

**KAHAL B'RAIRA
SUNDAY SCHOOL**

PARENT HANDBOOK



Kahal B'raira, Community of Choice

617-969-4596
www.kahalbraira.org

Kahal B'raira Sunday School

The Sunday School at Kahal B'raira acquaints children with the history, traditions, beliefs and accomplishments of their ancestors, enabling them to understand and enjoy their heritage. The school teaches the humanistic rather than the theistic aspects of that rich heritage. We want our children's Judaism to be meaningful and dynamic: something that will grow with them as they mature. Therefore, the school includes a broad range of Jewish experiences to promote a wholesome understanding of their identity as Jews and Humanists.

KB Sunday School consists of small classes spanning pre-school through seventh grade. Curriculum includes holidays, Bible stories, history, Jewish culture and traditions, literature, current events and ethics. It is our intention to offer religious education within the context of this community.

A Message from the Principal

Shalom and welcome!

On behalf of the teaching staff and the School Committee, welcome to Kahal B'raira Sunday School.

Our Sunday School program was started in 1979 with the help of the national Society for Humanistic Judaism by three motivated families looking for a secular Jewish education for their children. Our community has grown, but we have continued to embrace their philosophy: that human beings possess the intelligence and wisdom to determine the purpose and course of their lives.

We honor Jewish tradition and heritage through cultural and educational exploration. KB Sunday School encourages our children to value their Jewish identity and to feel confident in their ability to think for themselves. We seek positive Jewish connections relevant to our everyday lives. To make learning fun, our teachers emphasize hands-on and dynamic approaches.

Our curriculum guides our children to understand where we come from in order to understand who we are today as Humanistic Jews. When we study Bible stories and heroes and heroines, we teach our children how to differentiate between myth and truth. We look at the context of the stories, the times in which they took place, and the historical events that made the stories meaningful. We look at the moral values that can be drawn from the stories, and the character traits that the heroes and heroines exhibited.

We also learn about Jewish men and women who have exhibited leadership worthy of study. We learn about outstanding personalities who overcame great obstacles to create nations and communities. We learn about the history of Jews in North America and the creation of the State of Israel.

As we learn about our own identities and communities through literature, film and music, we discover what being Jewish has meant to people throughout history. We focus on the humanistic values of family, equality, community, home, freedom, work, responsibility, friendship and environmentalism.

As the Principal of Kahal B'raira Sunday School, I am thrilled to welcome you and your children to an exiting and fun year! I conduct a Mifgash or all-school assembly at the beginning of each session. I invite you to join me, the KB staff and your children at the Mifgash and at the many activities we are planning to share with parents throughout the year.

If you have questions, concerns or comments at any time during the year, please call me or e-mail me.

Shalom!

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CURRICULUM GUIDELINES

KB's curriculum emphasizes four aspects of Humanistic Judaism:

1. **IDENTITY:** Children learn about their Jewish background through a range of classroom experiences, so they can create for themselves an identity as humanistic Jews.
2. **COMMUNITY:** Through integrated experiences in Sunday School and the larger KB community, the children develop a sense of community and shared goals, helping each other work together to strengthen their classroom and the KB community.
3. **CARING:** Children learn about and act upon the Jewish tradition of caring and concern for others through cooperation, respect for others, and active social service.
4. **ACCEPTANCE OF DIVERSITY:** Children learn to create a positive Jewish identity in a multi-cultural world, an identity that respects the diversity within the Jewish tradition and those of other cultures; that prepares us to cooperate and resolve conflicts with others in a world where we all accept each other.

Because many children come from families which have a broad range of Jewish backgrounds, and/or which have combined two or more religious and cultural traditions, the curriculum attempts to combine these elements in a way that builds a positive Jewish identity without rejecting other traditions.

Incorporating these Principles into the Classroom Setting

Our teachers and curriculum will seek to model for our children a respect for the following values:

Rationality
Decision-Making
Courage
Creativity
Generosity
Trust
Hope
Tikun Olam (Taking Care of Our World)

SUMMARY OF CURRICULA

Our Sunday School morning starts with a Mifgash, or all-school assembly, where we promote community building and inter-grade and staff connection by singing, listening to stories and sharing moments together. Music classes are integrated into the curriculum as well as family projects.

GAN Y'LADIM: PRE-K & KINDERGARTEN

JEWISH HOLIDAYS AND SYMBOLS

The colorful expression of the Jewish holidays enable our children to experience their identity in a positive way. Both seasonal changes and historical memory combine to provide the aesthetics of the annual calendar. Poetry, music and legend are the artistic vehicles for associating the regular changes of nature with events in the Jewish past. The repeated cycle of the seasons also highlights the religious experience of those aspects of life that never seem to alter.

Emphasis is on Jewish symbols which provide concrete visual expression and are intended to enable the children to feel a sense of group identity. Children will learn about Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shabbat, Hanukkah, Tu B'shvat, Purim, Passover and Yom Ha'atzmaut from a Humanistic Jewish perspective. Students will learn through group

projects, stories, dramatic play, arts and craft, cooking, games and songs.

KITAH ALEPH: GRADE ONE

JEWISH LEADERS IN EARLY BIBLICAL TIMES

The ethical example of famous Jewish teachers and leaders in ancient times helps our children find worthy heroes with whom they can identify. Through their biographies, personalities like Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Joseph, Leah, Rebecca and Rachel present the moral virtues of courage, loyalty and honesty. The events of their lives and the lives of many other Biblical figures enable our children to identify Jewish achievement with humanistic values.

The First Grade will focus on the study of Bible heroes and heroines, and decide what heroic qualities we have in ourselves and in people we know today. We will continue to study the holidays, and begin to explore the Humanistic Jewish values. Learning will occur through participation games, arts and crafts, music, cooking, group projects, and reading of children's books. First grade students will create artwork and assemble a booklet recording their learning and discussions about Biblical stories, Mitzvot and Humanistic Values. The focus will be on having fun while we learn!

KITAH BETH: GRADE TWO

JEWISH LEADERS IN LATER BIBLICAL TIMES

Every hero must make choices -- many difficult, some seemingly impossible. These choices, and a person's actions that follow, make a hero.

As exciting as their predecessors, Jewish leaders of the later Biblical period afford the opportunity to study many Jewish personalities. The individual heroes who evidence a humanistic tendency are chosen for study. If they sought to solve their problems through reliance on human effort and reason, they are morally interesting. The Second Grade will study about Samson and Delilah, Ruth, Samuel and Saul, David and Goliath and Solomon. Students will decide what heroic qualities our heroes had, which one we have in ourselves and in people we know today.

Learning will occur through participation games, arts and crafts, music, cooking, group projects, and reading of children's books. Second grade students will create artwork and assemble a booklet throughout the year recording the Biblical stories learned and how those relate to them and their heroes. Their own booklet will be a product of their humanistic Judaism discussions and learning. The focus will be on having fun while we learn!

KITAH GIMEL: GRADE THREE

ONE PEOPLE, MANY FACES

At first glance, we can surely say that every person looks different from every other person. Anyone who looks around, either in the classroom, at home, or in the street can agree that there are "many faces" all around us. The harder part is the idea of "One People". Third grade learns about the many families of Judaism around the world, so they can understand and celebrate their own identity as Humanist Jews in a broader context.

We include culture, geography, history and ethics -- always with a focus on experiential education and building a classroom culture that celebrates diversity and builds community. We specifically explore two "families" of Judaism: Ashkenazic and Sephardic traditions. We explore our own family tree and investigate our family origins, history and customs.

We then learn in depth about the Jews of Yemen, the Jews of Poland and the Jews of Argentina. This year we will use photo galleries as a medium for learning about these different communities. Each student will assemble a portfolio that will include their family tree history, photo collages and his/her reflections about our learning. Homework focuses mostly on family research activities. Holiday learning will be explored in the context of the Jewish communities studied.

KITA DALET AND KITA HEY: GRADE 4 & 5

JEWISH HEROES IN MODERN TIMES

The themes we will explore these two years are identity, community and overcoming obstacles to create nations, recognizing the importance of human efforts and power. We will focus on the history of Jews in North America from the early pre-Colonial period to modern times, the Holocaust, and the creation of the State of Israel, identifying heroes and exceptional personalities who played key roles. These personalities provide exciting stories of human concern and courageous idealism. Students in the fourth and fifth grade explore the lives of these great people and the lives of others like them.

We will also learn about the different ways to be Jewish and deepen our knowledge about Humanistic Judaism and its history. Holiday study continues, with emphasis moving from the retelling of the holiday stories to exploring the values and meaning of that holiday. Homework focuses on the text and on historical research based on family and community.

KITA VAV AND KITA ZION: GRADE 6 & 7

THROUGH OUR JEWISH LENS: A JEWISH EXPERIENCE THROUGHOUT HISTORY

This curriculum is built around the overarching questions: *What has being Jewish meant to people over the centuries? What does being Jewish mean to us?*

Students are invited to explore important values/concepts related to Humanistic Judaism (family, equality, community, home, freedom, work, responsibility, friendship, environmentalism) and how Jews throughout history have thought about these values/concepts. Each thematic unit is organized around a subquestion connecting to the specific value/concept. For example: *“What has ‘Family’ meant to Jewish people over the centuries. What does ‘Family’ mean to us?”* Exploration of these topics is done through music, literature and film.

The final activities each year are intended to help students transfer these different perceptions of Judaism to their own lives. Students are given an opportunity to explore what being a Humanistic Jew means for them. In 6th grade this exploration culminates in writing a simple “I Am” poem. In 7th grade, the students prepare a more detailed piece that is presented to the congregation in the graduation ceremony.

TEACHER/PARENT COMMUNICATION

Parents are always welcome in the classroom and are encouraged to let teachers know of any relevant interests that they would like to present to the class.

Teachers will provide parents with a phone number or email address to facilitate communication. Parents can also arrange a mutually convenient time to meet with teachers during the Sunday School day. In addition, parents should feel free to meet with the principal to discuss any questions they may have.

There will be a Parent Open House scheduled at the beginning of the year. The Open House is meant to explain the goals of the educational program and to share expectations and goals for the school year. It is enjoyable and instructive, as parents and teachers get to know one another and become more familiar with each other's expectations. Please check the school calendar for the date. Parents are always welcome to speak with their child's teacher about any questions they have about the program.

Please let your child's teacher know in advance about any planned absences. In the event of an unplanned absence (e.g. sickness) please call 617-969-4596 on Sunday morning and leave a message.

Any time the school needs to be closed due to snow, there will be an announcement on the KB website (www.kahalbraira.org).

Any behavioral problem that arises during class will be addressed by the teacher and/or principal. The teachers and principal will make every effort to work with each child. In the rare instance where, in the judgement of the principal, a child is not benefiting from class or totally disrupts the learning environment, parents may be asked to remove the child from class for a specified period.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL'S HOME

The Sunday School meets at 765 Concord Avenue in Cambridge. We are very fortunate to be able to share this building with the Fayerweather Street School. It is a beautiful building, and we are especially pleased to operate in an environmentally conscious setting which recycles paper, plastic, glass and metal, and has a compost bin. As part of Tikun Olam, or "taking care of our world", the KB Sunday School models for our children the care for our environment by using recycled materials for our arts and crafts projects, minimizing the use of plastic bags, and composting the remains of our snack.

THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH PROGRAM

For families that wish to celebrate a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the Kahal B'raira Bar-Bat Mitzvah program provides resources and support to help guide families through the process, and to insure that the student's experience is as meaningful and fulfilling as possible. A class to orient families to this process is held every fall and spring by the B'nai Mitzvah coordinator.

The Bar-Bat Mitzvah ceremony is written and personalized by each family, to meet the needs of the individual child. Some ceremonies involve reading from the Torah while others do not. They range from quite traditional to very non-traditional. Many are enhanced with music. All are wonderful — each in their own way.

For more information, contact the B'nai Mitzvah coordinator, Renee Lubowich, at relubo@aol.com.

THE YOUTH GROUP

All KB youth in grades 8 to 12 are invited to join our youth group. The Youth Group is actively involved in a wide range of activities. In past years, the teens have attended the Jewish Film Festival, taken the lead in the Passover food distribution project, produced their own version of the modern Megilla for Purim, staffed the KB Purim Carnival, and of course

spent time just having fun. A highlight of each year is attending the SHJ North American Teen Conclave where they meet teens from other Humanist congregations.

PARENT COMMENTS ABOUT THE KB SUNDAY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE:

"Age-appropriate, low-key, educational and fun, KB Sunday School promotes a positive sense of Jewish identity."

"I have been so impressed by the enthusiasm and efforts of the young teachers in the program, who themselves benefited from a KB education. I also loved the curriculum my daughter had last year, learning about both Ashkenazi and Sephardic cultures."

"What a comfortable and warm atmosphere the Sunday School staff creates to foster a sense of community among our young children. I am truly impressed with the KB Sunday School program"

"Our kids have always had great teachers! Not only do they seem to approach each class with creativity and enthusiasm, we've liked how they've brought their different backgrounds and perspectives to the class material."

“We enrolled our children in the KB Sunday School because we wanted them to learn about their Jewish heritage in a way that was entirely consistent with our own beliefs. They have gotten that and so much more from this exceptional community. “

“Our daughters started KB Sunday school at the ages of 5 and 3. They each developed a solid foundation as Jewish Humanists, and each had a Bat Mitzvah that was creative, transformative, and brought together so many aspects of their lives. They both went on to be teachers in the Sunday school, and have done especially well with passing on the history of the holidays and beginning to think and behave as ethical people. They continue to question and learn more.”

“We joined KB in part because the Sunday School meets less frequently than other schools in the area, leaving room for other weekend activities. The emphasis on Jewish values, culture and history, and the down play of theistic beliefs also matches our family's preferences. We also like having the adult and children's programs meeting at the same time, and the opportunity for kids in different classes and of different ages to interact and build a sense of shared community together.”