



Themes and Activities to Help Prepare for a Tu B'Shevat Seder

Topic

Tu B'Shevat

Grade Level(s)

All

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will...

- Be able to explain that we have a tradition of a special Seder for Tu B'Shevat
- Integrate a theme into the Seder
- Create material around a theme to be used during the Seder
- Make connections to the fruits of Israel

Materials needed

(Please note that the materials will depend on which activities you choose.)

- Markers
- Crayons
- Pens and/or Pencils
- Paper
- Poster Board
- Glue Sticks
- Safety Scissors
- Magazines with Pictures of Israel (to be cut out)
- Magazines with Images of Trees

Technology needed

- iPad (optional)
- Computer (optional)
- [Educreations](#) (optional), free, available for iPad, create a video/slideshow
- [iMovie](#) (optional), \$4.99, available for iPad, create videos or movie trailers



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Background for Teachers

Tu B'Shevat, the New Year of Trees, is mentioned in the Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 1:1). It is the day on the Jewish calendar that determines how old a tree is. However, for many years, there were no particular rituals associated with the day itself. During the 16th century, Kabbalists led by Rabbi Yitzchak Luria in Sefad created a seder around the day in order to celebrate the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, which maps out the *Sephirot* (spheres) that the Kabbalists believe are a path to getting closer to God. The Seder was first presented in the *Chemdat Yamim*, which is an anonymous collection of Kabbalistic writings about Jewish holidays.*

The Seder was also developed as a way to connect to Israel. The text of the Seder referred to God's natural creations. Since people could no longer bring fruit offerings to the Beit Ha'Mikdash (the Holy Temple) in Jerusalem, the Tu B'Shevat Seder helped people to connect with God through the eating of fresh produce.

The original Tu B'Shevat Seder included four cups of wine and four types of fruit to be eaten. The wine and the fruits are meant to recall the four spiritual realms. With the eating, the fruit becomes more and more edible as the Seder progresses, the level of eating corresponding to levels of purity. Thus, we begin with fruits with inedible peels or shells (e.g. walnuts, oranges) whose essence is hidden by the covering and move to fruits that are completely edible (e.g. grapes, figs) and whose essence is apparent. With the drinking, the wine becomes darker and darker, implying a greater level of completeness.

The food at the Seder is also a way of making a greater connection to Israel. The *Shivat Haminim* (seven species that are mentioned in the Torah as being products of the Land of Israel: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates) are featured during the Seder, and discussion often centers on the food that the Land of Israel produces.

Today, people continue to host Tu B'Shevat Seders. However, modern Seders tend to focus on the natural world, why we are thankful for the things that God has created, and how we can tend to and protect God's creations. The food and drink that were consumed at the original Seders are still consumed today along with other natural foods.

There are many simple Seders available online. The chart below gives a variety of options, both traditional and creative, to enrich and customize a Seder for your class. Choose one of the themes suggested and have students create pieces to integrate during the Seder. You can also come up with a theme of your own.

*The Seder was later published separately in a pamphlet called *Pri Etz Hadar* (The Beautiful Fruit), which is a reference to the etrog. (The Torah refers to *pri etz hadar* in connection to Sukkot. This is understood to refer to the etrog.) There is a *minhag* (tradition) to pray for a beautiful etrog on Tu B'Shevat.



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Description of Activities

Students can prepare for the Tu B'Shevat Seder in a number of ways. Pick a theme from the chart. Divide students into four groups. Assign each group one topic from the theme that you chose. Each group prepares a presentation to go along with its topic. Some suggestions for ways to present include:

- Use Educreations or iMovie to create a video using audio recordings and images from Israel to show during the Seder.
- Create a poem or limerick.
- Make posters to decorate the room.
- Make placemats from images of trees. Use the placemats during the Seder.
- Create a song and/or dance.
- Create a trivia game for the rest of the class.

Note: You might choose to allow each group to decide how it wants to present. You also might choose to ask each group to focus on a particular mode of presentation. You could also give students creative freedom while also requiring an additional mode (e.g. each group must write a limerick).



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	1st Cup	2nd Cup	3rd Cup	4th Cup
The Color of the Wine/Grape Juice in Each Cup	White	Pale Pink (White with some Red)	Dark Pink (Red with some White)	Red
Traditional Kabbalistic Interpretation	<i>Asiyah</i> (Action)	<i>Yetzirah</i> (Formation)	<i>Beriah</i> (Creation)	<i>Atzilut</i> (Emanation from God)
Traditional Fruits Eaten During the Tu B'Shevat Seder	Fruits with inedible peels or shells (e.g. orange, pomegranate, walnut)	Fruits with inedible pits (e.g. date, olive, peach)	Fruits that are completely edible (blueberry, fig)	Fruit on the table with the best fragrance
Environmental Themes	Recycle	Reuse	Reduce	Sustainability
Holy Cities in Israel	Teveriyah (Tiberias)	Tz'fat (Sefad)	Chevron (Hebron)	Yerushalayim (Jerusalem)
4 Children (What do they have to say about the environment?)	Doesn't Know to Ask	Simple	Wicked	Wise
Bodies of Water	Dead Sea	Red Sea	Mediterranean Sea	Kinneret (Sea of Galilee)
Seasons	Winter (Tree Is Bare)	Fall (Leaves Falling)	Spring (Tree Is Green)	Summer (Tree in Bloom)
Modern Cities of Israel	Eilat	Haifa	Tel Aviv	Yerushalayim
Creation (How does each higher level have responsibility for the lower levels?)	Heavens and Earth	Light and Dark	Grass and Trees	Animals and People



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A Short Guide to Online Tu B'Shevat Seders

Tu B'Shevat Seder by Rabbi Amy R. Scheinerman

<http://scheinerman.net/judaism/tubshevat/treeseder.html>

A Family Friendly Seder by PJ Library

<http://pjlibrary.org/pj-blog/index.php/archives/4262/seder-for-tu-b-shevat/>

Tu B'Shevat Seder by My Jewish Learning

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Tu_Bishvat/Practices/Mode rn_Seder.shtml

Branching Out: Your Tu BiShvat by JNF

<http://support.jnf.org/site/DocServer/BranchingOut.pdf?docID=921>

Kabbalistic Tu B'shvat Seder by Yitzhak Buxbaum

<http://www.aish.com/h/15sh/ho/48965616.html>

Tu BiSh'vat Seder Compiled by Marc Katz and Debra Eichenbaum

<http://www.reformjudaism.org/sites/default/files/articles/files/RAC-NFTY-seder.pdf>

Seeds of Hope: Tu B'Shevat by Yosef I. Abramowitz and Marilyn Z. Fine

http://www.lookstein.org/resources/seder_babaganewz.pdf

Tu B'Shvat Haggadah / טו בשבט Hazon Seder and Sourcebook

<http://www.hazon.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/2013-Tu-BShvat-Haggadah.pdf>