



Resolution Sticks: Celebrating New Beginnings with Positive Intention



Topic: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and other new beginnings

Grade Level(s): 3rd – 5th grade. May be adapted for older children, as well as for teens and adults

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Understand a traditional model for doing תשובה (*teshuvah*, see Background for Teachers for more information)
- Reflect on how they can improve themselves in the upcoming year
- Set personal goals

Materials needed:

- Sticks fallen and gathered from trees
- Yarn and other material to wrap around the sticks (e.g. cord, thread, strips of cut fabric, pipe cleaners)
- Masking tape
- Scissors (for cutting yarn)
- Paper
- Pencils, pens and/or markers
- Optional: beads, feathers and other embellishments and a glue gun to affix them to the wrapped sticks

Background for Teachers

This is a hands-on activity likely to be successful for learners of all ages and competencies. It is well suited for school, community, and home settings. This activity enhances the lessons and opportunities of the יָמִים נוֹרָאִים (*Yamim Nora'im*, Days of Awe), particularly תשובה (*teshuvah*), encompassing both repentance (acknowledgment of previous shortcomings) and return (renewed intention toward goodness).



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If possible, have learners gather their own sticks from the ground outside. Spending time outdoors can enhance respect for the natural environment and one's integral place within it. Direct sensory contact with nature can have many benefits, including a grounding (pun intended) and calming effect. This project incorporates the repetitive act of wrapping, which also can be calming and self-regulating.

Note: If there is concern about students using the sticks appropriately, other materials, such as boxy pieces of cardboard can be used.

תשובה (*Teshuvah*)

According to the 12th-century scholar Maimonides, also known as Rambam, there are four steps to תשובה:

- Acknowledging where one has gone wrong
- Confessing the wrong-doing using words, most often verbally
- Showing remorse or regret for one's actions
- Making a plan so as not to repeat the action, especially if faced with similar circumstances in future.

The idea of this process is to help people repent for what they have done wrong and then to do better in the future. According to Maimonides, the highest form of *teshuvah* is being faced with the same situation and then acting differently.

וידי (Vidui)

וידי is said just prior to Yom Kippur and many times over the course of the day. [Note: *Vidui* is also included in סליחות (*Selichot*), which many people say in the days leading up to and during the ימים נוראים (Days of Awe).] The prayer is written in the first-person plural — we have sinned. There are many reasons given for this, among them:

- If we had to stand up and confess our sins individually, we might not do so for fear of shame or embarrassment. If the entire community is confessing at the same time, we can name all of the sins aloud while acknowledging, in our hearts, those for which we are responsible.
- We may not have the courage to confess alone but might be strengthened standing in the midst of community.
- When one person goes astray or makes a bad choice, the entire community is responsible.



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Description of Activities

Go Outside (If Possible)

1. Take students outside to collect sticks from the ground. Emphasize that students should respect the trees, etc. by taking only what has fallen to the ground. If going outside is not feasible, gather and bring sticks for students.
2. Label sticks with students' names on masking tape.
3. Have students place their sticks by their seats or somewhere out of reach.

Focus on תשובה

1. Explain: New beginnings, like Rosh Hashanah or the start of a new school year, are great times to set goals in terms of your relationship with other people, the natural world, and/or with God. We are going to do a fun hands-on project making resolutions for the new year.
2. Go over Rambam's four steps of *teshuvah*. Discuss why each of the four steps is important to the *teshuvah* process.

Brainstorming & Writing

1. Pass out paper and pencils or pens to students.
2. Ask students to write down a list of at least three resolutions related to their relations with other people, animals, the environment, and/or God. Some examples:
 - a. Being a better team player, a more gracious loser, or a more humble winner (rather than just being a better basketball player).
 - b. Prioritize time, pay better attention, persevere (rather than just getting a better grade in math).
 - c. Listen better, be more inclusive, or be more supportive (rather than just being a better friend).
3. Before students begin, consider taking suggestions for possible resolutions and asking the class as a whole how they can be sharpened.
4. Emphasize that resolutions should be sufficiently concrete and attainable for students to track progress and accomplish over the course of the year.
5. While students reflect and write individually, walk around the class to help students refine their resolutions.

Create Resolution Sticks

1. Students choose one resolution from their list to write on a strip of paper.
2. Explain that students will tape their resolution to their stick and then wrap or "cocoon" the stick and resolution with yarn and other available materials.
3. Students gather materials they wish to use.
4. Pass out sticks.



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5. Have students wrap with yarn and fabric, covering their resolution. Beads with large enough openings may be threaded onto wrapping (using an embroidery needle or a make-shift needle of a masking-taped tip may help).
Optional: Students may choose among embellishments which the teacher or other adult affixes with a glue gun.
6. Students display their sticks in a location, in class or at home, where they can see it and be reminded of their personal resolution.
7. Communal Option:
 - a. Discuss *Vidui*. (See Background for Teachers.)
 - b. Brainstorm communal class goals for the upcoming year.
 - c. As a class, create a communal resolution stick with the class goals.

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 needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance:

- Ask learners with difficulty coming up with resolutions to consider the following:
 - When could they have been a better friend during the past year? What can they do differently to improve in the year ahead? (e.g. include others in play, tell someone they are feeling irritable rather than speak harshly)
 - What makes someone a good citizen of various communities to which they belong? (e.g. sharing with a sibling; waiting your turn at school)
 - What aspects of themselves do they feel good about and would like to expand or deepen? (e.g. express appreciation, timely follow-through on tasks)
- Student(s) who have difficulty with the mechanics of writing or keyboarding dictate their resolution to a classroom helper or to another student to write down for them.
- Students who have difficulty with the mechanics of wrapping have a classroom helper or another student assist.

For learners who could benefit from extension opportunities

- Students discuss or write about the differences among wishes, goals, and resolutions. What role does chance, personal agency, and accountability have in each?
- Students write a poem about how it feels to be personally cocooned and/or blanketed.