



Restart with Your Heart

Grade Level

Primary and Intermediate

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

- Students will be able to explain the differences between how the Torah looks when we finish reading it and when we begin reading it.
- Students will have an opportunity to see the inside of a Torah scroll.
- Students will reflect on why we finish reading the Torah and begin reading it again on the same day.
- Students will learn the meaning of the Torah ending and beginning with לב (*lev*, heart).

Background for Teachers

Each year on Simchat Torah, we finish reading the end of *Sefer Devarim* (the Book of Deuteronomy) and begin reading *Sefer Bereshit* (the Book of Genesis). Usually, this is done with two different Torahs because it would take so long to rewind the Torah from the end to the beginning. This lesson gives students the opportunity to view and reflect on how the Torah looks when it is rolled to the end and how the Torah looks when it is rolled to the beginning.

The lesson further gives students the opportunity to learn a classic interpretation about why the Torah ends with a ל (*lamed*) and begins with a ב (*vet*) to make the word לב (*lev*, heart).

Many communities have different *minhagim* (customs) for how they read the Torah. Some read the Torah only during the day while others read the Torah at night. Simchat Torah is a special time when communities that read during the day also read at night.

Restart with Your Heart

Description of Activities

The Thing to Do Before Class

- Arrange to have access to your institution's Torahs. Ideally, you can take your students to the Torahs' home as opposed to bringing the Torahs to your class.

The Activity

1. Explain that we finish reading the end of *Devarim* (Deuteronomy), the last book of the Torah, and that we start reading the beginning *Bereshit* (Genesis), the first book of the Torah on Simchat Torah.
2. Ask students why they think we finish and begin reading the Torah on the same day. Why is this an occasion that we want to celebrate? Ideas will likely vary, but some possibilities include:
 - a. We never want to be done reading the Torah.
 - b. We can always learn something new from the Torah so we start again as soon as we can.
 - c. The narrative of the Jewish People never ends, so we keep reading about it.
 - d. The Torah is very important to the Jewish People, and we do not want to be done with it.
3. Ask students to picture in their heads what the Torah looks like when it is near the end and when it is near the beginning.
4. If the Torahs are still in the *aron* (the ark), explain to students that we show respect for the Torah by standing when we open the *aron* and when someone is standing and holding the Torah. Ask students to stand up while you take out the Torahs and lay them down.
5. After you undress both Torahs, ask students to identify what is similar and what is different about the Torahs.
 - a. Although there might be some cosmetic differences between the Torahs, students should be able to identify that the Torahs look the same for the most part (i.e. they have the same basic parts in the same places).

Restart with Your Heart

- b. Emphasize that the big difference is that most of the scroll is on the left of the Torah that is rolled to the end while most of the scroll is on the right of the Torah that is rolled to the beginning.
6. You can also take the opportunity to examine the Torah dressings.
 - a. Ask students to describe the Torahs dressings.
 - b. Help students to identify that the Torahs dressings are different during the time of the *Yamim Nora'im* (High Holidays).
 - c. Check out ["White" the Slate Clean](#) for a more detailed lesson that can be adapted to talk about the Torah's dressings.
7. Unroll the Torah that is scrolled to the end of *Devarim* so that it could be read. Students take turns looking at the inside of the Torah.
 - a. You can take the opportunity to let each student point to the end of the Torah with a *yad* (Torah pointer). Emphasize that we do not touch the parchment (i.e. paper) of the scroll with our hands but rather use other implements if we must touch it.
 - b. If your students can read Hebrew:
 - i. Ask them what the last word of the Torah is. They should be able to identify ישראל.
 - ii. Ask them what the last letter of the Torah is. They should be able to identify ל.
 - c. If your students cannot read Hebrew:
 - i. Mention to them that the last word of the Torah is ישראל.
 - ii. Mention that the last letter of the Torah is ל.
8. Unroll the Torah that is scrolled to the beginning of *Bereshit* so that it could be read. Students take turns looking at the inside of the Torah.
 - a. If your students can read Hebrew:
 - i. Ask them what the first word of the Torah is. They should be able to identify בראשית.
 - ii. Ask them what the first letter of the Torah is. They should be able to identify ב.

Restart with Your Heart

- b. If your students cannot read Hebrew:
 - i. Mention to them that the first word of the Torah is בראשית.
 - ii. Mention that the first letter of the Torah is ב.
9. As you put the Torahs away, ask students to stand up.
10. After the Torahs are put away, ask students to sit down in a seat. (If there are no seats, you can ask them to sit in a circle.)
11. Explain that the last letter and the first letter of the Torah combine to make the word לב. Explain that לב means “heart.”
12. Ask students what a heart represents.
13. After taking a few suggestions for what a heart represents, ask students why it is significant that the Torah creates the word לב through its ending and beginning.
 - a. Answers will likely vary, but you might want to emphasize the idea of the Torah being close to our hearts.
 - b. For a more in-depth discussion, you can ask students why the Torah is close to our hearts. Some ideas might include:
 - i. It tells the narratives of our ancestors.
 - ii. It includes Jewish laws.
 - iii. It is the thing that binds all Jews together.
 - c. For a project that reinforces the idea of the Torah being close to our hearts, check out [*Put Your Lev Into Torah*](#).