



CURRICULUM OVERVIEW SIXTH GRADE

Our sixth-grade curriculum focuses on God, theology, and personal belief systems. Students will be exposed to different ideas about God that are represented in traditional Jewish text and modern day “Jewish” media. Students will become conversant in the diversity of names for God, and will encounter the theologians and philosophers who have shaped Jewish spiritual thought. Students will reflect on the ways their belief in God has changed throughout their lives, and articulate a theology that will grow with them in years to come.

During the God unit, we will focus on the following goals:

- Encourage students to articulate cohesive and contradicting ideas about God.
- Introduce students to multiple names for God in Jewish traditions.
- Empower students to navigate talking about God with people who have different beliefs.
- Show students that asking questions is part of Jewish spirituality.

All middle school students will have an aspect of “choice” for one of their class periods. *Chug* classes are interesting and developmentally appropriate classes similar to social studies and that expose students to Jewish history, culture, and values. Every two years, the class units rotate through three or four of the seven themes: “*Middot: Values*,” “*Historia: History*” “*Yisrael: Israel*” “*Makom: Place*,” “*Am: Peoplehood*,” and “*Torah: Texts*.” These intersectional topics each highlight a way of relating to Jewish education. The overall goal of the theme is made clear through a community wide program that will introduce the unit. This Chug program encourages sixth and seventh grade students to mix in learning communities, and invites students to engage with compelling Jewish role models on the teaching team, which will include guest educators and members of the Stephen Wise clergy.

At Stephen Wise Free Synagogue’s Religious School, we want students to see Hebrew as a living language of the Jewish people and to be able to use it confidently in prayer and in Jewish life. We work to ensure that every child is capable of decoding (reading without full comprehension) Hebrew prayers and blessings in preparation for leading the Shabbat morning service during their b’nai mitzvah.

Sixth graders and their parents will come together four times throughout the year to participate in bar/bat mitzvah cohort meetings. These learning sessions will create a close-knit community of learners and families who are all on the same path studying towards becoming a bar or bat mitzvah. The programs will educate on the significance of this rite of passage, the opportunities and responsibilities that come with being a Jewish adult, the structure of the rituals in the b’nai mitzvah service, and logistics about the bar/bat mitzvah preparation process at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue.

Middle school students are also invited to take on a *mitzvah* project to make the world a better place. We will support students and families with social justice or social action opportunities within our synagogue, and with outside organizations. Students may choose to prepare meals for the guests at the Next Step Men’s Shelter, visit with the elderly, create a fundraiser for a meaningful cause, or launch a pay-it-forward project at school.