



Read the PJ Library Book

Happy Birthday, Tree! (3's)

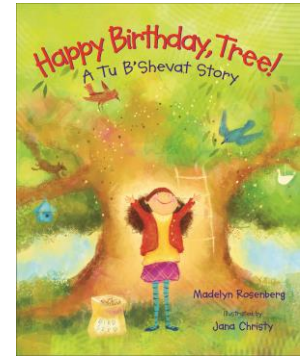
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Synopsis

When Joni discovers *Tu B'Shevat* is the birthday of the trees, she enlists her friend Nate's help in throwing a birthday party for her own tree. Nate and Joni wrack their brains to come up with ideas for an appropriate party and gift for this magnificent tree. Cupcakes and party hats don't quite work. Joni ultimately comes up with the ideal gift – a friend for the tree. Joni, Nate, and Joni's parents plant a sapling to grow alongside their existing tree. Happy Birthday, Tree!



Discuss the Jewish values and vocabulary with one another

Repairing/Perfecting the World - *Tikkun Olam* - תְּקוּן עוֹלָם

Appreciating nature / Do not destroy - *Bal Tashchit* - בַּל תַּשְׁחִית

Tu B'Shevat - *Tu Bish'vat* - טו בִּשְׁבַט

Repairing / Perfecting the world – Tikkun Olam. The concept of repairing the world began in the rabbinic period (~300 BCE – 500 CE). The Mishna, a collection of commentaries on the deeper meaning of Torah, uses the expression *mip'nei tikkun olam* – for the sake of healing the world. The phrase implies that anything that we do is for the sake of the community, and may even right social wrongs. *Tikkun Olam* has special meaning through the lens of *Kabbalah*, Jewish Mysticism. The Jewish mystics of the middle ages likened the world to a broken vessel of light. Each good deed we do seals one shard back into place, ultimately recreating the whole.



Appreciating nature / do not destroy – *Bal tashchit*. According to Jewish teachings, trees and all of nature are precious. The Torah states that during war or a siege against a city, “You must not destroy its trees.” [Deuteronomy 20:19] Ancient rabbis expanded the concept of not destroying trees to a general ban of wasteful behavior, including breaking an object in anger. Many Jewish writings refer to the earth as God’s possession; humans are merely its caretakers.



[For more about “*Bal tashchit*” please read the *Room for the Baby Resource Guide*.]

Tu B’Shevat. Tu B’Shevat, or the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat, is known as the Jewish Earth Day. The Torah says we cannot harvest the fruit of a tree until its fourth year, [Leviticus 19:23-25] so this day was chosen to mark the trees’ birthday. This day was used as a guide for taxation as well as a guide to eating fruit from a tree. “Tu” is not really a word, but an expression of the number 15 using Hebrew letters. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has a numeric value. This system, sometimes referred to as Gematria, may reveal deeper meaning to words and numbers based on the sum of the letters. For example, the letters of the Hebrew word *chai* (life) add up to 18, considered by many to be a lucky number.

Imagine your community living these Jewish values.

**How would your classroom change?
How will families be involved?**

In the Classroom / Centers

- ☆ **Repairing the world / *Tikkun Olam*:** Here is a different take on the classic “Mitzvah Tree.” Discuss repairing the world at **morning meeting**. Create a large outline of the world on a poster (or a three-dimensional structure with wire.) Each time a student does something for the sake of the classroom community, such as sharing or recycling, let them add a piece of paper to fill in the world poster. Show how their deeds are physically rebuilding the world.
- ☆ **Do not destroy:** Make recycling an important part of your routine. Sorting recyclables is a **math skill**, and the recycle checker might be part of your classroom **job chart**.
- ☆ **Tu B’Shevat:** Hone **large motor skills** by pretending to be trees. Narrate as your students begin as seeds, burrowing deep into the soil. Ask them to feel the warm sun and gentle rain; begin to sprout one arm at a time. As the saplings emerge from the ground suggest they drink water from their toes and pull it up through their bodies. Reach branches to the sky and grow leaves, flowers, and fruit. Wonder aloud what types of trees they will become. If the trees are in a magic forest they could come out of the ground and dance!
- ☆ **Tu B’Shevat:** Listen to songs about nature and trees from your PJ Library musical CD collection. Felicia Sloin sings “Plant a Tree” in the *Zeh Hayom* CD; “*Hageshem*” in Rick Recht and Sheldon Low’s *Look At Me* celebrates the rain.



Bridging Home and School

Tree Collage

Start with a giant outline of a tree and branches. Discuss with the children what is made from bark or wood. Ask parents and children to share photographs of objects they own that are made from wood. Post these photos on the trunk of the classroom tree. Families can contribute more photos or magazine cut-outs to fill out the branches after you have discussed leaves and fruit. Finally, you might discuss what animals live in trees. How will your students and their families add animals to this growing tree?

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Tu B'Shevat is the perfect time to begin a discussion about lowering our consumption of energy. You might be able to facilitate families' carpools to school. Perhaps your families would donate to a "dishes and flatware" fund, so that when we serve special treats at school, we don't have to use disposables. Challenge your families to come up with one way to reduce trash, such as using cloth napkins on Shabbat or reading books by the light of a sunny window. Create a journal of all of your energy-saving ideas.



Family Engagement at Home

Fixing things at home

Tikkun Olam means repairing the world, but families can start by fixing things at home. In your newsletter to parents, share some suggestions for home repair children can help with, such as taping torn pages of a book, tightening the screws on cabinetry, or finding the match to lonely socks.

Share

your stories and experiences with everyone.

What happened?

How can the learning go deeper?

Tell us a story... about the trees and the children in all seasons

Tu B'Shevat marks the beginning of spring in Israel. It's a time of blossoming and growth. How are the children in your classroom blooming and growing? Start taking pictures of the children, in front of a tree perhaps, to mark the passage of time and their accomplishments.

Then share with all of us on our private Facebook group page! <http://pjfor.me/pjgts-facebook>

More

resources and websites for inspiration

PJ Library Tu B'Shevat blog: http://pilibrary.org/pi-blog/tu_bshevat

Shalom Sesame and Tikkun Olam: http://www.youtube.com/Sesame_Tikkun_olam

Nature activities: <http://tinyurl.com/kidsandnature>

