

Peretz Centre

for **Secular Jewish Culture**

Education – Community – Tradition – Tikkun Olam

**Child & Youth
Education Program:
a Secular Approach to
Jewish Cultural Education**

**Peretz B'nai Mitzvah
(Bar and Bat Mitzvah)**

**A two-year bi-weekly program
whose breadth and richness is
not matched anywhere else in
Vancouver, where children gain a
comprehensive understanding of
Jewish culture and history.**

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 be perfect for your family:

- ◆ 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.

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

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. The B'nai Mitzvah graduation ceremony is planned and organized cooperatively by the 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.

B'nai 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.

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.

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 ranging from a book report, art, dance or video to learning to chant the traditional haftorah.

Bnai Mitzvah in Detail

YEAR ONE

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); Hanukkah in the Poorhouse (Hanukkah 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

B'nai Mitzvah Credo

I am I.

I am a citizen of the world.

All life on this planet nurtures me.

Therefore, I must assure its future.

I am a human being.

Nothing that touches other human beings is strange or foreign to me.

All people are my sisters and brothers.

I am a Canadian.

The dreams of all the millions who came here,
who sweated, struggled and died for a better life,
all this is my heritage. The dreams are not yet fulfilled.

Therefore, my heritage is my responsibility
to carry on the struggle for the dream.

I am a Jew.

My roots are deep in the millennia that formed my people's culture.

My people are not chosen; they are unique, as are all peoples.

The freedom-dream of Moses is my heritage,
and the picket-lines of the sweat shops.

I am a descendant of the Prophets,
and the uprisings in Europe's ghettos and death camps.

My inheritance is in the songs of Hirsh Glick and Solomon, in the wisdom of Maimonides, Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz, in the heroism of Masada and Hannah Senesh.

The beauty of my people's dreams finds voice in Yiddish, in Hebrew,
in Ladino and in all the languages of the world.

I am a Jew.

Every person must have roots and these are mine.

I am I.

My eyes and hopes are on the future.

My identity and my strength come from the past and from the present.

From the heritage of all our yesterdays I will help build
a humane tomorrow.

— Adapted from Hershl Hartman's text, Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations

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6184 Ash St, Vancouver: a scent-free environment on the
unceded traditional territory of the Coast Salish First Nations