

Jacob's trial: Hebrew court room at Hebrew Day School

Dina Shtull, special to the WJN

Fourth graders at Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor played out a court scene to determine whether Jacob acted morally when taking the birthright from his twin brother Esau and when tricking his father Isaac into giving him the blessing intended for his elder brother. Students played the roles of

brothers received what they truly wanted. God also played a role in Jacob's decision, and Jacob was following a divine calling.

Student Gaya Pederson, attorney for the prosecution, claimed otherwise. While Jacob was following his mother's direction, he was at the same time deceiving and tricking his father

"It was a good experience," said Gabe Seir. "We had to prep in many ways to be ready for any question." "If you really wanted to prove something," said Natan Bondin, "you had to keep asking questions." "It was hard to defend a client who most think is guilty," admitted Zachary Weissman. Dana Steiner who played Rebecca

in a text to demonstrate comprehension and to draw inferences. Students were required to provide textual evidence for their testimonies. A third skill is effective public speaking. Students practiced looking at the lawyer, and speaking loudly and slowly — skills that are particularly challenging to do in a second language.



the attorneys, the witnesses, and the judge. The scene was un-scripted; characters on the witness stand answered whatever question was posed to them by the attorneys. All of the court proceedings were conducted in Hebrew. The spontaneous use of language to critically reflect on and analyze the Biblical story is the highest level of achievement for students studying a second language.

What did the students think of Jacob's actions? In his opening remarks, student Zachary Weissman, defense attorney, claimed that in tricking his father to get a special blessing, Jacob was not acting alone; he was listening to his mother. Following his mother's wishes was the respectful thing to do. Jacob did not steal the birthright; he engaged in an honest deal with his brother who preferred to have the bowl of soup. It was a win-win situation because both

and disregarding his father's wishes. The commandment is to honor *both* your mother and your father. Jacob's father was blind, and tricking a blind person is in violation of the commandment "Do not put a stumbling block in front of a blind person (Leviticus 19:14)." While the sale of the birthright was legal in that Esau agreed to sell it for a bowl of soup, Jacob was taking advantage of his brother who was at the time in a distressed emotional state.

Other students played the role of the witnesses. Called to the stand were Jacob himself, Isaac, Esau, and Rebecca. Jacob and Esau were asked if they thought their deal was fair. Isaac was asked why he proceeded to bless Esau if God's desire was otherwise. Rebecca was asked why she tricked her husband. The questions, and the opening and closing remarks, were all written by the students themselves.

on the witness stand said that the lawyers "asked the same question in different ways. It was hard to find different ways to answer the same question."

The students all agreed that the main idea they learned from the project was that one should not judge someone without having proof. "We needed to find proof from the text for our arguments," continued Bondin. "We had to go to the Torah for our reasons," said Seir. "We could not make assumptions." "A lot of people in our class will make great lawyers one day," said Bondin.

Participation in the court scene was a demonstration of academic skills that are developing in fourth grade. One of these skills is the ability to understand that some questions have more than one answer. The debate raised a complicated question that did not have a simple answer. Another is the ability to refer to details

Additional academic goals related specifically to the study of Torah — the ability to distinguish in a verse between narrative, dialogue, and inner quotations; and the ability to use verb prefixes and suffixes as an aid in text comprehension.

The court case was one example of the development of critical thinking, a key 21st century skill, that is applied at Hebrew Day School in the study of secular and Biblical literature. Students often have debates when discussing a challenging question. "In fact," says teacher Aaron Magid, "everyday in class is a mini court case." ■

More information about Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor can be found on the school's website www.hdsaa.org or by calling the office at 971-4633 to schedule a private tour.



1 Gabe Seir, as Jacob, on the witness stand
2 Talía Duniétz, playing Isaac, on the witness stand
3 Dana Steiner, playing Rebecca, on the witness stand
4 Gaya Pedersen, prosecuting attorney
5 Zachary Weissman, defense attorney
6 Attorneys for the defense, writing their closing remarks: Gabe Seir, Sophia Berry, Zachary Weissman, Dana Steiner
7 Rachel Siegel, playing the judge
8 Attorneys for the prosecution writing their closing remarks: Tom Duniétz, Talía Duniétz, Gaya Pedersen, Natan Bondin, Jesse Rosenberg



Tuition incentives and scholarships at Hebrew Day School

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Enrollment tuition incentive

The Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor is offering a tuition incentive for children entering kindergarten. All families applying to the HDS kindergarten for the 2012–2013 academic year will be entitled to an enrollment tuition of \$10,000 for the kindergarten child. This represents close to a 20 percent reduction from the current tuition rate. Applications are due by February 6, 2012.

The offer is contingent on formal acceptance of the student. The additional sibling discount and the early tuition incentive cannot be combined for the kindergarten. Other fees remain obligatory (registration, book and supply, PTO). Families may also apply for scholarships that are based on demonstrated need.

Scholarship process

Each year, the HDS designates a substantial amount of scholarships to assist families with demonstrated need. A loan may also be offered if a family is only temporarily financially impaired. The scholarship program helps ensure that the school maintains its diverse and inclusive student population.

This past year \$145,000 was allocated in scholarships. Of that amount, \$76,000 came from the Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor. Over the last few years, at least 90 percent of all applicants received an offer of either a grant or a loan. Approximately 30 percent of HDS students receive financial assistance.

Privacy and confidentiality are of utmost importance in the process. Parents submit financial information and documentation to an online service used by independent schools throughout the country. A local committee reviews recommendations from this service. To preserve the privacy of the applying families, the committee does not include any present HDS parents, and all proceedings are kept confidential. The online application form may be viewed at <http://sss.nais.org/Parents> using the school code of 1404. There is an application fee of \$37. Information about data security and privacy regarding the online documents can be found at <http://sss.nais.org/schools> then click on the "Comp*Assist online" tab and pick "Information Security" from the drop down menu. Further questions about scholarships can be directed to hdsscholarship@hdsaa.org.