Sefer Shemot, students work in chaveruta to write, in Hebrew, a script that dramatizes key sections of the Exodus story. These scripts are later performed as a dramatization of the Maggid section of the Haggadah. While the scenes are written in modern Hebrew, the students are asked to include at least one key verse from the Torah text itself, which is chanted with the appropriate Torah cantillations adding a choral touch to each dramatized scene.



Included in the Chumash packet are examples of reference material and guided worksheets that explore the first Big Idea explored in Sefer Shmot: אדם / אדם ירא משמ"י הוא אדם חפץ חיים / A person who is in awe of God is a person who desires life.



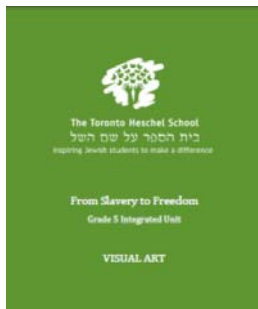
## Visual Arts

The Art room at The Toronto Heschel School is a place where students have an opportunity to integrate and express the Big Ideas that they have been learning across the disciplines. Art forms, materials and projects are carefully chosen to reflect and reinforce the Big Ideas being learned.

To engage with topic of the Journey from Slavery to Freedom in a tactile way, students learn the art of knot tying and macramé. Rope and knot-making are the ideal materials and medium through which to depict a journey that has a beginning and an end, and yet which is hardly straight and simple line. Working with this medium offers the students an opportunity to engage with materials and forms not usually encountered in a traditional art class.

Students bring with them to the art room a record of the knots and loops that they discovered when they read from the Torah about Bnai Israel's journey from Slavery to Freedom in Egypt. After studying a number of classic knots, and experimenting with some of their own, each student selects verses from the Torah to express through a series of knots and loops. Students then weave the verse itself, written in Hebrew on a ribbon, into the artwork.

The resulting collection of textile artwork and embedded Torah text becomes the backdrop for the multi-arts culminating performance of the Dramatized Haggadah.



Included in the Visual Arts packet are photos of the completed macramé weavings, as well as photos of a few artists' statements about the meaning behind their completed work.



## Hebrew Language

The Maggid tells the story of the Exodus, but of course there is much more to the Haggadah than just the Pesach narrative. The Grade 5 Dramatized Haggadah is a presentation of each of the 15 parts of the Seder: Kadesh, Urchatz, karpas, Yachatz.. Etc... Each section is presented in a unique way, through dramatic dialogue, dance, or song.

The dramatic scenes of the Haggadah are developed through a specially designed Grade 5 Hebrew Language Program. The program is designed around the premise that language learning involves the reiteration of key phrases and language patterns. This approach enables the students to learn and internalize key grammar and vocabulary, and then apply their learning to creatively interpret the steps of the haggadah.

For example, in the section Urchatz, which focuses on water, students learn a midrash that points to the special relationship Miriam had with water. Students then write short imaginative dialogues between Miriam and the different forms of water – such as the Nile, a well, and the Red Sea-- that are significant in the Exodus story. Students combine specific verbs related to speech-- speak, whisper, cry, laugh-- with adjectives describing qualities of speech-- such as soft, loud, gentle – to build their dialogues. The result is that the students write well-constructed sentences using key vocabulary that form the basis of the dramatic scene that later becomes part of the performance.

Many of the parts of the Dramatized Haggadah are developed using this framework for second language learning that provides key grammatical structures and vocabulary as the framework through which to write creative, interpretative pieces. Using this method, the students write dialogues for several sections of the Haggadah including: Kadesh, Urchatz, Carpas, Yachatz, Maror/ Korekh, as well as Arabat Habanim. These dialogues become the skeleton of the Dramatized Haggadah performance – a performance of approximately 90 minutes, which is presented to parents entirely in Hebrew.

The Toronto Heschel School places a premium on oral and dramatic Hebrew expression, which we believe instills a sense of confidence and deep linguistic identity in students.



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HEBREW

Included in the Hebrew language packet are many of the guided worksheets that take the students through the different sections of the Haggadah and help them create the scripts that they will present.



## Dance

At the Toronto Heschel School we believe in the many expressive languages of children. We also believe that children need opportunities to move and use their bodies as part of their learning. In each grade from 5-8, all students participate in a weekly dance class for approximately half the year. Dance helps students develop their coordination, rhythm, flexibility and cardiovascular fitness. As an integral part of the curriculum, the classes involve all students in the grade, not just those who have previous dance experience or take dance classes outside of school.

In Grade 5, the students learn the basic elements of dance, and then apply their knowledge as they choreograph dances based on two texts from the Haggadah: Betzeit Israel (from the section “Hallel”) and Shir Ha’ma’lot (from the section “Barekh”). Key words from each text are used to build a movement vocabulary. For instance יסוב לאחור (the river turned backwards) might refer to a turn or a reversal, while ההרים – the mountains- indicates a change in levels.

Students study the Hebrew texts, jotting down ideas for particular movements, level changes, and shifts in energy or emotion. They then use their dance vocabulary and elements of dance to create original movement interpretations of these two texts.



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Included in this submission is a link to a video clip in the Dramatized Haggadah performance with the two dances that were choreographed and performed by the students.



## Music

Music is another form of artistic expression integrated into the Grade 5 Dramatized Haggadah. In Grade 5, students help compose an original rendition of Mah Nishtana. As well, they work closely together to arrange sounds from a variety of instruments, and by doing so they create imaginative and meaningful soundscapes of Eser Hamakkot – The Ten Plagues.

As with the macrame and dance programs, the process for expressing the plagues through sound begins by reading the original text through the lens of the art-form. When students encounter the Makkot texts in their Torah class, they do so by considering how each of the Makkot might have sounded. For each section of the text describing one of the Makkot, the students receive a soundscape identification sheet. Students read the verses of the text carefully looking for words that might suggest a sound. For instance, the phrase “כבד לב פרעה” – “Pharaohs Heart was hardened,” might suggest the strong hard beat of a drum or the crash of a cymbal. Students record the “sonic phrases” from each verse along with the type of instrument that could be used to make this sound.

The students bring their Makkot-Soundscape sheets to the music room and use them to arrange their Makkot Sound-scapes.



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Included in the submission are links to video clips from the final performance of the students singing their version of Mah Nishtanah, as well as their musical depiction of the Ten Plagues.



## Language Arts and Social Science

The final major integrated component of the Grade 5 Living Haggadah Program is a study of the novel *Underground to Canada* by Barbara Smucker. *Underground to Canada* recounts the experiences of Julilly, an African-American slave, who along with several other escaped slaves, makes the perilous journey through the Underground Railroad to Canada. The novel emphasizes the courage of Julilly, her friends, and those who helped them in their journey from Slavery to Freedom.

The *Underground to Canada* novel study is a component of the Grade 5 Language Arts and Social Science curriculum. Students study the novel by gathering in Reading Circles during meetings that are referred to as “Station Meetings.” Station meetings are opportunities for students to discuss the novel, share knowledge and reflections, and take responsibility for their own learning. Students alternate between different roles at each station meeting, and prepare for these roles by completing tasks related to chapters that were assigned for reading. Roles include the Conductor, the Passenger, the Preacher, the Fly on the Wall, and the Storyteller.

Characters from the Underground Railroad also make guest appearances in the Dramatized Haggadah performance. They introduce many of the scenes and make connections between their experiences and the aspects of the Exodus narrative that are presented in the upcoming scene.



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LANGUAGE ARTS AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCE

Included in the Language Arts and Social Science packet are many of the reference materials and worksheets that guide the students through their study of the novel and provide historical context to understand the book and the events surrounding slavery of African Americans.





## A Seder Plate for Julilly Project

The culminating performance of understanding of the Novel Study challenges students to make analogies between two journeys from Slavery to Freedom: The experiences of Julilly and her friends on the Underground Railroad and the experiences of Bnai Israel during Yetziat Mitzrayim.

The integrative tool for this analogy is the Seder Plate – the centre piece of the Seder Table that holds the key symbols of the Pesach story. Drawing on the model of the Seder Plate, students are asked to imagine what symbols of slavery and freedom would appear on a Seder Plate that commemorated the experience of Julilly and her friends. Students are required to choose 5 key symbols and to create a model of a Seder plate depicting these symbols.

Students then compose a 3-5 page “Artist Statement” that describes their choice of symbols, the relevance of each symbol to particular passages in *Underground to Canada*, and a parallel verse from the Torah that makes the association between the two journeys from Slavery to Freedom.

	<p>Included in the Seder Plate for Julilly packet is the outline of this project, many samples of students' creations and artist statements, and the assessment tool for the project.</p>
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## Dramatized Haggadah Performance

The Dramatized Haggadah Performance brings all of the students' learning together through a multi-sensory presentation of the Haggadah in Hebrew, with guest appearances from the characters from the *Underground to Canada*.

	<p>Included in the Dramatized Haggadah packet are video clips from the performance in April 2016, as well as links to the performance in its entirety. Also included is the programme handed out at the performance and sample Hebrew scripts from two parts of the performance, Kadesh, which explores the colours and shapes of slavery and freedom, and Urchatz, which dramatizes conversations students' imagine Miriam having with the water.</p>
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