

## Kollel's 2022-2023 Highlights



Pictured: a student with their illuminated *Megillat Esther* (scroll of Esther), made during [Unit 6](#).

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Our yearly curriculum covers holidays, Shabbat practice, and basic liturgy and Hebrew. Each year, we focus in-depth on a particular Torah story and its related themes and contemporary justice topics. **The 2022-23 curriculum focused on renewal and *tikkun* (repair) through the story of Noah.**

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# Unit 1: High Holy Days

In our first unit, we introduced the *Brit* (covenant, agreement, or promise), met the Torah, and celebrated High Holy Days with our community.

We learned about the concept of a *Brit*, a promise or agreement to do right. Our class *Brit* included promises to be respectful, to ask for help when we need it, keep our bodies to ourselves, and pay attention.

**Some kids suggested, “Be kind!” and, “Use people’s correct pronouns!”**

We read an adapted version of “The Golden Dove” from [Howard Schwartz’s \*Leaves from the Garden of Eden\*](#), and talked about whether peace and prosperity are even possible. One 4th-grader was quick to assert that the world would never be ready so long as there were human beings; another suggested that humans didn’t have to be perfect, we just had to do better.



Kollel students writing poetry at Rock Creek Park.



Rabbi Yosef showing students our Torah.

**We learned about the laws for building sukkot and built our own model sukkot. Students received one special instruction for sukkah-building from Mishnah Sukkah.**

One pair of students received the special instruction that, if a sukkah were built on top of another sukkah, only the top one would be valid, so they built one sukkah with



sticks and twine, and dug a “basement” below it in the dirt, which they covered with a *schach*.

Another group told me that they were “focusing on aesthetics,” and decorated a beautiful sukkah with leaves, shells, and other colorful nature detritus from the creek. Some groups built their sukkot specifically for ants or bees. The largest model sukkah had an outdoor garden decorated with vegetables (and one particularly large carrot).

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## Unit 2: Midrash and Noah

**We celebrated Simchat Torah and the Shmita-year ritual of *Hakhel*, and began a deep-dive into the story of Noah and accompanying *midrash*.**

Rabbi Yosef brought the Torah to Kollel - the real one, the original, the one Moshe brought down from Mount Sinai - and we unrolled the WHOLE THING! Kids were excited to find the Alef-Bet letters that we had learned so far.

**We made comic-books to re-tell the story of Noah, with creative additions.** One fifth-grader showed me that in their comic book, the flood was actually a “social experiment” to see what Noah would do. Their comic showed that the bathroom on the ark had toilets at every level, for various animals’ access needs.

**Using the framework of “Ask a question about the Torah story, and create a new story to answer**



Students learning about NSP's Torah

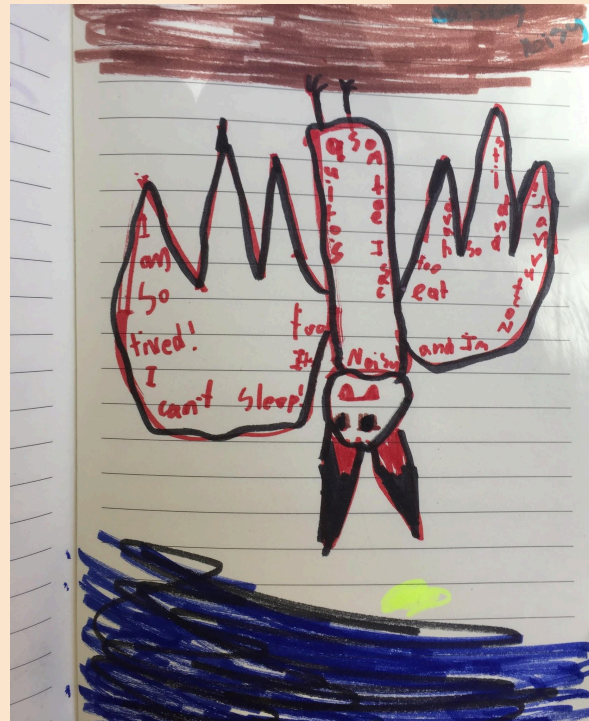
it,” students produced original *midrashim* and skits. We read a story from Rabbi Marc Gellman’s “Does God Have a Big Toe?” which asked, “Where is God?” and “What did all the sea creatures do during the flood?”

One kindergartener asked, “Is the ark still here? Where is it?” In one skit, a student played in a game show against “Anime Rabbi,” answering rapid -fire theological questions such as, “Who is God?” “What is God?” “Why is God?” “How is God?” Another skit proposed, “Can God be destroyed?” and theatrically resolved that the answer was “no.” Other questions included, “Where did the animals poop?” “What did they eat?” “Did they eat each other?” “Did it smell bad on the ark? If not, why not?” One student drew a giant poop machine that God might have put on the ark to process all the poop.

**We wrote our own poetry as *midrash*. We read poems about Noah and the flood in many forms—from limericks and haikus to free verse and rhyming poems. Examples came from Enid Dame, Rick Lupert, Rabbi Joe Black, and Shel Silverstein.**

**A fourth-grader’s acrostic poem:**

Night and day the flood continued  
Over the waves the ark lives on  
After the flood Noah left happy



**A second grader’s concrete (shape) poem from the perspective of a bat.**

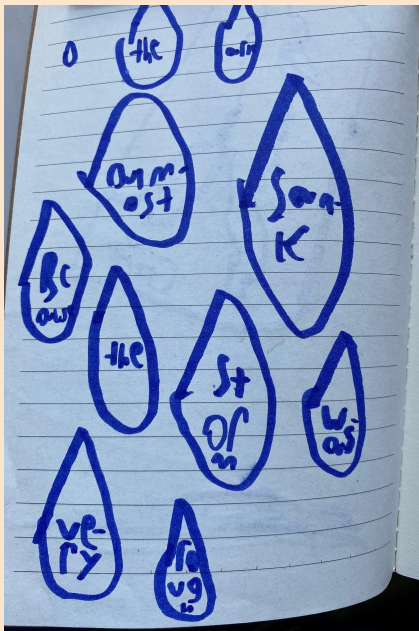
I’m so tired!  
I can’t sleep!  
It’s too noisy!  
And I’m nocturnal  
And its so hard too eat  
Cas I eat mosquitos



**A one-word *kavanah* by a kindergartener (this says PEACE).**

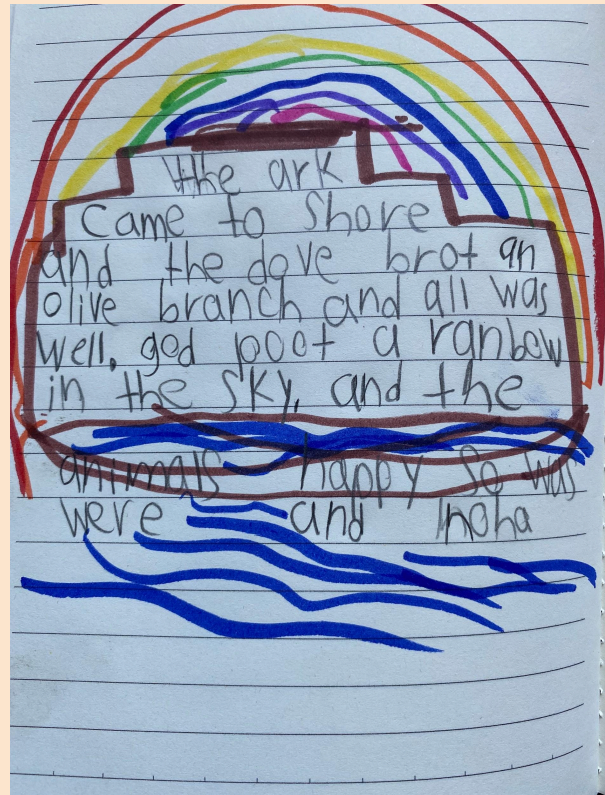


How did he not die in the ark



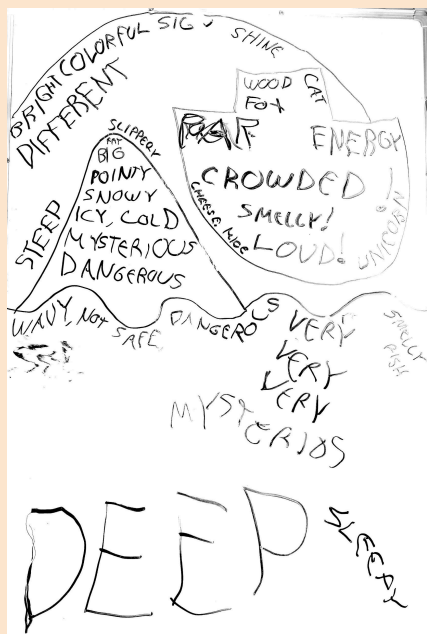
A second grader's concrete poem.

The		Ark	
Alm-		San-	
ost		k	
Bc-	The	St	W-
ows		Or	as
		M	
Ve-ry		Ro	
		Ug	
		h	



A first grader's concrete (shape) poem.

The ark  
came to shore  
and the dove brot an  
olive branch and all was  
well. God poot a ranbow  
in the sky, and the  
animals were happy  
so was Noha



**A collaborative concrete poem by a cohort of kindergarten-2nd graders.**

(Rainbow) Bright, colorful, sign, shine, different

(Mountain) Steep, slippery  
Big  
Pointy  
Snowy  
Icy, cold  
Mysterious  
Dangerous

(Ark) Wood, cat, fox  
Roar, energy,  
Crowded!  
Smelly!  
Loud!  
Cheese, mice  
Unicorn

(Waters) Wavy, not safe, dangerous  
Very  
Very  
Very  
Mysterious  
Smelly fish  
Sleepy  
DEEP

**A fifth-grader's free-verse poem from the perspective of the dove:**

Noah wanted me to see  
If the flood was finally over.  
So he threw me out the window  
And told me to scout ahead.

Now I didn't like being thrown  
But there was nothing else to do  
Except look for a piece of land  
So I wouldn't wind up dead.

I found the peak of a mountain  
Sticking up above the flood,  
So I paused to rest my wings  
Then reported back to Noah.

Noah yanked me back through the window

Seven days later  
Noah came up  
And threw me out the window  
Again.

He told me to check  
if the flood had gone down  
And he could take the ark  
Back to land.

The waters were down back to normal  
And there was a rainbow in the sky,  
So I grabbed an olive branch in my beak.  
And brought it back to Noah.

Noah yanked me into the ark



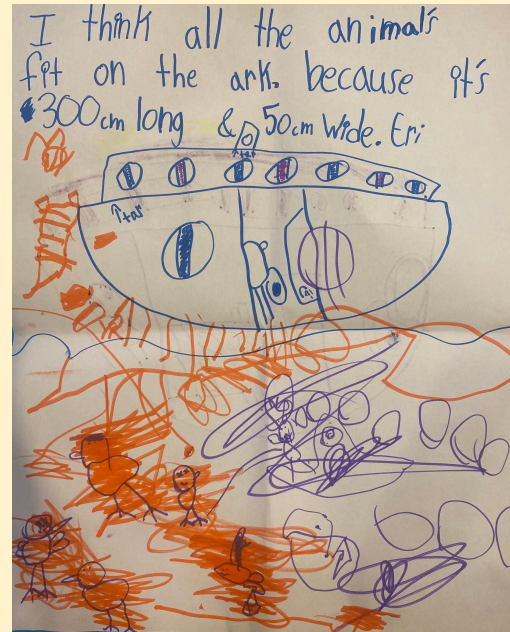
And asked me what I'd found.  
I told him I'd found some mountains  
And the waters were now going down.

And saw the olive branch.  
So he steered the ark to the right  
And we finally hit land.

**We debated the question, “Did all of the animals fit on the ark?” based on [Zevachim 117b:5-11](#).** We engaged in [debate for the sake of heaven](#), which our ancestors described as a debate for SEEKING TRUTH rather than trying to WIN for the sake of being right.

One group argued that there would be at least a few animals who would not fit on the ark including the t-rex, triceratops, elephants, whales and quetzalcoatlus. They discussed weight, in addition to size, because too many heavy creatures would cause the ark to sink into the ocean. One student urged the group to consider that dinosaurs probably didn't even get onto the ark in time, which is why they are extinct today. Another group argued that the ark was *designed* to fit all the animals, and, as one kindergartener astutely pointed out, “The story says they fit.”

**Students in both the oldest and the youngest classes proposed that God might have shrunk some animals to fit in the ark.** For the 4th-6th grade students, what began as a very silly argument became, by closing statements, a very serious theological proposition. They wrote, “The way that you believe in God affects how



Illustrated debate notes from the K-2nd graders, featuring a misconception about centimeters vs. cubits, and correctly noting that the ark was sealed with tar.

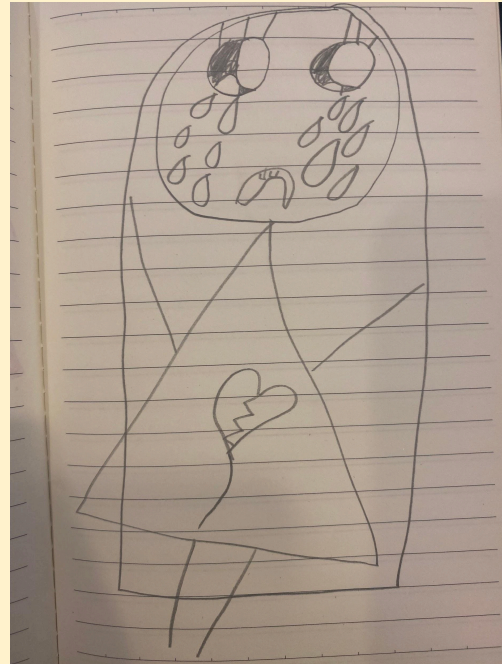


A drawing of the giant *Reima*, as described in [Zevachim 117b:5-11](#).

our idea works, and in this world God has stupid crazy powers and it makes it so everything we said works with the animals and science so it makes it so we are wright [sic] and that we win.” When a kindergartener made the same assertion, the opposing team argued that God does not have the power to shrink animals.

**The extent of God’s power is hopefully a theological debate that we can keep open for many years to come.**

We ended our deep-dive into Noah *Midrash* with stories of a great flood or deluge from around the world.



A drawing of a giant “baby *Reima*,” as described in [Zevachim 117b:5-11](#).

## Unit 3: Chanukah: Miracles, Dreams, and Parties!

**Our Chanukah unit began with a discussion on miracles.** Most of the older students were adamant that science could explain everything, but others argued, how could anything but the existence of God and miracles explain why dogs are so great? The youngest kids, however, were steadfast in their belief that miracles are real and they have seen some in their own lives.

**Because Kislev is the month of dreams, we took a short nap together and somehow had the same dream, all together.** We read an adapted version of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Salomi’s “The Dream



A student lighting the Chanukah candles they made in class.



Assembly,” as told in [Howard Schwartz’s \*Leaves from the Garden of Eden\*](#). We dreamt ourselves into an orchard with apple and orange trees, pear trees, and, according to one first-grader, butterflies! In that dream, we tried to solve the mystery of: “How do prayers get to heaven?” Our dream had a scavenger hunt full of riddles and clues, which ended in a Gematria riddle, and a dreamy directive to “build a dove” to carry prayers to heaven.

**We discussed, “What is the purpose of praying?”** One second-grader suggested repentance and saying sorry, because that’s why we pray on High Holy Days. Another suggested that prayer is for blessings, because their parents bless them. One first grader identified closely with the idea (from the story) that the purpose was “to open up your heart and let it sing.”

**We took that question to Shabbat morning services.** Kids collected answers from grown-ups.

We prepared for Chanukah by learning the choreography to Ocho Kandelikas and making Chanukah candles. **But conditions at the Kollel Kandelika Factory were brutal, so students had to get organized!**

The Tav class (K-2nd grade) had by far the most defiant and well-organized factory workers. When Tav class learned



A student holding the Chanukah candles they made in class.



A student lighting the Chanukah candles they made in class.

that Liora the Kandelika Factory owner was going to keep their kandelikas and sell them for a profit, they all IMMEDIATELY followed the striking teacher out the door and went on strike.

Although the older students were certainly agitated, few of them actually joined the strike. One student said they *would* go on strike, but they really wanted to make candles. Those who did strike won the right to a snack break for all of the workers in the factory.

One student explained that they wanted to color in their Hebrew letters but they weren't sure if they should, because of the strike. **The union salt (a teacher) explained that the striking was for working, not learning, and the students were still allowed to learn without crossing the Kandelika picket line.**



A student with the Chanukah candles they made in class.



A student lighting the Chanukah candles they made in class.

**We wrote poems to share with the NSP community at the Chanukah party. Check out some examples below!**

**By a second grader:**

You prair on Hanukkah  
And you prair at night  
And when you light  
Hanukkah candles  
It turns a speshle  
Prair of light.

**By a second grader:**

Lighted candles  
Lighted candles  
Badoful and bright  
Please give me good  
Luck and ptado  
Pancakes. Ptado pancakes  
Yummy yum, yum.

**Dada Poem by a fifth and sixth grader, who alternated each word:**

Once upon a time popcorn  
Ate chicken on Hannukah  
and  
It was sick and it barfed on  
The menorah wich blew up.



**Acrostic by a second grader:**

Dradel is fun to play  
Round and round the  
dradel spins  
And mine landed on gimel  
Dradel so fun to play  
Eat the candy you get  
Leve the candy not me.

**Free verse by a fifth grader:**

Festival of Lights,  
Lasts for eight nights  
Light the Menorah,  
Going once, twice,  
Eventually, eight times.  
Spin a dreidel,  
Do I win?  
"Food time!"  
Mother calls.  
Potato pancakes,  
Nice and warm,  
Applesauce, sour cream,  
delicious latkes

**Acrostic by a fourth grader:**

Candles of every night  
Hey is better than nun  
Apple sauce with latkes  
Nun is one of the letters  
on a dradle  
Under the candles their is  
wax  
Kittens need gifts too  
Anyone can play dradle  
Happy Chanukah to all



**A kindergartener's  
"Latke through the  
senses:"** it "smells like  
french fries," sounds  
crackly, and tastes salty.

**A first grader's free  
verse:**

One presint tow presint it  
Is so fun lets play tgetr and  
Lets have sum fun. Gilt\* is  
the  
Best of thum all lets (livin?)  
of  
Thum all.

\*Very Jewish!!

**Acrostic by a third  
grader:**

Dreidel is fun to play  
Round and round it goes  
Eat the gelt chocolate  
I want to land on gimel  
Dreidel spins and spins  
Ever so fast  
Last, I eat my chocolate

## Unit 4: Do Words Have Power?

**We considered when and how words can be powerful - in both good and bad ways.** We read a story of the Baal Shem Tov, and talked about whether words of prayer matter, and for whom. We looked at some examples of [papercut Mizrach art](#), and kids chose their own powerful (positive) word to make a cut-paper collage of. Some kids chose Hebrew words, and some chose English words. Students brought their artwork to the Shabbat morning service and shared their words with adults.

**One second-grader said, “I know a two-letter word with a LOT of power,” and several kids shouted out “No!” in agreement.** Another student suggested another two-letter word with a lot of power: “Hi!” The youngest students agreed that the word with the greatest power was, “Stop!”

**The K-3rd graders later connected the power of “No!” to standing up for justice.** We learned about civil disobedience in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and read examples of civil disobedience from the present day.



A cut-paper collage of *Shalom*, meaning “peace.”



A cut-paper collage of *Ko'ach*, meaning “inner-strength/power.”



A cut-paper collage of “Heart.”

**The 4th-6th grade students did a mini-unit on antisemitism.**

Using a resource adapted from JFREJ's "[Understanding Antisemitism](#): An Offering to



Our Movement,” and Tiffany Jewell’s “[This Book is Anti-Racist](#),” we held a community conversation with parents to discuss antisemitism as a product of white supremacy X political power. Students said that they look forward to learning more about Jewish communities from around the world, what life was like for Jews in Islamic lands, and World War II.

## Unit 5: Tu B'Shvat

**While the older students studied antisemitism, the youngest students journeyed into four mystical realms of action, emotion, intellect, and spirit, searched for God, and began our unit on Tu B'Shvat.** Several students wondered aloud what G!d's pronouns are. Julian finally told us, “I know where you can find G!d. It's when you're at NSP.”

**We planted Parsley for Tu B'Shvat.** Everyone painted pots inspired by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso's “[The Story of Na'amah: The Mother of Seeds](#).”

**We celebrated Shabbat Shirah, the Shabbat of Song, and made instruments.** Students brought their instruments to Shabbat morning services, and got to see and hear the Song of the Sea. It looks like bricks made of words—but why?? One of the youngest students suggested that the Song of the Sea looks like a brick wall so that other people/enemies can't get through it (were the Egyptians stopped by water or by song?? I'm confused but also charmed by this suggestion).



Some kids' parsley kept growing and growing!

The kids were VERY creative with materials! We saw no fewer than three distinct rubber-band string-instrument designs, many forms of percussion instrument, and various bell/lentil shakers.

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## Unit 6: *Megillat Esther*

**Kollel students did a deep dive on *Megillat Esther*—the scroll itself!** We studied illuminated *megillot* from around the world. *Megillot* can be funny, beautiful, and strange! Jewish communities from different places have different artistic traditions.

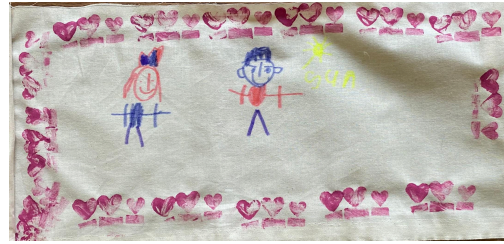
Many illuminated *megillot* have decorated borders. Sometimes they are hand painted, or papercut. We looked at examples that had copper-plate printed borders. **Students made their own stamps to decorate the borders of their scrolls!**

We made beautiful and funky decorated cases for our *megillot*.

**We had a special guest come to Kollel and teach us more about *sofrut* (Jewish scribal traditions).**

Students were excited to try Hebrew calligraphy with special calligraphy markers. Some even wrote the Hebrew names of the Purim story characters into their scrolls!

And finally, we got to show off our handmade illuminated *megillot* at the NSP kids' Purim party!



A kindergartener's scroll, with a printed heart border.

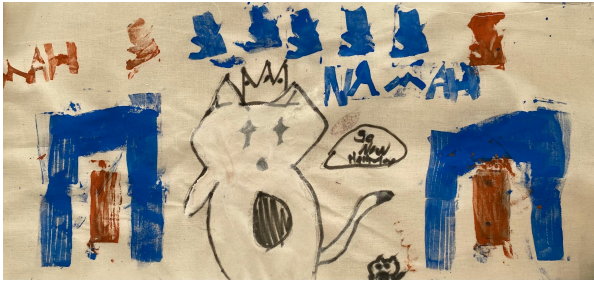


A kindergartener's megillah, featuring a Robot Purim Dance Party.



A first grader's cat megillah. Haman is a bad cat! This student made cat stamps to decorate their border.





Detail from a fourth grader's cat megillah. Cat Achashverosh tells Haman to "Go now!" This student made cat-shaped stamps.



A second grader's cat megillah. Cat Esther tells Cat Achashverosh that she is Jewish!



A second grader's megillah. Mordechai rides a horse!



A second grader's megillah, inspired by the beautiful gilded megillah cases we looked at.



A second grader's megillah. Achashverosh and Esther confront Haman (booooooooooo!).



A third grader's megillah, featuring an awesome party!





A fourth grader's fish-themed megillah.

We saw many examples of *megillot* that featured fish imagery. A fish is a symbol of Pisces on the Zodiac, which matches up with the Hebrew month of Adar. Purim happens in Adar!

**What does astrology have to do with Purim?** [There is a debate in the Talmud](#) about whether the stars can affect the fate of the Jewish people. In the Purim story, the fate of the Jewish people depends on lots.



Detail from a 5th grader's megillah. Esther tells Achashverosh, "I'm Jewish," and he replies, "OMG really?"



Detail from a 6th grader's megillah. This student told me that they were inspired by dreams. A headless arachnid/octopus Achashverosh tells a headless Vashti, "You must dance for us."

## Unit 7: Returning to *Teshuvah*

We discussed *teshuvah* in connection with the stories of the flood and Passover. We read short, unfinished stories about various characters on Noah's ark that dealt with problems relevant to our lives: keeping one's hands to oneself; tattle-taling; interrupting; and criticizing. Students completed the stories themselves by having their character acknowledge their mistake and do *teshuvah*. Kids explained that it's okay to tell a grown-up if someone is being bullied or in

danger; instead of interrupting, one can say “excuse me;” it’s important to ask for consent before touching someone; and one can offer constructive feedback instead of just saying mean things.

**Our 4th-6th grade students debated the question, “Can God do *teshuvah*?”** using excerpts from the story of Noah. Here are some important teachings:

- One 6th grader explained, “If humans are ‘in the image’ of God, then God makes mistakes just like humans.”
- Two 4th graders outlined how **God goes through all of Maimonides’ steps of *teshuvah* in the story of Noah**: acknowledging a mistake, saying it out loud, apologizing, and making a plan not to do it again. **They said that the story of the flood is basically about *teshuvah*.**
- One 5th grader delivered some compelling rhetorical questions for closing statements, directly addressing God: “Okay, you regret it? But did you say sorry?” Just because God admits a mistake doesn’t mean that God has “owned up” fully. The most important part of an apology is actually saying “sorry.”
- The whole Torah is just PR for God.
- Another 6th grader explained that the world requires balance: they pointed out the [merisms](#) in [Bereisheet 8:22](#) (Seedtime and harvest / Cold and heat / Summer and winter / Day and night) and argued that creation requires destruction, and that God has to do the destruction in order to have something to be sorry for.
- At the end of the debate I asked the kids what they really thought. One student was quick to announce that since they didn’t believe in God, they didn’t think God could do *teshuvah*, and the others all agreed, **until we came to one 6th grader, who said that if God is creation and nature, maybe God does *teshuvah* in ways we don’t understand.** (I spent my journey home wondering how this insight might relate to climate change.)

**Our K-3rd grade students debated the question, “If someone does *teshuvah* just to avoid consequences, does their *teshuvah* really count?”** (I wanted to know what the kids think because I struggle with this question myself.)

- To get us into the spirit of debate, one 2nd grader challenged the premises and argued that there was a crucial step of *teshuvah* in between 3 & 4: in order to make a meaningful apology, **you have to ask the person you've hurt how you can make it better.**
- A 3rd grader, following suit, suggested a **zero<sup>th</sup> step of *teshuvah*: making the mistake in the first place.**
- Apologies are meaningful for the person receiving the apology, even if you don't really mean it. Saying sorry can make the other person feel better.
- There are many things, like speeding or protesting, that you might never feel sorry for regardless of the consequences! Even if you only stop speeding to avoid the consequence of a ticket, making a plan not to speed again will also keep you safe.
- If you apologize simply to avoid consequences, you're avoiding Rambam's steps 3 and 4, so your *teshuvah* can't possibly count!
- You shouldn't apologize until you mean it, because **fake apologies can actually do more harm than good.**
- If someone does *teshuvah* to avoid a consequence, they might return to the bad behavior as soon as the threat of consequence disappears. As one 1st grader pointed out, Pharaoh's decision to go chasing after the Israelites was a key example of turning back toward bad behavior.

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## Unit 8: Passover and the Omer

**We fulfilled our obligation to “see ourselves as if we ourselves had left *Mitzrayim*”<sup>\*</sup> by discussing and illustrating personal narrow-places, pharaohs, and freedoms.** Some students shared that school is where they feel constricted and un-free. One fourth grader felt that time itself was their narrow-place, and drew Pharaoh as time. The Song of the Sea prompted students to think about building a wall of things they were grateful for. One second grader wrote that they were grateful for doctors, teachers, and shelter.

<sup>\*</sup>*Mitzrayim* is the Hebrew name for Egypt. It means “narrow place.”



**We sang the Four Questions, interviewed characters from the Exodus story, and investigated particulars of the story.** One second grader suggested that the reason God appeared in a burning bush was because if God had appeared as an elephant, the people of Mitzrayim would have hunted God down.

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## Unit 9: The Rainbow and the Omer



A student with their natural-dye challah cover, dyed with beets, turmeric, cabbage, and baking soda. (Baking soda turns cabbage dye blue!)

**Why was a rainbow the sign of God's *brit*?** We read "A Midrash on the Rainbow" by Cherie Karo Schwartz, from *Chosen Tales: Stories by Jewish Storytellers*. Two students explained that the rainbow is one of the only truly and indisputably beautiful things (along with humans and flowers). Another pair wrote a short alternative *midrash* involving a catastrophic explosion of fireworks that *inadvertently* formed a rainbow. One sixth grader felt that the rainbow's beauty was urging humans to take care of the world and make it a beautiful place.

One first grader responded in a short poem:

Half of the rainbow is God  
Half the rainbow is the promise  
The whole rainbow is hope

**We investigated several connections between the stories of Noah, the Exodus, and the Omer.** Through a short mystical scavenger hunt, we investigated what the Baal Shem Tov said about the word *teva*, which is used for both Noah's "ark" and Moshe's "basket." Why did the stories use the same word? One second grader suggested, "they both have people inside of them and go sailing." Others agreed that both were vessels to carry Jewish people through the water to safety. The Baal Shem Tov suggested that *teva* had a secret meaning: "the word" or "speech." After the scavenger hunt, students suggested some historical figures that inspired change or hope with their speech. We remembered that one of the most powerful words you can say is, "no."

**Ahead of Lag Ba'Omer, we chartered a special time-traveling airplane and took an adventure across time and space!** On a special Choose-Your-Own-Adventure version of the story, we followed the course of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Elazar as they fled the Roman army and hid in a cave for thirteen years. Students learned that there was no rainbow in the sky during the life of Shimon bar Yochai, because his righteousness was enough to merit protection for the entire world.

Rabbi Shimon wanted to spend *all* of his time studying Torah; students shared a few of the things that they would like to spend *all* their time doing, which included "sleeping" and "eating." One sixth grader suggested, "It's all about work-life balance."

Making choices as Rabbi Shimon was difficult! One kindergartener was *not* sure *at all* whether to flee from the Romans, or simply give up Judaism and the ways of our people. And, although this was arranged as a Choose-Your-Own-Adventure, there was really only one path forward; so some grown-ups (and one sixth grader) discussed whether or not the secret message was that choice is really all an illusion.



We celebrated Rabbi Arthur Waskow's "[Rainbow Day](#)," with rainbow stories, rainbow trivia, and rainbow natural tie-dyeing.

We made challah covers with natural dyes made of beet, cabbage, and turmeric.

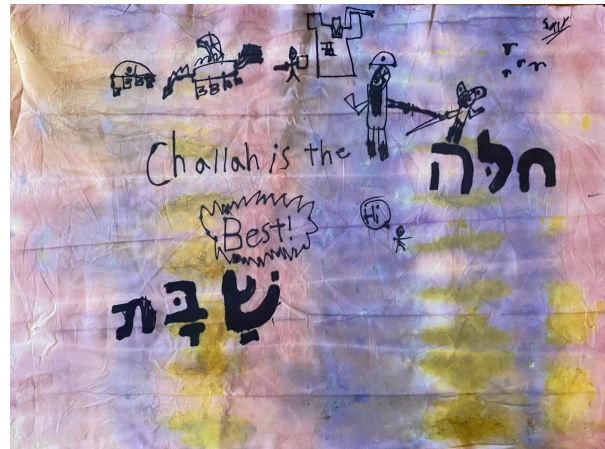
Younger students listened to Rabbi Marc Gellman's "The Bird Feather Rainbow" for inspiration, and older students discussed some reflections on the rainbow by Rabbi Rachel Barenblat.



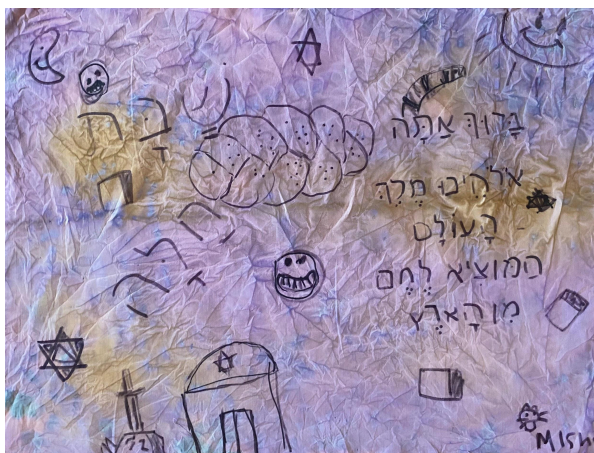
This natural-dye challah cover, made by a first grader, dyed with beets, turmeric, cabbage, and baking soda, says "Keshet," meaning "rainbow" in Hebrew.



This natural-dye challah cover, made by a sixth grader, says "I [heart] Shabbat v'challah" meaning "I love Shabbat and Challah."



This natural-dye challah cover, made by a second grader, says "Challah is the best!" and "Challah" and "Shabbat" in Hebrew.





This natural-dye challah cover, made by a fourth grader, says “Shabbat,” “challah,” and the blessing over challah.



This natural-dye challah cover, made by a kindergartener, says “challah.”

This natural-dye challah cover, made by a second grader, says “Challah” in Hebrew.



This natural-dye challah cover, made by a fourth grader, says the blessing over challah.

## Unit 10: Shavuot and the Big Questions

We learned about Shavuot, and the receiving of the Torah and the Ten Commandments. Using a list of 16 *other* commandments from Torah (of the 613 identified by Maimonides), we held an auction to determine which felt the most personally significant.

To my surprise, our older class bid highest on the second half of [Vayikra 19:17](#). When asked why that one was the most important—even more important than the life or death options—one student said that it’s just their personal values to let people know when they’re doing something wrong.

When the 1st-second graders considered the question, “How could God be sure the Israelites were actually ready for the Torah?” one student suggested that they could show God their library cards to prove that they were responsible. Another suggested that their class was actually *not* ready, because they might draw on or accidentally tear the Torah.

## ***At Kollel, kids can decide what we learn about!***

Shin class (4th-6th graders) returned to their topic from last year: **“Why did God create Covid-19?”** We started by talking about the premises of the question, and the kids offered a good variety, including “God exists,” “disease exists,” “humans exist,” and “reality exists.” We established some important terminology for our conversation, such as “rhetorical questions” and “satisfactory answers.” We also established that when we talk about “God,” the idea can mean something different to each person, and the way that God is understood across Jewish texts and from thinker to thinker is also different. Although for the most part the kids assert similar beliefs about God, there was no clear consensus on free will.

Tav class (K-2nd graders) asked, **“Did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai have laser eyes, and if so, what other superpowers exist in Jewish folklore and tradition?”** One second-grader sagaciously announced, “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Bet class (1st-3rd graders) investigated the question, **“Are there unicorns and other magical creatures in Jewish folklore and tradition?”**

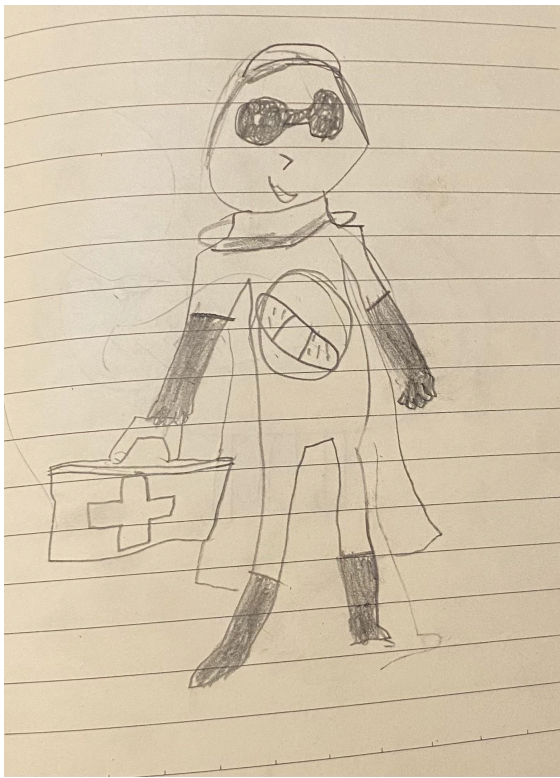
The class was delighted to learn that Judaism does, in fact, have unicorns, zombies, and sea monsters.

One group learned about the *tachash*, which some sages of the Talmud asserted was like a unicorn. The kids all agreed it was rainbow colored, but had different ideas about what it would eat and whether its whole body would be rainbow or just its mane.



The *Tachash*, as illustrated by a second-grader.

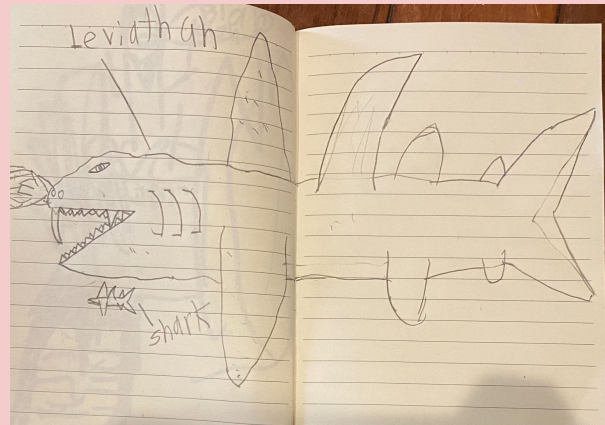
Another group learned about *Leviatan*. Is it big enough to eat a whale? Would it fit in the Atlantic, or would it have to live in the Pacific?



A drawing of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa as a superhero with super healing and imperviousness powers.

One pair about Elazar's "laser vision." For kryptonite, they created special sunglasses for Elazar to wear while he lived inside the cave, that would make it too dark for him to study Torah. They made a theme song that went, "E-L-A-Z-A-R, Elazar, he's our star!"

Another group learned the story of a farmer who "jumps the road," or otherwise has "super-speed." They demonstrated this power with a great deal of running and big leaps. One kindergartener let their imagination take off: they developed special shoes and crystals for the character to give him these powers.



*Leviatan drawn to scale beside a shark, as illustrated by a third-grader.*

Another group learned about the phoenix, referred to in several places in [midrash](#). One student drew a fiery hamster hybrid.

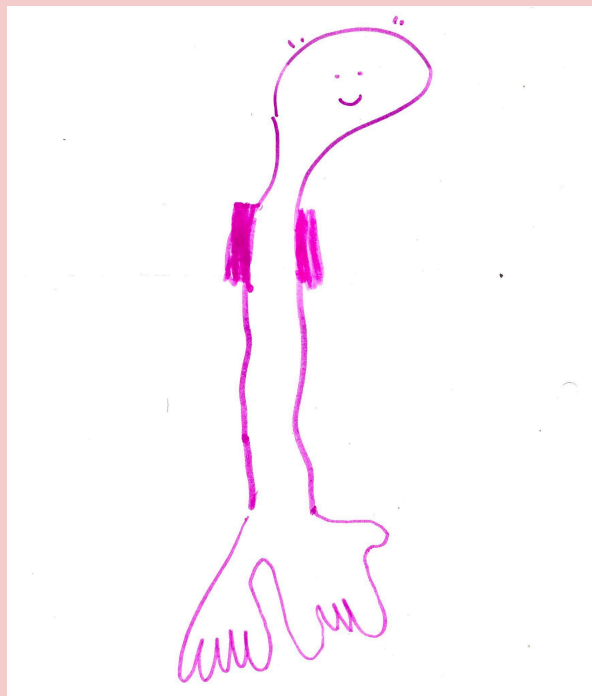


*"Hamster Phoenix," as illustrated by a second-grader.*

Another student studied and illustrated the mighty Shamir:



Another group learned the story of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa's imperviousness to the bite of a creature called the *arvad*. There was a [machloket](#) about what his kryptonite should be. One student said, crossbones (??); another said, doing the wrong thing (because his imperviousness comes from being so righteous); a third said, hypnotism. The group developed an original narrative in which Rabbi Hanina, on vacation in Paris, discovers a Torah stuck on top of the Eiffel tower. He tries to rescue it, but is hypnotized and fails.



*The mighty Shamir, as illustrated by a second-grader.*

**We talked about the wildfires in Canada, and the difference between fires that burn, and fires that light.** All classes read a mystical repetition poem written by the 6th century poet [Yannai](#) called, "[Celestial Fire](#)." Older students also read Rick Lupert's "[Fire is the New Rain](#)."

### **Then, Kollel kids wrote their own repetition poems**

(and a few other forms; we always love an acrostic, or a haiku). Some of the kids reflected on the smoke and fire this past week, some reflected on fire generally, and others reflected on other weather events, like rainbows.

***Fire is Like* by a kindergartener** (very directly inspired by Yannai's color-comparisons, and the colors orange and gold!)

Fire is like the suN  
 Fire is like lovu\*  
 Fire is like a Liyins MaNe.\*\*  
 Fire is like a meedeeyor.\*\*\*  
 Fire is like a hot riNG.  
 Fire is like a Dragin brithing fire.

***Fire in Canada* by a fifth grader**

#### **Fire in Canada**

Liars say, it is not true  
**Smoke in New York,**  
 As yellow-orange as an egg yolk.  
**Lighter smoke in D.C.**  
 Broke the day of field.\*

**Fire in Canada,**  
 In forests, a bonfire.

Fire is like a puMpkIN.  
Fire is like the kor of the erth.  
Fire is like a oriNg.\*\*\*\*  
Fire is like a big brite trofee.\*\*\*\*\*

\*lava  
\*\*lion's mane  
\*\*\*meteor  
\*\*\*\*orange  
\*\*\*\*\*bright trophy

### ***Fire is Like* by a second grader**

Fire is like a beautiful light  
Fire is like a torch that lit the way.  
Fire is like a light that lit for eight days.  
Fire is like a beautiful light.

**Smoke in New York,**  
Who stays inside?  
Townfolk.  
**Lighter smoke in D.C.,**  
Arised from it,  
Lots of jokes.

\*field day

### **Further reflections by kindergarteners -**

- "This week the smok was vurs then last week."
- "A fir dad spreads Ive a rabow."
- "Dire wire in a lyre."

### ***Smoke Acrostic* by a second grader**

**S**ecretive

**M**asterstroke

**O**ak

**K**inetic

**E**voked

### ***Smoke That* (based on a song?) by a sixth grader**

Smoke that kills  
Smoke that chokes  
Smoke that makes you lose a love  
Smoke that kills  
Smoke that crys  
Smoke that makes you want to die  
Waaaiit  
Smoke that dies, after time  
Smoke that's gone, now go outside  
Wait  
Smoke that starts from fire, now you can go outside waitit.

### **"A Rainbow that" by a first grader**

A rainbow that shines like hope

A rainbow that's cut in half like a apple

A rainbow that has 7 colors like the 7 days of creation

### **Sense poem, by a second grader**

**This week I saw** smoke smoke smoke and more smoke. It's like my life is smoke now.  
**I saw smoke.**

**This week I heard** people talking about the smoke.

A rainbow that curves like a curve in your life

A rainbow that has all the colors like all the colors in your heart

A rainbow that is made of atoms like the universe is made of atoms

A rainbow that arks like God

**I heard** friends talking about the smoke.

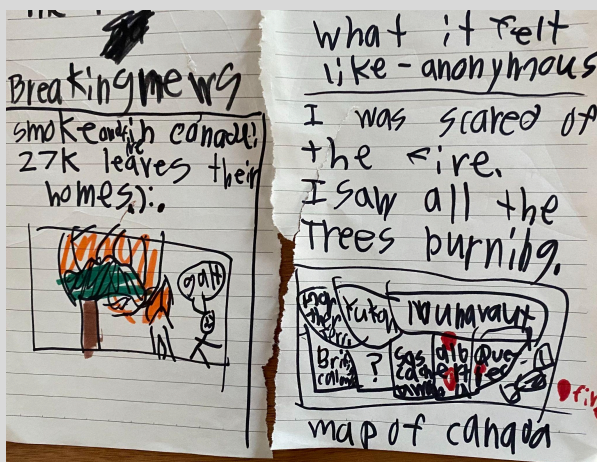
**This week I felt** sad.

**I felt** sad because we had indoor resses.

**This week I thought** I want to go outside.

**I thought** I am board.

### Newspaper by a third grader



### Breaking news

Smoke in Canada!

27k leaves their homes. :(

### What it felt like - anonymous

I was scared of the fire.

I saw all the trees burning.

[map of Canada]

We rounded out our big focus on the Flood story with an activity drawn from the “deep ecology” movement and adapted for Jewish settings and for kids by Rabbi David Seidenburg (and then for Kollel, by me). In [“The Council of All Beings,”](#) kids became an “antenna” for a particular Being in the world, and then met for a Council on matters of the utmost importance to all Beings in the world. During the Council, some Beings told us what their life/existence was like, a story from their life/existence, and a problem that they would like to call the Humans’ attention to.

A student who channeled Sand commented: **the problem with the Council is that afterwards, people will just go right back to buying too many things (primarily toys) and creating too much waste!**



One student was “air pollutants,” saying they should not exist at all. Another became the tree that was closest to our circle, and advised the humans to stop cutting trees down. They explained that they were really hoping not to be cut down themselves.

One kindergartener became the creek at Rock Creek Park. “It carries things to other...things,” they told us wisely, and presented a nature item collage on blue paper, of things being carried by the water. Our Council was joined by several additional Beings: a flightless lightning bug, a ladybug, and a dangling spider.