



ROSH HASHANAH PENNY POSTCARD PROJECT

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Four Activities Using Penny Postcards

Activity #1: Modern Rosh Hashanah Cards

Students can create their own “modern” Rosh Hashanah postcards, using index cards and markers or crayons. Before they begin, engage the students in a discussion of what kinds of images and words are appropriate for a Rosh Hashanah postcard of today. (Use the Rosh Hashanah Penny Postcards as a launching point for this discussion) The students can keep their postcards or send them to a friend or family member.

Activity #2: Class Covenant

Students can use the Rosh Hashanah Penny Postcards to create a Class Covenant—a set of guidelines for their classroom, expressing the values that the students want to embody as they interact with each other throughout the year. Each student can write a suggestion for the Covenant on the back of a postcard. The class can then gather the postcards and select which ideas to include.

Activity #3: A Letter to Yourself

Have each student write a postcard that includes their name, three things about themselves that they like, and three things they would like to improve. Collect the postcards and keep each one in an envelope. Return each child's postcard at the end of the year and see how these things have changed.

OR

Have students write one New Year's resolution on a postcard that you collect. Give the postcards back to the students on January 1st to see if they kept their resolution from New Year to New Year.

Activity #4: An Album of Postcards

Students can create a class album of postcards, just as Flora Atkin Blumenthal's grandparents did (please see “Background: Rosh Hashanah Penny Postcards” section). The album can include postcards that the students write during this lesson, in addition to other postcards that they create and write throughout the year.

OR

Students also can create their own, individual postcard albums. In either case, the albums should be comprised of “clear pockets,” enabling the students to view both the front and back of the postcards.



“Penny Postcard” Background Information

Postcard Traditions

Beginning in the late 19th century, Jewish families in America sent “penny postcards” as New Year’s greetings. The penny postcards provided an inexpensive and expressive way for Jews to share holiday wishes. They were called “penny postcards” because they cost 1¢ to mail. (In the late 1800s, it cost 2¢ to mail a letter.) Today, it costs 24¢ to mail a postcard, and 39¢ to mail a letter.

Postcards in The Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington’s Collection

The period from 1898 to 1918 was known as “The Golden Age of the Postcard,” when people throughout the world sent postcards with images of buildings, cities, natural wonders, families, children, and exotic peoples. The Jewish community participated in this popular trend, sending postcards with Rosh Hashanah greetings and images of Jewish homes, families, and sites (such as synagogues). Postcards were often collected and kept in albums as keepsakes. These albums were so special to the families that created them that they were passed down to children and grandchildren in the family.

The postcards included in this package were donated to the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington by Flora Blumenthal Atkin. The postcards, were originally sent to Mrs. Atkin’s grandparents around the turn of the 20th century. Mrs. Atkin’s grandparents ran a dry good store (which sold fabrics, yarn, buttons, and other household goods) in the historic Seventh Street corridor of downtown Washington, D.C., not far from what is now the Verizon Center. Jewish families lived, worked, and worshipped in and around Seventh Street, and many (like Mrs. Atkin’s grandparents) lived above their shops.

Mrs. Atkin remembers visiting her grandparents’ home on Seventh Street in the first decades of the early 20th century:

My grandparents’ home was reached by a steep flight of linoleum-covered stairs, lit by a gas lamp. At the top of the stairs was a long hall, and another flight up to the bedrooms, with deep feather beds. On the lower floor, in the front, was the elegant parlor, with its lace-curtained bay windows facing Seventh Street and the noise of the clanging street car, Tiffany lamps, velour drapes, upright piano, and beautiful carved furniture. The next room along the hall was a study, or den. Less formal than the parlor, this was where we children played table games, learned how to build a house of cards. . . . It was here, also, that we . . . Perused with great fascination the huge album of postcards sent to my grandparents. The collection included humorous Jewish New Year greeting cards from my grandfather’s family in Europe.



Connections between the Penny Postcard Project and *Rosh Hashanah*

Rosh Hashanah and the secular New Year's Day (January 1) are often celebrated in similar ways. During each "new year," we think about the year that has passed and we make resolutions on how we can do better. On *Rosh Hashanah* we pray to God to help us do better as individuals and as members of families and communities.

Rosh Hashanah connects to the "Penny Postcard" Project because at this time of year we want to share good wishes and hopes with our friends, our family, and our classroom community. The Hebrew word for postcard is "*gluyah*," which means *revealed*. It comes from the word "*galoi*," which means *open for scrutiny*.

Why is *gluyah* an appropriate word for postcard? What do we learn from writing postcards? How does a postcard relate to how we should treat our neighbors or classroom community?

Postcards are written so anyone can read them. They are open for scrutiny and need to be appropriate for everyone. They are less private than a sealed letter. We need to think carefully about what we write and say publicly, and we should speak to our neighbors and classmates carefully because your words are open for anyone to hear.

Rosh Hashanah also connects to postcard activities through memories. Postcards are ways to remember. Staying in touch with people is a way to build relationships. How do these acts of remembrance make us better friends, family members, or community members?



Rosh Hashanah Background Information

The Calendar

The Jewish and secular calendars have several new years. *Rosh Hashanah* is the birthday of the world and the primary Jewish New Year. *Tu B'shvat* is the New Year of the trees and takes place in the winter in the United States, during the rainy season in Israel. *Pesach*, in the first month of the Jewish calendar, *Nisan*, celebrates our redemption from slavery. The Torah calls Passover (*Pesach*) the new year. The *Mishnah* lists the first day of the month of *Elul* as the new year for the tithing of cattle. In addition to Jewish new years, American Jews also mark the new school year; new sports seasons; and the secular New Year on January 1st.

Rosh Hashanah, the “head” of the Jewish Year (the Hebrew word *Rosh* means “head”), or the Birthday of the World, takes place in the fall at the beginning of the month *Tishrei*, which is the seventh month of the Jewish year. *Rosh Hashanah* is proclaimed a festival in the book of Leviticus:

In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, there shall be a solemn rest for you, a sacred convocation commemorated with the blast of the ram's horn. You shall not work at any of your ordinary labor, and you shall bring a fire-offering to Adonai (Leviticus 23:24-25).

Rosh Hashanah Prayer

The High Holiday season (which includes *Rosh Hashanah*) is a time to take a journey into ourselves. The liturgy stresses three themes—*Tefilah* (prayer), *Teshuvah* (repentance, saying “I’m sorry” or “I can do better”), and *Tzedakah* (the mitzvah of sharing and giving to others). These themes are introduced in the *Selichot* midnight service on the Saturday night before *Rosh Hashanah*, where we begin to look at ourselves, determine how we can improve ourselves, and ask for forgiveness from our friends and family. The theme continues through *Rosh Hashanah* into the ten days of repentance and conclude with *Yom Kippur*, when we ask for forgiveness from God. There is a *midrash* (rabbinic tale) that talks about our being “written into the Book of Life for good.” The Book of Life can be thought of as an anthology for us to “do good” and be good people. Introducing the concept of the Book of Life can help students to think about what they want to write on their postcards.

During the *Rosh Hashanah* prayer service there is a section called *Zichronot*, Remembrance. The *Zichronot* service is a time to remember God and to be aware of God’s actions. The *Zichronot* service contains quotes from the Torah that remind us of God, and this service is followed by the blowing of the Shofar. We as Jews are in the habit of remembering, helping to make us better family members, neighbors and friends. We also want to remember God and want God to remember us for good and forgive us for any wrongdoing.

How do we remember? Why is it important to remember on Rosh Hashanah. What are ways to keep memories alive? How do you want to be remembered in the future? How do you collect memories?

(Note: for younger students, there are many appropriate prayers in the Rosh Hashanah family service and the Selichot family service, published by KarBen. Please see Bibliography for more information.)



Additional Resources

Resources on Postcards

“Past Perfect: The Jewish Experience in Early Twentieth Century Postcards,” an exhibition sponsored by the Friends of the Library at The Jewish Theological Seminar of America. Information available at <http://jtsa.edu>.

“When New Year’s Cards Heralded a Changed Identity,” *The Forward*, September 6, 2002.

The National Postal Museum. <http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu>

Resources on Rosh Hashanah

Craig Taubman song *Zochreinu* from “Voice of the Spirit”

Selichot: A Family Service, by Judith Z. Abrams, published by KarBen

Rosh Hashanah: A Family Service, by Judith Z. Abrams, published by KarBen

The Book of Jewish Holidays, published by Behrman House

My Jewish Year, published by Behrman House

BLJ Blue and Red Lable *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* Books from Torah Aura

BLJ Beginnings *Rosh Hashanah* published by Torah Aura

BLJ *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* published by Torah Aura

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