

Ah, November, when OZHS finally gets a chance to settle in to some sort of routine. Well, 2020 is proving to be an interesting year for us. Between the pandemic and the High Holidays all falling on Sundays it's been a bit challenging but we're on our way!

Our Zoom class sessions, holiday content delivery days, Family Engagement Kits and monthly in-person gatherings are all offering a sense of connection although we sure would like more. Teachers are finding creative ways to teach kids online while our monthly kits offer offline activities for students to continue their learning and Jewish engagement.

September's theme of High Holidays brought us to an apple orchard where we all had a chance to see each other face-to-face, run around and learn about Rosh Hashanah. October's theme of Welcoming and Beginnings found us at OZ's cemetery. Our students learned about their and OZ's matriarchs and patriarchs. They also had a chance to participate in a community Tikkun Olam project by helping to tidy up the cemetery. They raked pine needles, power washed headstones, picked up sticks and trimmed grass. Who knew how popular a leaf blower could be?

October's theme will spill over just a bit into November when OZHS will have its annual Desert Tent Jamboree! Kids will dress up in their best desert garb while sitting in a blanket tent at home eating homemade pita and drinking homemade chai and we will all come together on Zoom to learn about stories of our Genesis family. Then we will move into the theme of Gratitude. Kids will all receive journals to record their thoughts and feelings of thanks as well as a rock to decorate with these same guiding motifs. We will end the month with a walking gratitude service in the Intervale led by Cantor Steve. There, we will share readings, prayers and poems and each class will create a gratitude art project made from found nature objects and leave for others to enjoy.

Chanukah will round out our themes for the fall semester. Each student will receive a dreidl and chocolate gelt along with materials to make their own 'menorahs' at home. They will also receive recipes to make latkes and sufgnait (jelly doughnuts). We will celebrate the holiday mid December together outside by participating in a maccabiah competition and by making holiday cards for our OZ community.

Running a school during a pandemic is challenging. At OZHS, along with learning about our Jewish culture, history and traditions, we focus on fostering a sense of connection and togetherness, both difficult to achieve when you must remain socially distant. I commend our whole community on their efforts to remain connected and support each other – our teachers, madrichim, students, parents, Hebrew School Committee members, OZ staff, clergy and synagogue volunteers. More proof that it takes all of us to raise a Jewish child.

Stay safe, stay healthy. May Chanukah bring us a true miracle this year.

~Naomi Barell