

Hebrew

Teaching Hebrew has been a challenge. Students have been exposed to letters in 1st grade, used a pre-primer in 2nd grade, were decoding in 3rd grade, able to recite or chant prayers in 4th, 5th, and 6th, and leading large portions of their B'nai Mitzvah service. But, something was not right. At the end of 2nd grade students could decode, but they then needed to learn it all again in third grade. From 3rd to 4th about half of the class had to start over, and from 4th to 5th we focused on look-alike letters and vowels. The transition from 4th to 5th was better and by 6th the students seemed to retain their letters and vowels over the summer. This repetition resulted in boredom, skepticism, and a need for differentiated learning with limited resources. It has led to frustration and wonder about the efficiency of the system. Hebrew was a big challenge.

We will meet the challenge of engaging students in the learning of Hebrew for purposes beyond the performance of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah by creating a richer Hebrew environment in our school introducing *#OnwardHebrew* into our curriculum using Jewish Life Vocabulary.

Jewish Life Vocabulary (JLV) is a collection of Hebrew words or phrases that increases one's connections to Jewish people, traditions, culture and life. A JLV list includes:

- Concepts, for example: תיקון עולם *Tikkun Olam*; repairing the world
- Objects, for example: חופה *huppah*; wedding canopy, and
- Greetings, for example: שבוע טוב *shavu-a tov*; (have) a good week

Jewish Life Vocabulary is easily woven into English sentences using a sandwiching method, for example:

- “What is this week’s פַּרְשָׁה (parashah; Torah portion)?” or
- “You’re going to Israel? נְסִיעָה טוֹבָה (n’siyah tovah; have a great trip)!”

Using this method, doors are opened to insider participation and a richer Jewish life journey.

The program is based on the work of Dr. Sarah Bunin Benor who notes that Jews often speak “Jewish English,” naturally inserting or infusing various vocabulary and terminology from Hebrew (and even Yiddish) into their everyday speech. When a group of people use Hebrew words this way, they create a “Hebrew metalinguistic community”– a group that bonds itself together through use of Hebrew songs, prayers, vocabulary and culture – without the pressure of needing to become fluent in Hebrew. Instead, words are sprinkled into normative conversation.

This method is based on a sound-to-print learning model. Students hear the sounds of Hebrew before being taught to decode/read. With multiple brain paths created for Hebrew learning (especially kinesthetic and auditory), students more quickly become confident, competent, and joyful Hebrew learners.

Jewish Life Vocabulary is one of three pillars supporting sound-to-print learning principles. It is combined with *Hebrew through Movement*, regular Tefillot (prayers) during Hebrew classes in grades 4-7, and delayed decoding. Together, these methods will provide increased comfort and familiarity with Hebrew. The overall goal is for Hebrew learning to be streamlined and intentional, integrating each educational opportunity and creating a cohesive trajectory of learning.