



# The California Three Rs Project

*Rights, Responsibility, and Respect*

## Teaching About the Jewish High Holidays: Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur

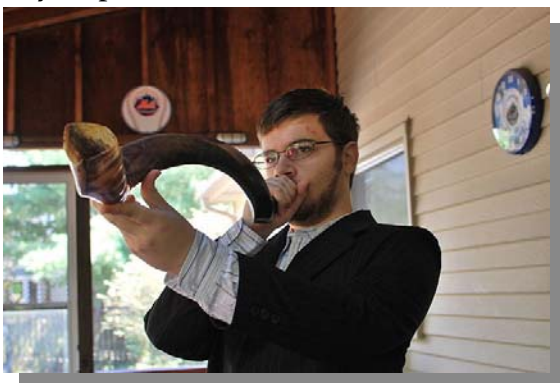
Dr. Margaret Hill

It is a sign of America’s growing sensitivity to religious diversity that many school calendars now include the Jewish High Holy Days, or High Holidays, of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. These major religious holidays directly involve many Jewish students and teachers in California public schools. The two days of **Rosh Hashanah**, or the Jewish New Year, kick off a period known as the Days of Awe, or the Ten Days of Repentance, culminating in **Yom Kippur**, or Day of Atonement. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are major holidays for Jews.

When students or teachers are absent from school these days, some educators or parents might wrongly perceive that school or class is not important to them. While such an interpretation of an

Jewish High Holy Days					
Year	Dates for Rosh Hashanah			Dates for Yom Kippur	
	begins at sundown on...	ends at sundown on...	New Year on the Jewish Calendar	begins at sundown on...	ends at sundown on...
2016	Oct. 2	Oct. 4	5777	Oct. 11	Oct. 12
2017	Sep. 20	Sep. 22	5778	Sep. 29	Sep. 30
2018	Sep. 9	Sep. 11	5779	Sep. 18	Sep. 19
2019	Sep. 29	Oct. 1	5780	Oct. 8	Oct. 9
2020	Sep. 18	Sep. 20	5781	Sep. 27	Sep.28

absence for religious observance is completely erroneous and unfounded, Jewish leaders encourage affected educators, school staff, older students, and parents of younger children to advise the school or district in advance of the High Holy Days so there is time to make the accommodation. Jews, like other religious minorities whose holy days are incompatible with school calendars, need to take the opportunity to explain why they will be absent, and ask for any important information or materials that will be provided during the days or classes missed.



A *shofar*, or ram’s horn, is blown in synagogue (or temple in Reform Judaism) on Rosh Hashanah and at the end of Yom Kippur. (slgkgc/Wikimedia Commons)(CC BY-2.0)

Schools are sometimes caught off-guard because Judaism uses a lunar-solar calendar. Each month in the Jewish calendar begins at the new moon. Each year has 12 or 13 months, to keep it in sync with the solar year. Years are counted from the religiously determined date of creation.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur require that all normal business, school, or secular activities cease about two hours before sundown on the eve of the holiday in order to allow for adequate preparations. The holiday involves special foods, prayers, blessings, and many hours at the synagogue in worship.



Sliced apples dipped in honey are a traditional treat for Rosh Hashanah, representing hope for a sweet new year. (Swertz/Flickr Commons)(CC BY-NC 2.0)

Predicting the challenges that could face schools, staff, and students during the High Holidays, the Anti-Defamation League has distributed a special publication [\*School & Workplace Accommodations for the Jewish High Holidays: Know Your Rights and Obligations\*](#). (Though this document relates to the Jewish holidays, it is equally valuable for issues related to school and workplace religious holidays in general.)

Beyond the practical matters of school attendance is the opportunity that the Jewish High Holidays provide to increase multicultural understanding and religious tolerance when teachers take the time to teach about the meaning and practices of religious holidays in an academic manner. The materials below were selected to assist schools in that endeavor.

## High Holidays - General

### L'Shana Tova and Welcome to High Holy Days on the Net

<http://www.holidays.net/highholydays/>

Written for Jews, this web page is academic in nature and dedicated to the Jewish High Holidays. It covers the history, observance, relevance of the Holidays and more. Activities such as coloring pictures are not appropriate to do in the public school classroom, but they can be printed to show students about important symbols of the holidays. There is a sound file demonstrating the sound of the *shofar*, a ram's horn and an ancient symbol of Rosh Hashanah.

### Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly - Sin and Repentance

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/september-26-2008/sin-andrepentance/649/>

This *Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly* "Belief and Practice" site is an interview of Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz in 2008 about the meaning of the ideas of sin and repentance to Jews, the key concepts underlying Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It has video clips of a Jewish service. The site is designed to explain Jewish religious practice in an academic manner to non-Jews.

### Jewish High Holidays

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2009/09/11/september-11-2009-jewish-high-holidays/4177/>

At this *Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly* site, Rabbi Irwin Kula explains that the religious activities, prayers, and practices of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, as well as the days in between, are designed to help Jews make *teshuva*, or return, to that deep path that a person

knows that he/she wants to be on. Rabbi Kula says there are three basic sets of questions about which these 10 days invite thought and reflection:

1. Can I change as a human being? Can I really become better?
2. Is forgiveness possible? Can I forgive other people and can I feel forgiven?
3. Am I accountable for my behavior?

### **Jewish Calendar**

<http://webexhibits.org/calendars/calendar-jewish.html>

This site gives background information about the Jewish calendar and how it is determined from a combination of solar and lunar calendar factors. It strives to have its years coincide with the tropical year and its months coincide with the synodic months. This is a complicated goal, and the rules for the Jewish calendar are correspondingly fascinating.

### **Learning about Rosh Hashanah**

This year, Rosh Hashanah marks New Year's Day of the year 5777 on the Jewish calendar, and the anniversary of the biblically based story of the creation of the world.

### **Children's Shofar Factory**

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/september-7-2007/childrensshofar-factory/3950/>

For Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement that takes place nine days later, one of the traditional parts of the worship service is the blowing of the shofar.

### **Judaism 101: Rosh Hashanah**

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday2.htm>

This Jewish source “from an Orthodox perspective” has a clearly written basic description of Rosh Hashanah’s history and traditions. Hyperlinks to definitions and some further information are included.

### **Rosh Hashanah**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosh\\_Hashanah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosh_Hashanah)

This Wikipedia article is clearly written, richly link-embedded, and adequately referenced. It gives the history and importance of the holiday in Jewish life.

### **Rosh Hashanah - BBC**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/judaism/rosh\\_hashanah.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/judaism/rosh_hashanah.shtml)

This brief description of Rosh Hashanah is designed for students by the British news network. Questions and lesson activities are suggested.

## Learning About Yom Kippur

### Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly - Yom Kippur

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week503/belief.html#>

This 2001 PBS broadcast is focused on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and most solemn day of the Jewish calendar. Cantor Abraham Lubin explains the meaning of the holiday to Jews, and there is a video clip of a service.

### Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly - Rituals of Yom Kippur

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2009/09/25/september-25-2009-rituals-of-yom-kippur/4352/>

This *Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly* is an interview with Rabbi Irwin Kula of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership about the rituals related to Judaism's holiest celebration of the year.

### Jewish Virtual Library - Yom Kippur

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/holiday4.html>

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is the holiest day of the Jewish year and is a day of fasting. To re-establish oneness with God, Jews ask forgiveness and forgive others. Then they can confess their sins and ask God's forgiveness.

### Judaism 101 - Yom Kippur

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday4.htm>

This Jewish source "from an Orthodox perspective" has a clearly written basic description of Yom Kippur's history and the liturgy and traditions of its celebration. Hyperlinks to definitions and some further information are included.

## Children's Literature

Blackwell, Amy Hackney. *Lent, Yom Kippur, and Other Atonement Days*. New York: Chelsea House, 2009. (Grades 5-HS)

Chaikin, Miriam, and Erika Weihs. *Sound the Shofar: The Story and Meaning of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. New York: Clarion, 1986. (Grades 4-MS)

Fishman, Cathy Goldberg., and Melanie W. Hall. *On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. New York: Atheneum for Young Readers, 1997. (Grades K-5)

Ganz, Yaffa, and Li'at Binyamini Ari'el. *Rosh Hashanah: With Bina, Benny and Chaggai Hayonah*. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1990. (Grades 2-6)

\_\_\_\_\_. *Yom Kippur with Bina, Benny, and Chaggai Havonah*. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1991. (out of print) (Grades 2-6)

Groner, Judyth Saypol., Madeline Wikler, and Bonnie Gordon-Lucas. *All about Yom Kippur*. Rockville, MD: Kar-Ben Copies, 1997. (Grades K-5)

Gross, Judith. *Celebrate: A Book of Jewish Holidays*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 2005. (Grades K-4)

Head, Honor. *Celebrating Yom Kippur*. New York: PowerKids, 2009. (Grades K-5)

Heiligman, Deborah. *Holidays around the World: Celebrate Passover with Matzah, Maror, and Memories*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006. (Grades 2-6)

Jules, Jacqueline, and Katherine Kahn. *The Hardest Word: A Yom Kippur Story*. Rockville, MD: Kar-Ben Copies, 2001. (Grades K-6)

Kimmelman, Leslie, and John Himmelman. *Sound the Shofar!: A Story for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1998. (Primary)

Marx, David F. *Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. New York: Children's, 2001. (Grades K-5)

Peppas, Lynn. *Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. New York: Crabtree Pub., 2010. (Grades K-6)

Rouss, Sylvia. *Sammy Spider's First Rosh Hashanah*. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publishing Group, 2011. (Grades K-4)

Silverman, Erica, Sholem Aleichem, and Matthew Trueman. *When the Chickens Went on Strike: A Rosh Hashanah Tale*. New York: Dutton Children's, 2003. (All ages)

Sources used in the introductory text were those suggested in this document and *Finding Common Ground: First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Schools* by Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas, First Amendment Center, 2007.

Sources for dates used in the Jewish High Holy Days chart come from chabad.org, the website of Chabad-Lubavitch, a Hasidic Jewish movement and organization.

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**For more information, please find the California Three Rs Project on the Web at [ca3rsproject.org](http://ca3rsproject.org).**