

## Submission Template

**Teacher name** Ronit  
**School name** The Toronto Heschel School  
**Project name** Human Rights Speeches  
**Age / Grade of students** Grade 8

### **Tell us about your school and its community**

The Toronto Heschel School is a pluralistic independent Jewish day school from junior kindergarten through grade 8 in Toronto, Canada. As a community based Jewish Day School, it respects a wide range of Jewish observances.

The school is named for Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel who is the religious and philosophical inspiration of the school. Heschel believed that in order to be a good Jew, one must first be a good human being, concerned with justice. In this spirit, students at The Toronto Heschel School learn to apply the teachings of the Torah into their daily life both in the school and within the community at large. Rabbi Heschel believed that Jewish ethical values must be applied and lived to every aspect of life.

### **Describe the heritage, religion, or culture that grounds the curriculum / project / initiative that you are submitting**

The Toronto Heschel School is grounded in Judaism as it is seen through the lens of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's writings. Heschel framed the Jewish imperative as a wholehearted search for justice. Heschel's unique contribution to Jewish thought emphasized the personal relationship between the individual and God and so the students study from original text and learn to make meaning from their heritage themselves and to take steps towards justice on a daily basis. Heschel said that when he walked with Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. at Selma, "his legs were praying."

### **Which value(s) are you hoping to inspire in your students through this curriculum / project / initiative?**

One of the most basic Jewish values emerges through the covenant in the Book of Genesis between God and Abraham; God makes promises to Abraham on condition that Abraham accepts God as the One and Only, and walks before Him wholeheartedly. The value of walking before God wholeheartedly is often understood as the personal responsibility to pursue justice in the world.

We hope to inspire the following qualities which support the value above:

1. Respect Diversity;
2. Listen with empathy, compassion, and understanding;
3. Think and communicate with clarity and precision;
4. Be conscious of the role of God, have awe, feel wonder.

**Identify the source(s) of the value(s) you are teaching (text, tradition, ritual, practice, story, etc).**

The Jewish primary sources for this project come from the Gemara, a rabbinical commentary on the Mishnah (an authoritative collection of exegetical material embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law).

Examples of the sources that they learn are below:

1. In Talmud class, students learn texts from Masekhet Sanhedrin that teach the high standard imposed on witnesses in capital cases in order to emphasize the importance of each individual life. The students reflect on the meaning of the phrase:

*'Haolam Nivrah Bi'shvili*  
The world was created for my sake,'  
(Talmud, Sanhedrin 37a)

They also consider how this pertains to the responsibilities of each individual person for Tikkun Olam (fixing the world).

According to the Gemara, God created all humanity from one original being in order to teach that every human being is equal. The Gemara goes on to teach that while coins are equal only because they are the same, in the case of humans:

*Ein Echad Domeh L'chavero*  
"not any one of them is the same as the other"  
(Talmud, Sanhedrin 38a)

The students discuss how equality and uniqueness can coexist and why each are important for Tikkun Olam.

2. The students read of the story of Rabbi Eliezer who was wrongly excommunicated because his rulings were rejected. While the rabbis were permitted to democratically vote against Rabbi Eliezer's views, God interceded when Rabbi Eliezer was excluded from the conversation. According to the Gemara, God intercedes because:

*Kol Hashearim ninalim chutz meshaarei Ona'ah*

"all the gates of heaven are locked, except the gate concerning the theft of dignity."

(Talmud, Baba Metzi'a 59b)

The students discuss how we can listen to diverse voices and perspectives, even those with which we disagree. Students consider various forms of Ona'ah (dignity) and relate these to human rights issues in today's world as a basis for their Human Rights speeches.

3. In addition to the Gemara sources, the students also explore the concept of "Hineni." This word, meaning literally "Here I am" and more figuratively, "I am completely here" is found several times in the Bible. Two of these sources are Genesis 22:1 (God calls out to Abraham and he answers Hineni) and Exodus 3:4 (God calls out to Moses and he answers Hineni).
4. Additional sources are news articles (from a newspaper or online) about a human rights issue to which the Jewish principle applies.

### **List the learning goals for this project**

This project culminates a yearlong Grade 8 cross-curricular exploration of Hineni – "I am here!" Our graduating students examine the impact of the individual on society and, reciprocally, the responsibility that society has for the development of the individual. The students work with the concept that each can make a difference when they see an injustice around them. Our hope is that they will leave the school after grade 8 ready to change the world.

Our yearlong goals for Hineni – "I am here!" are for our students to:

1. stand up for what they believe in;
2. know that everyone is worthy of a voice and every voice deserves to be heard,
3. become mindful citizens of the world;
4. keep their eyes open and notice when things are unjust;
5. keep the "other" in mind, remembering that sometimes Jews are the other and sometimes they are not.

The Human Rights Speech Project adds the following objectives:

1. The students will learn about people who have made a difference through different means;
2. The students will learn what the Torah says about the fundamental principles for creating just societies;
3. The students will learn to bridge Jewish sources with daily world events and reflect on their personal connections to this relationship.

## **Describe the project**

The Human Rights Speech Project is an exercise in persuasive writing and a practical experience in public speaking.

The Project connects Jewish sources on social justice to human rights activists. To prepare for this final semester project, the students will have closely examined Jewish texts on social justice and individuals featured in the Jewish narrative. They will have also completed an historical review of a wide spectrum of human rights activists, including Ghandi, Maya Angelou, Malala, Mother Theresa, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Nelson Mandela.

The students are instructed to prepare written speeches about a human rights issue in relation to the Judaic sources they have studied. To start off they research for an article that reports on a human rights issue that they can explain Judaically and with reference to a specific text. They can incorporate ancillary human rights statutes (e.g. UN Declaration, Canadian Charters of Rights and Freedoms), relevant stories and articles to help illustrate the Jewish sources in action or in absence. They may include references to works of art, theatre, etc, that help highlight their thoughts.

The class receives public speaking tutorials from professionals in preparation for their public presentation. This includes diction, posture, presence and emotional delivery; the students learn that effective presentation skills are strategic in community participation. The speeches are presented in June to their peers at school.

The speeches are evaluated according to:

- Hook: Opening of Speech in Introduction
- Connection, Explanation, and Integration of the selected Jewish source, the “Makor.”
- Inclusion of additional Jewish sources, Mekorot.
- Plea for Change
- Supporting Points and Explanation of Human Rights Violation

**Describe the evidence of implementation that you are submitting. This may include student work, photographs, documented class conversations, or anything that shows the learning of the children**

Two examples of human rights speeches written by grade 8 students.

## Human Rights Speech: Gender Equality

The movie Aladdin is set in Arabia in the Middle East. Jasmine is a princess who defies the law and instead of marrying who her father wants, she decides to marry for love. She is not afraid to speak up against anyone, even men who have more power than her. Princess Jasmine is a great ruler alongside her father. Her stomach, arms, and hair are often shown. Yet how come none of the Arabic countries in the Middle East let women do any of these things? Jasmine was much ahead of her time, even our time right now. Women in Saudi Arabia do not dare to think about love, speak up, be in politics, or even show their hair. Princess Jasmine is a heroine of a future generation, a generation where women will be able to marry for love, speak their mind without punishment, have any job they wish without persecution, and wear whatever they want without judgement.

Women in Saudi Arabia are not treated as equals; instead they are considered an “accessory”. The men treat women as if they mainly only have one purpose, to have kids. They are not even seen as individuals, only as mothers, wives or daughters. Women must cover their head and wear a headscarf but men do not. Men can have any occupation they want, yet women cannot. In restaurants, women must sit in areas where men cannot see them. This is not an equal civilization; men have a monopoly over women. The way most women are treated in Saudi is against almost every single article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These articles include everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country, everyone has the right to the protection of the law, and everyone has the right to leave any country, including his or her own.

Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world that does not allow women to drive. According to official Saudi Statistics, women constitute only 13% of the workforce and only 18.2% of all women work. And even more significantly, women are not allowed to vote or hold public office.

Gender should not affect how people are treated. There is no reason why women and men should be treated any differently. That is why I believe Saudi law must change, everyone deserves to be equal, no matter his or her gender.

Saudi Arabia is an Arabic country which follows Sharia law which is an interpretation of Islamic law founded in the Quoran. Sharia Law discriminates women in many different ways. For example, according to the sharia Civil Code, a woman’s testimony is worth half of a man’s. In addition, a man does not need justification or consent to divorce his wife but a women needs consent and justification.

In 2002 there was a fire in a school in Mecca. The religious police would not let 15 girls leave the burning school because they were not wearing their headscarf and abaya, which are required. The police was seen beating the girls so that they would not leave the

school. The police even stopped men who were trying to get the girls out saying that “it is a sin to approach them”. All 15 girls died.

The Religious police is a police force dedicated to enforce Sharia Law by the Saudi government. They can punish people for infracting dress code or prayer time, talking with the opposite gender, and many other absurd things. For example, this year a Religious Police kicked a woman out of a mall in Riyadh for wearing nail polish. Until recently, the religious police were able to arrest, detain, or interrogate without anybody’s permission. Now there are rules and regulations to make sure that the Religious Police’s actions comply with the law.

In Saudi Arabia women are not able to go anywhere without their male guardian. Her guardian could be her father, brother, or husband. The Religious Police are able to arrest a woman if she is without her guardian. If a woman’s husband, father, and brothers die, a woman may be forced to obey her son.

In 2006, a 19 year old girl was in the car with her male friend. In Saudi Arabia women and men are not allowed to talk to each other unless they are related or married. Therefore, two men jumped into his car and drove them to a secluded area. There, seven men raped her. However, the 19 year old girl was sentenced to 200 lashes for being with the opposite sex and for not being with her male guardian. She got more lashings than the men who raped her.

These stories do not only terrify women, they also encourage them. They can see what is wrong with their country, the horrible way that women are treated and they realize that they need to make a change. Many women risked their life and their reputation just to prove a point, that women are not inferior to men.

Conservative families strictly interpret the laws concerning women. Women from conservative families were often taught, ‘A fly will never be able to enter a mouth which stays shut’. This saying encourages women to not speak up and say their opinion. Yet some women who were brought up conservatively are now very strong women rights activists. For example, Manal al-Sharif was brought up very conservatively. In an interview with Reader’s Digest Manal said, “I was taught that if I left home, I would be fully responsible for any evil that befell me, because men cannot be expected to control their instincts. I am the seductive fruit, they said, and I would seduce men in all my shapes and forms. So I was made to stay home.” In 2001, the internet was first introduced to Saudi Arabia, when Manal was 21. Manal started talking to girls from all around the world. Only then did she realize how lonely she was in her isolated world. Manal said “We were voiceless. We were faceless. We were nameless. And we were completely invisible.”. now, Manal is one of the biggest women’s rights activists in Saudi. Time magazine named her one of the Most Influential People of 2012.

In 2001, Manal al-Sharif led a campaign called "Drive Your Own Life" which encouraged women to drive. On June 17<sup>th</sup>, over 100 women came out to the streets of Riyadh and drove. None of these 100 women were arrested, yet there were many protests. This campaign was the first of many women to drive campaigns.

There may be people in the audience who are still saying to themselves: "Who cares what happens to those women in Saudi Arabia; I clearly do not live in Saudi Arabia". However, one may think of it this way: if I was ever persecuted would I want someone to stand up for me? For example, think of when the Jews were being persecuted against during the Holocaust. Would you have wanted someone to say, "oh, I am not Jewish so why should I help them?"

"Honour your father and your mother" – Deuteronomy Chapter 5, verse 16. This concept is stressed a lot in the Torah. The verse clearly states to honour your father AND your mother. In Saudi Arabia many sons do not respect or honour their mother. Even a five year old boy, who does not know right from wrong, does not honour his mother. Children see the way their parents act and then copy them. So if a young boy sees his father beating his mother, what do you think he will do when he is older? He will not respect his mother or any other woman. That is why everyone in Saudi has to honour both men and women.

Sanhedrin, page 38, says "Every Person is a coin from the same mold". In simpler words: the value of every coin is the same, so the value of every person should be the same. Each coin came from the same mold and is equal. This verse from the Talmud teaches us that everyone comes from the same place, so everyone should be treated the same. Women and men are the same coin so they should be worth the same. So then why are women and men in Saudi Arabia worth different amounts?

Life for women in Saudi is slowly getting better. Saudi Arabia's ranking in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report was 4<sup>th</sup> last out of 135 in 2012. Then in 2013 it improved to 10<sup>th</sup>, and in 2014 it improved to 12<sup>th</sup>. Although you may not live in Saudi Arabia, there are many ways you can contribute to this change. An easy way to help is by signing a petition. I already signed a petition to let women drive on [thepetitionsite.com](http://thepetitionsite.com) and you can too. Some other petitions you can sign to help are: Free Saudi Women Drivers on [change.org](http://change.org) or Free Saudi Human Rights Activists on [gopetitions.com](http://gopetitions.com). These petitions are sent to King Salman, the religious police, and Hilary Clinton. Saudi Arabia is a very wealthy country with a lot of oil. They would like to continue trade with foreign countries and stay wealthy. That is why they care about the public opinion, even your opinion.

Gender should not affect how a person is treated, that is why the laws in Saudi Arabia must change. Women are not accessories. Women are not faceless. Women are not voiceless. Women need to stand up for their rights and speak their minds to the whole

world, just like Princess Jasmine. Although our life is not a Disney movie, we can still determine our own future by speaking up. Princess Jasmine refused her chosen destiny and declared: “How dare you! Standing around, deciding my future. I am not a prize to be won!”

## Human Rights Speech: Child Labour

I bet you didn't know that every 1 in 13 children are forced to work. How would you feel if you were one of the 150 million children today, who will not have the opportunity to have a childhood? Childhood is a very crucial time for children to learn and grow. Picture this, you're one of the 8% of all kids who can't have an education, have friends, or even be able to go outside during the day. Well all this is what is happening to children working in child labour every day.

Everyone should understand what child labour is; almost all the students in the school are considered children by the UN and if born in another country could be susceptible to child labour. Instead of being here at The Toronto Heschel School, we would be in a dark room sewing clothes and making toys. I believe that child labour is a very unethical way for companies to make money because it is causing physical and mental pain to these children and stealing their childhood.

According to the International Labour Organization, also known as the ILO, they explain child labour as "The term 'child labour' is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development." Not all child work is considered child labour. A child who participates in work that does not affect their health, personal development and learning is not considered child labour. For example, working after school hours or during holidays to earn pocket money is not child labour.

There are two different types of child labour. Ordinary child labour is when kids are working but are too young to work, and hazardous child labour is when children are working in an unsafe environment. Hazardous child labour is the most common form of child labour. It is estimated that 115 million children are working in an unsafe environment. These children do not have a choice in their work, and work all day struggling to breathe because of all the dust and smoke but must continue. Child labour is happening all over the world, various companies use it and countless countries benefit from it, while few people are trying to stop it.

There are many physical and mental health problems that result from working in child labour. Physical health problems such as struggling to breathe and broken bones are very common among child labourers. Mental health problems caused by working as a child labourer often do not occur until adulthood, after the labour is over. Suicide is very common among the children who are treated the worst. Both the physical and mental problems that occur because of working in child labour last their entire lives and continuously affect them.

In the Talmud it says: "Whoever destroys a soul; it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world." Sanhedrin 37a. This relates to child labour because when children are forced to work in most cases they end up being emotionally scarred, which is as if their soul was destroyed. This child was not only scarred by one person, he was scarred by all the

people who've supported this company, who allowed him to continue working, most likely you too. In this case many people contributed to destroy this world.

In the Chumash Devarim Chapter 1:7 it says "you shall not favour person in judgement." This is very similar to child labour because we should all treat people the same, and not favour children based on where they are born. Children should have the right to their childhood and freedom, just as the Chumash says not one person should be favoured. Everyone deserves to be treated fairly, especially children.

There are many different ways children end up in forced labour. The main cause is poverty. Parents may not have enough money to support their children, making their only option giving up their children to companies to work to make money for the family. In addition to poverty, some countries do not support child education and there is minimal social pressure to send your child to school. This can be because basic education is not free in all countries, and it is also not always available for all children in remote areas. In situations where education isn't affordable or parents don't value education, children are often sent to work, rather than to school.

There are countries all over the world that have thousands of children working, including the Philippines, India, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Brazil. Although these are some of the worst child labor offenders, there are countries that are even worse. In Ethiopia, sixty percent of children are put to work and make an average of one dollar a month to support their family. While in Myanmar, 40 percent of children never enter a school. The Myanmar army recruits children as young as 12 years old. Those who don't serve as soldiers in the army are forced to work on farms, run street markets, or collect garbage in the streets. These are just two of the numerous countries that have high child labour rates.

Various companies that you buy products from, like clothing and toys, support and use child labour. Now how do you feel knowing that your H&M sweater or your Nike soccer ball made by a poor child in the Philippines?

We all can do little, simple things to stop child labour. You could stop buying from countries that use child labour. Maybe instead of buying a product that was made in the Philippines or China, you could buy a product that was made in Canada or America. You can donate to organizations that fight for children's rights like Free the Children. Craig Kielberger at the young age of 12 began to fight for children's rights. 20 years later, his organization Free the Children has grown from 12 classmates to 2.3 million people fighting to give children all over the world the rights they deserve. Every small thing can make a difference, but together if everyone does something small it will turn into something big.

It is not by accident that companies all over the world prefer to hire children; they are "cheaper" than adult employees. Even though it is very unethical for companies to have children workers, they still do. I believe children deserve the right to education, to freedom, and to be free of labour. Craig Kielberger once said, "Child labour is an issue of grave importance. It must become a top priority for all governments of the world. How can

the world move into the twenty-first century with children still being exploited for their labour and denied their basic right to an education?" I believe we all can make a difference, but not as one person, as a community.

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