CIVIC SPIRIT

EDUCATORS COHORT: Reflections and Artifacts

A look into the classroom projects and reflections from our cohort of educators who utilized Civic Spirit's resources, content, tools, and pedagogies to inspire students and promote civic education in the classroom and beyond.

Bornblum Jewish Community School

COHORT 5

Michal Almalem,
Jewish Studies Principal

Stephanie Osher,
Teacher and Librarian

Cynthia Van Gunda,
Teacher and Mentor Teacher

The three teachers from Bornblum Jewish Community School (Michal, Cindy and Stephanie) came to Civic Spirit with completely different lenses. As an Israeli, an American Jew from the north, and a devout Christian from the south, we come from different points on the compass, but are closely united in our belief in the importance of a civic belonging as a way to strengthen our country. Participating in the Summer Institute gave us all a restored passion for civic belonging and a renewed commitment to bringing that to our students - especially in this upcoming election year.

For our Civic Spirit Project, we decided to create a civics curriculum that would serve as a school wide resource revolving around major events. The hope was that this will ultimately be used by every grade in our K – 8 school. We began by creating a full year curriculum map with attached resources that will be useful for every teacher. We selected some core dates for this year with the plan to add more each year until we have at least one learning opportunity per month for the entire school year. Some of these events were developed for whole school participation, while others were tailored to upper elementary school or middle school.

During this pilot year, our students and staff engaged in a variety of ways. We began the school year by sharing with the entire staff what we learned during our time in New York to introduce them to the project. At a staff meeting we did the exercise we had done at the Summer Institute about what makes you feel like an American. We also had an opportunity to use the reading of Ralph Ellison's "In a Strange Country" to bring that idea to life. Middle school students did a similar exercise (also copied from the Summer Institute) where we discussed civic language.

Bornblum Jewish Community School

COHORT 5

In the fourth and fifth grade, students started the year by exploring civic terms and creating 2D or 3D visual representations of what those words mean to them. Fifth grade students created group norms to ensure all voices are heard and respected when working in groups. After our participation in the additional virtual session on dialogic discussion, we had the eighth graders participate in a spirited discussion about immigration. It was fascinating to hear their thoughts and, at the end, to see the resulting shifts in mindset.

For Constitution Day fourth grade students discussed the words of the preamble and assigned images for each line to help the students gain a deeper understanding of the words. Fifth grade lead a preamble puzzle activity with their kindergarten buddies as well as scribed, by candlelight, the Preamble with a feather dipped in paint.

The entire school participated in a Mispacha (Mixed grade family) Kabbalat Shabbat activity for Veteran's Day where teachers were supplied with a lesson plan to use. We discussed the connection to that week's parsha, read presidential quotes, and created posters with each student's impression of why Veteran's Day is important. These posters were used to decorate the auditorium the following week when we welcomed Veterans from our community who came and spoke with the student body.

For Hanukkah, the students explored a variety of primary sources related to Hanukkah and presidents and discussed why these American presidents would be pictured with a Menorah. We also explored a variety of quotes related to light throughout history. We discussed why different presidents called on the United States to be a "City Upon a Hill" and explored the concept of whether this is still a need today. After returning from winter break, we finalized the activity by creating a resolution to "Be the Light." Students shared examples of people they know that can be characterized as being worthy of imitation as well as brainstormed simple acts that would shine light for others.

On MLK day, after a selected reading of the "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," middle school students were asked to respond to what they heard in art or words. Their work was displayed on a dedicated bulletin board in the middle school.

Bornblum Jewish Community School

COHORT 5

For President's Day, in combination with a unit of study on Tennessee, fifth grade students participated in a jigsaw activity where they each researched different presidents from Tennessee. After completing the research, students created a tri-fold of their findings and placed the presidents in chronological order. For Civic Learning Week, 5th grade students participated in a mock trial where they served as a juror, attorney, or a witness prosecuting Andrew Jackson.

Because we want this to be an ongoing part of our school's identity, we have been inspired to search for opportunities to infuse Civic Spirit into our curricula in a variety of ways. In addition to Civic Spirit, we are incorporating resources from the National Constitution Center, Women's American Historical Society, and iCivics to name a few. We try to approach each lesson with both an American and a Jewish lens to continue to honor the pillars of Civic Spirit as well as our school's vision and mission.

One of our school's mission goals is "to create socially responsible community leaders with lifelong connections to their Jewish identities." Whenever we commemorate events and people from American history, we helped the students to make connections with Jewish history and values. It is our hope that through continued involvement with these civic calendar milestones we will be able to do just that.

Bornblum Jewish Community School

COHORT 5

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Tennessee Presidents

How Can We Tell the Story of Our State?

Directions: Cooperatively, you will create a trifold brochure for United States presidents from TN James Polk, Andrew Jackson, Andrew Johnson. Each section of the trifold will be devoted to one TN president and should include the following information: Introduction, biographical information, life before becoming the president, life as the president, life after leaving the presidency, and conclusion.

Each section of the trifold needs to have proper headings and subheadings. When applicable, you may use bullet points rather than writing in complete sentences. The trifold should include a cover with the TN presidents and images.

Trifold –

I. Introduction and photo

II. Biographical Information
   a. Birthday, Death, Birthplace
   b. Family Information
   c. Education

III. Life before becoming the president
   a. Career
   b. Accomplishments

IV. Life as the President
   a. Major Events
   b. Important Legislation

V. Life after leaving the presidency

VI. Conclusion
   a. Perceptions (Did the people like the president? Did they feel he did a good job?
   b. Legacy (For what is the president remembered?)