Blessings All Around Us by Leah Boonin

Subject area: Jewish Living & Identity, Hebrew, Prayer, Values, Art
Multi-lesson unit
Target population: early elementary

Objectives: Students will know that our lives abound with holy things and moments and will be aware of the variety of blessings already available in our tradition.

First lesson:

1) Introduce the idea of blessings: Teacher starts by asking students what a blessing is—using discussion, let students know that a blessing is a way to make something special and/or to proclaim the holiness of something or someone. It can also be a wish or hope for that person.

2) Have students, make a list all of the things they know blessings for. Give students a few minutes to finish lists. When they are done, make a group list on the board including everything (accurate) that anyone thought of. This can also be done as a game, with students getting a point for each thing that only they thought of. After looking at the list, show students the back of the Siddur (it will be different pages, but this is included in siddureim from many movements) where other blessings are included (i.e., blessing for Israel, blessing for seeing rainbow…). Let them include those on list on board.

3) While we are looking at the siddur, have students read (in Heb. If possible- if not, English or transliteration), a few blessings. Ask them to note commonalities. Note that most blessings start the same way; Baruch atah Adoni Eloheynu melech Ha Olam.” Have students figure out what each of the words mean—write translations on board. Have students repeat the meanings of each of these words, and if time, do a game with flashcards of each word.

Baruch= bless
Atah= you
Adani= God
Melech= king
Haolam= the world
Second lesson: Motzi

1) We look at the motzi (in many groups students know this one already) closely, reviewing last lessons vocabulary, and looking at a full translation of this blessing.

2) discuss as a class when the blessing is said and why. Some students may know this as a Shabbat-only blessing, so be sure to let them know this is not just said on Shabbat. Perhaps direct the discussion to all that is involved in a loaf of bread getting to our table. (the labor of the farm workers, the sun and rain, the hens that gave us eggs…)

3) Paint wooden bread boxes, for serving bread at the dinner table. I recommend using a medium-sized wooden ‘basket’ style box, unfinished, usually available at a craft store like Michaels. This would also work with a wicker basket or bread board. Students can paint the outside of the basket using acrylic or tempera paints. The surface where food is put should not be painted.

4) After the paint has dried, the motzi should be applied to the basket. Older children can write it on the side with sharpies, perhaps copying from the board. Younger students can glue on a photo copy of the blessing, including Hebrew, English and transliteration.

5) Students are encouraged to use this at home, sharing the blessing with their families.

Third lesson: The blessing over beautiful nature

1) We look at this blessing in Hebrew and English. (Baruch atah adoni eloheynu melech haolam ose ma’ase v’resheet) I recommend teachers use the wording and translation in their movement’s siddur for specifics. The basis, though, is that, when we see a wonder of nature, we than God for creating the world and its wonders.

2) Students list all the wonders of nature they have experienced. List them all, stressing that we see wonders of nature daily, and we ought to notice them.

3) Create blessing sun-catchers.
Blessings All Around Us by Leah Boonin

Students are each given a piece of “shrink dink”, with one hole punched out of the top and three evenly-spaced holes punched from the bottom. Depending on age and Hebrew literacy, this piece may already have the blessing written on it. Some students can write English and/or Hebrew by themselves. For those in between, a teacher can create copies of the blessing the proper size so that students can place them under the plastic and trace the letters. BE CAREFUL THAT STUDENTS UNDERSTAND WHICH SIDE IS TOP!

4) After the blessing is applied, the students should decorate the plastic with colored pencils.

5) The ‘shrinky dinks’ are baked. During the baking, students should be stringing beads onto lengths of ribbon, thread, yarn or plastic lacing.

6) After they are baked, students tie the three strands of beads to the three holes at the bottom. A piece of yarn is tied to the top hole to enable hanging.

7) Encourage students to hang the project at home where they will see natural beauty.

Fourth Lesson: Blessings over other food.

1) Present all the non-motzi food blessings and discuss their uses. Look at each blessing, reviewing the standard beginning, and looking at the new words for the varieties of food. Younger students may enjoy a game where they are shown pictures of food and sort them according to the appropriate blessing.

2) Make decorative place-mats with food blessings. We don’t just bless bread! Students each decorate a large sheet of construction papers by gluing on pictures of foods (one group of foods per place mats) and the matching blessing. For instance, a student may make fruit, dairy, or meat place-mats. The teacher may provide copies of the blessings, or the students could write them themselves. Teachers may provide pictures of different foods cut from magazines, or give students magazines and have them find and cut-out the pictures.

3) The sheets are laminated, and students bring them home to mix and match to use at appropriate meals.

Fifth Lesson: Our own blessings
Blessings All Around Us by Leah Boonin

1) Review all the blessings you have focused on, and look again at the lists generated at the beginning of the unit.

2) Students then brainstorm things that we do not have traditional blessings for yet that are blessings in their lives. For instance, students have thought of things such as blessing a pet, blessing for new clothes, blessing before or after taking an important test.

3) Students then chose something from the list, and write the blessing. Using the format we have been learning the past weeks.

4) After meeting with the teacher for individual discussion and editing advice, they then turn this blessing into a piece of art by writing it nicely and decorating the page with colored pencils. They can be shared with the class, or included in with a class siddur. I have used them to decorate the classroom, and also included them in a service led by the class.