



# Make it Count!

## A Creative Calendar for Counting the Omer

### Topic

Passover, Shavuot, Counting the Omer

### Grade Level(s)

All

### Goals for the Lesson/Activity

#### Students will

- Be able to count the Omer and recite the appropriate *berachah* (blessing).
- Be able to explain that the Omer is a commandment from the Torah
- Create their own ways of representing *Sefirat HaOmer* (Counting the Omer)

### Materials needed

- Copies of the Torah Text
- Copies of the *berachah* for counting the Omer

NOTE: This lesson is written to use the iPad; however, the same kinds of calendars suggested here could absolutely be done using a variety of colored papers, markers, stickers, etc. We encourage you to provide a variety of pathways for students to apply what they have learned about counting the Omer.

### Technology needed

- iPad(s)

#### **I only have 1 iPad. What can I do?**

Ask the class to brainstorm as a group around a particular theme and create one whole-class calendar that you can share via email to the whole class.

#### **I'd like to ask students/parents to bring in iPads. How would that work?**

This is a great opportunity to try a BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) day. Invite parents to bring their iPads into the classroom. Ask parents to download Strip Designer BEFORE arriving to class. Each parent can lead a small group of 3-4 students in creating their digital Omer calendars. Completed calendars can be emailed to the class to be printed at home.

- **Strip Designer**, \$2.99 for iPad, iPhone, or iPod Touch; This app is well worth the small price tag. Students create their own comic strips using pictures, drawings, text bubbles, digital stickers, and more. Once purchased, there are many ways to use it in the classroom. For more ideas, see [Storytelling with Tech](#) on [JTeach.org](#).





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### Background for Teachers

The Torah teaches us that we should count 50 days, seven full weeks, beginning on the day after the Shabbat of Passover (*Vayikra* 23:15-16). The Rabbis understand that this means that we begin counting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> night of Passover (since the first day qualifies as a kind of Shabbat) and that we count each night for seven full weeks (Tractate *Menachot* 65a-66a).<sup>\*</sup> The fiftieth day is Shavuot.

According to the Torah, counting the Omer was an agricultural event as this counting coincides with the wave offering of the first sheaf (the first Omer) of the grains reaped that season (*Vayikra* 23:10-12). For the Rabbis, counting the Omer between Pesach and Shavuot took on added historical and religious significance because counting finished on the day that the Rabbis understood as the anniversary of the giving of the Torah. Thus, counting the Omer begins after God redeemed us from Egypt and ends as we prepare to commemorate receiving the Torah from God.<sup>\*\*</sup>

The *mitzvah* of counting the Omer is generally completed at night. One stands and recites the *berachah* and then counts the day. The ideal is to count as close to sundown as possible so that you count as much of the day as possible. If you miss counting during the evening, you can still count during the day, just without a *berachah*. For the purposes of education, counting during the day with a *berachah* is OK.

One should remember not to announce the current day of the Omer until one has counted the day with a *berachah* since, by announcing the day, one is counting. Thus, if you want to remind others what day it is, the best way to do so is to say, "Yesterday was the X day of the Omer."

There is some debate over the precise formula for counting the Omer. Some say, "היום היום יום אֶחָד בְּעֶמְרָא (Today is day one in the Omer)." Others say, "היום היום יום אֶחָד לְעֶמְרָא (Today is day one to the Omer)." When you have reached a week or more in your counting, the formula is, "Today is eight days which make one week and one day in/to the Omer."

\* The Gemara records a debate between the Rabbis and the Boethusians about the meaning of Shabbat in this context.

\*\* It should be noted that the Torah does not make mention of Shavuot as the day that the Torah was given. Rather, according to the Torah, Shavuot is an agricultural holiday on which people bring their first fruits to the *Beit HaMikdash* (the Temple). Rabbinic custom, however, holds that the Torah was given on the sixth of Sivan, which coincides with Shavuot when counting the Omer begins on the second night of Pesach.



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#### Description of Activities

1. Play this version of the game Sparkle.
  - a. Students stand in a circle and count progressively by ones (i.e. first student says “One” second student says “Two” third student says “Three,” etc.).
  - b. When a student says a multiple of seven, the next student says, “Sparkle” and sits down.
  - c. Continue play until you reach the number 49.
  - d. You may choose to play with the remaining students until all but one are sitting.
2. Ask students when, what, and why they count. (i.e. What does counting accomplish?)
3. Share the *pesukim* (verses) from *Vayikra* with students and ask them to read the *pesukim* out loud.
4. Ask students what the Torah tells us in these *pesukim*.
  - a. Students should be able to identify the mitzvah to count after the waving of the Omer.
  - b. Explain that we understand that Shabbat in this case means the first day of *Pesach*.
5. Ask students when we begin counting according to the *pesukim* (keeping in mind that Shabbat means the first day of *Pesach* here). How long do we count?
  - a. Students should be able to identify that we begin counting on the second night of *Pesach* and that we continue counting for seven weeks.
  - b. If students state that we count for 50 days, that is OK. You can use it as an opportunity to point out that the 50<sup>th</sup> day is Shavuot and that we finish our counting at the end of the seventh week.
6. Explain to students that we count the Omer at night and that we have a *berachah* that precedes the counting.
7. Post the *berachah* on the board.
8. Ask students to read the *berachah* with you.
9. Count the appropriate day of the Omer with your students. [See Background for Teachers for more details.]
10. Ask students to create their own Counting the Omer calendars using a theme of their choice and the Strip Designer app. We recommend that students work in groups of 2-4, to reduce the number of devices needed and, more importantly, to encourage collaboration and community building. Review ***Tips for Using Strip Designer*** before beginning. You may want to distribute copies of the ***Tips for Using Strip Designer*** page to each student or group of students. You might choose to have each of seven groups create one week of the calendar or you might have each group create its own seven-week calendar.

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## Tips for Using Strip Designer

- Think of a theme for your Counting the Omer Calendar. Sports, food, dance, math... Be creative!
- Tap “Create new” to get started.
- Tap “Titled Pages” and select a template that has room for a title and 7 pictures. This way you will have a box for each day of the Omer. If you are creating a calendar for the entire Omer, you will need seven pages, one page for each week of counting the Omer.
- Tap in each square to add pictures, text, stickers, and more. Use ONE BOX for EACH DAY of the Omer. Remember to include the day of the week and the date in each box. When you begin counting, you can cross off each box as you count.
- If you would like, you can add extra boxes to include the Hebrew and/or English versions of the *berachah*. You can take a picture of the text that your teacher shared earlier to import into your calendar.
- Share your calendar via email or print it.

### Sample Calendars:

#### Count the Omer Basketball Style



#### Count the Omer Map Style



#### Count the Omer with MMs



All photos used above were “Labeled for reuse” with no restrictions or taken using a personal camera.



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#### **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.

- Use [Google Calendar](#) to create your own Omer calendar. An example of a particularly fun one can be found here. <http://homercalendar.net/Welcome.html> For each day of the Omer, include a fun fact or reminder for a brief activity to do that relates to the day being counted. For example, run once around the block on day 1, do 2 push-ups on day 2, etc.
- Create a counting game to remember how many days you have counted. You might try including hand gestures or rhythm. For example, on day 1 you count and clap, on day 2 you count and clap and stomp, on day 3 you count, clap, stomp, and snap, etc.
- Write a journal entry about the importance of counting from the time that we leave Egypt until the time that we receive the Torah. Why would we want to count the days until we receive the Torah? How does counting help us to look forward? You could add one entry for each day or each week of the Omer.
- Create a collage using [PicCollage](#) (free on iTunes or Google Play) of images that fit in with the agricultural theme of counting the Omer, the historical/religious theme of counting the Omer, or both.
- Read about the number 7 in Judaism [here](#). Create a slideshow movie (try using [Educreations](#)) that teaches your class about multiples of 7. Don't forget to include counting the Omer!
- Create a Counting the Omer Scrapbook. Include a photo/page for each day of the Omer. You can include personal thoughts and connections to the Omer and counting, to the Exodus from Egypt, to Shavuot, or any events from your daily life.



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וַיִּקְרָא כִּי־גֹ: ט״ו-ט״ז  
(ט״ו) וְסִפְרֹתֵם לָכֶם מִמִּתְחַרַּת הַשָּׁבֹּת מִיּוֹם הַבְּיָאֵתְכֶם אֶת־עֹמֶר  
הַתְּנוּפָה שֶׁבַע שָׁבֹתוֹת תַּמְיִמֹת תִּהְיֶינָה

(ט״ז) עַד מִמִּתְחַרַּת הַשָּׁבֹּת הַשְּׁבִיעִת תִּסְפְּרוּ תְּמִשִּׁים יוֹם  
וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה תְּדִשָּׂה לִיקָוָה

**Leviticus 23:15-16**

(15) You shall count from the day after the Shabbat, from the day you brought the Omer of waving, seven full weeks they shall be.

(16) Until the day after the seventh week you shall count 50 days. You shall offer a new Mincha offering to God.



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בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלֵּךְ  
הַעֲלֹלִים, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ  
בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וְצִוֵּנוּ עַל סְפִירַת  
הַעֲזִיבָה.

Blessed are You, our God, sovereign  
of the universe, who sanctified us  
with mitzvot, for counting the Omer.