

Running a Rosh Hashanah Seder
David Schwartz; Director of Education
Temple Har Zion

A Rosh Hashanah Seder is good for the first day of Rosh Hashanah when you want to make a good impression, or for the second day of Rosh Hashanah when there are fewer kids. As you might know, there are “simanim,” symbols for the coming year that are built on Hebrew puns, such as “apples and honey for a sweet new year”. The general idea behind a RH seder is that you say the traditional statement, say the blessing, and eat the food. See here for traditional foods and statements about them: http://www.lookstein.org/resources/seder_rh.pdf (also good for other resources). The seder that I ran was based off of Apples and Pomegranates, by Rahel Musleah (https://smile.amazon.com/Apples-Pomegranates-Holidays-Rahel-Musleah/dp/1580131239/ref=sr_1_1_tw_i_pap_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1470942050&sr=1-1&keywords=apples+and+pomegranates).

To run this seder, in advance I gathered plastic tablecloths, small cups, plates, napkins, grape juice, dates, pomegranate seeds, an apple, a plastic knife, apple slices, honey, Twizzlers (not gluten-free - notify any relevant parents in advance), M&Ms, and trash bags. Having 1-4 copies of Apples and Pomegranates is good so your leader(s) can prepare their parts. Pitchers of water are also good, and a few assistants (parents or teens) makes this flow much better. Ideally you can do this in a room where you can have several rows of long tables, so you can set up for all the groups at the beginning instead of resetting the tables each time, but with enough help it shouldn't take too long if you need to reset the tables between groups. There should be a tablecloth on each table and each seat should have a small cup, a plate, and a napkin.

When the group of kids comes in (hopefully with their own adults to do crowd control), they should sit down at a place setting. As your assistants pour grape juice, discuss with the kids what it means for something to be “holy” and try to arrive at “separate”. Then talk about how as Jews we indicate that time is holy through Kiddush, which comes from the root k.d.sh., meaning “holy”. Sing the first line (or entirety) of Kiddush for Rosh Hashanah.

Next introduce the idea of simanim by asking why we eat apples and honey on Rosh Hashanah. Hopefully the kids will be able to answer that. Explain that there are other foods that some Jews eat on Rosh Hashanah to ask for other things, like eating raisins for a “raise in” grades. Tell the kids that for our Rosh Hashanah seder we were going to do stories, followed by saying the blessing and eating the food.

For the oldest kids (middle school), I had them break into groups (usually based on friend groups who were sitting with each other) and assigned them stories from Apples and Pomegranates to turn into plays for each other. For the other groups I told them stories from the same book, though I might have my assistants read them the stories. In all situations, after each story we would say the blessing and eat the food (handed out by the assistants). The stories I chose were: “The Story of Deborah” (goes with dates since Deborah sat under a palm

date tree) (Judges 4); “The Magic Pomegranate” (goes with pomegranates) (<http://www.learningtogive.org/resources/magic-pomegranate>); “The Apple Tree’s Discovery” (goes with apples and honey - cut open an apple equator-style and hold it together while you tell this story) (http://my_tapestry.tripod.com/apple_tree.html); “Jacob and the Beanstalk” (goes with Twizzlers) (<http://www.authorama.com/english-fairy-tales-15.html> - starts like this, but when Jacob goes to sleep he sees angels climbing down and up the beanstalk and when he wakes up it’s full of vegetables and his family never goes hungry); and “Tuli’s Treasure” (goes with M&Ms) (http://www.parents-choice.org/article.cfm?CFID=3d3d93a8-afeb-4654-a6f7-5a9467a1847f&CFTOKEN=0&art_id=120&the_page=consider_this - similar to this, but the younger brother’s pumpkin is full of rubies/sapphires/emeralds, older brother’s vine grows pumpkins that are full of snakes and scorpions, and the bird is called “Tulli”).

At the end, you can do Birkat Hamazon in any variety of ways. If this kids know how to sing the first paragraph they can do that (for those that care, they didn’t actually eat any bread). Alternatively, you can teach them “*Baruch..Hazan et haKol*” (Praised...Who feeds everybody). Or, you can teach them to say “Hubba, hubba, hubba, thank ya for the grubba, yay G-d!). No matter how you handle Birkat Hamazon, the kids should also be told to thank the assistants, ideally in Hebrew, and then the kids should throw away their plates (and the tablecloth if it’s dirty).