



Putting a Temporary Roof Over One's Head

Topic
Sukkot

Relevant Vocabulary

Grade Level(s)
3rd – 8th

Big Ideas

The natural world can seem both aggressive and protective.

The holiday of *Sukkot* emphasizes the dual role the natural world can play.

סִכָּךְ (<i>Schach</i>)	The materials used for the roof of a sukkah (See Background for teachers for more details)
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (<i>B'nei Yisrael</i>)	The Israelites (literally: Children of Israel)
וַיִּקְרָא (<i>Vayikra</i>)	The Book of Leviticus

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Understand what makes a *sukkah's* roof kosher (i.e. fit to be used as a *sukkah's* roof)
2. Appraise where they could put up a *sukkah*
3. Assess how different locations or constructions of a *sukkah* might affect their relationship to the ritual of the holiday.

Prepare in Advance

Collect pictures or actual specimens of kosher and non-kosher *schach*.

- Examples of kosher *schach* include: tree branches, vines, and wheat stalks, all detached from the ground.
- Examples of non-kosher *schach* include: wooden boards, metal poles, bamboo baskets, plastic tarps, and tree branches that are still attached to a tree

Background for Teachers

Vayikra 23:42 – 43	ויקרא כג: מב-מג
<p>⁴²You shall dwell in sukkot for seven days, every citizen in Israel shall dwell in sukkot.</p> <p>⁴³In order that your future generations will know that I made B'nei Yisrael dwell in sukkot in my taking them out from the land of Egypt. I am YHVH your God.</p>	<p>מִגִּבְסֻכֹּת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל־הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשְׁבוּ בִּסֻּכֹּת:</p> <p>מִגִּלְמֶעַן יִדְעוּ דִּרְתִּיכֶם כִּי בִּסֻּכֹּת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:</p>



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Residing in a *sukkah* is one of the central *mitzvot* of the holiday of *Sukkot* according to the Torah (Vayikra 23:42-43). This temporary booth is meant to commemorate the protective cover that *B'nei Yisrael* had during their journey through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. According to a debate recorded in the Talmud (Tractate Sukkah 11b), this protective cover was actually “clouds of glory,” and the *sukkot* are meant to demonstrate faith in God for protection from the natural elements.

The walls of a *sukkah* may be made out of anything and, in fact, could even be permanent walls (e.g. the side of a house). The roof, however, is meant to recall in some way the clouds of glory from the desert. It must be temporary and built with several requirements (*Shulhan Aruch* 631):

- The materials of the roof must be made from *schach*, materials that come from the ground but are no longer attached to the ground. Thus, while a tree branch would make kosher material for *schach*, the branch cannot still be part of the tree. (This is related to the harvest, with the leftover materials from the harvest being the ideal *schach* (Deuteronomy 16:13, Tractate Sukkah 12a).)
- The *sukkah* must be built so that the only roof (i.e. the only thing covering the inhabitants of the *sukkah*) is the *schach*. Building a *sukkah* under a tree or under the eave of a building traditionally would invalidate the *sukkah*.
- The roof must provide more shade than sun but still enable the residents to see the stars at night; and rain must be able to get through the roof.
- The roof may not be made of utensils or anything that is usually used for another purpose. Thus, for example, a piece of wood from a tree is valid; but anything made of wood and used for a different purpose is invalid.

There are various other details that go into whether *schach* is kosher or not (e.g. pieces cannot be bundled together), but the above rules are the basics.

Description of Activities

1. Show students examples of kosher and non-kosher *schach*. Ask what the kosher examples have in common. Explain what makes *schach* kosher (see Background for Teachers).
2. Take students on a walk outside the school building.
3. Stop at various places and discuss whether it is a place where a kosher *sukkah* can be built. Discuss why particular locations might be better or more meaningful. Remember that the location cannot be under a tree or under an eave of a roof.



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4. If there are wooded areas nearby, take students to search out *schach* that can be used for the roof of a *sukkah*. Discuss why the items they suggest might or might not be kosher *schach*.
5. Thought questions for reflection at the end:
 - Why might it be important for *schach* to be made only from items whose origin is from the ground? [This question could also be asked before going on a hunt for *schach* in step 4.]
 - How might it be meaningful to have a meal in a hut that provides shade (i.e. protection from the sun) but allows rain to enter? What does such an action indicate?
 - How might the experience of sitting in a *sukkah* be different with tree branches for a roof or with bamboo mats as a roof?