



KAYITZ 5776

SUMMER 2016

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Where I'm From



"FAMILY IS ALL OUR FRIENDS." (OREN, AGE 2)



Our favorite family activity that weaves us together is Shabbat dinner. Every Friday night we light candles and sing our favorite Shabbat songs. We drink grape juice and eat challah and talk about our week! We look forward to Shabbat all week long.

Ayelet Gold, 4



Family is your parents, also you eat with them, and you listen to them, and also you make stuff with them.

Clara Light, 3



John, Sibyl, Callum, and me. When I dance, Callum makes a smile.

Colette, 3



on my mind

Celebrating Our Roots

Akiba-Schechter is more than a school; we're a family. Our daily interactions, shared experiences, and in-depth studies together shape who we are and what we become.

I am beginning my 26th year at Akiba and very much feel that it has shaped who I am, how I look at the world, and what is important to me. It has become my family in every way, and I know I am not alone in feeling that way. For the past two years we have had the honor and privilege of sending teachers to participate in a study tour in Reggio Emilia, Italy; for Early Childhood Education. One of the big ideas from these studies that resonated with us was the idea of a school-wide study. As a staff, we decided to focus on "Family" as a project for the Preschool and Kindergarten. We wanted to give children the opportunity to express what family meant to them through art, photographs, collages, weavings, story writing and dramatic play.

We didn't know what to expect when we set out on this journey. Each class decided upon a medium and then each child was given a storyboard to use to express what he or she considered "family." We decided to hang this exhibit along the hallway and instead of separating the work by classes, we displayed what family looks like in our Preschool: children of different ages, races, religions, and genders all playing together. This exhibit graced our hallway for the rest of the year. I watched parents, teachers and children walk more slowly down the hallway, stopping to look at individual works and then the work as a whole. I saw children recognize themselves, their friends,



and siblings. I saw Grade School teachers and students interact with the exhibit on the comment board. The project reaped benefits that we never expected.

The Family Study was only one way of connecting to our roots. In the Kindergarten, children engaged in a year-long study of habitats, starting with animals like penguins and culminating in their own habitats, their homes. Children in 1st/2nd grade studied migration

patterns of monarch butterflies and whooping cranes, as well as their own families. In the 3rd/4th grade, children took it a step further by researching their family trees, finally holding an immigration fair. We also interviewed Josephine Gendler (Class of '10), who went back to her roots this year by volunteering in the Israeli Defense Forces.

The Family Study helped us think about who we are and how our families shape and define us. But, it also helped us think about our Akiba family. And, we celebrated our roots in more ways than one. At Akiba, we're committed to empowering children to know who they are, where they come from, and all the myriad ways they can become who they want to be.

Carla

Carla Goldberg,
Preschool Director

OPPOSITE PAGE: Close ups of the Family Project displayed in the downstairs hallway. Through different media, every Preschool or Kindergarten child represented what family means to them.

alumni profile

Q>A

JOSEPHINE GENDLER, CLASS OF 2010

DOGS + ISRAEL = IDF CANINE UNIT

About midway through Josephine Gendler's sophomore year at Ida Crown Jewish Academy, she decided she wanted to go into the Israeli Army. So, she signed up with Machal, an IDF program that allows non-Israeli Jews to volunteer as lone soldiers for 18 months. And, while Josephine was happy to do whatever she was assigned to, she had no idea what that might be. After an interview with a commander in which she talked about her love of animals, she found herself in the Canine Unit, **Yechidat Oketz**. "It's like we teach them how to read, and then they go on to learn literature in their specific units." We sat down to chat with Josephine about it.



ABOVE: IDF dogs, usually Belgian Malinois, are often used to find explosives. **LEFT:** Josephine Gendler in uniform.

Q> Why join the Israeli Army?

A< Some kids want to be astronauts, some want to be doctors. I've always wanted to be a soldier. I'm committed to Israel and, as a woman, there are far more opportunities in the Israeli Army than in the US Army.

Q> What was your favorite part?

A< The job itself--I trained dogs to find explosives--and the other lone soldiers. It's a unique person who decides to leave home and volunteer in the IDF. I also appreciated the independence I gained, being on my own in a foreign land. Hard stuff comes up, such as when I was bitten by a dog and couldn't use my right hand for weeks. You have to solve those problems by yourself. And I did.

Q> What was the hardest part?

A< The culture/language barrier. You're not allowed to speak English, and your commanders are barking at you in a foreign jargon. They use a lot of slang, which is not the stuff you learn in a classroom. For instance, now I'm at the point where it's hard to speak to dogs in English. I just associate dogs with Hebrew, because that's how I trained them.

Q> Tell us about your future plans.

A< In the Fall, I'll be going to Boston University's Kilachand College. I don't know what I want to 'be when I grow up,' so to speak, but I do know I want animals in my life. This summer I'm going back to Israel to see my friends and visit my dogs. Especially this one I want to adopt after college named Max.

He was injured, and was so sweet, and was always going in and out of physical therapy. He was our 'eternal project.'

Q> What was it like to talk to kids at Akiba about the program?

A< The kids asked really smart questions and were so polite. They came up to me afterward and thanked me. But I was also surprised at what they did and didn't know. There was a 2nd grader who asked elaborate questions about explosive devices, but then said, 'What's a terrorist?' I decided to let his teacher answer that one.

Q> Last words for current students?

A< Yes. The ladder to the school's roof is in the closet in Room 203. If it's ever unlocked, get in there. I always regretted not doing it myself.

For former Middle School English teacher Deirdre Willner and her husband Jay Schreiber, there was one major goal in leading this year's 8th grade trip to Israel. "We wanted to bring Israel to life. To take it out of the textbook and into these kids' lives. We wanted to bridge the ancient and the modern." In many ways, it seems that's exactly what they did.

Jay talks about one student who, he says, started the trip by admitting that she didn't think she ever would return to Israel. "I just don't connect religiously," she told him. But by the end of the two-

week trip, she was telling anyone who would listen about her next visit—albeit still unplanned. "She probably didn't even remember her original comment from 10 days ago," says Jay.



ABOVE: A pause from an afternoon at the springs of Ein Gedi.
RIGHT: Ari and Yossel in the middle of hiking Ein Uvdat.

That kind of connection was exactly what Jay and Deirdre were hoping for. The trip, which requires two years of 8th grade fundraising and spans at least 30 different locations from the Negev to the Golan, is Akiba's 5th annual. And, it's a whirlwind, non-stop adventure. "It's kind of a teaser," says Jay. "We throw a lot at them and hope something sticks."

According to Deirdre, it does. "Look, it's our homeland. We're each going to

students had their first encounter with the Kotel, and how they sat down to debrief afterwards. "They talked about their personal experience, what they got out of it. The responses were all so different. It was very Akiba."

But that kind of connection doesn't just happen naturally. Deirdre and Jay prepared the students throughout the year, including an Israel-themed Shabbaton hosted by the couple at school (and at their home), a guided tour of the Oriental Institute,

ISRAEL TRIP 2016 BEHIND THE SCENES

history timeline activities to get to know 3,000 years of History, and assigning each student a location on their trip to research, so that when they arrived at said destination, students were able to present their knowledge. "The projects helped the kids really 'own' the trip. It was a ready-made connection." Not just a connection, but a culmination.

But for Deirdre, the best part of the trip wasn't anything having to do with the land, per se. It was the students themselves. She remembers watching them meet up with teenagers in Kiryat Gat, Chicago's "sister city," and how warmly they accepted their Israeli counterparts. "As much as this was a culmination of learning," says Deirdre, "it was also a display of everything our kids had learned. What Akiba tried to engender in them really came out. I was



floored and impressed with the people these kids have grown into. We have a really special group of kids at Akiba."



THE GREAT MIGRATION

What do monarch butterflies and whooping cranes have in common with the patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah, as well as our own great-grandparents or grandparents? They all migrate(d)! Several of our elementary classes undertook a study of migration this past fall. Mrs. Rapp's 1st/2nd graders followed the journey of whooping cranes from Wisconsin to Florida. They logged the birds' progress, measured themselves against a life-size drawing to

understand how big those birds are, and created their own 3-D models. They also participated in Symbolic Migration, an initiative that had classrooms close to the Monarch butterflies' northern habitats sending class photos and paper butterflies to classes in Mexico. In the spring, the children were happy to receive the return mailing containing paper butterflies and class photos from Mexico.

Meanwhile, Kitah Alef explored the Torah portion of Lech



Benjamin's paternal great grandparents, Paula (was in the Lodz ghetto) and Zelig Smulevitz (both survivors of the Holocaust), with their son, Armed born a few years after Liberation. Germany, c. 1949.



Lecha in which Abraham and Sarah heed G-d's command to leave their native country and head into the unknown. What was it like to pick up and move? What animals did they take along? What did they see along the way? After plotting Abraham and Sarah's journey from Charan to Cana'an, the children looked into their own family histories and charted their ancestors' journeys on a world map, replete with family photos.

Mrs. Leonard's 3rd/4th graders took it a step further and put themselves into the shoes of their ancestors by re-enacting the immigration port of Ellis Island. Each child received the profile of an immigrant in 1910 and created a passport. The children then "traveled" on the S.S. *Rose* to arrive at Ellis Island, where they had to pass health

inspection, information intake, passport control, and baggage check. Not all made it: two were deported and a few were detained. Migration, as all the children learned, is not an easy, but apparently a rather necessary process for animals and humans alike.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE: A menagerie of butterflies sent from children in Mexico, a butterfly card from Mexico, mapping the migration of the whooping crane on the class bulletin board, and Mr. Esse and Toby measuring themselves up against the actual size of a whooping crane. **TOP** and **MIDDLE:** close ups of the family history research students conducted when looking at *Parshat Lech Lecha*. **ABOVE:** Third/fourth grade students going through "inspection" during the Ellis Island simulation.

teacher profile

KIDS ARE KIDS, FAMILIES ARE FAMILIES

A CONVERSATION WITH IRIS PUTTERMAN

This past fall, Kindergarten teacher Iris Putterman returned to Akiba after a 14-year-hiatus of living in Singapore, where she also taught at a Jewish preschool. When asked about the differences between teaching here and teaching there, she insists there really aren't any. "Of course Singapore has a different culture, and we participated in local celebrations like Chinese New Year and Eid [end of Ramadan]—which I enjoyed because where else would I get to do that? But really, teaching in Singapore was very similar to teaching here in Hyde Park. The Jewish calendar is the same, and kids everywhere are kids, curious and lovely, and parents are parents; they want the best for their children."

Iris grew up in Israel and discovered her love for teaching while working with children on a kibbutz. "I wake up happy every day with what I do. There is something so special about talking with a child and seeing the light in her eyes when she really gets something." Iris now runs the Hebrew program in the Kindergarten but says "program" isn't even the right word because it is so integrated into the school day. "At morning meeting, I say everything in English and in Hebrew. We play Hebrew music, and I



Iris makes candles for Chanukah with students. The wax molds are peppers!

to get to know the people. "That's what I do here, and that's what I did there. The Jewish community was smaller in Singapore, so everybody knew everybody. But we have that here, too. I've run into families I knew 15 years ago at the drugstore and at the gym." Iris' main reason for returning to Akiba and to living in Hyde Park is exactly that community feeling. "Akiba is more like a family to me. It speaks for itself that so many of the teachers have worked here for many years. I really feel like I came home."

Iris believes in teaching at a school in the same community where she lives in order

to get to know the people. "That's what I do here, and that's what I did there. The Jewish community was smaller in Singapore, so everybody knew everybody. But we have that here, too. I've run into families I knew 15 years ago at the drugstore and at the gym." Iris' main reason for returning to Akiba and to living in Hyde Park is exactly that community feeling. "Akiba is more like a family to me. It speaks for itself that so many of the teachers have worked here for many years. I really feel like I came home."



LEFT: Kindergarten students created a compilation of self portraits throughout the year, each time with a different medium. This allowed them to look back at their progress. The final portraits were made with yarn.

The Chesed Club, run by middle schoolers and teacher Mrs. Gold, has been a fixture at Akiba for a few years now. This year, however, it kicked into high gear when Judaics teacher Baila Brackman's 11-year-old son Shmulie was diagnosed with leukemia. What, the students asked, could they do to support Shmulie and the Brackman family? It began with the entire Middle School saying one *perek* (chapter) of *Tehillim* each day before going to class. Wanting to do more, the Chesed Club created #teamshmulie wristbands that they sold for \$2 each. They assembled and sold Passover cookbooks and baked challah to raise funds. In the spirit of "you're not alone in this," they also organized an actual team Shmulie to ride **Bike the Drive** in Shmulie's honor, and raised more than \$4,700 to support Chai Lifeline, an organization that has been a great support to Shmulie and his family.

Chesed (Loving Kindness), however, is not just an extra-curricular effort at Akiba. While the 8th graders were on their Israel trip, the 7th graders learned about and discussed Chesed each morning. They went on a Chesed field

BELOW: 7th grade girls sort clothes at the Chicago Chesed Fund Warehouse.
RIGHT: Mrs. Gold and Shira Bike the Drive.

trip, visiting local Jewish charitable organizations like the ARK, the Chicago Chesed Fund, and Bigdei Yisrael. They also welcomed speakers to learn about their organizations: Jessica Kaz (Lone Soldier Connect), Elliot Cohen (YACHAD) and Tzippy Dukes (Friendship Circle). This unit prepared them for next year, when all 7th graders, either independently or in a small group, will be responsible for running their own Chesed project.



CHESED: SERVICE

NOT EXTRA-CURRICULAR

OFFICIAL #teamshmulie CHALLAH RECIPE

INGREDIENTS:

1 1/2 C Sugar, 4 T Yeast, 5 C warm water, 5 lb bag flour, 1 1/2 T salt, 1 1/4 C Oil

DIRECTIONS:

Proof the yeast by combining warm water, sugar and yeast. Place it in a warm area (open the oven door and let it sit on the door, or anywhere in a warm room) and wait for it to bubble a little. Once yeast is ready, pour it into a bigger bowl. Add oil and salt. Gradually add flour. If you have a big enough mixer (Kitchenaid or Bosch), then this can all be done in a mixer. Otherwise, mix by hand in a large bowl. You may need to add a little water as you pour in the flour. Once the dough is combined, let it rise for 30 min. After 30 min, punch down and shape the challah. Let it rise for another 30 min. Brush with egg wash and any other toppings you like! Bake at 350 for 20-30 min, depending on size.

Recipe
courtesy of
Rebetzin
Bastsheva
Kanievsky, with
additions and tips from the
Chesed Club.



EGYPT



If you were going to curate a museum, what would you include? How would you showcase your artifacts? These were the questions Mr. Esse's 5th/6th History students had to answer when they created a class museum on Ancient Egypt.

"The goal was to let the students go deep with one specific topic of interest. That meant presenting a topic without being able to say anything about it. This proved to be quite a challenge." Mr. Esse was worried the project was too open-ended. But the students thrived. "I was surprised how well they worked without being given a lot of guidelines," he says. "Often they would arrive early and simply ask, 'Can I work on my project?'"

One group created pyramids from sugar cubes. Another created a ramp and pulley model to show Egyptian beasts of burden. Yet another harnessed a Tablet to his trifold for a more interactive experience.

Other classes visited the "museum," of course, but the big surprise awaited: a class visit to the Oriental Institute, the real-world version of their class project, just a few days later!



ABOVE: 5th/6th grade students at the Oriental Institute. **RIGHT:** Tea Party-goers in costume.



One Lump or Two?

As a culmination to their unit on Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the Humanities classes held a party—a tea party, that is. With Aunt Alexandra, Scout's imperious stand-in for a mother, in the Finch parlor. Students were sent invitations and each was assigned a character from the novel. Their task: dress up in character, write a character analysis, and assume the speech and dialect of said character for the duration of the party. Students also were tasked with creating a dish mentioned in the novel, such as Southern Tea Cakes, scuppernongs, lemonade, or Miss Maudie's famous Lane Cake, which, Scout writes, had "so much shinny it made me feel tight."

Awards were distributed for "Most In-character," "Most Extravagant Dish," and "Best Costume." And, the competition was stiff. Isabel Kucher played Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose, the crotchety 90-year old who dishes out Southern Cause Ideology from her porch wheelchair and who keeps a pistol in her bedside table. She arrived to the party in her wheelchair, covered by multiple shawls and a plastic pistol in her lap, carrying a ziplock bag of baby powder—aka, the morphine Jem weaned her off. Mrs. Grace Merriweather, Maycomb's official "saint," came as a devout Christian. She was insulted

when she noticed her placecard next to Mayella Ewell's. "I can't believe I've been seated next to such white trash," she announced to the room in an impeccable



Southern drawl. "I simply won't have it." Miss Maudie, Scout's trusted confidante and celebrated gardener, arrived with a plant.

Walter Cunningham, the schoolmate who shocks Scout by his table manners, circulated with a jar of molasses. Aunt Alexandra, played by Dani Siebzener, came in full regalia, including dress, hat, gloves, and bosoms.

For some, the event was more than a school project. "You don't understand," said Rosa Shanes when she arrived at school the morning of the event. "This party is my life." Well, not quite. But something like that.

Special thanks to the Kass/Hochmans for their "Parlor."



BY THE NUMBERS

Mazal tov to this year's graduates: **Sarah Campbell, Eli Devir, Shira Friedman-Parks, Yossel Goldbloom, Jake Gordon, Ari Gutman, Aya Hamlish, Abigail Koifman, Isabel Kucher, Rebeca Price, Rosa Shanes, Dani Siebzener, Zoe Weiner, Sarah Winitzer, and Chavie Zeller.** They will attend the following high schools: **Ida Crown Jewish Academy, Jones College Prep, Kenwood Academy, Northside College Prep, Walter Payton College Prep, and Whitney Young Academic Center.**

2015-16 HIGHLIGHTS

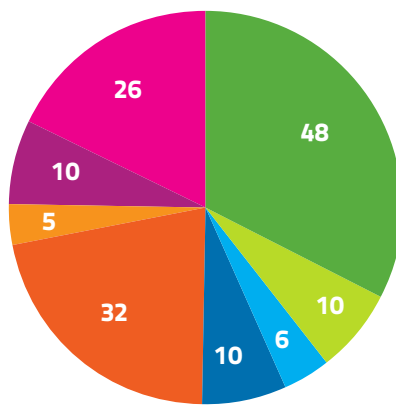
- **SARAH CAMPBELL**, Scripps National Spelling Bee: 1st in state, Competed in Washington, D.C. at Nationals.
- **SHIRA DAVID**, Chidon HaTanach (National Bible Contest): advanced to Nationals in NYC and took 3rd place in Project Shine, a national Chessed contest
- **AARON FAIER**: National Geographic Bee: advanced to State

IN THE LAST 15 YEARS...

ACCEPTANCE RATES

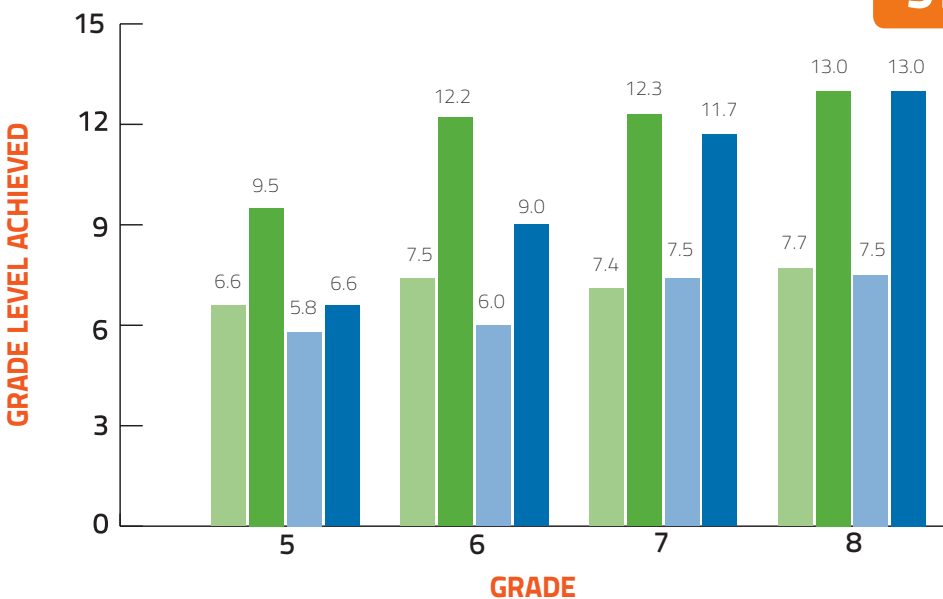
- 84% of students who applied to CPS selective enrollment high schools were admitted to their 1st choice: Payton, Jones, Northside, or Whitney Young.
- 93% of students who applied to the U of C Lab High School were accepted.
- 100% of students who applied to Jewish high schools were admitted to their 1st choice.

ATTENDANCE (Numbers represent students, not percentages)



- Ida Crown Jewish Academy
- Rochelle Zell Jewish High School
- Fasman Yeshiva High School
- Hannah Sach Bais Yaakov
- CPS Selective Enrollment
- U of C Lab High School
- Lincoln Park IB Program
- Other

STANDARDIZED TESTING



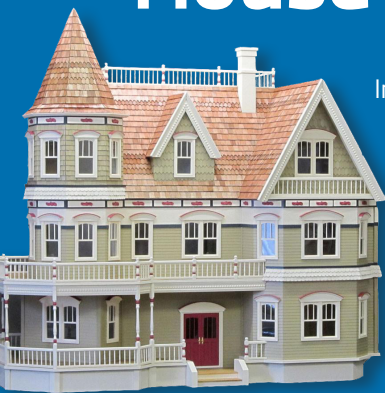
Every year, students take the TerraNova tests, a norm-referenced, nationally standardized achievement test. These are the scores for 2015-2016. **GME = Grade Mean Equivalent.**

- Nat'l GME, Reading Composite
- ASJDS Reading Composite
- Nat'l GME, Math Composite
- ASJDS Math Composite



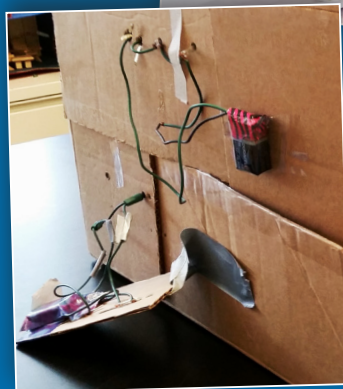
Kindergarten students engaged in a **HABITAT STUDY** inspired by learning about Noah's Ark. It evolved into the children researching different animals and each creating its habitat, and then looking to their own habitats--their homes. The unit culminated with their designing and building their own homes, replete with photographs and blueprints. **LEFT:** Sisters Deborah and Sophia hold up their habitat: the 3-flat building where they live. **ABOVE:** Tamar's habitat for her animal, a turtle.

House Party



In culminating their unit on electricity and magnetism, the 7th/8th science classes were tasked with creating dollhouses. In groups, students collaborated to build miniature homes with working lights and multiple types of

circuits. Everything in the homes was fully functional, including an elevator in one. "It was hard," says Shira Friedman-Parks, "especially when nearly everything broke at least once, but in the end, we created something we were proud of." Shira's home included a kosher bakery with hand-braided challot on the first floor, and the owner's private quarters on the second floor--including, of course, her private *sheitel* (wig) collection.



ABOVE: Shira and Isabel's dollhouse, Just Another Kosher Bakery Sponsored by Geico. Note the green lizard populating the wallpaper. **LEFT:** The actual circuitry (where the magic happens). **RIGHT:** One dollhouse was a restaurant. Tiny menus graced the tables.

