

# ROSH HASHANAH

## READING + WRITING

Grades 5-8

# History & Literacy Activities

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### ROSH HASHANAH VOCABULARY

Define the vocabulary words below using context clues from the passage.

ins	
ection	
agogue	
challah	
greeting	
shofar	
atonement	

### THE HISTORY AND TRADITIONS OF ROSH HASHANAH

Many countries and cultures celebrate New Year's Eve on December 31 each year. But did you know there are actually many different new year celebrations around the world? One of the most significant is Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The name "Rosh Hashanah" literally means "head of the year" in Hebrew. It's one of the most important holidays for Jewish people worldwide and is filled with meaningful traditions, customs, and prayer.

#### When Is Rosh Hashanah Celebrated?

The Jewish calendar is different from the Gregorian calendar used in the United States and many other countries. In the Jewish calendar, Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first and second days of the month of Tishrei. While Tishrei is actually the seventh month of the Jewish calendar (not the first month as you might expect for a new year), it marks the beginning of the civil year.

Rosh Hashanah usually falls in September or October on the Gregorian calendar. The exact dates change each year because the Jewish calendar is based on lunar cycles. Interestingly, Rosh Hashanah is just one of four different new year observances in Judaism, but it's the most widely celebrated and marks when the year number changes.

#### A Time for Reflection and Celebration

Rosh Hashanah begins a ten-day period known as the "Days of Awe" or "High Holy Days." This time concludes with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. During Rosh Hashanah, many Jewish people do not work or attend school. Instead, they spend time in synagogue services, which can last several hours. These services include special prayers and readings from the Torah (the Jewish holy text).

While Rosh Hashanah is definitely a celebration, it's also a serious time for reflection. Jewish people reflect on the past year and think about how they can improve in the coming year. They ask forgiveness for the sins they've committed and pray for the future. The holiday lasts for two days by law, though many communities observe it for three days.



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### THE FOODS OF ROSH HASHANAH

The head of the year symbolizes the hope to be "the head and not the tail" in the coming year, representing leadership and a front of positive things.



**Pomegranates** with their many seeds represent the hope that our good deeds in the coming year will be as plentiful as the seeds in this fruit.



The sweetness and the fresh possibilities of life.

**Honey** symbolizes wishes for a sweet and prosperous new year ahead.



Challah is shared with wishes that the family will need to ask for in the coming year.

**Raisins** are used for the Kiddush blessing and represents joy and abundance during holiday celebrations.



The round nature of the year and the fact that we made extra sweet with raisins.

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History of the Holiday

RI.1: Explicit and Inferential Details
RI.2: Main Idea
RI.3: Analyze Ideas and Events
RI.4: Domain-Specific Vocabulary
RI.10: Text Complexity
Critical Thinking Prompts

**Common Core Skills Covered**

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While Rosh Hashanah is definitely a celebration, it's also a serious time for reflection. Jewish people reflect on the past year and think about how they can improve in the coming year. They ask forgiveness for any wrongs they've committed and make goals for the future. The holiday is observed for two days by most Jewish communities, though some Reform Jewish communities celebrate for just one day.



## Traditional Foods of Rosh Hashanah

Unlike Yom Kippur, when Jewish people fast for 25 hours, Rosh Hashanah is a time for festive meals with family and friends. Special foods are eaten that symbolize hopes and a prosperous new year.

One of the most well-known Rosh Hashanah foods is dipping apple slices into honey. This tradition represents wishes for a sweet new year. Round challah bread is also popular. Its circular shape symbolizes the cycle of life and the continuity of creation. The bread is often studded with raisins for extra sweetness and dipped in honey as well.

### Symbolic foods include:

- Apples and Honey:** Apples, whose many seeds represent a year full of good deeds, are dipped in honey, which symbolizes being at the head rather than the "tail" of matters in the new year.
- Challah:** Those circular slices look like gold and represent prosperity.
- Vegetables:** Carrots that haven't been eaten yet that represent gratitude for reaching the new year.



Other traditional foods often include brisket, roast chicken, and other special dishes that vary by Jewish community around the world.



# IMPORTANT ROSH HASHANAH TRADITIONS

## The Shofar

One of the most distinctive traditions of Rosh Hashanah is the blowing of the shofar, a musical instrument made from a ram's horn. The shofar is sounded during synagogue services on both days of Rosh Hashanah (except when the first day falls on a Friday or Saturday). The Torah commands Jews to hear the shofar on this holy day.

The shofar produces four different sounds: one long, straight blast (shofar); three medium-length sounds (shevarim); nine short, quick blasts (trikatan); and Gedolah: an extra-long blast, as long as the blower can manage.

The shofar calls Jews to reflect, repent, and remember God's sovereignty. Traditionally, the shofar is sounded 100 times throughout the Rosh Hashanah service.



## Tashlich

Another meaningful custom is called Tashlich, which means "casting off" in Hebrew. During this ceremony, Jews gather near a body of water (such as a river, stream, or ocean) and symbolically cast off their sins by throwing pieces of bread or small pebbles into the water. While doing this, they recite prayers asking for forgiveness. The Tashlich ceremony is inspired by the words of the prophet Micah: "You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."



## Greetings

At the start of the holiday, people wish each other "Happy New Year" on January 1, Jewish people exchange special greetings during Rosh Hashanah. The most common is "Shanah Tovah," which means "good year" in Hebrew. A longer version is "Shanah Tovah U'Tovah Tikatevu," meaning "a good and sweet year." Another traditional greeting is "L'Shanah Tovah," which means "May you be inscribed for a good year." Rosh Hashanah is a beautiful blend of joyous celebration and solemn reflection. It's a time when Jewish communities around the world come together to strengthen family bonds, and renew their faith.

# Three-Page Reading Passage

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## THE HISTORY OF ROSH HASHANAH

Directions: Answer the following questions using textual evidence from the passage.

- 1) When does Rosh Hashanah usually occur on the Gregorian calendar?
- 2) What is the name of the special horn blown during Rosh Hashanah services?
- 3) Why do you think Jewish people dip apples in honey during Rosh Hashanah?
- 4) How does the Tashlich ceremony connect to the theme of reflection during Rosh Hashanah?
- 5) What can you infer about the importance of community during Rosh Hashanah based on the passage?
- 6) Compare and contrast Rosh Hashanah with Yom Kippur using information from the passage.
- 7) How do the different foods eaten during Rosh Hashanah relate to hopes for the new year?
- 8) How do the round shape of the challah bread symbolize, and why is this important for a new year celebration?
- 9) The text mentions that Rosh Hashanah is both a celebration and a time for serious reflection. If you were celebrating this holiday, how might you balance these two different aspects?

How do the traditions of Rosh Hashanah compare to other new year celebrations with special foods and traditions. How do the traditions of Rosh Hashanah similar to or different from other new year celebrations that you know about?

# Comprehension & Critical Thinking Questions

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## ROSH HASHANAH VOCABULARY

**Directions:** Define the vocabulary words below using context clues from the passage.

origins	
reflection	
synagogue	
challah	
greeting	
shofar	
atonement	

## ROSH HASHANAH WRITING: HOPES & DREAMS



**DIRECTIONS FOR THIS ACTIVITY**

During Rosh Hashanah, Jewish people spend time reflecting on the past year and setting intentions for the new year ahead. This important holiday is a time for both celebration and thoughtful reflection.

**Your Task:** Take a few minutes to think about your own hopes and dreams for the coming year. What would you like to see happen in your life over the next few months?

Consider different areas of your life:

- School goals and academic achievements
- Friendships and social connections
- Family relationships
- Sports or physical activities
- Clubs, teams, or extracurricular activities
- Personal growth and skills you want to develop
- Ways you might help others or your community

Write a thoughtful response (1-2 pages) that:

- Clearly states 3-5 hopes or dreams you have for the coming year
- Organizes your ideas into paragraphs with main ideas and supporting details
- Explains why each hope or dream is meaningful and important to you
- Includes specific actions you might take to help achieve these goals
- Uses complete sentences and proper grammar

Remember: Just as Rosh Hashanah is a time for Jewish people to reflect and set intentions, this activity gives you a chance to think about your hopes and dreams to you as you look ahead.

# Vocabulary and Writing Activities

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## ROSH HASHANAH WORD SEARCH

M I V A L O J P A Z J V I S S  
 S S V H Z X K L P R M P I H P  
 Y R B S V G G A P E A F O A O  
 N A R W H R F F L F T O Z N M  
 A E Q E A O Z K E L I R M A E  
 G L Z E W X N F S E S G Z H G  
 O C Y T J L N E I C H I U T R  
 G W N W U R R U Y T R V P O A  
 U S C Y B O U V L I E E I V N  
 E H E P R A Y E R O I N Y A A  
 D O H G L B W O K N Y E R H T  
 F F O J U M R L T A S S N K E  
 R A K J C H A L L A H S A U R  
 P R W D H K J E W I S H V O J  
 C R F P L D N E W Y E A R O D

SHOFAR  
 CHALLAH  
 REFLECTION  
 SWEET  
 SHANAHTOVAH

APPLES  
 TISHREI  
 SYNAGOGUE  
 PRAYER  
 ISRAEL

HONEY  
 POMEGRANATE  
 NEWYEAR  
 FORGIVENESS

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**KEY**

## ROSH HASHANAH WORD SEARCH

A L O J P A Z J V I S S  
 H Z X K L P R M P I H P  
 S V G G A P E A F O A O  
 W H R F F L F T O Z N M  
 E A O Z K E L I R M A E  
 E W X N F S E S G Z H G  
 T J L N E I C H I U T R  
 W U R R U Y T R V P O A  
 Y B O U V L I E E I V N  
 G L B W O K N Y E R H T  
 J U M R L T A S S N K E  
 J C H A L L A H S A U R  
 D H K J E W I S H V O J  
 P L D N E W Y E A R O D

SHOFAR  
 CHALLAH  
 REFLECTION  
 SWEET  
 SHANAHTOVAH

APPLES  
 TISHREI  
 SYNAGOGUE  
 PRAYER  
 ISRAEL

HONEY  
 POMEGRANATE  
 NEWYEAR  
 FORGIVENESS

# Fun Activities

**SHOFAR**



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**CHALLAH**



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**Colorful Posters**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**key**

## THE HISTORY OF ROSH HASHANAH

**Directions:** Answer the following questions using textual evidence from the passage.

- When does Rosh Hashanah usually occur on the Gregorian calendar?  
*Rosh Hashanah usually falls in September or October on the Gregorian calendar.*
- What is the name of the special horn blown during Rosh Hashanah services?  
*The special horn blown during Rosh Hashanah services is called a shofar.*
- Why do you think Jewish people dip apples in honey during Rosh Hashanah?  
*Jewish people dip apples in honey to symbolize their wishes for a sweet new year ahead. This tradition represents the hope that the upcoming year will be full of sweetness and good things.*
- How does the Tashlich ceremony connect to the theme of reflection during Rosh Hashanah?  
*The Tashlich ceremony connects to reflection because it involves symbolically casting off sins by throwing bread or pebbles into water while reciting prayers for forgiveness. This physical act represents letting go of past mistakes after reflecting on them, allowing people to enter the new year spiritually renewed.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**key**

## DOCH HASHANAH VOCABULARY

Define the following vocabulary words below using context clues from the passage.

- beginnings** or sources of something; where something starts from. In the passage, this refers to the beginnings of the calendar.  
*...community is very important during Rosh Hashanah because it involves people spending time in synagogue services, having family and friends, and participating in communal ceremonies. Shared activities strengthen community bonds during this time.*
- contrast** Rosh Hashanah with Yom Kippur using information from the passage.  
*Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are important Jewish holidays that involve fasting. Rosh Hashanah is more festive with special meals and special foods, while Yom Kippur involves fasting. Rosh Hashanah begins the ten-day period that Yom Kippur ends.*
- symbolic** foods eaten during Rosh Hashanah relate to hopes for the new year.  
*Apples and honey symbolizes specific hopes for the new year: apples and honey symbolizes sweetness, round challah represents the cycle of the year, and fish heads represent leadership and prosperity. These foods are physical reminders of the hopes for the new year.*
- shape** of the challah bread symbolize, and why is this important for the new year celebration?  
*The round shape of the challah bread symbolizes the cycle of the year and the continuity of the Jewish people. This is meaningful for a new year celebration because it represents a cycle, with each new year building on the previous one, offering fresh beginnings.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**key**

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# Answer Keys Included