

Deficiencies in Heschel Israel Curriculum Exposed in Encounter Encounter

By Charlie Lebwohl ‘23, Opinion Editor

The high school’s recent program with the organization Encounter brought to light longstanding issues with the way Heschel teaches its students about Israel. During the program, high schoolers heard from Yara and Huda, two young Palestinian women living in the West Bank. Yara and Huda discussed their personal experiences living in the West Bank and their experiences seeking education outside of the West Bank.

During the program, engagement in my class was low. After the program, I heard no chatter about Yara and Huda in the halls. In Thursday’s town hall, only a few students spoke up in my section, despite the smaller groups.

The program was a rare opportunity for Heschel students to hear from people with very different backgrounds about their very different experiences in Israel. On paper, the program should have been captivating to students. But it wasn’t.

The low engagement was a result of many students not having the basic knowledge about Israel’s history required to understand the

divide organizations like Encounter are trying to bridge. This is not the fault of students or a poor reflection on their intelligence; it is proof that the school has not done enough teaching about the subject. My only memory of learning about Israel outside of Hebrew class is in eighth grade, where we spent about a week learning about the British occupation. Students at Heschel are forced to take it upon themselves to read articles, news stories, or books about Israeli history if they wish to be informed. Indeed, in my social studies class immediately after the program, students asked simple questions about the West Bank that made me think that the program must have been gibberish to them.

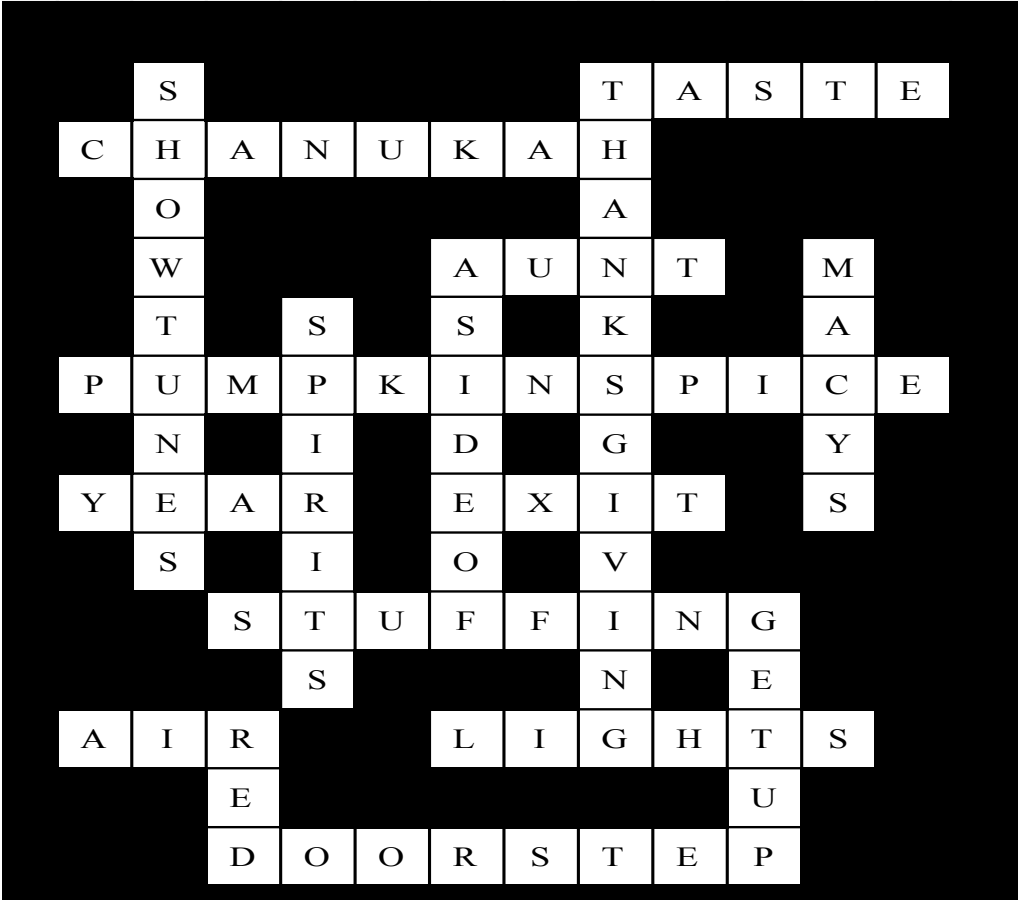
It is only possible to separate learning about Israeli culture and its ancient history from learning about Israel’s modern history for so long. In the lower school and most of middle school, students are absolutely not equipped to learn about the Israeli-Palestine conflict. The Israel trip, however, presents a unique challenge: students spend two weeks in Israel, deepening their connection with the land and with their peers. At the same time, the Israeli-Palestine conflict is a constant aspect of life for Israelis

and is hard to ignore on the trip. While my grade was on the trip, Hamas fired missiles at Israel. All we were told was that we would be safe. When we visited the Dead Sea, no one explained what the West Bank was or even mentioned the fact that we would be in the West Bank. When the tension stares you in the face like that, the school has to say something.

This program was a step in the right direction for the school. It is the school’s Zionist responsibility to fully educate students on Israel, to teach them not just a religious and cultural love for Israel, but also a complete understanding of its history and current politics. Students are simply lacking the foundation of knowledge needed to have these conversations.

The truth is, there are many people outside of the Jewish bubble our students live in that have very different views about Israel. It is not reasonable to expect someone to defend Israel just because they are Jewish, but if the school teaches a love for Israel and neglects to teach students about its secular history and politics, students will either be torn to shreds on college campuses or be forced to suppress their Zionist beliefs for fear of retribution.

Answers to Fall Crossword



Helios Editorial Board and Policies

Sophie Rasol ‘22, Eliza Fisher ‘23, and
Zoe Singer ‘23
Editors-in-Chief

Jed Cosgrove ‘23 and Gemma Levy ‘23
News Editors

Karen Messer ‘24
Assistant News Editor

Sadie Mank ‘23 and Olivia Sohn ‘23
Features Editors

Shira Mack ‘24
Assistant Features Editor

Neri Frank ‘23
Layout Editor

Emma Jonas ‘23 and Charlie Lebwohl ‘23
Opinion Editors

Ariella Kaplan ‘23 and Ruby Kazam ‘23
Art Editors

Jared Levy ‘23 and Ariel Plevan ‘23
Sports Editors

Shoshana Sugerman ‘22 and Noam
Medjuck-Bruckner ‘23
Online Editors

Sofie Braun ‘22 and Lydia Miller ‘23
Photography Editors

Anna Khorets ‘22
Outreach and Engagement Director

Shannee Goldman ‘23
Heschel Beat Coordinator

Jodi Posner and Penny Ratcliffe
Faculty Advisors

To submit a letter to the editor or an opinion
piece, please email us at helios@heschel.org. We
welcome all views.

Interested students should attend an assign-
ment meeting during select clubs blocks in room
324. Opinion pieces reflect the views of the au-
thor and not of Helios and its editorial board or
its advisors.

3
[@heliosheschel](mailto:heliosheschel)
Email us: helios@heschel.org ||

Call us: (212) 246-7717 || Find us:
helios.heschel.org

*To submit a correction, email
helios@heschel.org*