National Educators Cohort
CIVIC SPIRIT PROJECT REFLECTIONS

A look into the projects that fellows developed to advance civic learning in their educational settings.

Barkai Yeshivah High School

BROOKLYN, NY

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The Values Project was an interdisciplinary unit of study for 9th graders that stretched across English, History, and Judaic Studies over a period of six weeks with the goal of raising civic awareness in students, especially around moral values. In History the students studied ancient Greece and the ways that Greek philosophy focused on moral development. In English, they read Antigone, paying special attention to the values that the various characters espoused. In Judaic Studies, students spent time thinking about the figures they were studying in Tanakh and which values they most embodied. To facilitate deeper study, each student chose two values from a provided list and traced them across three texts.

Then students turned to the personal aspects of value development. They took the VIA Character Survey which helped them to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and then reflected on the results. They chose one value that either was a particular strength or an area for growth and then joined 2-3 other students who selected the same one. As a group, the students considered how their value shows up in their life and identified practical steps that they and others could take to bring it more into their lives. Finally, students created digital portraits surrounded by the values they studied as a way of representing their journey.

The goal of the project was to have students begin thinking about the way that values influence our thoughts and behaviors and how the choices we make influence the development of those values. We wanted them to learn the language of values and reflect on the ones that are most relevant to them. It was also important for us that students realize that the content that they learn in their classes can play an important role in their moral and spiritual lives.

This project focused mostly on laying the foundations for Civic Belonging while engaging in many of the Civic Skills in its implementation. Through learning more about themselves and reflecting on how their own personal values play a role in communal engagement, the students are taking key steps in the journey towards articulating their role in American society and how they can leverage their personal, religious, and communal values to become fully engaged citizens of democracy. During the project students collaborated deeply, especially in the creation and recording of the podcast episodes and took their first steps towards becoming civic ambassadors.

Facilitating this project alongside the classroom teachers who taught the content was a valuable and meaningful experience. Students felt more connected to the curriculum because it focused on personally relevant concepts and they were able to articulate sophisticated understandings of themselves and others in their podcast conversations. Parents were really impressed by the scope and depth of the project, and we will definitely include it in next year's curriculum.

Click here to read an overview of Tziri's "Values Across Time: Interdisciplinary Learning Expedition" project.

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One of the biggest takeaways for me was that we can't limit the explicit focus on values to one project with one grade. I am in the process of developing a 4-year advisory curriculum that uses the language of the VIA Character Survey and Jewish texts and ideas that will launch in the upcoming school year.