

Yesodos Curriculum Alignment: CASEL & Common Core

The Yesodos Curriculum is a dual-impact program. While its primary goal is religious instruction (Halacha and Hashkafa regarding honesty), its method of delivery fulfills critical Social Emotional Learning (SEL) benchmarks for adolescents and utilizes Common Core methodologies for critical thinking, text analysis, and argumentative writing.

Part 1: CASEL (Social Emotional Learning) Alignment

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)¹ identifies five core competencies.

1. Responsible Decision-Making

Standard: The ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

Yesodos Evidence (Student Artifacts):

- **"My Ethical Muscle" Journaling (Unit 3, Lesson 3):** In the "Planning Ahead" lesson, students are presented with complex moral dilemmas (e.g., "Lying about age to gain entry," "Copyrighted Music"). They must explicitly choose a course of action and write a justification for their choice in their workbook.
- **Decision-Making Matrix (Unit 2, Lesson 3):** In the lesson "The Challenges of Feeling Included and Peer Pressure," students complete a "Pros and Cons" chart for three distinct choices: 1) Go along with the group, 2) Stand firm and say "No," 3) Don't participate but stay silent. This forces students to evaluate the consequences of passive vs. active choices.

¹ <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/#se-management>

- **"On The Fence" Analysis (Unit 3, Lesson 2):** The students must categorize ambiguous actions (e.g., borrowing a neighbor's tool without asking) into "Not Geneiva," "Possibly Geneiva," or "Clearly Geneiva," requiring them to evaluate ethical nuance.

2. Self-Awareness

Standard: The ability to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.

Yesodos Evidence (Student Artifacts):

- **"My Actions" Audit (Unit 2, Lesson 5):** In "The Emunah Paradox" lesson, students complete a T-Chart separating their actions into those driven by "Fear of Hashem" (internal values) vs. "Fear of People" (social anxiety/reputation). This builds metacognitive awareness of their own motivations.
- **Personal Application Writing (Unit 1, Lesson 2):** Following the "Torah Helps Determine the Emes" lesson, students complete a prompt: *"This story applies to my life because..."* requiring them to connect abstract ethical narratives to their personal identity and lived experiences.
- **Knowledge Mapping (Unit 1, Lesson 1):** In the "What Does Emes Mean?" lesson, students utilize a "Mind Map" where they document their current understanding of Truth (*Emes*) and identify gaps in their knowledge ("What I still want to learn").

3. Self-Management

Standard: The ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.

Yesodos Evidence (Student Artifacts):

- **The "Human Advantage" Venn Diagram (Unit 2, Lesson 6):** In "The Human Advantage" lesson, students fill out a Venn Diagram comparing Humans and Animals. This exercise reinforces the concept that humans possess the unique capacity for self-regulation and intellect (*Sechel*) over instinct, framing self-control as the defining human trait.
- **Scripting Ethical Responses (Unit 2, Intro):** In the Peer Pressure lesson's "My Ethical Muscle" section, students must write down exactly *what* they would say to a friend pressuring them (e.g., "What can Benny say to his friend?"), allowing them to rehearse self-management strategies in a low-stakes environment.

4. Social Awareness

Standard: The ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.

Yesodos Evidence (Student Artifacts):

- **Impact Analysis (Unit 3, Lesson 2):** Through the Chofetz Chaim narrative and the "Milky Mystery" story, students analyze how "small" dishonest actions affect others—specifically teachers, business owners, and the community's reputation.
- **Perspective Taking (Introduction):** In the "Borrowed Pencils" scenario, students must evaluate the feelings of two different characters (Dovid and Yonah) to determine if borrowing without permission is valid, fostering empathy for the owner of the object.

Part 2: Common Core State Standards (CCSS) - Grade 8 ELA

This curriculum uses ELA (English Language Arts) modalities to teach Torah, effectively doubling the students' exposure to these critical skills.²

Writing: Arguments & Routine Writing (W.8.1, W.8.10)

Standard:

- Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
- Write routinely over extended time frames and shorter time frames for a range of discipline-specific tasks.

Yesodos Evidence (Student Artifacts):

- **Routine Argumentative Writing (Multiple Units):** The workbook features the recurring "My Ethical Muscle" section (e.g., Unit 1 Intro, Unit 3 Lesson 3). Students are presented with a scenario (e.g., Yankel the Runner) and must choose a stance (e.g., "Is Yankel a winner?") and support their claim with written reasoning.
- **Justification of Claims (Unit 1, Lesson 1):** In the "What does Emes Mean?" lesson, students must explain *why* specific actions (like selling *neveila* to a non-Jew) are prohibited or permitted, citing evidence from the provided Rambam text.

² <https://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>

Reading: Informational Text (RI.8.1, RI.8.4)

Standard:

- Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly.
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

Yesodos Evidence (Student Artifacts & Text Analysis):

- **Word Choice & Text Analysis (Unit 2, Lesson 4):** In "The Challenge of Geneiva," students analyze the Ramban's commentary on *Devarim 7:12*, specifically determining why the text uses the specific word *Mishpatim* in the context of "minor commandments" and investigating the metaphorical meaning of "trampling with heels" (*dash b'ikeivav*).
- **Text-Based Checklists (Unit 1, Lesson 1 & Unit 3, Lesson 1):** Students utilize primary texts (Shulchan Aruch, Rambam) to complete "Yes/No" Halachic application charts, requiring them to extract specific laws from the text and apply them to modern scenarios.
- **Vocabulary & Comprehension (Unit 3, Lesson 1):** The "Cross Check" crossword puzzle requires students to recall and define specific domain-specific terminology (e.g., terms related to *Geneiva* and *Hashgacha*) derived from the texts.

Speaking & Listening (SL.8.1)

Standard: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Yesodos Evidence (Instructional Method):

- **Structured Debate Protocols (Unit 2, Lesson 1):** The curriculum employs "Philosophical Chairs" (e.g., discussing "Needs vs. Wants") where students must articulate their responses verbally, listen to opposing arguments from peers, and switch positions based on the evidence presented.
- **Peer-to-Peer Discussion (General Methodology):** The "Think-Pair-Share" activities found throughout the Teacher Guide (e.g., Unit 3, Lesson 1) require students to first formulate their thoughts independently and then refine them through dialogue with a partner before sharing with the larger group.