

Subject / Growing Together: Tu BiShvat, Trees, and Healing After Hard Times

Grades / Elementary School (Grades 1-5)

Pedagogies / Story-Based Learning, Reflective Discussions, Hands-On Activity, Community Engagement

Required Materials / Age-appropriate storybooks, Discussion prompts and materials for a Tu BiShvat Seder, Gardening Tools, small tree or seeds.

Abstract



This lesson introduces elementary school students to Tu BiShvat, the Jewish "New Year for Trees," and its significance in healing and community resilience, particularly following the difficult events of October 7th. Through age-appropriate discussions, storytelling, and interactive activities, students will learn about the importance of trees in nature and how they symbolize strength and recovery after tough times. The lesson culminates in a tree-planting activity to symbolize hope and growth.

Lesson Goals



- To understand Tu BiShvat and its connection to nature and healing.
- To recognize the role of trees in environmental health and as symbols of resilience.
- To learn about community healing and support after difficult events like those experienced on October 7th.
- To engage in meaningful activities that promote environmental stewardship and collective recovery.

Essential Questions (Part of Lesson Plan):



- What can we learn from trees about recovering from tough times?
- How does celebrating Tu BiShvat help us think about taking care of our world and each other?
- What can we do to help our community heal after something sad or difficult happens?

Part 1: Introduction to Tu BiShvat

• • • •  (15 min)

- Objective:** To introduce students to Tu BiShvat and emphasize the importance of trees in the environment, our lives, and the natural cycle of growth and renewal.
- Activity:** Begin the lesson with a group discussion. Start by asking students what they know about trees and why trees are important. Then, introduce Tu BiShvat as the Jewish "New Year for Trees," explaining how this day celebrates the vital role trees play in our environment and lives. Use simple, relatable language to describe the celebration, its significance, and the life cycle of trees, including how they provide nutrients to the soil and other plants even after they die.
- Interactive Element:** Create a large collective tree drawing on paper or a classroom board. Invite each student to draw or write something on a leaf, branch, or fruit. Include a section in the drawing where a fallen tree is shown, explaining how it contributes to the life of new plants. Encourage students to add drawings of new saplings or plants around this fallen tree, symbolizing the continuation of life. As each student adds to the tree, they can briefly share their contribution with the class.

- **Materials Needed:** A large sheet of paper or space on a whiteboard/blackboard, markers, crayons, or colored pencils for drawing. Pre-cut leaf shapes, as well as shapes of fallen trees and saplings, could also be provided for younger students.

Part 2: Story Time - Trees as Symbols of Strength

▪ ▪ ▪ ▪  (15 min)

- **Objective:** To help students understand resilience and recovery through the metaphor of trees overcoming challenges, with a sensitive link to the October 7th events.
- **Activity:** Instead of reading from a specific book, use an improvised or familiar story about a tree overcoming a challenge such as a storm, drought, or changing seasons. The story should be simple yet engaging, highlighting the tree's strength, resilience, and ability to grow and thrive despite difficulties.
- **Interactive Element:** After the story, lead a discussion about how the tree in the story showed strength and resilience. Ask students how they think the tree felt during its challenge and what helped it to keep growing. Gently draw a parallel to how people, like trees, can face challenges but grow back stronger, using the community's response to the October 7th events as a context.
- **Materials Needed:** No specific materials are needed for storytelling, but you might choose to use visual aids like pictures of trees or illustrations drawn on the board as you narrate.

Part 3: Discussion on Healing and Community

.....  (20 min)

- **Objective:** To facilitate a class discussion about community recovery and strength, drawing parallels with the resilience of forests and trees.
- **Activity:** Using the story from Part 2 as a starting point, lead a discussion on how communities, similar to forests, can recover and grow stronger after facing challenges. Guide students to consider how trees support each other in a forest and how this is analogous to people supporting each other in a community, especially during tough times like those experienced on October 7th.
- **Interactive Element:** Create a "Community Tree" on a large poster or paper. Each student adds a leaf with a written message or drawing about ways to help and support each other in difficult times. This can include messages of hope, unity, and resilience. The completed tree will visually represent the collective strength and support of the class community.
- **Materials Needed:** Large poster or paper for the "Community Tree," leaf cut-outs or paper for making them, markers, pens, and other decorative materials for students to write or draw their messages.

Part 4: Tu BiShvat Celebration

• • • • •  (30 min)

- **Objective:** To celebrate Tu BiShvat in a meaningful way that honors the symbolism of fruits and trees in healing, rebirth, and resilience, and to deepen students' understanding and connection to these themes.
- **Activity:** Organize a simple Tu BiShvat Seder in the classroom. Introduce traditional elements such as fruits, nuts, and grape juice, and explain their significance related to life, growth, and renewal. Describe how these elements represent different aspects of nature and our relationship to it.
- **Interactive Element:** Encourage students to participate actively in the Seder. They can share something they love about nature, a commitment they want to make to help the environment, or a poem or song about trees and nature. If possible, integrate existing nature-related songs or poems that the students might already be familiar with.
- **Materials Needed:** Fruits (e.g., grapes, figs, pomegranates), nuts, grape juice, cups, plates, napkins. Prepare any readings, poems, or songs related to nature for the celebration.

Part 5: Planting for the Future

• • • • •  (30 min)

- **Objective:** To engage students in a hands-on activity that symbolizes hope, healing, and commitment to environmental stewardship and community support, especially in the context of recovering from challenging events like those of October 7th.
- **Activity:** Organize a tree or seed planting session. If an outdoor space is available, guide the students in planting a tree in the schoolyard. If outdoor planting isn't feasible, use pots for indoor planting. Discuss with students the symbolism of planting a tree or seed, relating it to themes of growth, renewal, and the future. Explain the basics of how trees grow, their role in providing oxygen, and their importance in ecosystems.

- **Interactive Element:** As students plant their seeds or trees, encourage them to make a wish or commitment related to helping their community or the environment. This could be a promise to take care of the plant they are nurturing, to be kind and supportive to classmates, or to engage in environmentally friendly practices at home.
- **Materials Needed:** Small trees, seeds, soil, pots (if indoor planting), basic gardening tools (such as shovels or spades), water, labels or markers for students to personalize their planting area or pots.
- **Follow-Up:** Plan regular sessions for students to care for and observe the growth of their plants or trees. Integrate these sessions into broader discussions about ongoing care, stewardship for the environment, and the importance of nurturing growth, both in nature and within the community.

Equipment Needed:

- Age-appropriate storybooks about trees and resilience. (optional, may improvise)
- Discussion prompts and materials for a Tu BiShvat Seder (fruits, juice).
- Gardening tools and a small tree or seeds for planting.

Pedagogies Used:

- Story-Based Learning: Using narrative to teach resilience and environmental care.
- Reflective Discussion: Encouraging students to think about community, healing, and nature's resilience.
- Hands-On Activity: Planting as a tangible act of hope and community rebuilding.
- Community Engagement: Fostering a sense of collective responsibility and care.