



The Jewish Academy of Wake County

Judaics Curriculum

The overall goal of the Judaica program is to develop children who are proud of their Jewish identity and love being Jewish regardless of their affiliation. In order for a child to be proud of his/her heritage, he/she must be able to understand, love, and be comfortable with it. We offer our students a rich understanding of their Jewish heritage by providing a comprehensive Judaic program. The Secular program and the Jewish studies curriculum complement each other. This generates a rich blend of knowledge.

Because our students come from diverse Jewish backgrounds, our curriculum stresses the ideas and values that all Jews have in common, including an understanding of the holidays, customs and heritage of Judaism. At the Jewish Academy, we teach first and foremost respect for one's parents and family customs. Children learn about Judaism from a positive perspective and are presented with Judaic concepts and traditions in a non-judgmental way. Students are taught to appreciate each family's autonomy in choosing their religious practices. At the Jewish Academy, we stress character development as we strive to help students embrace their heritage. To that end, our aim is for each student "to be a mensch." They learn the values and ethics that will help them grow into principled and compassionate adults. We cultivate specific מידות – Middot, Qualities of Character in classrooms, on the playing fields, and in the relationships formed at school.

We expose students to the rich and deep study of Jewish texts and reinforce their love of being Jewish by providing joyful and meaningful experiences. We are committed to teaching students Modern Hebrew which will help them form a lasting connection with the people of Israel and Israeli culture. When we speak of "Hebrew," we are referring to Hebrew used in the prayer book, as well as the Modern Hebrew that is spoken in Israel today. The basic structures of both prayer book and modern day Hebrew are very similar; therefore, our studies complement each other. Our students begin learning Hebrew in kindergarten when they are taught the Hebrew letters and vowel recognition. They progress to reading words and sentences, developing vocabulary and increasing comprehension.

Tefilla--Prayer

Our reading and comprehension skills are also applied during prayer. The children pray every day. They express their thanks to G-d for all the good they receive daily. The amount of time spent praying depends on the age of the child. The kindergartner's tefillah, or prayer, includes Modeh Ani (a prayer that is said on awakening in the morning), Adon Olam, and Shema. New prayers are added for the 1st grade, and then again for the 2nd grade, and so on until the 5th grade, when the children have tefillah for no more than 20 minutes.

We also utilize our skills in the study of Torah. Since the Torah is the basic foundation of Judaism, we feel that it is important for the children to be exposed to the original text, which is written in Hebrew. The skills that we teach allow the children to further explore the many treasures contained in the Torah. We begin using the actual text of the Torah in the second grade.

Parsha

The Torah, which is the five Books of Moses, is divided into 53 portions. Each of these portions is called a "Parsha." A large percentage of Parsha is devoted to the lives of our ancestors. We strive to present our ancestors, the patriarchs and matriarchs, as models from whom we can learn. For example, we are all familiar with the story of Moses and the Burning Bush, when G-d commands Moses to lead the Jews out of Egypt. When relating this story, we explain the Midrashic explanation, which teaches that at this particular time, Moses was working as a shepherd. One day when he was herding sheep, he rescued a single straying sheep — a sheep that would otherwise have been lost from the flock. By rescuing that sheep, Moses showed his concern for each of the creatures in his flock. He knew that each one of G-d's creatures was important, and it was after demonstrating this quality that he was chosen by G-d to be the shepherd of the Jewish people.

We help the children recognize and understand Moses' compassion and love. The children then incorporate that compassion and love in family relationships, friendships, and each aspect of their own lives.

Holidays and their Customs

Because so many families identify with our many beautiful holidays and celebrate them, we spend time learning the story and practices of each holiday. We want the children to understand the reasons behind the holidays and their customs. For an example, the younger children begin by learning about the origin of the Chanukah menorah. They learn about the one-day supply of oil miraculously lasting for eight days. They are then ready to learn how to recite the blessings that precede the lighting of the Chanukiyah (Hanukah Menorah).

We know that children learn and remember best by hands-on experience, so the children design functional menorahs and actually press olives to produce olive oil for their handcrafted Chanukiyah.

As the children mature, we focus on the message of the lights. Just as we mark each new day of Chanukah by adding another candle, so must we constantly strive to add light and warmth to everything and everyone who surrounds us.

We further encourage the children to apply their critical thinking skills by challenging them to understand not only what we do or what happened but also why we celebrate in the manner that we do. For example: Why is Chanukah the only holiday that is not celebrated with a festive meal? And why is the miracle of the great military victory barely mentioned and certainly not included in the practices of the holiday? These thought-provoking questions help the children gain a complete understanding of the holiday, from the when, to the what, to the why.

At the Jewish Academy, our students truly gain both a wealth of information and an appreciation of their heritage.

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