



Sukkot, Symbolism, and Sharing Our Strength

Topic: Sukkot symbols, wandering, and the obligation to help the stranger

Grade Level(s): Family programming (all ages)

Big Ideas

- Jews have a responsibility to pursue freedom from injustice for all peoples.
- Symbols help us visualize concepts that are sometimes difficult to verbalize.
- The Jewish people have a deep history of wandering, from ancient examples like the exodus from Egypt to modern examples like the journey of Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

Learning Targets

Students will:

- Articulate how a specific object is symbolic of the pursuit of justice for asylum seekers at the southern border.
- Connect their specific pursuit of justice/injustice to a Jewish value.
- Create a page that can be hung in a sukkah or community space explaining their symbol.

Relevant Vocabulary

אַרְבַּע מִיָּנִים (Arba Minim)	The four species that are shaken on Sukkot
אֶתְרוֹג (Etrog)	The citron that is shaken as part of the <i>arba minim</i>
לוּלָב (Lulav)	The palm frond that is shaken as part of the <i>arba minim</i>
הָדָס (Hadas)	The myrtle branches that are shaken as part of the <i>arba minim</i>
עֲרָבוֹת (Aravot)	The willow branches that are shaken as part of the <i>arba minim</i>
סֻכָּה (Sukkah)	A temporary three-walled dwelling
גֵּר (גֵּרִים) (Ger (pl. gerim))	A stranger
אַהֲבַת הַגֵּר (Ahavat haGer)	Loving the stranger
שְׁמוֹת (Shemot)	The Book of Exodus
וַיִּקְרָא (Vayikra)	The Book of Leviticus
דְּבָרִים (Devarim)	The Book of Deuteronomy

Materials / Technology Needed

- Copies of the Symbols sheet (separate download), 1 for each small group
- Copies of Brainstorming / Design sheet, 1 per group
- Additional sheets of blank paper
- Pens
- Art supplies
 - Options can include markers, colored pencils, crayons, construction paper, magazines, scissors, glue, etc.



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Background for Teachers

The holiday of Sukkot is both a harvest festival (*Shemot* 34:22) and a commemoration of the journey of *B'nei Yisrael* (the Israelites) through the desert on the way from Egypt to the Promised Land (*Vayikra* 23:42-43). As part of the commemoration of that journey, the Torah includes the *mitzvah* to dwell in sukkot for the duration of the holiday so that later generations remember the temporary shelters that their ancestors dwelled in during their long journey. These temporary shelters provided (and still provide) sparse protection from the elements and other outside influences.

In the same chapter, the Torah includes the *mitzvah* to take a beautiful fruit (understood to be the etrog) along with three other pieces of flora (understood to be the *lulav*, *hadassim*, and *aravot*) to form the *arba minim*, which are waved together throughout the holiday (*Vayikra* 23:40). The *arba minim* are seen to represent many different human attributes and ideas. One classic midrash posits that the relative smells and tastes (or lack thereof) of each item represent the levels of wisdom and good deeds of four types of people (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:12). Another interpretation posits that each of the items represents a part of the body and its inherent characteristics (*Sefer haHinuch* 324):

- *Etrog*—Heart, the source of wisdom, hinting at our desire to serve
- *Lulav*—Spine, the source of uprightness
- *Hadas*—Eyes, demonstrating that we will not turn away even at times of joy
- *Aravot*—Lips, demonstrating action through words and control of speech

Note that the *mitzvah* of *ahavat ha'ger* also is connected to the Exodus from Egypt. According to the Torah, Jewish people are obligated to look out for the *ger* because “you were once *gerim* in Egypt” (e.g. *Shemot* 22:20, *Devarim* 10:19).

Description of Activities

- Divide the group up into small groups of 2 -3 families and pass out 1 copy of the Symbols pages and 1 pen to each group.
 - Challenge each group to look at each symbol and record all of the ideas/concepts that each symbol could represent in the time allotted. They will be competing to see which team can come up with the most ideas/concepts that were not on any



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other teams' lists. (They have to be able to appropriately justify each unique answer in order to get a point). After time is up, go through each symbol and have teams cross off answers that the other teams share, and tally the points as you go to figure out the winning team.

- Point out how many different ideas/concepts were identified for each item, and how it shows that items can be rich in significance and that single objects can symbolize multiple ideas/concepts.
- Invite the whole group to look at the lulav, etrog, and sukkah diagram on the back of the page and go through what each of the traditional items symbolize, pointing out how they can symbolize more than one thing.
- Read the following to the group: "The following line is from one of the Torah portions we read during Sukkot: 'וַיֹּאמֶר פָּנֵי יְיָ לֵכוּ וַהֲנַחְתִּי לָךְ: ' And God said, "I will go in the lead and will lighten your burden."' (Shemot 33: 14). God says this while *B'nei Yisrael* are wandering through the desert." Then ask them the following questions:
 - What is a burden?
 - God said that God was going to help the Israelites by lightening their burden. If they were slaves and left in a hurry, why would the Israelites have had a burden leaving Egypt and wandering through the desert? Is it possible that their burden was emotional as well as physical?
 - In what ways might the journey and the burden of the Israelites on their way from Egypt to the Land of Israel be similar to those of the people and families journeying from Central and South American countries to the United States? How might they be different?
 - In *Shemot* 33:14 God says that God will lighten the burden for *B'nei Yisrael* as they travel through the desert. What might we do to help lighten the burden of people who are on a difficult journey?
 - *Shemot* 22:20 says, "You shall not wrong or oppress a stranger (*ger*), for you were strangers (*gerim*) in the land of Egypt." *Devarim* 10:19 says " You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." How might these verses



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inform the decisions we make about community help the people seeking asylum at the southern border?

- Hand out the Brainstorming/Design sheets and art supplies. Explain to the groups that they will be developing a new symbol for Sukkot to hang in the sukkah or other community space. In their small groups, they are tasked with coming up with an object that symbolizes helping others who are on difficult journeys, like the Israelites were in the desert. The page they create should:
 - Feature a drawing of their object
 - Explain the symbolism behind it
 - Write a sentence about the Jewish values that guide us to help others in need
 - Include an idea about how we can help
- Let students/families know they have 15-20 minutes to work on their pages. Students who finish early can go around to other groups asking about their objects.
- End the program with a share-out and by hanging up the pages either in a sukkah or other community space. If time permits, give each family sticky notes and pens and invite them to go on a gallery walk, sharing their insights and ideas on each other's work.

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 unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Staff/aids can be moved around for appropriate support within the groups.
- Group sizes can be adjusted for better assistance, or a student can work individually if necessary.
- Instead of having groups think of and choose their symbol collaboratively, give the group two or three choices from which to choose.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Students create questions to use at home in their own sukkot.
- Challenge participants to think about the symbols associated with another holiday, such as a shofar or Hanukkah. Ask them to think about how those symbols might encourage us to be helpers or who they might encourage us to help.