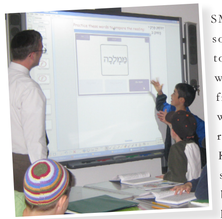
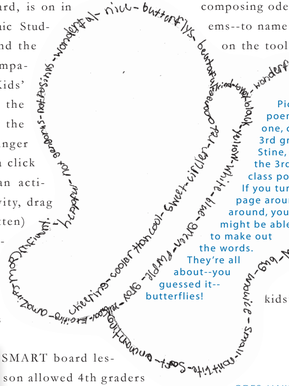
COMING TO A SCREEN NEAR YOU

SMART boards add new ways to interact in the classroom

Who says working with a computer screen makes kids sit around all day? Quite the opposite is true when the SMART board, an interactive whiteboard, is on in Rabbi Holman's 4th grade Judaic Studies class. Lights are dimmed and the big screen comes to life, accompanied by a chorus of "Cool!" Kids' hands gesture madly, vying for the chance to jump up and "poke" the board. After all, the user's finger functions as the mouse. With a click of the remote, the teacher can activate any pre-programmed activity, drag graphics, save (even handwritten) lessons, and access the Internet. *This* SMART board also speaks Hebrew.

In conjunction with learning about Joshua, one day's SMART board lesson allowed 4th graders to practice their Hebrew words before they chant from their books. A window with two quadrants, titled Cities and Kings, hovers on the screen, a choice of Hebrew words listed below. Students ran up to the board to move the Hebrew text boxes into what they thought were the correct quadrants. Once all words were placed, one student touched the "Check" button. How many words were placed correctly? The biggest challenge: Only one student at a time can "poke" the board!





Picture poems like this one, created by 3rd grader Sarah Stine, were part of the 3rd/4th grade class poetry unit. If you turn the page around and around, you just might be able to make out the words. They're all about--you guessed it--butterflies!

LEGACY HERITAGE FUND The SMART Board equipment has been generously donated by Legacy Heritage Fund Limited.

CHAPTER AND VERSE

3rd/4th grades try their hand at all forms of poetry

Poetry's in motion! Well, at least in the 3rd/4th grade classrooms. Both Ms. Sandler's and Ms. Kass's classes have tackled poetry in a big way, composing odes, haikus, lymerics, couplets, and picture poems--to name a few. Ms. Sandler's class has been focusing on the tools of poetry, including rhyme, meter, and alliteration. By the time they complete this unit, they will have studied over 20 different types of poetry! The unit will conclude with a poetry jam when the students transform their classroom into a coffee house. Shades will be drawn, coffee (well, okay, hot chocolate) and pastries will be served, and students will share their work with their peers. To get a taste of the kids' work, read on.

ODES, HAIKUS, LYMERICS, AND OTHER KINDS OF POETRY ABOUNDED THIS SPRING. A COFFEE-HOUSE POETRY JAM DURING WHICH MS. SANDLER'S 3RD/4TH GRADERS SHARE THEIR WORK WILL CONCLUDE THE UNIT IN JUNE.

Haiku

Rain falling makes noise
drip, drop, dark, wet
wind blows, swoosh

–Samantha White, 4th grade

ODES

Winter

Snowy, white.
The crack of dawn, everything silent.
White blankets engulfing all.
Lying in bed, a peaceful pattering on the window.
Something warm to drink filling you up as you lay.
Climbing into bed with you:
father, mother, sister, baby brother
Comfy, cozy, all in bed.
A fire in the grate; smoke out the chimney.
Bundling up in boots, hats, coats, gloves, scarves.
Outside the fresh, clean, crisp, clear, bitter.
The crunch of new snow under my boots.
The trees glittering decorated with sapphires,
shining in the early light.
This is my winter.
I hope you find yours.

–Tahlia Altgold, 4th grade

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DID YOU KNOW?

akiba facts + figures

Grades 1-8 took part in an all-school color war on Lag B'Omer. Below, the tan team finishes their opening cheers. Below Right: Grandparents Day.

107,000 pages read by students in the book contest

$190,000 funds raised at the Annual Benefit

1/100 Akiba's representation in the National Geographic Bee

Above: 7th and 8th grade girls took top honors this spring in several national competitions: From left: Josephine Gendler (8th) was one of 100 Illinois students to compete at the state level of the National Geographic Bee. Lena White (7th) was a top finalist in the regional Science Fair and took silver at the state level. Devora Klionsky (7th), Hannah Giren (7th) and Avriel Faye McCullough (8th) qualified for the national level of the National Bible Contest in New York. Giren's score was the highest in the country. Klionsky was also a state finalist in the National Spelling Bee and will represent Illinois at the national level in Washington, D.C.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? *Up close with Akiba alumni*

In the most recent issue of *All About Jazz NY*, Akiba-Schechter alumnus Jonah Parzen-Johnson ('02) was described as "a 30-something baritonist from Chicago … whose [jazz trio, Reed's Bass Drum,] applies a constructivist process: their grazing passes over what's on the usual jazz buffet; they sample judiciously, tasting their way from track to track, taking small bites, chewing well, savoring and digesting with discrimination."

Jonah's music has been featured in many publications, including *TimeOut NY* and the *Chicago Tribune*, but this article received a bigger response than usual. In fact, the day after it appeared, Jonah's parents found several messages on their voicemail. "We didn't know you were old enough to have 30-year-old children!"

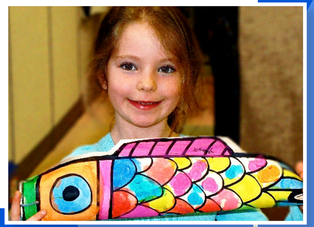
They're not. Jonah, a 22-year old graduate from New York University, recently received his Bachelor's Degree in Music and Jazz Performance and will begin his Master's in the fall. But much of his time has actually been spent outside of school, carving out a name for himself and his band, Reed's Bass Drum. The group recently released their second CD, *Which Is Which*, and has several Chicago performances planned. Jonah performs about twice a week.

It was in middle school that Jonah began playing in a formal jazz combo at Akiba. "We met during lunch. Yoel [Furman] played trumpet, I played sax, Gideon [Klionsky] played piano, and [then science teacher] Mr. Basa played bass. It was a great opportunity to play serious music in a small, private school setting. I appreciated that."

Reed's Bass Drum's newest CD is available on iTunes as well as on Jonah's website, www.jonahparzen-johnson.com.

That wasn't the only thing that propelled Jonah toward music. "Akiba made me a very active learner," he says. "It created an environment where students were allowed to shape their own development around questions they had." It's no wonder that, when Jonah arrived at Lincoln Park High School's IB Program, one of his first moves was to start a jazz combo. "At Akiba, we were active in the trajectory of our education," says Jonah. "It's something that can be dangerous in the rest of the world—I mean, it drove my high school teachers crazy—but ultimately, direct dialogue between teachers and students is crucial. In a lot of elementary school settings, you're given, at most, the opportunity to discuss what's being taught. But what's important is learning *how* to learn. Akiba taught me *how* to learn."

So where does he see himself in five years? Performing. Teaching. Composing. "It's important not to lock yourself into one thing," says Jonah. "In your focus, you miss the real opportunities. It's really easy to get onto a road and continue on it. But there aren't actually any roads without turns. And if you can learn to make the turns you want, that's a powerful thing."



Akiba-Schechter

NEWSLETTER

June 2010/Sivan 5770
Volume 1, Issue 2

Akiba Schechter
JEWISH DAY SCHOOL

Why I Volunteer: In their own words

I enjoy meeting other parents and getting to know the teachers that make up this extraordinary school. Volunteering is a powerful way to inspire people, to bind them and to build community.

Shirley Olaf Mother of Jacob (Downstairs Green Rm)

My participation makes our child feel that her education is really important to us. Years from now, my visits to the school or joining her on class trips is what she will remember.

Amy Dachman, father of Eliana (5th)

I love being around the school; I wish I could have gone there when I was young. The feeling of love and community that I experience there is honest, never contrived and all too rare. My daughter will be there through 8th grade (I hope), and I'm looking forward to every minute of it.

John Sefner father of Lila (KDG)

I get to spend a couple of afternoons a week running with a group of energetic girls, getting everyone's sillies out and helping them work together to accomplish a goal. Teamwork is important, and I get to share that experience here.

Jamie Reitman, Girls on the Run coach and mother of Isabel (1st) Benjamin (1st) Margalit (3rd) and Gabrielle (5th)

It gives me the opportunity to connect with my son, his teachers and the school on a different level. Volunteering is a way for me to share in my son's wonderful school experience.

Dena Levy mother of Gavi (3rd)

AKIBA-SCHECHTER JEWISH DAY SCHOOL | 5235 S. CORNELL AVE. CHICAGO, IL 60615 | WWW.AKIBASCHECHTER.ORG

June newsletter.indd 1 6/3/2010 10:32:23 AM

School

Dear Friends of Akiba-Schechter,

I often get asked by those unfamiliar with Akiba-Schechter what distinguishes the School as an educational institution. While it is always tempting to respond that our students score very high on standardized tests and are accepted at the top high schools in Chicago (which is all true), you have to dig a little deeper to get to the better answer - or, as 3rd/4th grade teacher Ms. Kass would say, provide a "thick" answer rather than a "thin" answer. The central question any educational institution should ask itself is: "What type of people do we want our graduates to be? More specifically, what do we want our students to know? To value? To do with their lives?"

We are one of many top-of-list academic schools in the Chicago area. But what distinguishes Akiba-Schechter graduates is that, in addition to being top notch and enthusiastic scholars, our graduates also show up to 9th grade steeped in the wisdom of teachings more than 5,000 years old, and they are ready to and interested in applying that wisdom to the betterment of their communities, both in high school and beyond. Being the best academically is part of the teaching culture at Akiba-Schechter, but it only takes spending a little time at the School to understand that the it is about so much more.

Left: 6TH GRADER SOPHIE ZIMBALIST'S MODEL OF A CELL

Larry E. White
President, Board of Directors

5 QUESTIONS WITH...

Arundhati Srimani, Upstairs Blue Room

1. *How long have you been at Akiba-Schechter?*
This is my 8th year in the Blue Room and I'm very attached to it. I can't even think about being any place else. Akiba is my second family!

2. *What made you pursue teaching?*
I always knew I would be a teacher. When I was a little girl, I used to play "teacher" like others play "house." It never occured to me to play anything else. Teaching is a job where you not only work, you learn. You grow. Even at home, my wall is a blackboard!

3. *What makes this age so special?*
Four-year-olds are at that vulnerable stage where they want to be part of a community, but they're struggling with how to negotiate that. My job is to empower them, to help them build community, and to show them that that they can solve problems by themselves. That's a very powerful lesson.

ARUN EXPLAINS THE LIFE CYCLE OF A BUTTERFLY OVER LUNCH.

4. *You're from Calcutta, India. How does it feel to be in a Jewish school in Chicago?*
When you are respectful to others, no religion can be a boundary. That's what my grandparents taught me, and it's true. We are all connected, we just don't always see it. Akiba has really healed my soul and my loneliness, being away from my family. I'm blessed to be here.

5. *What do you do in your spare time?*
Cooking. Listening to music. And poetry. I read and write poetry--in Bengali, my mother tongue.

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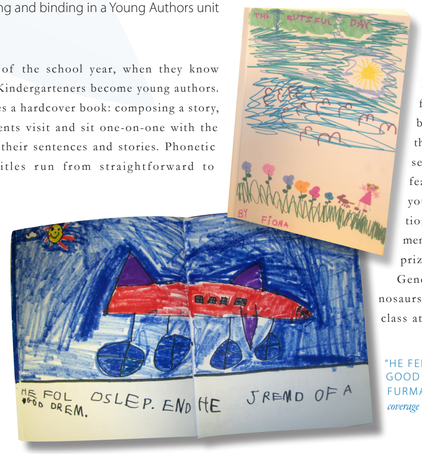
PULP FICTION

KDG tackles writing, illustrating and binding in a Young Authors unit

Towards the end of the school year, when they know their ABCs, the Kindergarteners become young authors. Everybody creates a hardcover book: composing a story, writing and illustrating. Parents visit and sit one-on-one with the students to help them craft their sentences and stories. Phonetic spelling is encouraged. Titles run from straightforward to wildly imaginative:

- *The Penguin*
- *The Beautiful Day*
- *A Unicorn Pegasus*
- *Harry Potter and the Dementors*
- *Lava Boy and Shark Girl*



With the Kindergarten hooked on books, the 1st/2nd graders as well as the four-year-olds visit for story time at Friday's Shabbat celebration. Kindergarten co-teacher Mrs. Kohl reads the books out loud. Kids' faces light up as she presents their books. Their favorite part? Hearing their teacher read the "About the Author" section on the inside back cover. It features not only a photo of the proud young author, but a little biography mentioning favorite colors, pets and family members. These young author books remain prized possessions: 8th grader Josephine Gendler still considers her book on dinosaurs her favorite project of her favorite class at Akiba-Schechter: Kindergarten.

"HE FELL ASLEEP AND HE DREAMED OF A GOOD DREAM," READS ONE PAGE OF NATAN FURMAN'S BOOK *(left). To see the* Chicago Tribune's *coverage of this unit, check out our homepage.*

BALANCE OF NATURE

Marine biology and economics: an unlikely pair

Why have Hopewell's freshwater mussels disappeared? Ms. Rotfeld's 5th/6th grade science class was called in to investigate and propose solutions. Now, Hopewell is a fictional town, so a little imagination was required. How does the river flow through the town, and what surrounds it? Three science teams were dispatched, consisting of a team leader, discussion manager, coordinator, recorder, research and presentation coordinator. They gathered information from the EPA on water cleanup, and traveled to the Museum of Science and Industry to learn how to test water samples. (Psst... Do you know what point and nonpoint source pollution are?*) The teams also had to figure out a feasible solution by considering the economics of Hopewell, the cost of a cleanup, and paying for it without causing job losses or making the community unaffordable.

Amazingly, all three groups came up with different solutions: a water-filtration system financed through a tax on plastic bags, steep fines for polluters to pay for a new process for disposing of waste, and letting the ecosystem heal itself. They fearlessly presented their findings to a panel of judges, realizing that what they presented was just as important as how they presented it.

*Point source pollution: a single identifiable source of pollution (like an oil refinery outlet). Nonpoint source pollution: diffuse sources (like acid rain).

A BRUSH WITH THE LAW

7th/8th graders launch mock criminal trial

Do you know the difference between 2nd degree murder and involuntary manslaughter? What constitutes "reasonable doubt?" Who carries the burden of proof? These are some of the questions the 7th/8th graders have been tackling in their recent mock trial unit. Coming on the heels of reading Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird, a novel that revolves heavily around a trial, this unit asks students to think critically about proof, precedent, authority, and justice. The case: Thomas Carter, on trial for the murder of Joyce Ann Miller. Carter claims it was an accident, but it's hard to know. May the truth prevail on June 8, when the jury (or middle school) decides!

PAPER MACHE, BALLOONS, MASKING TAPE, PAINT, AND A LITTLE CREATIVITY: 5TH GRADERS' MOTHER'S DAY BOWLS.

News

GOT RHYTHM?

Blue Room kids pick up on literacy through music

Recently, the 4-5 year-old pre-schoolers in the Blue Room learned about music. They filled glass jars with varying amounts of colored water to create chimes, and they also wrote their own drum compositions. They used colors to indicate whether the drum should be hit with the left, right, or both hands, and when to pause for a beat. The neat part about these compositions is that they teach "secret" literacy. In recording these compositions, the children learned that information can be represented symbolically, and that, with a recording system everyone agrees on, others can receive your message just by looking at the symbols you've used. This is a key aspect of early literacy, and a great example of the pre-school's approach of "play-based learning."

JARS OF COLORED WATER, OR CHIMES, CORRELATE TO THE KIDS' COMPOSITIONS *(right)*. ABOVE, A DECODING IN PROGRESS.

CELEBRATE ISRAEL!

2 to 13-year-olds take on Israel's independence

Did you know the Purple Room sports a tractor? And an orange tree? That cows are milked there? On Israel's birthday (Yom Ha'atzma'ut), the classes turned into *kibbutzim* and the entire pre-school was transformed: Flights to Israel took off in the Loeb Social Hall and the Ready!Set!Go! children entertained visitors to Tel Aviv with Israeli dancing, hummus, pita and falafel. Another room became the beach in Eilat, while another offered trinkets in a *shuk* (market).

In the day school, the clock turned back to the 1940s on Yom Ha'atzma'ut, as the middle schoolers simulated Palestine's immigration port during the British Mandate. Some dressed up as immigrants from Europe, others played British soldiers. In celebration of Yom Hazikaron (Memorial Day), time moved forward to 1976, as the 7th/8th graders re-enacted the Israel Defense Forces' amazing hostage-rescue raid at Entebbe.

Last in the lineup of Israeli celebrations between Passover and Shavuot is Yom Yerushalayim, the anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967. Students went on an archaeological "dig," ran across the British barricades, and recreated modern-day Ben Yehuda. An all-school sing-along and the 7th/8th graders' flag dance ceremony concluded the day.

A clay map of Israel, complete with 3-D landmarks like the *kibbutz* (above), was the joint project of the b'not sherut and the 5th-8th graders. Other landmarks included Mt. Hermon, the port of Haifa, Jerusalem, and the beaches of Eilat.