

The Hamilton Hebrew Academy Celebrates Canada 150 with the Community at Westfield Heritage Village

By: Goldie Weiser

The clocks turned back and time stood still for three hours on November 16th when the students of the Hamilton Hebrew Academy stepped off their school buses in period dress and traveled through time.

With the grand opening of the Hamilton Hebrew Academy's new library learning commons and our schools embracement of inquiry style learning, the students of the Academy set out on a learning journey this September to connect with their Canadian heritage. Each grade at the Academy worked for months formulating their own personal questions and conducting independent research to uncover the answers to their queries. With each grade researching their own curricular history strand a timeline of historical events that occurred throughout our countries history was woven and connected to form an educational masterpiece of information.

Each grade was paired with an historical house at Westfield Heritage Village that best connected with their inquiry topics. Our grade ones, who were working on identifying roles and responsibilities, revived the historical Westfield Inn, with each student acting out a unique role as they walked a volunteer through a typical day at the Inn. Our grade two students presented at the railway station, focusing on the various inventions that were created in Canada during that time period and sharing their research and artistic creations of period postcards. Our grade three class was based in the schoolhouse where they shared their inquiry findings on what daily life was like for children of the early settlers and had the opportunity to re-enact an authentic classroom experience. Our fourth and fifth graders presented their multi-media presentations on indigenous tribes at the Ironwood Tea House and showcased a 3D diorama of a first nations village, which they created with our art teacher, Gila Lawton. Grades six focused on the immigration stories of various ethnic groups, which they shared at the Bamberger house, a home that was inhabited by a German immigrant family. Grade 7, presented at the Westbrook house, where they taught the community about the history of New France and the impact it has on our Canadian identities. In the Misener house, grade eight re-inacted a parliamentary debate and what the future role the monarchy should have in our country. The Ironwood café was set up with all digital and multi media presentations for students who wanted to present their findings using technology. Our guests were able to view the presentations while warming up with hot refreshments.

The Westfield Canada 150 celebration personifies the power of inquiry learning. Inquiry learning is about providing students with choice. It lets student explore their own interests within the curriculum guidelines and involves the explicit teaching to students of how to formulate higher level thinking questions. The students then use these questions to guide their research with teachers supporting them through the research process. Students are also given the choice as to how they would like to share their findings, which provides them with the opportunity to explore their own unique learning styles. At the Academy our students are provided with mentorship opportunities to work with our art teacher to explore their artistic interests as well the use our new stage and maker space located in our Library Learning Commons. Student feedback on the power of inquiry learning has been profound. Says, Bailey Green, "I love how you get to choose your own topic rather than have the teacher assign you one. This way you get to learn about something you enjoy." Ben Neiterman says, "Finding information yourself makes you feel smarter than your teacher!" Esti Schweitzer stated, "I feel like it (inquiry learning) really pushes me and forces me to challenge myself and to think more critically." David Efrat says, " Inquiry learning lets me think about my own answer vs. hearing someone elses thoughts and opinions." Evelyn Beilin states, " I Like that there are different levels of inquiry questions, this way I can challenge myself to reach higher levels of thinking."

"Inquiry ... requires more than simply answering questions or getting a right answer. It espouses investigation, exploration, search, quest, research, pursuit, and study. It is enhanced by involvement with a community of learners, each learning from the other in social interaction." (Kuklthau, Maniotes & Caspari, 2007, p. 2

At the Hamilton Hebrew Academy, our goal is to provide our students with the learning community they need to become passionate life-long learners. Our Westfield event testified to how we are achieving that goal each and every day.

For more information on inquiry learning at the Hamilton Hebrew Academy contact Goldie Weiser at gweiser@hamiltonhebrewacademy.ca. For more information on admissions please contact admissions@hamiltonhebrewacademy.ca .