



**Elul & The High Holidays:
Practicing the 3 T's of Teshuvah, Tzedakah & Tefillah
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Subject Area: Holidays, Jewish Living and Identity, Prayer, Values

Multi-unit Lesson Plan: To be done over at least 4 class periods

Target Age Group(s): Primary (4th & 5th grade)

Lesson Objective(s):

- 1) Students will know basic practices for a) maintaining good relationships, b) helping others, and c) having a relationship with G-d.
- 2) Students will understand that these practices are in preparation for the new year but can also be used at any other time of the year
- 3) Students will notice the effects of these practices on their own happiness and the happiness of others and thereby internalize the value of the practices (or not)
- 4) Students will gain an experiential understanding that Judaism can be active and engaged, involving practices they can actually *do* to better themselves and the world
- 5) Students will be equipped with practical tools for bringing basic principles of Judaism alive: a) returning relationships with family and friends back to more harmonious states (teshuvah), b) working for justice, equality and fairness (tzedakah), and c) praying for forgiveness (tefillah)

Procedure:

Class 1: Before students arrive, set up 3 separate “stations” or areas in the room for each of the 3 T’s. Decorate each—elaborately and thoroughly—with items and symbols that represent that particular T. Examples: Teshuvah has 2 dolls sitting and talking, making up with one another, apologizing and asking forgiveness. Tzedakah has a tzedakah box with a doll putting money into the box or one doll helping another doll. Tefillah has a doll, with a miniature yamaka on, praying with his/her siddur open. Include also Tefillin and perhaps a Shiviti (e.g. YHVH design on paper or embroidered where lower H symbolizes the earth and material things, V symbolizes feelings and relationships, upper H symbolizes the mind and intellect and Y symbolizes spirit). On the board, draw a really big circle and label it “Elul-30 Days.” Inside that circle, draw another circle and label it “Rosh Hashanah→Days of Awe→Yom Kippur-10 Days.”

Once students arrive, allow time for them to make their way around the room and view each station. Gather together for a story. Tell [The Fireman](#) story (see attached). Allow time for reactions and questions and whatever meanings they got from the story. Help draw out the meaning that we can't simply expect the world to become a better place without our doing something about it, without our contributions. Blowing the shofar is just a reminder to practice the 3 T's, it won't do them for us.

Ask your students: "Do you ever practice for things before you do them, like for sports, for a play, for a test, etc.?" Allow some time for sharing.

Introduce the idea of Elul as a preparation month for the Jewish New Year. Ask: "Does anyone know what we do in the month of Elul, the month before the New Year?" Briefly introduce the 3 T's as practices, as things we can actually do to make for a good and sweet year to come (see [homework handouts](#) for descriptions of each). Ask students if they know which station represents which T and why. Let them show their understanding of the different objects or express their curiosity about objects they don't know. Explain why you chose the objects you did for each station.

Explain that over the next number of classes they will have a homework assignment to practice one of the 3 T's and they will be reporting their experience back to the class.

Hand out the first assignment, Teshuvah, explain it in more detail and provide and/or ask for examples such as making up with a friend, a sibling, a parent or the whole family. Explain that it means "return" and that by apologizing sincerely, we can return our relationships to how they were before any feelings were hurt. Apologies, saying we're sorry, can shift relationships whereas not doing so can leave relationships stuck. If students are having difficulty thinking of a person to talk to or they cannot think of what to say, then demonstrate through role play a model of what the conversation might look like.

Class 2: Set up stations and board as before. Ask students to share their experiences from doing the Teshuvah assignment. Possible questions to ask students: "Who did you choose? Why? How did it go? How did you feel before doing it? During? After? Were you nervous, scared, excited? Did you feel better afterward, the same, worse?" Facilitate a discussion based on what comes up for students.

Tell the parable [The Hole in the Boat](#) (see attached). Allow time for reactions and questions and whatever meanings they got from the story. Help draw out the meaning that good deeds, no matter how seemingly small, actually turn out to be extremely powerful and helpful. They spread and grow and create a better world.

Hand out the second assignment, Tzedakah, explain it in more detail and provide and/or ask for examples. Also prepare and send home a flyer with community service information (e.g. soups kitchens, environmental work, etc.). Talk about the ideas of justice, fairness and equality and how it feels when things aren't fair.

Class 3: Set up stations and board as before. Ask students to share their experiences from doing the Tzedakah assignment. Possible questions to ask students: “What did you choose? Why? How did it go? How did you feel before doing it? During? After? Were you nervous, scared, excited? Did you feel better afterward, the same, worse?” Facilitate a discussion based on what comes up for students.

Tell [The Confession](#) story (see attached). Allow time for reactions and questions and whatever meanings they got from the story. Help draw out the meaning and power of genuine prayer, of how genuinely asking for help can lead to truly receiving. Also, we are all connected and we can pray for each other in addition to praying for ourselves. We can express to G-d our care for others and our wish for them to be happy.

Hand out the third assignment, Tefillah, explain it in more detail and provide and/or ask for examples. Use [Avinu Malkenu](#) song chart and handouts (see attached) to introduce this as a form of prayer and to practice as a group. Use the analogy of authority figures to help students understand “Our Father, Our King” as the ultimate authority, the Parent of kids’ parents, school principles, presidents, etc.

Class 4: Set up stations and board as before. Ask students to share their experiences from doing the Tefillah assignment. Possible questions to ask students: “What did you do? Why? How did it go? How did you feel before doing it? During? After? Were you nervous, scared, excited? Did you feel better afterward, the same, worse?” Facilitate a discussion based on what comes up for students.

Discuss how these practices, in addition to being used at this one time a year could perhaps be useful or helpful throughout the year.

Minimum Materials: [3 T’s homework handouts](#): 1)Teshuvah, 2)Tzedakah, and 3)Tefillah (see attached); 3 stories/parables: 1) [The Fireman](#), 2) [The Hole in the Boat](#), and 3) [The Confession](#) (see attached); [Avinu Malkenu](#) song chart and handouts (see attached); 4-5 young person dolls, tzedakah box, tefillin, siddur, miniature kepa for the doll representing prayer.

Resources: [The Jewish Holidays](#), by Michael Strassfield; [Seasons of our Joy: A Modern Guide to the Jewish Holidays](#), by Arthur Waskow