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Romps, riots, and revels in the land of make-believe : imaginative play as a prerequisite for social and emotional development in early childhood through adolescence

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Romps, Riots, and Revels in the Land of Make-Believe:
Imaginative Play as a Prerequisite for Social and Emotional Development
in Early Childhood Through Adolescence

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the impact of imaginative play on child development, as well as its educational benefits when incorporated into the learning environment. The initial focus of this topic was piqued through interactions with early childhood aged children and observations as to how the presence of make-believe play was associated with social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Thus, the study at its conceptual stage consisted of a literature review, case study, and interviews. The study expanded when the author, who was placed in a classroom of eleven-year-olds, resolved to investigate whether these same functions of imaginative play might be comparably impactful on the development of emerging adolescents. Though these are years when play becomes minimized, the author sought to incorporate imaginative play into the classroom; and specifically for this study, imaginative play became narrowed to role play as a curricular modification. Further suggestions for role play based learning are made at the conclusion of the study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....1

Rationale.....3

Case Study.....7

Practical Applications.....15

Conclusion.....25

Appendices.....28

References.....50

RATIONALE

According to the sociocultural theory of developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky, make-believe play is an essential component of social and emotional development in early childhood. Imaginative play enables children to renounce impulsive action in favor of self-regulatory activity; teaches children to cope with social rules such as waiting their turn, putting their toys away, and other daily routines that delay gratification; and prepares children for abstract thought when physical symbols in the real world are absent (Cole, Cole, and Lightfoot, 2009). In the words of Berk (2005), “Whenever there is an imaginary situation, there are rules” – thus, free play is not actually as “free” as it may appear to grownups; on the contrary, it is characterized by rules for behavior that children must follow to successfully act out the play scene, effectively preparing them for their transition into middle childhood and ultimately into adulthood.

As a young adult who still delights in fanciful playtime no less than I did in my childhood, I was keen to explore Vygotsky’s concept of play through several methods of practical application. On a personal note, my strongest memories of imaginative play during childhood are specifically correlated with dramatic play and role play. At the age of six, my mother enrolled me, her shy middle child of five, in a youth theater group hoping it would help me break out of my shell. My family often jests that her plan “backfired” because far beyond overcoming my shyness, I evolved into a first-class dramaqueen who became most comfortable in the spotlight.

However, my fascination with the effects of dramatic representation began almost a decade later, when I was cast as the eponymous role in my high school's production of "Annie." I was stunned that one of the students who showed up to the auditions was Ruth¹, a classmate who had always presented as mute. Whether in or out of class, I had never heard Ruth utter a word. My classmates and I had always been inclusive of her in class activities, but we were accustomed to her silence and thus never posed a question or comment in her direction that necessitated a response.

As she stood up for her audition, I felt myself lose my breath; out of no where, Ruth erupted into the most incredible acting shpiel that had the small crowd keeled over with laughter. Ruth was fittingly cast as the comedic housemaid in the show. In a manner comparable to comedic genius Rebel Wilson, the best parts of her performance were unscripted. When the show closed, our cast sparkled with the pride at the success of our performances. My classmates and I were abuzz with the prediction that perhaps this was the dawn of a new chapter for Ruth. Yet perhaps even more shockingly than her dramatic debut was that, as soon as the play season had ended, Ruth retreated into her self-inhabited universe of silence.

After that year, I began to think about how acting as someone else seemed to have pushed Ruth to break out of her silence. She had not even been forced to play a role, but had sought role play out on her own, almost as if desperate for a means to give herself voice through the guise of another character. I began to think of the possibilities

¹ Name has been changed.

that dramatic representation and role play could represent for others in creative endeavors, social interactions, and perhaps even in the learning environment.

In adulthood, the relevance of role play to my life was brought to new heights. I experienced a personal trauma as a young adult, for which I sought traditional psychotherapy on my road to recovery. Although psychotherapy was helpful for the day-to-day coping mechanisms, years passed by and I continued to feel incredibly stuck. Determined to leave painful memories in the past and construct the future I was certain I deserved, I threw myself into any technique that promised a remedy: EMDR, hypnosis, mindful breathing, meditation, herbs, yoga, acupuncture, and life coaching. Finally, my laundry list of remedies left me with one final attempt at self-healing: psychodrama, an approach that entails “the development of dramatic situations in which the patient enacts confrontations with various family members or other key life figures” (Singer & Singer, 1990, p. 248). The environment was not unlike a classroom, as it was a group setting with people from all different backgrounds with a shared goal of harnessing role play to break through personal barriers. I found that by entering a “role” and engaging with others entering parallel roles, I was able to model for myself, and others, the type of behaviors and results that would push me where I needed to be. At long last, I was beginning to feel unstuck.

In light of my own experiences, I became convinced of the power of role play within the broader context of imaginative play. As I entered my career as an educator, I was placed first in a class of eights and subsequently transitioned to a class of elevens. In this transitory period, I observed how dramatic play remained vibrant for sevens and

eights (if not as much so as it did in early childhood), yet by the time they had reached age eleven it had essentially disappeared. Singer & Singer (1990) wrote extensively about how play tends to go “underground” starting in the middle years of childhood, noting that “psychotherapists working with children in the nine-to-twelve-year-old age group have recognized that many are no longer comfortable with overt role playing and yet cannot articulate their problems or dilemmas using the verbal methods of adult psychotherapy” (p. 249). Indeed, my eleven-year-olds were kept busy churning out essays, memorizing facts, and creating sophisticated presentations using PowerPoint and Google Presentation. These classroom tools were certainly relevant to the academic transitions that characterized a learning environment that became progressively more sophisticated; yet I wondered, could not imaginative play still function as a key component of middle school classrooms? Weren’t these children missing out on something that had been so instrumental to the growth and development I had observed in the younger years?

When I was hired as a head teacher at a new school in a class of elevens, I seized the opportunity to implement curricular modifications that capitalized upon dramatic play in the learning environment. Over the course of the school year, several strategies related to role play emerged as beneficial to the students based on their own feedback. I assessed their experiences using polls and personal interviews to measure responses. The responses of the children speak volumes about their experience with role play as it broke away from a traditional and static educational framework. By reimagining the classroom as a stage, learning flourished and became dynamic.

CASE STUDY: DRAMATIC PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

To commence my investigation, I engaged in several consecutive sessions of imaginative play with three-and-a-half-year-old Ariana. Although sandwiched between two sisters (Maytal, five-and-a-half, and Ayla, 18 months), I handpicked Ariana for my observation because “at the age of three or four, children enter into the golden age of pretend play, and for three or four more years, they will be masters of romps, riots, and revels in the land of make-believe” (Gottschall, 2012, p. 23). As a highly imaginative child at the apex of her early childhood years, I was eager to find out whether playtime with Ariana would reflect the notions of child psychologists and play scholars I had been studying. After recording my observations and reflections on these instances of pretend play, I set up an interview with Ariana’s mother, in which I further investigated Ariana’s play preferences and the developmental milestones she exhibits during playtime. The interview included some reflections from Ariana herself on our playtime together, and her commentary on the type of play she enjoys most. Throughout my exploration, my motivation was based on Vygotsky’s premise that play is not merely recreational for children, but is in fact a biological function indispensable to their growth and development (Berk, 2005).

For the purpose of this study, I wish to highlight one particular “romp in the land of make-believe” which occurred on a Tuesday afternoon in Ariana’s home. When I arrive on the scene, Ariana begs: “Play Peter Pan with me!” Initially, I am reluctant to comply as I have been in this situation during my previous romps with Ariana. A strikingly theatrical child, she has a memory like a sponge; when she says she wants to

“play” Peter Pan, what she really means is that she wants to act out every scene and every line of the story (the 1956 film adaptation starring Mary Martin, to be precise) from beginning to end – and if one errs in the replication of the story or tries to skip over a scene, the indignant Ariana will stand for no such scandal in the land of make-believe!

Despite my reservations, I find myself captivated by the concept of engaging in pretend play that surrounds Peter Pan, “the boy who wouldn’t grow up” (Barrie, 1911). Grownups often assume that play is a pleasurable activity; but in fact, Berk (2005) notes that children regularly choose play over other experiences that are almost guaranteed to be more gratifying, such as undivided attention from a parent, or eating a favorite treat; and in fact, certain play scenarios can result in disappointment and defeat, such as competitive games which can be won or lost. To that end, play is more adequately characterized as “the work of children” (Gottschall, 2012, p. 32), usually dealing with mature themes that help prepare children for adult life. Yet here is a story that revolves around a tangible land of make-believe, in which a child resists growing up because all he wants to do is play! Hence, both intrigued by the paradoxical theme of the narrative and eager to integrate theories of play with real life experience, I allow myself to be sprinkled with faerie dust and bombarded with happy thoughts in preparation for our flight to Neverland.

Sociocultural theory asserts that supportive guidance from adults creates a scaffold for children’s learning that is essential for their cognitive development (Berk, 2005). During the interview, Ariana’s mother explains that her three-year-old mostly engages in parallel play with peers her own age, whereas her older sister Maytal usually

guides instances of role play. Since Ariana is still acquiring the skills for independent role play, I act not only as protagonist Peter Pan, but also as director, stagehand, and talent agent in this small-scale theatrical production. Circulating the house, I cast unsuspecting family members in various roles, designate toys and household items as the objects that appear in the narrative, and pronounce the family room the setting for the Darling nursery. As the leading adult in this instance of make-believe, an enriching and productive play experience requires effortful facilitation on my part. In her analysis of imaginative play, Spitz (1988) clarifies, "...its effect depends in large part upon the qualities of the . . . adult – whose presence and engagement must serve, like that perhaps of conductor and performer of a musical score, to contain, guide, and modify the child's experience" (p. 433). Indeed, during moments such as the climactic swordfight between Peter Pan (me) and Captain Hook (Ariana's aunt), Ariana appears more as an onlooker watching the show, and less her assigned role of the panicked yet resolute Wendy about to walk the plank. Later on when she is interviewed, Ariana will tell me that she prefers playing with adult family members to playing with other children her age – perhaps because she is still reliant on the scaffold provided by adult support and engagement during imaginative play.

Vygotsky demonstrated that the early childhood years introduce children to the necessity of abstract thought, and prepare them for the esoteric thinking that will characterize their development into adulthood (Cole et al, 2009). While a baby might play with a pretend phone, if you hand him or her a banana, he or she will not necessarily infer to use the banana as a toy phone. However, in accordance with Jean

Piaget's preoperational stage of cognitive development, young children can represent reality to themselves through the use of symbols, including mental images, words, and gestures (Cole et al, 2009). Therefore, a two-year-old child is likely to pretend that a banana is a telephone; whereas a typical three-year-old child does not need the banana to play telephone, as he or she is content to talk on an imaginary telephone. Ariana demonstrates comfort with symbolic objects in a number of Neverland scenarios: we use pastel-colored building blocks to construct a house for Wendy, toy drum sticks pass as weapons, and a wooden toy knife from a play food set suffices as a non-threatening hook for the pirate villain. During the appealing exchange in which Wendy (Ariana) offers to sew Peter's shadow back on as an alternative to sticking it on with soap, Ariana demonstrates mastery of abstract thought by using an imaginary needle and thread.

The studies of Vivian Gussin Paley on early childhood play reveal just how slow biological evolution appears in comparison to cultural evolution. Paley was astounded by the gender distinctions she observed during playtime in her preschool class, despite her interventions to foster a gender-neutral play environment. The girls in her class perpetually preferred playing house and taking care of their baby dolls, while the boys acted as superheroes fighting against villains and staged battles with weapons constructed from Legos (Paley, 1984). Her findings suggest that there must be a biological influence surrounding play, one that would determine how the instinctual play preferences of boys and girls would have prepared them for the impending tasks of adulthood, had they been growing up a century ago. Ariana certainly exhibits these

female stereotypes as our pretend play progresses. She is unconcerned with the casting of the other characters, insisting simply that *she* must play the role of Wendy. I would suggest her preference for this role is based on the characterization of Wendy as the most domestic of the female characters. Tiger Lily is a wild heathen; Tinker Bell, a jealous, promiscuous pixie; but Wendy is brought to Neverland for the primary purpose of acting as mother to the Lost Boys. Indeed, when I interview Ariana after we play and inquire about her favorite part, without missing a beat she replies: “The part when we build a house for Wendy.”

As our journey continues, I perceive that the story of Peter Pan in particular dispels the myth that the land of make-believe is a “heavenly, sun-kissed bunny land” (Gottschall, 2012, p. 32). Within the span of an hour-and-a-half, we were emancipated from the comfort of the nursery and the safety of caretakers, settled our cultural differences with the Indians, kidnapped by pirates and forced to walk the plank, threatened by an ominous hook, and faced with a man-eating crocodile! As Gottschall (2012) eloquently elucidates, “...the land of make-believe is less like heaven and more like hell. Children’s play is not escapist. It confronts the problems of the human condition head-on” (p. 32). I recall my own favorite games of pretend as a child, which included “playing poor” and “hiding from the witch” – themes that eschew mere pleasure and seem to capitalize on facing threats and overcoming adversity. Accordingly, Gottschall (2012) asserts that the most prevalent themes of children at play include “being lost, being stolen, being bitten, dying, being stepped on, being angry, calling the police, running away or falling down. In their stories they portray a world of great flux,

anarchy, and disaster” (p. 34). Such themes support Vygotsky’s affirmation that play is a means by which children cope with the rules of social behavior and prepare for the challenges that will mark the onset of adulthood (Berk, 2005).

When Captain Hook (Ariana’s aunt) is finally defeated and the Darling children are restored to their anxious mother (played by Ariana’s own mother), I have scarcely uttered Peter’s last lines before Ariana exclaims, “Let’s do that again!” Though I do confess my affinity for imaginative play in spite of my age, adulthood has hammered out of me the desire to repeat the same sequences over and over! Nevertheless, Maytal (age five), previously Tiger Lily, jumps at the opportunity to play Wendy for round two. Just when I think the sisters are about to have a face-off over the coveted role, a light bulb goes on over Ariana’s head as she exclaims, “Maytal! We can *share* being Wendy!” Based on Freud’s psychodynamic theory, the ego emerges during early childhood, influencing rational thought to compete with the biological impulses of the primitive id (Cole et al, 2009). Moral behavior guided by the superego is not fully developed until the end of early childhood, but Ariana is demonstrating an age-appropriate level of maturity in her attempt at conflict resolution; though not entirely willing to give up the role of Wendy, her ego balances her id to the extent that she offers to “share” the role so both sisters can have their moment in the spotlight. Both girls seem content with the compromise of “sharing” the role of Wendy; so the game begins again from scene one in the Darling nursery, and our romp in the land of make-believe continues.

“When children are at play, they are training their bodies and brains for the challenges of adulthood – they are building social and emotional intelligence” (Gottschall, 2012, p. 41). I would ascertain that the themes surrounding Peter Pan, Ariana’s story of choice, reflect Gottschall’s declaration that play usually centers on challenging and demanding scenarios, helping youngsters rehearse for adult life. Vygotsky also found that children who spend more time at sociodramatic play are more advanced in their intellectual development and show an enhanced ability to understand the feelings of others. They are also seen as more socially competent by their teachers (Cole et al, 2009). To that end, I would be interested in following up this investigation by interviewing Ariana’s teachers and observing her at school to explore how her play with other children might compare to our episode of pretend play at home. I wonder whether she is shy, as her mother implies in the interview, or whether she is more assertive in the absence of an adult to provide the “scaffold” for pretend play.

There were many instances during the aforementioned playtime experience that I found intriguing and worthy of further investigation. For example: In a moment of spontaneous genius, Ariana’s father– who ostensibly overheard our chorus of crowing and singing – sauntered into the family room with a makeshift hook peering out of his shirtsleeve, cleverly crafted from a closet hanger. Despite his cunning contribution, Ariana found that neither his “hook” nor his gender rendered him a superior Captain Hook to her aunt, who had already been cast in the villainous role. In the interview and during play, Ariana kept repeating, “Captain Hook is only a little bit mean, right?” According to Spitz (1988), a child between the ages of three and five “actually inhabits a

universe of shifting realms in which the boundaries between fantasy and reality are not yet firmly established” (p. 435). Therefore, I wonder whether she was frightened of my father taking on the role, as the combination of the convincing “hook” and his male persona might make the character seem too real and convincing as a threat. On the other hand, perhaps she merely prefers consistency throughout her pretend play and therefore insisted on fixed roles (such as her desire to be Wendy each time, rather than experience role-play of other characters).

Finally, I would be interested in replicating this investigation using musical instruments as the focus of our pretend play. As Ariana’s mother stated during the interview (Appendix B), Ariana is “obsessed” with musical instruments and pretends that virtually all household items or toys are instruments when she plays. Ariana exhibits an adult-like familiarity with instruments, noting in the interview that her favorite instrument is the French horn. In fact, I have observed Ariana playing pretend with instruments and have noticed that even in these settings, play maintains its guise as “the work of children” – for example, I have seen her pretending to be playing a violin, and exclaiming, “Oh no! My violin string broke!” I would be fascinated to observe what other conflicts or challenges might arise in a play setting with musical instruments.

My investigation has not only proven to be eye opening and reflective of my research, but has also opened many doors for further exploration of imaginative play. Marvelously, I found that play is indeed “a virtual recapitulation of life’s enigmas” (Gottschall, 2012, p. 32) – and that in many respects, I can enjoy and appreciate a romp in the land of make-believe even more as an adult.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS: DRAMATIC PLAY IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

My case study surrounding Ariana represents my investigation and reflections on dramatic play. However, the work that remained to be done was the practical application of these findings within a context that was of current relevance to my teaching experience. In my third year teaching a class of elevens and starting at a new school as a head teacher, I perceived that imaginative play going “underground” more than ever before. Since dramatic play had revealed itself to me as a learning experience in my interactions with Ariana, I was determined to assess its benefits on my older class of play-deprived elevens. Landreth (2002) asserted that “children learn through play, what cannot easily be taught. It is the way they explore and orient themselves to the actual world of space and time, of things, animals, structures, and people. By engaging in the process of play, children learn to live in our symbolic world of meanings and values, at the same time exploring and experimenting and learning in their own individual ways” (p. 174). Why, then, does make-believe seem to phase out along with the early years of elementary school?

Parents, educators, and even emerging adolescents themselves might argue that children at this age level simply do not engage in make-believe play, thus rendering curricular strategies featuring play irrelevant and undesirable. Indeed, notable developmental psychologists such as Freud and Piaget had little interest in exploring play beyond the early childhood years. Perhaps it made sense to them that play going “underground” mirrored Freud’s developmental stage of latency, when so many impulses and reflexes are biologically and psychologically repressed. Piaget himself

noted that “the more the child adapts himself to the natural and social world, the less he indulges in symbolic distortions and transpositions, because instead of assimilating the external world to the ego, he progressively subordinates the ego to reality” (Singer & Singer, 1990, p. 232).

However, studies conducted by Singer & Singer (1990) prove that “imaginative play persists well beyond the usual cut-off age of six or seven, even though it becomes increasingly internalized . . . in middle childhood overt play is gradually and subtly transformed into private thought. It does not disappear, but a deeper level of inner experience becomes central to the nature of the child” (p. 231). It would appear that imaginative play does remain instinctive during these years, but due to external factors it becomes socially less acceptable for children to engage in such play as they grow older. Singer & Singer (1990) assess how imaginative play takes its forms in “acceptable” outlets such as board games, computer games, and video games, noting that “even the most rule-governed, traditional games . . . all contain a fanciful element of fairy tale or myth” (p. 239).

According to my research, the bottom line seemed to be that play must certainly remain developmentally beneficial and even appropriate during the middle years of childhood and beyond; but hesitations among students and teachers alike were ever-present because society has, directly or indirectly, deemed it not to be so. Singer & Singer (1990) noted that “childrens’ impulse to continue make-believe play in middle childhood represents more than the mere persistence of the preoperational accommodation-assimilation cycle into the concrete operations period. Rather, without

completely realizing it, children may actually find that their taste for pretending actually helps them to master school content, to confront the novelty of the school setting, and to remember and think more clearly than their peers who have already put aside such ‘childish things’” (p. 237-238). Despite the scientific research supporting dramatic play as supportive of learning, Erikson described a child between the ages of seven and thirteen as “mortally afraid of being forced into activities in which he would feel exposed to ridicule or self-doubt” (p. 266). Therefore, I had to strive to make play a “norm” in my classroom.

Stevenson (2002) explains that “while younger children’s thinking tends to be focused on objects in hand and immediate events, these older students are able to think about objects in their relationships to more complex phenomena” (pg. 98). To that end, one consideration for my class of elevens was that play would have to be adapted to complement their stage of development. Singer & Singer (1990) attest that the ages of seven to thirteen “represent a period of accelerated growth and differentiation in a child’s fantasy capacities and perhaps also the most critical period in which self-awareness, beliefs about self and others, and a host of wishes begin to crystallize” (p. 234). At the same time, I actually noticed that the attention spans of my eleven-year-olds tended to be far more erratic than those of the eight-year-olds I had taught. Indeed, Cushman & Rogers (2008) found that the average attention span of an emerging adolescent lasted for seven to eight minutes in a traditional classroom setting. One of the adolescents they interviewed commented, “After being in class a couple of hours, you need to have a break in the yard . . . and play some ball. I sometimes get a

headache. I feel like there's too much stuff in my head and it's going to blow up" (p. 133). In light of these developmental sensitivities, I thought long and hard about how to adapt my material to a maturing eleven-year-old, yet still keep it fanciful. I envisioned curricular strategies that were student-centered, that fostered collaboration among pairs or groups of students; and that provided scaffolding by providing specific guidelines and clearly defined goals.

I chose to focus on a sixth grade class consisting of 22 students, 13 boys and nine girls. Of my three sixth grade classes, this one had encountered the most struggles behaviorally as well as academically. A rowdy and excitable bunch, many of the students in this group are challenged by conceptual thinking that comes hand-in-hand with the demands of sixth grade coursework. Nevertheless, they are highly enthusiastic about learning and enjoy the rewards that come from mastering new skills and concepts. I anticipated that they would be an ideal group in which to apply a method of learning that would veer away from the traditional style to which they had become accustomed. Across the board, the learning environment at their school is high-pressured and grades-oriented. Based solely on their academic performance and attitude towards learning, many of these students felt at odds with the lecture-style approach and struggled with mastering large quantities of information. They embody what Schroeder (2007) said about a curriculum devoid of play, which is that "too little time for unstructured play leads to increased stress for children and parents" (p. 74). Sure enough, this class has the developmental appearance of eleven-year-olds when

arriving at school each morning, but the disposition of overworked and fatigued grownups who have gotten up at the crack of dawn to attend a meeting on Wall Street.

The “playful” approach to learning I aimed to incorporate into the classroom was to take place within somewhat of a unique topic study. The subjects I have taught this year have differed considerably from those taught by most of my colleagues at Bank Street. Throughout my time in the master’s program, I have been employed by Jewish day schools where students study a double curriculum of subjects. Along with math, science, reading, writing, and social studies, their coursework includes a heavily text-based study of Biblical and legal texts that form the basis of Jewish law and tradition. One of the challenges that accompanies this genre of learning is ensuring the material is relevant and accessible to young students.

I had planned to teach my elevens a chapter of Talmud entitled “Pereq Ha-Maphqid,” which translates to “The Chapter of Borrowing.” As its title implies, this Hebrew-Aramaic text discusses the legal implications of borrowing and lending money or property. Admittedly, at first glance it seems that a teacher would have to be utterly oblivious to the interests of eleven-year-olds to even think about approaching such a unit. However, my teaching approach has been shaped by the belief that more important than specificity of content to successful learning is technique. Upon reading the text of the Talmud, I instantly identified four “characters” in the legal discourse, and thus a vision for sixth grade role play began to unfurl in my mind. In English, I named my “characters”: The Freebie, the Hired Guard, the Renter, and the Borrower².

² In the original text, these “characters” are referred to as “shomer hinam,” “shomer sachar,” “socher,” and “sho-el.”

Prior to taking an inside look at the text with my class, I broke up my students into four groups of players so that each miniature “cast” had between five and seven students. Ideally, I would have liked to make these groups smaller to maximize student participation, but in this case the numbers were based on a narrative that revolved around just four characters. Each team was assigned a “character” with a brief description of its role (Appendix C). Each team was also assigned a modern-day scenario featuring a legal case relevant to their age and life experience, but still compliant with its description in the Talmud. Providing the students with these scenarios was my way of scaffolding their comprehension of the material, while still empowering them to have autonomy and work as a team to develop their interpretation of the assignment. I explained that each team would be responsible to “teach” their particular “character” within the given scenario to their classmates. Each group was provided with writing materials, props, costumes, and assigned roles. Along with their presentations, each group was assigned to teach a distinct set of vocabulary terms from the original text. Finally, in order to hold each group accountable during the presentations of their classmates, each student received a study packet which they were required to complete throughout the duration of the dramatic representations.

Three class sessions were devoted to this introduction to the study. The students were collectively engaged and excited throughout the process of the study, including the classwork subsequent to the role play. As a whole, the class successfully completed their skit assignments with creativity and flair. The majority of them also completed and submitted the accompanying work packets with targeted accuracy. In light of this

group's rowdy nature and its struggle with transitions, clearly defined and structured class work was key to keeping them on task. Furthermore, the students varied in their ability to craft their assigned topics into full-fledged skits. It was important to create heterogeneous groups in which students with stronger writing skills could craft a coherent script, students comfortable in front of a group could play out the lead roles, and so forth.

I responded to the success of this project by incorporating costumes and role play as regular tools used in my sixth grade classroom. Even though I teach Talmud, which features discourse from the post-Biblical era, the Talmudic text will often reference stories from the Hebrew canon that contain structured narratives, characters, settings, and themes. For example, I studied the tractate of Megillah with my students, which discusses the various laws and stipulations concerning the ceremonial reading of the Hebrew Bible. This tractate references a post-Biblical decree, in which Ezra the Scribe moved a mass immigration of Jews back to Israel during the Second Temple Era. During this wave of immigration, the Jews struggled with acts of terror imposed by their Samaritan neighbors. To strengthen Jewish faith and adherence to Jewish law, Ezra proclaimed that communal readings of the Hebrew Bible would take place not only on the Sabbath, but on Mondays and Thursdays (a tradition that is still maintained in Jewish communities across the globe). To draw the students "back in time," I brought a stash of my own costumes to school and had them dress in character. I also instructed assigned "architects" to use white board markers to draw the skyline of Babylonia on the surrounding white boards, which accounted for the inclusion of students who did not

necessarily want to play. Based on the historic information we learned in class, the students created a script (Appendix D) that introduced our next section of the Talmud.

These strategies prompted me to reflect on how to integrate the benefits of role play into a rapidly evolving society. It occurred to me that instead of limiting role play to the physical realm of our bodies, perhaps it was a method that could extend into the boundaries of educational technology that had become a hallmark of learning for this generation. I decided that in lieu of an exam on *Pereq Ha-maphqid*, I would challenge my students to create animated scenes in which they themselves generated the characters as well as the role play. After trying out several different computer programs and consulting with the head of technology at my school, I selected an animation website called “Powtoon” for this assignment. This site enables students to select from a cast of characters and preprogrammed settings, in addition to creating and uploading their own. For this assessment, I divided students into pairs or groups of three and provided each with a sample scenario to illustrate from the text of *Pereq Ha-maphqid*³. The students were provided with a rubric of requirements that detailed how to respond to the assessment (Appendix E), but were encouraged to be as creative as they desired within that framework. As part of their presentation, each pair or group of students had to construct an example of the assigned textual reference that might occur in contemporary times. For example, the Talmud discusses the legal ramifications of a situation in which a cow dies of natural causes while being watched by an appointed guardian. Two of my students adapted this narrative to a pet goldfish who dies while

³For example, one assignment prompted students to create a screenplay that illustrated scenarios of “negligence” in guarding someone’s property as defined by the Talmud, such as putting the object out of sight, allowing minors to watch the object, or not locking up the object properly.

being watched by a friend, thus applying the Talmudic discourse to a situation of which they could conceive and personally relate.

I discerned that the greatest benefit of this assessment was its benefit for students who were not as apt to achieve high scores on tests or written assignments. Because Talmud class is taught with a combination of Hebrew and English language, some students struggle with expressing their knowledge when assessed in a more traditional manner. These students not only were able to demonstrate their knowledge with more competence using the Powtoon platform, but also reported enjoying the work much more so than other assignments. Another beneficial aspect to this assessment was that it necessitated collaboration, in a similar manner to the introductory role play activity to the unit.⁴

To measure the reactions of my students to these curricular modifications, I created a survey entitled “Role Play in Middle School Classrooms” (Appendix G). After listening to my directions, The survey revealed that 75% of students believed dramatic play helped sixth graders enjoy learning more. 70% reported that when role play is used in class, they feel more focused. 60% said they preferred to volunteer to play roles in class (as opposed to the other 40%, who preferred the role of the “audience,” the “architect” who designed the setting using markers or three-dimensional materials, or the narrator). 45% claimed that role play helped them achieve better accuracy on assessments and enabled them to recall material with more ease.

⁴ For samples of the Powtoon projects, refer to the URL links in Appendix F.

The results of the survey indicated that my sixth graders were less concerned with embellishments such as costumes, accents, props, or the surrounding environment. Overall, the feature of dramatic play that excited them seemed to be the experiential aspect of breathing life into the narratives they encountered on the pages of ancient textbooks. Despite their age, the response of my eleven-year-olds was not all that different from a group of early childhood students I had once observed at play in the park, creating an entire “feast” using nothing but mud and sticks. Certainly, the core component of make-believe involves the imaginative stamina to visualize characters, relationships, concepts, and plot twists even in the absence of tangible items.

CONCLUSION

Ashiabi (2007) explicated that interactive play enhances learning because “it requires the capacities for reflecting before acting, sensing the perspective of others, and emotional understanding and regulation” (p. 202). Based on my own observations coupled with the student feedback I received, the majority of the students expressed being positively impacted by curricular strategies that incorporated role play and dramatic play. In spite of these results, a closer look at the survey results revealed that a significant number of students reported feeling “neutral” in many categories. While that pattern might reflect the characteristic “nonplussed” attitude that one encounters at the dawn of emerging adolescence, it reignited within me the awareness that there is no “one way” to teach a child. In the Book of Proverbs, King Solomon authored a piece of timeless advice for teachers: “Hanoch lana-ar al pi darko,” which translates as, “Teach a child according to his way.” Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, a 19th century rabbinic leader of German Jewry, applied this phrase to the upbringing of Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah in the Hebrew Bible. Although Jacob grew up the righteous son while Esau is portrayed as wicked, the narrative of these opposite brothers indicates that Esau was actually born with potential to be greater than his brother. According to Hirsch, the parenting mishap that occurred was an attempt to educate their twin sons in an identical framework - an approach which turned out to be ideal for Jacob, but not the correct method for Esau. In this dramatic case, the child put through the incompatible system ended up completely immoral and estranged from the teachings of his parents. To my mind, this message emphasizes the uniqueness of

each child and the extent to which each has different needs, preferences, and talents when it comes to learning.

In a similar vein, I was fascinated to discover a source from my learning of ancient Biblical texts that mirrored the findings of modern experts in education. Menachem Meiri, a Spanish commentator who lived during the 13th and 14th centuries, expounded upon the symbolism of the Menorah's eight branches. He explained that each branch symbolizes a distinct mode of intelligence: the ability to draw conclusions, the knowledge of nature⁵, the knowledge of the soul⁶, the knowledge of biology, music, metaphysics⁷, and the knowledge of Torah, which stands at the center and is considered the foundation of the other six branches. Evidently, this source mirrors the contemporary findings of Howard Gardner as detailed in his Theory of Multiple Intelligences. While there are variations as to the specifics of their respective modes of intelligence, the parallels between them are too powerful to overlook. Educational outlooks such as these, which span the centuries, shaped my perspective on learning to the extent that a friend and I have spent years imagining a space to which we refer as the "Menorah School" - a learning environment which we dream of creating that, echoing the symbolism of the candelabra's branches, reimagines the meaning of intelligence and caters to a variety of learning styles and preferences..

In my observations with dramatic play and role play, my inspiration stemmed from the desire to break out of the frontal models of education I encountered in a very traditional school setting. I desired to open up a platform from which children could

⁵ Such as chemistry or physics.

⁶ Rabbi Aharon Soloveichik explains this branch to be psychology.

⁷ Philosophy.

thrive on self-expression and become the masters of their own learning. My experiences over the course of this study revealed that dramatic play yields positive results in learning for many students across the ages; yet this research only just touches the surface of the broader conversation surrounding multiple learning modalities. I recognize that while some of my students thrive using role play in the classroom, others learn best through outlets that are artistic, kinesthetic, or language-based. As I move forward in my career, I maintain a longstanding professional commitment in the expansion of my practice to accommodate a host of learning variations, to cultivate an environment in which students of multiple intelligences are given the opportunity to excel and thrive.

Plato was quoted to have said: “You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.” Certainly, my exploration of imaginative play and role play has been endlessly eye opening, and has taught me a tremendous amount about my students as well as my own teaching practice. In response to my independent study centered on dramatic play, my mentor at Bank Street, Madeleine Ray, concurred that imagination had indeed gone underground in too many middle school classrooms. In her words, “Life will get serious soon enough” for these children, and phasing out play in the middle years of childhood robs learning of one of its most joyful components. No matter the age I teach, I aspire to continue shaping a learning space that emphasizes the value of make-believe right alongside with “real life” as it is experienced.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Reflections and Observations on “Playing Peter Pan”

*We act out EVERY scene.

*Maytal agrees to be Tiger Lily, but wants to be Wendy the second time; Ariana will not budge. However, she proffers: “Maytal, we can share being Wendy!”

*She follows my lead and acts out all the songs and the lines.

*She loves being lifted in the air over and over when she is “flying” to Neverland.

*Her absolute favorite part is “building a house around Wendy” while she is sleeping.

*Loves the pieces with singing, such as “I gotta crow” and “ugga wump” – she and her sister both correct details so that our song and dance promises to be as similar to the film as possible.

*She is able to pretend that blocks are for building a house, and able to pretend that objects exist that are not really there – indicative of development towards independent and esoteric/abstract thought.

*Eliana plays Captain Hook and we stage a fight. Ariana is totally in character when walking the plank. She is actually a little frightened of Eliana and asks her to just be a “little bit” mean.

*Every time we play, insists on characters being consistent.

*Afterwards, loves talking about what we did and referring back to play.

Themes of Ariana's Play:

- *Music, song, and dance
- *Repetition and consistency
- *"Girly" (girl characters, domestic preferences)
- *Adults leading the way
- *Abstract thought
- *Conflict resolution (sharing being Wendy)

Further Questions:

- *Interviewing Ariana's teacher to see how she interacts with children at school
- *I would love to do a parallel study on Ariana's sisters, ages five and 18 months

Appendix B: Interview with Mother and Daughter on Make-Believe Play

Featuring Aviva (age 29, mother of three) and Ariana (age three-and-a-half)

S: Can you comment on the social and emotional development of Ariana?

Av: She seems more socially developed than other three-year-olds I've seen, although she's very shy; but once she overcomes her shyness, she loves interacting with other children. She and her friends run over to each other happily when they see each other, and they instantly want to play together. They're at the point where they often parallel play, but also join together to play in certain scenarios. Ariana also likes to interact with older children, such as with her sister Maytal (*age 5*) and her sister's friends. She engages in imaginative play with friends, whereas role-play usually takes place with older children. (Although I don't see her with her friends on a daily basis, since she mostly plays with them at school.) Emotionally, I think she's right on target for a three-year-old.

S: Can you tell me about what she likes to play, or play with? Are there any recurring themes in her play?

Av: She is obsessed with music and musical instruments, and almost every toy in our house becomes a "musical instrument." She also draws a lot from things she sees on television or reads in a book, so she will recreate those scenarios with things in our house even if they're not exactly the same. For example, she took a little stuffed puppy from our house that she puts in a basket and calls Toto and pretends she is Dorothy

(from "The Wizard of Oz"). Some things she's very specific about, like she gets very upset that the basket she uses doesn't look like the basket from the movie. On the other hand, the dog looks nothing like Toto but for some reason that doesn't seem to bother her. She's very into pretending she is in a band. She'll take a play drum or even just a box, drum on it, and say, "This comes from Africa." So many times her play goes back to music. She also pretend plays with food. She's not really into puzzles. She likes coloring. She likes books, and she's at a point where she's starting to understand jokes. Oh, and she loves playing on the playground.

S: What does she like best on the playground?

Av: I guess I would say the swings, though she doesn't spend ALL her time on the swings.

S: Does her play ever seem like it's based on real life scenarios that she has experienced?

Av: (*stops to think*) Sometimes she will sing the songs she learns at school, and make up her own "fun time" with those. I can't think of an example other than that, though.

S: For example, does she play going to bed or brushing her teeth?

Av: She definitely sometimes plays that she's going to sleep, but often with Maytal. She also loves sleep! But a lot of time when I see her doing that kind of play, it's more with

older kids like Maytal or Maytal's friends. Though I don't usually see her at school. Sometimes she will say, "We're going to the store."

S: Can you comment on how she plays with her two sisters?

Av: With Ayla (*18 months*), it's more like giving her toys, or building a tower for her to knock down, or she'll play on her level like putting a baby doll in a crib and covering it up, or cooking food with her. When she plays with Maytal, the games are driven by Maytal in most cases. They usually play board games together or they do role-play games, like Maytal is the mother and Ariana is the daughter, and that kind of thing. Or sometimes Barbie dolls.

S: Does Ariana ever contest being the daughter and say she wants to be the mother?

Av: I don't know if she ever says she wants to be the mother, but there are times she says she wants to be something else. It could be she associates mother role with Maytal because she's older, I'm not sure.

S: Do you see any strengths of hers come out when she's playing, whether social, emotional, creative, or artistic?

Av: I mean, I think she's very imaginative, like I see her imagination working. I see her ability to recreate things that she has seen in other places....sometimes emotionally I'm impressed with how she handles situations, like, if it's not necessarily going her way....I don't know.

S: Okay. What strategies does she use when she plays?

Av: Like on her own?

S: Or with another person.

Av: I've seen her say things like, "We can both do it!" or "We can share/take turns."

What are other examples of strategies?

S: I don't know.

Av: Or I've seen her, like, trade toys to get what she wants. "Here, you can have this" (usually to Ayla).

S: What skills do you see she has when she plays?

Av: Well, Maytal has certain things that are harder for her than other kids....and I can see Ariana can do some things that Maytal has trouble with. She has strength in her hands....her play guitar has a strap you have to push and pull to close it, and it's even hard for me – and she's able to do it herself. It's difficult for her to do things like get a Polly Pocket dressed, but that's normal for a three-year-old. She knows how to hold an instrument very well! *(laughs)*

S: Because people taught her, or because she just knows how?

Av: No one taught her, but she saw on TV or in person. Her biggest thing now is guitar.

(Ariana runs in)

Ar: Maytal hit me!

Av: Awww come here.

Ar: I want more noodles!

S: Do you know that in my school we're learning about why children love to play so much? And do you know I told them Ariana and I like to play Peter Pan together? And that I like to be Wendy, and you like to be Peter Pan?

Ar: And Maytal is Tiger Lily!

S: Do you remember who Aunt Eli was?

Ar: Captain Hook!

S: Were you scared?

Ar: I wasn't scared at all. We're going back to Cincinnati!

Av: We're not going back to Cincinnati yet.

Ar: Remember Aunt Eli was being a little bit mean?

S: *(laughs)* Just a little bit mean?

S: When she's playing, does she prefer to play alone, with other children, or with adults?

Av: Not with adults.

S: Even though she loved playing with her aunts?

Av: I'm not saying she doesn't enjoy playing with adults, but I more see her playing with other children. In our house I see her most alone, then with Maytal, last with adults.

S: Ariana can I ask you a question? What's your favorite thing you like to play with?

Ar: Ummmmmm....I like to play with a jump rope.

S: Do you know how to jump rope?

Ar: There's a jump rope downstairs!

S: Do you know how to use it?

Ar: No....Maytal does!

S: Do you want to learn how to use it?

Ar: Ummm I don't know how. *(laughs)*

S: Do you like watching Maytal playing with it?

Ar: Yes.

Av: What do YOU know how to play with?

Ar: Ummmm...I like to play ballet! *(laughs)*

S: What do you like the best? Playing with your friends at school, or with Maytal, or with your aunts?

Ar: *(points at me)*

S: Do you also like playing with Maytal? And your friends?

Ar: *(nods)*

S: Do you like playing by yourself?

Ar: I like playing with Ayla!

S: What about by yourself?

Ar: Yes.

S: When you play games, do you always...

Ar: I could play Candyland! And Kosherland!

S: When you play games and you pretend to be somebody, do you always like to be the girl?

Ar: Like, I like to be Wendy.

S: Do you ever like to be Peter Pan or Captain Hook?

Ar: Ummm...Wendy. *(laughs)*

S: Do you and Maytal ever play house together?

Ar: She doesn't play house with me.

Av: Yes she does!

Ar: But sometimes she doesn't. I play hopscotch!! And also Maytal does.

S: When you play house do you like to be mommy or sister?

Ar: Sister.

S: Do you also like being the mommy?

Ar: I don't want to be the mommy.

S: And you love playing with instruments, right? How come?

Ar: Because they have instruments in the Fresh Beat Band.

Av: What about clarinet? That's not in Fresh Beat Band.

Ar: I know but umm....my favorite instrument is the French horn!

S: How do you know what a French horn is?

Av: Where did you see a French horn?

Ar: The Marvelous Musical Mansion. Also my favorite thing is gymnastics.

S: Do you like animals?

Ar: Yeah, there's animals at the zoo.

S: Mommy told me sometimes you like to pretend that you're Dorothy.

Ar: Yeah! I have red slippers! But they don't fit me anymore!

Av: No, they're starting to fit you.

S: I think I remember when you got those, did Savti get them for you?

Ar: No, Mommy.

Av: No, Savti got them, remember at the mall?

Ar: But you were there.

Av: Yes.

Ar: Remember there was a princess castle?

Av: Yes, at the Disney store.

S: When you play that you're Dorothy, do you use a dog that looks like Toto?

Ar: Yeah, we have a dog named Toto!

S: Does it look like Toto in the movie?

Ar: Um, we have two pink dogs! *(laughs)* We have one for Peter Pan, too.

Av: We have one big pink dog she pretends is Nana, and the other one she pretends is Toto.

S: But does it look like Toto?

Ar: *(shakes her head)*

S: But you don't mind that it looks different?

Ar: The dog named Toto is Ayla's!

Av: Yeah, it sleeps with her in her crib.

Ar: I got side bangs! These are my bangs!

S: I know, you showed me in Cincinnati, remember? So beautiful!

S: When she plays, she always likes being the girl character, right?

Av: I believe so. Once in a while she'll pretend to be a male character.

S: Anything else about gender development when she plays?

Av: What do you mean?

S: I don't know. *(laughs)* Does she choose pink things?

Av: I mean, she's a girl. She likes girl things.

S: Do you notice anything about her temperament when she plays?

Av: It depends on what she's playing and whether she's imitating something.

S: Like remember Maytal was kind of aggressive, always sent dolls to time out?

Av: Ariana isn't like that unless she's imitating Maytal. I would say she's more naturally sensitive.

S: Does she ever play being characters that conflict with how she looks, like Tiana *(the black princess from "The Princess and the Frog")*? Does she notice that character has different skin color?

Av: She does notice, and might have commented on it before (dark skin, not black – she doesn't have that label for it) but she doesn't usually play that character. I don't know if that's because she looks different or if we just don't have a lot of Tiana things.

S: Does she ever ask if a character is Jewish?

Av: Maytal does, but I don't think Ariana is old enough yet to think about that yet.

Appendix C: Role Play Descriptions for Introduction to Perek Ha-maphqid**THE FREEBIE**

In your skit, you will be teaching your classmates about two important terms from פרק המפקיד:

שומר חנם - someone who watches something for somebody else, for free

אונס – when an accident happens that causes the object being watched to be lost, stolen, or damaged, even if the person watching it was careful to guard it well

Bruno has a dentist appointment right after school. He does not want to bring his knapsack with him to the dentist. He asks his best friend Judd to take his knapsack home with him, keep it at his house overnight, and bring it back to school the next morning. Judd is acting as the **שומר חנם** - he is watching Bruno's knapsack, for nothing in return. When he gets home from school, Judd puts the knapsack in a safe place, right next to his own knapsack in his bedroom. Judd even locked the door to his room before leaving for lacrosse practice. But Judd's six-year-old brother, Spike, is a menace who is always getting into his things and is so mischievous that he knows how to pick locks. Sure enough, Spike breaks into the bedroom and colors all over Bruno's knapsack, breaks the zipper, and leaves it in an unfortunate condition. This situation is called **אונס** – an accident that damages the object being watched, even though Judd did his best to protect it.

The next day at school, Judd is embarrassed to show Bruno what happened to his knapsack. However, Bruno knows what a menace Spike can be, and he understands that Judd watched the knapsack as carefully as he could. He accepts that Judd does not owe him any money or replacement for the knapsack.

THE HIRED GUARD

In your skit, you will be teaching your classmates about two important terms from פרק המפקיד:

שומר שכר - someone who is paid by the owner of an object to guard the object

פְּשִׁיעָה - negligence (when something happens to the object because of carelessness)

Clarisse is insanely excited to be missing ten days of school to go on a family cruise to the Galapagos Islands. However, she just got a new iPad mini for her bat mitzvah, and she does not want to bring it on the trip in case it gets damaged. She is nervous to leave it at home, too, without anyone there. Luckily, she knows she can count on her good friend Hugo to keep an eye on it while she is away. Hugo feels reluctant to watch such an expensive item, but Clarisse promises to pay him \$50 if he will watch it for those ten days. Hugo agrees to this business deal. Hugo is a **שומר שכר**, which means he is being hired to watch the iPad. For the first five days, Hugo is extra careful to take the iPad with him everywhere he goes, keep the passcode on, clean the screen each night, and keep it out of the sight of other kids at school. By the sixth day, he starts playing on the iPad once in a while, but still makes sure to put it back in its case and keep it where he can see it. On the ninth day, during recess, Hugo longs to join in the football game with the other students. He has watched the iPad so carefully all this time, and Clarisse will be back tomorrow. Just this once, he leaves the iPad inside his backpack next to a school bench so he can spend the last twenty minutes of recess playing football.

Much to his dismay, when Hugo opens his backpack after the game - the iPad has disappeared! It has most likely been stolen. Hugo was negligent to watch the object, which is called **פְּשִׁיעָה**. Since he was being paid to watch it, he must pay Clarisse for the iPad.

THE RENTER

In your skit, you will be teaching your classmates about two important terms from פרק המפקיד:

someone who rents an object from somebody else – שוכר

when an object is lost or stolen – גְּנִיבָה וְאֶבְיָדָה

Hansel is a first year student at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry⁸. He is delighted to have been sorted into Gryffindor House, but bummed that he did not make the Quidditch team. Meanwhile, his sister Gretel did make the team as Seeker and gets to ride a Firebolt broomstick. Hansel is incredibly envious of his sister, and wishes he could have a Firebolt of his own. Hansel begs his sister for a ride on the Firebolt, but Gretel is very overprotective of her champion broomstick. Finally, Hansel simply cannot take it anymore and offers to pay Gretel one hundred Galleons if she will let him ride the Firebolt. Stunned, Gretel hands the broomstick over, and Hansel hops on in sheer glee. Hansel is a **שוכר** - he is a renter, because he paid Gretel to use her broomstick.

Hansel has never had such a wonderful feeling as flying above the school grounds below. Even though he knows it is risky, Hansel decides to fly right over the Forbidden Forest - an area the Quidditch players have been told to avoid. Still, Hansel is paying a lot of money for this joy ride, and he wants to make the most of it. As the forest comes into sight, a flying Hippogriff bangs into him midair, swipes the broomstick from his grasp, and leaves Hansel falling to the ground. The broom was stolen by the Hippogriff - **גְּנִיבָה**. Fortunately, Hansel is a good Charms student and remembered a levitation spell that saved his life. Unfortunately, though, he has to pay Gretel for the Firebolt since he had paid her to use it and had assumed responsibility for it.

⁸ A cultural reference to the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling.

THE BORROWER

In your skit, you will be teaching your classmates about two important terms from פרק המפקיד:

שואל - someone who borrows an object from someone else

מזיד - someone who purposely causes damage to an object that belongs to someone else

Shirley is the only kid in her grade who has not read the new book Wonder by R.J. Palacio. She feels totally left out that everyone is talking about it, while she stands on the sidelines feeling clueless. During after-school clubs, she sees the book sticking out of Laverne's backpack. She begs Laverne to let her borrow the book so she can read it that evening. Since Laverne has already finished the book, she agrees. Shirley is a **שואל** - she is borrowing the book, for free.

Shirley wants to read the book that night, but gets distracted when she gets home from school because she has homework and drum lessons. She goes to sleep and forgets about it. But the next day in school, everyone is talking about it again and she feels left out. During science class, Shirley takes out the book and slides it inside the opening of her desk so she can read during class. Suddenly, she looks up and sees the science teacher, Mr. Barrett, narrowing his eyes at her and starting to walk towards her. He must know she is reading during class! Shirley has already had two detentions this semester, and one more will mean a phone call to her parents. On a whim, Shirley flings the book across the room into the dry ice bucket. Luckily this saves her from detention; but when Shirley picks up the book after class, the dry ice has totally ruined the cover and many of the pages. Shirley is responsible to pay Laverne for the damages since she threw the book into the dry ice on purpose, **במזיד**, which caused the damage.

Appendix D: Student-Generated Script, Tractate Megillah, Chapter 3*Ezra the Scribe***NARRATOR**

Our story takes place 23 centuries ago. At this time, the Jewish people lived in Babylonia. This country had become a place that Jews now called “home” as a result of גלות בבל. In the year 3408, the Jews finally got permission to rebuilt the המקדש and return to ארץ ישראל!

But around this time, another major change happened for the Jewish people. Until now, there had always been נביאים among בני ישראל who helped them communicate with Hashem. Suddenly, נבואה began to fade away. The very last נביאים were named חגי, זכריה, and מלאכי. After these three prophets died, there was no one left to communicate directly with Hashem.

EZRA

But instead, the people had me! Allow me to introduce myself. My name is עזרא הסופר – Ezra the Scribe. But you can call me Ezra, for short. I was born in בבל like most Jews in my generation, but my heart has always been in Jerusalem. By profession, I am a scribe, a teacher, and a כהן – a triple threat! I may not get נבואה, but I would say I’m pretty well qualified to lead עם ישראל in their return to ארץ ישראל.

KING ARTACHSHASHTA

I’m not even going to introduce myself, because none of you will be able to pronounce my name. All you need to know about me is that I am the ruler of Persia, so you can just call me “your royal highness.” Ezra, you’re the perfect man for the job. Not only am I going to help you return to Israel to lead the Jewish people, but I am appointing you a high-ranking officer there. You hereby are invested with the power to appoint judges and officers of law, to levy monetary fines, to impose banishment, and even to impose the death penalty!

EZRA

Your highness!!! How can I ever thank you?! At long last the Jews will be redeemed!

NARRATOR

Ezra left בבל in the springtime during the month of ניסן, ready to begin a new life in his homeland. He brought lots of gold and silver with him to donate to the בית המקדש. Back then, there were no cars or trains or planes; Ezra had to travel by donkey. It took him almost six months to get to Israel, which meant he did not arrive until the month of אב. When he finally got there, Ezra was in for a bit of a shock.

JEW #1

Tonight is the night. I'm finally going to propose to Kessia.

JEW #2

Dude, she's a Samaritan! I know she's a looker and all, but if you marry her, your kids won't be Jewish, and you won't be a part of the Jewish community anymore!

JEW #1

Dude, marrying Jewish is so last Temple Era. There are as many Samaritans in Israel now as there are Jews - so what's the big deal? The truth is, we're all related anyway. I don't see a reason to limit my marriage options just because we have different religions.

EZRA

לא, לא! מה אתה עושה? זה אסור להתחנן אם הגויים

JEW #2

Sorry dude, we don't speak Hebrew.

EZRA

AN ISRAELI JEW WHO DOESN'T SPEAK HEBREW? Oy vey! Something must be done!

NARRATOR

Ezra decided to call an assembly. He gathered the כהנים and לויים, along with some teachers and political figures.

EZRA

I came to Israel to find spirituality; but the spirituality is no where to be found. The Jewish people here in Israel are even more disconnected from the Jews living in גלות back in Babylonia! What can we do?

SHECHANIAH

Ezra, we've been waiting a long time for a guy like you! You couldn't be more right! We have committed a crime against God and against our people by marrying non-Jewish women. The only way to change our ways is to give up our non-Jewish wives and children, and part ways with them. Ezra, we must call upon the people to send away their non-Jewish wives. Be strong, firm, and fearless!

SAMARITAN #1

Who do those filthy Jews think they are? They come into Israel, OUR homeland, and all of a sudden we're not good enough to marry! We'll show them!

NARRATOR

For the next twelve years, the Samaritans terrorized the Jewish people. They smashed their homes, burned their property, and chased the Jewish people from the land. Despite these unfortunate events, they reminded the Jews that they had to stick together. The intermarriage

problem was solved. In terms of protecting the Jews against these attacks, Ezra was going to need help. The man who became his partner in protecting the Jewish people was named Nehemiah; but, that's another story for another time.

Appendix E: Powtoon Project Rubric

Criteria:	Points:	Points Earned:	Comments:
Project includes four animated slides	5		
Title Slide is included with names, class, seder, masechet, pereq and Mishna	5		
Assigned text from the Mishna is included, and is translated/explained	10		
All characters in assigned Mishna are portrayed and clearly identified	10		
Presentation includes "real life" situation based on the Mishna (invented by you and your partner)	15		
Interpretation of the Mishna is accurate	20		
Being productive and cooperative during work periods for assignment	20		
Creativity and Layout	15		

Appendix F: Powtoon Project Samples

<http://www.powtoon.com/show/f6VfemVJ36B/powtoon-mishna-project-elan-and-chai/>

<https://www.powtoon.com/show/bFWYoWiJhrE/mishna-powtoon-sokolowb/#/>

<http://www.powtoon.com/show/dr0HboUutDZ/ita-n-g-and-lauren-lepor/#/>

Appendix G: Survey on Role Play in Middle School Classrooms

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
When role play is used in class, I feel that I am more focused on the lesson.					
When the teacher assigns roles or characters in class, I usually like to volunteer to play a role.					
When we have learned a concept using role play, I find that I can recall the material with more ease.					
When costumes are used during role play in class, I find that I am more attentive to the lesson.					
When props are used during role play in class, I find that I am more attentive to the lesson.					
I prefer having a script in front of me when acting out a role during class.					
I prefer making up the script as I go along when acting out a role during class.					
When we learn a concept using role play, I achieve higher accuracy on tests or assessments.					
When acting as a character in class, I feel more confident doing or saying certain things that I would not do or say as my regular self.					
Acting out a role during class boosts my self-esteem.					
When we engage in role play during class, I feel more excited about learning.					

When my classmates and I interact through role play, I experience positive feelings towards them.					
When a classmate acts out a role or a scene, it helps me understand an idea more clearly.					
When I act out a role or a scene myself, it helps me understand an idea more clearly.					
When my classmates or I use voices or accents that are "in character," I am more focused and understand the material with more clarity.					
I most enjoy acting as a character or as a role during class.					
I most enjoy acting as a narrator or announcer during instances of role play.					
I most enjoy being in the "audience" and watching my classmates act during role play.					
I prefer when role play involves acting out clues using body language instead of talking, such as charades.					
Dramatic play can help sixth graders learn and understand material better.					
Dramatic play can help sixth graders enjoy learning more.					
Additional Comments:					

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