

Let's Focus *by Ellen Share*

Description: Attracting and holding children's attention during library period is not easy in these times when children spend hours watching TV or movies and surfing the web. Ellen has found beginning a library period with an introductory activity which serves to transition and focus is important. An origami demonstration or yoga posture quiets the class as a whole, blocks out distractions and focuses the attention. The origami figures can also be integrated into storytelling and used as an easy and clean art project in the library. **NO ARTISTIC ABILITY IS REQUIRED.** Moving the body in the shape of Hebrew letters is for all ages, including pre-school. In addition to focusing and calming, it provides familiarity with Hebrew letters and helps to reinforce the Hebrew alphabet. It is another teaching modality to use to help students learn the shape of Hebrew letters. **NO ATHLETIC ABILITY REQUIRED.**

Ellen Share, Jubilee Conference co-chairperson, holds an M.L.S. degree from the University of Maryland at College Park. She has worked for nearly thirty years as the librarian at Washington Hebrew Congregation managing two libraries at the Temple in Washington, D.C. and one library at the Julia Bindeman Suburban Center. Ellen sees students of all ages, plans a yearly Jewish Book Month Shabbat celebration and runs an active book club which meets four times yearly. Ellen and her husband have two grown children, twins (boy & girl) as grandchildren, and a whistling cockatiel.

Today, I am discussing ideas that you can incorporate into library visits by the students. There is No special ability required and it will serve as an aide for focusing the class when it comes into the library. In an article by Bernard Luskin, he discusses a new and official subspecialty in the field of psychology, known as media psychology. The brain functioning is studied using Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). The conclusions are varied as to the effects of

video games, online learning, and internet resources such as Google. However, one of the definite negative effects to quote Luskin, "attention spans are decreasing because of exposure to excessively stimulating and fast-paced media." In the keynote conversation of the conference, Leon Wieseltier spoke about the "fragmentation of attention" which serves to reinforce the observations of Luskin.

You can use origami folding or yoga postures to focus your student's attention when the class comes into the library. To just begin talking does not provide enough transition from their previous activity.

The origami folding can be used: 1. to focus attention at the beginning of class 2. folding objects while telling stories and 3. an easy and clean craft project in the library. I have put a display on the counter and welcome you to look at the objects. I have also prepared a small bibliography. These books are largely out of print, but they can be purchased used on Amazon. You really don't need a special Jewish origami book-any simple origami book will do and you can also find on u-tube demonstrations of folding. This should not be complicated for you but very easy.

The yoga postures in *Alef-bet yoga* are easy to do and reinforce the Hebrew letters. These require no special skill. This is a good book to share with Hebrew teachers-especially if they are dealing with special needs students and are looking for other modalities to

reinforce letters. The yoga postures or positions bring a focus and calmness. You can show a word spelled with Hebrew letters on a blackboard and have the students do the postures of each letter that spells the word. You can have the class get into the posture of one letter and discuss words and concepts associated with the letter. Again referring to Wieseltier's conversation, he spoke of a need for universal Hebrew literacy among Jews.

We are constantly competing for student's attention and interest. As I see it, the present day Judaica children's librarian, needs to have special techniques to focus the students and draw them into the library program during the library visit. The students are accustomed to constant stimulus and just saying "*listen carefully*" does no longer work.



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