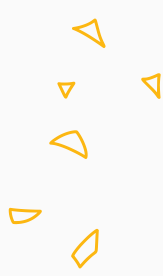


# EZRA ACADEMY



## RABBI AMANDA BRODIE

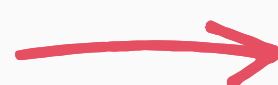

### Middle School Secular and Judaics Teacher



My school's mission ends with the aspiration that students will become "caring and responsible citizens." I have always felt that we have the best intentions to fulfill this mission, but we approach it haphazardly. My Head of School, Tani Cohen-Fraade, is an alum of Civic Spirit and was keen for two of us to join the 2022-23 cohort. It has been an incredible year of professional development.

My goal was to create a civics course and integrate civics into as many aspects of the curriculum as possible. I used the resources, pedagogic insights, and mentoring from Civic Spirit. I tried to incorporate the three pillars of Civic Spirit: democratic fluency, civic skills, and civic belonging into as much of what I was doing as I could.

I developed a curriculum starting with Congress, its role and organization, and played many i-civics games. Then for the midterm elections, we focused on critical senatorial battleground states. Because of our research, the students became interested in polling and wondered what motivated voters to vote in this election. We had several discussions and agreed on each question we would use in the poll. Next, we strategized how to reach as many voters as we could. Fortunately, we had Special Visitors' Day in the fall, so we began with a captive audience! After the results, several of our more advanced math and statistics students showed us how to work with the data. We created information depending on people's age, gender, and stated political affiliations. Initially, I was very concerned because our polling didn't align with the national polling we were seeing. However, our little sample aligned more with the actual election results than the national pre-election polls! So we analyzed why that might have happened.

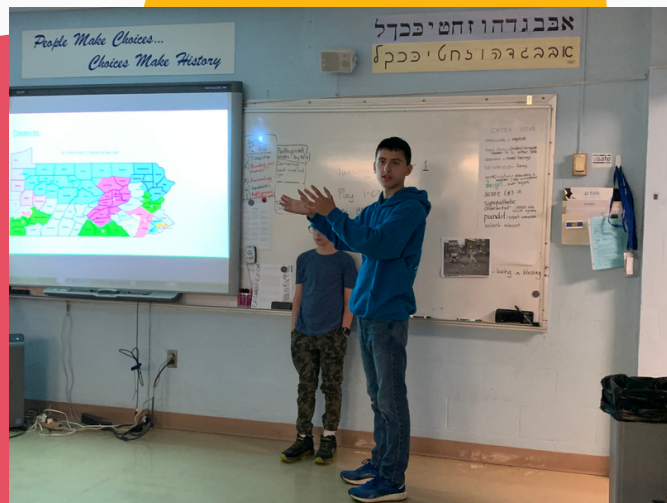


# EZRA ACADEMY

Also, as part of a small group of Jewish schools called the Alliance, the 7th graders began studying advocacy. Each group of students researched an issue and wrote a research paper that we condensed and presented to our Congressperson. Each group had a different artifact to show. My group, for instance, made a presentation book in which we advocated for the LGBTQ community and asked that in CT, all federally funded teacher-training schools should be mandated to create units to help new teachers work with LGBTQ students in their schools.

One of the things I found was that since I was so attuned to civic issues, I integrated them into every class I taught. For example, we read *Romeo and Juliet*. Instead of brushing aside the minor character of the Prince, we talked about his role in the play and how he contributed to the political well-being of Verona. In Jewish studies, we learned Mishnah about the argumentation style of two famous rabbinic houses: Hillel and Shammai. One rabbi's arguments are chosen as Jewish law simply because he and his students argued: Hillel's House is favored because his students were pleasant, patient, and compassionate. More than that, when they taught, they would teach Shammai's reasoning before their own. Teaching students that when we debate in class, they must restate their classmates' opinions before expressing their own is an essential lesson in civic discourse.

Next year, I will build on what I learned through the fellowship experience this year. I will use Civic Spirit resources to redo the Alliance 7th-grade curriculum to focus on American democracy. In addition, I will continue to be very aware of how much civics is integrated into most of my teaching. It is interwoven into the subjects I teach and how I teach.



Presentation of data from the "Why do people vote for certain candidates?" Ezra school and community survey.