KOHELET PRIZE APPLICATION

THE JEWISH ACADEMY OF SUFFOLK COUNTY

THE NEW AMERICAN ACADEMY MODEL

“INTERDISCIPLINARY INTEGRATION”

**Interdisciplinary Unit: Reflection**

*Fundamental to the JA/TNAA model, is team reflection. Nowhere is this more important than in weaving the many facets of curriculum together into one almost seamless unit.*

Due to the importance of reflection to our overall TNAA model, we chose it as the theme of our first unit. Reflection is defined in multiple ways, and our team has chosen to weave it throughout our curriculum using the definitions, “serious thought or consideration” and “an idea about something, especially one that is written down or expressed”. These ideas about reflection are seen in every classroom throughout all grades in the school. We chose this topic specifically to help set the tone for the year for the teachers, students, and parents. Since reflection is so important in everyday life and helps us all to improve upon ourselves as readers, writers, scientists, mathematicians, and of course as members of the Jewish community the skills and strategies learned in this unit will continue throughout all units.

**Our Process**

As a team, we brainstorm prior to each of our five units of study during the year. Our challenge is how to integrate all disciplines underneath one *‘essential question’* across all grades.

This year’s first *essential question* was *How do your reflections impact yourself and others?* In sync with the New Year, the theme of reflection also focuses on rebirth, new beginnings, and atonement. Underneath this broad umbrella were topics relating to Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, reading and writing about informational texts, writing fictional narratives, scientific research on animal habitats, and human impact on the environment. After the themes were developed by our team we began drilling down on specific ideas for each grade band.

As you will see, we integrate in several ways:

1. within a broad theme
2. the connecting of topics throughout multiple subjects
3. between academic subjects through strategies and skills.

During the process of developing the grade-band specific projects and curricula, each team member brings resources and ideas that are developmentally appropriate for the group. We ask team members questions which deepen our thinking around the connections to Yahadut, Judaic law, and general content. Similarly, we ask questions that keep our focus on student engagement, integration, connections to the real world, all while using the Common Core Standards as a guide. This collaborative climate is imperative to integrating curriculum and becoming truly interdisciplinary.

Finally, we integrate our unit theme into morning Tefillah as well as our Shabbat Assembly on Fridays through the guidance of our Head of School. We reflect on events such as 9/11 or current events such as water contamination on Long Island or the recent election process and events. Students learn first, that they have a voice. They learn how to listen deeply and respectfully to others and how to share their own thoughts and ideas. On Fridays we focus on the weekly Parsha. Students are guided in their preparation, and then share their findings with peers at the Shabbat Assembly through student led discussion or skits. This reflection on the Parsha and our learnings about the Parsha allows for deeper understanding of learning a lesson.

In addition, woven throughout the curriculum are ways we can give back to our community. Students created bird houses, held a memorial service for the anniversary of the loss of a classmate, created placemats for the Suffolk County JCC’s patrons, and visited the Gurwin Geriatric Center next door, bi-monthly. We do this all through the lens of reflecting on how our actions impact ourselves and others. We recognized that when we bring joy into others lives this also brings joy into our own. Through our reflections we also recognize that when we give back to our community this may change someone’s day, week, or month for the better.

Keeping our school parents in the loop is essential. Upon completion of each of our five units we host a Curriculum Celebration. Parents are invited to school to experience the learning that took place throughout the unit. Students become the teachers - an opportunity for empowerment.

This past Curriculum Celebration started with one group performing an original play about the rainforest. There was a walk-through Gallery for parents. Parents were asked to interact with the kids who were ‘stationed’ at their projects. Students used their newly acquired expertise to teach parents what they learned, which also lent itself to them having the opportunity to practice the speaking and listening skills they acquired during the unit. For example, they explained how they wrote a story in Hebrew about saying they were sorry, presented about the environmental impact of the expanding towns in Long island, and described the characteristics of the Arctic fox and its habitat of the polar region.

Following is an overview of how our essential question ‘**How do your reflections impact yourself and others?’** found expression in each grade level in the three ways that we integrate.

**K-2nd Grade Students**

Students read about and discussed the Yamim Noraim. They learned about and experienced the traditions, prayers, foods, and laws. They composed books in Hebrew and in English. A field trip as a school to Wickham Farm brought the ‘routine’ apples & honey discussion to life, and they experienced this both through the eyes of a scientist and in connection to Jewish law.

We learned about bees in flight and the laws of grafting (animals and) fruits as well as how we can eat the apples only after three years. Upon return the Students wrote a class book. They first wrote in small groups practicing their narrative writing skills. Next, as a whole group they brought group storylines together to create one story line for the group, polishing their teamwork skills as well as strategies to revise and edit a story to make it flow to a reader. Finally, an online book titled, “The Mystery of Apples and Honey (A Story About Bees and Seeds)” was printed. The book will be sold on Amazon through Createspace. Thus a prime example of how Science, Judaics, and literacy all came together!

Another way we experienced reflection was through the eyes of a scientist. Taking what we learned on our field trip and in science class about the habitat of the Rainforest we created a play. Entitled, “A Trip to the Rainforest” , it helped us to showcase our learning about the different layers of the rainforest as well as the many animals that rainforest visitors would encounter. We created our own props, scenery and costumes, revised and edited lines during our practice, and finally performed for the parents and older students at our Reflection Curriculum Celebration. We integrated the reading genre of plays along with our reflections as scientists and artists.

One last experience was the authoring of books written in Hebrew on the connection between Yom Kippur and saying ‘we are sorry’. During Elul, we learned about reflecting on our actions, apologizing to our friends, and asking for forgiveness when necessary. We read Hebrew stories as examples of saying *slicha/*I’m sorry. We discussed how reflecting would help us in similar situations. We used our learnings about Hebrew sentence structure to write our very own Hebrew book; rough drafts which were edited and revised. Finally we published our books and added pictures to engage the readers.

**Standards**

**K/2.SL.2** Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.

**K.RL. 2** With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.

**2.RL.7** Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

**K/2. RI.1** With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

**2.W.3** Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.

**2.W.5** With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.

**2.W.8** Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

**3rd-5th Grade Students**

At the onset of the unit, students learned about a few different habitats by researching some of the more common ones, and they then presented what they learned to the class. One form of reflection here is reflecting on our learning as a scientist to create the diorama in science and the field guide in literacy. Each student chose a habitat to research further. They took notes about the animals and plants, the features of the land, and the food chain of their chosen habitat. They learned how to research, quote, paraphrase, and cite information. They looked at the interactions of beavers with trees, plants, animals, and the overall environment as a guide for their research. As their research expanded, they also began to develop ideas for their own dioramas.

At the beginning of the unit we started with short writing about texts. They reflected on their writing and noticed there were improvements that needed to be made. As they connected their writing to science they began writing scientific field guides that described the animals they researched in science and literacy. During their study of writing informational texts, they learned about creating catchy titles, using paragraphing structure that includes reasons and facts to support their main idea statement, and ways to find and source photographs that are connected to the paragraph. During the process they integrated these learnings into the creation of the field guide. We continued creating dioramas by using a drawing as a plan, determining the materials needed, and making replicas of the plants and animals that inhabit the ecosystem. Finally, a field guide was published. Students were ready to discuss the wonderful world animals live in.

Another way we learned about reflection was in our Elul unit. We learned that scientists reflect on their learning by merging what they thought they knew about a topic with their new knowledge to create new learnings and ideas. This is the same way we prepare for the New Year. We reflect on our behavior from the past year, reflect on what we want to fix, and come up with resolutions for the new year.

We read Hebrew stories, in both *Ivrit*  and English, as examples of personal reflections that led the characters to apologize and correct their actions. We then discussed how reflecting would help us in similar scenarios. We concluded that there would need to be a two step process - an *initial* reflection that brings us to realize that a behavior needs to be changed and then a *concluding* reflection to assess how much we improved.

Through focusing on four basic sentence structures in Hebrew we were able to write a Hebrew book in *Ivrit*. Each student thought of a true scenario and wrote their own experience "choshev/choshevet" (literally thinking) reflecting and correcting their actions. The students created rough drafts, revised, edited, and published their books.

**Standards:**

**3/4/5.RI.1** Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**3/4/5.RI.2** Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

**3/4/5.RI.3** Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

**3/4/5.RI.4** Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 5 topic or subject area*.

**3/4/5.RI.9**  Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

**3/4/5.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.**

**3/4/5.W.2.A** Introduce a topic clearly, provide a general observation and focus, and group related information logically; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

**3/4/5.W.2.B** Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.

**3/4/5.W.2.C** Link ideas within and across categories of information using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., *in* *contrast*, *especially*).

**3/4/5.W.2.D** Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

**3/4/5.W.2.E** Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented.

**6th - 8th grade Students**

Our unit was based on the study of reading and writing informational texts in literacy, science, and Judaics. We studied many different types of mediums and topics such as the presidential election, the Nobel Prize in Literature, research around the human impact on the environment when building a city, and quotes related to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Through the lens of reflection, we analyzed these texts in our different classes and ask asked ourselves the questions, *how do the actions of others impact us and our community?* and *how are our actions impacted others and ourselves?* The answers to these questions led to many thoughts around change, problem solving, and taking a deeper look within ourselves. The thoughts then manifested through written reflections in literacy, Judaics and a Google Slide project on the topic of human impact on the environment.

Throughout the process we learned about and practiced writing from both an objective and subjective standpoint. In addition, we determined the criteria for quality sources, tried out various ways to annotate texts, determined central ideas, and summarized these ideas objectively. From start to finish, we revised and edited, using proper paragraphing structure and began our work on learning to cite textual evidence. As we reflected on these learnings we integrated these writing and research skills through the creation of a quote-analyzing Google slide presentation, research on the impact of a growing Long Island and solutions that may help decrease the negative impact, and also used these skills in the essays on the individual understandings of the Parsha.

In the essays we wrote about their reflections on how the lessons pertained to them, in addition they created a way to present the reflections that reflected their personalities (some created artwork, others designed Google Slide presentations). These reflections needed to contain at least two other sources for each week’s Parsha. This added in the element of research as well as reading about different interpretations of the Parsha in turn giving students the opportunity to reflect on these accounts and to develop their own.

One way we reflected on our impact on society was to imagine that we were environmental consultants, and our company was contacted to research and report the major impact of building a new town on our existing ecosystem in Suffolk County. Our job was to research the effects that building a town has on this existing ecosystem, for example: deforestation, water contamination, pollution, etc. Each student was assigned an area to research. We researched the general effects of one of these topics, the effects in relation to urbanization, the effects in relation to Long Island, and then we proposed solutions to lessen the impact of building a new town. After researching we each created a Google Slide presentation based on the findings. Finally, we reorganized and combined our results to make a comprehensive presentation, showing the impacts and the proposed solutions of building a new town in our ecosystem.

**Standards:**

**6/8.RI.1** Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**6/8.RI.2** Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

**6/8.RI.3** Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

**6/8.RI.6** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

**6/8.W.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

**6/8.W.2.A** Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

**6/8.W.2.B** Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

**6/8.W.2.C** Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.

**6/8.W.2.D** Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

**6/8.W.2.E** Establish and maintain a formal style.

**6/8.W.2.F** Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

**Our Reflections on the Process and Unit**

In our review of the unit during the past few weeks we learned about some of the strengths and struggles of the unit. Our review process entails us gaining feedback from the students through short responses, essays, and in class discussions. In addition, as a team we reflect on the unit by looking at the goals from the unit in conjunction with the student work and we discuss our own struggles and strengths from the unit.

“I learned a lot about the ecosystem and pollution...while we did a lot of research I want more interactive labs in the next unit”. - 8th Grade

“I liked demonstrating the biological interaction between my two animals. However, I would have liked to have spend more time on researching this interaction so that my diorama could have added more precision to my project”. - 5th Grade

“When I made my Hebrew book, I learned how to write script Hebrew”. - 2nd grade

“My scientific reflections impact myself because I have learned how to gather information and then present it. I can now collect different information… This impacts others because they can use my presented material and base their own works on mind… because I presented my work in a presentable fashion.” - 5th grade

“The lesson I learned (from the readings on Noach) was to stay who you are and not let your emotions change you. If you let yourself out of control people will not look at you the same. This changed my schema by the ways I react to things and unwanted news. Now I reflect on this story and I reflect on my actions for the better from this valuable story.” - 8th grade

“My favorite part of science this was when we were making the setting for the Rainforest Play. it looked like I was in a real rainforest!” - 2nd grade

“Working on my Hebrew fluency worked for me. Translating Hebrew didn’t work for me, because I don’t know many of the words”. - 6th grade

“Being in the play was cool. I showed what I knew”. - 2nd grade

“What worked for me is doing skits to remember what we did. What didn’t work for me is the amount of Hebrew, you should use more English.” - 3rd grade

“Using Aleph Champ is my favorite part of the class” - 3rd grade

“Using mentor sentences and reflecting on reading through responses is helpful” - 3rd grade

“Creating the diorama worked for me, because of adding in art. I like art”. - 3rd grade

“ I reflected on the beginning and now. Now I can write longer, because of the reading responses”. - 4th grade

“Reflecting on what we did during Yom Kippur and writing about it really helped me understand the connection”. - 4th grade

“Becoming an author was amazing, we created our work together and then reflected on it and made it better”. - 2nd grade

As we reviewed the students comments, we began to see some themes.

**Strengths**

* Reflecting on reading and writing was helpful to students and they saw progress and improvement in these areas
* The use of art (dioramas, skits, plays) helped students to internalize their learning
* Students were able to transfer the knowledge for one class and use it in another class.
* The connection made between the dioramas and the field guides gave way for teacher development to take place, for students to see that their work was impacted and connected across content, and made the unit stronger to show student learning in multiple ways (research, writing, building)
* Judaics and writing with the 6th-8th graders interpreting texts and quotes, reflecting on texts and have text based discussions was helpful in teacher and student learning to see the connection across subjects.

**Struggles**

* The integration in science and literacy was clear to the students in reference to learning about habitats and reading and writing about the interactions. While it was clear to the teachers the idea of reflecting as scientists and as readers and writers, it was not as explicit to the students.
* Some of the projects were introduced mid-unit we need to introduce them at the onset of the unit to help kids make the connection to the theme throughout.
* Finding the time to touch base about daily changes in lessons that may impact another class. (We changed our team meetings to now have a short period where we do a check in around this topic.)
* The 8th graders have been exposed to years of education where the teacher is in the front of the room and where the teacher holds all the knowledge. We are teaching in a way that they need to empower themselves and are taught the research skills and are asked to develop the content. This is very new and they are pushing back on not having frontal teaching all of the time.

With reflection being the theme of our first unit, as well as an ingrained part of who we are as a school and an organization, we leave you with these quotes to reflect on.

## **“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” Albert Einstein**

## **“One question is always relevant: How can I use this to move forward?” Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller.**