

# Yearning. Believing. Achieving.

## YBA English Teachers' Newsletter

Kislev 5776

## Short and Sweet

*"The greatest ideas are the simplest."*

William Golding, Lord of the Flies

### Editor's Note

As Chodesh Irgun draws to a close, it's time to think ahead to Chanukah, with the theme of the past month in mind. Bnei Akiva's overall theme for the year is עליה מתוך התחדשות and the slogan of Chodesh Irgun is "אני לא לבד - בסוד היחיד והיחד". As teachers in YBA, we can take these slogans and apply them to our work together as a team comprised of remarkable individuals with the communal goal of fostering English learning.

For some students, baby steps and the K.I.S.S. philosophy of "Keep It Simple, Silly" (or whichever version you go by) are the stepping stones to success. This month's newsletter is dedicated to short and simple tasks for students to do in class and at home. It also includes short clips and tips to use in class to add to the upbeat atmosphere of Chanukah.

### "Site-Seeing": Useful Sites for Teachers and Students

#### Short, But Not Always Simple

In class, we teach articles of varying lengths. Parents and students often want suggestions what they can do from home. Here are a few ideas:

- [Dreamreader](#) is a superb website for students of all ages who want short texts to read online. There's a wide variety of topics, audio recordings of the texts, and a few questions with the supplementary answers in several units.

Not that our students need more exposure to current events, but international sites can give them perspective

of what is going on around the world. Prepare students that beyond the borders of Israel, media focus differs, including anti-Israel bias. **Modesty is also a concern** - three quarter length sleeves aren't fashionable worldwide.

- [Time for Kids](#) – Time's news site for kids.
- [News in Levels](#) – This is a British site. It is based on scaffolding – the lowest level text has the story in simplest terms, the middle level is more difficult and the final level is of the transcript broadcast on the televised news with the accompanying video.
- [The British Council website](#) is also a well of endless resources – audio and visual content, vocabulary and grammar review etc. Prepare students that the site exposes them to other cultures and material that don't always conform to an Orthodox Jew's standards.

### Promoting Progress In and Out of the Classroom

#### Weekly and Daily Tasks

1. In the first newsletter, we proposed a Read-A-Thon (Kislev/ Tevet). If completing books is too taxing for some, have students go on Dreamreader.net or other sites and see how many days in a row they can read texts and answer the questions at home. Alternatively, challenge classes or individual students to count how many pages they can read rather than define their achievement by the quantity of books. Promote it as "English Daf Yomi". **Send in pictures of students next to graphic representation of their accomplishments (parental permission required).**

- Encourage your students to do a daily search for a "Word of the Day". Assign students to look up a new word and share it the next day (Google "Word of the Day"). Thanks to a classmate back in 6th grade, I learned the meanings and spelling of words such as "aglet". Turns out my own students learned the word from a Phineas and Ferb cartoon show.
- On a more serious note, ask students in the upper grades to follow international news coverage on-line for a week. Even "Olam Katan" did a cover story about the international media's distorted spin on the terror attacks in Israel in its weekly publication. We teach students the skills they need for writing formal letters. Have students write a mock letter reacting to the news reports. By making the tasks realistic, students may be more inclined to learn English and act as ambassadors for Israel in the future.

**Aglet:**  
**"A metal or plastic tube fixed round each end of a shoelace."**

(Oxford Dictionary)

There are two NBN clips from that event. The first is [the video of the flashmob](#) itself. The [lyrics](#) were written by Eric "Smooth-E" Schwartz – they appear below the lyrics' clip. Copy and save them to distribute and learn before watching the videos. Expect to teach about American name brands and a *bissel* Yiddish. After enjoying the reactions of the onlookers on Ben Yehuda St., show [the clip of the making of the NBN flashmob](#). Have students consider the impact mass media has. From 8<sup>th</sup> grade and up, point out the use of passive. You can create a worksheet to follow and fill in facts while watching the clip. Stop and read the subtitles as you go along.

**Here's the food for thought:** [Marvin Casey](#) was the choreographer. His bio is fascinating (linked to his name) – including training as an English teacher in Israel. Refer to the opening paragraph

of the following article from last spring which appeared in Makor Rishon. <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/693/489.html> (in Hebrew). As successful as he is, he still gets targeted by police based on external appearance alone. This is an excellent trigger for oral discussion about racism/prejudice in Israel and worldwide.

## Food for Thought

### Chanukah and Sense of Identity

This month's "Food for Thought" is directed at our students as we get ready for Chanukah. Way back in the last decade when flash-mobs were coming into fashion, Nefesh B'Nefesh organized a flash-mob that went viral. That same year, after showing them the NBN clips, my students learned the lyrics and dance and had a fun-filled recess right before Chanukah. A few years later, "Gangnam Style" swept the world. Another class professionally recorded "Chanukah Style" – their own cover of the song. Like every holiday with a great clip, signs with lyrics were posted and everyone was called to join the dance. (Comb YouTube and Facebook two weeks before a holiday for new clips).

Although six years have passed, the NBN videos are still valuable teaching tools for students in Ulpanot and Yeshivot, *with one drawback*. The dance is a line dance – but mixed. Teachers need to consider if it's appropriate for them. If you choose to go ahead with this idea, refer to the fact that NBN doesn't distinguish between Orthodox and secular Jews when they assist new immigrants and therefore there are Jews of all backgrounds dancing together to appeal to a wide audience.

## Gimmicks and Games

- When students ask for an encore of a song taught when they were younger, you know it has left a lasting impression. [This song](#) was originally performed by a Canadian singing troupe for kids. (Note: The song has the female singers also singing short solos):  
**"I am slowly going crazy, 1...2...3...4...5...6 Switch, Crazy going slowly am I, 6...5...4...3...2...1 Switch."**  
 On a whim, I once did this to review Present Progressive. The rest is history.
- Older students studying temporals / first conditional can memorize this rhyme, taught to me by my נד"פ מ"ח מילה אור, Ron Belzer. Thank you, Ron.  
**"If", "when", and " 'til",  
 Never get will,  
 And if you want some more,  
 "As soon as", "after", "before"."**

## We Want to Hear From You

Send in your rhymes, gimmicks, acronyms etc. that facilitate teaching, with emphasis on bagrut tips for the written and oral exams for our next newsletter.

Submit them to:  
[english@yba.org.il](mailto:english@yba.org.il)

Teachers not yet on the mailing list can sign up by completing [this form](#).