

Jewish Holiday Resource Guide -

Fall 2026

Field Resource

On the Jewish calendar, Fall is holiday season, featuring four major holy days in quick succession and interspersed with other significant dates. This document is designed as a guide to the Jewish festivals for public and independent schools, including background on each holiday, notes on observances, accommodations that may be necessary, and opportunities for introducing cultural diversity and ensuring Jewish students have appropriate opportunities to share their celebrations and feel seen in the classroom.

The Jewish calendar is semi-lunar, which means that, while the exact dates of any holiday are different year-to-year on the Gregorian calendar, the approximate time of year is consistent. Therefore, Jewish students generally observe these fall holidays in September or October of any given year.

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about these observances. We ask that you share important information regarding accommodations with teachers in your schools and that you consider introducing some elements of Jewish culture at this time of year as you would for other cultures and religious observances.

There may be some questions that arise around discussing Jewish American culture in the classroom, particularly now as antisemitism is rising and in light of the war between Israel and Hamas. The Anti-Defamation League has a helpful [guide to these difficult questions](#) available online, discussing issues such as ensuring lessons are inclusive and appropriate for diverse classrooms, common stereotypes to be aware of (and avoid), and concerns of filtering information through trauma and war. We encourage you to contact your local Jewish Federation with any additional questions or concerns.

Rosh Hashana

Begins shortly before sunset on September 11 and concludes at nightfall September 12, 2026

Description: Rosh Hashanah means “head of the year” and is the beginning of the Jewish New Year. Orthodox and Conservative Jews observe the traditional two-day holiday, while Reform Jews observe only the first day. Rosh Hashanah is one of three most observed holidays by all Jewish families. The central observance of Rosh Hashanah is listening to the blowing of the shofar (ram’s horn) during prayer services. Rosh Hashanah meals traditionally include round challah bread and apples dipped in honey that symbolize our wishes for a sweet year.

Practice: Jewish students will likely attend prayer services and gather with their families. Rosh Hashanah is considered a day of rest; therefore, some students will not do work, write, spend money, or travel.

What to expect: Jewish students might miss school and extracurricular activities.

How to support your Jewish students: Please try to avoid scheduling tests during or the day after the holiday. Please ensure major events such as meet the teacher night, Homecoming, or other school events are not scheduled during the holiday. School districts with sizable numbers of Jewish students should consider having the first day or both days of the holiday as a scheduled day off.

Resources

[Sharing Rosh Hashana In the Classroom: A resource guide for caregivers and educators](#)

This resource guide, produced by the Contemporary Jewish Museum, is designed for introducing Jewish traditions and culture with K-5 students in secular K-5 classrooms. It includes an overview of what being Jewish means, background information on Rosh Hashana, a supply list, guided art project, read-aloud for grades K-2, music playlist, snack suggestions, and additional resources.

Secondary schools: Rosh Hashana is a holiday marked by foods, including sweet, rich challah bread, which is round, symbolizing the cycle of the year. The bread is often dipped in honey for a sweet new year. Many Jewish communities have recently begun community-wide challah bakes, providing a social opportunity for cultural engagement. Participants receive ingredient packets and instructions for making the dough, which they bake at home. Program leaders engage in a conversation about culturally significant foods. Consider requesting that this program be brought as cultural enrichment to your school by the local Jewish community.



Tzom Gedalia

September 14, 2026

Description: Tzom Gedalia is one of 4 fast days on the Jewish calendar connected to mourning the destruction of Jerusalem and original expulsions of the Jewish people from the land of Israel in 587 BCE by the Babylonians and again in 70CE by the Romans. This fast day is considered a “minor fast day,” meaning there are fewer restrictions on activity and it takes place only during the daytime, from sunrise to sundown. It is not widely known or observed outside the Orthodox Jewish community, although there are some non-Orthodox Jews who do observe it.

Practice: Jewish students over the age of 12 or 13 who observe this holiday will abstain from eating and drinking from sunrise to sundown.

What to expect: Because observance of Tzom Gedalia is limited outside Orthodox Jewish communities, there may be few or no students in your school who observe this holiday. However, those who do may be more tired or weak as a result of fasting.

How to support your Jewish students: Ensure that students who are fasting are excused from physical education and sports practices and have the opportunity to rest in the nurse’s office upon request.



Yom Kippur

Begins shortly prior to sunset September 20 and concludes after sundown September 21, 2026

Description: Yom Kippur translates to “Day of Atonement” and is the holiest day of the year on the Jewish calendar. It is focused on atonement and repentance through prayer, fasting, and acts of charity. Many Jewish people over the age of 12 or 13 do not drink or eat anything for 25 hours. The holiday is spent in synagogue.

Practice: Jewish students will likely attend prayer services and gather with families. For those over the age of 12 or 13, students will traditionally fast for 25 hours and refrain from all food and drink. Yom Kippur is considered a day of rest, and some students will therefore not do work, write, spend money, travel, or use electronics. Many families have a sit-down, formal meal prior to the start of the holiday.

What to expect: Most Jewish students will likely miss school and extracurricular activities. Some students may leave school early and/or skip after-school activities immediately prior to the fast to ensure they have time to eat and prepare for synagogue. Yom Kippur services often begin shortly before the start of the holiday.

How to support your Jewish students: Please try to avoid scheduling tests the day prior to Yom Kippur and during the holiday itself. Consider avoiding tests the day after the holiday as well, as students may not be able to study during Yom Kippur. Major school events, such as parent teacher conferences, Homecoming, and other significant activities should not be scheduled during or the afternoon before the holiday. Some school districts with sizable numbers of Jewish students should consider having the holiday as a scheduled day off.

Resources

[Background information for upper elementary and middle school students](#)



Sukkot

Shortly before sunset September 25 through October 2, 2026

Description: Sukkot, which means “festival of booths,” is a week-long holiday commemorated by eating all meals and sometimes even sleeping in temporary structures called “sukkot” with roofs of branches or other plant matter. These huts are evocative of the temporary dwellings the Israelites lived in during their wilderness journey after the Exodus from Egypt, as well as harvest dwellings that ancient Israelite farmers made during the fall harvest period in ancient Israel. Sukkot is correspondingly important both as a holiday recognizing the Exodus from Egypt and divine protection as the Israelites traveled from Egypt to the land of Israel, and as a harvest festival. Finally, Sukkot is one of three holidays on the Jewish calendar known as “Regalim” during which the ancient Jewish people made pilgrimage to Jerusalem. One important symbolic feature of Sukkot is making a blessing over the four species, three different types of branches with leaves and an etrog, a type of citrus.

Practice: The first two days are considered days of rest, where some Jewish people abstain from work, including writing, use of electricity, money, and travel. Observance of Sukkot varies in different Jewish communities of practice; some observe full holiday restrictions, some use electronics but still attend prayer services and have meals with family, and some do not observe this holiday at all. After the first two days, the use of electricity, writing, and other activities are permitted for Jews of all observance levels as needed, but many Jewish people still use these days as a time to rest and enjoy the holiday. This period of time after the first two days is called the intermediate days (bookended by the first two days of Sukkot at the start and by the holiday of Shemini Atzeret, below, afterward). Students can participate fully in academic activity during the intermediate days. Please note that the intermediate days often include a Shabbat (Saturday/Sabbath), which is also a day of rest and abstaining from work.

What to expect: For the first two days of Sukkot, some Jewish students may miss school and extracurricular activities, while others may not. This variance in observance should be conveyed to ensure neither choice is discriminated against.

How to support your Jewish students: Please try to avoid scheduling tests during the holiday.

Resources

Activity: Consider building a graham cracker Sukkah (in the mode of a gingerbread house) with supplies such as graham crackers, marshmallow fluff, pretzels, and gummy candies. [Lesson plan and discussion questions](#) for elementary and middle school students.



Books:

- Lower elementary books:
 - *Sammy Spider's First Sukkot* by Sylvia Rouss. An introduction to the holiday for grades PK-1. Discussion guide, activity, writing prompt, and recipes available at <https://www.karben.com/assets/images/eSources/Sammy%20Spiders%20First%20Sukkot%20Lesson%20Plan.pdf>.
- Middle-elementary books:
 - *Molly's Pilgrim* by Barbara Cohen. [Synopsis and learning connections links](#); classroom [discussion guide](#). A classic story of Thanksgiving, Molly's Pilgrim also celebrates immigrants and Jewish Americans, and makes reference to Thanksgiving's origins in the holiday of Sukkot.
 - *Tikvah Means Hope* by Patricia Polacco. (Note that this book references California wildfires, which may be difficult for some children). A story of friendship, community and resilience involving the holiday of Sukkot. [Discussion guide and activity](#).



October 7

October 7th, 2026, marks the 3rd anniversary of the attack on Israel during which terrorists murdered 1,185 people, took 251 civilians hostage, and sparked the war in Gaza in 2023. The tragedy has inspired strong feelings and, unfortunately, antisemitism. Many Jewish and other families are still grieving or shaken by the events.

In 2026, October 7th falls on a Wednesday. Victims of the October 7th attacks also included non-Jews, including Bedouins, Arab Israelis, and immigrants and workers in Israel, including many Thai students and workers, and it is possible there are families beyond the Jewish families in your community who were affected as well.

We encourage you to review our [Guidance for the Anniversary of October 7 for Public and Independent Schools](#) for detailed guidance on meeting Jewish students' and families' needs, and important considerations for this anniversary.



Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah

Shortly before sunset October 2 through sundown October 4, 2026

Description: Shemini Atzeret is a holiday that occurs at the end of the weeklong holiday of Sukkot, marking the end of the high holiday season on the Jewish calendar. Simchat Torah is the celebration of when the Jewish people finish their annual Torah (Hebrew Bible) reading cycle and then begin it again with Genesis, and the holiday is often joyous, with much singing and dancing. Jewish communities that observe two days of festivals (most Conservative and Orthodox Jews outside Israel) observe Shemini Atzeret as the first day of the holiday and Simchat Torah as the second; Jewish communities that observe one day of festivals (most Reform Jews, Jews in Israel, and some Israeli communities in the US) will combine the two events on the first day.

Practice: Jewish students may attend prayer services and participate in festive events at their synagogues.

What to expect: Some Jewish students may miss school and extracurricular activities, and may also refrain from working, traveling, spending money, and using electronics. Shemini Atzeret independently is not widely celebrated outside Orthodox and Conservative circles, but Simchat Torah sometimes is, and as noted above, there may be a one-day divergence of Simchat Torah observance in different communities.

How to support your Jewish students: Please try to avoid scheduling tests during or the day after the holiday. Please bear in mind that the Hebrew date of the October 7, 2023 attacks in Israel was on the holiday of Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah, and some students may feel a degree of resonance and mourning on this date as well as on the Gregorian anniversary.

Resources

Lower elementary school read-aloud: Bubbe Isabe la's Sukkot Cake by Phylis Hornung discusses themes of friendship and environmental stewardship while tracing a grandmother's experience through the holiday of Sukkot to Simchat Torah. Discussion guide at <https://pjllibrary.org/getmedia/de0fd383-a9c8-4308-bb6c-fe59dc42bba7/Bubbe-Isabe-la-RG.pdf>



Sigd

Before sunset November 8 through sundown November 9, 2026

Description: Sigd is an Ethiopian Jewish holiday that takes place on the 50th day after Yom Kippur, marking the end of the high holiday season for that community. It focuses on accepting the Torah and yearning for a return to Israel and Jerusalem, and resurfaces themes of fasting and repentance from Yom Kippur. Ethiopian Jews also believe it to be the date on which God first revealed Himself to Moses.

Practice: Sigd is marked with fasting, prayer, and communal celebration, including readings from the Torah and prophets.

What to expect: Some Jewish students may miss school and extracurricular activities, and may also refrain from working, traveling, spending money, and using electronics. Some students who observe Sigd might fast for 25 hours.

How to support your Jewish students: Sigd is primarily celebrated by Jews of Ethiopian descent, the vast majority of whom live in Israel and not the US. However, there may be some students in your schools who mark this holiday. It is also an excellent opportunity to note Jewish diversity. Students who do observe Sigd should be allowed an excused absence; if they attend school and are fasting, accommodations should be made to excuse them from physical education and sports.

Resources

Lower elementary school resources:

- Read-aloud: *Yuvi's Candy Tree*, by Leslea Solomon, a story of Ethiopian Jewish refugees; [Reading guide and recipe](#).
- Ethiopian Jewish music playlist and recorded folktale at <https://pjlibrary.org/beyond-books/pjblog/october-2024/learn-about-sigd>

Secondary school resources:

- [Sigd backgrounder with photographs](#) of the ceremony in Ethiopia

YOUR LOCAL RESOURCE:

The **Center for Jewish Resilience**, a program of Jewish Philanthropies of Southern Arizona

Email: cjr@jparizona.org

Phone: (520) 577-9393

