

fforum

Looks at Two Schools

Paula Finkelstein,
Susan Marwil,
Dolores Montgomery

Akiva Hebrew Day School

Akiva Hebrew Day School is a bicultural school in Southfield, Michigan. Although it is a relatively young school, founded in 1964, Akiva has been successful in accomplishing its original goal, to commit to the educational ideals of academic excellence in general studies as well as Jewish learning. At Akiva, studies are integrated with beliefs for a harmonious interplay between general and Judaic studies--an interplay that begins in kindergarten and culminates with a senior year spent in Israel, a unique feature of our school and for which the students receive some transferable college credit. Because of Akiva's plan for sending twelfth graders to school in Israel, the high school endeavors to give the students a well-rounded curriculum in three years rather than four. Therefore, the English department has pursued a **traditional** college preparatory curriculum which has been most successful.

In our attempt to meet the needs of our students by providing the basics in grammar and composition, a survey of forms in literature, as well as studies in American, English, and world literature, we find our students excelling in Advanced Placement tests and the Scholastic Writing Contest sponsored by the Detroit News. Although we don't offer an Advanced Placement course, our first year in the Advanced Placement program, of the ten students who took the English AP exam, eight placed with a three or better. Students in succeeding years have met with equal success. Last year, too, we had a national finalist in the National Council of Teachers of English Writing Competition and our students won thirty-seven awards in the Scholastic Writing Contest. (This would not be remarkable, perhaps, except that our junior and senior high school combined enrollment is 65 students).

The Program

The school day is extremely intensive, with students in grades 9-11 spending the morning hours (7:30-12:30) in Judaic studies and the afternoon (1:00-5:10) in general studies. The following is a typical afternoon class schedule:

- Grade 9: English
 French I
 World History
 Biology
 Algebra
- Grade 10: English (Amer. Lit.)
 French II
 U.S. History
 Chemistry
 Geometry
- Grade 11: World Literature
 English Literature
 U.S. Government/Economics
 Physics
 Advanced Algebra

In order to achieve a high level of competence within the compressed academic curriculum, our English composition and literature program begins in Grade 7, where study of grammar fundamentals and paragraph writing are coupled with readings from a literature anthology.

Literature study in eighth-grade introduces Shakespeare and emphasizes form and theme, exploring poetic forms and figures. Students compile an anthology of their favorite poems on a selected theme, such as seasons, friendship, feelings or technology, and compose three or more poems of their own, using traditional forms: Diamante, Cinquain, and so on. (This assignment is modeled on the Bay Area Writing Project described in Learning Magazine, September, 1978). In addition, we write letters to authors of books the students have read. Our writing instruction focuses on the topic sentence, supportive detail, and an introduction to the two-paragraph theme.

In the ninth-grade we use factual source material to study the Holocaust as we introduce students to non-fiction. The culmination of this unit focuses on student interviews with Holocaust survivors residing in the community and furnishes a plethora of writing activities, including short stories, diary entries, poetry, juvenile literature (explaining the Holocaust to beginning readers), and two- three- or four-paragraph informative articles. Other writing activities include a portfolio of essays: one each of description, process analysis, persuasive exposition, personal reaction,

and comparison-contrast. The literature program also includes a study of more difficult Shakespearean drama, usually one comedy and one tragedy, and a novel.

In the tenth grade, the students study American literature; in eleventh grade, world literature; and in twelfth grade, English literature. By tenth grade they write more formal, analytical papers of four and five paragraphs with introductory theses and formal conclusions. By twelfth grade they focus on a variety of writing experiences, including mock heroic poems, ballads, literary analyses, and the research paper.

Because our aim is to encourage critical thinking and effective written communication, we tend to avoid objective tests. Many composition assignments are completed under impromptu classroom conditions, which provide the challenge of pre-thinking, planning, and writing. In both oral and written work, we always encourage the students, especially those in seventh and eighth grades, to answer in complete sentences. Moreover, we expect the students to be able to validate their responses to literature questions with specific references to the text. On tests we prefer answers in compact sentences and begin encouraging sentence-combining skills as early as seventh grade. We try to offer as many opportunities for oral communication as possible, including oral reports, poetry recitation, literature dramatizations, and debates between author and character. Sometimes the students prepare their own scripts for their dramatizations of literature; other times, they write newspaper accounts or television journalists' accounts.

Although our school day places limitations on our offerings, we expose our students to a variety of creative and challenging reading and writing experiences which call for a variety of responses, and we are always searching for new methods, ideas and materials to incorporate into our English curriculum.

We are proud of our students' writing; therefore, we wish to share some of it with fforum's readers. The selections that follow are a sampler of Akiva students' work.

Machine

Machine
Computerized, Mechanized
Perfecting, Solving, Blinking
Television, computer - adult, child
Caring, Loving, Feeling
Affectionate, Emotional
Man

Deena Schramm, Grade 8

To illustrate the effect of living in Israel on our seniors, here are some writings from them:

It is sunset in the Old City of Jerusalem. The patchwork bricks of the stone buildings are all slightly illuminated: lacquered in a golden honey by the sun. The shadows of the palm trees stretch out over the white pavement like graceful fingers, belonging to hands which are preparing to fold in a pose of rest; a cue for the descent of dusk. Jerusalem glitters as the last shower of embers from the departing sun lightly settles over the well-worn bricks. The sliver of sun that is melting over the horizon of the Promised Land is reflected in the eyes of the cats that stalk the shadows. Their eyes flash like sequins of fire. Jerusalem at dusk: gilded, dipped into a vat of gold sheen with the expertise and perfection of the finest craftsman.

Eyes catch the last glare of the sun as it sinks beyond the Kotel (Western Wall). Faint whispers of prayer skim the air and blow gently against the cheek. It is the time of Maariv (evening prayers), and the Jews can now be seen entering the courtyard of the Kotel. Little children run aong beside their fathers and tug playfully at their robes. Although it is almost twilight, the Old City is gleaming softly in a halo of light that is shed from the golden dome of the Mosque of Omar.

Eyes blink. The sun has long since melted onto the parched earth beyond the Kotel. Loud and mournful wailing of a taped prayer pierces the air and slaps the cheek. Moslems can be seen scurrying into the courtyard of their

sacred temple. Jerusalem still gleams softly, sparkling, illuminated by the Dome of the Rock. Tears are reflected in the eyes of the cats that stalk the shadows.

Zoe Levin

Your Hands

Your hands
had to turn
the pages of
the calendar as
you realized that
we would soon be gone

and

Your arms
had to let go
of a child
who, you believed,
was yet
unprepared for
life

and

Your eyes
had to watch
that child leave
and you knew
that he would return
a changed person

and yet

Your lips
did not ask
that
we remain at
home

for

Your heart
understood
that
we
were

Going Home.

Thank you, Mom and Dad,
for this year in Israel.

Annette Ryba

L'Anse Creuse High School-North

L'Anse Creuse High School-North is located in northern Macomb County in a primarily blue collar, middle-class area, which has rapidly changed from rural to subdivision living. Our student enrollment is approximately 1,600, 99 percent white with a small Latino, Arabic, Asian, and black population. Approximately forty percent of our students see themselves as college preparatory and an even smaller percentage actually go on to college.

English teachers at LCHS-North usually teach 125-160 students at different grade- and ability-levels in five classes each day. In spite of this demanding schedule, we have made a semi-elective English program, of which we are proud, available to our students. Our ninth graders are required to take an introductory course which emphasizes composition first semester; literature, second. General students begin an elective program in the tenth grade, while college preparatory students are required to take a year of American literature. Electives open to general students include such courses as: **Search for Values, Composition, Mass Media, Man in Conflict, and Mystery.** College preparatory students begin the elective program in the eleventh grade. Offerings for them include: **Science Fiction, Man and Society, Film Studies, Mythology, Advanced Composition, Creative Writing, and Of Men and Women.**

Our elective program is successful because we offer students a choice of equally demanding courses. At the college preparatory level all semester electives emphasize critical reading and thinking and writing skills. All literature courses include nine major works. For example, a student in **Of Men and Women** will read works such as: The Scarlet Letter, The Taming of the Shrew, Anna Karenina, and Harriet Arnow's The Dollmaker; while a student in **Man and Society** may read A Separate Peace, Lord of the Flies, Grapes of Wrath, and Brave New World. Although reading is less intense in our **Film Studies** course, we do require an essay per week of each student in the course.

Another reason for the success of our elective program is that students are aided by their English teachers in select-

ing their courses. We register students in English classes before they enroll in other courses during full-school registration.

Since we have had a separate course in creative writing, our students have been very successful in winning recognition and awards. More writing of sketches, personal essays and autobiographical articles is done in the **Creative Writing** class than can be included in all-purpose English courses. This is reflected in the large number of awards L'Anse Creuse students have won in the creative writing area.

One of our students, Al Huebel, has a state-wide reputation with participants, teachers, and judges of contests; in fact, he has won two college scholarships as a result of his placement in writing contests. Another student, Maureen Darmanin, won a fourth place award in the National Scholastic Short-Short Story division this year. We are indeed proud that L'Anse Creuse students have won a total of thirty-six writing awards this year. Within our school we publish some of our writers and artists in our literary/art magazine, Pencil Marks, which has also received the highest ratings from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association.

It would be inaccurate to lead forum's readers to believe that all our students are talented writers. In fact, award winning students are not the norm at L'Anse Creuse: most of our students do not write well. Therefore, in addition to our college preparatory and general English course, we provide a remedial program for those students who need such instruction. Entering ninth graders with severe handicaps in writing take **Basic Language Skills and Reading Lab**. Their teachers then help them choose among electives geared to them, such as: **Communication Skills, Action and Adventure, Mass Media, and Individualized Reading.**

Our aim at L'Anse Creuse is to provide a diversified English curriculum which will meet the needs of all our students. Although we have a hardworking, well-prepared English staff, who give it at least

their best shot, the extent to which we achieve our goal varies.

The following selections from our literary/art magazine Pencil Marks illustrate the quality and diversity of the writing which our students do at L'Anse Creuse.

Ticks

When you live in Este, Virginia, ticks are a part of life. They grow about thick as ants, and you talk about bloodsuckers! Ticks will get hold of anything that's bloody--dogs, cats, chickens, and people.

Before we went to bed, Mom or Maw Maw, one would grab us for a checking. Our bodies were gone over quickly, but our heads were inspected thoroughly. Ticks love squeezing down deep as they can into a head of hair. And you can believe after a day of wrastling around on the ground and climbing trees they were plentiful. When one was found, it was yanked out quick as that. If the tick had his head under good, it would usually pull a piece of skin off with it, and bring a cry from us little ones getting the treatment. Then we were only hollered at and told to set still and that it was our own fault. The ticks were then handed over to Uncle Jim who would cut their heads off while us kids giggled over the bodies still walking around without heads.

Uncle Jim used to check out the dogs' ears. He would hold the hound between his legs, then pick the creatures out with a pair of tweezers. Sometimes they'd get big as a marble, or bigger, all filled up on blood. They'd turn real white and ugly. Those we just squashed with a rock, cause you couldn't tell front from back they were so fat. But those hounds sure were glad to have their ears cleaned out afterwards. They'd flop their heads all around and smile from ear to ear.

I was always wondering how it was the older folks never seemed to get ticks. Maw Maw told us that's what we got for rolling around on the ground. But I figured different. Their blood pobably wouldn't even taste good since they were so old and tough-skinned. And if I was a tick I'd rather have little children's blood, too.

Anita Mantey '78, Scholastic Writing Award, Scholastic Art Award

Big Jake

Everything is relative, right? Well, next to Big Jake I'm Mr. Peepers, body and soul.

All I did was invite my two nearly-faint-from-hunger ninth grade buddies to stand up front with me in the cafeteria line. No big deal, right? Wrong! You see, Jake has a tendency to overdo things a bit.

"All right, gentlemen, why don't we kindly step to the end of the line!" he said as if he was bawling out the entire football team after another loss.

His massive body towered above the heads of my buddies and me. His humungous arms casually leaned against the wall and his thick lips juggled a helpless little toothpick.

I felt the situation called for an articulate spokesman. I didn't see any reason in hell why he had to carry on as if we were waiting for him to introduce us to Bo Schembechler.

The toothpick continued to bob from side to side. I shrank under his eyeball-to-eyeball gaze. His eyebrows cocked according to the position of the wooden object his teeth had entrapped. My buddies said nothing; together we stood frozen, glancing from time to time at each other.

Maybe he thought that the term "gentlemen" put us on a more man-to-man basis.

I chanced a reply, risking the wrath of the tiger. "Do you mean me?" I shook like a hooker in a Baptist church.

His muscle-bound body tightened as if to move into a defensive stance. "Don't question me, young man, or we'll take a walk down to the office!"

It wasn't what he said but the way that he said it that scared the daylights out of me.

(cont. from p. 47)

Stephen Bernhardt (cont. from p. 20)

ful. Whether such transfer occurs, whether, for instance, practice in writing dramatic episodes will help the writer control other, less personal writing, remains an open question.

The question will not be answered, but support for such transfer will be assumed; for Moffett, like other good cognitivists, believes in the value of creative play with the forms of language through non-directed, individual exploration in a non-threatening environment. In these days of competency testing, explicit objectives, and the general homogenization of curriculum under the cry of "the basics," Moffett's ideas about teaching English appear even more radical than when they were first proposed in the late sixties. I would advocate a rational balance of his speculative, exploratory activities with content-oriented formal instruction. But whatever position we finally adopt, reading and thinking our way through the wealth of ideas in Moffett's books can only help us understand our own behavior better as we go about our day-to-day teaching.

Stephen Bernhardt is a doctoral candidate at The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Mark E. Smith (cont. from p. 22)

of text after text; all you had to do was look at the table of contents. So, for five or six years, I methodically plotted out and plodded through separate units on these four modes. But then I read Moffett: there were not just four modes, but a universe of modes, infinite in number. And more importantly, they all have a place in the English classroom. So now I offer my students a much broader scope of writing assignments than those in the four traditional modes. They write papers ranging in point of view, from subjective to objective; in content and concern, from immediate to remote past or future; in topic, from simple to complex; in style, from unedited transcripts of speech to polished, formal essays; in audience addressed, from intimate to public; and so on. Now, instead of assigning a comparison and contrast or process paper, I ask students to think of a topic or issue that strongly interests

them and then to write a paper which says what they want to say about that topic. Moffett quotes one teacher who says, "You can't write writing." But you can write ideas and feelings, which is what my students do more often now, and with stronger motivation.

To paraphrase Jacqueline, if you use journals, small group work on drafts, and assignments from a universe of discourse, you will find you have made better writers and "glad of it."

Mark E. Smith is Director of Composition at Northern Michigan University, Marquette, Michigan.

Two Schools (cont. from p. 27)

But I didn't know if I could afford to let this muscled creature knock my ego around.

"We were just..."

"Just what?"

"Sheeuit," I mumbled, making my way to the end of the line, looking like a scolded puppy with its tail tucked between its legs.

Gary Robertson, '81

Matisse

I dreamed last night that i was chasing a butterfly through a crowded city and when he flew too high i sat down and cried because i think that that butterfly was you

Anita Mantey '78



SQUINTING
MODIFIER

Paula Finkelstein and Susan Marwil teach English at Akiva Hebrew Day School in Southfield, Michigan; and Dolores Montgomery is English Department Chairperson and teaches English at L'Anse Creuse High School North, Mt. Clemens, Michigan.