Brandeis Marin

COHORT 5

Steven Friedman, Teacher

My goal for the Civic Spirit-inspired project was to have a meaningful culminating project after my 8th-grade American history class's unit on civics. One of the pedagogical approaches of the middle school is combining project-based activities with deeper learning and the use of primary sources.

The students were assigned to create communities based on certain rights and responsibilities they identified as most meaningful and important to them. In addition to learning about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights earlier in the year, we embarked on a weeks-long unit on civics, learning how a bill becomes a law and how cities allocate money for necessary services.

The City on a Hill project was designed with my Civic Spirit coach, Audi Hecht. It focused on using a primary source–John Winthrop's Model of Christian Charity–and a guiding question: What are the most important features of a model American community? As I guided them through this project, I focused on Civic Spirit's Civic Belonging pillar to foster a sense of communal responsibility.

The students requested a project similar to the ones we did in sixth and seventh grades, where they created civilizations and Medieval villages and produced an Egypt TV news broadcast.

The students identified the values most important to them and translated their choices into a vision for a community based on their mission. This project allowed them to clarify values and put them into the context of a society that would reflect their choices. They had specific steps they needed to take on the project and also had to ensure that their final product was an advertisement for their community.

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City on a Hill Project

You will create a fake TikTok video promoting your 'town,' 'city,' or society. You will draw upon what we've learned so far this year: what it means to be an American, the issues that went into the founding of our Republic (citizenship, slavery, freedoms, rights), the citizenship unit (how people participate in our democracy, how towns and cities operate and allocate resources); and then apply the values clarification you did last year in Tzedakah class to design a just society.

Guiding question: **what are the most important features of a model American society?**

After reading and analyzing John Winthrop's **Model of Christian Charity**:

a. You will identify five values (from the attached list):
b. You will choose a minimum of 3 rights that will be part of your community (you should use the Bill of Rights and any other parts of the Constitution)
c. You will explain why you have isolated each value and right
d. You will write a mission statement or preamble to share about your community's purpose,
e. You will include a list of five responsibilities each community member has
f. You will create a FAKE TikTok of 3-5 minutes long to present your society
g. Follow the rubric
h. You will be creative and create a video to make viewers want to explore your society

1. *Faith*
2. *Knowledge*
3. *Privacy*
4. *Adventure*
5. *Physical strength*
6. *Security*
7. *Love*
8. *Leadership*
9. *Arts*
10. *Justice*
11. *Financial success*
12. *Fame*
13. *Change*
14. *Equality*
15. *Freedom*
16. *Ethics*
17. *Friendship*
18. *Cooperation*
19. *Competition*
20. *Helping others*
21. *Helping society*
22. *Self-respect*
23. *Power*
24. *Country*
25. *Honesty*
26. *Pleasure*
27. *Creativity*
28. *Family*
29. *Democracy*
30. *Expertise*
31. *Influence*
32. *Economic security*
33. *Inner harmony*
34. *Efficiency*
35. *Integrity*
36. *Intelligence*
37. *Excellence*
38. *Independence*
39. *Innovation*
40. *Self-reliance*
41. *Sustainability*

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Stephen Riave,
Teacher

I thought, no better place to start my reflection than with our Brandeis Marin Mission Statement.

With an uncompromising commitment to exceptional academics and universal Jewish values, we ignite a passion for learning that propels our students to become caring and engaged global citizens. Central to the mission are the school's Jewish values of Kindness (Chessed), integrity (Ometz Lev), and service (Tikkun Olam).

Reflecting on the mission statement of Brandeis Marin, I realized without hesitation that my work with Civic Spirit would be complementary and mutually beneficial to both communities. Considering the simpatico nature of Brandeis Marin and Civic Spirit, I asked myself the following question: how does my work with Civic Spirit support the work that I am engaged in with my fifth-grade students? I soon realized that my challenge wouldn't be whether or not I could apply what I was learning with CS but how I would apply this learning to a group of twelve fifth-grade students. I share this thought as it became apparent that there would need to be an adjustment of expectations and a modification of the concepts to be learned to make this meaningful to ten and eleven-year-old students. In other words, my overarching goal was to meet them where they were at and take them on a journey into the work of Civic Spirit's three pillars.

My primary focus and goal for implementing the learning from CS has been to make the concepts of Civic Belonging, Democratic Fluency, and Civic Skills understandable and accessible to my fifth-grade students. Reflecting on Democratic Fluency, I asked myself, how do I deepen my students' exposure and experience with the development of an evolving and democratizing colonial America? How was colonial America and later the United States built from the labor of enslaved Africans? How did this colonization impact Native Americans? How did Colonial America transition to becoming the United States? Finally, my goal was to provide opportunities for students to wrestle with the imperfect perfection of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. In the course of our study, my students asked, how could good people agree to allow slavery in the newly independent United States of America? Didn't the Declaration of Independence, penned by Thomas Jefferson, state that all men are created equal? They then understood that to mean all except enslaved Africans and women of all races.

At Brandeis Marin, our fifth graders are expected to take on leadership roles as they are the eldest of the lower school students. Leadership is to be exercised on the playground, resolving conflicts, and leadership beyond that is to be determined by their interests and ability to carry out their plans. We explored the concept of Civic Belonging through the lens of Tzedakah, the Hebrew word meaning righteousness, commonly used to signify charity. My students wanted to have a bake sale and donate the proceeds to

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support Israel, Ukraine, and local nonprofits serving the homeless and hungry, and then they added-abandoned pets. My class organized the fundraiser, baked the cookies and brownies, and determined the price points for different treats. We raised $208.00 in one 45-minute lunch period! Selecting the final two recipient organizations took our class on a journey of problem-solving, actively listening to the opinions of other students, and voting repeatedly; a narrowing down of worthy organizations to a final Israeli organization that serves wounded IDF soldiers and a local organization that rescues abandoned dogs. The process of planning and conducting a fundraiser, working through all the different ideas the students had, and ending up with two winners was just as important as the money we were able to provide our two selected organizations.

The third Pillar of Civic Spirit, Civic Skills, has been an ongoing exploration. Using the Social-emotional learning curriculum of *Wayfinder*, I provided a framework and an opportunity to explore leadership concepts, and worked with my class to develop listening skills, patience, and learning how to disagree agreeably. This was no small feat and has required student practice for the entire school year. I'm confident that the study and work that our fifth graders engaged in provided an entry point into the shared aims of Civic Skills. Their efforts, especially engaging with others whose opinions may differ, becoming aware of their collective constitutional rights, and learning about our shared commitment to carrying out basic civic activities, such as informed voting, developed a foundation for continued learning and growth as scholars and engaged citizens.

Working with Audi Hecht was, at all times, a pleasure. As my coach, she provided a framework for narrowing down and sharpening my related instructional learning goals. In her role as my thinking partner, we brainstormed learning outcomes that aligned with the goals of Civic Spirit, were standards-based, educationally sound, and matched my students' developmental levels. The overarching challenge that I faced as an educator was modifying the middle and high school goals of Civic Spirit to make them accessible for fifth graders. With Audi's contributions, I am confident that my students were able to begin the journey of engaging in the goals and concepts of Civic Spirit.

My colleague, Steven Friedman, and I presented a twenty-minute demonstration of a Dialogic Classroom activity to the Brandeis staff. The prompt was taken from a scenario set in 1978 in Skokie, Illinois. The scenario had a visibly agitated Jewish resident (played by me) talking about how as Jews, we needed to stop the Neo-Nazis from marching in our neighborhood. With exaggerated gestures and curses flying out of my mouth, my colleague listened without comment, and then I finished, he then told me what he heard from me while the rest of our faculty listened. I quickly became aware that while the presentation was abbreviated, in none the less felt real to me as a Jew and to others in the room who had been shaking their heads watching us. I think the value of this activity is not only in creating an opportunity for listening to divergent viewpoints but also made me aware of how close to the surface these emotions regarding the Nazi past were and how we, as teachers who implement this activity, need to be aware of the potential for it to

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bring up emotions related to discussing a wide range of topics. My only regret was that we didn't have sufficient time to conduct a complete activity.

My final thoughts on working with Civic Spirit compel me to reflect on the final weeks of study that our students will engage in. My class will focus on 19th-century American slavery and the abolition movement that Frederick Douglass was so central to. I'm reminded of our work back in the summer and learning about the evolution of Frederick Douglass. I paraphrase here…from being a vocal critic of the United States and stating that we could not celebrate our democracy while slavery existed to joining the government and being a vocal advocate for the government's role in the liberation and full enfranchisement of newly freed African Americans. His life, his work, and his evolution inspired me to engage my students in the study of Frederick Douglass.

In closing, I'd like to thank my fellow attendees, all the members of Civic Spirit, the presenters, Rabbi Savenor, and a special appreciation for my coach, Audi Hecht. You all made this work meaningful and memorable for my fifth-grade class and me.