



Hyman Brand
H E B R E W A C A D E M Y

Orton-Gillingham at Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy

In partnership with the Wonders Reading program, we have successfully implemented the Orton-Gillingham (OG) approach. Developed by neuropsychologist Samuel Orton and educator Anna Gillingham, this method is enhancing the way we teach reading, writing, spelling, and overall literacy skills, and we're thrilled to have it at the heart of our Lower School curriculum.

So, what sets the Orton-Gillingham approach apart?

Understanding the Method:

The OG approach is a structured, systematic, and multi-sensory method designed to help students build crucial literacy skills. While it was originally developed for students with dyslexia, all students benefit from this method of learning. Each lesson is designed and taught in a manner that connects the right brain to the left brain by activating the neural pathways to cross the midline of the brain. Learning these tools also develops logic and higher-order thinking skills.

Breaking down reading and spelling into manageable components fosters a deep understanding of the connections between letters and sounds, paving the way for proficient literacy. Approximately 95% of the words in the English language follow a spelling rule. “We want to empower our students to learn these rules through engaging, explicit, and sequential instruction,” said Wendy Snitz, Director of Lower School Student Services.

Engaging the Senses:

The key strength of the OG approach lies in its many multi-sensory techniques. By engaging multiple senses—sight, hearing, and touch—students develop stronger neural pathways, enhancing retention and comprehension. Whether it's tracing letters in a specialized sand tray, manipulating letter tiles to practice letter sounds

and blending, or writing Red Words (words that contain irregular spelling patterns or whose spelling rules have not yet been taught) on bumpy paper with a designated color, every activity reinforces learning in a dynamic and effective manner.



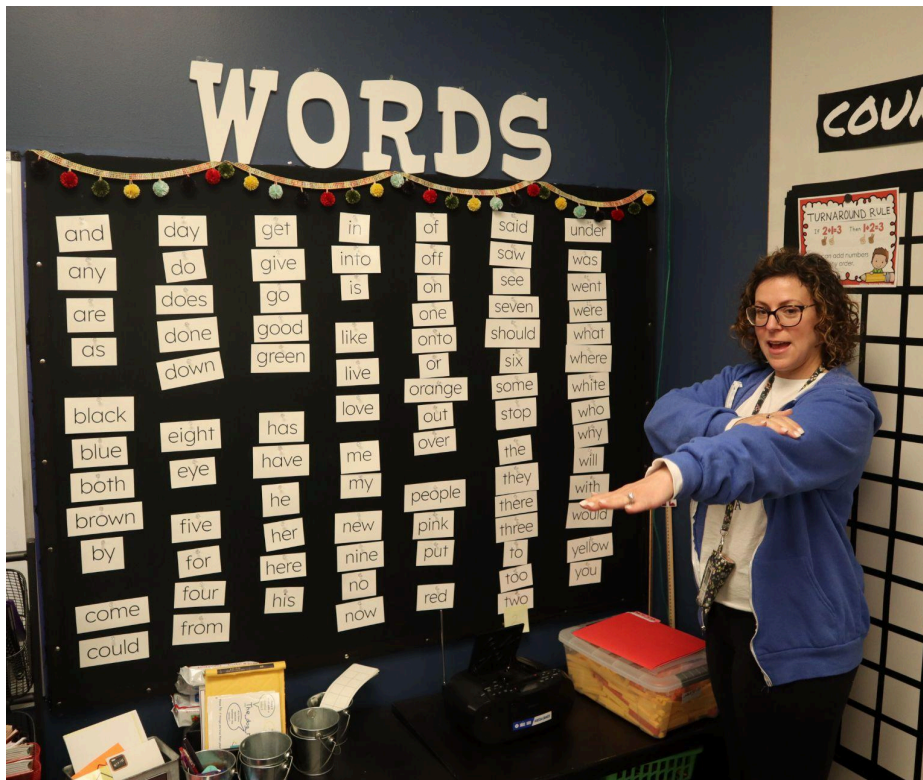
Kindergarten teacher Stephanie Kolb instructs students in an Orton-Gillingham lesson, where they practice writing letters by tracing them in shaving cream.

Teachers in grades K-5 have either a Red Word (OG sight words) wall, a sound wall (teaching the letter sounds and blends), or a morphology wall (teaching prefixes, suffixes, and their meanings, as well as Latin and Greek bases) in their classrooms. Teachers utilize these bulletin boards daily when teaching across subject areas. Students are regularly using this classroom resource and making connections in their own learning.

The OG program is unique in that each vowel and some consonant letter sounds have a corresponding movement to increase retention. Teachers are skilled in

utilizing these motions throughout the day to help students strengthen their reading, writing, and spelling skills.

“When sounding out a word, students are taught to “tap out” each sound with their fingers. When spelling a Red Word, we stand up with one arm straight in front of us and the other arm crossing the midline to tap each letter on our arms,” said first-grade teacher Shira Zigler.



First-grade teacher Shira Zigler demonstrates how to “tap out” a word.

“In First Grade, students are held accountable for spelling Red Words correctly. When they are editing a sentence with me, I circle the Red Words so that they can find the correct spelling on our Word Wall,” said Zigler. “It is amazing watching their spelling and reading skills develop as we use the Orton-Gillingham approach.”

Tailored to Individual Needs:

At HBHA, we recognize that every student learns differently. That's why the OG approach is designed to be flexible and adaptable, catering to the unique needs and learning styles of each child. Through individualized instruction, we ensure that every student receives the support and guidance they need to thrive. For instance, each student in second grade has a weekly differentiated list of Red Words to learn. Each student studies and progresses at their own pace through the Red Word scope and sequence. "Orton-Gillingham fits in well with HBHA's curriculum because OG is designed to do what HBHA does best—meet every student where they are," said Snitz.

Early Intervention and Lasting Impact:

Early identification and intervention are crucial in addressing reading difficulties. By implementing the Orton-Gillingham approach from an early age, we empower students to overcome challenges and build a strong foundation for lifelong learning. The evidence-based nature of the OG approach means that its effectiveness is supported by research, giving us confidence in its ability to make a meaningful difference in our students' lives.



A student makes a connection and has an "A-ha moment."

How We Implement at HBHA:

The Orton-Gillingham approach was adopted at HBHA across K-5 in 2022 and is now fully integrated into our LS curriculum. Teachers can be trained in the comprehensive course (K-2/3), with a focus on letter sounds, blending, reading, and Red Words, or the intermediate course (3-5), with a focus on continued Red Word learning and understanding the morphology of words. By the end of 2024, all HBHA General Studies teachers will be trained in one or two levels of OG.

Second-grade teacher Marsha Cowan, who is trained in both courses, elaborates on the differences between them. “The comprehensive course provides an understanding of OG’s multi-sensory methods, the components to literacy, an understanding of the structure and foundation of the English language, and the research behind the Science of Reading,” said Cowan. “The intermediate course focuses on the teaching of reading and instruction of vocabulary, including Greek and Latin bases, integrating orthography (spelling), morphology (meaning of word parts), phonology (the study and description of the sound structure of language), and semantics (the study of word meanings).”

Through small group rotations and focused learning blocks, students engage with OG activities daily, honing their phonemic awareness, decoding skills, and fluency.

“One lesson that is especially engaging is teaching children how to spell words with the /ed/ suffix,” said Cowan. “Children frequently enter second grade spelling the past tense of ‘jump’ as ‘jumpt’ or the past tense of ‘soar’ as ‘soard’. We make paper airplanes with regularly-spelled past words and fly them to ‘airports’ where the /ed/ suffix sounds like /id/, /d/, or /t/, but is spelled with /ed/. We have a chant that helps them remember that even though we hear /t/, /id/, and /d/, we spell /ed/. This lesson has been very successful, as it involves sight, hearing, touch, and speaking.”



The “Sound Wall” in Marsha Cowan’s second-grade classroom surrounds students with rules and tips for sounding out words.

By weaving the Orton-Gillingham approach into the fabric of our General Studies curriculum, we're not just teaching students to read and write in isolation—we're empowering them to unlock their full potential and succeed in all areas of their academic journey.

Thank you for your continued support as we strive to provide the best possible education for our students.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jessica Kyanka-Maggart

K-8 Principal