



Be the Sofer

Topic

Torah, Hebrew

Grade Level(s)

3rd Grade and Up

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Students will be able to identify the *STaM* style of writing
- Students will write in the *STaM* style of writing
- Students will write with intent like a *sofer*

Materials needed

- Torah scroll
- Copies of the *Be the Sofer* worksheet
- Quills – available at craft stores (trim feather tips on an angle)
- Ink – calligraphy ink, or diluted tempera paint (washable ink is preferred)
- Optional – books for browsing, see bibliography at the end of the lesson

Technology needed

- [Torah Blendspace](#)

Background for Teachers

Tractate <i>Menachot</i> 29b	מנחות כ"ט:
Rav Yehuda said, "Rav said,	אמר רב יהודה אמר רב
'When Moshe went up to the heavens, he found the Holy Blessed One sitting and attaching crowns to the letters [of the Torah]. He said before Him,	בשעה שעלה משה למרום מצאו להקב"ה שיושב וקושר כתרים לאותיות אמר לפניו
"Master of the Universe, [why do you need to add crowns to what you wrote?]"	רבש"ע מי מעכב על ידך
He said to him,	אמר לו
"There is a man who will be at the end of many future generations, and his name is Akiva ben Yosef; in the future he will interpret about every crown piles and piles of Jewish law."	אדם אחד יש שעתיד להיות בסוף כמה דורות ועקיבא בן יוסף שמו שעתיד לדרוש על כל קוץ וקוץ תילין תילין של הלכות



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אבגדהוזהזטיכרלמםנזסעפהציקרשת

ם"ס (Ktav STaM) is the traditional Hebrew calligraphy style with which sacred texts are written. The word *STaM* is made up of the first letters of the texts this lettering is used to create: מזוזה, תפילין, ספר תורה (*Sefer Torah*, *Tefillin*, and *Mezuzah*). The predominant font used by a *sofer*, or scribe, is called *K'tav Ashuri*.

Ktav STaM is written with flourishes called תגין (*tagin*). These flourishes do not change the meaning of the letters or the words that they adorn. However, they have been the source of interpretation through the years (see above).

The writing of *sifrei Torah*, *tefillin*, and *mezuzot* is done by a special scribe called a *sofer*, who uses a special quill called a *kulmus* and a special ink called *d'yo*. Learning how to become a *sofer* usually takes about six months -1 year and finishes with the new *sofer* writing a *Megillat Ester* (Scroll of Esther).

Description of Activities

1. Unroll a *sefer Torah* for students to see.
2. Ask students to describe the letters.
3. Students look at the Hebrew writing in a *siddur*, *Tanakh*, or other holy book. How is the writing in the books and in the *sefer Torah* similar? How are the styles different? How does adding the crowns affect your feelings about what you see/read?
4. Explain that the Torah is written in *Ktav STa"m* and give background about this style of writing (see Background for Teacher).
5. Explain that a *sofer* must write with intention and say each word out loud before writing it.
 - a. Optional discussion question: How can saying each word out loud before writing it change how one thinks about writing?
6. Show selected videos from the [Blendspace](#) including:
 - MJLC's Animoto video chronicling the process of writing a Torah
 - Interview with Scribe Julie Seltzer
 - Scribing the Alef Bet
7. Students practice writing in *Ktav STa"m*



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Bibliography

A Torah is Written by Paul Cowan; photographs by Rachel Cowan

Describes the training, the materials, and the tools of Jewish scribes and the process used to transcribe handwritten Torah scrolls, as shown in the work of Rabbi Yehuda Clapman. Publisher: Jewish Publication Society, 1986

Sofer: The Story of a Torah Scroll by Eric Ray, with Joel Lurie Grishaver

A Jewish scribe explains in detail how he shapes the Hebrew letters he uses in transcribing the Torah and how he prepares the scrolls themselves. Publisher: Torah Aura Productions, 1986

How It's Made: Torah Scroll by Allison Ofanansky; Illustrated by Eliyahu Alpern

Visit the people who make Torah scrolls and decorations. Find out how parchment is scraped and stretched, how tree sap becomes ink, how a computer program checks for mistakes, and *why* people spend so much time and care making Torah scrolls by hand. Publisher: Apples & Honey Press, 2016