

Values Curriculum:

Simchat Torah: Trying New Things

OVERVIEW	This session explores the holiday of Simchat Torah, the renewal of the annual Torah cycle. Using the alef-bet (Hebrew alphabet) as the focal point, students learn about the building blocks of Torah.
OBJECTIVE	To explore the alef-bet through a variety of activities and link our Hebrew language and the value of <i>Talmud Torah</i> to the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah.
VALUE(S)	<i>Talmud Torah</i> (Love of Learning)
STORY	"Kindergarten at Age Forty" adapted by Ariela Roney-Jinich (attached here, see pages 8-9)
MATERIALS	Alef-bet chart and flashcards, sugar, camera
AT HOME CHALLENGE	Students will learn something new together with members of their family.

Materials List

Activity One

- Alef-bet memory game set
 - ◊ Could be printed from chart below (2 copies) or two sets of alef-bet flashcards with plain backs

Activity Two

- Alef-bet flashcards or letter chart
- Digital camera or other electronic device with a camera

Gathering Activity

- Small colored plates (one per student)
- White or brown sugar
- Set of alef-bet flashcards

Opening/Closing Circle

- Printed copy of story: Kindergarten at Age Forty, adapted by Ariela Ronay-Jinich
- Alef-bet chart
- Big pad of paper and markers
- Torah scroll (actual scroll or mini version)
- At Home Challenge Sheet

Gathering Activity: Alef-Bet Sugar Writing (15 Minutes)

Children will explore the shapes of Hebrew letters by writing them in sugar.

1. Gather children around a table with small plates of sugar (one for each student) & alef-bet flashcards.
2. Have each child choose a letter and then draw it in sugar with their finger. The color from the plate will show up through the sugar.
3. After each letter, have the child gently shake their plate to erase it and choose another letter to draw.
4. As children draw letters, see if there are letters they recognize and can name or say the sound of.
5. Discourage children from licking their fingers in between making letters.
6. When time is over tell the children that our tradition teaches us that learning is sweet and invite them to lick their fingers (but not their plates!).



Opening Circle (10 Minutes)

Gather everyone into a circle and begin with a melody, a niggun or a greeting song such as Hineh Ma Tov.

Tell about today's theme:

- Today we are learning about Simchat Torah
- What do we already know about Simchat Torah?
- Simchat Torah is: a celebration of the Torah, at the end of the holiday of Sukkot, the last of our fall holidays, when we start reading the Torah from the beginning again each year, often celebrated by dancing with the Torah

Introduce today's Hebrew words: *Simchat Torah*

- Everyone put your pointer fingers together at the middle of your lips and say "Sim." Draw your fingers apart and up (into a smile) and make a smile and say "Chat."
- Simchat means joy or rejoicing.
- Everyone put your hands next to each other, palms facing you, and move them apart from each other as if spreading a parchment. Say "Toe." Once your hands are far apart, move them in circular motion as if they were the wooden rollers rolling the Torah scroll in and say "Rah."
- The Torah is where we find our Jewish story. Every time we open it we can learn something new.
- Now put the two together: Simchat (make a smile) Torah (open and roll the Torah).
- Together they mean rejoicing in the Torah. Today we will celebrate the Torah with joyful learning.

Story (20 Minutes)

Introduce the Story — Kindergarten at Age Forty

- Ask the children to raise their hands if they have ever tried something new.
- Have a few children give examples of what kinds of new things they have tried (a food, a skill, a game, an activity).
- Is it scary to try a new thing? Is it easy? Is it fun?
- Today's story is about Rabbi Akiva, a very wise rabbi who lived about two thousand years ago. He was so wise that he had 24,000 students who wanted to learn from him! However, just like you and me, he wasn't born knowing what he knew. Let's find out how he learned something new and then became the favorite teacher of so many students.

Read the Story. Ask some good Questions.

- **Check for Understanding**
 - ◇ Why didn't Akiva think he could learn Torah?
 - ◇ What did the drops of water teach him?
- **Get Curious**
 - ◇ What are kids wondering about the story?
 - ◇ Encourage kids to wonder about WHY something happened in the story, WHAT might happen next, or HOW someone did something.
 - ◇ Record these questions on the big pad of paper.
 - ◇ These questions don't have to have answers – though kids are welcome to try and answer each other's questions.
 - ◇ Have kids respond to each other's questions with "good question!" and a thumbs up
- **Give one more Question to Ponder**
 - ◇ I'm wondering: How did Rabbi Akiva learn the alef-bet?

10 Minute Break

Activity One: Alef-Bet Memory Game (25 Minutes)

The goal of this activity is for children to enjoy learning some of the letters of the alef-bet by playing a memory card game.

Introduce the Activity:

It took Rabbi Akiva years and years of studying to become a Torah teacher. His first step was learning the alef-bet. The alef-bet is the alphabet in Hebrew. “Alef-bet” sounds like “alphabet”!

Once you know the Hebrew letters, you can learn words, and once you know words, you can know sentences, and after that, you can read anything in the Torah because it’s all in Hebrew! That’s why Rabbi Akiva had to start out by learning the alef-bet.

Today we have the opportunity to play some games that will help us learn some of the alef-bet. You probably won’t learn the whole alef-bet today. It will take a while, but drop by drop and letter by letter you can learn Hebrew if you want to.

1. Lay out the memory cards (either using flashcards with no information on the back or memory cards you have prepared).
2. Divide the children into two teams or have the children work in pairs.
3. Have a child choose a card. See if they can say the name of the letter and the sound and/or tell them the name and the sound.
4. Have their partner or another child on the team choose another card and see if it is a match.
5. If not, say the name of that letter and its sound. And flip over the cards where they are. It’s the next team’s or pair’s turn.
6. If it is a match, repeat the letter name and sound and that team or pair keeps the card and takes another turn.
7. Play continues until all of the matches are made.

ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	ב	א
מ	ל	ך	כ	פ	י	ט	ח
ף	פ	פ	ע	ס	ז	נ	ם
ת	ת	ש	ש	ר	ק	ץ	צ

Activity Two: Alef-Bet Body Challenges (15 Minutes)

Children will make letters using their bodies. Introduce the Activity. Now we are going to get to know the letters of the alef-bet by being letters. I wonder if different letters will feel different in our bodies.

- Split the group into two teams.
- Have each team choose a Hebrew letter from the Hebrew flashcards.
- Each team will try to create the letter with their bodies.
- Once they have created the letter together, take a picture of it and show it to them along with the flashcard they chose. Does it look like the letter? Would they like to try again with some adjustments?
- They can then choose another letter.
- Continue until you run out of time.

Extra challenge: try to create all the letters for the word "Torah" (tav, vav, resh, hey).

Closing Circle (10 Minutes)

Gather everyone into a circle.

Introduce Closing Game: Finding the letters in the Torah (5 min)

We learned a lot of letters today. And we know those letters are the building blocks of the Torah. Now we are going to find them in the Torah.

1. Pass out one Hebrew letter flashcard to each student.
2. Have the children look carefully at their card and its shape. What does it look like or remind them of?
3. Unroll the Torah scroll in the middle of the circle.
4. Ask the children to look carefully at the scroll until they see their letter. When they see theirs, they should raise their hand.
5. When they are called on, they can come up and point carefully to their letter. Say the name and sound of the letter when they share it.
6. Let every child find their letter.

Review the Hebrew Words of the Day:

- Have the children practice the Hebrew words with their bodies: Simchat (make a smile) Torah (open and roll the Torah).
- Have the children say what Simchat Torah means (rejoicing in the Torah).

Pass out the At Home Challenge Sheet

Sing a goodbye song like *Shalom Chaverim* or *Oseh Shalom*.

At Home Challenge: Trying New Things

Today, in celebration of Simchat Torah, we learned how the letters of the alef-bet (Hebrew alphabet) are the building blocks of the Torah. And we talked about how learning something new can be scary, fun and exciting, but that we can learn anything (at any age) drop by drop.

Your challenge is to learn something new together.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Learn Debbie Friedman's Alef-bet Song:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiCzoTs1AdE>
2. You can also check out this fun Alef-bet video rap:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2b0YVazSOg&feature=youtu.be>
3. Try something else new together: a new recipe, a new skill (tying shoes or going across monkey bars), a new game, a new art project.

“Kindergarten at Age Forty” adapted by Ariela Roney-Jinich

About two thousand years ago, in ancient Israel, lived a man named Akiva. He was a shepherd and grew up in a family of shepherds. He had learned how to guide his family's sheep through the hills of Judah, how to keep them safe, where the best watering holes were, and how to tell when it was time to go home to rest for the night. Some people said he was the best shepherd in the village.

“You find clear springs and watering holes few shepherds even know about, Akiva. How do you know where they are?” they would ask. “I guess I've just been doing this for so long,” Akiva would say in a simple tone, “that I've just learned.” And so Akiva would care for his sheep year after year, finding the freshest pastures and cleanest springs.

Once in a while, Akiva and his wife Rachel would travel to Jerusalem to sell wool from their sheep. Jerusalem was a very different place than the hills of Judah. In Jerusalem, people rushed along and spoke so quickly that you could barely hear what people said before they had passed by you. There were also people of distant lands who spoke different languages. They were all there to exchange their spices, textiles, fruits in season and latest harvest.

Among the hustle and bustle of the town, sometimes Akiva noticed a group of people who weren't rushing around. In fact, they would sometimes sit in the same place for hours and hours. Akiva and Rachel would often be done with their day of selling and still they sat together.

Akiva was curious about them—what are they doing for so many hours? They didn't seem to be exchanging anything like the other people in the town. Quietly and discreetly, Akiva tried to get closer to them without being noticed. He saw them studying strange scrolls, rolling and unrolling them, and most of all, having a very heated conversation.

“Good question,” one of the would say to the other. “But what about this,” another would add passionately. It seemed they had a lot to talk about. Maybe what they liked to exchange were words and ideas, not linens and spices. He wanted to know what they were talking about but he was too shy to get even closer and ask.

And so Akiva continued his life as a shepherd, caring for his flock, and selling wool in Jerusalem when the season came.

One day, and all of a sudden, his wife Rachel said to Akiva “I think you should go to Jerusalem on your own next time.” Akiva was puzzled; was she tired of the hustle and bustle of the big city?

“I think you should go study Torah,” she said in a gentle yet convincing tone. Rachel always noticed how curious Akiva was of the Jerusalem scholars who sat closely and studied the ancient scrolls with so much passion.

“But I don't even know the Alef-bet!” Akiva said in a flurry, “How will I be able to read the Torah scrolls, much less be able to have a conversation about it or ask a good question?” “You'll learn,” Rachel responded calmly. “But I'm too old to learn, Rachel. Men my age don't learn the Alef-bet, only children do!” “You'll learn,” repeated Rachel with a convincing calm.

Akiva wasn't so sure he would learn. He wasn't so sure he could learn. In his mind he saw the Torah scholars rolling and unrolling scrolls where Hebrew letters danced on the parchment, switching places and creating new words. The Torah scholars would discuss with such cleverness and wit, sharing ideas, challenging them, and coming up with thoughts never thought before. How could he, a simple shepherd, ever learn enough to join a conversation like that. And so Akiva stopped thinking it could ever

be possible to learn Torah.

One day, Akiva was tending his flock and after a long day in the sun, and he led his flock to a clear and fresh spring in the hills of Judah. His flock was thirsty, and he also was thirsty. He dipped his bare hands into the crystal clear spring, cupping the water in his palms and quenching his thirst.

At that moment, something strange caught his eye. There was a huge stone along the small brook flowing from the spring, and drops of water were falling on the stone, one at a time. Drip, drop, drip—he could hear each drop falling. Directly where the drops were falling, there was a deep hole being carved into the stone.

Akiva was fascinated. He gazed at the drops and at the stone. How could something as gentle as a drop of water make a hole in a stone? What immense power something like a drop of water could have. One at a time, each drop made a small difference, and over time, maybe even years, those drops had carved away something as hard and solid as rock.