

V'shinantam
A Year's Study for Kindergarten Families

An Education Capstone Project

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Table of Contents

<u>Introduction and Curriculum Rationale</u>	3
<u>Letters to the Teachers</u>	10
<u>A Crash Course in Understanding by Design</u>	14
<u>Learner Outcomes: Know, Do, Believe, and Belong</u>	20
<u>Enduring Understandings</u>	22
<u>Outline for the Year</u>	23
<u>Resources</u>	25
<u>Sample Lesson Plan 1 (Parents and children together)</u>	26
<u>Sample Lesson Plan 2a (Children only)</u>	32
<u>Sample Lesson Plan 2b (Parents only)</u>	38
<u>Sample Lesson Plan 3 (Parents and children separate and then together)</u>	48
<u>Annotated Bibliography</u>	58

Introduction and Curriculum Rationale

[Back to top](#)

הלומד תורה בילדותו דברי תורה נבלעין בדמיו ויוצאין מפיו מפורשין.

The one who studies Torah in youth, words of Torah are absorbed in his blood and come out of his mouth distinctly.

~Avot d'Rabbi Natan 24

אמר רבי אלעזר מה התינוק הזה צריך לינק בכל שעה שביום כך כל אדם שבישראל צריך ליגע בתורה בכל שעות שביום.

Said Rabbi Elazar, "Just as an infant must drink milk every hour of the day, so must every person among Israel taste Torah every hour of the day."

~Talmud Yerushalmi, B'rachot 9:5

Learning is today, as it has been for thousands of years, central to Jewish life.

The *Shema* serves as a central reminder to "teach [these words] to your children"

(Deuteronomy 6:7). It naturally follows that one cannot teach without first having learned oneself. In fact, the Hebrew word used in this context of education is from the root .ה.נ.ש, to repeat. Without continual adult learning, child learning cannot be possible.

American Jewish educators have, in recent decades, reinvigorated their commitment to this view of lifelong learning. Adult Jewish learning has developed as a unique and flourishing field with an emergence of several high-quality adult education programs that have shed light on the rest of the field (Shuster and Grant 2008). As well, early childhood education has become more and more intentional, with critical focus being given to creating meaningful and Jewishly rich learning environments for young children (Handelman 2003). As these emphases merge, it comes as no surprise that awareness of *family* education is also on the rise (Kay 2003). Thus, in his landmark study *Linking the Silos*, Jack Wertheimer concludes that it is ineffective to separate adult and child education since "adults and their children mutually reinforce each other's Jewish

engagements” (Wertheimer 2). Clearly, a major emphasis is due both for adults as well as for their young children.

However, a paucity of new resources gives guidance to today’s family educators. While Michael Meyer has argued that Jewish education *must* include both parents and children,¹ nevertheless models of full-family education are rare. Therefore, this curriculum seeks to address this critical need. Drawing from the best practices of both adult and early childhood education, the curriculum strives to create meaningful experiences of family learning in a synagogue setting. Its primary goal is fostering a rich and joyful Jewish life in the family. The basic elements that constitute this curriculum’s approach to that goal include:

- Situation in context of school as learning community
- Children learning as children
- Parents learning as parents and as adults
- Families learning as families
- Parents as teachers

These items, as well as some other notes on the rationale behind the curriculum, are described in further detail below.

Summary

In this curriculum, parents and children learn in the context of a religious school, but they do not spend all their time at school together. During some of the sessions, parents and children learn all together; during other sessions, they will learn separately;

¹ See Meyer, Michael. “Reflections on the Educated Jew from the Perspective of Reform Judaism.” *Visions of Jewish Education*. Eds. Seymour Fox, Israel Scheffler, and Daniel Marom. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003. p. 156-157.

and some days will include both time together and time apart. Generally, the first session of a unit will be spent all together and the second session will be spent with adults and children separate. Most units are three weeks long, and the final session begins with separate time and concludes with time dedicated for parents to serve as teachers for their children (and vice versa).

Situation in context of school as a learning community

This family learning program is meant to be situated in a larger religious school context. It may be thought of as a preschool/kindergarten class within the religious school, called Kinder Kef for the purposes of this description. Thus, children who conclude this program after one or two years² and move into first grade are expected to progress into the school's Kitah Aleph (first grade class).

As a class within the larger school, Kinder Kef participates in all school-wide activities, including community programming, holiday celebration, story-telling, etc. This inclusion of small children as well as adults in the goings-on of the entire school reinforces the notion that the synagogue is home to a multiage community of learners who learn from and teach one another in a variety of ways. Since few religious school programs involve parents in weekly study in a way that is envisioned in this curriculum, it is imagined that parents will participate in these activities on a weekly basis only while their children are in Kinder Kef. However, the early exposure to the community of learning is intended to make parents more comfortable in the synagogue and to encourage them to include their family in community events for years to come.

² See comments below ("Repeat students").

Children learning as children

In her article “Developmental Psychology,” Roberta Louis Goodman applies scientific theories of human development to Jewish educational contexts. She reminds us that “people differ at various ages or stages in their lives physically, cognitively, morally, socially, and spiritually” (Goodman 2003, p. 86). Thus, it is crucial to acknowledge the unique stage of preschool and kindergarten learners in order to create the most nourishing educational environment. For example, a five-year-old child is inclined to listen to and follow authority figures (parents and teachers), to imitate roles and rituals, to focus on one thing at a time, and to dream of roles they might fill. The idiosyncrasies of this age group have been factored into the development of this curriculum and should remain paramount in the teacher’s planning of individual lessons.

Parents learning as parents and adults

Just as young children require special attention to their stage in life, so too do parents of young children. Betsy Dolgin Katz and Mitchell Parker point out that parents of preschool- and kindergarten-aged children “want to know specifically what they can do, how they can enhance their children’s Jewish lives, and how they can share Judaism with their children” (Katz and Parker 2008, p. 151). Likewise, Jo Kay reports that “parents are too busy to have their time wasted. They want to be with their children. They want to enjoy the time they have together with their children. They want to know that their children are happy and learning. And, especially in parent education (adult only) sessions, they want *their needs as parents* to be addressed” (Kay 2003, p. 170, italics in original). In other words, parents at this stage in their lives seek out learning

that specifically addresses their role in their families. They may look to Judaism as a source of inspiration for ethical parenting, and they can turn to their Jewish peers as a network of friendship and support. This family learning opportunity should address these specific needs, enriching lives of the parents *as parents*.

In addition, it should also be acknowledged that parents are not *only* parents. Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman has warned against the tendency of synagogues to cater only to children, resulting in a “pediatric Judaism” devoid of depth.³ Accordingly, it is important for parents to learn on an adult level for their own enrichment. Thus, some of the adults-only sessions are reserved for topics *not* related to parenting in order for parents to enrich their Judaic knowledge independent from their children’s understanding.

Families learning as families

Jo Kay and Evie Rotstein remind us that “Parents are the primary agents for transmitting religious beliefs and cultural values” (Kay and Rotstein 2008, p. 145). In other words, the establishment of a rich and joyful Jewish life in a family with young children *must* include both children and parents. In religious school, children learn about Judaism and then may or may not report their findings to their parents when they get home. In contrast, this curriculum attempts to bring “home” into the learning community by having families learn Jewishly together. Kay and Rotstein write, “Jewish family education is about building a community that connects learning to real-life experiences in the context of a community of practice” (*ibid.*). Thus, the family learning envisioned in this curriculum is both present-focused and practical. Families will celebrate holidays *in*

³ See his comments in *Rethinking Synagogues: A New Vocabulary for Synagogue Life*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006. p. 96. Also see reflection by former Union for Reform Judaism chairman Peter Weidhorn in his 2008 “Chairman’s Message: Don’t Be a Stranger” (reformjudaismmag.org).

situ rather than learning skills to take away from the learning environment. Families will practice Jewish values during the school day rather than planning for Jewish engagement later on. Families will read stories, sing songs, and play games in the context of a learning community, demonstrating that active Jewish life is something that all members of the family can participate in at any time. Ultimately, this curriculum aims to cultivate a love and passion for Jewish life and learning strong enough that graduates will continue to engage Jewishly for years after its completion.

Parents as teachers

A final element of this curriculum is an opportunity for parents to teach their children what they learned in their adults-only session. This activity is intended to develop the Jewish education skills of the parents. Katz and Parker refer to the psychologist Lev Vygotsky in pointing out that children learn best when guided by adults. Thus, the better equipped parents are in transmitting meaningful Jewish beliefs and values to their children, the more ably they can create the Jewish family environment they desire. Moreover, as it is well known, the best indicator of having learned something is the ability to teach it. By teaching Jewish values to their children, parents can further embrace the tenets of their family's religious tradition.

It may be noted that children may wish to share with their parents what they learned while in their own class. This should be encouraged! The learning community is a mutual one in which everyone is a student. Children see their parents learning, and they may come to internalize the notion that everyone is a student in her own way. Since children of this age tend to heed the example and guidance of adults, it may not be wise

to push them too hard to interact in this way with their parents. Nevertheless, for those who do express an interest in teaching their parents in some way, children can reinforce their own knowledge while embodying the value of universal learning.

Repeat students

Since this curriculum is intended for both preschool and kindergarten students, it is possible that the class will contain students who have already experienced the curriculum in a prior year. Note that this curriculum, as it is laid out, contains only a few specific lesson outlines; therefore, teachers are encouraged to approach each lesson's core concept differently every year. The topics and understandings addressed in this curriculum are broad and rich enough for two years' study (at least!), provided that teachers contribute creatively in order to diversify learning experiences.

A note on history

This curriculum was developed with a specific congregation in mind. This congregation is small, including less than 40 enrolled students in its Pre-K through 8th grade religious school. While the curriculum was created for a context of intimacy, effort has been taken to ensure that classes of any size can follow it. While family education is not currently a focus of this congregation's religious school, it is hoped that implementation of this curriculum will inspire similar efforts in other areas.

Letters to the Teachers[Back to top](#)

Dear Kinder Kef teacher,

Shalom! My name is Daniel, and I authored this curriculum for preschool and kindergarten children and their parents. I'm excited for you to turn this theoretical work into actual teaching, and I hope that the research and examples contained in this document will help enrich the learning for your entire class.

As you can gather from the Introduction to this curriculum, the year is intended to provide meaningful learning opportunities for parents and children alike. Sometimes parents and children will be learning separately; sometimes they will be learning together; and sometimes they will start the day apart and then come together. You will always be with the children, and you will also usually be the teacher when the children and parents learn together. However, you should also remain in communication with your partner teacher to know what the parents are learning during the adults-only sessions, and you should also keep the parents informed of what their children learn without them. Even though parents and children have opportunities to learn in age-specific settings, one of our goals is for the learning to continue for the whole family when they return home – to make this happen in the best way possible, both parents and children should be aware of what the other is learning. This curriculum is truly a family education program, and you play a vital role in the learning of children *and* their parents.

You'll notice in the year-long outline that this curriculum is divided into units. Each unit is contained under an "enduring understanding," about which you can read more below. As well, the units are sub-divided into individual sessions, each of which comes with its own "core concept." I have outlined the enduring understandings and core

concepts in order to provide direction and sequence for the entire year while leaving open *how* to address each topic. My intention is to provide structure while also leaving space for creativity. By following this sequence and filling in your own ideas, I hope you will feel both supported and free to make your own connections in the year ahead.

If you have any questions about this curriculum, please be in touch with me anytime. I'm available by email at daniel.kirzane@gmail.com, and I would love to hear from you – even if just to know that this curriculum is still alive and well.

Thank you for your passion and your energy. The work of a teacher, while often unappreciated, is crucial to the health of our society and every person in it. As you set out on your holy adventure, remember the words of Shir Hashirim Rabbah (1:234): “Our children are our guarantors. For their sake I give the Torah to you.”

Yours,

Daniel Kirzane

Dear Kinder Kef parent teacher,

Shalom! My name is Daniel, and I authored this curriculum for preschool and kindergarten children and their parents. I'm excited for you to turn this theoretical work into actual teaching, and I hope that the research and examples contained in this document will help enrich the learning for your entire class.

As you can gather from the Introduction to this curriculum, the year is intended to provide meaningful learning opportunities for parents and children alike. Sometimes parents and children will be learning separately; sometimes they will be learning together; and sometimes they will start the day apart and then come together. You will teach the parents when they learn alone. While you won't be teaching every week, and while you won't be working with the children at all (unless you go out of your way to do so), you should nevertheless remain in communication with your partner teacher to know what the children and families are learning with him or her, and you should share what the parents learn when not with their children. Even though parents and children have opportunities to learn in age-specific settings, one of our goals is for the learning to continue for the whole family when they return home – to make this happen in the best way possible, both parents and children should be aware of what the other is learning. This curriculum is truly a family education program, and you play a vital role in the learning of parents *and* their children.

Note that some of the parents-only sessions should address your learners' questions and concerns about the art of Jewish parenting; research has shown that this kind of knowledge is highly valued by parents of young children. Get to know them, perhaps dialogue with them about *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* (which you and they

would do well to read!), and try to help them create a rich Jewish home for themselves and their children. As well, find sessions to appeal to your learners *as adults* and not just as parents. While it may be hard (for them and others) to remember, adults with young children *do* have lives independent of their children, and it's healthy to nourish adults' separate identities. The sample parents-only lesson in this curriculum (2b) is an example of a lesson that speaks to adult Jewish learners without reference to their parenthood.

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A Crash Course in Understanding by Design

[Back to top](#)

This curriculum uses the approach to education known as “understanding by design” (UBD), which is described in detail in Grant Wiggins’ and Jay McTighe’s book by the same name.¹ While I highly recommended reading Wiggins’ and McTighe’s clear and practical descriptions firsthand, I will also outline some key fundamentals of UBD that will be helpful in executing this curriculum. Indeed, these concepts may prove useful in all instruction as the principles apply across disciplines and can be employed in a variety of settings.

Understanding

The most essential component of UBD is “understanding.” According to Wiggins and McTighe, “An understanding is a mental construct, an abstraction made by the human mind to make sense of many distinct pieces of knowledge” (37).² The distinguishing features of understanding are:

1. An understanding is an important inference, drawn from the experience of experts, stated as a **specific and useful generalization**.
2. An understanding refers to **transferable**, big ideas having enduring value beyond a specific topic.
3. An understanding involves abstract, counterintuitive, and **easily misunderstood** ideas.
4. An understanding is best acquired by “**uncovering**” (i.e., it must be developed inductively, co-constructed by learners) and “**doing**” the subject (i.e., using the ideas in realistic settings and with real-world problems).
5. An understanding summarizes important **strategic principles** in skill areas (128-129).

It is essential to distinguish understanding from *knowledge*, which involves recall of specific facts or mastery of a particular skill. For example, one may easily *know* how to start a car without *understanding* how cars start. Additionally, one may *know* that the

¹ Wiggins, Grant P., and Jay McTighe. *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005.

² All citations taken from *ibid*.

square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides without *understanding* the significance, application, or transferability of the Pythagorean Theorem. In our contexts, a student may *know* that there are five books in the Torah without an *understanding* of the meaning of Torah in Jews' lives, or a student may *know* that בִּינָה is pronounced *binah* without *understanding* the depth and richness of this concept in Jewish thought. Ultimately, our goal as educators should be to nourish understanding rather than knowledge because understanding leads students on paths of continued discovery of ever-richer meaning while knowledge lies still in the mind.

Enduring Understandings

In particular, we guide our students toward *enduring understandings*.³ Enduring understandings (EUs) are specific inferences, based on big ideas, that have lasting value beyond the classroom. They use discrete facts or skills to focus on large concepts, principles, or processes. They derive from and enable transfer: They are applicable to new situations within or beyond the subject. Ideal EUs

1. are at the heart of a discipline or area of study.
2. are lifelong; they can be explored by people of any age.
3. are abstract and should be engaged and grappled with.
4. are counterintuitive, easily misunderstood ideas.
5. are big ideas embedded in facts, skills, and activities.
6. should “make the angels sing.”
7. are not facts.

Examples of EUs in our context include:

- Prayer broadens our awareness of God's presence, nourishing our beliefs in God, leading to love of God's people.
- Reform Judaism calls for each person to live an ethical life based on Torah, a connection to community, and a partnership with God.

³ The following is drawn from *ibid.* 128-130 and derived from syntheses provided by Dr. Lisa Grant and Nechama Moskowitz.

- A Jewish person is like a reed: alone, one can be easily broken, but a group together stands strong against the wind.

Any understanding may be considered an *enduring understanding* in the appropriate context; this makes selection of good EUs for our lessons exceptionally difficult. However, strong EUs are critical to powerful learning in UBD, so spending time to craft them carefully is well worth the effort. The EUs in this curriculum are designed to focus adult and child learners on co-constructing a rich and joyous Jewish family.

Essential Questions

While we aim to cultivate understanding in our learners, “essential questions” (EQs) are those deep and recurring questions to which we return over and over again in our lives. These questions have no single answer (even a complex one), and they should resonate deeply—though differently—with every learner. Thus, questions such as “What does the *maror* on the seder plate symbolize?” or even “How does Judaism approach the concept of bitterness?” are *not* EQs since they have clear answers. Rather, an *essential* question would be, “How does Jewish wisdom help me understand bitterness?” A six-year-old and a sixty-year-old will both be able to explore this question, and their learning will be enriched by good teaching.

Wiggins and McTighe suggest that “a question is essential if it is meant to

1. Cause genuine and relevant inquiry into the big ideas and core content.
2. Provoke deep thought, lively discussion, sustained inquiry, and new understandings as well as more questions.
3. Require students to consider alternatives, weigh evidence, support their ideas, and justify their answers.
4. Stimulate vital, ongoing rethinking of big ideas, assumptions, prior lessons.
5. Spark meaningful connections with prior learning and personal experiences.
6. Naturally recur, creating opportunities for transfer to other situations and subjects” (110).

In sum, the learning of every lesson should equip students to address essential questions, which accompany and supplement the *enduring understandings* of the curriculum.

Backward Design

Both EUs and EQs are part of *backward design*, which is an approach to education planning that starts with the goals of education and finishes with the activities. Often, teachers are attracted to what they consider to be “engaging activities,” choosing to use them in their classes and hoping that students will learn from them. Teachers collect enough engaging activities to fill up their class period and that, they say, is a lesson. So, such teachers may say to themselves, “I just read about a *great* game online that I could easily adapt for Purim. I’ll start with that game, and since I know my students love to draw, then I’ll have them draw pictures—of Purim symbols, of course. We’ll read a story (I’ll find one later) and then have a short discussion about it – then sing some songs and we’re done!” While this lesson may be fun, there’s no guarantee that it will actually *teach* anything – and even if students do absorb meaningful content, the teacher has not committed to discovering whether and how his or her students understand.

In contrast to this model, backward design starts with the ultimate goal: understanding. One lists the enduring understandings first and then makes sure that *every activity* is in service of the enduring understanding. As Wiggins and McTighe put it: “Our lessons, units, and courses should be logically inferred from the results sought, not derived from the methods, books, and activities with which we are most comfortable” (14). Did you find a great game online? Fabulous – but use it in your classroom *only* if it

is in service of the enduring understanding. Instead of thinking, “How will I fill up 45 minutes with fun, engaging activities this week?” think, “How will I guide my students to understand this core concept?” By starting with the goals and having the entire lesson plan flow from that wellspring, the lesson remains more focused on the true purposes of education: to help students discover meaning in the world and to cultivate wise and eager life-long learners equipped to continue their journey of discovery.

Evidence of understanding

A final component of Understanding by Design that’s important to remember for this curriculum is that of *evidence of understanding*. UBD encourages us to check for our students’ understanding rather than to assume (or simply hope) that they understand as a result of our teaching. The best evidence comes in the form of *authentic assessments*, which are real-life activities that could only be accomplished if the producer has real understanding. In our context, then, students might make a recommendation (in person) to their synagogue’s social action committee at the end of their *tzedek* unit. Or students might write letters to Israeli penpals to tell them about their Passover experiences during their “symbolic food” unit. In this curriculum, for example, families make a visit to a hospital or nursing home during their unit on *bikkur cholim*. The key here is that first, the educational experience cultivates an understanding (which, by its nature, has transfer to the “real world”) and then students create a product (physical or abstract) that serves as *evidence* of their understanding.

While designing assessment activities that themselves are educational and engaging can be exceedingly difficult, it’s also exceptionally important. Without assessing our students’ understanding, we have no way of knowing whether we’re

succeeding with our teaching. And since we are committed not to *covering content* but to *cultivating understanding*, we must always seek to correct our teaching if it's not leading anywhere. It may be frustrating to conclude collecting evidence of understanding and to realize that our students just *didn't get it* – but rather than giving up and moving on because we have more *stuff* to cover, we must reconsider our teaching such that we're able to try again to produce real understanding. It's not about getting through material, in the end, and collecting evidence of understanding serves as a corrective to our impulse to push through the year without looking back, reminding us to stay on course in the education of our learners.

Conclusion

These few pages serve, as promised, only as a “crash course” in Understanding by Design, but I hope that they provide some helpful guidance for this curriculum as well as future teaching. As these are only my own reflections on understanding, and since they are quite brief, I recommend reading the original *Understanding by Design* for a more comprehensive treatment of these important concepts. In the meantime, this curriculum may serve as a framework for using backward design in your classroom.

As you set out on this journey of meaningful education, remember that the work you do is holy. Recall as you teach the words of Proverbs: קְנֵה-חָכְמָה מֶה-טוֹב מִחֶרֶץ וְקִנּוֹת בִּינָה נִבְחָר מִכֶּסֶף, *How much better to acquire wisdom than gold; preferable to silver is acquiring understanding* (16:16).

Learner Outcomes: Know, Do, Believe, and Belong

[Back to top](#)

This vision is based on the discussion of a Religious School committee for a small religious school and is modeled on LOMED's four-pronged approach of KDBB (Know, Do, Believe, Belong).¹

Vision

The Religious School guides students from Kindergarten through 8th grade through the early years of their lifelong Jewish journey. Students will engage their minds, hearts, hands, and feet in their learning, developing in four areas:

Knowledge

Students will know who they are as Reform Jews and will understand the major Reform principle of *tikkun olam* (healing the world). They will be familiar with Jewish holidays and history, and they will attain the Hebrew decoding and vocabulary skills appropriate for active life in the Reform Jewish community.

Action

Students will engage in *mitzvot* (holy obligations), including celebrating Shabbat and conducting acts of *tzedakah* (righteous giving). They will participate in their local Jewish community and will be prepared to seek out future Jewish learning in high school, college, and beyond. Some students will choose to visit Israel, the Jewish state, as an expression of their commitment to the Jewish people.

Belief/Values

Students will cultivate a strong Jewish identity, rooted in the ancient Jewish values of questioning and curiosity. They will share in the Jewish commitment to human rights, recognizing that every human being is created *b'tzelem Elohim* (in the image of God), and they will affirm the centrality of *tikkun olam* (healing the world).

Belonging

Students will develop their sense of belonging to their temple community, the New York Jewish community, the national Reform Jewish community, and the larger Jewish world.

For the Kinder Kef program, the following outcomes (in no particular order) will receive targeted attention:

¹ To learn more, visit <http://lomed.wikispaces.com>.

- Learners will honor every member of their family.
- Learners will recognize and celebrate Jewish holidays.
- Learners will engage in *mitzvot* (holy obligations), especially the observance of Shabbat and other Jewish holidays.
- Learners will begin/continue to develop their Jewish identity.
- Learners will affirm the principle of *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick).
- Learners will feel a sense of belonging in their family.
- Learners will feel a sense of belonging in their class.
- Learners will feel a sense of belonging in their school/temple.

Enduring Understandings

[Back to top](#)

This curriculum revolves around three enduring understandings:

- My family lives out Jewish values when we learn together, when we celebrate Jewish holidays, and when we honor others.
- Living out Jewish values helps us care for our family.
- Living out Jewish values helps us care for our community.

Learners engage with these enduring understandings over the course of twenty-eight sessions (which include several all-school activities). The following outline is based on a potential calendar for 5773. Each session includes a core concept that supports the Enduring Understanding, and sessions are divided into units. As well, the outline indicates which lessons are intended to be taught with parents and children together, separate, or separate and then together.

Outline for the Year

[Back to top](#)

Weekly sessions for this curriculum could proceed according to the following sequence. For each session, a comment is made to indicate whether parents and children should learn together, separately, or first separately and then together. Additionally, whole-school sessions (usually holiday celebrations) as well as significant school breaks are included.

1. Welcome: *B'ruchim Haba'im* (Together)
2. Yom Sippur:² A Day of Storytelling (Whole school together)
3. Sukkot celebration: *Z'man Simchateinu* (Separate; children with school, parents with other Temple adults)

EU: My family lives out Jewish values when we learn together, when we celebrate Jewish holidays, and when we honor others.

Unit 1 – Wherever I Look, I Find My Community

4. Unit 1, part A: My Family is a Loving Jewish Community (Together)
5. Unit 1, part B: My Class is a Fun Jewish Community (Separate)
6. Unit 1, part C: My School is a Helping Jewish Community (Separate/Together with teaching)

Unit 2 – Shabbat Brings Us Together to Live Out Jewish Values

7. Unit 2, part A: Shabbat Celebration Brings My Family Together (Together)
8. Unit 2, part B: Shabbat Symbols Remind Us to Celebrate Together (Separate)
9. Unit 2, part C: Shabbat Blessings Bind Us in Love Together (Separate/Together with teaching)

Thanksgiving

Unit 3 – Miracles Shine Out with Wonder

10. Unit 3, part A: The Miracles of Daily Life Inspire us to Wonder (Separate)
11. Unit 3, part B: The Miracles of Hanukkah Inspire us to Wonder (Together)
12. Hanukkah celebration: *Chag Urim Sameach* (Whole school together)

Winter Break

Unit 4 – We Honor Our Families Because Our Families are Treasures

² “Yom Sippur,” a pun on Yom Kippur, means “Story Day” and is envisioned as a holiday program for the entire school in which Religious School families get to know one another by sharing their family stories.

13. Unit 4, part A: My Family Passes Down Special Treasures (Together)
14. Unit 4, part B: We Treat Our Parents and Our Children as Treasures (Separate)
15. Unit 4, part C: My Family Helps Build the Whole Community's Treasures (Separate/Together with teaching)

EU: Living out Jewish values helps us care for our family.

Unit 5 – We are Jewish Heroes for Our Families

16. Each of Us Can Be a Jewish Hero of Courage and Wisdom (Together)
17. Our Interpretation of Esther's Heroism Enriches Our Family's Celebration of Purim (Separate)
18. Purim celebration: *Chag Gadol Layehudim* (Whole school together)

Unit 6 – We Show Our Caring by Asking Questions and Telling Stories

19. Passover Time is a Time for Questions and Stories (Together)
20. Our Interpretation of the Four Children Enriches Our Family's Celebration of Passover (Separate)

EU: Living out Jewish values helps us care for our community.

21. Our Family Shares Stories with Each Other and with Our Community (Separate/Together with teaching) [NB: This lesson is part of Unit 6]
22. Passover: Community model seder (Whole school together)

Unit 7 – We Can Help Heal Our Community through Bikkur Cholim (Visiting the Sick)

23. Every Member of Our Community is Important (Together)
24. There are Lots of Ways to Be Sick and Lots of Ways to Feel Better (Separate)
25. *Bikkur Cholim* (Visiting the Sick) is an Important and Meaningful Obligation (Separate/Together with teaching)
26. We Heal Our Community through *Bikkur Cholim* (Together – field trip to hospital or nursing home)
27. We Heal Our Community through Telling the Stories of Those We Don't Often Hear (Separate/Together with teaching)
28. *Siyyum*: Community celebration of conclusion of learning (Whole school together; each religious school class offers a presentation to the entire school community)

Resources

[Back to top](#)

In addition to the articles listed in the Annotated Bibliography, the following resources may be helpful in planning for and executing this curriculum:

Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative (jceei.org). This free web resource is dedicated to “strengthening the quality of both the Jewish and secular education offered to young Jewish children.” The Publications section contains several potentially helpful articles such as “Pursuing Excellence in Jewish Early Childhood Education” and “Jewish Living and Learning in the Classroom.”

The Jewish Education Project: LOMED Wiki (lomed.wikispaces.com). This curriculum was written with guidance from the LOMED initiative, which seeks to revitalize synagogue-based Jewish education. Before going straight to the “Lesson Plans” section of this website for ideas, be sure to read up on what LOMED actually is and how its “noticing targets” are intended to work.

Mogul, Wendy. *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children*. New York City: Penguin Books, 2001. While this is not directly a course devoted to parenting *per se*, the adult learners in this class may find the insights of this popular book helpful. You may suggest this book as supplemental reading and perhaps encourage parents to discuss amongst themselves using the Discussion Guide in the back of the book.

PJ Library: Jewish Bedtime Stories and Songs (pjlibrary.org). This organization distributes free books to all families with young Jewish children, and every parent should strongly be encouraged to enroll. You may wish to incorporate PJ Library books into the weekly curriculum in order to bridge the gap between school and home. Additionally, you and/or the parents in the course may seek out “Reading Resources for Families” to provide further guidance on how to use stories for rich education and also as a general resource for teaching young children.

Sample Lesson Plan 1 (Parents and children together)

[Back to top](#)Lesson Topic: Shabbat as a Family HolidayLevel: Kinder Kef Parents and ChildrenLength of lesson: 90 minutes (45 minutes + 45 minutes)

Stage 1 – Desired Results	
Enduring Understanding: My family lives out Jewish values when we learn together, when we celebrate Jewish holidays, and when we honor others.	
Core Concept: Shabbat celebration brings my family together.	
Understanding (s)/goals Learners will understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resting on Shabbat refreshes our souls. Celebrating Shabbat brings joy to our family. 	Essential Question(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is <i>absence</i> from work inherently meaningful? To what extent do I want to spend Shabbat with my family?
Learner objectives (outcomes): Students will be able to: ¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Explain</i> – Express that Shabbat entails rest and that rest is refreshing. <i>Interpret</i> – Suggest how Shabbat rest could be felt by the family. <i>Apply</i> – Prepare a “Shabbat set” for use at Religious School family Shabbat dinners. 	
Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence	
Performance Task(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write a story or draw a picture depicting a refreshing Shabbat with one’s family. Craft a “Shabbat set” with candlesticks, kiddush cup, and challah cover. 	Other Evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk about Shabbat with excitement and eagerness. Repeat the “meanings” of the Shabbat symbols (candlesticks → special, kiddush cup → sweet, challah cover → nourishing).

¹ This draws from the Six Facets of Understanding described in *Understanding by Design* (2nd edition), Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, ch. 4: When we truly understand, we (1) Can explain, (2) Can interpret, (3) Can apply, (4) Have perspective, (5) Can empathize, and (6) Have self-knowledge.

Stage 3 – Learning Plan

Materials:

- Music (by instrument, a capella, or CD/mp3 player).
 - Songs may include Chag Purim and Hakova Sheli.
 - Songs in Hebrew may be found online here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFZzVq1XTv4>.
- *The Queen Who Saved Her People* by Tilda Balsley, illustrated by Ilene Richard
- Costume supplies
 - Markers, crayons, colored pencils
 - Scissors
 - Tape
 - Glue sticks
 - Paper plates (for masks)
 - Rubber bands (for masks)
 - Construction paper (for crowns)
 - Paper towel rolls (possibly for scepter)
 - Costume jewelry
 - A few yards of cloth or fabric
 - Optional: Face paints
 - Optional: Dress-up supplies (hats, gowns, etc.)
- Laptop and speakers to play the G-dcast episode "The Purim Story for Kids and Other Double Dutch Jumping Hipsters" (available online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=mYGqOMe-DqQ)
- *Mishloach manot* or *matanot la'evyonim* supplies
 - Plastic baggies
 - *Hamentaschen*
 - Candies
 - Dried fruit (raisins, bananas, apricots, apples, etc.)
 - Juice boxes

Learning Activities:

1. **Morning Music.** Students will sing *Hinei Mah Tov*, as in every morning. The Kinder Kef teacher or a music specialist will then teach two Purim Songs (perhaps *Chag Purim* and *Hakova Sheli*). (10 min)
2. **Story time.** Read *The Queen Who Saved Her People* (10 min).
 - During the story, engage students through pointing out details in the pictures and asking questions about the story.
 - Interpretive questions such as "What do you think will happen next?" or "What would you do in this situation?" will both draw students into the story and bring the story into their lives.
 - These activities are meant to make the story-telling process interactive, resulting in deeper student understanding.
 - At the conclusion of the story, add the following:
 - When the Jews were safe, Mordecai suggested that all the Jews in the kingdom celebrate the holiday of Purim, and Queen Esther made it a law for all time. So from that day to this, Jews have

retold the Purim story and celebrated with a festive meal. Perhaps even more importantly, Esther reminded the Jews how important it is to honor the holiday of Purim by giving gifts to friends and also by helping out those who are in need. Esther reminds us that we don't just have fun on Purim: We also give what we can to other people as special presents.

3. **Remembering Esther.** Remind students of some of Esther's actions from the story. In particular, be sure to emphasize Esther's advocating for the Jews in front of the king and her establishment of gifts for friends and for the needy as part of celebrating Purim. Then ask them to identify what they admire about Esther. Students may respond with one or more of the following characteristics. (5 min)

Esther is...

- A good friend
- Beautiful
- Brave
- Concerned about the poor
- Jewish
- Loyal
- Smart

4. **Making Esther Costumes.** Present students with a wide variety of Purim costume materials and invite them to make an Esther costume. (20 min, including cleanup)
- Boys and girls should both make Esther costumes; no student will be forced to wear theirs if they are uncomfortable doing so.
 - Students may choose to make only a mask; that's fine.
 - While students are making their costumes, ask them to explain why they're making certain decisions.
 - If students are not reflecting on the Purim story, prompt them to do so. For example, you might ask, "Remember that Esther was very committed to Judaism even though she didn't tell the king that she was Jewish. How can you show this in your costume?" If the student needs further prompting, you might suggest, "You could include a Jewish star, a Hebrew word, a *kippah*, or an item of Jewish food in your costume. Which of those do you think is best?"
 - If there's time before the break, have students explain to one another why they made the choices they did in their costumes.
 - Students may take home any disposable part of their costume, though supplies such as costume jewelry should remain at school.

Break. Students will join the rest of the school for snack, community program, and *t'filah*.

5. **Reviewing the Esther story.** Show the G-dcast episode "The Purim Story for Kids and Other Double Dutch Jumping Hipsters." Students should respond to the following questions. (10 min)
 - What does Esther do that makes her a hero?
 - What's your favorite thing about Esther?
 - How do you want to be like Esther?
6. **Learning about giving Purim gifts.** Tell students that the video version of the Purim story left out one piece from the end. Ask if they remember it. If they don't, remind them that Esther said that giving gifts was an essential part of Purim. Students should respond to the following questions. (5 minutes)
 - How do you feel when you receive a gift?
 - How do you feel when you give someone a gift?
 - Why do you think Esther said it was important to give gifts on Purim?
7. **Choosing between *mishloach manot* and *matanot la'evyonim*.** Explain to the students that there are two kinds of gifts on Purim: *Mishloach manot* are gifts that we give to friends, and *matanot la'evyonim* are gifts that we give to those who are needy. (5 min)
 - Tell the students that the class is about to put together gift packages during class, and they get to decide whether they will be for *mishloach manot* or *matanot la'evyonim*.
 - Whichever one they *don't* pick, they'll have an opportunity to do at home (see *Kinder Kef Corner*).
 - Ask students to share their choice and explain why. Based on your read of the class, either have the class come to consensus, take a vote, or allow each student to make gifts with his or her own intention.
 - If students choose *mishloach manot*, ask the students who they hope to give the baskets to and mark it on the *Kinder Kef Corner*.
 - If they choose *matanot la'evyonim*, invite students to put all the finished products in a basket for delivery to the needy.
 - At the Purim carnival next week, there may be residents from a nearby nursing home who are visiting to volunteer/celebrate the holiday. Kinder Kef students can give their *matanot* to these seniors, who are "needy" because they no longer live in the homes where they used to be able to make their own Purim celebrations.
 - Alternatively, you may be able to arrange for these *matanot* to be distributed at a local soup kitchen; you could invite Kinder Kef families to participate in a trip to the soup kitchen (regardless of whether they deliver these *matanot* or other gifts made at home).
8. **Assembling gift baskets.** The class will assemble gift packages with materials listed above. (Feel free to add items of your own.) Every basket should have a note with a picture and/or greeting on it. (15 min, including cleanup)
 - During this time, prepare each student's *Kinder Kef Corner*.

9. **Kinder Kef Corner.** As they do every week, students will write or draw a response to their prompt in the *Kinder Kef Corner*. (5 min)
10. **Closing Circle.** As they do every week, students will come together on the floor for Closing Circle. In Closing Circle, every person (teacher included) will share something from today that they loved and something that they learned. Class will conclude with the singing of *Shalom Chaveirim*, and students will exit to participate in the full school's closing circle. (5 min)

Kinder Kef Corner



Our Unit Topic is: Living out Jewish values helps us care for our family.

The Core Concept of today's lesson is: Our interpretation of Esther's heroism enriches our family's celebration of Purim.

Today I...

- Heard the story of Purim from the book *The Queen Who Saved Her People*
- Made a Queen Esther costume
- Learned about the difference between *mishloach manot* and *matanot la'evyonim*
- Made gift baskets to give out

I was a special part of class today, and my teacher noticed that I...

We had the choice of giving our gift bags either to friends and family (as *mishloach manot*) or to the needy (as *matanot la'evyonim*). In the end, the decision was:

So at home, we can fulfill the other *mitzvah*! My teacher has ideas about this if we have any questions.

This is what I think about or feel about Queen Esther:

Sample Lesson Plan 2a (Children only)

[Back to top](#)Lesson Topic: Esther's HeroismLevel: Kinder Kef Children (Preschool and Kindergarten)Length of lesson: 90 minutes (45 minutes + 45 minutes)

Stage 1 – Desired Results	
Enduring Understanding: Living out Jewish values helps us care for our family.	
Core Concept: Our interpretation of Esther's heroism enriches our family's celebration of Purim.	
Understanding (s)/goals Learners will understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Esther's bravery and kindness in the story of Purim make her a hero. As we celebrate Purim, we too can be heroes like Esther. 	Essential Question(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do biblical heroes serve as contemporary role models? How do biblical stories inform our holiday observances?
Learner objectives (outcomes): Students will be able to: ¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Explain</i> – Specify the ways in which Esther acted heroically (appearing before the king to advocate for the Jews and establishing the practice of <i>mishloach manot</i> and <i>matanot la'evyonim</i> as part of Purim observance). <i>Interpret</i> – Create an artistic <i>midrash</i> through crafting an Esther costume reflective of features of Esther's character. <i>Apply</i> – Choose to engage in either <i>mishloach manot</i> or <i>matanot la'evyonim</i>. 	
Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence	
Performance Task(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an Esther costume that reflects features of Esther's character. Engage in the Purim practice of <i>mishloach manot</i> or <i>matanot la'evyonim</i>. 	Other Evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responding to and asking questions about Esther and Purim. Justifying choices about Purim costume and Purim <i>mitzvot</i> through reference to Esther's character.

¹ This draws from the Six Facets of Understanding described in *Understanding by Design* (2nd edition), Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, ch. 4: When we truly understand, we (1) Can explain, (2) Can interpret, (3) Can apply, (4) Have perspective, (5) Can empathize, and (6) Have self-knowledge.

Stage 3 – Learning Plan

Materials:

- Music (by instrument, a capella, or CD/mp3 player).
 - Songs may include Chag Purim and Hakova Sheli.
 - Songs in Hebrew may be found online here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFZzVq1XTv4>.
- *The Queen Who Saved Her People* by Tilda Balsley, illustrated by Ilene Richard
- Costume supplies
 - Markers, crayons, colored pencils
 - Scissors
 - Tape
 - Glue sticks
 - Paper plates (for masks)
 - Rubber bands (for masks)
 - Construction paper (for crowns)
 - Paper towel rolls (possibly for scepter)
 - Costume jewelry
 - A few yards of cloth or fabric
 - Optional: Face paints
 - Optional: Dress-up supplies (hats, gowns, etc.)
- Laptop and speakers to play the G-dcast episode "The Purim Story for Kids and Other Double Dutch Jumping Hipsters" (available online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=mYGqOMe-DqQ)
- *Mishloach manot* or *matanot la'evyonim* supplies
 - Plastic baggies
 - *Hamentaschen*
 - Candies
 - Dried fruit (raisins, bananas, apricots, apples, etc.)
 - Juice boxes
- "Kinder Kef Corner" sheets (one per child)

Learning Activities:

1. **Morning Music.** Students will sing *Hinei Mah Tov*, as in every morning. The Kinder Kef teacher or a music specialist will then teach two Purim Songs (perhaps *Chag Purim* and *Hakova Sheli*). (10 min)
2. **Story time.** Read *The Queen Who Saved Her People* (10 min).
 - During the story, engage students through pointing out details in the pictures and asking questions about the story.
 - Interpretive questions such as "What do you think will happen next?" or "What would you do in this situation?" will both draw students into the story and bring the story into their lives.
 - These activities are meant to make the story-telling process interactive, resulting in deeper student understanding.
 - At the conclusion of the story, add the following:
 - When the Jews were safe, Mordecai suggested that all the Jews in the kingdom celebrate the holiday of Purim, and Queen Esther

made it a law for all time. So from that day to this, Jews have retold the Purim story and celebrated with a festive meal. Perhaps even more importantly, Esther reminded the Jews how important it is to honor the holiday of Purim by giving gifts to friends and also by helping out those who are in need. Esther reminds us that we don't just have fun on Purim: We also give what we can to other people as special presents.

- Esther was very brave in standing up for what's right, and she risked a lot to go before the King. So we owe her the respect of remembering in her honor the importance of giving to others who are in need.

3. **Remembering Esther.** Invite students to recall some of Esther's actions from the story. In particular, be sure to emphasize Esther's advocating for the Jews in front of the king and her establishment of gifts for friends and for the needy as part of celebrating Purim. Then ask them to identify what they admire about Esther. Students may respond with one or more of the following characteristics. (5 min)

Esther is...

- A good friend
- Beautiful
- Brave
- Concerned about the poor
- Jewish
- Loyal
- Smart

4. **Making Esther Costumes.** Present students with a wide variety of Purim costume materials and invite them to make an Esther costume. (20 min, including cleanup)
 - Boys and girls should both make Esther costumes; no student will be forced to wear theirs if they are uncomfortable doing so.
 - Students may choose to make only a mask; that's fine.
 - While students are making their costumes, ask them to explain why they're making certain decisions.
 - If students are not reflecting on the Purim story, prompt them to do so. For example, you might ask, "Remember that Esther was very committed to Judaism even though she didn't tell the king that she was Jewish. How can you show this in your costume?" If the student needs further prompting, you might suggest, "You could include a Jewish star, a Hebrew word, a *kippah*, or an item of Jewish food in your costume. Which of those do you think is best?"
 - If there's time before the break, have students explain to one another why they made the choices they did in their costumes.
 - Students may take home any disposable part of their costume, though supplies such as costume jewelry should remain at school.

- Break.** Students will join the rest of the school for snack, community program, and *t'filah*.
5. **Reviewing the Esther story.** Show the G-dcast episode "The Purim Story for Kids and Other Double Dutch Jumping Hipsters." Students should respond to the following questions. (10 min)
 - What does Esther do that makes her a hero?
 - What's your favorite thing about Esther?
 - How do you want to be like Esther?
 6. **Learning about giving Purim gifts.** Tell students that the video version of the Purim story left out one piece from the end. Ask if they remember it. If they don't, remind them that Esther said that giving gifts was an essential part of Purim. Students should respond to the following questions. (5 minutes)
 - How do you feel when you receive a gift?
 - How do you feel when you give someone a gift?
 - Why do you think Esther said it was important to give gifts on Purim?
 7. **Choosing between *mishloach manot* and *matanot la'evyonim*.** Explain to the students that there are two kinds of gifts on Purim: *Mishloach manot* are gifts that we give to friends, and *matanot la'evyonim* are gifts that we give to those who are needy. While *matanot la'evyonim* can take the form of *tzedakah* (gifts for charity), they can also be gifts of food that are similar to *mishloach manot*. (5 min)
 - Tell the students that the class is about to put together gift packages during class, and they get to decide whether they will be for *mishloach manot* or *matanot la'evyonim*.
 - Whichever one they *don't* pick, they'll have an opportunity to do at home (see *Kinder Kef Corner*).
 - Ask students to share their choice and explain why. Based on your read of the class, either have the class come to consensus, take a vote, or allow each student to make gifts with his or her own intention.
 - If students choose *mishloach manot*, ask the students who they hope to give the baskets to and mark it on the *Kinder Kef Corner*.
 - If they choose *matanot la'evyonim*, invite students to put all the finished products in a basket for delivery to the needy.
 - At the Purim carnival next week, there may be residents from a nearby nursing home who are visiting to volunteer/celebrate the holiday. Kinder Kef students can give their *matanot* to these seniors, who are "needy" because they no longer live in the homes where they used to be able to make their own Purim celebrations.
 - Alternatively, you may be able to arrange for these *matanot* to be distributed at a local soup kitchen; you could invite Kinder Kef families to participate in a trip to the soup kitchen (regardless of whether they deliver these *matanot* or other gifts made at home).

8. **Assembling gift baskets.** The class will assemble gift packages with materials listed above. (Feel free to add items of your own.) Every basket should have a note with a picture and/or greeting on it. (15 min, including cleanup)
 - During this time, prepare each student's *Kinder Kef Corner*.
9. **Kinder Kef Corner.** As they do every week, students will write or draw a response to their prompt in the *Kinder Kef Corner*. (5 min)
10. **Closing Circle.** As they do every week, students will come together on the floor for Closing Circle. In Closing Circle, every person (teacher included) will share something from today that they loved and something that they learned. Class will conclude with the singing of *Shalom Chaveirim*, and students will exit to participate in the full school's closing circle. (5 min)

Kinder Kef Corner



Our Unit Topic is: Living out Jewish values helps us care for our family.

The Core Concept of today's lesson is: Our interpretation of Esther's heroism enriches our family's celebration of Purim.

Today I...

- Heard the story of Purim from the book *The Queen Who Saved Her People*
- Made a Queen Esther costume
- Learned about the difference between *mishloach manot* and *matanot la'evyonim*
- Made gift baskets to give out

I was a special part of class today, and my teacher noticed that I...

We had the choice of giving our gift bags either to friends and family (as *mishloach manot*) or to the needy (as *matanot la'evyonim*). In the end, the decision was:

So at home, we can fulfill the other *mitzvah*! My teacher has ideas about this if we have any questions.

This is what I think about or feel about Queen Esther:

Sample Lesson Plan 2b (Parents only)

[Back to top](#)Lesson Topic: Esther's HeroismLevel: Kinder Kef ParentsLength of lesson: 90 minutes (45 minutes + 45 minutes)

Stage 1 – Desired Results	
Enduring Understanding: Living out Jewish values helps us care for our family.	
Core Concept: Our interpretation of Esther's heroism enriches our family's celebration of Purim.	
Understanding (s)/goals Learners will understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We might interpret Esther as pious or tragic, lucky or assertive. Our approach to the character of Esther affects how we celebrate Purim. 	Essential Question(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What makes an interpretation valid? How do the characters of biblical figures influence my Jewish practice?
Learner objectives (outcomes): Students will be able to: ¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Explain</i> – Articulate the differences between the interpretations of Esther given by the Rabbis, Itzik Manger, and Vanessa Hidary. <i>Interpret</i> – Offer a personal interpretation of the character of Esther. <i>Apply</i> – Recognize connections between interpreting Esther and commemorating Purim. <i>Have Self-Knowledge</i> – Acknowledge personal criteria of accepting an interpretation as valid. 	
Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence	
Performance Task(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share personal interpretation of the character of Esther, commenting on others' interpretations. Commit to a Purim practice informed by personal interpretation of the character of Esther. 	Other Evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasonable dialogue that demonstrates engagement with interpretive texts. Perceptive questions that point to a meta-awareness of the process of text interpretation.
Stage 3 – Learning Plan	

¹ This draws from the Six Facets of Understanding described in *Understanding by Design* (2nd edition), Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, ch. 4: When we truly understand, we (1) Can explain, (2) Can interpret, (3) Can apply, (4) Have perspective, (5) Can empathize, and (6) Have self-knowledge.

Materials:

- Tanakhs (optional)
- Handout: Esther's Change of Heart
- Handout: Esther in the Eyes of the Rabbis
- Laptop and speakers to play the G-dcast episode "The Purim Story for Kids and Other Double Dutch Jumping Hipsters" (available online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=mYGqOMe-DqQ)
- Handout: Itzik Manger Reads Esther
- Handout: Four Mitzvot of Purim

Learning Activities:

Check in

1. **How is everyone?** Learners will share a sentence or two about how they are this morning. (5 min)
2. **Introduction of topic.** Introduce today's topic, various perspectives on Esther's heroism and how these interpretations affect our celebration of Purim. (1 min)
3. **Biblical Text.** Invite learners to share what they remember of the Purim story. It may be helpful to review any of the following items if students don't mention them:
 - Mordecai, Esther's older cousin, adopted her as a child when she was orphaned.
 - Esther became Queen of Persia after Ahashuerus banished/executed his wife, Vashti, for refusing to appear/perform at his feast. She does not reveal that she is Jewish.
 - Mordecai reported—through Esther—a plot to assassinate the king but was not rewarded.
 - Haman, a descendant of Amalek (ancient enemies of the People of Israel), becomes advisor to the king and counsels the extermination of the Jews.
 - Mordecai learns of this plan and urges Esther to intercede on behalf of her people.
 - Esther wins an audience with the king and invites him and Haman to a private party, where she exposes Haman's plot to destroy her people.
 - At Esther's urging, Haman is hanged on the gallows he had erected for Mordecai.
 - Also at Esther's urging, King Ahashuerus allows the Jews throughout the kingdom to violently attack those who would have attacked them on that day had Haman's plan come to fruition.
 - Mordecai and Esther together decree an annual commemoration of these events in the holiday of Purim.

Distribute "Esther's Change of Heart." Learners will read the biblical texts aloud as a group and discuss, responding to the questions on the handout. (19 min)

Intro

Anchor

Add

4. **Rabbinic Text.** Distribute "Esther in the Eyes of the Rabbis." Learners will read

the midrashic text aloud as a group and discuss, responding to the questions on the handout. (10 min).

5. **Contemporary Text.** Show the G-dcast episode "The Purim Story for Kids and Other Double Dutch Jumping Hipsters." Learners should respond to some or all of the following questions. (10 min)
 - How does Vanessa Hidary understand the character of Esther?
 - How does the interpretation differ from the rabbis'?
 - What do you appreciate about this interpretation? What bothers you about it?
 - What makes an interpretation "valid" for you? Do you consider either the Rabbis or Vanessa Hidary more authoritative than the other?
6. Break.
7. **Modern Text.** Distribute "Itzik Manger Reads Esther," and divide the class into two groups. Groups can read through text separately and discuss, responding to the questions on their handout. Feel free to join one or both groups to contribute to conversation. If the class is smaller than 6, discuss the text as a full group. (15 min)
8. **Discussion.** Each group will report to the other what it discussed, sharing items of particular interest to members of the group. (10 min)
9. **What do you think?** Invite learners to share their own interpretations of Esther's character. Encourage learners to specify *why* they offer their interpretation. (For example, an interpretation may reflect a learner's reading of the original text, or it may cohere with the learner's values system.) (15 min)
10. **How does this impact your celebration of Purim?** Our celebration of Purim is based at least in part on our understanding of Esther. For example, the rabbis instituted a fast day to correlate with Esther's pious fast, and Aguilar notes that celebrating holidays like Purim is imperative because of Esther's example that women can and must keep their religion alive.

Distribute "Four Mitzvot of Purim," and read together as a class. Learners will discuss how their understanding of Esther may impact their celebration of Purim. The following questions may guide discussion: (15 min)

- In what ways does your interpretation of Esther relate to any of these mitzvot?
- Which mitzvah of Purim can you observe differently this year (or observe at all if you usually don't)? In what ways does your study of the figure of Esther impact your decision?
- In telling the story of Purim, which of Esther's characteristics would you emphasize, and how would you make those characteristics relevant to your practice today?

Apply

Away

Feedback

- | |
|--|
| <p>11. Closing words. Each learner can respond to one of these questions: What is one Purim mitzvah you are eager to commit to this year? OR What is one new lesson that you gained during today's class? (5 min)</p> |
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Esther's Change of Heart

Mordecai has learned of Haman's plot to exterminate every Jew in the kingdom and petitions his cousin and foster daughter, Queen Esther, to speak up on behalf of her people. She tells Mordecai that she can't help: If she approaches the king without being summoned, she shall be put to death.

4:13 וַיֹּאמֶר מָרְדֳּכָי לְהָשִׁיב אֶל-אֶסְתֵּר אֶל-תְּדֹמַי בְּנִפְשׁוֹ לְהַמְלִיט בֵּית-הַמֶּלֶךְ מִכָּל-הַיְּהוּדִים: ¹⁴ כִּי אִם-הִתְרַשׁ תִּתְּרִישִׁי בַּעֲת הַזֹּאת רוּחַ וְהִצִּלָּה יַעֲמֹד לַיְּהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אֲחֵר וְאֶת וּבֵית-אָבִיהָ תֵּאבְדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם-לָעֵת כְּזֹאת הִגַּעַת לְמַלְכוּת: ¹⁵ וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לְהָשִׁיב אֶל-מָרְדֳּכָי: ¹⁶ לֵךְ כְּנוּס אֶת-כָּל-הַיְּהוּדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאֶל-תִּשְׁתּוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים לֵילָה וַיּוֹם גַּם-אֲנִי וְנַעֲרָתִי אֲצוּם כֵּן וּבִכֵּן אָבוֹא אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-כִדָּת וְכֹאֲשֶׁר אֲבִדְתִּי אֲבִדְתִּי: ¹⁷ וַיַּעֲבֹר מָרְדֳּכָי וַיַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-צִוְתָהּ עָלָיו אֶסְתֵּר:

4:13 Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther: "Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace. ¹⁴ On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis."

¹⁵ Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast in my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!"

¹⁷ So Mordecai went about [the city] and did just as Esther had commanded him.

1. How does Esther's position change during the course of her correspondence with Mordecai?
2. What do you notice that indicates that Mordecai is dominant in the relationship? What do you notice that indicates that Esther is dominant?
3. What do you think Esther feels toward Mordecai? What do you think Mordecai feels toward Esther?



Esther and Mordecai by Aerte de Gelder

Esther in the Eyes of the Rabbis

To the Rabbis of the 6th-9th centuries, Esther was a paragon of Jewish virtue. For instance, they teach that her Hebrew name is Hadassah (myrtle) “because her good deeds spread her fame abroad, as the sweet fragrance of the myrtle pervades the air in which it grows.”¹ Although the story of Esther takes place long before rabbinic law existed, they nonetheless imagine her observing *halakhab* perfectly, even while residing in the palace of a foreign king.



Detail from *Queen Esther*, by Minerva K. Teichert. © William and Betty Stokes.

The change in her worldly position wrought no change in Esther's ways and manners. As she retained her beauty until old age, so the queen remained pure in mind and soul as ever the simple maiden had been.... Only such things passed her lips as were permitted to Jews. She lived entirely on vegetable food, as Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah² had aforesaid done at the court of Nebuchadnezzar.... She was sure to remember the Sabbath every week... As for Esther herself, she was but following the example of her race. She could keep silent in all modesty, as Rachel, the mother of Benjamin, had kept a modest silence when her father gave her sister Leah to Jacob for wife instead of herself...³ [Rachel was] recompensed for [her] self-abnegation by being given a descendent like Esther.⁴

1. How do the Rabbis imagine Esther? In what ways is she seen as a model Jew?
2. What can you learn about the Rabbis by considering their interpretation of Esther?
3. In what ways do you appreciate this rabbinic portrait of Esther? In what ways does it bother you?

¹ Ginzberg, Louis. *The Legends of the Jews, Volume IV: From Joshua to Esther*. p. 383-384. Ginzberg draws this description from Babylonian Talmud *Megillah* 13a.

² These three Hebrew figures, along with Daniel, survive many trials at the court of Nebuchadnezzar, demonstrating not only the power of the Eternal but also their singular devotion to their God. Cf. Daniel 1-3, in which they are often referred to as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (see Daniel 1:6-7 for Hebrew and Chaldean names).

³ Cf. Genesis 29.

⁴ Ginzberg p. 385-387, 389-390. Ginzberg draws from Babylonian Talmud *Megillah* 13a-b, II Targum Esther 2, and Esther Rabbah 2.

Itzik Manger Reads Esther



Itzik Manger (1901-1969) was a well-known and highly-regarded author of Yiddish poetry and prose. Among his many works is a series of poetic midrashim, among which is Manger's treatment of the story of Esther. Manger's most notable midrashic innovation is the invention of the character Fastrigosso, who had loved Esther since before her marriage to Ahashuerus and who jealously attempted to kill the man who married his beloved.

Mordecai Comes to Queen Esther

It's night, Queen Esther patches
The king's shirt in her hand.
Once she was only an orphan,
Estranged in a strange land.

But her mother's soul interceded
And her uncle, the go-between.
Now the fool of a king is her husband
And she is his proper queen.

And Esther can have what she wants —
The king's true and faithful to her...
She can bathe both in milk and in wine.
Who could ask for anything more?

Knock, knock. There's a knock at the door.
Slowly, Mordecai comes in.
"Esther I've brought you some news.
And I'm glad that I find you alone."

She says, "Perhaps my dear uncle
Would like a nice cup of tea?
It's been raining and snowing outdoors —
Storming the livelong day."

"As for that," Uncle Mordecai sighs,
"Things, Esther, are really not good.
On the fourteenth of Adar — that's Purim —
Blood will be shed. Jewish blood."

Esther is silent. She knows
How angry the king has been
Since he was attacked in the street
By the tailor journeyman.¹

And she knows that Haman is whispering,
"Jews this ... and Jews that, and Jews do ..."
Reminding the king that the man
Who attacked him was also a Jew.

Softly old Mordecai says,
"Esther, prepare your great fast.
Satan and I've made a deal²
And he's promised to do his best."

He whispers a word in her ear,
"Do you know what I mean or not?
This Purim, with God's help, and yours,
We'll have something to celebrate."

Esther turns feverish, the shirt
She holds falls out of her hand.
Again, she feels like an orphan
Estranged in a strange land.

¹ I.e., Fastrigosso.

² Later, we learn that Satan has agreed to teach Mordecai "a trick to push Haman / Straight into Queen Esther's bed" (Cf. Esther 7:8).

Queen Esther Fasting

Esther, the queen, is weary and pale,
And trembles as if she had fever.
“Soon – in forty-five minutes, thank God,
The fast day will be over.”

The king, when he saw her, said, “Dear
What makes you look so pale?
Tell me what makes you so wan
On a day this beautiful.”

How to the foolish king can she say,
“My Lord, I’m pale, it’s true...
It’s Esther’s fast and I must fast
Because Mordecai told me to?”

May the fast bring Haman down, Lord,
Him and his flattery...
That charlatan, that crashing bore,
That sly old debauchee.

“The light of the sun and the moon and the
stars
Compared with you are dim.”
Each hypocrite word he utters is false,
Buts he has to put up with him.

It’s what her uncle wants. He says,
“Let him bark on to the end.
Every word of a villain like that
Is a spume that blows in the wind.

The Megillah,” her uncle says,
“Has prophesied of him
That Haman one day will be a thing
Of scorn to kith and kin.”

That’s what her uncle Mordecai says,
And Mordecai understands.
And Esther always does everything
That Mordecai commands.

As she betrayed the tailor’s lad
Because it was Mordecai’s will:
Yet Fastrigosso, the tailor’s lad,
Was a treasure, a perfect jewel.

And here, she’s been fasting ever since
dawn
At Mordecai’s command;
Her uncle’s a wise old Jew –
And Mordecai understands.¹

1. These two poems, excerpted from a series of poems that tells a fuller story, paint yet another picture of Esther and Mordecai. How would you characterize Mordecai in this reading? Esther?
2. Consider the final stanza of each poem. Do you think the tone is the same in each? If not, how do they differ?
3. What aspect(s) of the biblical Esther story seem particularly significant for this reading?
4. Do you see evidence of the Rabbis’ interpretation of Esther in this reading? If yes, where? If not, what might this reveal about Itzik Manger?
5. In what ways do you appreciate this portrait of Esther? In what ways does it bother you?

¹ Manger, Itzik. *The World According to Itzik: Selected Poetry and Prose*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002. p. 55-56, 63-64

Four Mitzvot of Purim

There are four basic mitzvot established by the Mishnah, the first Rabbinic law code, based on the text of the Book of Esther. Following the salvation of the Jews, Mordecai decreed the everlasting observance of the holiday, and Esther confirmed his ordinance:

Esther 9:29-31

^{9:29} Then Queen Esther daughter of Abihail wrote a second letter of Purim for the purpose of confirming with full authority the aforementioned one of Mordecai the Jew. ³⁰ Dispatches were sent to all the Jews in the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the realm of Ahashuerus with an ordinance of “equity and honesty.” ³¹ These days of Purim shall be observed at their proper time, as Mordecai the Jew—and now Queen Esther—has obligated them to do, and just as they have assumed for themselves and their descendants the obligation of the fasts with their lamentations. [I.e., the Jews are to celebrate this festive holiday in addition to their commemorations of national tragedies.]

1. Reading the Megillah (*Mikra Megillah*)

And Esther’s ordinance validating these observances of Purim was recorded in a scroll (Esther 9:32).

Each year, we retell the story of Purim, found in the Megillah (which is the same as the biblical book of Esther). As this story is one of overturned fortunes and unexpected endings, our recitation of the story is often humorous, honoring the festivity of the holiday.



2. Festive meal (*Se'udat Purim*)

They were to observe [these days of Purim] as days of feasting and merrymaking... (9:22).

Purim is a time for feasting and making a day of gladness. Purim is a time for special foods such as *hamantashen* (cookies filled with poppy seeds or jam) and *kreplach* (dumplings).

3. Sending gifts to friends (*Mishloach Manot*)



...for sending gifts to one another... (9:22)

On Purim, Jews across the kingdom of Persia celebrated their freedom, and they continue to share in that joy every year. Sending gifts to friends, often baskets of food and treats, is a practice intended to increase everyone's joy, both the sender and the receiver.

4. Sending presents to the poor (*Matanot L'evyonim*)

...and [sending] presents to the poor (9:22).

The festivities of Purim are not reserved only for those who can afford them. Giving money or other gifts to those who are in need allows the spirit of the holiday to spread to every corner of the community.



Sample Lesson Plan 3 (Parents and Children Separate and then Together) [Back to top](#)

Lesson Topic: *Bikkur Cholim: Its Challenges and its Centrality*

Level: Kinder Kef Parents and Children

Length of lesson: 90 minutes (45 minutes separate + 45 minutes together)

Stage 1 – Desired Results	
Enduring Understanding: Living out Jewish values helps us care for our community.	
Core Concept: <i>Bikkur cholim</i> (visiting the sick) is an important and meaningful obligation.	
Understanding (s)/goals Learners will understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Bikkur cholim</i> is a holy obligation. The principles of <i>bikkur cholim</i> are <i>r'fuah</i> (healing) and <i>kavod</i> (honor). 	Essential Question(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are my behaviors guided by Jewish wisdom? When do I put the wellbeing of others before the comfort of my family?
Learner objectives (outcomes) – Parents: Students will be able to: ¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Explain</i> – Identify key principles of <i>bikkur cholim</i> (<i>r'fuah</i> and <i>kavod</i>). <i>Interpret</i> – Connect rabbinic teachings on <i>bikkur cholim</i> to the life and practice of the family. <i>Apply</i> – Demonstrate appropriate behavior during a visit to the sick. Learner objectives (outcomes) – Children: Students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Explain</i> – Identify key principles of <i>bikkur cholim</i> (<i>r'fuah</i> and <i>kavod</i>). <i>Interpret</i> – Suggest how they can appropriately and helpfully visit the sick. <i>Apply</i> – Demonstrate appropriate behavior during a visit to the sick. 	
Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence	
Performance Task(s) – Parents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline important values of <i>bikkur cholim</i> that will help children to perform this mitzvah. Act out a model visit to the sick. 	Other Evidence – Parents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk about <i>bikkur cholim</i> with compassion and commitment. Share examples of <i>r'fuah</i> and <i>kavod</i> that would apply during a visit to the sick.

¹ This draws from the Six Facets of Understanding described in *Understanding by Design* (2nd edition), Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, ch. 4: When we truly understand, we (1) Can explain, (2) Can interpret, (3) Can apply, (4) Have perspective, (5) Can empathize, and (6) Have self-knowledge.

Performance Task(s) – Children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrate a family visit to the sick. • Act out a model visit to the sick. 	Other Evidence – Children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about <i>bikkur cholim</i> with compassion and commitment. • Share examples of <i>r'fuah</i> and <i>kavod</i> that would apply during a visit to the sick.
Stage 3 – Learning Plan	
Materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nana Upstairs & Nana Downstairs</i> by Tomie dePaola • Coloring supplies (paper, markers, colored pencils, etc.) • "Visiting the Sick in the Shulchan Aruch" handout (one per parent) • "Visiting the Sick" by Lisa Samick (one per family) • Kinder Kef Corner sheets (one per child) 	
Learning Activities – Children: <p>Note: This lesson follows one dedicated to understanding sickness and healing that parents and children experienced separately. It precedes a whole-class visit to a nursing home and should be seen largely as preparation for a meaningful visit.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Morning Music. Students will sing <i>Hinei Mah Tov</i>, as in every morning. The Kinder Kef teacher or a music specialist will then take requests for students' favorite songs or simply review others that the class has sung before. (10 min) 2. Story time. Read <i>Nana Upstairs & Nana Downstairs</i>. (10 min) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ During the story, engage students through pointing out details in the pictures and asking questions about the story. ○ Interpretive questions such as "What do you think will happen next?" or "What would you do in this situation?" will both draw students into the story and bring the story into their lives. ○ These activities are meant to make the story-telling process interactive, resulting in deeper student understanding. 3. Discussion of story. Students should respond to the following questions. (10 min) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. How many nanas did Tommy have, and where did they live? B. What did Tommy like to do when he visited with Nana Upstairs? C. Why do you think Nana Upstairs lived upstairs? [Guide students to an understanding that Nana Upstairs is very old and therefore tired, perhaps sick, and nearing her natural death.] D. How do you think Nana Upstairs felt when Tommy visited her every Sunday? E. If you were Tommy, how would you feel visiting Nana Upstairs? F. Who do you know in your life who might be old or sick like Nana 	

Upstairs? [It may be helpful for the teacher to share a personal story.]

- G. Remember that last week, we learned about getting sick and feeling better. How could you make a person who is tired or sick like Nana Upstairs [or the individuals previously identified] feel better?

4. **Picturing *bikkur cholim*.** Explain that the Jewish word for visiting people who are sick (like Nana Upstairs) is *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick). Remind the students that next week, the whole class will make a visit to a nursing home to see people like Nana Upstairs and to make them feel better. Ask students to draw a picture of them visiting either a person they know in their own lives or someone like Nana Upstairs and making that person feel better during the visit. (10 min)
5. **Sharing.** Children will share their picture with the whole class, pointing out what they can do to make someone feel better during a visit. (5 min)

Break. Learners will join the rest of the school for snack, community program, and *t'filah*.

Learning Activities – Parents:

Note: This lesson follows one dedicated to understanding sickness and healing that parents and children experienced separately. It precedes a whole-class visit to a nursing home and should be seen largely as preparation for a meaningful visit.

1. **Check in.** Learners will share a sentence or two about how they are this morning. (5 min)
2. **Anchor.** Remind learners that we are in the midst of a unit of learning about *bikkur cholim*, visiting the sick, and that we will travel together as a class next week to a nursing home. Invite learners to briefly share an experience of when they *received* a visitation while sick and how it affected their experience of illness. (10 min)
3. **Chevruta study.** Distribute the handout “Visiting the Sick in the Shulchan Aruch.” Divide class into three groups and assign each group to read a pair of texts. The first group should read texts 1 and 2, the second 3 and 4, and the third 5 and 8. [NB Paragraphs 6-7, 9-10 have been excerpted out.] Each group should answer questions 1-3. (10 min)
4. **Group text study.** Invite all groups to come back together. Each group should share—very briefly—their answer to question 1. Then, conduct a full-class conversation guided by questions 4-6. (15 min)
 - It may be helpful during this conversation to suggest that *bikkur cholim* has two primary focuses: *r'fuah* (healing) and *kavod* (honor). We visit the sick in order to provide them relief, and our visit is guided by respect for the dignity and wishes of the person who is sick.

5. **Application.** Instruct parents that they will have an opportunity to discuss these values with their children in preparation for the nursing home visit next week. Distribute "Visiting the Sick" by Lisa Samick and invite parents to glance over the article during the break and to read it more carefully over the course of the week. Respond to any questions parents may have about next week's trip. (5 min)

Break. Learners will join the rest of the school for snack, community program, and *t'filah*.

Learning Activities – Parents and children together:

6. **Singing together.** Parents and children will sit in a circle together and sing *Hinei Mah Tov* as well, perhaps, as other songs. (5 min).
7. **Children teaching parents.** Invite the children to share their picture of a visit to a sick person with their parents. Encourage children to share what they learned from *Nana Upstairs & Nana Downstairs*. (5 min)
8. **R'fuah and Kavod.** Write רְפוּאָה and כְּבוֹד on a board or large piece of paper. Tell the class that these two concepts are central to *bikkur cholim*. When we visit someone who is sick, we are visiting because of *r'fuah*, or to help them feel better (physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually). Also, when we visit someone who is sick, we're doing it *for them* and not for ourselves – so it's very important that we treat them with *kavod*, which means honor. We respect their wishes and make sure that whatever we do, we don't embarrass them. (10 min)
 - Invite children to share what *r'fuah* and *kavod* mean in their own words.
 - Encourage parents to add their own thoughts.
 - Ask for examples of *r'fuah* and *kavod* that would apply during a visit to someone at a nursing home.
9. **Practicing a visit.** Invite families to role-play a visit to the nursing home. First, children should be the nursing home residents and parents can be the visitors. Parents should model behaviors such as introducing themselves, asking how the resident is feeling, and inviting the resident to tell a story or play a game. Then, parents should play the part of the resident and children can be the visitor. You may also allow children to play with one another and/or to interact with other parents in the class. (10 min)
10. **Getting ready for the visit.** Ask families to sit again on the floor and describe the nursing home you intend to visit. Try to create a virtual experience, attending to all five senses. What does this nursing home look like? Smell like? What are you likely to hear? Is it cold? Are you bringing food or eating with the residents? Tell the families that the residents are *very* excited to meet them next week and remind them that what they're about to do is a *mitzvah*. Address any questions from children or parents about next week's trip. (5 min)

11. **Kinder Kef Corner.** As they do every week, children will write or draw a response to their prompt in the *Kinder Kef Corner*, parents can assist. (5 min)
12. **Closing Circle.** As they do every week, learners will come together on the floor for Closing Circle. In Closing Circle, every person (teacher included) will share something from today that they loved and something that they learned. Class will conclude with the singing of *Shalom Chaveirim*, and learners will exit to participate in the full school's closing circle. (5 min)

Visiting the Sick in the Shulchan Aruch

The Shulchan Aruch is a compendium of Jewish law composed by Rabbi Joseph Karo in the 16th century CE and later supplemented by various commentators. It is considered to be an authoritative guide toward *halachah*, or a Jewish way of life. This chapter discusses the *halachot* (laws) of *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick), and the following selections are relevant to our study this morning.

Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah, Chapter 335

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה סימן שלה

א. מצוה לבקר חולים. הקרובים והחברים נכנסים מיד; והרחוקים, אחר ג' ימים. ואם קפץ עליו החולי, אלו ואלו נכנסים מיד.

1. It is a mitzvah to visit the sick. Close relatives and friends enter immediately; those who are distant, after three days. And if sickness overtakes him, both [close relatives and those who are distant] enter immediately.

ב. אפילו הגדול ילך לבקר הקטן, ואפילו כמה פעמים ביום, ואפילו בן גילו. וכל המוסיף ה"ז משובח, ובלבד שלא יטריח לו. הגה: י"א דשונא יכול לילך לבקר חולה, ולא נראה לי. אלא לא יבקר חולה, ולא ינחם האבל שהוא שונאו, שלא יחשב ששמח לאידו, ואינו לו אלא צער, כן נראה לי.

2. Even the great visit goes to visit the small, and even several times a day and even if they are the same age. Everyone who increases [his visits], this is praiseworthy provided he does not trouble him. *Comment:*²⁰ Some say that an enemy may go to visit a sick person, but this does not seem right to me. Rather, he should not visit a sick person no comfort a mourner whom he hates so that [the latter] should not think that he rejoices at his misfortune and thereby feel pain. This seems right to me.

ג. המבקר את החולה לא ישב ע"ג מטה ולא ע"ג כסא ולא ע"ג ספסל, אלא מתעטף ויושב לפניו, שהשכינה למעלה מראשותיו. הגה: ודוקא כשהחולה שוכב על הארץ, דהיושב גבוה ממנו, אבל כששוכב על המטה מותר לישב על כסא וספסל.

3. The one who visits the sick person should not sit on the bed nor upon a chair nor upon a stool but must wrap himself and sit before him since the Shechinah [the divine presence] is above the head [of the sick person]. *Comment:* [This applies] only when the sick person is lying on the ground such that one who sits [near the sick person] would be higher than him. But when he is lying on the bed, it is permitted to sit on a chair or a stool.

²⁰ Comments such as these come from later contributors to the Shulchan Aruch. Often, as in this case, they represent a different local custom, highlighting the frequent discrepancies between Sephardic and Ashkenazi practice.

ד. אין מבקרין החולה בג' שעות ראשונות של יום, מפני שכל חולה מיקל עליו חליו בבקר, ולא יחוש לבקש עליו רחמים. ולא בג' שעות אחרונות של יום, שאז מכביד עליו חליו ויטיאש מלבקש עליו רחמים. (וכל שביקר ולא ביקש עליו רחמים, לא קיים המצוה.)

4. One must not visit a sick person during the first three hours of the day because for every sick person, his sickness is light upon him in the morning – thus, [the visitor] would not feel it necessary to pray for [lit. “seek mercy upon”] him. And [one should not visit a sick person] during the last three hours of the day, for then his sickness weighs upon him, and [the visitor] will give up hope to pray for him. (Everyone who visits and does not pray for [the sick person] has not fulfilled the mitzvah.)

ה. כשמבקש עליו רחמים, אם מבקש לפניו, יכול לבקש בכל לשון שירצה. ואם מבקש שלא בפניו, לא יבקש אלא בלשון הקדש.

5. When [a visitor] prays for [lit. “seeks mercy upon”] him, if he prays in his presence, he can pray in any language that he wishes. If not [in his presence], only in the holy language.

ז. אין מבקרין לא לחולי מעים ולא לחולי העין ולא לחולי הראש. וכן כל חולי דתקיף ליה עלמא וקשה ליה דיבורא אין מבקרין אותו בפניו, אלא נכנסין בבית החיצון ושואלין ודורשין בו אם צריכין לכבד ולרבץ לפניו, וכיוצא בו, ושומעין צערו ומבקשים עליו רחמים.

8. One must not visit someone with an intestinal sickness nor one sick in the eyes nor one sick in the head. Also anyone whose illness has gotten very bad and he has trouble with his speech, one must not visit him personally. Rather, come into the outer part of the house and ask after him and inquire of him whether he needs him to enter and sweep or mop or take care of other needs. One should listen to his pain and pray for [lit. “seek mercy upon”] him.

Discussion questions for chevruta study:

1. According to these passages, what constitutes a “visit” to the sick?
2. What is the role of prayer in visits to the sick?
3. What are the intended benefits of visiting the sick?

Discussion questions for class discussion:

4. Describe an ideal *bikkur choleh*, visit to a sick person. Consider what happens before, during, and after the visit.
5. In what ways do these descriptions match your own experience of visiting the sick? In what ways do they differ from your experience?
6. How can you incorporate these values into our trip next week to the nursing home?

Visiting the Sick

How to teach your kids that it's important to take care of each other

By Lisa Samick

We all want to raise ethical children - children who care about others, about the environment, about making the world a better place. But in a society where the focus seems to be more and more about “me,” can we change this pattern? How can we help our children to value people in addition to valuing things?

A way to change that me-focus is to translate Jewish values into concrete language and experiences for our preschoolers. It’s best to start with values that impact your child’s life directly, like visiting the sick (in Hebrew, *bikkur holim*). Young children remember being sick, so they can easily empathize with another person. The next time your child is recovering from a cold, engage them in a conversation about what kinds of things make them feel better.

Brainstorm a list of “get well strategies” that you can refer back to (and if you’d like, you can call it your “Bikkur Holim List”). It should include anything and everything that they come up with – getting hugs, watching movies, eating soup, etc. This list is a great tool. Pull it out when you hear about someone else who is sick, and you and your child can decide together which of the things on the list might help that someone feel better.

How to Do It

There are many age-appropriate ways for your child to visit the sick, depending on your comfort level and your child’s innate temperament. You can work directly with patients, or more behind the scenes. Any of these will give you an amazing opportunity to expand your child’s understanding of his/her own power in the world around you and will help them to rethink their role in healing.



- You can literally visit. While most hospitals will not allow young children to come in, nursing homes will. You can set up a time to come in and visit on your own or to volunteer for a holiday party or social activity. Or better yet, organize a visit to a nursing home with your child’s nursery school class.
- It will be important to prepare your child for what they might see. A few books that I recommend include: *Singing with Momma Lou* by Linda Jacobs Altman (for Alzheimers Disease), *Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs* by Tomie dePaola and *Oma’s Quilt* by Paulette Bourgeois (both for the elderly). Be sure to have a conversation about what is going to happen before you go. Help them to understand that they may see, hear, or smell things that are unusual. Reiterate to them that the people they will be visiting may be lonely or sad and tell

the children how happy the residents will be to see them, and how their visit will make them feel better.

- Volunteer for home visits. There are many organizations that are focused on visiting homebound sick/elderly people that are eager to have families volunteer together. In New York City, Dorot is a great resource, but you can also contact the Visiting Nurse Association or Meals on Wheels. Many JCC's and YMCA's also have programs.
- Make soup or a meal for someone in your neighborhood. When you hear about someone that is sick or that is recovering from a medical procedure, involve your child in cooking and delivering a meal.
- Make get-well cards, pictures or homemade gifts for children that are in the hospital. Even if you cannot go up to the floor to visit, your cards and gifts will be a welcome respite for patients.
- If there is an illness that directly affects your family, volunteer for a walk or drive that addresses it. Participating in a walk-a-thon or benefit will give your child a perspective not only on visiting the sick, but also on giving charity (*tzedakah*). An older preschooler can participate in Locks of Love – where they grow their hair and then have it cut to donate to make wigs for children who have lost their hair in treatment.



How to Talk About It

These are just some ideas for powerful, hands-on ways that you can get your preschooler involved in bikkur holim. But what is equally important is the conversation that you have with them after the experience. Ask questions like:

- How did you feel?
- What was hard/what was easy?
- How do you think the person you affected felt about what you did?
- What else might we do to help people feel better?

You will be surprised by what they will come up with as they reflect on what you experienced together. Having these experiences together will open up amazing conversations about who they are and what their place is in the world around them.



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Kinder Kef Corner



Our Unit Topic is: Living out Jewish values helps us care for our community.

The Core Concept of today's lesson is: *Bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick) is an important and meaningful obligation.

Today we...

- Heard a story about visiting the sick from the book *Nana Upstairs & Nana Downstairs*
- Discussed how helpful a visit can be for a person who is sick
- Drew a picture of what it might look like to visit someone who is sick
- Practiced visiting residents of a nursing home as we get ready to visit one next week

I was a special part of class today, and my teacher noticed that I...

Next week, we're going to visit residents of a nursing home. I'm excited to perform this *mitzvah*!

This is what I'm looking forward to about visiting the nursing home:

Annotated Bibliography

[Back to top](#)

Bloomberg, Linda Dale and Roberta Louis Goodman. "Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiatives: Transforming Communities through Purposeful and Meaningful Engagement of Parents in Jewish Living and Learning." *jecei.org*, n.d. Web. 16 Feb. 2012. This overview of the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative [JECEI] methodology outlines the sources of inspiration and ultimate goals of the family engagement model. The authors review the primary values, learning models, and elements of excellence that constitute JECEI education.

Goodman, Roberta Louis. "Developmental Psychology." *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher's Handbook*. Ed. Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz. Denver, CO: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2003. 85-108. Goodman provides an overview of systematic developmental psychology, summarizing the theories of Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, and Fowler. Additionally, she demonstrates how each theory can influence Jewish educational settings and guide teachers to sensitively and effectively enrich their students' learning.

Handelman, Maxine Segal. "Jewish Early Childhood Education" *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher's Handbook*. Ed. Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz. Denver, CO: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2003. 109-126. Handelman outlines how a Jewish school can infuse Judaism into every aspect of the environment, melding Jewish and secular content into a whole experience for students. They offer discrete recommendations for how to decorate, celebrate holidays, and engage parents in early childhood education.

Katz, Betsy Dolgin and Mitchell Parker. "The Jewish Education of Parents." *What We Now Know about Jewish Education: Perspectives on Research for Practice*. Eds. Roberta Louis Goodman, Paul Flexner, and Linda Dale Bloomberg. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2008. 151-159. The authors examine current trends in American Jewish family life and learning trends in the adult Jewish community. Parents of young children seek out expert information to help them provide for their families, and educational models for young families should account for this perspective.

Kay, Jo. "Family Education." *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher's Handbook*. Ed. Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz. Denver, CO: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2003. 164-176. Kay discusses what is meant by "family" in today's context and reviews several of the diverse family constellations that populate American synagogues. These families are essential to the Jewish community, and "family education" should be infused into every educational effort a synagogue makes. Kay offers several examples of how educators can shift their mindset to consider family education as primal to their work.

----- and Evie Rotstein. "Jewish Family Education." *What We Now Know about Jewish Education: Perspectives on Research for Practice*. Eds. Roberta Louis Goodman, Paul Flexner, and Linda Dale Bloomberg. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2008. 143-150. Print. This article summarizes current research in Jewish family education, focusing on four areas: the development of Jewish family education, the effect of changing expectations of what constitutes a Jewish family, the identification of "family educators," and transfer of Jewish learning for children and adults alike.

Schuster, Diane Tickton and Lisa Grant. "Adult Jewish Learning." *What We Now Know about Jewish Education: Perspectives on Research for Practice*. Eds. Roberta Louis Goodman, Paul Flexner, and Linda Dale Bloomberg. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2008. 161-172. Drawing from recent research in the flourishing landscape of adult Jewish learning, the authors review how adults most effectively learn. For example, adults are self-directed learners who value collaborative discovery. The authors suggest how teachers can best facilitate adult Jewish learning as credible facilitators and guides.

Vogelstein, Ilene. "Early Childhood Jewish Education—'If Not Now, When?'" *What We Now Know about Jewish Education: Perspectives on Research for Practice*. Eds. Roberta Louis Goodman, Paul Flexner, and Linda Dale Bloomberg. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2008. 373-385. Vogelstein argues that early childhood Jewish education is critical to addressing the most urgent concerns of today's Jewish community. She offers suggestions of how to craft excellent early childhood education and recommends professional training opportunities. Drawing from many successful ventures, Vogelstein paints a picture of the landscape of the potential early childhood Jewish education of the future.

Wertheimer, Jack. (2005). *Linking the Silos: How to Accelerate the Momentum in Jewish Education Today*. <http://avichai.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Linking-The-Silos.pdf>. Retrieved February 2012. Wertheimer shines a light on the fractured state of Jewish education and encourages organizations and communities to collaborate rather than function in vacuums. Ultimately, he explores the value of Jewish day schools, the necessity of investing in congregational schools, and the importance of "thinking systemically."