

Teaching About the Jewish High Holy Days

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur



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It is a sign of America's growing sensitivity to religious diversity that many school calendars now include the Jewish High Holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. These major religious holidays directly involve many Jewish students and teachers in our schools. This year Rosh Hashanah, or the Jewish New Year, begins at sundown on September 28. It is celebrated by most American Reform Jews through September 29 and marks the beginning of 5772 on the Jewish calendar. Jews of other traditions exercise an extra day of observance for Rosh Hashanah and hold the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as sacred days of introspection. Yom Kippur, or Day of Atonement, begins at sundown on October 7 and lasts through October 8. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are major holidays for Jews.

Since Jewish holidays are determined by a combination of the solar and lunar calendar, thus moving each year on the western calendar, coordinating with school schedules can sometimes be tricky. Significant numbers of faculty and students are members of the faith and absences from work and school will occur especially on Yom Kippur, October 8 this year. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur require that all normal business, school, or secular activities cease about two hours before sundown on the eve of the holiday to allow for adequate preparations.

Beyond the practical matters of school attendance, however, is the opportunity that the Jewish High Holy Days provide to increase multicultural understanding and religious tolerance when teachers take the time to teach about the meaning and practices of religious holidays in an academic manner.

High Holy Days – General

L'Shana Tova and Welcome to High Holy Days on the Net

<http://www.holidays.net/highholydays/>

Written for Jews, this web page is academic in nature and dedicated to the Jewish High Holy Days. It covers their history, observance, relevance, and more. Activities such as coloring pictures are not appropriate to do in the public school classroom but can be printed to show students about important symbols of the holidays. There is a sound file demonstrating the sound of the shofar, an ancient symbol of Rosh Hashanah.

Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly – Sin and Repentance

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/september-26-2008/sin-andrepentance/649/>

This Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly “Belief and Practice” site is an interview of Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz in 2008 about the meaning of the ideas of sin and repentance to Jews, the key concepts underlying the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It has video clips of a Jewish service. The site is designed to explain Jewish religious practice in an academic manner to non-Jews.

Jewish Calendar

<http://webexhibits.org/calendars/calendar-jewish.html>

This site gives background information about the Jewish calendar and how it is determined from a combination of solar and lunar calendar factors. It strives to have its years coincide with the tropical year and its months coincide with the synodic months. This is a complicated goal, and the rules for the Jewish calendar are correspondingly fascinating.

Learning about Rosh Hashanah

This year Rosh Hashanah marks New Year's Day of the year 5772 on the Jewish calendar, and the anniversary of the creation of the world. On the 2011 American calendar, Rosh Hashanah begins at sundown September 28. This is the first of the Ten Days of Awe (or Repentance.) Reform Jews celebrate the holiday for one day. All other Jews celebrate for two.

Children's Shofar Factory

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/september-7-2007/childrensshofar-factory/3950/>

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, begins 9 days before the beginning of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. For both occasions, one of the traditional parts of the worship service is the blowing of the shofar. This is a ram's horn that is blown in synagogues throughout the world to recall Abraham's last-minute sacrifice of a ram instead of his son, Isaac. On Rosh Hashanah the shofar's mournful sound is intended to

induce feelings of repentance and the need to return to God. This site has a brief video clip of the process of blowing the horn as well as a show and tell about how the horns are made.

Judaism 101: Rosh Hashanah

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday2.htm>

This Jewish source has a clearly written basic description of Rosh Hashanah's history and traditions that is appropriate for 6th grade students who may be learning about this holiday as part of their History-Social Science course work. Hotlinks to definitions and some limited further information are included.

Rosh Hashanah

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosh_Hashanah

This Wikipedia article is clearly written, richly link embedded, and adequately referenced, giving the history and importance of the holiday in Jewish life. Since Wikipedia is a source often used by students, it is a good place to begin.

Learning About Yom Kippur

Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly – Yom Kippur

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week503/belief.html#>

This 2001 PBS broadcast is focused on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the most solemn day of the Jewish calendar. Cantor Abraham Lubin explains the meaning of the holiday to Jews and there is a video clip of a service.

Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly – Rituals of Yom Kippur

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/september-25-2009/ritualsof-yom-kippur/4352/>

This Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly is an interview with Rabbi Irwin Kula of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership about the rituals related to Judaism's holiest celebration of the year.

Jewish Virtual Library - Yom Kippur

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/holiday4.html>

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is the holiest day of the Jewish year and is a day of fasting. To re-establish oneness with God, Jews ask forgiveness and forgive others. Then they can confess their sins and ask God's forgiveness.

Judaism 101 – Yom Kippur

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday4.htm>

This Jewish source has a clearly written basic description of Yom Kippur's history and the liturgy and traditions of its celebration. Hotlinks to definitions and some limited further information are included.

Children's Literature

Chaikin, Miriam. **Sound the Shofar: The Story and Meaning of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.** Houghton Mifflin, 1986.

This narrative covers the background and development of themes and traditions associated with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It includes anecdotes and interesting sidelights on different holiday customs around the world.

Fishman, Cathy G. **On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.** Aladdin, 2000.

This brief book describes the tradition and philosophy behind these Jewish holidays for young children.

Ganz, Jaffa. **Rosh Hashanah: with Bina, Benny and Chaggai Hayonah.**

Mesorah Publications, 1990.

In this Artsroll Youth Holiday Series entry, Bina, Benny and Chaggai, the Holiday Dove, share information about Rosh Hashanah, the shofar, teshuvah, the apple dipped in honey, and many other holiday customs.

Ganz, Jaffa. **Yom Kippur with Bina, Benny, and Chaggai Havonah.** Mesorah Pub., 1991.

In this Artsroll Youth Holiday Series entry Bina, Benny and Chaggai the Holiday Dove observe Yom Kippur, a day of fasting and forgiveness, of being serious but not sad.

Groner, Judith and Madeline Wikler. **All About Yom Kippur and All About Rosh Hashanah.** Kar-Ben Publishing, 1997.

These two little volumes describe Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur explain traditions at home and in the synagogue, alternating with classic folktales based on themes of repentance, renewal and forgiveness.

Head, Honor. **Celebrating Yom Kippur.** Rosen, 2009.

This is a brief, easy-to-read nonfiction overview of the Yom Kippur holiday, its history and traditions.

Heiligman, Deborah. **Holidays Around the World: Celebrate Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur: With Honey, Prayers, and the Shofar.** National Geographic, 2007.

This book examines how Jewish High Holy Days are celebrated worldwide. Rosh Hashanah, known as the Jewish New Year, is a time for reflection and resolution. On Yom Kippur, also called the Day of Atonement, Jews fast, pray, and ask God's forgiveness for their sins.

Kimmelman, Leslie. **Sound the Shofar!: A Story for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.** HarperCollins, 1998.

In this easy to understand story, a family is preparing to celebrate Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. All of the symbols and the meaning of the holiday are clearly explained. Uncle Jake practices blowing the shofar, because he has been selected to blow it both at the beginning of the New Year and at the conclusion of the holiday. This introduction for young children has scenes and characters that they will be able to relate to.

Marx, David R. **Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.** Children's Press, 2000.

This entry in the Rookie Read-About Holidays series describes these important Jewish holidays in easy-to-understand, academic language for young children.

Peppas, Lynn. **Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.** Crabtree Publishing Company, 2009.

This book is for young readers to learn about how Jewish people eat special foods, reflect on the year gone by, and think about how they can improve themselves in the year to come.

Silverman, Erica. **When the Chickens Went on Strike: A Rosh Hashanah Tale.** Puffin, 2005.

In this adaptation of a Russian tale, a boy overhears some chickens planning a strike just before Rosh Hashanah. They are sick of being used for Kapores, the New Year custom in which people swing a live chicken over their heads, hoping to erase their bad deeds. When all of the chickens run away, the villagers try to get them to come back. Finally a boy pleads, "Without Kapores, I will never be able to make my papa proud." A chicken responds, "Boychick, for this you need a chicken?"



Reviewed and written by Dr. Margaret Hill, Director, California 3Rs Project, 2011.