

Carmel Academy Mitzvah Math

Carmel Academy's mission statement:

Carmel Academy is an educational institution that stretches each child's intellect and creativity; that is passionate about Jewish identity and values; that is committed to the betterment of our world and a strong bond with the State of Israel. Our faculty models it ... our students live it.

Our third grade Mitzvah Math project, which includes interdisciplinary integration as well as real world learning, is a 6-week unit that embodies our mission statement, from stretching the intellect and creativity of our third graders to the betterment of our world. Our students "live it" every step of the way, and then become role models for our school, the greater community, and even the subject of an "ELI" talk by Rabbi Shai Held from Mechon Hadar. (see attached YouTube video)

Below is a timeline of events that encompass this project.

Early November:

During a social studies lesson, the teachers introduce the broad concept of "needs vs. wants." As the discussion ensues, we create a chart of what children around the world truly *need* in order to live, such as nutritious food, health care, education, and shelter. Then we create a second chart, as students eagerly generate of list of what children *want*, including toys, games, and technology. We conclude this discussion by talking about children in general and especially those close to home who are less fortunate than us. As a grade, the children begin to create their own ideas as to how they could help kids in need get some things they *want* during the holiday season.

At this point, we introduce the third graders to Camp Sunrise in Pearl River, NY. This camp, a program of the Freidberg JCC (a beneficiary agency of the UJA Federation of New York) provides a totally free camp experience to children with cancer and their siblings. In December, Camp Sunrise hosts a camp reunion and the teachers suggest that Sunrise campers might be the lucky recipients of our tzedakah project if we could provide them with some new toys and games around the holiday time.

Late November:

Just after Thanksgiving break, students and teachers begin a 21-day at-home read-a-thon. Children take responsibility for reading 15 minutes each day and they make an "X" on their own personal calendar page to verify they have read. Simultaneously, a letter is sent home to the parents (see attached) explaining the project and asking them to "sponsor" their child's reading with a \$1 per day.

Mid-December:

After the read-a-thon is complete, all the money earned is collected at school. The first true evidence of our children's commitment toward this project is when we far surpass our goal of \$20 per student. Above and beyond their reading challenge money, they bring in dollars and coins from their allowance, their home tzedakah boxes, and even money they raised from lemonade and brownie sales. Teachers make contributions as well and we find ourselves with bags and bags of coins.

During our most anticipated, hands-on, and fun math class of the year, we spread all the coins and dollars on the floor to sort. First, students use their estimation skills to give an educated guess as to the total amount of money collected. Then the counting begins (see photos). Students are put into groups and once the coins are counted, we write the totals for each type of coin and all the bills on the whiteboard. Then we switch the groups and re-count everything to ensure we did it correctly.

Finally, we use front-end estimation to get an idea of the grand total (see photo) and then we actually add it up together. It's with great excitement we divide the total amount of money collected by the number of pairs of students going to the toy store. When the students find out that each pair of "shoppers" will have upwards of \$50 to spend on toys for the Sunrise campers, they are excited and so very proud.

Third week in December:

We schedule our field trip to The Learning Express Toy Store in Rye, New York. Prior to boarding the bus, the teachers reiterate the shopping mission:

1. The Sunrise campers are from 5-16 years old, so students should choose games and toys that are age-appropriate.
2. Students may not spend over their "budget," so they must continually estimate the total cost and stay within their budget before they arrive at the cash register to pay.
3. While we are at the store, we represent Carmel Academy as *ambassadors*. We brainstorm what school ambassadors should look and act like.

Upon our return to school from the store, we sort the gifts according to their age-appropriateness and then we load the unwrapped toys into the trunk of the Camp Sunrise Assistant Director's car with over 80 toys, games, art projects, and sports balls. We do a short, reflective writing assignment about how it feels to be toy shopping for other children and giving those less fortunate than us some joy during the holiday season.

Early January

The students were thrilled to receive a photo taken at the Camp Sunrise reunion, with the children holding their gifts behind a giant banner they decorated that said, "Thank you!"