



Experiencing Bereishit Through Art

Submitted by: *Rebecca Swartz*

Subject Area: Torah, Hebrew, Art

Target Age Group: Early childhood to young primary grades

Lesson Objective:

1. The children will understand that Bereishit is the beginning parasha of the Torah and the first part deals with the creation of the world.
2. The art experience will focus on the process of creation, in order to help the children to develop a personal understanding of what it means to create.
3. The children will begin to develop an understanding of how Shabbat represents the completion of creation.

Summary:

Young children learn best through their experiences. When children actively engage their hands in creating art, they are also engaging their hearts and minds. Through this activity, the children in the preschool at the Boulder Jewish Day School were able to engage in discussion and exploration of the creation story from the Torah, while engaging in creating a concrete representation of the story. Using art materials to represent the story was especially appropriate in this setting, because the children varied in age from 2.5-4 yrs old. The older children had the language skills to engage in discussion about the story, as well as in the art creation. The younger children were motivated by their interest in the art materials, and this expanded their understanding of the story. Throughout this experience, the children were exposed to Hebrew vocabulary related to Torah study as well as vocabulary from the parasha.

We began by looking at the letter bet in the beginning of the Torah Scroll during our weekly Torah Service, on the Thursday after Simchat Torah. During the previous weeks, we had been talking about how we were going to start the cycle of reading the Torah anew. Each child had an opportunity to point to the bet using the yad, while I described the sequence of creation from the Torah. I



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encouraged the children to chime in with their ideas about how the world may have looked as each day and act of creation was completed.

The children continued to talk about the story of creation I had described over the next two days. The children described what it may have looked like as the sequence of creation unfolded. In order to help the children express their ideas about how the creation of the world may have looked, I decided to create a visual art experience that would allow them to engage in creation as well as represent their ideas in a concrete way.

I set out carefully selected art materials that would help the children represent the day's creation. For example, feathers were available on the fifth day, to represent birds. Light blue glitter was used to represent water. A rainbow of fingerpaint was mixed together to represent the void and darkness described on the first day of creation. We worked together on the large panels of the mural, and the energy channeled into the act of creation was strong and focused, as one might imagine the energy was from God as the world was created. I took dictation from the children as they described their creations.

Each child also completed an individual page for their own Bereishit books. We completed two panels each day, for three days, and completed the seventh panel, which included drawings of resting and celebrating Shabbat before our Kabbalat Shabbat. We were able to read our version of the Bereishit story during Kabbalat Shabbat. (See the list attached to the end of this document for a complete list of materials used for this project in the BJDS preschool.)

The mural was displayed in the school, and the children were very proud to explain their creation. Creating the mural and books also provided motivation for the children to continue to discuss parasha stories as well as represent their ideas through drawing and dictation. The children felt a powerful connection to the Torah through their representation. Through art, we were able to make Torah tangible and visible. This kind of experience could be modified to meet the needs of various educational setting and developmental levels of children. Older children would be able to do more writing and reflecting on the story than younger children, but the experience of creating is meaningful to all children.



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Materials used at BJDS (The material lists are intended as a guide, and can be modified according to what is available at your school.):

7 panels of tag board (butcher roll paper could be substituted)

Day 1: Finger paints in these colors: Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet-together these mix to create various browns.

Day 2: Torn construction paper in light and dark blue, plus light and dark blue glitter to represent the separation of sky and sea.

Day Three: Torn paper of assorted types (tissue, crepe, and construction) to represent land, plus torn light blue construction paper and light blue glitter, to represent the separation of earth and sea.

Day Four: We used paint stamps of various kinds of leaves to represent vegetation with green paint. You could also collect grass and leaves to glue on the paper to represent the vegetation that appeared. We used paint stamps of the sun, moon, and stars with assorted colors of paint, including some gold and silver glitter paint to represent the heavenly sky. Drawing these with pastels, markers, or crayons would be a suitable substitute.

Day Five: We made cutouts of birds and fish available to our youngest preschoolers, and paper and scissors available to our older preschoolers to make the birds and fish that filled the sky and sea on day five. We also divided the paper into two sections, to help the kids represent the sea below and the sky above. We made feathers available to the children to embellish their birds, and blue cellophane or watercolors could be used to enhance the watery look of the sea.

Day Six: We used markers and crayons, plus some foam shapes we had of animals to represent the animals and people that appeared on day six.

Shabbat: The children drew pictures of what they do for Shabbat as well as people resting using markers and crayons.



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