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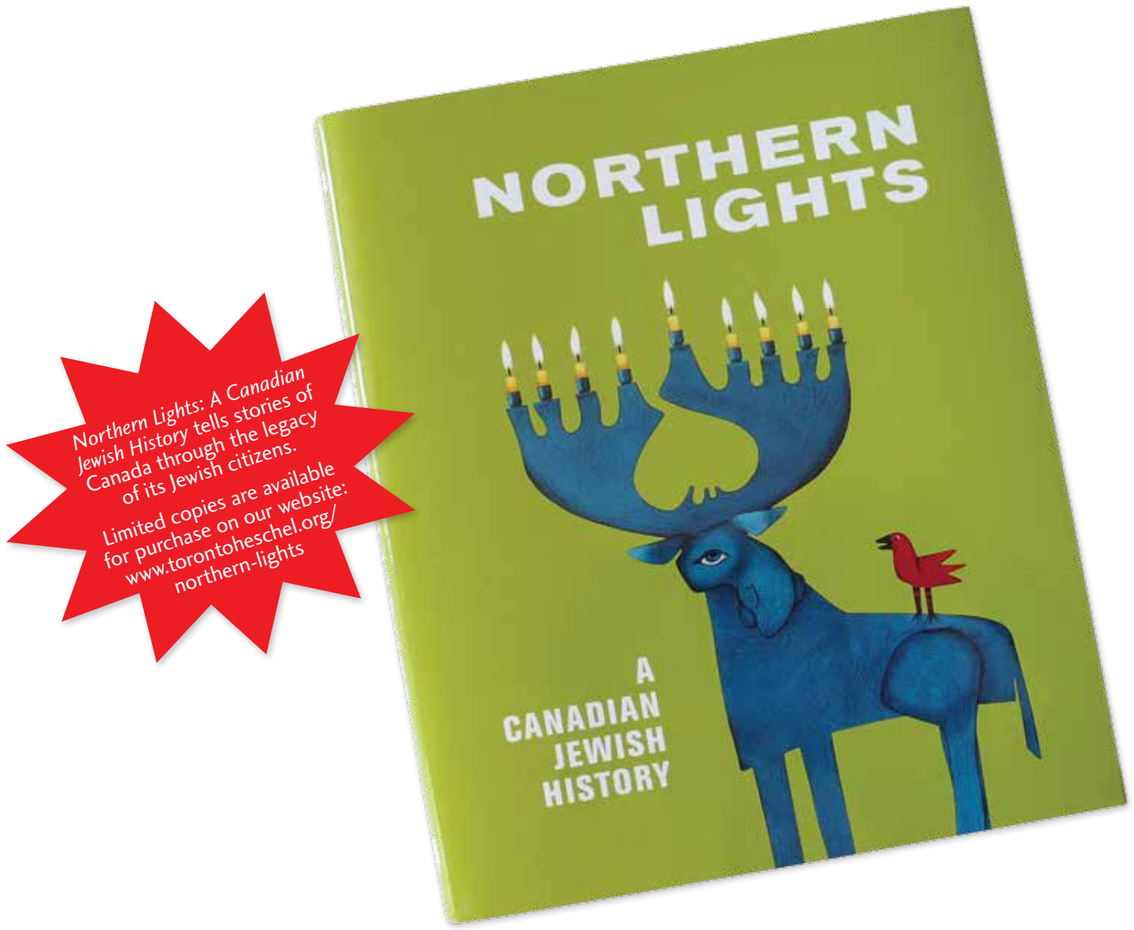
THINK

THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

Conversation about Education, Ethics, and Our Children

TELL ME A STORY



Northern Lights: A Canadian Jewish History tells stories of Canada through the legacy of its Jewish citizens.

Limited copies are available for purchase on our website: www.torontoheschel.org/northern-lights

THINK THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

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LSI PUBLICATIONS

Lola Stein z"l was an early female pharmacist in South Africa, but her special talent was in hospitality and friendship. She cared for family and friends, at home and abroad, individually, uniquely, and lovingly. We honour her memory in a way that also reaches out to many. We lovingly remember Mannie Stein z"l whose enthusiasm and support for our work with children is gratefully acknowledged.

COLUMNS

SPECIAL FEATURE: STORYTELLING AT SCHOOL

OUR SAGES TELL US: THE STORIES WE TELL

Sights, Sounds, People, and Places

CULTIVATING WISDOM THROUGH THE STORIES WE TELL

Here we are, setting off on the journey of 5781: as always, we are stalwart pioneers foraging through an unexplored frontier—recounting repeatedly this year that the territory is unknown, there is COVID-19, and more. We are crossing a wilderness of remote learning and distant socialization, from time to time welcoming respite in a layby of face-to-face interaction. It feels like an unprecedented journey. Or is it rather a new angle on the annual launch?

Another telling of the season describes us sailing out on the tide of a new year, well provisioned by experience and fully expecting—if perhaps acknowledging more than usual—the rolling waves of the seafaring life, the unpredictable storms, and the beautiful, sometimes bewildering, becalmed days as we sail forth. Certainly, how we tell the story is up to us.

The writers in this issue of THINK reflect on that favourite childhood demand, "Tell me a story." Maintaining the nautical flow, we observe the storyteller at the helm, steering the message, hopefully delivering a voyage as worthwhile as it is enjoyable. Greg Beiles uses history as a compass for perspective and meaning. He heads a Jewish day school named to remember Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who stood against racism and walked at Selma with Martin Luther King Jr. Rabbi Heschel's daughter Susanna remembered, "When he came home from Selma in 1965, my father wrote, 'For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying.'"[1] That story and that memory ignite our activism today.

Daniel Held uses the Haggadah as a pathfinder—an astrolabe—sighting the universe of human experience to evoke memory. The Haggadah instructs each of us to identify personally and immediately with otherness and hardship; it's our duty, now more than ever, to help fellow citizens realize their own Exodus towards strength and promise. Dvora Goodman uses the Jewish calendar to hold the course. She clarifies the annual recycling of Torah stories as anything but repetitious.

Leaving port, we check the elements that will factor into how our voyage ensues: Are there clouds foreboding a clear sail? Will the storytelling be tossed by waves? Can we rely on open waters? To take in the whole picture, Lisa Rendely recommends skills in aesthetics, while Isaac Hollander adds spatial thinking.

Saying yes to storytelling feels like an easy thing to do. Saying no to going off course requires us to watch what happens when ships veer accidentally one degree in the wrong direction and end up in a surprise location. How we tell the story is important to our children. Are the flags we fly authentic messages, or are we virtue-signalling to get a home-free pass? Jasmine Eliav looks for hidden rocks: how family dramas and harsh words become enduring childhood memories. Ava Kwinter explains the skill sets that the youngest students must learn if they are to decipher and interpret information. Yoni Goldstein suggests a good editor as first mate; there is always work to be done.

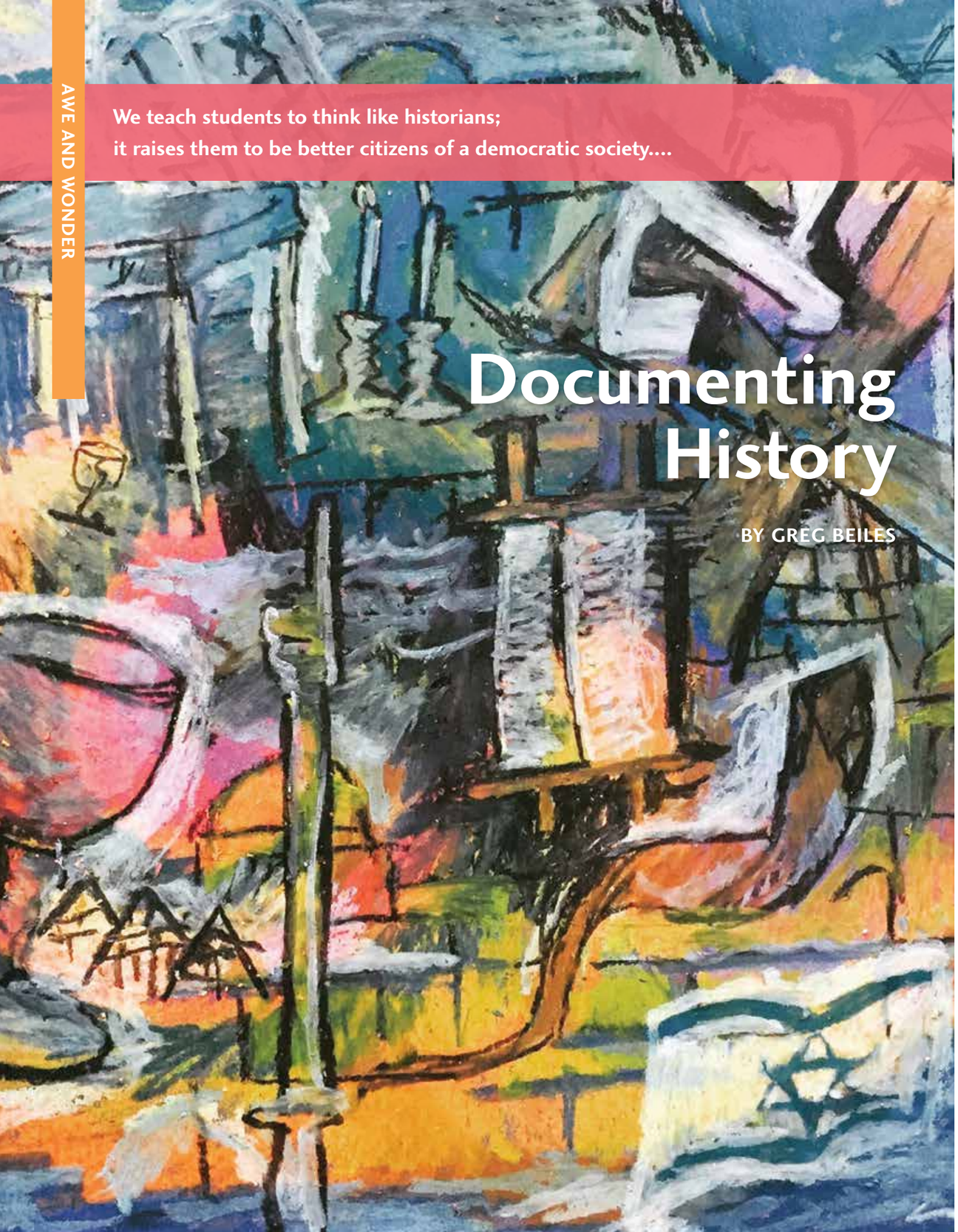
There are many stories to tell: narratives from the Torah and Talmud; legends from folklore, world literature, film and television, family anecdotes, and brand new tales straight from the imagination. Sometimes we tell and sometimes we just have to listen. Cosy up and have a good read! The stories are about to begin.

Pam

1 Susannah Heschel, "Following in My Father's Footsteps," December 17, 2008, para. 12, http://www.dartmouth.edu/~vox/0405/0404/heschel.html

The storyteller is at the helm, steering the message, hopefully delivering a voyage that is worthwhile and enjoyable.

We teach students to think like historians; it raises them to be better citizens of a democratic society....



Documenting History

BY GREG BEILES

The following excerpt is adapted from Greg Beile's introduction to *Northern Lights: A Canadian Jewish History*, published in Spring 2020 by The Lola Stein Institute and *The Canadian Jewish News*.

Jewish history records the meaning that we make of our people's story. As Jewish parents, writers, publishers, and teachers of history, the job before us is not merely to recount what happened, when, and where, but to ensure that the story has significance. Doing Jewish history reminds us that in the roll out that is eternity, it's now our turn to model the meaningful lives from which our children and grandchildren will learn.

At its best, studying history examines the road taken in previous generations in a way that reveals that how things are today is anything but inevitable. The sciences, such as geology and paleontology, record the evolution of the world; history records human involvement in it. The society in which we are immersed today is the product of past human actions, ideas, and specific events. The buildings we live in, languages we speak, jobs we do, technology we use, even our games and hobbies—they all have histories. The student of Jewish history will consider those who lived, worked, and created Jewish moments and the backdrop that was their historical circumstance. Memorializing, more than noting events, is the Jewish method of recording history.

Northern Lights: A Canadian Jewish History is precisely such an act of memorializing. To find meaning in history, it helps to start at home. Published by The Lola Stein Institute, with *The Canadian Jewish News*, it tells how Jewish artists, writers, entrepreneurs, historians, lawyers, activists, and athletes in Canada met the test of being immigrants, second-generation builders, and next-generation visionaries.

Teaching history well includes training children to think like historians and understand how historians construct their knowledge of the past. It means ensuring that as much as possible, students engage in the actual work of doing history, not just reading about it. To "do history" means working with primary sources wherever possible. This volume of Canadian Jewish history, inspired by the primary newspaper sources of *The Canadian Jewish News*, offers a new tool for making history meaningful for young Canadian Jews. Jewish history functions as a diary of our people, a record of conversations, debates, and decisions that can help us to best meet the situations of our times. How we act in society is part of the Jewish covenant and the documentation of Jewish conversations from ancient times are scrolls, Talmudic volumes, annotated *siddurim*, and *haggadot*. In modern times, following the Holocaust, *landsmanshaft* societies and survivors worldwide created *Yizkor* books to keep safe the memory of European Jews. The very act of writing these books—not merely the content within them—constitutes a Jewish response to history.

We also teach students to think like historians because it raises them to be better citizens of a democratic society. Learning how to research, compile, analyze, and report on history prepares them to critically assess historical information that may be presented to them from time to time. It equips them to inquire into sources and bias, and to be skeptical of the simplifications of history that are sometimes presented for political expediency.

Torah narratives tell that God has a "stake in human history." Rabbi A.J. Heschel writes, "This is the secret of our legacy, that God is implied in the human situation and that man must be involved in it. Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor (Leviticus 19:15). This is not a recommendation but an imperative, a supreme commandment." Our daily prayer service invokes us to remember the kind deeds of our ancestors: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rivkah, Leah, and Rachel. Our prayers do not lead us to recite the dates on which they departed from Haran or arrived in Canaan; rather, they direct our reflection on their roles and contributions.

Understanding the historical process and learning to note the perspective of the storytellers opens students' curiosity for how their own identities are a function of historical moments. When history recedes too far into the past for personal connection, a focus on primary sources and artifacts allows students to make conjectures for themselves. An ancient grave's headstone that bears both Hebrew and Greek lettering and images, juxtaposed with a Talmudic text on the permissibility of studying Greek wisdom, helps students perceive the cultural tensions that Jews experienced under Hellenistic influence in the second century BCE. It also lets students compare the Hellenist period with a Canadian-Jewish moment when a *kippah*, woven with a Toronto Maple Leaf or Montreal Canadiens logo, expresses another complex identity.

A mind that is unconscious to history lives in an apathetic present. It assumes that the way things are—or seem to be—is how they always were and always will be. A mind that is awake to history recalls the deeds of our ancestors and reminds us that, like them, we have the will and responsibility to shape the future.

Greg Beiles is Head of School at The Toronto Heschel School and Director of The Lola Stein Institute.

The Happiest Families

BY AVA KWINTER

When Tolstoy said that "all happy families are alike, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," I wish he had given a few more details about the former. Although I can see how stable happy families would not be as juicy to write about as dysfunctional ones, there is something to be said for looking more closely at happy families to see how they work and how we might emulate them. This is not to recommend a reading list packed with 19th-century Russian novels, whose obsession with the infinite nuances of discontent and insatiable appetite for tragedy appeals mainly to undergraduates and other travellers still early in their journey. Yet Tolstoy had it right. There are few contexts, literary or otherwise, where the stakes are as high and the anxiety as intense as in a family, and, for those of us inclined to look for more optimistic scenarios, another genre of literature tells a much different story.

Self-help books have kind of a flaky aura about them and tend to be located next to the New Age section in bookstores, which doesn't add to their credibility. Regardless, I love self-help books. Their promises, their optimism, their encouragement. I devour them. I firmly believe that if you want to know about someone, look at what they want to change about themselves. On my own bookshelves I've curated a self-help library that would reveal more than perhaps I'd like about my priorities, whims, weaknesses, and values: *The Five Love Languages*, *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, *Bringing Up Bebe*, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, *How To Talk so Kids Will Listen*, *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, *Modern Mindfulness*, *The Conscious Parent*, *The Awakened Family*, are some examples.

The craving for more peaceful and joyous relationships drives the huge market for self-help publications aimed at families. This constant and insatiable demand produces a teetering skyscraper of books about how to have a more harmonious home and raise more successful, well-adjusted children. Even choosing which book to read can overwhelm an already harried parent.

Consider, for instance, this portrait of a parent of young children during the COVID-19 pandemic as depicted through her self-help reading list:

March: Charlotte Mason's *Home Education and Personal Reflections on the Gentle Art of Learning*.
April: *Playful Parenting: Nurture Close Connections, Solve Behavior Problems, and Encourage Confidence*.
May: *The Art of Screen Time: How Your Family Can Balance Digital Media and Real Life*.
June: R*eset Your Child's Brain: Reversing the Effects of Electronic Screen Time*.
July: Still trying to get through the resetting the brain book.

August: OK, fine, I'm not going to lie; I still haven't even opened the resetting book. I've been too busy bingeing on *Schitt's Creek* with the kids. We're also trying to unlock Golden Mario in Mario Kart 8. You have to win 200 races while driving 200 ccs and it's like, really hard. Currently, I have very little focus. Probably all our brains have gone a bit haywire from so many screens and devices and togetherness and lockdown and uncertainty.

What kind of insights can I gain if I am too frazzled even to read self-help books? Will our family crash and burn if we aren't focused, at every minute, on optimizing its potential? These are the late-night worries of a parent whose whole understanding of the narrative of parenting has been shaken during the pandemic. It was just around this time of peak anxiety that, inadvertently, I did a step-by-step foray into the work of Marshall Duke.

It happens that Marshall Duke, a psychologist and professor at Emory University, delivered a keynote speech at the Covenant Foundation's Pomegranate Breakfast, the morning after Greg Beiles—yes, Head of School at our own Toronto Heschel—was awarded the prestigious Covenant Award in New York last November. Duke's speech so impressed those who heard it that they talked about it for weeks afterwards, which is how I was first introduced to its salient points. At the same time, I somehow came across an old article from *The New York Times* archive about Marshall Duke and his partner Dr. Robyn Fivush's research on family history.[1] Then, serendipitously, the self-help book next up in my queue, *The Secrets of Happy Families*, turned out to be heavily influenced by Duke's work. This kind of synchronicity, as you can imagine, makes me feel that there is something auspicious at play here.

Cravings for peaceful joyous relationships drive self-help publications aimed at families.

Duke's research in child and family psychology examines how family histories and family stories are passed on through the generations and how the cumulative effect of this telling and retelling of family stories relates to a child's psychological development. Tales of perseverance, survival, overcoming obstacles, failures before successes—these anecdotes and stories help children develop an internal narrative of themselves that mirrors the characteristics remembered and relayed. Both the quantity and quality of family stories matter. As *The New York Times* article explains, "The more children knew about their family's history, the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem and the more successfully they believed their families functioned." The amount and type of information that children knew about their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents "turned out to be the best single predictor of children's emotional health and happiness."[2]

But here's my question about this amazing insight: What distinguishes these powerfully formative and transformative family stories from the sometimes equally funny or dramatic scenarios dropped like an endless trail of breadcrumbs in my forest of self-help books? I've learned that in the literature of self-help almost any situation can be improved, people can determine their own destinies, and each of our lives can make sense and have purpose, strategy, and order. Family stories, on the other hand, are not so relentlessly affirmative in their narrative trajectories; they are complicated by the fact that they are not fiction and not governed by the structures of a made-up story: they don't have simple beginnings, middles, and ends, nor do they always have happy endings. They accumulate an encyclopedia of characters whose portraits cut against the grain of generic typecasting and it's these idiosyncrasies that make the stories so memorable, so powerful, so enduring. The process of repeatedly retelling these family stories is what makes them acquire something like the character of folklore. Folklore, like other kinds of myth and legend, is, after all, an accumulation of stories. These stories transmit the cultural values of a people. Perhaps family stories are one of the most basic foundations of folklore: they signal belonging, history, endurance, and regeneration. They are renewable sources of emotions for new generations to build and rebuild themselves.

1 Bruce Felier, "The Stories That Bind Us," *The New York Times*, March 15, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/fashion/the-family-stories-that-bind-us-this-life.html
2 Ibid., para. 18.

Ava Kwinter studied English Literature at McGill University, Queen's University, and the University of Ottawa. Her children attend The Toronto Heschel School.

Turn It Over and Over for All Is in It

THERE REALLY IS NO SAME OLD STORY

BY DVORA GOODMAN

It's on Jewish educators to turn the Torah's annually repeating stories into intriguing invitations for new meaning.

The centrepiece of the fall holiday of Simchat Torah is dramatic. Weary from the string of the preceding holidays, on Simchat Torah the last passages of the Torah in *Sefer Devarim* (Deuteronomy) are chanted; then everyone waits as the entire scroll of the Torah is wound all the way back to its beginning and the very first part of *Sefer Bereshit* (Genesis) is read, describing the creation of the world. The rabbis tell us to turn and turn the Torah again and again for everything is in it, "*Hafoch Ba Hafoch Ba de'kula ba*" (Pirkei Avot 5:26).

הפך בה והפך בה, דכלא בה

A challenge that comes with this cyclical habit is that, as they grow, our children sometimes tune out the repeating narrative, feeling they "already know that story," having heard it so many times before. Yet such is the Jewish year—purposely built to read the same stories over and over again. Our tradition thrives on repetition.

The paradox of remaking the "same old" into the "fresh and new" keeps Jewish educators alert to the test; yes, it's on them to keep their students interested and engaged in Judaism *throughout* the annually revolving Jewish cycle. With the Torah standing central to this strategy, educators must turn and turn its stories, fashioning them into intriguing invitations to search out deeper interpretations and new applications. One way can be found in Toronto Heschel School classrooms where the teachers curate groups of Torah stories according to themes. For example, in Grade 1, a generative theme across the months between Purim and Pesach is "What is hidden and what is revealed?" God is not named in the Purim story; the face of God is hidden and we wear masks. Esther reveals her beauty to the king but hides that she is Jewish. In the *Sefer Shemot* (Exodus), Moses floats down the Nile hidden in a basket but is later revealed and saved by Pharaoh's daughter. God's role is highly visible during the 10 plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea.

The children learn that sometimes what's important is not obvious and at other times it's very clear. They discuss this with respect to the Torah stories, as well as with respect to events they may see in the schoolyard where sometimes it's easy to understand what's going on and other times a friend's behaviour can be mystifying.

In Grade 5, students refocus on the Book of Exodus, this time to investigate how what they say and what they don't affects others. Joseph begins the story as a vulnerable boy who meets great trouble when he reveals his most favoured status and dreams of superiority to his brothers. Years later, his ability to interpret dreams sees him released from an Egyptian jail and he becomes a trusted adviser to the pharaoh. Now older, the children consider ramifications: sometimes keeping things private is beneficial and sometimes it's not.

The turning and turning of Torah stories also works in reverse to the above. Not only does repetition facilitate increased depth of understanding, increased depth of Torah understanding facilitates shortcuts to insight in other studies. An unbeatable model is the creation story. The Junior Kindergarten (JK) children are introduced to the story of creation when September opens their year-long theme: "Through creation, God teaches us about the world and about ourselves."

As they begin school, we want young children to appreciate the steps, systems, and responsibilities that support productive learning and how creation relates directly to beginning school life—everything that God created has a specific "job," and our job is to care for the world. The JK children each have a specific classroom chore in caring for their immediate world (classroom, selves, and peers). They witness how well order works in class and explore the notion of chaos, "tohu va'vohu," תוהו ובוהו—rocks, wind, and water without order was the first state of the world. They move through the seven days of creation: For example, relating to the first day—when God created light and separated light from darkness—the children experiment with prisms and explore how it feels to exercise in the dark. For the second day—when God separated water above and water below to make sky—they use math to explore the many ways that separation creates something new—objects can be separated into groupings, and paper can be divided into rectangles.

Five years later, Grade 6 students revisit the creation story as a useful catalyst in the study of prayer. The Junior Highs are figuring out their beliefs and how meaningful beliefs are or might be, delving into a new world of mysterious ambiguity. Familiarity with the process of creation is a solid starting place for wide-open questioning. The second blessing of the Amidah, a central prayer in our community, refers to God's power as "mechalkel chaim," מכלכל חיים—a provider of life. God's role in our existence is cited daily yet differently in different *siddurim*: Orthodox and Conservative *siddurim* describe God as "mechaye meytim," מחיה מתים—a giver of life to the dead; the Reform say "mechaye hakol," מחייה הכל—a giver of life to all; and the Reconstructionist *siddur* reads "mechaya kol chai," מחייה כל חי—a giver of life to each living being. A discussion of these nuances now has legs to stand on, as the students have spent years becoming familiar with the creation story.

As an adult Torah student, I am aware of how biblical narratives resound in different contexts. Young adults, who are moving away from home for the first time, may read about Avraham leaving Ur and empathize with his wondering. Becoming a parent I noticed nuances in the tale of Cain and Abel about siblings but also motherhood. With a teenage son, the saga of the Garden of Eden offers new thoughts: Is God's response to adolescents pushing back how I want to answer my children's rebellion?

Maybe the reason we Jews tell stories over and over again has something to do with why we have them in the first place. The Israelite experience of being a stranger in a strange land reminds us to remember others in a similar situation today. The story of Avraham and Lot coaches us to be generous in sharing. The tales—our history—ground us and give our lives purpose. If we want our children to experience Judaism in their lives, they must also tell and retell the stories of the Torah, examine the words, ask the questions, and find meanings for themselves, turning them over and over again. It's on us to start them off.

Dvora Goodman is Coordinator of The Lola Stein Institute. She has worked in a variety of Jewish educational settings and is a Toronto Heschel School parent.

SPECIAL FEATURE

STORYTELLING AT SCHOOL

Past and Present at Home

THE GRADE 4 FAMILY HISTORY PROJECT

BY MALKA REGAN

In Grade 4, students are at a particular stage of childhood development and are figuring out their sense of place in their friendships and their communities. They question events and dilemmas in their network of personal relationships as well as those that are happening further afield. It's a prime moment for them to consider who they are in their family history, and the discoveries they make through the intergenerational lens of this project are impactful and enriching.

The Family History Project at Heschel integrates the Grade 4 theme, "We Tell Stories to Teach Values." When they listen to their relatives' life experiences, students become aware that their history is layered and that commonplace occurrences, decisions, and actions are significant and relevant. They see that thought and intention lay behind choices that were made, and that these decisions were sometimes made with generosity and devotion, sometimes through urgency, and sometimes by happenstance.

To begin, students identify a specific family member—of an older generation—whom they wish to interview. They write a letter to this relative, describe their research project, and pose a few starter questions to give an idea of what they hope to learn in their research. In some cases, students already know details of the person's life and are interested to learn more. In other cases, they know very little.

The students prepare a list of open-ended questions that are meaningful to them and they take that list to the interview. This structure keeps the conversation rolling, although, of course, the student is free to investigate in new directions as additional information comes to light. As the children peer through this little window into their relative's life, the wider historical context of the time lived comes into focus and the questions flow.

The students also look for items, which we call "historical artifacts," from their relative's past: photos, old passports, letters, and work papers. Holding these pieces of history in their hands, the anecdotes and narratives become that more real. One parent mused how her daughter "came to understand a bit how stories become truth and truth becomes stories. The artifacts we uncovered from her great-grandparents' youth made her realize that the stories that she's heard are based on things that actually happened, and vice versa."

Children glimpse what is outside their personal experience and yet nonetheless belong to them.

In their role as historians, the students openly and unreservedly search for personal qualities and real-life experiences that they hadn't known were part of their relative's life or had the opportunity to ask about, and they harvest memories that prove inspiring, funny, tragic, and uplifting. The process enhances—or perhaps creates—intergenerational and intrafamilial relationships with real meaning. As much as understanding, the engagement evokes awe as their family's unique path comes into focus along with the wider historical backdrops of their heritage. One student wrote:

> I researched my Great Bubbie. I learned that she had an amazing story of surviving in the Holocaust… Most people didn't even have a home or a family. If she could survive then with no home and no family, then we can (certainly) survive now [during the COVID-19] quarantine.

One student's interview with his grandfather revealed things that none of the family had known before. Yes, they knew he was an American soldier during World War II, but not that his commander was anti-Semitic and would send him out first to conduct reconnaissance in dangerous situations. At the grandfather's funeral a few years later, the attributes and stories gleaned through this Grade 4 project formed part of his eulogy.

Students found stories that were inspirational and motivational. One student learned her great-grandmother had had her own television show—a first for a woman at that time—and her sense of connection to a woman who broke barriers was very exciting. Another learned that her Saba was the chief engineer for the cranes used to build the CN Tower, and that he was one of the people to stand on its top. Yet another student wrote,

> I learned that Mama was always caring and a great cook. I learned that in that time period, although Mama had a job, it was not common for women to work outside of their homes. Through this project I learned how proud I am to be named after such an inspirational woman.

Learning more about their own relatives enables children to see the interconnectedness of life, its ups and its downs, as this student wrote:

> My great-grandfather, whom I was named after, was really interested in horseback riding and he loved all animals. My Bubbie, who I interviewed about my great-grandfather, had so many stories to tell me, and I found out that we had a lot in common. It was nice to hear her stories, but it made her sad to think of him. But sad in a good way, because she was reminded of him by telling me her stories.

When a nine-year-old receives a story directly from an older relative, the child becomes an owner of happenstance, perseverance, and resilience in action, all of which are instrumental to the development of the child's social and emotional well-being. In 2001, psychologists Dr. Marshall Duke and Dr. Robyn Fivush researched intergenerational learning and found, "The more children knew about their family's history, the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem and the more successfully they believed their families functioned."[1]

In the Grade 4 Family History Project, students glimpse circumstances, places, and times that are outside their personal experiences yet nonetheless belong to them. Their curiosity is opened up by a sense of right, and they begin to use the past to inform their present. Knowledge of family history reveals the marathon that history is. It offers up the good and the bad, the joy and the sorrow, and Grade 4 is just the right time to learn all that family stories can teach.

1 Bruce Felier, "The Stories That Bind Us," *The New York Times*, March 15, 2013, para. 18, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/fashion/the-family-stories-that-bind-us-this-life.html

Malka Regan has been an educator and Leadership Team member at The Toronto Heschel School for many years. This year Malka has the role of Master Teacher (Grade 4) and Director of Social Emotional Learning (SEL).

I am sharing the blessing that combines wisdom with aesthetics.

Art as History

BY LISA RENDELY

Artists are authors who relay past events and ideas through their own perspectives—art is their language of telling. We can see what was important to great artists throughout time by looking today at what they created then, and asking ourselves why might they have done it this way?

At the end of the 15th century, Michelangelo sculpted *David* and, 150 years later, Gian Bernini did it again. Michelangelo presents a serene, poised, and confident ideal. Bernini's *David* is volatile and dramatic. Both hold the rock soon to be hurled towards Goliath, but the Renaissance posture shows assured perfection and the Baroque paragon is fraught with tension. We see the gestalt of each time period: the Renaissance celebrated achievement, and the Baroque era saw the upset of religion and the state at war. Opening students' eyes to see all that art can be, feels to me like a true privilege.

Art movements build on one another, and, especially in the canon of Western art, one sees the thread of artistic evolution weaving through time, claiming more sophistication and technical complexity, becoming more secular. We can trace the historical trajectories of society and science through artistic messaging. Cave painters used their hands for stencils and made pigments by grinding natural materials; it tells which materials our ancestors had access to, just as digital art speaks to the computer age today. In their study of art history, students unlock meaning for themselves. They learn to observe without judgment and to craft interpretation based on knowledge.

While artworks do teach content—historical context, ideas, materials, point of view—I see also that art helps us learn how to behold. The viewer's job is not only to appreciate the beauty but also to find meaning in a message delivered through the language of aesthetics.

Luckily for me, my own high school art teacher had a background in art history. She showed us slides that spanned art history from Ancient Greece and Rome, from the Renaissance through the Romantic period, all the way to pop art, contemporary sculpture, and land art. I was fascinated by the images projected in front of me, and her explanations of each artist's background and training. The precision of Athenian architecture built before calculators and laser levels, the diligence of Claude Monet's brushstrokes, and the enormity of Richard Serra's metal sculptures crisscrossing a landscape—all held me captive. I learned that Greek temples, perched atop the highest hills, were visible homes for deities, making them beacons for the community.

The artists were storytellers of their time. As Baroque artists painted dramatic spectacles using the effects of light and dark, Gothic architects reached their spires towards the sky with stained glass windows bringing similarly dramatic light to prayer. The power of art was strengthened for me in architecture school where we studied cultural history through the lens of the artworks and buildings that acted as our textbooks, and we decoded the symbols, colours, materials, and techniques as evidence of theories, ideals, and advancements. We examined the different ways that the beholder looks at art, and how to ascertain the very personal perspectives deeply embedded in technique and technology.

I remember my first experience standing in front of Eugène Delacroix's enormous painting, *Liberty Leading the People*—a beam of hope in the midst of a revolution. No wonder the proletariat felt galvanized; I felt ready to join a movement after seeing the larger-than-life figure, bare-breasted, waving her flag to invite others to join her in battle against aristocracy. We can learn much by looking closely at the image, and still more if we step back for a broader sense of Delacroix's intended political message. We can ingest the ideals and carnage of the French Revolution in *Les Misérables* or we might look at Delacroix. Admittedly, I may be on the more overtly expressive side of the museum-goer spectrum, but standing in front of a painting by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, entering a room walled in Mark Rothko paintings, and coming face to face with Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* have all moved me to tears.

Situating artists' expressions in their times helps my students translate the artists' thoughts as well as understand the eras in which they emerged. My Grade 6 students analyze Marc Chagall's imagery illustrating his shtetl childhood. His images reveal a Jewish story but they also expand students' facility with metaphor. Chagall—a Jewish artist who fled his home and arrived in Paris before World War I—recreated his past through dream-like images that connected his work to themes found in biblical texts, including *Sefer Shmuel* (Book of 1 Samuel) where God speaks through dreams. This twinning of the subconscious and the spiritual is beneficial exposure for my students.

I feel very lucky as a teacher that when my Grade 7 students enter a room filled with Rothko paintings posted along each wall, they are already primed to study each piece prior to ascribing meaning on their own. They have been taught how to look. In Kindergarten, they mix blue and yellow to make green; in Grade 5, they explore mixing colours, adding

a range of hues between blue and yellow. Their schooling is launched every September by a poetry festival that sets self-expression and imagination as the starting blocks of the school year. Now in Grade 7, experiencing Rothko's colours that are image-free, they are ready to use art for deeper associations and more advanced learning.

In addition to imbibing Rothko's dramatic expression with me, in their science class, my Grade 7 students are busy exploring the science of optics and perception. As they do so, I teach them the colour theory of Josef Albers, the Bauhaus artist whose colour explorations emerged from the scientific knowledge of his era. Grade 5 students study the history of slavery and learn the art of macramé, which depicts knots and spaces as metaphors for slavery and freedom. They draw inspiration from digital artist Windy Chien, whose career demonstrates the push and pull of our current artistic climate. After years of working with Apple, she returned to rope as her tangible medium. Rope harkens back to the tools of enslavement and working with one's hands, and macramé binds students closely to what they are exploring. We use rope.

I want my students to appreciate beauty as a goal itself and to articulate feelings and ideas that are their own. Each of the artists we study reflects and comments on a particular era, saying something unique to each student. As artists themselves and like the artists they study, my students are building on what came before them, just as Bernini reconfigured Michelangelo's *David*. To me, each student is a new length of thread in the rich tapestry of art and imagery. I take it as a gift that my job as a teacher lets me introduce children to works of art made across the millennia. In teaching them to look closely at art and to understand its meaning, I can share with a new generation the blessing that combines wisdom and aesthetics. To look at and learn about art is to be a historian, a skeptic, a time traveller, and an author. To look at art is to make meaning.

Lisa Rendely teaches Grade 7 and visual art at The Toronto Heschel School. She studied and practised architecture before pursuing a career in education, and integrates art and design in her daily classroom teaching.

Spatial Thinking

HOW LAND TELLS A STORY

Continuity, separation, direction, and distance: the properties of space magnify a learner's ability to understand, reason, and communicate.

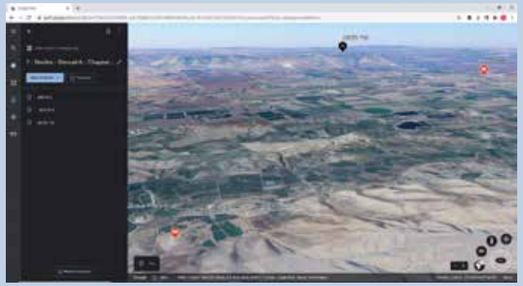
BY ISAAC HOLLANDER

Learning to think spatially should be at the forefront of the 21st-century educational agenda—not as an add-on to an already overburdened curricular structure, but as an integrator and a facilitator for problem-solving across the curriculum.[1] Spatial thinking is a distinctive form of thinking about the world, cultivating habits of mind that consider the properties of space—continuity, separation, direction, distance—and magnifying a learner's ability to understand, reason, analyze, and communicate.

Enter spatial technology and the geographic information system (GIS). Picture a stack of transparencies, each displaying a defined class of spatial features—points (towns), lines (tracks), or polygons (territories). Link each layer to a database table containing descriptive or quantitative information about each feature. Now view and query the data vertically, using Waze or another online interactive mapping application. It is hard to imagine the Earth sciences or the business world without spatial technology, yet spatial technology stands at the opposite end of the frequency-of-use scale in the social sciences and humanities, notwithstanding online options that make GIS eminently practical for classroom use, and that the Ontario Curriculum mandates that GIS literacy begin in Grade 7.[2]

The marriage of spatial thinking and technology, for example, brings stories of the past to life. When historical materials are spatially conceptualized and contextualized, they can be more easily discussed, absorbed, and retained. To illustrate this, I introduce three screenshots of data as viewed through Google Earth (www.google.com/earth), which is a straightforward and free GIS interface. Each of the three layered screenshots represent locations encountered in Toronto Heschel's Grade 7 course on the Nevi'im (the Prophets). (To appreciate the value added by thinking spatially, readers could spend a few minutes reviewing 1 Samuel Chapter 31, and 2 Samuel Chapter 1.)[3]

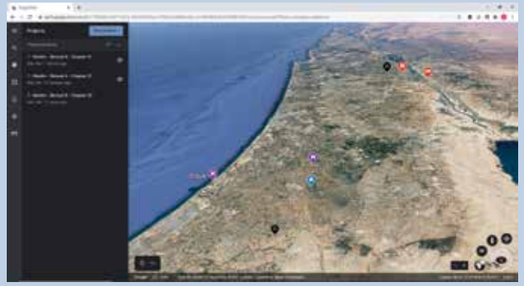
At the start of class, the students first read 1 Samuel Chapter 31, which describes one of two successive and conflicting accounts of King Saul's death. Screenshot One positions us east of the River Jordan, invoking the westward perspective of the people of Yavesh Gilead.



This view grounds the story as told in 1 Samuel Chapter 31, verses 1–6, the battle at Mount Gilboa (the crossed swords tag at top of screen); verse 7, the flight of the Israelite population from the rim of the valley and the Philistine resettlement; verses 8–10, the walls of Beth Shean (red tag at top right); verses 11–13, the actions of the people of Yavesh Gilead (red tag at bottom left).

Exciting questions materialize: Why would King Saul choose Mount Gilboa for his last stand? Why would the Philistines select Beth Shean to display his corpse? How did the people of Yavesh Gilead know about the battle and its outcome? What was the level of risk in their act and what might this reflect? Why would a location be named "Yavesh (dry) Gilead"?

Screenshot Two superimposes a layer of locations from 2 Samuel Chapter 1 over the layer from 1 Samuel Chapter 31, whose features now appear at the top right. The two purple tags mark the two Philistine cities of Ashkelon (left) and Gath (right). The blue tag is Ziklag—this is the field town turned over to David by Akhish, the king of Philistine Gath, and from where David conducted forays against the Amalekites to the south (reported in 1 Samuel Chapter 27).



By viewing these specific layers from two chapters, we open up opportunities for deeper understanding. Why would the herald mentioned in the text be so dishevelled? How do Saul's battleground and David's headquarters relate geographically? How does knowledge of this illuminate David's questions in verses 3–5? Why would David not help Saul out on Mount Gilboa (adding to information in 1 Samuel Chapter 29)?

Visualizing David's actual location can explain the urgency of the concern in his eulogy about the rejoicing by Ashkelon and Gath (verse 20). We can better imagine David's first-person address to Mount Gilboa, far over the horizon (verse 21). Finally, what was on David's mind, sandwiched there between the victory-intoxicated Philistines to his north and west and the vengeful Amalekites to his south, knowing that the reason for his flight from Judea had passed along with Saul, and understanding the need to address the new Israelite leadership vacuum from a safe Israelite base?

Such a spatially informed understanding of David's predicament forms a natural introduction to his thinking in the first verse of 2 Samuel Chapter 2. "Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judea?" And then, "Where shall I go?"

David's hometown of Bethlehem comes to mind (blue tag in centre). But as we can see in Screenshot Three, Hebron (blue tag at top right) and its surrounding villages—whose support he had cultivated during his exile—were nearer to Ziklag and farther from the tribe of Benjamin, bastion of the House of Saul. To display this, an image of political boundaries is draped over the landscape, approximating the Israelite tribal zones according to the Book of Joshua.[4] (The three locations to the left are referred to in the remainder of 2 Samuel Chapter 2.)

In a "live" flexible GIS, the files almost come alive: users can pan, zoom, and change angles of observation; add or remove layers. Data can be searched, analyzed, and manipulated; features described or modified. Even these three static screenshots demonstrate the value that spatial thinking and spatial technology afford stories of the past. They help clarify the primary meaning of narrative and contextualize sequencing of events. They promote student-centred discovery and re-envisioning of previous learning. It's a new form of learning through the visual arts, arranging and rearranging an overall mental picture, something especially valuable to visual learners.

With a small leap of imagination, it is easy to understand how GIS can contribute to student learning beyond any individual course. The facility for layered analysis makes spatial technology an enabler of integration and contextualization in parallel, earlier, or later courses. This is an accessible, tangible, and portable "takeaway" of learning that will be advantageous to students both at school and after graduation.

Schools that already encourage strong learning within the disciplines and between the disciplines can benefit uniquely from spatial thinking through GIS. Where learning integration is driven by shared big ideas that are approached from various discipline-specific course angles, the curriculum may be forced to move in many chronological directions at once. For example, if the study of the American Civil War precedes the study of First Nations, GIS can add a layer of subsequently learned information in a meaningful way. The same applies when students learn about Ancient Rome and Renaissance Europe only after their exposure to early 20th-century Eastern Europe. Intelligent use of GIS for curriculum integration can help educators and students alike conceptualize, visually index, organize, and integrate knowledge, and derive increasing benefit from such ever-shifting timelines and geographies. Most importantly, using GIS can inspire students to think spatially. Let the games begin!

1 National Research Council, *Learning to Think Spatially* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2006).

2 Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8, rev. ed.* (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 2018), http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/social-studies-history-geography-2018.pdf

3 The readings can be found online as follows: 1 Samuel Chapter 31, https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/15860/jewish/Chapter-31.htm; and 2 Samuel Chapter 1, https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/15861/jewish/Chapter-1.htm

4 "12 Tribes of Israel Map," Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:12_staemme_israels_heb.svg

Dr. Isaac Hollander has designed spatial technology solutions and training modules for business and education. He is the author of *Jews and Muslims in Lower Yemen: A Study in Protection and Restraint, 1918–1949* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). He teaches Judaic Studies and Hebrew at The Toronto Heschel School.

Origin Story

STORYTELLING, SCHEMA, AND SIMILE FOR KIDS

BY AVA KWINTER

The subject of how stories are used to teach in the Early Years (Junior Kindergarten to Grade 2) is replete with paradox. Storytelling is at once simpler and more complicated than it might seem at first. How specifically do children learn from stories, and how do we want stories to teach our children?

I spoke with Heidi Friedman, Director of Toronto Heschel's Early Years Division, about how stories are used in the classroom, and the role of stories in the curriculum. "Almost everything," Heidi told me, "is taught through stories, especially in Kindergarten." I asked her if she would characterize the children as storytellers. She paused and thought for a moment. "No, not in the sense of telling original stories," she finally said. "Children retell stories."

Children love listening to stories, repeating stories, re-enacting stories through play; they reframe stories, and mix and match plots from books, TV shows and movies they see both at home and at school. But it's true, young children do not usually create what we might call "original content." They are mimics, not artists, because before, say, Grades 2 or 3, most haven't developed the intellectual infrastructure for imagining scenarios outside of their own experiences.

"The teachers are always telling stories," Heidi explained. She described a routine in which the teachers and children tell and retell a story multiple times over several days: the story is narrated in circle time or read out loud from a book. Then the teachers act it out, and later the children act it out too. They "play" it in the drama centre with costumes or outside on the playground; they may use puppets or dolls or pictures, or music and movement. They tell and retell and retell a story so the children internalize it from many angles and it becomes part of their experience.

This is OK, I guess, but I am impatient to get to the part when the children become authors of their own personalities, construct their own identities, invent all those wonderful individualistic traits we are all so eager to see. I pressed Heidi to speak more about how school fosters originality of thought and individual development. Heidi shook her head. "We don't exist in a vacuum," she told me. "Children can't come out of a bubble. Their sense of themselves and their identities are rooted in the stories and the community. We are who we are in the context of tradition. That's the point."

She tried to explain it in a different way. "The children need role models, guides, to develop their identities. We use holiday and Chumash stories to develop the children's schema."

I don't know what this last word means. I go home and look it up. Schema: a psychological term that refers to a stage of cognitive development in children; the emergence in children's understanding of fundamental human concepts like time, space, numbers, justice, and causality. To develop a schema is to build the scaffolding, or as psychologist Jean Piaget calls it, the "building blocks" of one's intellect; to build a foundation on which to process and organize knowledge.

Finally, I begin to understand how stories do the work of teaching children. The concept of schema explains how stories actually build the child's brain; the structure of a story—the beginning, middle, and end—builds an understanding of sequence and causality into the child's consciousness. It's not the children who make up stories, it is stories that make up children.

And so we can see how children's brains are literally built through stories: their fundamental understanding of the world, their neural pathways and mechanisms of thinking are developed by internalizing the structure of a story. The structure of storytelling, which is at the very core of our modern Western notion of childhood, forms the basic structure of our understanding of the world: history, religion, politics, nation, culture, family—almost anything imaginable.

The stories that Heschel teachers share with children are instructive, but not all instructive stories work the same way. There are many stories that have "morals," which are recited didactically at the end, and other stories that are more subtle but still moralizing. The Chumash and holiday stories in the Heschel curriculum are used differently. It's more often the holiday stories that have a clear good-guy/bad-guy dynamic: the Maccabees versus the Greeks, Esther and Mordechai versus Haman, Moses versus Pharaoh. The Torah curriculum highlights stories that seem to lack drama or even plot: Abraham and Lot graze sheep.

The stories are told so that afterwards the teachers are positioned to ask, "How can you be *like* Abraham or Esther or Moshe?" As Heidi pointed out during our interview, the words in this question are similar to the words in the blessing that parents give children on Friday night: May you be like Ephraim and Menashe. May you be like Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca, and Leah. The echo is deliberate because both situations ask children to develop certain characteristics from these traditional role models. Identities in Jewish children are formed by simile: making a comparison using the words "like" or "as."

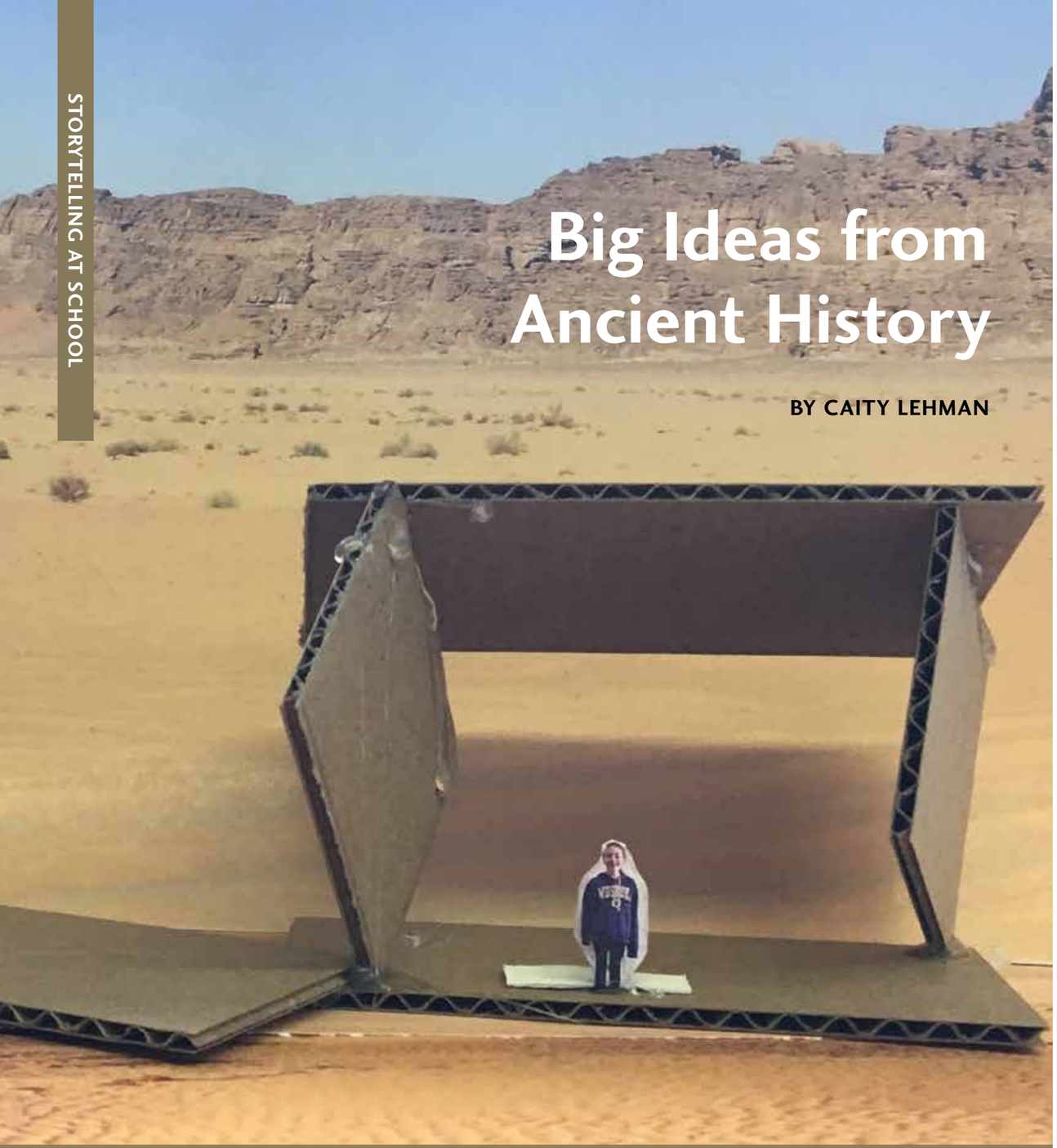
The structure of a simile is so foundational in the Jewish tradition that the invocation to "be like" the matriarchs and patriarchs is almost rote. The strategy is powerful, precisely because of the inclusion of the "like." A metaphor's imagery works by merging two things together: "my love is a rose." The love and the rose are identical, simultaneous, merged. The first element engulfs or absorbs the second. If this were a simile, on the other hand, "my love is *like* a rose," the two elements stay separate. The poet's love and the rose coexist side by side, neither subsuming the other, each holding space.

So it is with storytelling in the Jewish tradition. In asking "How can you be *like* Abraham or Esther or Moshe?" we make space for the individual and the model at the same time. Certainly Abraham, for example, had specific qualities like flexibility, resourcefulness, and fortitude that are good things to emulate. But there's no metaphor and the individual remains part of the equation. The pedagogy asks that, while the learner is to look to role models, it is equally important for the individual to be present in the space and conscious of being there. So it is with storytelling in the Jewish tradition. The stories don't create the child, yet they are the origin of identity.

Children's brains are built through stories; how they think is developed by internalizing narrative structures.

Big Ideas from Ancient History

BY CAITY LEHMAN



We turn to history to see how people in the past responded to their dilemmas.

I teach courses on ancient civilizations, but really, I am a teacher of big ideas. I help students recognize, frame, and fight for important values. In studying the ancients, we encounter themes that resurface as modern dilemmas. As we inquire into the meaning of our own lives and the societies we live in, we turn to history to see how people in the past responded to their dilemmas and questions. What meaning did they make of what happened to them? What patterns did they notice? How did they feel? What choices did they make? What values did they establish out of their experiences?

To learn history this way requires a specific lens from the start: we need to enter into our study with inquiring hearts and minds. When we read Torah with Senior Kindergarten (SK) students we ask, What patterns did *we* notice? How did *we* feel when we heard this narrative? What questions do *we* have? What would *we* want to do? By practising the art of asking these questions each time we read a new narrative, we develop cognitive and emotional skills that allow us to connect ancient stories with our own personal experiences; we lay the foundation for applying lessons to future situations.

For example, when SK students listen to the story of Abraham and Lot, they encounter an interesting problem. Both shepherds want to care for their animals, yet there is not enough grass to share. They need to find a solution. Through role play, visual cues, and practise, students experience what it feels like to be inside this problem and they brainstorm together for a solution. Acting out the circumstance makes it relatable and students are excited when they discover that, *thinking flexibly*, Abraham solved the problem with the suggestion that he and Lot share the pasture by each leading their animals along a different path through it.

To illustrate the importance of this lesson, we then act out situations in the classroom that might involve flexible thinking. For example, what happens when there is only one yellow marker but two students want to draw a sun? Students come up with an abundance of creative solutions, all of which are celebrated. Throughout the school year when students find themselves stuck, we teachers guide them back to flexible thinking. When students hear this message consistently, they notice the pattern and understand that thinking flexibly and conjuring new ideas works well in various situations. They come to see this biblical story as an illustration of finding a flexible solution, and that flexibility is universally valuable.

My Grade 7 students go deeper by exploring how big ideas interconnect across time. Does freedom promote innovation? Might loss enable growth? We study the Jewish experience in Hellenistic and Roman times, and consider how the notion of freedom was experienced in these different contexts. We contrast Jewish responses to adversity in different situations and reflect on how we might respond personally if we lost our freedoms today. We relate our own sense of freedom to that felt in antiquity, and see the notion of freedom as a concept across time. This is important in and of itself, but it also helps the story of ancient civilizations feel more relevant to Junior High students.

We begin by analyzing what we know about "freedom." We play a "values game" where students prioritize ideals, beliefs, and attitudes from a given list. This is a challenging task as it is not easy to weigh safety, love, and justice, even hypothetically against one another, and it's next to impossible to rank creativity, equality, health, and freedom. We task students in increasingly larger groupings to prune their lists of rankings, balancing divergent opinions, discussing and persuading. As they reflect on how their choices get influenced by others, they begin to articulate which values they consider indispensable and which they could compromise. As they envisage the impact of losing certain personal freedoms, a new comprehension dawns with respect to the various big ideas that are inherent in a healthy society. It's a powerful thought exercise and leads to heated debates as students advocate passionately for their beliefs.

The class focus then shifts to historical facts. We study the Roman Empire and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and we reflect on the Jewish experience when liberty was lost. Studying artifacts, artwork, architecture, and by reading texts by the first-century historian Flavius Josephus we begin to sense a story through the eyes of someone who lived it, to feel the nuance and impact of events. Without the Temple, the Jewish community had to adapt its spirituality; prayer became unlinked to a physical space. This brought about a significant change to Jewish identity, laying the foundation for the Rabbinic Era and diaspora. The class questions how we might respond to such hardship and what role might be played by the big idea of "adaptation." We discover and discuss how, in the face of adversity, Judaism thrives from becoming adaptable and portable.

As the COVID-19 pandemic progressed in the early months of 2020, our community changed quickly. Facing new challenges, it was our turn to adapt our families, friendships, careers, and classrooms to new ways of living. During a remote learning semester in the spring, I felt that my students drew on their knowledge of Jewish response to loss in ancient times to help navigate their way. Seeing how our ancestors found new ways to learn, to pray, and to form community inspired us: it not only gave us a model for adaptation but also showed us that we can change and adapt without losing what is most important to us—learning, community, and relationships. In the virtual classroom, we discovered new ways to interact and learn, and found new opportunities for personal growth. In fact, it showed us that adapting is a way of thriving. We're still here, just as before. We drew from wisdom that gives us strength to innovate: when Judaism adapts, it can thrive.

Caity Lehman is a passionate artist and traveller. After teaching for several years in Bogotá, Colombia, Caity is now in her third year at The Toronto Heschel School, teaching language arts and civilizations in Junior High. She studied English literature and film before pursuing a career in education.

THE STORIES WE TELL

We tell our own stories, wrapping ourselves in words that define our intentions and colours that convey our meaning.

The Bar Mitzvah Boy

MY UNDERGRADUATE VIDEO THESIS

BY JOSH GRANOVSKY

I could spot flecks of my individuality wrapped up in nearly every moment—the film was heavy on Jewish themes, stuffed with jokes, and packed with anticipation.

Often, the most common screenwriting advice is to "write what you know" because writers can then improve their skills at capturing vivid detail and specific insights in stories they already know well. Though I dreaded the thesis project necessary for my degree in film studies, I believed I had a starting advantage with a rich, lived experience in mind that I felt primed to cover: I would make a film about being a Jewish man.

I was lucky to have received over a decade of Jewish day school education and to grow up in a house with as much pervasive pride in our culture as *mezuzot* on our doorframes. I was always inquisitive—one of my earliest memories is of interrupting a class discussion to loudly ask my first-grade teacher "Who created G-d?" As my life progressed, I took particular interest in the measures that men take to avoid showing weakness, as well as in how society treats men and women differently. My schoolwork reflected these background curiosities, replete with essays about television depictions of gender roles and one-off scripts about *bar mitzvah* experiences.

Though I had never given much thought to the intersection of my Judaism and my masculinity, I figured I could offer something unique on the topic since I embody it every day. I sprinted past my thesis classmates during our topic-picking stage and locked in "Jewish masculinity" as the focus of my thesis. I envisioned a breezy research period during which I would read articles and academic journals about what makes Jewish men different from their non-Jewish peers. I figured a guiding principle would eventually find me and I would draw the arc of my film around it.

Researching what it means to be a Jewish man brought more questions than answers. I read everything I could reasonably find about the history of the Judean patriarchy, the Torah's teachings on gender roles, and where the most toxic traits of stereotypical masculinity fit into the Jewish man's struggle. I opened countless browser tabs of musings from Jewish men with the same curiosity, wondering where they could find answers I assumed they already had. I bought extra research time from my supervisors by building a vague story about a young man so engrossed in his own ideas of what a Jewish man "should be" that he fails to see its true meaning, and I marked "meaning" conveniently as "to be determined."

With only a few days left before my script was due, I felt no closer to pinpointing the meaning of the Jewish male experience than when I selected the topic. My research process was a letdown. All it gave me was an overwhelming sense of confusion. Everywhere I turned I found my own questions about the Jewish man's experience being reflected back at me. I tried reorganizing the swaths of material I had collected, but failure was imminent: I was not capable of writing what I know.

In the face of this disappointment, I resolved to take the most productive step I could think of and simply stare at what I had written until it magically turned into something usable. My fixed gaze eventually gave way to a linear narrative that I incorporated into a story without understanding—zero conscious recognition—of what I was saying. Simply put, I saw a journey that started with collecting questions in my childhood and that climaxed when I brought those questions to a place where I hoped to find answers. And then—I suddenly realized I had been sitting with the big discovery of what happens at the end of the story right in front of me: I learned there are only more questions.

I refined the story in my thesis to tell of a young man who time and again was denied being declared a son of the laws, a man, a Bar Mitzvah. He was frustrated and fed up because he thought he knew what being a Jewish man meant. Only when he admits to his confusion does he discover the truth that there is no answer. My script started sliding into place within minutes and by the end of the night, I had finished a full draft.

After a research period that felt endless, the production process passed in a blur. I recruited some classmates to help with filming and acting, and emerged with a final product I was proud of just two months after sending in my first draft. My biggest fear of making something with nothing to say started to slip away as I reviewed the project before its final due date. I could spot flecks of my individuality wrapped up in nearly every moment; the film was heavy on Jewish themes, stuffed with jokes, and packed with anticipation—just like my day-to-day life.

I may not have provided the new, life-altering insight about a man growing into his Jewish identity that I craved. However, I made a story that was unabashedly about me, with all my intuitions and the empty space that I reserve for future learned truths. With this process came a new understanding of how to embrace the things about Jewish life that I don't yet know and may not come to know for some time. For now, the clarity of that realization is enough.

Josh Granovsky is an MFA candidate in USC's Writing for Screen and Television program. He graduated from The Toronto Heschel School in 2012. You can view the thesis film, *The Good Place but Jewish*, at https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLz-UGw6uUhXqPh-AjsaesWJyCF5Bn4Qqx

The Story of Telling the Story

BY DANIEL HELD

מַעֲשֶׂה בְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־עֲזַרְיָה וְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְרַבִּי טַרְפוֹן שֶׁהָיוּ מְסֻבִּין בִּבְנֵי־בְרַק וְהָיוּ מְסַפְּרִים בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם כָּל־אוֹתוֹ הַלַּיְלָה, עַד שֶׁבָּאוּ תַלְמִידֵיהֶם וְאָמְרוּ לָהֶם רַבּוֹתֵינוּ הִגִּיעַ זְמַן קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע שֶׁל שַׁחֲרִית

It happened once [on Pesach] that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon were reclining in Bnei Brak and were telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt that whole night, until their students came and said to them, "The time of [reciting] the morning Shema has arrived."

The scene with which we open the heart of *magid*, the storytelling portion of the Passover Seder, has always engendered in me memories of the last night of summer camp; the night we stay up, fending off sleeping, holding on to the magic of the summer, hoping it will never end. Despite our best efforts, the sun inevitably rises, and the summer magic becomes cherished memory.

Reading about five rabbis, who also stay up all night, may seem a strange way to begin the Seder. Given that the words *haggadah* and *magid* both derive from the Hebrew word for "tell," shouldn't the goal of the Seder be to tell the story?

No, it shouldn't. If the Haggadah were a work of historical literature, it would create the rising action of the story first, describing Jacob and his eleven sons' descent to Egypt in a time of famine, move next to Joseph's outstretched arms welcoming them, and their subsequent enslavement under a new Pharaoh. It would develop the character of Moses, shaping his internal conflict, his reticence to lead, and his ultimate heroism. It would create a climactic event where Moses pleads with Pharaoh to "let my people go." If the Seder were just about telling the Exodus story, we might be best served by outsourcing the evening to Andrew Lloyd Webber. The overarching goal of the Haggadah is not to teach the story of our ancestors' Exodus; the Haggadah's overarching goal is to instill a living Jewish memory in future generations. The intention is to inform our communal future by remembering and building on the past.

When I taught Jewish history at the high school level, I held two responsibilities: teaching Jewish history and teaching Jewish memory. Studying history usually involves texts, facts, truths, and their implications; my students poured over primary and secondary sources and were tested on names, dates, and locations. My role was to challenge them to put together these pieces of the puzzle and find the broader perspective—both their own and that of others.

Memory is different. Memory is the story we tell of ourselves, our ancestors, and our people. It's the way we view ourselves and the image we want to create for the future. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, in his work *Zachor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, suggests that Judaism is a technology of memory. In his view, the practices of Judaism, from Shabbat to holidays to lifecycle events are designed to bring the past into current view.

The Passover Seder is fundamentally a mechanism for the creation of Jewish memory. Indeed, the Haggadah states this explicitly: In each generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt.

בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם

On Seder night, the creation of memory is achieved in three ways: through the text that we read, through the experiences the Haggadah prescribes for us to do, and through the development of new customs that add meaning to our celebration.

The Haggadah is designed to create memories. For months before Seder night, the youngest child practises how to chant the *Ma Nishtana* and ask, "Why is this night different?" Through its description of the four sons, the text reminds us to tailor the evening's conversation to the unique needs, interests, and character of every child at the table. The grand finale of *magid* is not *Dayenu* or the plagues, but Rabban Gamliel saying that, even if we have told the whole story, we have not fulfilled our obligation unless we discuss the Passover sacrifice, the *matza* and the *maror* (bitter herbs)—a scene which evokes a multi-sense experience of reading text, pointing to the object, and creating memories of taste and smell.

Seder dynamics illustrate the "technology" that develops memory.

The Haggadah's text per se only plays a supporting role. Unlike the Torah reading on Shabbat morning or the reading of the Megillah on Purim, the Seder is more about action than words. The various dynamic experiences of the Seder illustrate so clearly the "technology" at work to develop our memory. We taste the sorrow of our ancestors in the salt-water and the bitterness of their enslavement in the *maror*. We acknowledge the destruction wrought on the Egyptians through the plagues by dipping our finger in the red wine. And, of course, we eat the bread of affliction—*matza*—to evoke how difficult it was to live the ascent from slavery to freedom.

Ours is a living growing culture and so, in addition to ritual experiences set out in the Haggadah, over the centuries, communities and individuals have added countless new practices to strengthen the Seder's function in Jewish memory development. At one Seder my wife and I attended, guests were given scallions to whisk each other with during *Dayenu*, dramatizing the hardships of slavery. Communities worldwide have concocted unique recipes for *charoset*—a firm Seder ritual not even mentioned in the Haggadah!—to recall the mortar used in slave-driven construction. During the movement to free Soviet Jews, in deference to their absence from our communities, families set an extra place at the table, and today many place an orange on the Seder plate as a symbol of inclusion.

The Pesach Seder reveals that Judaism is not only about history, but also about memory. At the end of the Seder, there's no test to ensure guests can recite the 10 plagues or list the *Dayenus* before they leave. The evening around the table, however, is rarely forgotten. Memories of past Seders are reminisced and recounted for years to come.

The word *Zachor* (remember) appears over 200 times in the Tanach. Empowering memory of who we are as a people is the central tenet of the Haggadah. Part word, part practice, part innovation; in combination they may be the secret recipe of our assorted, connected, far-flung tribe.

Daniel Held is Executive Director of the Julia and Henry Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Education at the UJA Federation of Metropolitan Toronto and a parent at The Toronto Heschel School.

Good Books

by Tziporah Cohen & Gail Baker

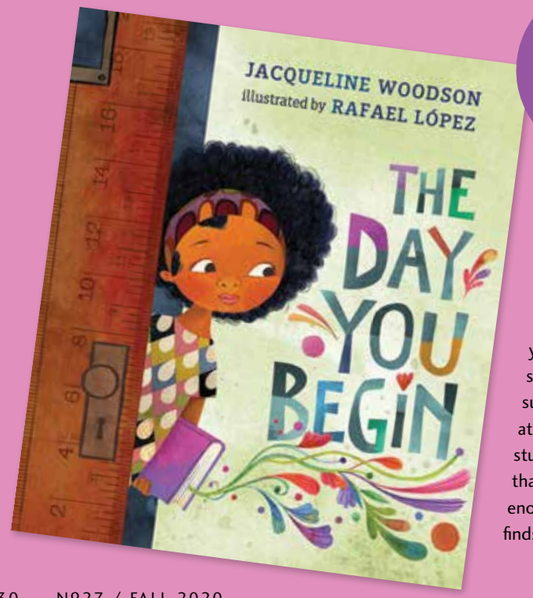
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM

Tziporah Cohen is a psychiatrist with an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults and is a former Toronto Heschel mom. Her debut middle-grade novel, *No Vacancy*, was published in September by Groundwood Books.

Gail Baker is a renowned educator, a mother, and a grandmother. In 1996 she co-founded The Toronto Heschel School and retired as Head of School in 2014.

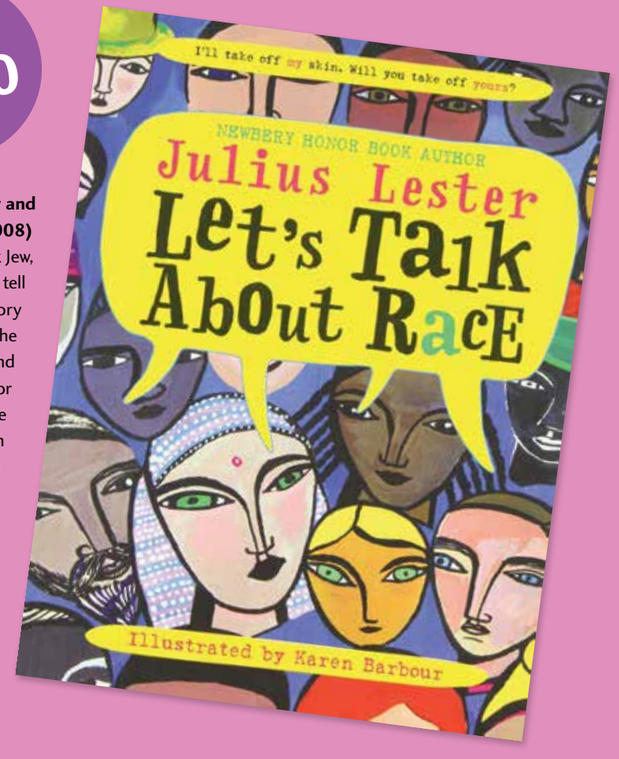
***The Keeping Quilt*, written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco, 10th Anniversary Edition (Simon & Schuster, 1998)**
In this classic tale, Patricia Polacco tells the story of her family, starting with her great-gramma Anna's childhood journey to America. When Anna outgrows her dress and babushka—the only things she brought with her from Russia—her mother makes a quilt from them, along with the old clothes of other family members. Polacco follows the generations down to her own birth, with the quilt as the enduring star: a cloth to cover the Shabbat table in one generation, a picnic blanket in the next, then a *chuppah* and a baby blanket. In each generation, the older family members tell the story of the quilt, and "whose clothes made each flower and animal." With stunningly detailed pencil illustrations punctuated by judicious use of colour, Polacco brings her family history to life, connecting past and present with joy and gratitude.

AGES 4–8



***The Day You Begin*, written by Jacqueline Woodson and illustrated by Rafael López (Nancy Paulsen Books, 2018)**
"There will be a time when you walk into a room and no one there is quite like you." Thus, begins this stunning and poetic book. Jacqueline Woodson, writing in an inviting and direct way, asks children how they feel alone and different, while wondering how they can connect with others. Angelina, a young student, listens nervously as the teacher asks the students how they spent their summer vacation. Children tell stories about their trips to places such as France, Spain, and South Carolina, while Angelina spent the summer at home, taking care of her little sister, whom she adores. What will the other students think? Other students in the book eat different foods or have accents that set them apart and make them feel different. When Angelina feels brave enough to share her stories, she finds that the world opens up to her and she finds her place amongst her peers. Everyone has a story to share.

AGES 4–10



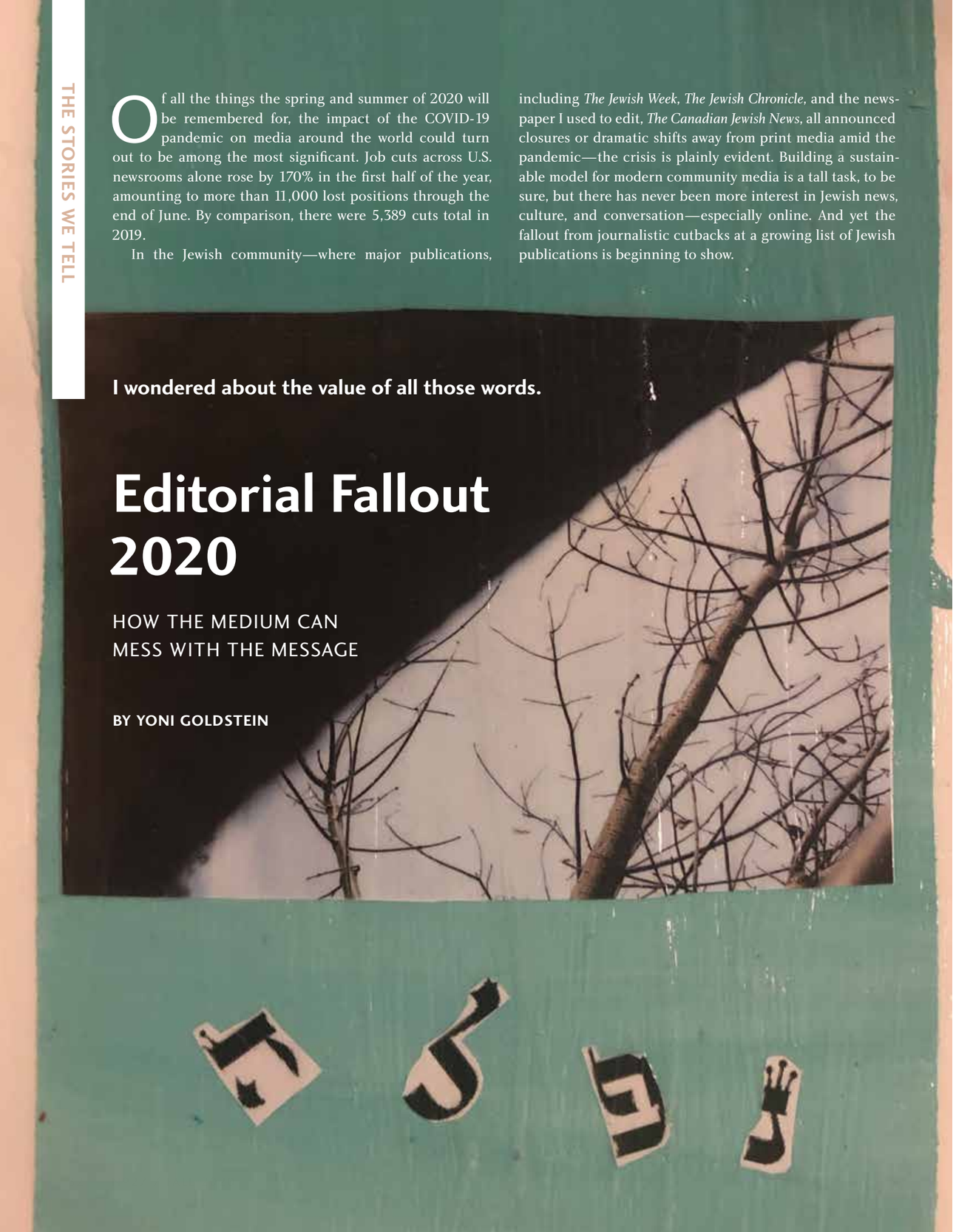
***Let's Talk about Race*, written by Julius Lester and illustrated by Karen Barbour (Harper Collins, 2008)**
This timely and evocative book by Julius Lester, a Black Jew, candidly discusses the issue of race and the stories we tell ourselves and others. Lester believes that every life is a story and it's only details that set us apart. Lester addresses the reader directly, telling them details about his own story and asking about theirs. We may all have a favourite colour or food, for example, but it is our specific choice of favourite colour or food that may be different. Lester invites children to discuss their personal stories, challenging them to literally look beneath their skin as they consider how they are the same—and different—from their friends.

AGES 10–14

***Broken Strings* by Eric Walters and Kathy Kacer (Puffin Canada, 2019)**
Disappointed to be cast as Golde and not Hodel in her middle-school production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, Shirli Berman makes the best of it, hoping to find inspiration for the role in boxes of old clothes stored in her grandfather's attic. When she finds an old violin with broken strings, Zayde becomes angry and upset, maintaining his silence about his experiences in the Holocaust and refusing to talk about his past with her. Over the course of the novel, Shirli embraces her role in the school's musical production and learns to listen patiently to her Zayde, while Zayde learns the importance of sharing his painful story with his family, to preserve it for future generations. An unflinching look at how sharing one's history, however painful, influences not just our own lives, but the lives of those around us.

Of all the things the spring and summer of 2020 will be remembered for, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on media around the world could turn out to be among the most significant. Job cuts across U.S. newsrooms alone rose by 170% in the first half of the year, amounting to more than 11,000 lost positions through the end of June. By comparison, there were 5,389 cuts total in 2019.

In the Jewish community—where major publications, including *The Jewish Week*, *The Jewish Chronicle*, and the newspaper I used to edit, *The Canadian Jewish News*, all announced closures or dramatic shifts away from print media amid the pandemic—the crisis is plainly evident. Building a sustainable model for modern community media is a tall task, to be sure, but there has never been more interest in Jewish news, culture, and conversation—especially online. And yet the fallout from journalistic cutbacks at a growing list of Jewish publications is beginning to show.



I wondered about the value of all those words.

Editorial Fallout 2020

HOW THE MEDIUM CAN MESS WITH THE MESSAGE

BY YONI GOLDSTEIN

At the beginning of July, the noted American Jewish writer Peter Beinart delivered his latest essay in the online journal *Jewish Currents*. Titled "Yavne: A Jewish Case for Equality in Israel-Palestine," Beinart's essay employed the narrative of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, who established a new house of rabbinic leadership while Jerusalem crumbled, as a metaphor for what he sees as a new, post-Zionist phase of Jewish history.

You may agree or disagree with the premise, but reading through the article, the editor in me was left with some serious questions.

Beinart's essay totalled nearly 8,000 words—that's about 16 pages worth, 12-size point, single spaced, of reading. Reading through it, I wondered about the value of all those words—whether the sheer volume actually detracted from an important community conversation. Could Beinart have gotten the message across in fewer words? And wouldn't that have meant more Jewish people—in a culture where media is increasingly measured in seconds and characters—would have been truly engaged?

The writer seemed to answer in the affirmative himself, simultaneously publishing a 1,000-word version of "Yavne" in *The New York Times*. Why did Beinart opt to promote his latest ideas in such drastically different forms for Jewish and non-Jewish audiences?

Perhaps it goes back to our people's historic connection to the written word, our inclination towards immersive textual study. Equally likely, in my opinion, is that an 8,000-word opus is a tough sell to the *Times*, even under more favourable circumstances and even for someone with the profile of Beinart. A sharp, experienced editor would have read the piece and quickly realized that the argument's therein could be made equally convincing, if not more so, in one-eighth of the space.

A smaller community outlet, however, might jump at the chance to publish the full Beinart on name recognition alone. Indeed, poaching him from *The Forward* at the beginning of 2020 and landing him as editor-at-large was a big deal for *Jewish Currents*. But producing solid long-form writing also presents challenges, especially at a time when there are fewer editors on the job, and at a time when the ones who are available are young and just starting out and might not feel comfortable challenging a writer of Beinart's pedigree.

Editing, after all, is about much more than spelling and grammar. A good editor hones in on a writer's argument, strips away anything that might hurt it, and is ever-mindful of the ultimate question: What can I do to get people to read and engage with this piece of media?

The answer isn't necessarily tied to a word count, but in my experience, it is rarely 8,000—or even 3,000—words long. The reason is that it's really hard to keep readers engaged for that length of time, especially these days. Even people who are devoted to an issue, and invested in the conversation, find it hard to process that kind of volume in one sitting and are less likely to return to finish it at a later time. (You can probably relate: How many articles have you saved for later reading and never returned to?)

To my eye, it looked like no one at *Jewish Currents* paid that kind of acute editorial attention to Beinart's words, either because there were not enough staff to do so effectively or because the people who were around didn't feel confident enough to ask their writer some incisive questions. Whatever the reason, the result hurt both the writer and the publication.

The glaring editing errors in the piece appeared, as the veteran American Jewish reporter Ron Kampeas noted on social media, right from the start. Beinart's essay began:

> What makes someone a Jew—not just a Jew in name, but a Jew in good standing—today? In Haredi circles, being a real Jew means adhering to religious law. In leftist Jewish spaces, it means championing progressive causes. But these environments are the exceptions. In the broad center of Jewish life—where power and respectability lie—being a Jew means, above all, supporting the existence of a Jewish state. In most Jewish communities on earth, rejecting Israel is a greater heresy than rejecting God.[1]

To which Kampeas responded on Twitter:

> Dear @PeterBeinart I could not get past this first graf—not one of these three assumptions holds water. Haredim hold above all to matrilineal descent. Most progressive Jews I know would take as a slur a definition of their Judaism that omits spiritual/cultural components. And I have never met a Jew that defines his Judaism as "above all" supporting Israel.[2]

It was a devastating blow—and all done in about 60 words. A serious editor might have picked up on it, wondered whether (a) it was true or whether (b) it was essential to the argument, potentially saving Beinart from making a crippling mistake in his opening paragraph. Which may be why those lines didn't appear anywhere in the version published under his byline in the *Times*—a place, it should be noted, where editors are still employed in decent numbers.

1 Peter Beinart, "Yavne: A Jewish Case for Equality in Israel-Palestine," *Jewish Currents*, July 7, 2020, para. 1, https://jewishcurrents.org/yavne-a-jewish-case-for-equality-in-israel-palestine/

2 Ron Kampeas [@kampeas], July 7, 2020, Dear @PeterBeinart I could not get past this first graf [Tweet], https://twitter.com/kampeas/status/1280600886104989699

Yoni Goldstein is a writer and the former editor of *The Canadian Jewish News*, where he wrote a weekly column. His work has appeared previously in *THINK*, as well as in the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, *Walrus Magazine*, and *Ha'aretz*.

Silver Linings and the Legend of Error

BY JASMINE ELIAV

One of the only constant factors during this pandemic is that everything seems to change; we are in a constant state of flux. Tasks that were previously mundane now require acute analysis. Now we ask such questions as: Should I go to the store to get milk? Can I bring my daughter? Can we drive another child if his parent is in a bind? No longer inconsequential or arbitrary decisions about convenience, these choices have become complex issues of personal and public health and safety.

We are living through an age characterized by an overload of soft data—information that is anecdotal, opinion-based, provisional—and a paucity of hard data that includes facts, evidence, precedent, and experience. Nonetheless, despite receiving constantly changing messaging from governments and health professionals, we are being held personally accountable for many more mistakes and missteps than ever before. We have to recuperate from them faster, and we have to take it all in stride. Our parenting decisions have taken on a whole new character and dimension in these uncertain times. For many of us, living in the world these days feels like a much more fragile experience than before. We find ourselves parenting from a place of vulnerability rather than confidence and we have to ask: What does this mean for our children?

Can we possibly find a silver lining within these times of worry and dislocation? Perhaps learning to accept making mistakes might be one of these unexpected bright spots. Can we reopen the book on errors and blunders and understand mistakes in a new way?

Pre-pandemic, it sometimes felt that we were expected to be perfect which, of course, included what social media and each of us were personally projecting out into the world. There were family expectations, for example, stories of our own parents being more respectful as children, with stronger work ethics, legends highly impacted by memories of their youth. Furthermore, we would compare our children to others, as in: I wish you studied like your older sister, or were organized like your brother, or active like your best friend. And on top of these internally driven standards were external expectations with their intensifying pressure for productivity across sports, school, and social interactions. We were increasingly motivated and strained by all of this and with it came an intrinsic need for perfection. Mistakes for many felt big, overwhelming, and, frankly, permanent.

Back before the pandemic, our parenting decisions used to be streamlined for the most part. Our children knew what to expect, even if it was daunting, and although they challenged our decision-making at times, we had strong familiar parameters guiding us. We had consistent academic, extracurricular, community, and familial expectations, a momentum consistently driving our family forward. During the pandemic, with no structure or routine, and with less idea of what tomorrow might bring, there was more opportunity to just be, and it put us in a new zone where vulnerability occupied a larger space within us, a space greater than perfectionism. I propose that we lean in to this new uncertainty. It could have a lot to teach us.

There are many reasons why mistakes are important, even crucial, to development. Through trial and error we gain knowledge, experience, understanding, resilience, compassion: no one would dispute the value of making a mistake. But beyond the mistakes themselves is the story of what led to them in the first place, and it is in these contexts of wrongness where we might find the richest lessons and greatest potentials for connection.

Why do we make mistakes, or more pointedly, why do our children sometimes make bad decisions? One reason that kids make wrong choices is because they consume so much soft data information that is opinion-based, anecdotal, suggestive, and speculative. What if we have lapsed in our sensitivity for the soft data that contextualizes kids' mistakes? Have we noticed how little hard data (facts, evidence, precedent, and experience) kids have access to, by virtue of just being kids? Just as our thinking during the pandemic is clouded and obscured by weak, provisional data, so are our kids' cognitive processes often hindered by faulty understanding. I'm referring to the scale of the unregulated information coming at them, the impact of anxieties induced by competitive games, TV violence, pressure to be perfect, and solo time on screens of all kinds, plus, of course, the diminution of authentic relaxed family interactions. What have these background influences done to our children's focus and their decision-making capacity? Might their judgment be clouded? Might ours? Might we understand?

Watching our children make mistakes in the moment, hearing of their past errors, and contemplating where they may go off track in future can prove a very difficult experience for many parents. Although we may tell our children that we want them to make mistakes, when they actually do, the feelings, conflict, and drama that can result within the family may belie our earlier words. It is so important to keep in mind how our reactions make our children feel, because we can unintentionally create enduring negative internal narratives. These internal stories can consequently shape our children's identity, their future decision-making, and their willingness to try again. Building a narrative of repair rather than injury can be a tough challenge, but the benefits to the kind of stories children tell themselves are immense.

As parents, let's reflect on the confidence it takes to fail, and the inner strength it takes to move forward and try again. If we want to teach our kids to build these resources, then the best thing we can do is model how to fail better: that is, with more grace, resilience, humour, and optimism. Living through this pandemic, we will make mistakes. We will be vulnerable in front of our children. Ideally, we will learn to accept others' decisions and mistakes with less judgment than we might earlier have brought to bear. There is no true formula to follow. In these uncertain times, let's use the mistakes that we make as parents as examples for our children. Let's create and share positive narratives around the repair of our own mistakes. Let's actively review with our kids the learning that's happening for all of us as we go through this experience together. It's so true: live and learn.

Dr. Jasmine Eliav is a registered child clinical psychologist. She has a private practice, is a staff psychologist at The Hospital for Sick Children, a clinical consultant to BOOST Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention, and the co-chair of The Toronto Heschel School Board of Directors.

Parenting decisions take on a whole new character in these uncertain times.

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