

Making a Happy and Sweet New Year

Topic

Rosh Hashanah

Grade Level(s)

2nd – 4th

Big Ideas

Symbols can make ideas more tangible.

Hopes for the future can be more likely to bear fruit if we put in effort to make them happen.

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Explore the origins of the custom to eat apples and honey on Rosh Hashanah
2. Consider how apples and honey represent aspects of desires for the new year
3. Develop ideas for what would make the new year a sweet one and create a plan to make the ideas come to fruition

Relevant Vocabulary

תפוח/תפוחים (<i>Tapuah/Tafuhim</i>)	Apple/Apples
דבש (<i>Devash</i>)	Honey
מחזור ויטרי (<i>Mahzor Vitri</i>)	A 12 th -century prayer book compiled by Simhah ben Samuel of Vitry, a disciple of Rashi's
שולחן ערוך (<i>Shulchan Aruch</i>)	A widely accepted collection of Jewish law compiled in the 16 th century
סימן/סימנים (<i>Siman/Simanim</i>)	Symbol/Symbols
ברכה (<i>Berachah</i>)	Blessing

Materials / Technology Needed

- Large sheets of paper to hang around the room.
 - One labeled “The upcoming year would be sweet for me if...”
 - One labeled “The upcoming year would be sweet for this community if...”
 - One labeled “The upcoming year would be sweet for the Jewish Community if...”
- Markers, pens, or other writing implements for writing on the large sheets of paper
- Optional: [Poll Everywhere](#) or similar app that allows learners to respond to prompts through devices
- Rosh Hashanah [simanim card](#) with images
- Optional: Apples and honey to enjoy while participating in this activity. Remember to consider allergies and clean-up if choosing to serve this sticky treat.

Background for Teachers

Apples and honey for Rosh Hashanah. It is an old tradition that offers an opportunity to indulge in a naturally sweet treat to begin what we hope will be a sweet year. But where does this tradition come from, and why do the apples and honey hold such a special place when many people also place other foods on their Rosh Hashanah tables to symbolize hopes for the new year?

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Many aspects of Rosh Hashanah, such as the shofar, are explicitly mentioned in the Torah or the Talmud. Eating apples, however, seems not to appear until the 12th century as a custom of the French community ([Mahzor Vitri 323](#)). Fast forward to the 16th century, and the custom of eating apples with honey had been codified for the Ashkenazic community (Shulchan Aruch, [Orach Chaim 583:1](#)). Various explanations have been given for the origins of this custom, the most basic being that the sweetness of the apples and honey are meant to bring sweetness to the new year (ibid).

In addition to the apples and honey, many households have the custom to have a [plate of simanim](#) to represent different hopes and aspirations for the new year. Some of these *simanim* date to rabbinic times (e.g. [Tractate Horayot 12a](#)), and each has its own special *Yehi ratzon* (“May it be your will”) blessing that is a pun on the food to express hopes and aspirations for the future. However, apples and honey are the only *siman* for which a *berachah* with God’s name is traditionally said. Thus, one says:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ

before eating the apples and honey even if *hamotzi* has been said for the full meal.

Description of Activities

1. Learners go on a *simanim* hunt around the building.
 - a. Depending on the size of the group, learners can be divided into smaller groups.
 - b. Learners look for objects that are meant to symbolize different aspects of Jewish life and/or history. As learners find examples, they share their findings and explain how the *simanim* symbolize hopes and/or important Jewish ideas. Examples might include:
 - i. Artwork of tablets of the Ten Commandments to symbolize a connection to the Torah.
 - ii. Images of a dove with an olive leaf in its mouth to symbolize a hope for peace.
 - c. If learners divide into small groups, give learners the opportunity to share their findings with the larger group.
2. Ask learners to think of *simanim* related to Rosh Hashanah. (Note that this might be a good time to enjoy apples and honey if employing that option.)
 - a. Show images of some of the traditional foods and share how they are connected with hopes for the future.
3. Explain that the *siman* of apples and honey represents hopes for the new year.

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4. Show learners the sheets posted around the room and explain that learners will walk around the room and write on the posted sheets ways that the upcoming year would be sweet:
 - a. One way the upcoming year would be sweet for themselves.
 - b. One way the upcoming year would be sweet for the learning community.
 - c. One way the upcoming year would be sweet for the Jewish community.
 - d. **Tech Option:** Use Poll Everywhere or similar app to survey learners.
5. Discuss: What *simanim* do you think might represent the various ideas the group has come up with? How can we as individuals and as a group help to make these sweet ideas come to fruition?
 - a. Write down ideas and do a monthly check-in about how the community is doing at making the sweet ideas happen.

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

- Learners identify Jewish objects that are meaningful to them.
- Learners draw what would be sweet in the upcoming year.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Learners think of other foods that can be *simanim* for the new year and compose sayings connected to them (e.g. Squash – May it be that all of our difficulties are squashed in the new year.).
- Learners research other occasions that apples are eaten (e.g. apple sauce on Hanukkah) and how apples are connected to those occasions.