

## **Peretz B'nei Mitzvah Program (Bar and Bat Mitzvah)**

### **Introduction and Overview**

Why send your child to Peretz when there are so many other great Hebrew schools in Vancouver?

There are a lot of reasons why Peretz might work for you:

- ◆ *You are looking for an inclusive, non-dogmatic, secular approach to Judaism.*
- ◆ *You are looking for an intellectually rich education that doesn't just focus on Hebrew, Israel, Holidays and Bible stories, but teaches Jewish history, ethics, literature, culture, music, and art as well.*
- ◆ *Your family practices more than one faith or is not religious.*
- ◆ *You identify as a "cultural Jew."*
- ◆ *You want your child to learn in an environment which is truly open-minded and welcomes all points of view.*
- ◆ *Your child is not interested in Synagogue life.*
- ◆ *Torah, prayer and Israel are not the primary way your child connects to Judaism*
- ◆ *Your child has not found a connection to Judaism yet and you want them to find their own way into Jewish tradition and history, not have that way chosen for them.*

## **The Peretz Centre: Education, Tradition, Community, Tikkun Olam**

Peretz offers a secular approach to Jewish culture which emphasizes the humanist, progressive, and universalist aspects of our heritage. We focus on language, literature, art, music and dance, and ethics.

### **Community and Pedagogy at Peretz**

Parents are encouraged to be part of their child's education at Peretz. Assignments to be done during the two weeks between classes often involve parent discussion or assistance; the year is dotted with holiday celebrations for the whole family to participate in—Tu b'shvat and Passover community seders, Purimshpil and party, *tikkun olam* (healing the world) activities, picnics and Shabbat dinners.

### ***Family Education***

Our bi-weekly Family Education Sundays begin with a thirty-minute session where families of children in Cohort One and Two (5-9 year olds) join in songs, teachings about the annual holiday cycle, and insights from the weekly Torah portion discussed and debated in a lively, non-dogmatic manner where all points of view are welcome.

### ***B'nai Mitzvah***

The B'nai Mitzvah ceremony that ends the two-year B'nai Mitzvah education of Cohort Three is planned and organized cooperatively by parents. In the past years this has been a wonderful opportunity for community building,

new friendships, and celebration of the always incredible growth that the students have undergone.

## **Overview**

### **Language**

Children at Peretz will learn to read Hebrew and choose how deeply they want to pursue mastery with the help of our teachers. Children will also learn Yiddish words, phrases and songs and can choose to delve deeper into the *mameloshn* (Ashkenazi “mother-tongue”) if they choose.

### **Literature**

Children will receive a grounding in Jewish literature, starting with *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible), Mishna, Talmud and Rabbinic thought, with a focus on the Jewish ethical tradition. As they progress they will then study Jewish novelists, poets, and philosophers of the classical and modern eras.

### **Art**

Children will be exposed to major Jewish artists in a variety of media and explore ways that Jews have used art to create beauty or make the world a better place.

### **Music and Dance**

From the beginning of the child’s journey to the end they will be exposed to Jewish songs in Yiddish, Hebrew, English, Ladino and other languages. They will also study Jewish contributions to modern music, from Bob Dylan to Gene Simmons (ok, maybe not Gene Simmons).

## **Ethics**

Children will learn virtues and values basic to the Jewish tradition, from studying *tikkun olam* and how to care for the stranger to Jewish contributions to ethical and political theory in the modern era.

Early Explorers and Growing Learners meet bi-weekly on the same Sunday. After gathering for learning, singing and activities together with their parents for the first half an hour, the two groups separate for the rest of the afternoon.

B'nai Mitzvah groups meet in two cohorts, Year 1 and Year 2. Year 1 meets on the same Sunday as Early Explorers and Growing Learners, Year 2 meets on the alternate Sunday.

## **B'nai Mitzvah Mitzvah Overview**

The B'nai Mitzvah program is a two-year program where children gain a comprehensive understanding of Jewish culture and history whose breadth and richness is not matched anywhere else in Vancouver.

In **Year One** the students learn pre-modern Jewish history and culture, studying the major narratives of the Hebrew Bible and being introduced to the Mishna, the Talmud, and Rabbinic thought. Students also learn the basics of Kabbalah and Jewish prayer liturgies. All subjects are taught as literature and their meaning and significance are examined and debated by the students with the children given space to find their own relationship to the texts. No question or thought is out of bounds.

Students also study Jewish history from the time of the closing of the Biblical canon up to the modern era and are introduced to topics such as Judaism in relation to Christianity and Islam, great Rabbis, Jewish women in history, the development of Jewish thought and religious practice, and how Jews went from a people in ancient Israel to a global presence.

In addition, each student will present a family history as far back as it is known, learning about their own history and how they came to be connected to the Jewish people.

In **Year Two** students explore Judaism in the modern world. Beginning with the Jewish Enlightenment (*haskalah*) and the fall of the ghetto walls, we examine the thought of great modern Jewish thinkers, revolutionaries, artists and scientists. The students are introduced to Jewish film, music, art and literature of the modern period, and study modern Jewish history

including Jewish political movements, the Holocaust, and the creation of the state of Israel.

At the end of the second year students prepare a graduation project where they present an aspect of Jewish culture that they have connected with and wished to research and explore in whatever medium they choose. In past years this has taken forms from a book report, art, dance or video to learning to chant the traditional *haftorah*.

## **Bnai Mitzvah In Detail**

### Session One

Genealogy

Jewish birthday

What is a Jew? Ways of being a Jew; Different kinds of Jews

The High Holidays Part 1: Rosh Hashanah

Assignment: Create a family tree

### Session Two

The High Holidays Part 2: Yom Kippur

What Is *Teshuvah*? Watch a film clip showing character transformation (e.g. *Maleficent*)

Watch *Teshuvah* scene from *Les Miserables*

What is Torah Part 1: *Tanakh*

Assignment: Read a Jewish short story that reflects Jewish cultural sensibilities (e.g. "And Weep Like Alexander", Neil Gaiman)

### Session Three

What Is Torah Part 2: *Mishna, Talmud*, Codes and Rabbinic Responsa

Assignment: Read and discuss a section of *Talmud* with parents

### Session Four

What Is Torah Part 3: *Kabbalah*, Torah of Nature

Hanukkah: What is it?

Assignment: Find one new story about Jews or a Jewish person to discuss

### Session Five:

Hebrew Bible 1: Creation; Adam and Eve

Jewish History 1: An overview of the story of the *Tanakh* from Abraham to the Second Temple Period

### Session Six

Hebrew Bible 2: Cain, Abel, Noah and the Flood; the Tower of Babel

Jewish History 2: Graeco-Roman rule; Jesus and the birth of Christianity

### Session Seven

Hebrew Bible 3: Abraham and Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael

Jewish History 3: The Jewish Revolts; Masada and Yavneh (The birth of Rabbinic Judaism)

### Session Eight

Hebrew Bible 4: Abraham and Isaac

Jewish History 4: A brief introduction to Rabbinic literature

### Session Nine

Hebrew Bible 5: Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Esau

Jewish History 5: The birth of Islam; the history of Jewish and Muslim interaction

### Session Ten

Hebrew Bible 6: Jacob in Haran, the Twelve Tribes

Jewish History 6: The growth and shape of the Jewish diaspora; the life and work of Rashi

### Session Eleven

Hebrew Bible 7: The story of Joseph and the Exodus

Jewish History 7: Maimonides and the birth of Kabbalah; the Zohar

Homework: Write your own *midrash*

### Session Twelve

Hebrew Bible 8: Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy: The foundations of Jewish law and religion

Jewish History 8: Jews under Christianity; Shabbatai Zvi

Homework: Watch *Fiddler on the Roof*

### Session Thirteen

Hebrew Bible 9: The Book of Joshua and The Book of Judges (Samson and Delilah; Deborah the Prophetess)

Jewish History 9: The development of Jewish religious practices

Summer Homework: Jewish movie watching list (Watch at least three)

*Yentl*

*The Frisco Kid*

Anything by Woody Allen

*The Chosen*

## **Year Two**

### Session One

Hebrew Bible 10: The Monarchy in Israel: Saul, David and Solomon

Modern Jewish History 1: Litvaks, Hasids and Maskils, Oh My.

Homework: Hebrew alphabet

### Session Two

Hebrew Bible 11: The Prophets

Modern Jewish History 2: The fall of the ghetto walls and its aftermath

Hebrew Alphabet

### Session Three

Hebrew Bible 12: Wisdom literature: Ecclesiastes and Proverbs

Modern Jewish History 3: Zionism

Hebrew Vowels

### Session Four

Jewish Literature 1: The birth of classical Yiddish literature

Modern Jewish History 4: Revolution!

Hebrew Reading

### Session Five

Jewish Literature 2: Sholem Aleichem  
Modern Jewish History 5: The Holocaust  
Hebrew Reading

### Session Six

Jewish Literature 3: Jews in English  
Modern Jewish History 6: The State of Israel  
Hebrew Reading

### Session Seven

Jews in Art 1: Famous artists and dancers  
Modern Jewish History 7: Jews in Canada  
Intro to Yiddish

### Session Eight

Jews in Art 2: Famous musicians  
Modern Jewish History 8: Jews in the USSR  
Intro to Yiddish

### Session Nine

Jewish Thinkers 1: Spinoza  
Language: Hebrew reading and vocabulary 1

### Session 10

Jewish Thinkers 2: Freud and Marx  
Language: Hebrew reading and vocabulary 2

### Session 11

Jewish Thinkers 3: Emma Goldman; Einstein

Jews in the present: Topical issues

### Session 12

Jewish Thinkers 4: Jewish feminists

Jews in the present: Topical issues

### Session 13

Jewish Thinkers 5: Ethicists: Peter Singer, Naomi Klein

Jews in the Present: Topical issues

## **Homework**

Read short stories. So far: Neil Gaiman, "And Alexander Wept"; Golem of Prague.

To come: I.B. Singer: *The Fearsome Inn* (Halloween 2017); *Hanukah in the Poorhouse* (Hanukah 2017); *The Dog Who Thought He Was A Cat and The Cat Who Thought He Was A Dog* (Jan 2017)

Stories by I.L. Peretz; Sholem Aleichem.

Social justice-oriented stories.

Jewish science fiction

## **Major Assignments:**

**Year One:**

Write your own *midrash* (rewrite a Biblical story to explore things the text didn't).

**Year Two:**

B'nai Mitzvah research project.