

Students shine on Hillel Project Night

By BOB FRYER
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Kindergarten student Rachel Hatfield was an adorable walking greeting card. Fifth grader Sydney Gold was an eloquent Iroquois Indian, and fourth-grader Briana Miele was a fountain of information — about Texas, the Alamo and the American Southwest.

These students and others assumed many roles during Project Night at Hillel Academy of Tampa: prancing ballerinas, miniature meteorologists, authentically costumed Indians, cutie pie kindergartners and serious-minded pre-teens deeply touched by their Holocaust lessons.

Hundreds of parents and siblings flocked to the school to see what the students have been studying. Classrooms and hallways were crowded as parents munched on snacks, chatted with teachers, listened to presentations from students and viewed displays.

“With project-based learning, the students are able to answer questions that are of interest to them; if the learning is put into the hands of the students, they will own the knowledge,” said Head of School Amy Wasser, adding that

the projects encouraged collaboration, cooperation and compromise. For the older students the projects helped them hone skills in research, writing and public speaking.

For the 4- and 5-year-olds in teacher Lisa Cohen’s transitional kindergarten class, the project was “What I Want To Be When I Grow Up.” Cohen brought in a pediatrician, a deputy and a chef and persuaded Hillel middle school teacher Jessica Witcoff to demonstrate belly dancing. The kids learned how doctors heal the sick, about police and fire safety, and about healthy and unhealthy foods. “They also learned that you must know how to read and write to do the things they want to do as grownups,” Cohen said.

In Helen Fried’s kindergarten class, the project was “Words Matter.” The youngsters learned that some words are helpful and some are hurtful. The children selected phrases they liked and created greeting cards they wore like sandwich board ads.

Laney Kay’s first grade students brought in photos of themselves from baby days to present, pasting together a timeline of their lives. Their two-part project, which

included Lisa Caine’s class, helped students learn about their family and their place in the world. They created a family tree going back to great grandparents and learned about their neighborhood, city, state and country.

Second graders studied marine life in Rebecca Guindine’s class, learning about the five different zones of an ocean. Their favorite was the Hadal zone, the deepest one, where marine life uses chemical reactions to produce phosphorescent light on their bodies, Guindine said. The students visited websites and consulted books to learn about marine environments.

Sara Wilson’s third grade class learned about hurricanes and their destructive power. She timed the lesson to begin when hurricane season is most active, so kids could track some of them on maps. They learned how hurricanes form, how to prepare for them, and what hap-



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Shira Tal shows a timeline of her still young life, with photos of herself and family, that she created for a first grade Project Night display. Students learned about themselves, their families and their community.

pens when a big storm strikes. An engineer visited and talked about how to make homes safe. The kids also learned about scientific instruments meteorologists use to study and track hurricanes. On display were wind speed gauges the kids made from pencils and paper cups.

“Don’t mess with Texas,” Briana Miele advised parents visiting a display on Southwestern states in teacher Randie Specter’s fourth grade class. She and Noah Pearlman and Courtney Elias chattered nonstop, sharing knowledge of America’s Southwest. Noah pointed out that 50 native tribes are



(L-R) Carly Rodriguez, Daniel Freedman, Rachel Weiss and Hannah Fishman participated in a study of how Gypsies and homosexuals were persecuted during the Holocaust. The seventh graders created a model of a hand showing a pink triangle. Nazi Germans used color-coded triangles to identify those they targeted, such as pink for homosexuals, yellow for Jews. The incomplete wire ends of the fingers represent the struggle of homosexuals to escape death camps.

represented in the Oklahoma state flag. Courtney named the Arizona state flower, the Saguaro cactus, and state bird, the cactus wren. The class was divided into groups that studied different regions of the nation. Each student was assigned a state in their region, learning that state’s history, geography, government and economy, as well as fun facts, Specter said. Students also made video presentations about the states.

Diana Elozory, Asher King, Sydney Gold and Shira Jacobson, each dressed as Iroquois Indians, greeted visitors to the fifth grade class co-taught by Pamela Bromberg and Burl Peters. The students delivered a speech about the Iroquois, each taking a part in explaining how the Indians lived and what they used for food, shelter and clothing. The class learned about five different American Indian tribes and how the tribes used natural resources to survive. The students also learned scientific classifications for plants and animals in each tribal region and made authentic looking costumes. They also built a tee pee, totem pole and plank house.

Sixth graders created an on-line history simulation about the SS *St. Louis*, a ship carrying hundreds of Jews seeking refuge from Nazi Germany. Using primary documents, students built a case to show that those involved in blocking the ship from docking in Cuba, the United States and Canada knew what was happening in Germany and Europe in 1939 and that they were essentially sending many of these people back to their deaths.

Students in Amy Wasser’s seventh grade Judiacs class learned about various groups targeted by Nazis for extermination, with an emphasis on the Sinti-Roma Gypsies.

At one display, Amber Shemesh explained that gypsies originated from two tribes, one in Egypt and another in India, and were persecuted because they did not look Aryan, did not dress conventionally, and lived as “free spirits.” She said they often were falsely accused of theft and sent to death camps.

Also on display was a giant paper and wire hand, missing flesh on the fingertips and showing a large pink triangle in the palm. Seventh grader Carly Rodriguez explained that the wire mesh in place of missing flesh represented barbed wire surrounding Nazi death camps and the pink triangle indicated the person was homosexual. Daniel Freedman pointed to a “pink list” with names of suspected homosexuals to be rounded up for death camps. He said color-coded triangles were used by Nazis to identify groups they targeted: yellow for Jews, pink for homosexuals, and brown for gypsies. Other colors were assigned for Jehovah’s Witnesses and the mentally ill. The targeted groups were forced to wear those triangles — visual symbols of Nazi hatred.

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