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INNOVATIVE INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECT FOCUSES ON THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Through an interdisciplinary project entitled Project GO FORTH: Lech L'Cha, seventh grade Language Arts and Social Studies teachers have teamed up to create a cross-curricular, multi-faceted, interdisciplinary approach to understanding the immigrant experience in America. In our first year of this project, co-creator Ms. Staci Zeif and I have integrated seventh grade Social Studies, in which students study the history of American immigration, with Language Arts and Judaic Studies. This year, the program emerges as a cross-curricular pilot program in one class; all students across the grade have participated and are deeply engaged in the oral history component of the project as well as the creation of a digital museum, which will serve as a repository for our families' collective histories.

Within this project, all students have created an oral history of a relative. These transcribed interviews are the Jewish diaspora on display: our students' families are tied to Poland, Uzbekistan, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Austria, Russia, Belgium and beyond! In the class that marries the Language Arts program to Social Studies, students are currently using their individual interviews about their familial experience immigrating to America as fodder for creative personal narratives based on their specific relative's experience. Through a text study with Rabbi Aron Srolovitz, the students learned about the first recorded immigration of Avraham Avinu, and they used Avraham's experience as an immigrant as a creative launching point from which they wrote a preliminary personal narrative, showcasing their empathy for Avraham's experience as a stranger in a strange land, as well as their understanding of sensory language. In the coming weeks, students can anticipate using the lessons learned from that creative writing experience to support them as they craft their unique narratives about their own relatives' stories.

By crafting narratives based on their understanding of American history, Parshat Lech L'Cha, and their personal familial history, Project GO FORTH: Lech L'Cha weds American national history to one's Jewish and personal history while fostering empathy among students for the experience of immigrants across all lands and historical periods.

All students in all seventh grade classes can look forward to creating videos which show them in role as their relatives, performing a response to an interview question. These videos will then be compiled in a "digital museum", through which students will experience the diaspora firsthand.

