



**JEWISH
LANGUAGE
PROJECT**

Rosh Hashanah Lesson Plan: Symbolic Foods with Optional MasterChef

Goals:

1. Make students aware of the tradition of symbolic holiday foods in Judaism, Jewish linguistic diversity, and multilingual Jewish wordplay
2. Help students think about their wishes for the New Year

Students: Age/Grade Level: 7th-12th grade

Milieu: Designed for any Jewish educational context, including Jewish day schools, part-time schools, summer camps, and youth groups

Essential Questions: How have Jews used symbolic foods and language creatively in various geographic traditions?

Objectives:

Cognitive: Students will be aware of the tradition of symbolic holiday foods in Judaism, several Jewish languages (Aramaic, Yiddish, etc.), and the tradition of multilingual Jewish wordplay

Skills-Based: Students will be able to select their own symbolic foods using wordplay

Affective: Students will feel a personal connection to the tradition of Rosh Hashanah symbolic foods and may want to introduce it in their homes

Materials:

- Print or electronic version of The Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America's ROSH 'ASHANA SIMANIM SEDER (or something similar):
https://mcusercontent.com/28fd9d2d3fb7963ebe93399ff/files/c368d1b8-72c6-6f7e-6dea-e7fae9a052f0/Final_Rosh_Ashana_Booklet_2022_Updated_5.5_8.5_in_1_.pdf
- Printouts: Two Jewish Language Project posts about symbolic foods, one multilingual Rosh Hashanah card, and one chart (Appendix)
- Plain paper, markers
- If you're doing MasterChef:
 - Kitchen, pots, pans, utensils, spices, flour, oil, sugar, eggs, garlic, etc.
 - Symbolic foods: 1 head cabbage, 1 large bunch carrots, 2 bunches leeks, 2 bunches chard, 2 squashes, 1 large bunch green beans, 1 pack dates, 8 apples – variety, 2 small containers honey

Learning Plan/Timeline (30-90 minutes):

Set Induction: 5 minutes

Learning Activities: 25 minutes

Symbolic foods: 15 minutes



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Blessing writing: 5 minutes

Multilingual greeting card: 5 minutes

Cooking Activity (optional): 1 hour

Learning Plan/Details:

Set Induction:

- [If doing MasterChef: introduce the symbolic foods they'll have to incorporate into their cooking. Why these foods?]
- How do Jews use symbolic foods for lifecycle events and holidays?
 - Starting Jewish learning (traditionally at age 3): Licking honey off Hebrew letters, symbolizing the sweetness of learning
 - Mourning: round foods, like bagels, hard boiled eggs, and lentils, representing the cycle of life
 - All holidays: wine represents holiness – something special – kiddush
 - Shabbat: challah represents the two loaves used in the Temple
 - Passover: matzah, salt water, maror, charoset, karpas, etc. to symbolize slavery, springtime, etc.
 - Tu Bishvat: wine and fruits and nuts to symbolize different types of trees on this celebration of trees
 - Chanukah: Fried foods to symbolize the oil that lasted 8 days
 - Rosh Hashanah: Our topic for today:

Learning Activities:

- Do you have a family tradition of symbolic foods for Rosh Hashanah? Some common ones: Apples and honey symbolizing a sweet new year, round challah symbolizing the cycle of the year, fish symbolizing fertility or fish heads symbolizing the head of the year.
- Others in the Sephardic tradition: squash, beans, leeks, chard, and dates. Why? Like many things in Judaism, they come from the writings of our ancient rabbis. Talmud Bavli, Horayot 12a:12:
 - אמר אביי השתא דאמרת סימנא מילתא היא [לעולם] יהא רגיל למיחזי בריש שתא קרא ורוביא כרתי וסילקא ותמרי
 - “[Rabbi] Abaye said [in a conversation about which omens are acceptable]: Now that you said that an omen is a significant matter, a person should always be accustomed to seeing these on Rosh Hashanah: squash and beans, leeks and chard, and dates, as each of these grows quickly and serves as a positive omen for one’s actions during the coming year.”
- But why these particular fruits and vegetables? Many other fruits and vegetables grow quickly too. Jews came up with other explanations for why these items are



important: **symbolism using wordplay**. And they did this in several languages. The Talmudic text we just read was written in Aramaic, the language Jews spoke in Babylonia, where this Talmud was written. But then they wrote blessings in Hebrew that used some of the same shorashim. Both Hebrew and Aramaic are Semitic languages, and most of their words are formed with three-letter roots.

- Introduce Sephardic Brotherhood's Rosh 'Ashana Simanim Seder. The blessings are written not only in Hebrew but also in Ladino, the language Sephardic Jews spoke in Spain and then, after they were expelled, in Greece and Turkey. Hebrew ability permitting, ask the students to read through the Hebrew blessings in pairs and circle the Hebrew words from the chart that use the same shorashim as the symbolic foods from the Talmud.
- Then when Sephardic Jews moved to America, they maintained this tradition but translated it into English – using English wordplay. Students now read “Have a Punny New Year” (Appendix) and circle the relevant words.
- Ashkenazi Jews also have a tradition of wordplay for Rosh Hashanah symbolic foods. Students now read “Carrots and Cabbage for Rosh Hashana” (Appendix) and circle the relevant words.
- What if we added some symbolic foods to our Rosh Hashanah meals, using English wordplay representing our aspirations for the new year?
- What do you hope for in the new year? Individually, students write their own English blessings for the new year and associate them with particular foods (could be from the list above or any other food). On the paper draw a picture of the food and write the blessing. Some ideas:
 - “Soup: May we have a super new year.”
 - “Ketchup: May I catch up with all my homework this year.”
 - “Two pizzas: May I have a year filled with pizzazz.”
 - “Split pea soup: May the new year bring world peace.”
- From this activity, we learned about symbolism in Judaism, but we also learned about a tradition of multilingual wordplay. Which languages did we discuss, and where were they spoken? Aramaic in Babylonia, Ladino in Spain, Greece, and Turkey, Yiddish in Eastern Europe, and English in America. In each of these places (and many others!), Jews continued to use Hebrew and Aramaic texts and blessings, and these languages were part of Jews' multilingual wordplay.
- Jews spoke many other languages too. You can see nine of them on this multilingual Rosh Hashanah greeting card (Appendix). Read through them and find:
 - One that refers to one of the symbolic foods (fish head) (Judeo-Italian)
 - One that refers to peace (Jewish Persian)
 - Four that refer to blessing (Hulaula, Bukharian, Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic).

- Four that refer to happiness, goodness, or sweetness (Judeo-Greek, Yiddish, Ladino, Juhuri)
- Do you recognize any words? Moadim shalom, gut, buena, dulce, coda?
- Find the shoresh b.r.k. – blessing – same as brakha: Bukharian (moborak), Hulaula brikhta, Judeo-Arabic mbark.

MasterChef (optional):

- In groups, students cook one savory main course/side dish and one sweet dessert dish. Each dish must use at least three of the traditional symbolic foods. Bonus points if the food is connected to a traditional Jewish food from any geographic community.

Wrap-up:

- Our holiday traditions continue to evolve, and you just created some innovations. Suggest that students take home their pictures/blessings (along with the chart and the handouts with the traditional blessings and holiday greetings) and implement them in their homes on Erev Rosh Hashanah.

Appendix:

	Name of food	Language	English meaning	Word (in the blessing)	Language of blessing	English meaning of word in blessing
Sephardi – Greece, Turkey						
	<i>karthi</i>	Aramaic	leeks	<i>sheyikartu</i>	Hebrew	cut away
	<i>silqa</i>	Aramaic	chard	<i>sheyistalku</i>	Hebrew	depart
	<i>tamari</i>	Aramaic	date	<i>sheyitamu</i>	Hebrew	end
	<i>qara</i>	Aramaic	squash	<i>shetikra</i>	Hebrew	announce/rip
	<i>rubiya</i>	Aramaic	beans	<i>sheyirbu</i>	Hebrew	multiply
Sephardi – America						
	date	English		dated	English	
	squash	English		squashed	English	
	leek (root)	English		rooted	English	
	fish head	English		ahead	English	
Ashkenazi – Eastern Europe						
	<i>mern</i>	Yiddish	carrots	<i>mern</i>	Yiddish	multiply
	<i>kol mit vaser</i>	Yiddish	cabbage with water	<i>kol mevaser</i>	Hebrew	voice proclaiming good news



Have a Punny New Year!

Sephardic Jews have a tradition of starting the Rosh Hashana meal with a series of *Yehi Ratsones* — blessings that incorporate wordplay, using symbolic foods that echo similar words in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Ladino. In the American Sephardic community, the punning tradition appears in English too.

Some examples of these hopeful blessings:

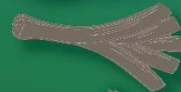
May it be Your will Lord our God and God of our ancestors . . .



*. . . that this new year will be **dated** one when enmity, hatred, and a person's desire for another's harm, will be brought to an end.*



*. . . that as You judge us, may the evil of the decree be **squashed**, but our virtue called out before you.*



*. . . that enmity, hatred, and a person's desire for another's harm, will be **rooted** out.*



*. . . that in the coming year we may go **ahead** in all we undertake.*

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Carrots and Cabbage for Rosh Hashana

Carrots and cabbage soup are traditional Rosh Hashana foods in Yiddish-speaking communities because of wordplay. *Mern* means both “carrots” and “to multiply” (as in, may we be fruitful and multiply in the new year).

Kol mit vaser (cabbage with water)

sounds like the Hebrew phrase

kol mevaser (voice proclaiming),

a harbinger of good news
and the world to come.



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