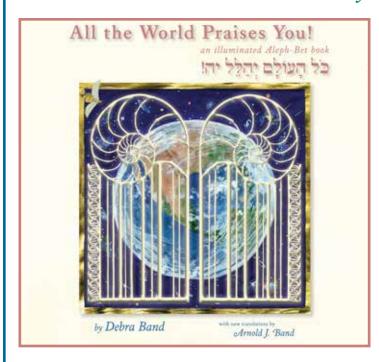
Diving Deeper!

Enrichment Materials Geared to Young People of Elementary School Age



How to Use these Materials

Each verse and each painting presented in *All the World Praises You!* is full of ideas and lessons we learn from studying Torah and other books of the Tanakh, from other kinds of Jewish learning, and from the way we think about Earth's precious environment nowadays. I hope that you love the paintings in the book! The pageby-page information here will help you understand all the many meanings of each page's verse and paintings. I hope these ideas will be helpful to you as you begin to learn about yourself as a Jew and as a citizen of our Earth. You will need a copy of *All the World Praises You!* with you so

you can see the paintings and read the biblical passages while you read this.

Begin anywhere! Each page's commentary is separate from the others. In each page's commentary you can dive into (a) information about the page's letter (b) the meaning of the verse (c) the meaning of the painting (d) thoughts about the relationship between our Jewish souls and our environment, that are raised by the painting, including links to websites on related environmental science, history, wonderful things from our arts, creative writing ideas, and even exciting "citizen-science" programs you can join as a young student.

Please note that website addresses can change over time and I am not responsible for website content that has changed since these materials were compiled.

Teachers may wish to include elements of the materials below in curricula for schools and study-groups—and are welcome to do so (for purposes of private or classroom instruction only, but not for publication without my written permission)! Please understand that each level of *Diving Deeper* covers a wide range of ages and Jewish educational levels. Please pick and choose among these rich resources to suit your own students' needs and interests. *Enjoy!*

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About the Aleph-Bet

The *Aleph-Bet*, the Hebrew alphabet, is a "cousin" of many other alphabets of languages and peoples who lived around the Mediterranean Sea. This whole family of "Semitic" alphabets grew from the alphabet of the <u>Phoenician people</u> who lived mostly on the Mediterranean seacoast just north of Israel, where Lebanon is today. The Hebrew language has had two main alphabets over time. The first Hebrew alphabet was used in Israel from the time of the Judges (13th century BCE, "Before the Common Era"). After Israel was conquered by the Babylonian Empire in 586 BCE, when its leaders and scholars were sent into exile in Babylonia (modern Iraq) and Persia, modern Iran, (as in the Book of Esther, which we read on *Purim*), we began to speak and write mostly in the language of Babylonia, called Aramaic. The Hebrew script we use now is the Jewish version of Aramaic script.

Many other languages and alphabets also grew from the Phoenician alphabet. Can you recognize the names of the Phoenician letters in the chart below?

In the chart on the next page you can see how these ancient Mediterranean alphabets grew up together and their letters look a little alike. Do you see how the letters' names are very alike?

About Perek Shira

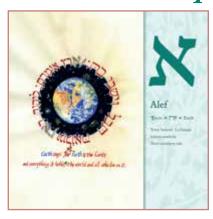
As I mentioned in the *What's This* section of *All the World Praises You!*, *Perek Shira* is a collection of verses praising God from across the Hebrew Bible, the *Tanakh*, the Talmud, and in later editions, the *Zohar* (a book that explores hidden meanings of Torah), all placed into the "mouths" of things from the natural world; all the world singing about loving God! Although we do not know exactly when this was first put or who wrote it, the first copies date from the tenth century.

The Semitic Background of Our Alphabet										
LATIN (ENGLISH)	ORIGINAL NAME	GRAPHIC PICTURE	EARLIEST KNOWN FORMS	SOUTH SEM (SABAEAN	MODERN ETHIOPIC	N. WEST SEMITIC (EARLY HEBREW)	PHOENICIAN	MID-EARLY GREEK	ARAMAIC (MODERN HEBREW)	ARABIC
Α	'alf	ox-head	Ø	D	カ	⋆	×	AVA	×	i
В	bēt	house 🕋		П	n	И	9	B	ב	ب
C,G	gaml	throw-stick	1	7	7	5	1	717	1	T
D	dāg	fish 🚙	⋄ >	又	又	Ø	۹	Δ٥	7	۵
E	hē	man calling	웃	4	U	=	1	4E	ה	۵
u,v,w	waw	mace	-0	Φ	Φ	Y	4	VY	٦	و
Z	zēn	7	X Ŧ	X	Н	I	I	VI	T	ق
Н	ḥēt	fence	ш	4	4	I	目		П	7
I, J, Y	yad	hand w/closed fist	المحار	9	P	7	Z	252	• •	ي
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T	taw	cross-marker	+	X	+	+ X	×	T	ת	ت

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 $Source: Institute\ of\ SemiticStudies.org$

The Letter Aleph



The letter *aleph* is the first letter of the aleph-bet, and its shape developed from ancient drawings of the head of an ox (ancient farmers used oxen to pull plows on their farms)! In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *aleph* is the number 1.

Diving into the Verse

This verse is from the book of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah lived and wrote his beautiful book, full of poetry, in the Kingdom of Judah, in the southern part of the Land of Israel, around 2800 years ago. The prophet is excited to tell us that

everything on Earth came from God. Now, we could ask whether Isaiah thought that God had created only our Earth (since we *now* know that there are many other planets). Isaiah lived thousands of years before scientists could use telescopes to look deep into the sky and find other planets. He did not know that there were many other planets besides our Earth. When Isaiah said that everything on Earth belongs to God, he really meant that God made the whole universe! We humans, and our pets, the insects in the grass, the soil, the rain, the moon, the stars and other planets—God made all of us happen. While most of us accept modern science, much Jewish thought continues to believe that God is *always* in our world. Isaiah's words tell us that God is even bigger than all of us put together!

Diving into the Painting

I wrapped Isaiah's words around a painting of our Earth surrounded by the night sky. The Earth is turned to show Israel, where Isaiah lived and wrote so long ago. The starry sky painting, though, is my version of a very modern photograph! My painting is based on a famous photograph made by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope in 2014. It shows stars and galaxies that are close to our Earth, and some whose light comes from very far away. Light takes some time to travel. For us, living on Earth, it can be hard to imagine that since light travels so fast (186,000 miles per second!). Since we know the speed of light, scientists can figure out that light from some of these stars has been traveling toward our eyes and telescopes since shortly after the Big Bang, which happened about 13.7 billion years ago. Big Bang was a kind of gigantic explosion, that we now know was the beginning of space and time and all matter in the universe; you may want to read this scientific explanation of Big Bang with your teacher. As we understand the Torah, God created the universe a little less than 6000 years ago. The Torah and modern science give our Universe and the moment of Creation two very different ages! Many religious people

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understand that while science can tell us the "how" and "when" of the world, the Torah tells us the "why does it matter?"

Click <u>here</u> to see an amazing one-minute video that moves from imagining the Big Bang to our own modern civilization.

What do we learn about God, ourselves, and the natural world here?

- How do you think Isaiah wanted us to think about all the rest of the world, outside of ourselves?
- If you were standing at the window of a space transport vehicle, looking at Earth, and out at the stars, what would you think about?
- When you stand outside (on Earth!) and look up at the starry sky, what do you think about?
- Read *Braishit*/Genesis 22:17. Abraham has just shown God that he loves and *completely* trusts God. God tells him: "I will place My blessing upon you and make your children as many as the stars of heaven and the sands of the seashore..."
- What does that promise tell you about how God will care for all of Abraham's children?
- Do you think that God's promise gives us a special responsibility in our world?
- You might enjoy reading the Creation story in the first chapter of *Braishit*/Genesis. You may see that the story in Torah is very different from the way we understand the way the world was made through modern science. In Torah the whole universe was created in 7 days. Through science we know that it took millions of years to make the world we have now...and that the world is still "evolving." In Torah God created everything by commanding it should be. Through science we know that that everything from rocks to hummingbirds developed through a long and complicated process. We do know, though, from *both* Torah and modern science that the whole universe began at one moment. In Torah, God said "Let there be light," to begin Creation. Our scientists now know that the Big Bang happened, to begin all space and all time and all matter. Why do you think the Bible story and modern science are different? How does the Bible story help us understand the *meaning* of our world? Talk about these hard and important questions with your parents and your rabbis and Jewish studies teachers. You can think about the *meaning* of our world as you read all the rest of this book.

The Letter Bet



The letter *bet* can be pronounced in two different ways. In Ashkenazic pronunciation, when there is a dot in the middle of the letter, its sound is *bais*. In Sephardic and modern Israeli Hebrew the letter is pronounced as I have written it, *bet*. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *bet* is the number 2.

Diving into the Verse

The people who put together *Perek Shira* and gave this verse to thunder to "say" remind us that God is so powerful that

He controls the Earth's climate. God makes water vapor rise from the earth to make clouds, rainstorms with thunder and lightning and the strong winds that blow through the sky. This verse is part of a longer psalm that was probably written by one of the Levites who took care of the Temple in Jerusalem. He tells us that Israel's God is more powerful than all the other gods of the countries around Israel, such as Egypt and all the Canaanite city-states. The ability to control the weather is one of God's amazing superpowers, along with power over the heavens, earth and sea, the power to cause the Ten Plagues, and the power to conquer the Canaanite kings so that Israel could return to the land God had promised to Jacob's children after God brought them out of slavery in Egypt.

Can you find another psalm about God's power to control stormy weather? (Hint: read Psalm 29)

Diving into the Painting

In the painting I made the Hebrew and English words of the verse ride the winds of a thunderstorm. Silver lightning sparks across the sky, and rain streaks down to the forests below. Above the clouds, though, all is calm. The sun glints through a break in the clouds, the sky is blue, and we can see a glimpse of the distant heavens above, based on the same photograph made by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope in 2014 that you saw in the *aleph* painting. Only our God has the power to create a world with such dramatic weather, and this is the same God who brought our whole universe into being.

What do we learn about God, ourselves, and the natural world here? What do you think about during a thunderstorm? What do you notice outside after a storm clears away? Here's a great video about thunderstorms! Since God set our climate into motion, and we depend upon our climate for a

The Letter Gimel



The letter *gimel* makes a hard "g" sound. The shape comes from the shape of a fish. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *gimel* is the number 3.

Diving into the Verse

Do you ever get tired and bored with rainy days? I do, and my dogs and cats don't like rainy days at all! But *all* kinds of life need the water rain brings to our land. Most of the land of Israel is very dry, with no very large rivers (the Jordan is a small river), and the Negev Desert takes up a large part of

the land. The rains that fall mostly during winter in Israel are very important for farming and supporting all the people and animals in the land. Modern Israel has developed new technologies to use water carefully so that farms and people have enough water, but all living plants and animals still need the water that comes from rain. In the fragile farming communities of ancient Israel all life depended on the winter rains. If you read this psalm, you will see that the poet mentions water several times as a way of showing how God protects and makes Israel strong. Today we know that it is important to have just the right amount of rain—not too little, but also not too much.

Just like today, rain was so important in biblical times that *Tanakh* mentions rain 36 times! Since the *Tanakh* was written in a very dry land (in fact, much of the Land of Israel is desert), rain is almost always a blessing from God. Today we still need rain, and we thank God for it in our traditional prayers. For instance, read the second paragraph of the *Shema* (*Dvarim*/Deuteronomy 11:13-21) and think how it describes the importance of rain. The prayer tells us that *right* amount of rain is one of God's rewards when Israel follows Torah. When the rains *fail*, God is punishing us for not meeting our responsibilities to God. You and your teacher may want to find some of the other mentions of rain in *Tanakh* and try to understand the different kinds of meaning attached to rain. However, just like the forty days and forty nights of rain in the story of Noah's flood (*Braishit*/Genesis 6-8) could destroy life (see *qof* below!), today we hope to protect our Earth so that we have just the right amount of rain—not too little, not too much.

Diving into the Painting

In this painting, I show how the coming of the winter rains brings the gray African veldt grasslands, where many animals live, to life. In the dry land at the left, where the rain has not yet fallen, the grass is still parched brown, and trees are thin and bare. Where the rain has fallen, the lakes and watering holes fill with water, the grass grows green, the trees sprout new leaves and all the animals crowd around to drink, graze and wash. Even flowers grow! In the corner we see not only the tiny honeybee sitting on top of the dahlia, but also a stalk of pink lilies. See the commentary on the letter *Tet* for the special Jewish meaning of the pink lily. In a break above the clouds we glimpse the dark sky lit with more stars than we can count (read about the Hubble Space Telescope photograph in *Aleph*), telling us that God is always round us.

What do we learn about God, ourselves, and the natural world here?

- Is rain just a bother to you or do you think it is an important part of life? Why?
- Is there a lot of rain where you live? Is there enough rain for the plants and animals (including people) to live comfortably?
- How can people to care for the land, and make sure that we, and all living things around us, can live happily?
- How can you help protect our water?

The Letter Daled



The letter *daled* is the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and represents a "d" sound. The shape developed from the shape of a fish. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *daled* is the numeral 4.

Diving into the Verse

The person who put together *Perek Shira*, matching up things from the natural world with verses from the *Tanakh*, Talmud and other books, chose this praise of God from one of the happiest descriptions of the world in all of *Tanakh*.

Psalm 104 is a long poem that tells how God created a world of perfect balance and beauty. God, the poet wrote, made the whole gigantic earth, and still cared about the tiny details, like making grass and green plants for cows and people to eat.

Diving into the Painting

If I had to choose a favorite painting in this book, this painting might be it! When I was little I loved to lie in the grass and look for tiny flowers and insects. Sometimes I was lucky enough to find a tiny lizard! This is what I painted in this scene. The author of *Perek Shira* must have been amazed at all the different life forms in a clump of grass. Like me, he must have thought that God's care for even these tiny lives showed how big and caring God was for all of Creation.

Our eyes at ground level, we look into a clump of grass. A worm, ants and a skinny daddy-long-legs crawl out from between the blades. A tiny lizard climbs up onto a strong blade of grass, while ladybugs and a honeybee get ready to fly into the warm summer air. A little dahlia bud pokes out of the grass at the left side of the painting.

What do we learn about God, ourselves and the natural world here?

- Do you have a garden or park near your home? Find a patch of grass, watch it carefully for a few minutes. Make a list or draw all the plants and animals (living or dead) that you see there. How do they depend on each other?
- Can you draw a picture or write a poem about the kinds of things you see?
- Can you think of small things and big things in the world that need each other? For instance, a tall apple tree grows from a tiny seed that was pollinated by a honeybee carrying tiny grains of pollen from one apple blossom to another.
- What would happen if all these related small and large things did not exist in the right time at the right place?
- Is your life connected to the tiny things in the natural world? To the really huge things?
- How do the many kinds of small and large things in our world make you think about God?

The Letter He



The letter *he* (pronounced *hay*) is the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. At the beginning or middle of a word it represents a "h" sound and is almost always silent at the end of a word. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *he* is the number 5. The letter evolved from the shape of a fence.

Diving into the Verse

This verse is part of Psalm 145, which is part of Ashrei, a prayer in many Jewish prayer services. Psalm 145 is a long list of ways of thoughts about how God is a good ruler of the universe,

with a verse for every letter of the *aleph-bet* (except *nun*). The verse in my painting uses the words "majestic," "glory" and "splendor" to help us think of God as a wonderful and powerful Ruler.

Diving into the Painting

What could be more amazing and royal looking than brilliant colored lights shimmering in the dark night sky? The <u>Aurora Borealis</u> makes wonderful shining curtains of light that wave across the sky in northern parts of our Earth. In the southern part of the Earth, this lightshow is called the Aurora *Australis*. To me, auroras are a wonderful way of imagining God's splendor in the world! Energy from the sun hits our atmosphere, makes all these colored lights and seems to show just how powerful and beautiful God is. You may enjoy this <u>video</u> that explains how auroras work. It also talks about how other cultures around the world have tried to explain these amazing lights.

What do we learn about God, ourselves and the natural world here?

What kind of pictures come to your mind when you think about God's power and splendor in our world?

The Letter Vav



The letter *Vav* usually makes a "v" sound, but if it appears with a *dagesh* (a dot) on its left side, the sound becomes "oo," as in "noodle." In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *vav* is the number 5. The letter evolved from a pictogram for a hammer-like weapon called a mace.

Diving into the Verse

Braishit/Genesis tells us that God used these words to create all plants. We're amazed at the variety of plants on Earth, and how many plants make their "children" by making seeds,

along with fruits to feed and protect those seeds. Those fruits are also delicious to us!

I think roses are the most beautiful flowers, and I love to plant and take care of the rose bushes in my garden. Healthy rose plants, with their colorful flowers seems to shine with happiness! Can you think of a happier "voice" to shout out God's creation of the beauty and variety of Earth's plant-life than the colorful and sweet-smelling rose?

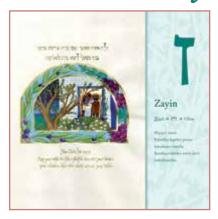
Diving into the Painting

The painting shows many different kinds of plants! In the front, a stalk of pink lilies, mushrooms, and the dahlia spring from the roots of an apricot tree. The rose plant climbs toward the sky, into the tree's leafy canopy. The land is covered with grass all the way back to hills where grapevines have been planted (this is called a vineyard). A white dove flies into the scene, holding a twig from an olive tree. The olive twig that reminds us of the dove that showed Noah that the Flood had ended and life was beginning to grow again on the Earth.

What do we learn about God, ourselves and the natural world here?

- If a plant could have feelings like us, what kind of plant would seem happy to you? What would make a plant happy?
- We can raise plants and care for a garden in many places—on farms, in city gardens, your family's front- or back-yard, or even in pots on a balcony! Have you ever planted seeds and watched them grow? Do you like to garden? Does gardening ever help you feel that you are a part of nature and close to God? If so, how?
- Do you travel to places with different kinds of plants? The beach, or a city park? Maybe the mountains? Do you notice how different plants are in different places? How do you think God want us to treat plants?
- If you were going to draw a picture of a garden of your favorite plants, what plants would you choose? What is special about these plants? What other animals (besides people) like these plants?

The Letter Zayin



The letter *zayin* represents a "z" sound. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *zayin* is the numeral 7.

Diving into the Verse

The verse is from Psalm 128, which is a short poem about the happiness that will be found by the good person who follows the Torah. The Psalmist tells us that these people will be able to enjoy the good things from what they do in the world ("the fruits of their labors"), be happy and have a

good life. The Psalmist singles out children as a special blessing! The Psalmist compares the wife, who, in most families, gives birth to the children, to a grape vine full of bunches of grapes. He also compares the family's children to olive sprouts around the family table. Many sprouts shoot up from the roots of olive trees, so that a healthy parent tree may be surrounded by a thicket of these leafy sprouts!

As fruit trees, olive trees have a special importance. The Talmud considers <u>fruit trees to be</u> <u>a special gift from God</u>, and includes laws to protect them.

Diving into the Painting

The painting compares the healthy, growing family to the fruiting olive tree in the middle of its shoots. Inside, we can see children sitting around the family dinner table. Outside, an olive tree stretches its branches toward the home, as though to protect it. A grape vine climbs up the side of the window, while stars spangle the clear night sky.

The painting includes several natural phenomena that carry particular symbolic meaning in Tanakh. The olives and grapes in the border suggest the holiness of the flourishing family. Olives and grapes are two of the "Seven Species" of crops grown in the land of Israel (see *Dvarim*/Deuteronomy 8:8). Olives have been farmed for thousands of years in the lands around Israel. The oil that was used for lighting the Menorah in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem was made from olives. Grapes are juicy and delicious, and they give us the juice that makes the wine that we use for *Kiddush* to welcome Shabbat and holidays, and that adults often drink to celebrate our happiest times. The Psalmist tells us that the person who follows God's law (the Torah) will enjoy all these blessings.

•	family? What kinds of plants could represent the way your parents love you (and your siblings, if you have them)?

The Letter Het



The letter *het* has a "kh" sound made at the back of the throat. The shape came from the shape of a fence. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *het* is the numeral 8.

Diving into the Verse

The poet who composed this psalm tells us about how beautiful God made the world. The poet also tells us that every creature has its special place in our world. Most beetles are so small that we often don't notice them! God, who is

larger and more powerful than anything else in the universe, made even the tiny beetles, and gave them each their own special jobs to do in the world.

Diving into the Painting

When I was a child, my brother, sister and I had an "insect hospital" in our backyard. We watched and fed insects who we thought were hurt. We enjoyed watching insect eggs and butterfly and moth cocoons and chrysalises develop and hatch. While I made this painting I remembered how we loved to watch the insects in our backyard.

In this painting, <u>beetles</u> and other insects of many colors, sizes and shapes scamper, crawl and jump around the soil at the roots of a tree. Each has own job to do in Earth's environment! Some, like bees and butterflies, spread pollen from one plant to another. Some, like roaches, eat and recycle the bodies of dead plants and animals so that the chemicals go back into the soil. Some, like ladybugs, eat other insects that we consider pests. Some, like earthworms (which are not actually insects), burrow through the soil and soften it, and mix it up so plants can grow.

What do we learn about God, ourselves and the natural world here?

- Have you ever had a chance to take a long, close look at an insect? Maybe a ladybug has landed on your finger, or maybe you have collected fireflies in jar to watch for an evening (before you let them loose again)? How does all the tiny detail on their bodies make you think about the many kinds of life that are made possible by God's creation of the natural world?
- You can learn more about your own place in the natural world! You can become a citizen-scientist, and do real scientific research. Check out <u>Backyardbarkbeetles</u>, which invites you to join scientists and kids to do research on helping protect our forests and our beetles.

The Letter Tet



The letter *tet* represents a "t" sound. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *tet* is the number 9.

Diving into the Verse

This beautiful verse comes from the book of the prophet Hosea, whose name means "he saves." Hosea lived in northern Israel about 2800 years ago, just before Israel was invaded by its warlike northern neighbor, Assyrian. At that time many Israelites prayed to idols instead of to God. Hosea promised that God would forgive the people and help

them live happily if they gave up the idol worship. In telling Israel about God's promises to take care of them, he talked about dew, lilies, olive trees, and good harvests. The dew that waters the plants every night, and helps the plants grow, is like a blessing to us.

Diving into the Painting

The lily isn't just a pretty flower in this painting! The dew isn't just that wet stuff that gets all over our feet when we walk across grass in the morning! Hosea used the sweet, fresh lily as a sign that God had forgiven Israel for its bad behavior. There's another famous Jewish legend that tells us about another meaning for the lily. In this story, the rabbis compare a lovely pink lily to the goodness of the Ten Commandments. One day, the story goes, a great King (God) traveled through his lands. The King found an old orchard (the human world) just outside his palace (Heaven). This orchard had once been like paradise, planted with pomegranates, grapes, roses and figs (did you know that the word "paradise" comes from an old Persian word for orchard?). His gardeners, though, had been careless about the beautiful garden, though, allowing it to wither and become overgrown with thorns. Suddenly, just as the king was about to order the orchard cut down, so he could plant it again, he noticed a single stalk of sweet-smelling pink lilies rising from the weeds. Seeing the flowers' beautiful color, smelling their sweet perfume on the breeze, he commanded, "For the sake of the lily, let the orchard be saved!" The rabbis compared the role of the Ten Commandments in the world to that lily in the ruined orchard. In my painting I show silver dew-drops on the lily, as a way of saying that when we live by God's important laws (the Ten Commandments, and the whole Torah), God will bless us with a safe and good life.

What do we learn about God, ourselves and the natural world here?

- Imagine walking barefoot in the dewy grass early on a clear summer morning. Think about how the tiny dew drops make the soil fresh and moist for the plants. How does this lovely morning make you think about the way God made our environment safe and happy for us? Those gardeners in the story had a job to do—and didn't do it very well! How does God want us to take care of each other and our world?
- Catch ladybugs or firelies, put them into a jar with small airholes and watch them carefully for a little while (please do let them go quickly)! Look at all the detail on their tiny bodies! Draw a picture and write about your observations. What does looking at them up close make you feel about how God takes care of our world?

The Letter Yod



The letter *yod* makes a "y" sound (and has the same sound as "y" at the end of a word). The shape of the *yod* comes from the shape of a hand with a closed fist. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *yod* is the number 10. As you will see starting with the next letter, after *yod*, the letters represent groups of 10, or groups of 100. All other Hebrew numbers are represented by combinations of letters/numerals.

Diving into the Verse

Have you ever stood at the edge of the ocean? Were you amazed by its size, noise and power? Just like many of us, the Psalmist imagined God's power when he heard the roar and rush of the ocean's waves. He wrote about this feeling in this verse. In fact, the whole short psalm tells us how ocean shows God's great power, reminding us that only God could separate the separate the sky and the oceans, and begin to organize our world.

Diving into the Painting

In the painting the verses follow the curves of the rocking waves, as the huge ocean changes from calm lapping little ripples to a sweeping wave.

My small painting of the ocean shows the way the sea can change from calm to violent. The nineteenth-century British painter, J.M. William Turner painted many wonderful pictures of both calm and violent seas. Click here to see his painting, The Bell Rock Lighthouse.

You may enjoy exploring the **Smithsonian Institution's website** about oceans.

What do we learn about God, ourselves, and the natural world here?

- Think of times that you have stood on a beach at water's edge. How do the waves make you feel? How does the size of the ocean make you feel?
- How does the ocean matter to our daily lives, even if we live far from it?
- We know that things we do on land (like our trash) can affect even the mighty oceans. As a young person, what can you do to help protect the oceans?

The Letter *Kaf*



The letter *kaf* can make two sounds. When it has a dot in its center, it makes a "k" sound. Without the dot it makes a "kh" sound at the top of your throat and is called *khaf*. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *kaf* is the number 20. Its earliest form, which showed a line sticking out from the center of the *kaf*, came from the shape of the palm of a hand.

Diving into the Verse

This verse is part of Psalm 147, in which the Psalmist reminds us that God produced every beautiful and powerful element in nature and controls the whole universe.

Tanakh mentions stars many times. Here are two of my favorites places! God says to Abraham "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them... So shall your offspring be." (Braishit/Genesis 15:4) Although Abraham didn't have any children at all yet, God wanted Abraham to know in time his children and his children's children would be too many to count! In the story of Deborah (Shoftim/Judges 5:20), the woman leader, Deborah, sings a long victory song after a battle in which she defeated a powerful Canaanite general. In Shirat Devorah, or "Deborah's Song", she exclaims that "The stars fought from heaven, From their courses [paths] they fought against Sisera." I wonder whether she saw a meteor shower around the time of the battle, and believed that it was miraculous sign of God's care for Israel!

Diving into the Painting

The <u>constellations</u> shown in the painting were visible in the night sky over Washington, D.C. at the moment that Dalia was born. The rainbow border shows you all the colors of light that come from the stars.

Do you think about <u>stars</u> as part of the Earth, or separate from it? Although stars may seem far from our own planet (and they are!), in fact, all the chemicals that make up our Earth, including our own bodies, were all made in the stars that we see in the night sky, and all the stars that came before since the beginning of the universe at the time of the <u>Big Bang</u>. The Earth is made up of matter that spun out of our own star, the Sun. The Sun still gives us our light and energy (think of solar power). The sun's heat doesn't only warm us on a sunny day, but <u>also causes our weather</u> by heating or cooling Earth's oceans and

Astronomy is the science of finding and understanding stars. You may enjoy NASA's website, Astronomy Picture of the Day. Every day NASA scientists post fascinating photographs of stars and other astronomical objects along with explanations to help us learn about them.

What do we learn about God, ourselves and the natural world here?

What do you think about when you look up at the stars? Or when you learn about stars? Write a poem or story, or draw a picture about how you feel when you look up at the night sky, or study about stars.

The Letter Lamed



The letter *lamed* makes an "1" sound. The shape comes from the shape of an ox-goad (a little whip that the driver of a cart would use to tell the ox to pull faster). In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *lamed* is the number 30.

Diving into the Verse

This verse from the special Psalm for Shabbat, celebrates how it is good to praise God all day long—giving thanks for God's lovingkindness, God's *hesed*, as the day begins, and for

the faithfulness of God's care of us during the dark of night. The author contrasts dawn and night. This is the kind of "thought-rhyme" that is a special part of poetry in *Tanakh*.

Diving into the Painting

In the painting I use a calm view of the night-time— a river flowing quietly between lush green forested banks, under the sparkling sky to show the poet's trust in God's care. As in the *Kaf* painting, the night sky shows the stars, and here the moon, the way they looked the night Dalia was born. You can also see the far-away deep sky shown in the famous Hubble Space Telescope photograph (see the *aleph* page). The sky here, though, spreads across the whole nighttime from sunset (at right) to dawn (at left), just like the Psalmist tells us that we can trust in God's care from night to dawn.

What do we learn about God, ourselves and the natural world here?

- What time of day do you most often find yourself thinking about your relationship or connection with God? Why?
- The psalmist chose the opposites, nighttime and morning to describe how he feels trust in God all the time. What "opposites" would you choose?
- What parts of your life do you especially trust in God to help you enjoy? Can you write a poem, or make a drawing about this?

The Letter Mem



The letter *mem* makes an "m" sound. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *mem* is the number 40. Its shape grew from the shape of a water wave.

Diving into the Verse

The prophet Isaiah ben Amoz, lived in the Kingdom of Judah about 2800 years ago. His book of prophecies about Israel, the <u>Book of Isaiah</u>, is one of the most loved books in all *Tanakh*. The book contains warnings about idol-worship, and how the Kingdom of Israel (northern Israel) and the

Kingdom of Judah (southern Israel, around Jerusalem and south) would be conquered by nearby warlike kings, especially the Assyrian king, Sennecherib. Isaiah also includes very beautiful prophecies about how wonderful God will make life in Israel when the Jewish people come back to worshipping only God. In this verse, Isaiah writes about how God will give Israel back its independence and health, comparing Israel to a desert filled with flowers after the winter rains.

<u>Click here to see a wall sculpture</u> that Sennecherib had made for his palace after he conquered the northern Israeli town of Lachish.

Diving into the Painting

When Dalia's dad and uncle were young, our family used to take a hike in the California desert during the middle days of Passover, backpacking our matzah. Since Passover happens during the spring, after the end of the winter rains, so we always got to enjoy seeing the desert turn to a wonderful garden of red and orange and pink. The refreshed desert really did seem to smile like a rose!

What do we learn about God, ourselves, and the natural world in this painting?

- Has there been a painful or difficult time in your life? How did it feel when it passed? How could you think about God during difficult times?
- Can you compare that time and your feelings about it to something in the natural world? Can you write a poem or draw a picture of this?

The Letter Nun



The letter *nun* is the 14th letter of the Hebrew alphabet and represents an "n" sound. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *nun* is the number 50. Its shape grew from the shape of a snake.

Diving into the Verse

Imagine the scene! Moses and Israel are standing at the foot of Mount Sinai. God is about to call Moses up onto the smoking mountain to receive the Torah. God uses these words to command Moses to remind Israel of how

God rescued the Children of Israel at the Red Sea. God split the Red Sea and saved the Israelite slaves from Pharoah's fierce army. The miracle of splitting the Red Sea has always been our proof that God protects Israel, with the strength of a powerful eagle. Many other empires have used the eagle as an emblem, but ever since we crossed the Red Sea, the eagle has been a Jewish symbol, not of *human* power, but of God's protection of Israel.

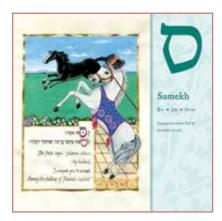
Diving into the Painting

In the painting you see the huge, strong <u>eagle</u> soaring over Egypt, the Sinai and the Red Sea. Below the tiny figures of the Israelites hurry toward the sea. In the front, next to the dahlia, a stalk of rose-colored lilies is a symbol of the goodness of the Ten Commandments that God would soon send ask Moses to carry to Israel, just like in the *Tet* painting.

What do we learn about God, ourselves and the natural world here?

- Can you draw a picture or write a poem or story about some event in your life when you feel that God has saved you from harm?
- What other animals do you think are strong and heroic enough to be a symbol of God's protection of us? Perhaps your teacher can help you find a verse from *Tanakh* about one of those animals! Can you draw a picture of this animal, in the middle of protecting you, or the Jewish people?

The Letter Samekh



The letter *samekh* makes an "s" sound. The shape comes from the shape of a kind of bow. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *samekh* is the number 60.

Diving into the Verse

Mares? Pharoah's horses? What do horses have to do with loving God? We can answer this question by understanding the way people lived in ancient Egypt and Israel, and explanations of *Tanakh* called midrash. Midrash is the collection of writings, made over more than two thousand

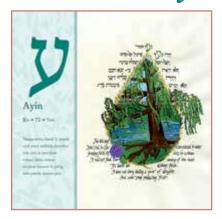
years, in which rabbis explain what passages from the Bible meant, often through making up, or passing on older tales spun around the biblical ideas. We have already talked about much midrash here; for instance, the lily story in the *tet* painting is a midrash.

Ancient Israel knew horses only as weapons of war. Instead of horses, Israelites rode donkey, and used them for carrying bundles and pulling carts. Horses that could carry soldiers and pull heavy chariots were fearsome weapons that Israel only saw in enemy armies. Horses were first brought into Israelite armies by King Solomon (970-931 BCE). Solomon bought them and with chariots, from Egypt (Kings I: 10-26). The Book of Kings, which includes his story, tells us that the horses and chariots weren't only for defense, but that King Solomon knew that they showed his wealth and power. We also know from studies of ancient Egypt that the Pharoahs' chariots were pulled only by stallions. So, what happens when you let a pretty mare loose in a paddock full of strong and lively chariot stallions? A pretty crazy scene! So, we understand that in this verse the man is saying something like, "Honey, I want to be with you so much!—you drive my guy-friends and me crazy!"

This verse is part of the Song of Songs, which is a short and very beautiful collection of love poetry in *Tanakh*. Jewish tradition believes that King Solomon wrote The Song of Songs. This beautiful poetry means much more in Jewish tradition than just beautiful poetry about the love between a young woman and a young man. Over the centuries the Song of Songs has also become the expression of love between God and God's Chosen People, Israel. Now that we know that this verse is about young human lovers, and that our tradition believes that the Song of Songs is about the love between God and Israel, we can understand that the verse is about the strong love between God and Israel.

Diving into the Painting The painting shows a beautiful black mare running freely across a pasture. A strong white stallion, saddled like ancient Egyptian chariot horses (I copied this from ancient Egyptian paintings), jumps up to run to the mare. What do we learn about God, ourselves, and the natural world in this painting? What thing in the natural world makes you feel a deep love for God? A plant? An
animal? A natural occurrence? Why?

The Letter Ayin



The letter *ayin* usually has no sound other than the vowels shown with it. In ancient times, and in some eastern Jewish traditions today, *ayin* made a sound at the top of the throat. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *ayin* is the number 70. Its shape developed from the shape of an eye.

Diving into the Verse

In Jewish tradition we often compare the Torah to a living tree. We also think of trees as symbols of men and women,

and symbols of the whole People of Israel. You may sing this song comparing the Torah to a tree of life in synagogue: "It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and all who hold on to it are happy." (Proverbs 3:18). We do not pray to trees, like some ancient religions did, but we often treat trees as symbols of God's blessings for Israel. Did you know that cutting down fruit trees is against Jewish law? The water in the verse adds another meaning! Water, that we, just like trees, need to live, is often compared to the wisdom of Torah.

The verse in this painting is from the book of the prophet, <u>Jeremiah</u>, who lived in Israel about 2300 years ago. He tried to help the King of Judah, Josiah, lead people to pray only to God, instead of the idols of nearby nations. In this peaceful verse he says that the Jews who believe only in our God will be as safe and happy as a tree planted beside water.

Diving into the Painting

Even in the middle of a busy city full of traffic, a tree planted near a stream in a park can grow strong and healthy. Living beside clean water, this tree has strong roots and leafy branches to keep it healthy and fresh even in very hot weather.

While I was planning this painting, I wanted to give the tree a full healthy canopy of leaves and strong roots. The leafy top and sturdy roots below ground remind me of a passage of *Pirkei Avot*, *Ethics of the Fathers*, part of the Talmud, that teaches us a lesson in good behavior based on our verse from Jeremiah. The passage from *Pirkei Avot*, *Ethics of the Fathers*, compares the person who follows up his words with actions to a tree with both full leaves and strong roots that anchor it to the ground.

What do we learn about God, ourselves and with the natural world here?

- Why do you think that our tradition thinks trees are good symbols of Torah?
- If you were a tree, what kind would you be? Why that kind? Would you be a full-grown tree or a young sapling? Write a poem or a story or make a drawing of this tree.
- Trees are so very important to our environment! We know that they help clean the air, hold the soil in place, give us fruit, and provide homes for many insects, birds and small mammals. How should you help take care of the trees around you?
- If you were a tree how would you imagine God? Humankind?
- Would you like to explore our relationship with trees and help protect them? Check out the citizen-science program, <u>Budburst</u>, for a chance to work with real scientists to protect our trees and plants...our whole environment! Maybe you could give a write a story, or make a video about what helping trees means to you!

The Letter Pay



The letter *pay* makes two sounds. When the letter appears with a dot in its center it makes a "p" sound and is called *pay*. Without the dot it makes an "f" sound, and is called *fay*. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *pay* is the number 80. Its shape comes from the shape of an eye.

Diving into the Verse

This verse is part of Psalm 92, the special Psalm for Shabbat, and helps us understand God's unimaginable breadth and power, God's infinite wisdom. The scholar, Amos Hakham,

teaches us how the composer of this psalm links God's great deeds and great thoughts to the environment: "The psalmist describes God's thoughts as 'deep' and His works as 'great' as an insight that deep thoughts lead to great deeds, just as the deep roots of a tree produce great, high branches."

As human activities destroy much of the wild grassland and forest of Africa and Asia, and hunters kill these wonderful animals for their ivory tusks, it is important to appreciate the elephants' rights to live their own lives in their environment.

Diving into the Painting

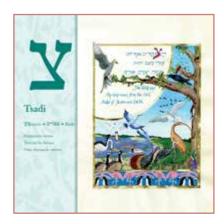
The <u>elephant</u> is one of the most gigantic and <u>intelligent</u> of all animals! In this playful painting, I imagine a huge African elephant trumpeting these words toward the heavens, telling us that God is even larger and smarter. Can you see my small cockatiel, Peaches, resting on the elephant's ear? Even though the elephant is so big and smart, people are making it hard for elephants to live in their natural habitats in Africa and Asia, as we take their grasslands and forests to use for our purposes, and even kill elephants for their ivory tusks.

What do we learn about God, ourselves, and the natural world here?

- What can you, as a young student, do to help the elephants live safely in their own lands? Can you study about elephants? Can you work with your class to plan a project to raise money or write letters to governments, or do other projects about saving elephants?
- What do you think God expects from us to do to help take care of elephants and other animals in our world?

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The Letter Tsadi



The letter *tsadi* represents a "ts" sound. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *tsadi* is the number 90.

Diving into the Verse

The line before this verse says "I lift my eyes to the hills. From where will my help come?" Then, in this verse, the poet tells us that it is *not* the hills or mountains, but the *Maker* of the mountains, God, who will protect us from all kinds of harm.

Perek Shira put this verse into the mouth of a small bird, called the Swift, but any bird—even the powerful eagle—could think the same thought. There are so many kinds of birds—so many shapes and sizes and colors, from tiny hummingbirds to noisy crows! They fly freely across land, sea and sky, feeding and nesting in every imaginable environment, from Antarctic ice to rain forest blossoms. Their songs and shrieks seem to sing of the joy of their free lives. All birds, though, depend upon the delicate balance of the environment in God's world—and upon us, who are responsible for protecting an environment that they can live in safely.

Diving into the Painting

Woodland and water birds from across the world dive into the water, fly up into the sky, and scrabble in the grass. A tiny hummingbird sips from the dahlia, a woodpecker drills into the tree-trunk and a noisy raven squawks rudely at a nesting robin. Every bird has adapted its lifestyle to its own body's needs and its habitat. Do you see my cockatiel, Peaches? He can't live safely outside, and is much safer living in my studio! Flamingos and penguins, each adapted to very different landscapes than our woodland scene, embrace necks and kiss.

What do we learn about God, ourselves, and the natural world here?

- Part of the magic of birds for us is the way they connect heaven and earth. How would it feel to you to soar into the heavens like, for instance, the high-flying swift?
- Pretend that you are a bird migrating from North American to South America. As you look down at the <u>rainforests surrounding the Amazon River</u> far below you, how would you feel about the damage being done to the land?
- Would you like to help take care of the wild birds in your area? Check out the "citizen science" program, <u>eBird</u>. If you do activities with them, think about making a video to tell about your project. You can also learn more about birds by checking out the <u>National Audubon Society</u>, which has worked to protect birds and their habitats for many years.
- Make a painting or write a poem about how the birds you especially love connect earth with the heavens.

The Letter Qof



The letter *qof* makes a "k" or "q" sound. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *qof* is the number 100.

Diving into the Verse

In this verse from the Noah story, God promises Noah and his sons that God will never again destroy the earth and all living on it with a flood. God shows them the colorful rainbow as a sign of this *covenant*.

We all know that God showed Noah and his family the rainbow as God's promise never again to destroy the world. The Torah tells us that the first people had been cruel to each other. God became angry with their bad behavior and decided to punish them by destroying all living things with the flood—and then start over again. God gave Noah a set of laws for all humankind, telling people to have babies and raise families, never to kill each other, to understand that they had power over other animals and should care for them, never eat part of a living animal, but that they could use animals and plants as food. God showed Noah the rainbow as a sign of a *covenant* to never again destroy the world. A *covenant* is a "two-way street" promise, where *both* people (one "person" here was God) take on responsibilities. So, the rainbow is like God's handshake on a *two-way* agreement. God wanted us to learn to care for each other and other living creatures, in return for God's promise never again to destroy the world. God gave Noah and his family laws that would help *all people* learn to treat each other (and animals) kindly and fairly.

Diving into the Painting

The painting shows a colorful <u>rainbow</u> appearing through the clouds after a storm. Can you see the rainbow's reflection in the peaceful river? This scene shows my favorite walk along the Potomac River outside of Washington, D.C.

What do we learn about God, ourselves, and the natural world here?

- If you were to compose seven laws that would help all people live together comfortably, and to help people and animals live together comfortably, what would they be?
- What would *you* choose as a symbol of God's side of the agreement to protect us? Why would you choose this?
- Can you write a poem or make a painting about your feelings when you see a rainbow?

The Letter Resh



The letter *resh* makes an "r" sound. The original shape came from the shape of a person's head. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *resh* is the number 200.

Diving into the Verse

This lovely poem from the ancient Temple in Jerusalem describes a world of perfect order and balance, a world where all creatures live in harmony. This verse is about how the great oceans in God's beautiful world are filled with every

kind of animal, from the tiniest crab that crawls on the rocks to huge fish and whales. The poet uses the Hebrew word *remes*, "creeping things," reminding us of the Torah's description of the Fifth Day of Creation, when God created the sea animals and fish, along with the "creeping things" like insects and reptiles.

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Diving into the Painting

In the painting I show you a <u>coral reef</u> filled with all kinds, colors and sizes of sea-life. The large <u>blue triggerfish</u>, that lives in the Red Sea off the coast of Israel swims in the center. Gigantic blue clams and tiny waving coral polyps, rough branching corals and schools of fish that swim in the coral reefs near <u>Eilat</u> in Israel, on <u>Australia's Great Barrier</u> and the <u>Belize Barrier Reef</u>—live together in these ocean eco-systems. Coral reefs are far from our cities, but they are already sick from changes humans have made in Earth's climate. <u>We still need coral reefs and healthy oceans for many reasons!</u> Coral reefs protect the land and create land (like many islands) and provide food for many other kinds of sea-life—that provide food for many humans.

What do we learn about God, ourselves,, and the natural world here?

- Have you ever watched a film about coral reefs? Have you ever snorkeled in a coral reef? Have you walked around a public aquarium's coral reef exhibit and looked at the jellies and silvery schools of sardines? Were you amazed at all the shapes and colors of the sea animals you see in the sun-dappled waters? What thoughts passed through your mind?
- Visit one of the great aquariums, such as the Scripps Aquarium in La Jolla, California, or the National Aquarium in Baltimore, or the Coral World Underwater Observatory in Eilat, Israel. The Eilat Underwater Observatory takes visitors down to the sea floor among the actual coral reefs!
- Watch this <u>documentary film</u> about coral reefs.
- Write a poem or draw a picture about your feelings about coral reefs.

The Letter Shin



Depending upon whether a dot appears at top right or top left of the letter, the letter *shin* has two names and represents two sounds. If the dot appears at top right, the *shin* makes the "sh" sound. If the dot appears at top left, the *sin* makes the "s" sound. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *shin* is the number 300. Like *samekh*, shape developed from the shape of a bow.

Diving into the Verse

The Milky Way is our own galaxy, the group of "nearby" stars that our Sun is belongs to. How huge and powerful God must be to have spread out the heavens like a sparkling robe! This verse is part of a long and wonderful poem about the beautiful order of the universe that God created. The first thing the poet wanted to share with us was his complete amazement at how powerful God must be! If you have ever spent a night under the cloudless desert sky, far from city lights—like I've been lucky to do in many parts of the world— you may have felt the same amazement at the beauty of the night sky, and also wondered at how enormous God must be to have made all of this. Do you remember (from the *kaf* painting) that God promised Abraham that his children would be as many as the stars of the night sky? Can you can imagine what it would have been like to be Abraham, looking up at the Milky Way in the perfectly dark desert sky one night, and hearing God's voice making this promise to him?

Diving into the Painting

The painting presents a view of the Milky Way far overhead on a dark night. Can you see all the colors of the rainbow in the letters? The rainbow shows us all the colors of the electromagnetic spectrum, which is the name of all the kinds of light and energy in the Milky Way, and the whole universe.

What do we learn about God, ourselves, and the natural world here?

Look up at the dark sky some night, try to find the Milky Way if your area is very dark, and think about how enormous God must be to have created us, our planet, our galaxy (the Milky Way), and all the other galaxies in the universe! Write a poem about your feelings.

The Letter Tav



The letter *tav* makes two different sounds, a "t" or an "s". Here are the rules for knowing which sound it makes when. In modern "Sephardic" Hebrew the letter *tav* always makes a "t" sound. In Ashkenazi Hebrew, when *tav* has a dot in the center, it makes a "t." Without a dot it is pronounced "s," and is called "*sav*." The shape of the *tav* comes from the shape of a cross-marker for land. In Jewish religious tradition, the letters are also numerals, and *tav* is the numeral for 400.

Diving into the Verse

Braishit/Genesis tells us how happy God felt as God finished his beautiful Creation. God says that Creation is not just "tov," "good," like the other days, but "tov me'od," "very good," indicating how especially happy God is at the completion of Creation. Cells are the tiniest kind of life, and every plant or animal is really a group of many cells working together. Here tiny, important cells that make up every kind of life join the writer of Braishit/ Genesis to praise the wonder of Creation. Our aleph-bet celebration of the natural world is complete!

Diving into the Painting

When we look at a real dahlia, or any flower, with our eyes we see soft petals and pretty colors. In the edges of the painting you see how those petals look in a microscope—lots of tiny round cells, each its own tiny plant. Those cells grow together to make each of the many petals and the whole flower. Can you see a honeybee flying to the center of the blossom? If you look at the bottom right you will find a blown-up view of the cells of the honeybee's eye—each its own tiny animal. This is how a powerful microscope would see the bee's eye. All those cells in the honeybee's eye grow together to help the bee to find flowers…and make honey for its larvae and us!

Would you like to see other microscope photographs of the bee's eye? Look at how this artist <u>photographed bee's eyes</u>! You might want to look at this with your parent or teacher to help you read her description of her project.

What do we learn about God, ourselves, and the natural world here?

- When you hold something beautiful, like a flower, in your hand and think about it, what do you learn about nature? What do you think God tells us by helping us see how the flower is made?
- Plant a flower seed in soil in a clear cup, keep it moist and give it good light, and watch it grow! Once you see the first tiny leaves, draw it every few days and make a record of how the plant develops. For each drawing, write a little about how the growing plant makes you feel.

Final Paintings: Find the Hidden Letters Puzzle





Diving into the Verse

This verse from Psalm 104 sums up everything we have explored in *All the World Praises You!* As we celebrate Creation, we praise our eternal God and pray that God will always protect us, and all our generations in the wondrous environment of Creation...and we hope that we will each play our part in taking care of our precious world.

Diving into the Paintings

Daytime and nighttime beside a stream. The sky, grassy meadow and stream are filled with all kinds of life, and the blue water reflects the color of the heavens. Every letter of the Hebrew alphabet is hidden in the paintings....at least once! See if you can find them all!

Click here for the key