



Pirkei Avot, the Omer, and the End of the Year

49 Days. 7 Weeks. The time it takes to get from *Pesach* (Passover) to Shavuot. The amount of time that passed between *B'nei Yisrael* leaving Egypt and receiving the Torah on *Har Sinai* (Mount Sinai). The time to be transformed from an enslaved people to one with a close relationship with the Divine.

Traditionally, many people mark this time by counting the Omer, a ritual that involves counting the days and weeks leading up to Shavuot (Leviticus 23:15-16, Deuteronomy 16:9-10). More recently, the custom has developed that people read one chapter of *Pirkei Avot* on each of the *Shabbatot* between the end of *Pesach* and Shavuot (six chapters for six *Shabbatot*). One explanation for this custom is that *Pirkei Avot* is meant to be a guide to bettering oneself while the period of the Omer is meant to be one of self-reflection and improvement.

The classroom can be a place that inspires students to evolve and transform over the course of the year. In many schools, counting the number of days in the school year has become a custom that helps students mark the sacred time that they have in the classroom. As the end of the school year coincides with the period leading up to Shavuot and the counting of the Omer, take the opportunity to learn one Mishnah from each chapter of *Pirkei Avot* as a way to reflect on the year and inspire students to take what they have learned with them over the summer.

Some suggested texts with guiding questions are included. Activities to go along with the texts are on the next page.



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ACTIVITIES

Reflection Circles

Invite students to sit with these texts and reflect on the questions. These texts can lead to larger discussions about the year and how students have evolved over the course of the year. This can also be a whip where each student comes up with a single word to associate with the text.

Graffiti Wall

Wrap your room with large white craft paper. Post one or two texts with their corresponding prompts each week and invite students to share their thoughts. Ask students to respond to what their classmates have written as well.

Comic Book/Cartoon

Students illustrate the *Mishnayot*. They can use the media of their choosing. Encourage them to explain how their illustrations connect to their personal reflections on the texts. Use the apps Strip Designer or Toontastic to create comics and cartoons electronically.

Write Your Own *Pirkei Kitah* (Chapters of the Classroom)

After exploring the general purpose of the teachings of *Pirkei Avot*, students create their own version based on what they have learned this year. After students have written their *Mishnayot*, divide into groups of editors, illustrators, designers, etc. and use Book Creator to make a class book.

The Game's the Thing

Divide into pairs or groups and design a game based on one of the *Mishnayot*. (Think of a baton being passed as a metaphor for the Torah being passed in *Pirkei Avot* 1:1.) Students can decide the form the game takes. Some examples include: board game, card game, video game. Make sure that students include the rules of their games. Encourage students to think about the values that they would like to incorporate into their games. Students play their classmates' games.



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Week 1

Pirkei Avot 1:1	משנה פרקי אבות א:א
<p>Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and handed it to Yehoshua; and Yehoshua [handed it] to the elders; and the elders to the prophets; and the prophets handed it to the Men of the Great Assembly.</p> <p>They said three things, "Be careful in judgement," "Raise up many students," and "Make a fence for the Torah."</p>	<p>מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי וּמָסָרָהּ לַיהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיהוֹשֻׁעַ לַזִּקְנִים וְזִקְנִים לְנָבִיאִים וְנָבִיאִים לְמָסְרוֹתָ לְאַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה.</p> <p>הֵם אָמְרוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָיוּ מְתוּנִים בְּדִין וְהִעֲמִידוּ תַלְמִידִים הִרְבֵּה וַעֲשׂוּ סָג לַתּוֹרָה.</p>

What is one thing that you have learned this year that you would like to pass on to others?
How will you pass it on? How can you make sure that you hold onto it yourself?

Week 2

Pirkei Avot 2:13	משנה פרקי אבות ב:יג
<p>He [Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai] said to them [his disciples], "Go out and see which is the right way to which a person should cling.</p> <p>Rabbi Eliezer said, "A good eye." Rabbi Yehoshua said, "A good friend." Rabbi Yose said, "A good neighbor." Rabbi Shimon said, "The one who sees the result." Rabbi Elazar [ben Arach] said, "A good heart."</p> <p>He said to them, "I prefer the words of Elazar ben Arach because his words include yours."</p>	<p>אָמַר לָהֶם, צֵאוּ וּרְאוּ אֵיזוֹהִי דֶּרֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיִּדְבַק בָּהּ הָאָדָם.</p> <p>רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר, עֵין טוֹבָה. רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אוֹמֵר, חֵבֵר טוֹב רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אוֹמֵר, שָׁכֵן טוֹב. רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמֵר, הָרוֹאֶה אֶת הַנּוֹלָד. רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר אוֹמֵר, לֵב טוֹב.</p> <p>אָמַר לָהֶם, רוֹאֶה אֲנִי אֶת דְּבָרֵי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲרָךְ מִדְּבָרֵיכֶם, שֶׁבְּכָלל דְּבָרָיו דְּבָרֵיכֶם.</p>

How do the words of Rabbi Elazar include the ideas expressed by the other rabbis?
Why is having a good heart so important? How do you demonstrate the goodness of your own heart? Create a map of your heart. Make sure to include all of your positive attributes that contribute to you having a good heart.



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Week 3

<i>Pirkei Avot</i> 3:12	משנה פרקי אבות ג:יב
[Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa] would say, "Anyone whose actions [i.e. good deeds] are greater than his wisdom, his wisdom endures. Anyone whose wisdom is greater than his actions, his wisdom does not endure.	הוא היה אומר, כל שמעשיו מרבין מחכמתו, חכמתו מתקיימת. וכל שחכמתו מרבה ממעשיו, אין חכמתו מתקיימת.

How do actions help wisdom to endure?

According to this Mishnah, what is the purpose of wisdom?

What is something that you have learned that has led you to do something good?

Act! Do something good. What have you learned that informed your actions?

Week 4

<i>Pirkei Avot</i> 4:20	משנה פרקי אבות ד:כ
Rabbi Matya ben Charash said, "Be first in greeting every person. Be a tail to lions and don't be a head to foxes."	רבי מתיא בן חרש אומר, הוי מקדים בשלום כל אדם. והוי זנב לאריות, ואל תהי ראש לשועלים.

Why is greeting people so important? What is the difference between being a head and a tail? In traditional Jewish literature, the lion is seen as a sign of kingship and strength while foxes are seen as sly and devious. Why is it better to be a lion's tail than a fox's head?

Whom do you consider to be a mentor? Roar! Really. Let out a big roar. Find the power of having someone to offer you advice and to lead you through difficult times.



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Week 5

<i>Pirkei Avot</i> 5:26	משנה פרקי אבות ה:כו
Ben Bag-Bag said, "Turn it [the Torah] over and turn it over because everything is in it. Reflect on it and grow old in it. Do not move away from it because you have not better portion than it. Ben He-He said, "According to the effort is the reward."	בן בג בג אומר, הפך בה והפך בה, דכלא בה. ובה תחזי, וסיב ובילה בה, ומנה לא תזוע, שאיין לך מדה טובה הימנה: בן הא הא אומר, לפום צערא אגרא

Turn yourself upside down. How does the world look different?

What about if you are lying on your side? Standing on a chair? Crouching down?

How can you make sure to approach things from different perspectives in order to get the most out of them?

Week 6

<i>Pirkei Avot</i> 6:3	משנה פרקי אבות ו:ג
Anyone who learns from someone one chapter or one law or one verse or one word or even one letter must treat him with <i>kavod</i> (respect/honor)...	הלומד מחברו פרק אחד או הלכה אחת או פסוק אחד או דבור אחד או אפילו אות אחת, צריך לנהוג בו כבוד...

What is something that you learned today? This week? This month? This year?

From whom did you learn it? Pass on that knowledge to someone else.

How does passing on knowledge demonstrate respect for the person who taught it to you?