

9 Adar

Creating a Class *Haskama*

Many teachers are in the habit of creating a class contract outlining expectations of derech erez—how students should behave and treat one another. This activity is designed to help build a class contract, a class “haskama” (community agreement), to deal with interpersonal relationships and the classroom environment (as opposed to expectations regarding homework, supplies, etc.)

Background:

Throughout history, Jewish communities created *haskamot* (agreements) to help guide individuals as to how to behave towards one another. These agreements could only be made when all members of the community were present and only if all, or at least most, members of the community came to consensus on them.

Goals:

Students will know about the Jewish tradition of creating community *haskamot*. They will consider the behaviors that build or destroy class community. Students will create a class *haskama* based on their thinking.

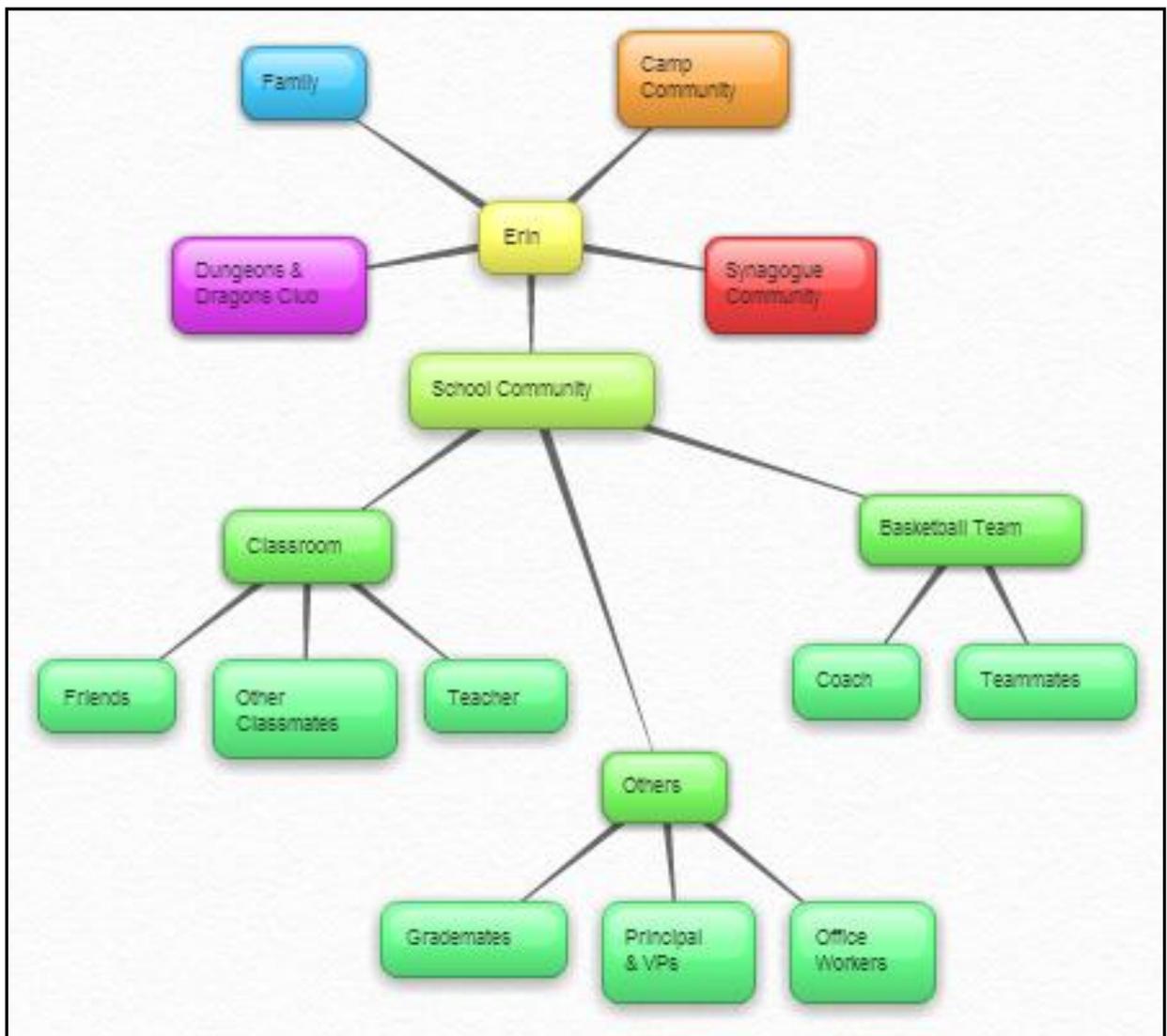
Lesson Activities:

- Introduction: Community Web
- Text Study: *Haskamot*
- Create a Classroom *Haskama*
- Wrapping Up

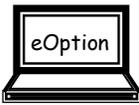
Lesson Activities

Introduction: Community Web

- Tell students that often we talk about belonging to a community. In reality, we belong to multiple communities. In this activity, students are asked to create a web of the various communities they belong to. Begin by modelling how you would create a web of your communities. Put your name in the middle, and then branch out to various communities such as school, family or synagogue. Then, add “sub-communities”. “Class” might be a sub-community of school, for example, and “youth committee” might be a sub-community of synagogue. An example of the beginning of a student community web can be found in the diagram below.



- Tell students that in general, every community has its own set of rules, formal and informal. There are certain things that are acceptable to do with camp friends, for example, that might be taboo with school friends. It is important to ensure that everyone feels comfortable, safe and valued in this community of students and teacher. Tell students that the goal of this lesson is to set the foundation for this safe community.



The activity above can be done digitally using any “mind map”, “web maker” or “graphic organizer” creation program or tool. The diagram above was done using a very user friendly tool, <https://bubbl.us>. While one does not need an account to create a mind map, having one allows students to save and share their work by generating a link. If you prefer not to have students create accounts, students can click on “export” and a .jpg image of the mind map will be downloaded.

Text Study: *Haskamot*

- Tell students that the Rabbis understood the idea that different communities needed different rules. Whereas there is *halachah* that applies to all of the Jewish community, the Rabbis also created another approach to deal with the particular needs of community at a given time. This text tells about this approach.
- Read the text at the end of this lesson together. The text is taken from the “*Pele Yoetz*”, a book of *mussar* (ethics) written in the early 19th century by R. Eliezer Papo of Constantinople. In this text, students discover the concept of a *haskama*, a formal agreement. It is particularly noteworthy how flexible the *haskama* is—it is designed to meet the needs of the time. Ask students: *Based on this text, what seems to have been a “need of the time” in the time of R. Eliezer Papo?* It seems that “excessive spending” was an issue. Rules were created, for example, to limit the amount of spending on a *simcha*. If there is time, discuss what impact this might have on Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrations if, for example, the maximum allowed to be spent was \$5,000.

Create a Classroom *Haskama*

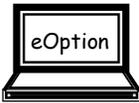
What follows are two different options for creating a classroom *haskama*. Select the one which you feel will be most successful in your classroom.

OPTION 1: COMMITTEE WORK

- Divide students into small groups (two to four students per group). Have each group come up with no more than four key rules that they feel will cover what members of the classroom community need to remember about how to act towards one another. Obviously, one could come up with more than four rules, but by limiting it, it focuses on what is most important. It also makes it more likely that the students will be able to succeed. Instruct students to word their rules in the positive – as opposed to what should not be done. You may wish to practice this with examples of rules such as the following being careful not to give so many examples that it takes away from the activity:
 - Negative: No interrupting when someone is speaking
Positive: Only one person speaks at a time
 - Negative: No putting up your hand when someone is talking
Positive: Put up your hand only when no one has the floor
 - Negative: No put downs.
Positive: Always speak respectfully to one another.
- Next, do one of the following:
 - Have the first group read out one of its rules, and write the rule on the board. Ask if others had written a similar guideline on the same topic. If so, have them read their versions out loud. If the other versions add something important, or have better wording, make edits without straying too far from the original. Repeat this process starting with the next group until all of the rules are on the board. Next, as a class attempt to determine which four rules are the most important and should be made into the class *haskama*. If there is a strong feeling that five or six or only three rules are needed, then allow the class to make that determination, so long as each guideline is unique. OR
 - Have the group nominate one member to represent them. These volunteers will serve on a committee and meet with the teacher at lunch, recess or study hall to determine a proposal for a classroom *haskama* based on each group's work. The

committee is then tasked with presenting the *haskama* to the class. The class is then asked to ratify the document through a vote. OR

- [You the teacher] Collect the various rules from the different groups and fashion them into a proposal for a four rule classroom *haskama*. Be careful to be true to the students' language and intentions to the extent possible, so that the students will recognize their work in the final product. Present the *haskama* to the class and ask them to ratify it through a vote.



The activity above can be done online using a virtual bulletin board such as “Lino Boards” (<http://en.linoit.com/>). Prior to class, set up the bulletin board to be available to anyone who has the link. Then, send the link to all students, or write it on the board after shortening it using a service such as Tinyurl (<http://tinyurl.com>). Have groups post their rules on the virtual bulletin board. You might even want to assign each group a different color “sticky” to use. Then, project the stickies on to the SMART board. Collect stickies with a similar rule together, and create a single rule that captures the main idea. Finally select the rules that will be used for the classroom *haskama*.

OPTION 2: INSIDE – OUTSIDE

- Hang up a piece of butcher paper with a large circle or oval drawn in the middle and ample space outside the circle in which to write. Tell students that they are going to work together to create a *haskama* that lists which behaviors are acceptable within the class community—behaviors that allow each person to feel respected and appreciated and which will help to promote a positive school experience for everyone.
- Tell students that the circle represents the community. Inside the circle will be written classroom behaviors that will promote a positive, learning community so

that people feel “in” the community. The behaviors should be worded in the positive – as opposed to what should not be done. (A practice exercise for this can be found in the first section of Option 1). Some examples of positive behaviors are:

- speaking one at a time
- listening to others
- weighing other people’s opinions even when they may conflict with yours
- giving constructive criticism in a positive way
- contacting students when they are out sick.

Have students suggest behaviors and as they do so, list them inside the circle. One should not worry too much about repetition, as the board can be returned to later to remove ones that are too similar to others. Alternatively, students can write their ideas on sticky notes and post them in the centre of the circle. Give students time to read what others wrote, and if they have something to add, they are permitted to do so. Further, if a student feels two or more sticky notes are similar, he or she may move them together so that they overlap.

- Next, tell students that destructive behaviors can make a person feel outside the community. Therefore, the class will now consider destructive behaviors and write them on the outside of the circle. Some examples of destructive behaviors are:
 - *eye rolling*
 - *interrupting someone when they are speaking*
 - *laughing at someone’s answer*
 - *making negative or hurtful comments about another*
 - *making sarcastic comments*
- On the top of the chart, write: *We, the members of class 8A, agree to do the actions on the inside and refrain from doing behaviors on the outside.* Have students ratify the *haskama* through a vote.

BOTH OPTIONS:

- The final step is to decide as a class what the process is when one observes someone breaking the *haskama* and what the consequences will be. A minor consequence might be an apology. A more serious offense might lead to peer mediation (if this exists in the school—see Area IV of the Certification Process), adult intervention, or

loss of privilege. Tell students that when they break the *haskama*, they are distancing themselves from the community.

- Be sure to hang the *haskama* prominently in the class. Refer to it regularly pointing out both misbehaviors that may occur and times when students are doing behaviors that reinforce community. Revisit the *haskama* a few times during the year to reflect on it and to revise if necessary..

Wrapping Up

- Tell students that a strong community is one filled with *shalom*, peace. This is a good time to introduce students to the *Rodef Shalom Advisory Program* which will promote the values of pursuing peace throughout the year. The classroom *haskama* is a proactive measure to promote '*shalom bayit*', peace in their classroom 'home'.
- You might choose to conclude with an excerpt from R. Nachman's prayer for peace, found on the next page.

משיר שלום, תפילה של ר' נחמן מברסלב

עזרנו והושיענו כולנו
שניזכה תמיד לאחוז במידת השלום
ויהיה שלום גדול באמת
בין כל אדם לחברו.

ויהיה כל אדם אוהב שלום ורודף שלום.

ונזכה לקיים באמת מצוות ואהבת לרעך כמוך בכל לב וגוף ונפש וממון.

From: Prayer for Peace, R. Nachman of Breslov

Help us and rescue us all,

That we should always merit to cling to the virtue of peace,

Let there be a truly great peace between every person and his or her fellow.

Let every person be ohev shalom, a lover of peace, and rodef shalom, a pursuer of peace.

May we merit to always fulfill the law, "love your neighbor as yourself" with all of your heart, body, soul and possessions.

פלא יועץ קמ"ז

ראוי בכל קהל מישראל, שיעשו הסכמות, ויתקנו לגדור גדרים לאפרושי מאסורא, ושלא להרבות בהוצאות וכדומה. הכל לפי צורך שעה.

Pele Yoetz 147

It is proper in every Jewish community to make *haskamot*, and to establish fences to guard people from doing wrong, from excessive spending, and the like—everything according to the needs of the time.