JOSEPH KUSHNER HEBREW ACADEMY

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We (Linda Litland and Ari Levine) co-teach and co-plan the 7th grade curriculum at Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy. We became interested in exploring opportunities to expand our civics education because the historical content in 7th grade is so crucial to understanding how we came to be a country. Therefore, it was incumbent upon us to create an engaging and relevant civic component of the curriculum to match what we felt was a strong content-based curriculum. We were very excited to explore these connections further through this Civics Spirit Cohort.

The primary goal for our Civic Spirit project was to connect civic knowledge and experience with the key directive of our school's mission statement, which reads in part "to embrace secular knowledge and American democratic values." In order to accomplish this, we directed our efforts to impart these core values through intensive research and study of the founding documents of the United States. For the Constitution, students were able to explain the complex ideas of

JOSEPH KUSHNER HEBREW ACADEMY

separation of power and the three branches of government by creating analogies of those concepts. These analogies included restaurants, the NBA, parts of a business, a book, a guitar, even a triple layer cake. For the Bill of Rights, students created infographic posters visualizing the key concepts, rights, and restrictions of each of the first ten amendments. Students then chose a specific amendment to research its origins, the argument for its ratification, and its lasting historical significance as seen through contemporary and historical landmark Supreme Court cases. Finally, students will share their research in the form of a short "Ted Talk" style video presentation. This project connects with our school's mission statement by empowering students with greater knowledge and mastery of their rights in a democratic society.

Involvement in Civic Spirit has made us more aware of areas where we have been incorporating civic knowledge, but can now focus and direct our instruction through this specific perspective. For example, students across the middle school learn how to use media literacy skills to interpret current events issues and news topics with sensitivity and attention to bias. The annual 7th grade field trip to Philadelphia will now become even more of a highlight for the grade's year. They have gained broader background knowledge and essential experience thinking through the concepts of American government, so witnessing the origins of America in person will have an enhanced impact on our students.

Being a part of this Civic Spirit fellowship has allowed us to reexamine the core curriculum through the lens of civic engagement. We will be using this 7th grade pilot program as a springboard for incorporating other civics activities and instruction throughout the middle school social studies curriculum. As we ask our students to become more involved civic learners, we ourselves have also embraced the challenge of civic teaching, finding the various entry points for civic engagement across our curriculum. For us (Linda and Ari), this synergistic aspect of co-teaching and co-planning this 7th grade to focus on civics has re-energized and strengthened the curriculum to better meet the needs of students to become more engaged future citizens of this country.

Check out some of their student work!

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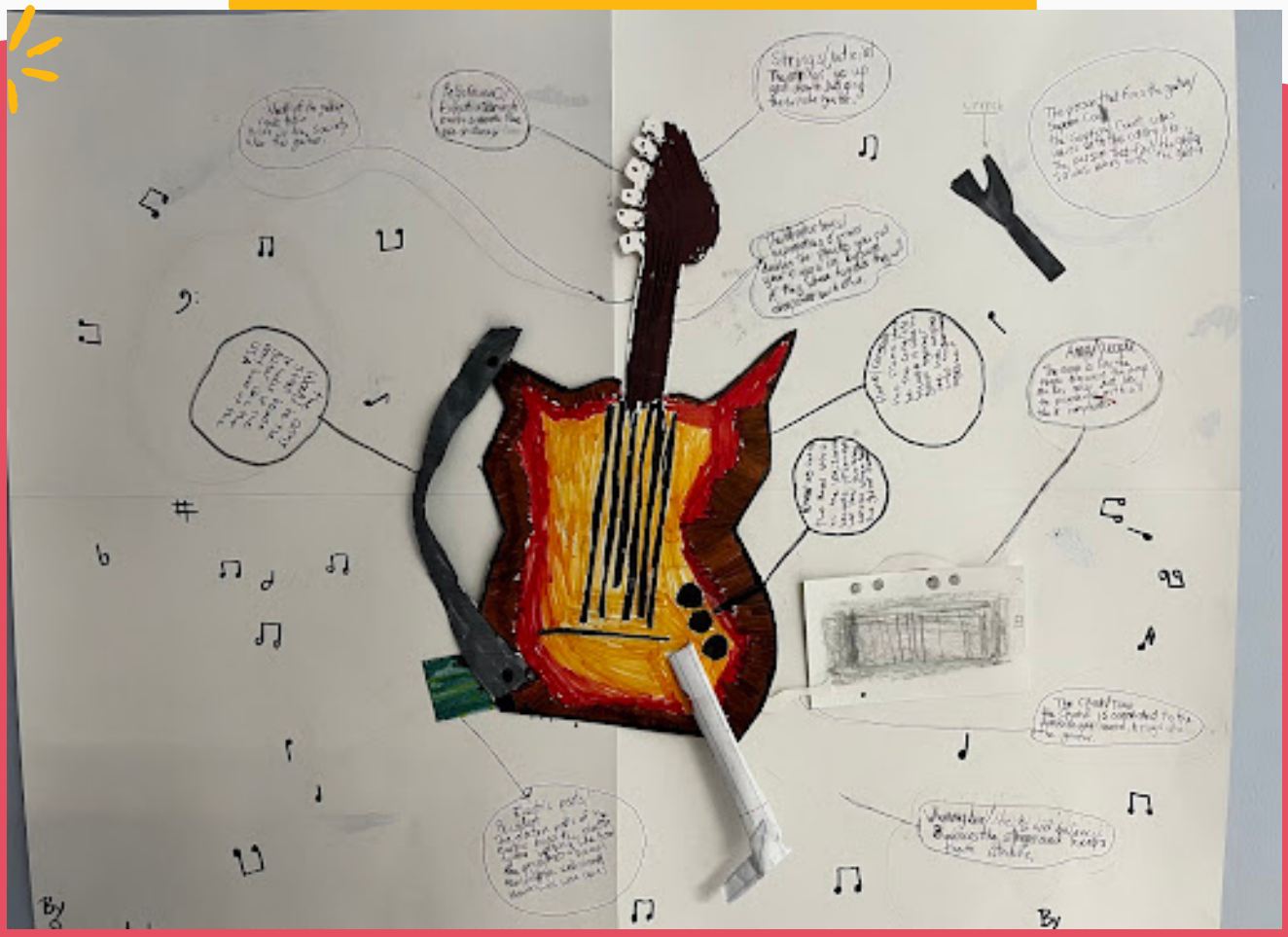

Students created a poster explaining the different components of the U.S. government and how each aspect fits together through checks and balances using a guitar as an analogy.

JOSEPH KUSHNER HEBREW ACADEMY

Students used their own analogies to explain the idea of separation of powers.