



Red Sea, Blue Feet

Topic

Pesach

Grade Level(s)

All

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will

- Dramatize *B'nei Yisrael* (the Children of Israel) crossing the *Yam Suf* (Reed Sea)
- Analyze the communal aspects of crossing the *Yam Suf*.
- Compare how *B'nei Yisrael* might have felt about their *Yam Suf* experience to how students felt about an experience that required great courage.

Materials needed

- Tape
- Butcher Paper (preferably white or brown but use blue if you are not using paint)
- Blue Paint (You might also choose to use water if you are concerned about mess.)
- Buckets of Water or a Hose
- Towels

Technology needed

- Music Player
- *Pesach* Music
 - Suggestions include:
 - “Pass Over the Water for Passover” by Debbie Friedman
 - “Dayenu” (Pick your favorite version)
- Video and player to set the mood for crossing the Reed Sea (optional)
- Recording of *Shirat Hayam* (the Song of the Sea); One example is [here](#). Alternatively, a recording of “When You Believe” from the *Prince of Egypt* could be used.
- Tambourines or other hand-held percussion/bell instruments

Background for Teachers

After leaving Egypt, *B'nei Yisrael* (the Children of Israel) reached the *Yam Suf* (literally translated as the “Reed Sea” but generally known as the Red Sea). When they reached the *Yam Suf*, they were stuck between an army and a wet place: In front of them was the deep and dangerous sea while in back of them was the even more dangerous Egyptian army. God instructed Moshe to place his staff in the water, and the sea divided for all of *B'nei Yisrael* to cross over dry land.

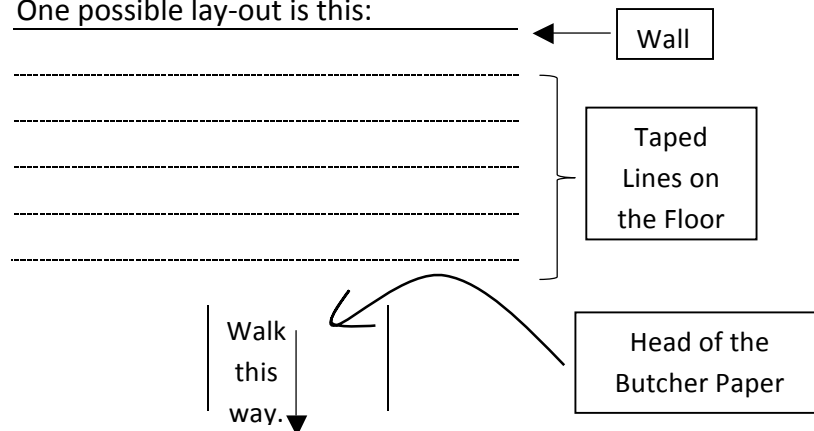
Red Sea, Blue Feet

Midrash teaches that the sea did not divide immediately and that it took the courageous Nachshon to begin to walk through the water before the sea split (*Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer* 42:1). After *B'nei Yisrael* began their crossing, the Egyptian army chased them through the parted waters only to have God enable *B'nei Yisrael* to reach the opposite shore before closing the sea back up and drowning the Egyptian army. To celebrate their salvation from the Egyptian army, *B'nei Yisrael* sang *Shirat Hayam* (the Song of the Sea, *Shemot* 15:1-19) in praise of God. [Note that there are *midrashim* that suggest that, although *B'nei Yisrael* were joyous at the Egyptian army's demise, God regretted having to drown the Egyptians. However, that is a discussion for another lesson. For more detail, see in particular Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Sanhedrin* 39b and Tractate *Megillah* 10b.]

Prepare in Advance

- Send a note home a few days prior to class explaining that the activity is messy and students should wear clothes that they won't mind getting drops of paint on! Also, they need to be able to walk around in bare feet (no tights!).
- Arrange to have a large space where you can lay out butcher paper and where things can get more than a bit messy. This could even be outside.
- Lay out several feet of butcher paper to create the dry land across which students will walk. The butcher paper will be used to recreate the crossing of the *Yam Suf*; so you might choose to get creative and add other elements that will give the students the feeling that they are crossing a parted sea.
 - Make sure that, if possible, you can set up the butcher paper so that students can line up against a wall and walk as a group to the paper.

- One possible lay-out is this:



- Students begin on the wall and then take a step to each line as they reflect on the visualization in section 1.
- Place a low, wide container of blue paint at the beginning of the butcher paper.
- Place a bucket of water (or an empty bucket and a hose) and towels at the end of the butcher paper.
- If you are using technology, make sure that your music and/or videos are cued up and ready to go (and possibly waterproof too!).



Red Sea, Blue Feet

Description of Activities

There are three parts to this activity: 1) a visualization exercise to get students “in the mood” 2) the actual walking through the Sea of Reeds followed by celebratory dancing and 3) a discussion about this seminal moment in our history and ideas that students can take from it for their own lives.

I. Visualization:

1. Tell students that they will be crossing the *Yam Suf* today.
2. Invite students to line up side by side against the wall, and then set the scene. You might encourage students to close their eyes so that they can picture themselves in the desert between Egypt and the *Yam Suf*.
 - a. Imagine that you have escaped from Egypt in haste. You have traveled through the desert only to reach the “uncrossable” *Yam Suf*. Behind you, the Egyptian army is closing in (though there is a messenger of God between you and the Egyptians).
 - i. Take a step toward the *Yam Suf* if you are scared.
 - ii. Take an extra step forward if you feel any of the following:
 1. Faith that God will protect you.
 2. Individual courage to face this difficult situation.
 3. Strength in the number of people facing the situation with you.
 - b. Moshe lifts his staff over the waters to part them.
 - i. Stay where you are if you are too scared to walk into the water.
 - ii. Take a step forward if you would be brave and walk into the water.
 - iii. Take a step forward if you would walk into the water even though you are scared.
 - c. The waters part. You begin to walk on the dry land between the parted waters. You do not know if the water will stay on either side as you cross or whether it will come back together and possibly drown you.
 - i. Stay put if you are scared of the water coming back down on you.
 1. Take a step forward if you feel any of the following:
 - a. Faith that the waters will stay parted.
 - b. Courage that you can face this potentially dangerous situation.
 - c. Strength from the multitude of *B'nei Yisrael* making the trek over the dry land.
 - d. While you are crossing, the Egyptian army begins to chase after you. They begin to enter the parted sea with horses, chariots, etc.



Red Sea, Blue Feet

- i. Stay where you are if you are scared that the army will overtake you.
- ii. Take a step forward if you feel any of the following:
 1. Faith that God will protect you.
 2. Courage that you can face up to whatever the army brings.
 3. Confidence that *B'nei Yisrael* can overcome anything if you stay together.
- e. Students line up at the beginning of the butcher paper to cross the *Yam Suf*.
 - i. Students who have taken the most steps forward line up first.
 - ii. If the floor was set up with lines of tape, students on the line closest to the butcher paper line up first.

II. Crossing the Sea

1. Students take off shoes and socks, roll up pants, etc.
2. The first student puts his/her feet in the blue paint and walks across the butcher paper, leaving footprints along the way.
3. Successive students continue to dip their feet in paint and walk across the paper.
4. When students reach the end, they dip their feet in buckets of clean water or use a hose to clean the paint off their feet. Students use towels to dry themselves.
5. While students are crossing, play music related to the event. This might mean music related to Pesach, Jewish pride, thanks to God, etc. [See "Materials" for suggestions.]
6. Hand out tambourines, bells, etc. and play *Shirat Hayam* (recalling Miriam leading the women of *B'nei Yisrael* in dance) for students who have completed their crossing. Students dance to the music with their instruments.
7. At the end of the dancing (after everyone has crossed), explain to students that *B'nei Yisrael* sang praises to God and danced after the closing of the *Yam Suf*.

III. Discussion

1. After everyone has had the chance to cross the *Yam Suf*, choose from the following prompts to help students reflect on the experience:
 - a. What do you notice about the footprints along the *Yam Suf*? What does it say about the communal aspect of the experience that it is difficult to identify particular footprints?
 - b. Ask students how it felt to dance to *Shirat Hayam*. Why would *B'nei Yisrael* express themselves through song and dance after the *Yam Suf* experience?



Red Sea, Blue Feet

2. Students reflect on a time that they used great courage to come through a scary or difficult situation. How did they mark that experience?
 - a. You might choose to prompt students with some suggestions:
 - i. Telling the story to a family member or friend
 - ii. Dancing
 - iii. Writing in a journal
 - iv. Eating a special meal
 - v. *Bentching Gomet*
 - b. Why did students choose to mark the experience in their particular ways?
 - c. Why do we mark these types of events in special ways?