



Keeping Kosher by Froma Fallik

Subject area: Jewish Identity

Single lesson plan

Target group: 5th grade through High School

Objective: Students will understand the Torah commandments relating to kashrut as well as the development of kashrut over time, up to the present day, including eco-kashrut. Students will be able to determine if an animal is kosher.

Description: Students discuss Torah and Rabbinic law.

What is halakhah?

- **Jewish law**
- **Rules and practices**
- **The path one walks (root: hey lamed kaf = walk, go, or travel)**

What do we call these laws?

- **Mitzvoth (commandments)**

How many are there?

- **613 (the numeric value of the word Torah, Tav =400, Vav = 6, Resh =200, Hei = 5, plus 2 for the two mitzvot whose existence precedes the Torah: "I am the Lord, your God" and "You shall have no other gods before Me")**
- **Many can only be performed in the land of Israel (ex Shmetah = Sabbatical year)**
- **Many cannot be performed today (Temple sacrifices)**
- **Some are for specific groups of people (Kohanim and Levi'im)**

How do we divide these laws?

- **248 positive and 365 negative**
- **Between man and man. Between God and man.**
- **chukim (laws that do not seem to have a rational basis- singular chok) and mishpatim (laws that make sense intuitively- singular mishpat).**
- **Mitvot D'Oraita (laws found in the Torah) and Mitzvot De Rabbanan (laws instituted by the Rabbis)**



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Students discuss what kashrut is and is not, including issues of health, identity, self-control, and holiness. What is kashrut?

- *Jewish law dealing with food*
- *What we are and are not permitted to eat*
- *How to prepare and eat food*
- *Kosher means fit, proper, correct*
- *Can be used to describe objects (ex, a 10 branch menorah is not kosher)*
- *Does NOT mean blessed by a rabbi*

Is “kosher style” food kosher?

- *Kosher style means foods we associate with Jewish cooking, not food that is halakhically kosher*

Why keep kosher?

- *Because the Torah says so (chok, not mishpat)*
- *Do we keep kosher to eat in a healthy way?*
- *These are old laws- don't think of modern hygiene. Think about thousands of years ago.*
- *Health benefits include good hygiene, slaughtering animal in clean environment, trichinosis in undercooked pork, plucking a chicken using cold not hot water BUT people who eat non-kosher food are healthy*
- *Despite health benefits, NOT health*
- *Rather than clean/unclean, translate kosher/ not kosher as pure/impure*

How does kashrut help us maintain our Jewish identity?

- *Separation (ex. drain blood from meat separates us from pagans.)*
- *It is our job to transform the world and to do so we need to remain distinct.)*
- *Biblical Jews connected to God through mitzvot relating to the land and to food (agricultural rules, bringing first fruits & sacrifices to the Temple). Adam (man) and Adamah (earth) have the same root.*

How does kashrut add holiness to our lives?

- *Teaches self-control*
- *Teaches us to control a basic instinct*
- *Elevates the act of eating to a religious ritual*
- *Kashrut is a tool to help us be morally sensitive and compassionate*



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Students learn the criteria for kashrut for vegetables, fruits, land animals, sea animals, insects, and birds.

- *All fruits and vegetables are kosher*
- *Animals must have cloven hoofs and chew their cud (Lev. 11:3 & Deut. 14:6)*
- *Fish must have fins and scales (Lev. 11:9 & Deut. 14:9)*
- *Birds: Torah provides list but not reason. All forbidden birds are birds of prey so rabbis infer that other birds can be eaten)*
- *Insects: Permitted insects are named in the Torah. We are not sure which these are so only communities that have a tradition of eating certain insects may do so.*
- *Rodents, reptiles, amphibians: Not permitted*
- *Products derived from forbidden animals (ie their eggs, milk) may not be used*
- *An egg that contains a blood spot (fertilized egg) cannot be eaten*

Students learn laws regarding food preparation.

- *Fruits and vegetables need to be washed & checked for bugs (non-kosher)*
- *Mammals and birds (but not fish) that can be eaten must be slaughtered according to Jewish law. An animal that dies of natural causes or that was killed by another animal cannot be eaten. Animal must be healthy.*
- *Ritual slaughter is meant to be as humane as possible. The shochet (ritual slaughterer) uses a very sharp knife with no nicks or unevenness. The shochet must be a pious person, trained in the laws of kashrut.*
- *Drain blood. (Torah law. Blood is equated with life.)*
- *Remove remaining blood by broiling or soaking and salting.*
- *Meat and dairy cannot be eaten together*
- *The Torah tells us three times not to boil a kid in its mother's milk (Ex. 23:19, Ex. 34:26, Deut. 14:21). The oral Torah explains that this means not to eat meat and milk together. The rabbis expanded this to include not eating milk with poultry.*
- *This includes the pots, pans, dishes and silverware used to prepare and eat the food.*
- *People wait either one hour, three hours, or six hours after eating meat before eating milk.*
- *Most people wait a brief period of time before meat after milk.*



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Students learn about exotic but kosher animals.

- *The Orthodox Union hosts an annual 15 course dinner with exotic kosher animals on the menu. In 2007 this included locust, sparrow, wild turkey, elk, yak, blue marlin (fish), and shibuta, an Iraqi fish that tastes like pork.*

Why?

- *Part of knowing whether something is kosher is identifying it. Tradition and custom help determine if an animal is kosher. This is especially true for birds (24 prohibited birds are listed but we don't always know what they are) and insects. Today the only insects that are considered to be kosher are the ones that have continuously been eaten by Jews across the centuries. (Ex. In Yemen, locusts)*
- *To experience the full diversity of kosher food*

Students are introduced to the concept of eco-kashrut. What is eco-kashrut?

- *Ecology comes from the Latin study of (logy) (our) house (ecos). The world is our house. Kashrut is eating only what is fit. Eco-kashrut expands the idea of what is fit to include eating what is ecologically better.*

How could we observe eco-kashrut?

- *Eat less meat*
- *Eat organic produce*
- *Don't eat food picked by oppressed people (ex. Caesar Chavez & the grape boycott)*
- *Don't eat food that causes suffering to the animal (ex. veal)*
- *Be aware of what it takes to produce the food we eat (ex. using insecticides, using plastic utensils)*

The lesson ends with two short games. In the first, the teacher asks the students kashrut riddles.

(See Appendix I)

The second game (kosher/not kosher?) involves the teacher showing pictures of animals and reading a brief description of the animal. Students determine whether the animal is kosher or not based on what they have learned in the class.



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Teacher shows students a picture of the animal and reads enough of the text so that they can determine if it kosher.

(See Appendix II)

Sources

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Appendix I: Kashrut Riddles

Question: *I am an extraordinary factory that processes ordinary grass and plants into a common drink. Ironically, Jewish tradition tells us that you cannot eat me at the same time you are enjoying my drink. What am I?*

Answer: *a cow*

Kosher animals are identified by the Torah as those which have a split hoof (not a whole hoof like a horse and not toes like a bear) and chew plants, swallow them, bring the food back up and chew a little more. All kosher animals are plant-eaters, non-predators. Now I ask you:

Question: *What is the largest kosher animal still roaming the wilds of North America?*

Answer: *The moose (up to 1500 pounds)*

Question: *What is the large kosher animal that roamed this country in herds of millions of animals and was nearly exterminated?*

Answer: *Buffalo, Bison*

Question: *What is the tallest kosher animal in the world?*

Answer: *Giraffe*

Question: *What are two food items that never come from kosher animals but in their natural state are 100% kosher?*

Answer: *Human breast milk & Bee honey*