



# JCSS NEWSLETTER

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Principal's Letter Dr. Shira Birnbaum	1
2006 JCSS Graduation/ B'nai Mitzvah Ceremony	2
2005-2006 Mitzvah Project Report	3
2006-07 JCSS Calendar	4
JCSS Adult Program Calendar for 2006-07	5

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, September 17, 9:30am  
**First Day of Classes** for Alef  
 through Hey; First Members  
 Meeting

Friday, September 22, 7pm  
**Rosh HaShanah Observance**  
 Fletcher Hall, Unitarian Church,  
 Montclair

Sunday, October 1, 7pm  
**Yom Kippur Observance**  
 Fletcher Hall, Unitarian Church,  
 Montclair

Sunday, October 8  
**Sukkot/Succos Celebration**  
 Tulip Springs, South Mountain  
 Reservation

Sunday, October 15  
 Classes for all students, and **Open  
 House** for prospective members

For more details, visit us online, at  
[www.jcss-nj.org](http://www.jcss-nj.org)

## LETTER FROM THE JCSS PRINCIPAL DR. SHIRA BIRNBAUM

**W**elcome back to JCSS. I hope everyone had a relaxing summer. I am looking forward to seeing your children again in September and kicking off a fabulous new school year. The JCSS Sunday School is coming back stronger than ever this time around. We have a great staff, a new and much clarified academic program, wonderful new materials and school resources, some terrific new families, and, most important, a reinvigorated spirit of joy and shared purpose. Let me tell you about some of our plans.

First, we have changed both the schedule and the configuration of classes. School will start promptly at 9:30 and end promptly at noon. School opening will be followed by a brief Morning Meeting. Parents are welcome to attend. Following Morning Meeting, students will cycle through three main classes: Hebrew, Jewish History, and Literature and Cultural Arts. For Hebrew, students will be using a new workbook and beginning a more clearly and deliberately focused program of reading- and conversation-building exercises. I am really excited about the materials we have ordered for this. They are fun and well targeted to our needs and to the skill levels of our students. In History, the curriculum has been revised and completely rebuilt around a wonderful set of resource-rich modular units, each with reading materials and hands-on activities that have specific



learning objectives and a clear conceptual focus. Clarity has been our aim with this revision: we want our students to come away with a much better understanding of the "big picture" of Jewish history. One of the goals for this year is to make an all-school "movie" about Jewish history, acted and narrated by the students themselves, with each class playing a role. This should be a really fun enterprise for our students. Literature and Cultural Arts have been combined, in part to meet our budget needs. The class will integrate readings and discussions with lessons about Jewish arts, artists, and culture around the globe and from different historical time periods. It should be a great year. For holidays, the whole school will have Activity Days rather than regular classes. We plan four of these for this year. Activity Days will help us engage students in the stories, themes and lessons specific to each holiday. We've planned a good variety of drama, music, cooking and art activities for these days. In all, these revisions

will make our school program stronger, fun, content-rich and action-packed. I am really confident your kids will be very happy with what they see.

Enrollment at our school has fluctuated significantly over the years. The graduating class this past spring was the biggest ever for JCSS – ten students – which was a wonderful achievement for our school, but which left us with a somewhat reduced overall membership and enrollment. New families are joining us, but budget constraints mean we will have to combine several of our classes. It is likely that Alef will be combined with Bet for this year. One additional pairing is also likely, depending on enrollment figures for each grade level. Stay tuned for more on this in the coming weeks.

JCSS is a wonderful community of people – smart, interesting, thoughtful, curious. I worked hard with our curriculum committee over the summer to reshape our school so that it actually reflects our membership's sense of excitement, intellectual engagement and moral purpose. Now I am really looking forward to making this a rich and rewarding year for all our students. I hope to get to know each of you this year so we can work together on behalf of our children's Jewish education.

Sincerely,

*Dr. Shira Birnbaum*

PROFILE

**Isaac Asimov** (1920-1992) was a self-described "second-generation freethinker" and one of the world's most prolific authors. Born in Petrovichi, Russia, he moved with his family to Brooklyn, New York, in 1923. Isaac taught himself to read by age five; at age seven, he taught his sister to read. Asimov earned a Ph.D. in chemistry in 1948. In 1958 he quit teaching to devote his life to writing. Employing the "Asimovian Law of Composition," which meant writing seven days a week, often from 6:30 am to 10 pm, he averaged at least 12 new books a year. Asimov won five Hugos, three Nebula Awards, and his best-known "Foundation" trilogy was given a 1966 Hugo as "Best All-Time Science-Fiction Series." Nonfiction works by Asimov were typically encyclopedic in range, such as his well-known *Asimov's Guide to the Bible* (1968).



Asimov called himself "an orthodox, practicing atheist" (April 29, 1988 letter). "I am Jewish in the sense that if an Arab wanted to throw a rock at a Jew, I would qualify as a target.. However, I do not practice Judaism or any other religion." (March 17, 1969 letter). "I must say that I stand amazed at the highly intelligent people who have taken so much of the Bible so seriously" (Oct. 28, 1966 letter).

*"I would not be satisfied to have my kids choose to be religious without trying to argue them out of it, just as I would not be satisfied to have them decide to smoke regularly or engage in any other practice I considered detrimental to mind or body"* (Aug. 22, 1963 letter).

JCSS GRADUATION, CLASS OF 2006

It is within the cultural meaning of "coming of age" that the JCSS holds its Graduation/B'nai Mitzvah ceremony each year.

Our children's education programs are the major focus of our community. The goal is for students to develop an ethnic identity, an understanding of their roots, a sense of their place in society as American Jews, and an interest in pursuing further Jewish studies.

The Graduation is the culmination of the five-year school curriculum. In their senior (Hey) year each student selects an aspect of Jewish life, culture, or history, and studies its significance, meaning, and relationship to the present. The subjects chosen over the years span the full breadth of Jewish experience. Some search for the answer to causes in history, others for understanding of political and social change in Jewish life. Individually, the essays represent the divergent views and interests of the graduates; collectively, they reflect the aims, scope and accomplishments of the secular folkshule.

The JCSS B'nai Mitzvah ceremony enlarges the graduation program by placing the graduates' Jewish identity in the context of the larger world and what it can mean to their lives and to the lives of future generations. The ceremony involves the parents in reflecting what they



wish to pass on to their children. And the graduates themselves reflect upon their Jewishness in expressing why they have chosen their graduation paper topic and what they have learned from their research.

The ten members of the JCSS Class of 2006 graduated over the course of two dates this past June, at the Maplewood Woman's Club. The beautiful ceremony was designed by the graduates, with the help of JCSS Celebrant Bonnie Cushing. JCSS members (and proud parents of a 2006 graduate) Eva Goldfarb and Rob Maskin lent their musical talents to the ceremony, leading the audience in song.

The 2006 Hey Class dedicated its graduation ceremony to all the children at the Family Violence Center, where they had volunteered in the course of their Mitzvah Project (see next page).

The papers presented by the 2006 graduates display a wide breadth of interests:

1. "Is Queen Esther a Good Role Model?"
2. "Tikkun Olam"
3. "Jewish Athletes"
4. "Tzedakah: The Giving Tree of Life"
5. "Was Theodore Herzl Responsible for the Creation of the Jewish State?"
6. "What Is the Message of 'Fiddler on the Roof' to Jewish People Today?"
7. "Who Is a Jew?"
8. "Why a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?"
9. "Anti-Semitism Leading to the Holocaust"
10. "Why Was Belief in God Necessary in the Past, and Is God Necessary Now or in the Future?"

## 2005 – 2006 JCSS MITZVAH PROJECT

For their Mitzvah Project, the Hey Class wanted to become involved in a community service project that would both broaden their experience and make a difference in other people's lives. They found what they were looking for in the Mentoring Program of Kids Who Care, Inc., a non-profit organization founded in 1996 by Ali Seidenstein, who was then twelve years old. The organization is made up of suburban students who help bridge socioeconomic barriers to enrich the lives of less fortunate children and peers.

The members of the Hey Class volunteered as mentors at a Family Violence Center, a confidential shelter providing temporary housing and guidance for mothers and children who had to leave their homes because of domestic violence. The Hey Class mentors visited the shelter in small groups at least once a week. They played games, engaged in art projects, read books to the children, holding them, giving them time, attention and warmth. This provided the mothers with some time to find permanent housing, attend counseling sessions, do errands and chores, or rest. The volunteer mentors also worked on a number of projects, such as organizing the playroom and shelving library

books. In addition to giving their time and energy, the Hey Class donated toys, art supplies, books and clothes to the shelter.

The Hey Class students developed strong bonds with many of the children. They learned about the difficulties and pain these children experienced before coming to the shelter. They also discovered that attempting to help is not easy. As mentors, they had to learn from the children what they needed. They had to learn from each other how to address difficult situations and work well as a group. They were moved by the strength of many of the mothers who had been through more than they could imagine. They

became aware of how difficult it is to make a difference in someone's else's life and were inspired to give what they could and hope that their efforts made a difference, even in some small ways.

The Hey Class was changed by this experience. Some of them have committed to continue with their volunteer efforts at the shelter; others want to take what they have learned and volunteer their time and talents to other organizations. All of them wish to thank Shelley Seidenstein, who guided them, supported them, and inspired them throughout this project.



# JCSS Calendar 2006 - 2007

		Pre-Alef	Alef - Hey Classes	Members Mtg	Adult Program	Teen Trip
Sunday	September 17, 2006		Alef - Hey Classes	Members Mtg		
Friday	September 22, 2006	<b>Rosh HaShanah Observance, Unitarian Church</b>				
Sunday	October 1, 2006	<b>Yom Kippur Observance, Unitarian Church, Montclair</b>				
Sunday	October 8, 2006	<b>Sukkot/Succos Observance, Tulip Springs, South Mountain Reservation</b>				
Sunday	October 15, 2006	Pre-Alef	Alef - Hey Classes	Members Mtg	<b>Open House</b>	
Sunday	October 22, 2006		Alef - Hey Classes		Adult Program	Teen Trip
Sunday	October 29, 2006		Alef - Hey Classes			
Sunday	November 5, 2006		Alef - Hey Classes			
Sunday	November 12, 2006	Pre-Alef	Alef - Hey Classes	Members Mtg		
Sunday	November 19, 2006		Alef - Hey Classes		Adult Program	Teen Trip
Sunday	November 26, 2006	<b>Thanksgiving Break - No Classes</b>				
Sunday	December 3, 2006		Alef - Hey Classes			
Sunday	December 10, 2006	Pre-Alef	Alef - Hey Classes	Members Mtg		
Sunday	December 17, 2006	<b>Chanukah Celebration</b>			Adult Program	
Sunday	December 24, 2006	<b>Winter Break</b>				
Sunday	December 31, 2006					
Sunday	January 7, 2007	Pre-Alef	Alef - Hey Classes		Adult Program	Teen Trip
Sunday	January 14, 2007		Alef - Hey Classes			
Sunday	January 21, 2007		Alef - Hey Classes			
Sunday	January 28, 2007		Alef - Hey Classes	Members Mtg		
Sunday	February 4, 2007	Pre-Alef	Alef - Hey Classes		Adult Program	
Sunday	February 11, 2007		Alef - Hey Classes			Teen Trip
Sunday	February 18, 2007	<b>Presidents Day Weekend - No classes</b>				
Sunday	February 25, 2007		Alef - Hey Classes	Members Mtg		
Sunday	March 4, 2007	<b>Purim Celebration</b>			Adult Program	
Sunday	March 11, 2007	Pre-Alef	Alef - Hey Classes			
Sunday	March 18, 2007		Alef - Hey Classes		Adult Program	
Sunday	March 25, 2007	<b>Model Seder</b>				
Sunday	April 1, 2007		Alef - Hey Classes			Teen Trip
Sunday	April 8, 2007	Pre-Alef	Alef - Hey Classes	Members Mtg		
Sunday	April 15, 2007	<b>Spring Break - No Classes</b>				
Sunday	April 22, 2007		Alef - Hey Classes		Adult Program	
Sunday	April 29, 2007		Alef - Hey Classes			
Sunday	May 6, 2007	Pre-Alef	Alef - Hey Classes	Members Mtg		
Sunday	May 13, 2007		Alef - Hey Classes			Teen Trip

## Adult Program Calendar 2006-2007

In addition to family events, JCSS adults and teens enjoy monthly Sunday morning discussion groups. Adults may also participate in conferences/seminars hosted by CSJO, the Society for Humanistic Judaism, the International Federation for Secular Humanistic Judaism. JCSS also co-sponsors trips to the theater, concerts, museums, historic sites and events. Unless otherwise noted, the JCSS holds these meetings from 9:45am to Noon at the West Orange JCC (760 Northfield Ave) in the Right Nursery.

### Sunday October 22

“Explaining Secular Humanistic Judaism “  
Bennett Muraskin

### Sunday November 19

“A Secular Jewish Perspective on Intermarriage”  
*Guest Speaker:* Rhea Seagull, former JCSS principal and madrikha

### Sunday December 17

“Jewish Last Names: Their Origins and Meaning” (At our Chanukah Celebration)  
Bennett Muraskin

### Sunday January 7

Jewish Film: *Wanderings: A Journey to Connect*, about a Canadian mother and daughter who visit obscure Jewish communities around the world

### Sunday, February 4

“Talking with your child about sexuality: A workshop for parents and caregivers.”  
*Guest speaker:* Eva Goldfarb, PhD, Professor at Montclair State University in the department of Health Professions, Physical Education, Recreation and Leisure Studies

### Sunday, March 4

“Humorous Jewish Short Stories on Tape” (At our Purim celebration)  
Bennett Muraskin

### Sunday, March 18

“Judaism as an Anti-Establishment Ideology”  
*Guest Speaker:* Larry Bush, editor of Jewish Currents magazine

### Sunday April 22

Holocaust/Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Commemoration



**Bennett Mursakin** is the Adult Education Program Coordinator for the JCSS. He is also a union representative for New Jersey college faculty, speaks nationally on Jewish topics and is a frequent contributor to Jewish publications, including Jewish Currents, Humanistic Judaism, and Outlook. His book, Let Justice Well Up Like Water: Progressive Jews from Hillel to Helen Suzman was published in 2004.

## Submissions to the *JCSS Newsletter*

JCSS members are encouraged to submit material for the JCSS Newsletter. In the past members have submitted photos, poetry, event notices, recipes, and personal reflections for our ongoing series "Why I belong to the JCSS". Any material of interest to our community is welcome, and can be submitted to the *Newsletter* editor electronically ([communications@jcss-nj.org](mailto:communications@jcss-nj.org)) or by snail-mail (to JCSS, PO Box 3365, Upper Montclair, NJ 07043).



Jewish Cultural School & Society  
 P.O.Box 3365  
 Memorial Station  
 Upper Montclair, NJ 07043

Mail to:

Membership Information  
 Phone: 973-783-7897  
 Email: [communications@jcss-nj.com](mailto:communications@jcss-nj.com)

*The JCSS is dedicated to the study and celebration of Jewish history and culture within the philosophy of Secular Humanistic Judaism.*

VISIT US AT  
[WWW.JCSS-NJ.ORG](http://WWW.JCSS-NJ.ORG)



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED