



Touchstones for the Beauty of the Everyday

Topic

The Month of Marḥeshvan

Grade Level(s)

3rd – 8th

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Become attuned to the rhythms of the Jewish calendar
- Reflect on the relative merits of times of special activity and times of mundanity
- Create Shrinky Dink backpack tags that will offer reminders to see the gift of the mundane.

Materials needed

- Music player and speakers (optional; see “Prepare in Advance”)
- Equipment for outdoor game (optional; see “Prepare in Advance”)
- Materials for Shrinky Dink Project
 - Blank paper and pencils for creating initial designs
 - Packages of Crystal Clear Shrinky Dinks sheets (may be purchased in craft supply stores)
 - Large jump rings for connecting finished Shrinky Dinks to carabiners
 - Assorted colorful carabiners (may be purchased in craft supply stores)
 - Jewelry pliers (to open jump rings)
 - Permanent markers
 - Regular hole punch
 - Scissors
 - Access to an oven
 - Cookie sheets covered with aluminum foil or parchment paper

Background for Teachers

The rhythms of the Jewish calendar often ebb and flow, alternating between particularly busy times and quieter times. The busy times offer very direct opportunities to connect with tradition, ritual, and God while the quieter times can seem absent of these opportunities without reminders.

Tishrei is a particularly busy month with Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah taking up 12 days of the month and with many of the other days spent preparing for those days. These days are particularly festive, beginning with the celebrating of the new year and culminating with the celebrating of the ending and beginning of the Torah-reading cycle.



Touchstones for the Beauty of the Everyday

Tishrei is flanked by Elul and Heshvan. Traditionally, the month of Elul is a month of that anticipates Tishrei. The shofar is blown each weekday; and many people begin to say special *selichot* (prayers of forgiveness), which lead up to Yom Kippur.

Heshvan, on the other hand, has none of the festive qualities of Tishrei nor any of the anticipation of Elul. In fact, Heshvan is the only month in the Jewish calendar void of celebrations, special rituals, etc. As a result, Heshvan is often called by the moniker Marheshvan, the “*mar*” at the beginning connoting the bitterness that comes from going from such a festive month to such a mundane month.

On a related note, there is a classic push and pull between prayer being *keva* (קֵבַע, set) vs. prayer being about *kavanah* (כַּוְנָה, intention). This struggle to find the optimal way to pray can also be seen in the contrasting natures of Tishrei and Heshvan. At the same time, there are many *berachot* (בְּרָכוֹת, prayers) that can help people to find blessings in everyday occurrences (e.g. *Modeh Ani* מוֹדֵה אֲנִי for waking up in the morning, *Hamotzi* הַמּוֹצֵי for eating bread). Where prayer is most often *keva* with the opportunity to find *kavanah* within the everyday words that one says, Heshvan provides the opportunity to find *kavanah* for everyday life in its most mundane aspects.

Prepare in Advance

The set induction invites students to participate in a 10-minute fun activity. This activity can be a dance party or an outdoor game. The specifics of the activity are less important than the fact that students move and enjoy themselves. Students will draw on the feelings of participating in this activity when they reflect later.

For the Shrinky Dinks project, follow the directions on the Shrinky Dinks packaging. Remember to make at least one test Shrinky Dink in advance of class to make sure that everything is in order.

Description of Activities

1. Announce that there will be a fun activity about 5 – 10 minutes into class. Conduct the normal class routine while periodically reminding students about the upcoming activity.
2. Hold the 10-minute fun activity.
3. At the end of the fun activity, return to the normal class routine.
4. After a few minutes of the regular routine, ask students to reflect on the arc of the class.
 - a. How was it different to be in “party mode” versus regular class mode?



Touchstones for the Beauty of the Everyday

- b. What are the benefits of engaging in celebratory activities?
 - c. What are the benefits of the regular class routine?
 - d. What are the disadvantages of each one?
5. Explain that the Jewish calendar has its own rhythms. The ups and downs are particularly apparent in the transition from Tishrei to Heshvan. [See Background for Teacher for more details.]
6. Discuss the following:
 - a. What is special about having lots of holidays in rapid succession?
 - b. What can be challenging about then going into a month without holidays?
 - i. Consider directing conversations to finding time to appreciate the special moments of everyday life.
 - c. What opportunities exist in a month without holidays?
 - i. Focus conversation on the opportunity to find meaning in the everyday.
7. Students create Shrinky Dink touchstones to attach to their backpacks in order to remind them to pause to appreciate the beauty of the mundane as they go through their routines. The Shrinky Dinks will go on large jump rings that will attach to carabiners that will hang from the backpacks.
 - a. Brainstorm words and phrases that students think will help them to pause and appreciate their everyday lives. Examples might include, "Remember," "Pause," and "Be Grateful."
 - b. Students choose a reminder word or phrase to put on their Shrinky Dinks and decorate their Shrinky Dinks.
 - c. Make sure students punch a hole before baking the Shrinky Dinks.
8. Optional: Ask students to share why they chose their respective words or phrases.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Pre-cut Shrinky Dinks.
- Offer four or five options of words/phrases from which students can choose.
- Write the word/phrase that students choose for them.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Students create a biorhythm map of the Jewish calendar based on the flow of holidays, fasts, etc.