

Mishnah Impossible

JRF Holiday Programming: Sukkot

By Rabbi Fredi Cooper

Program Title: Mishnah Impossible!!!

Program Audience: Grades 3 and above

This is a program meant to be used within the school during the week before Sukkot.

Goals:

1. Students will understand the criteria that the rabbis developed for constructing a Sukkah and try to understand the rationale behind their decisions about what might make a Sukkah kosher or not kosher.
2. The students will work in teams to fulfill their mishnah that has been assigned to their team. They will be ready to appear before the Beit Din to argue about why their sukkah is or is not kosher.
3. Students will then develop their own mishnah that will encompass a value for a sukkah today that the rabbis may not have considered.
4. Students will proudly display their sukkah with the knowledge that they have mastered in its construction prominently displayed for the community to relish.

Materials:

- Each team will need a kit that contains:
- Several sheets of balsa wood
- Scissors that are strong enough to cut the thin balsa wood
- Wood glue
- Stickers(appropriate to decorate their sukkah)
- Markers
- Construction paper
- Poster paper

Room Set-up:

1. Each team should have a table in a private corner of the room to complete their work.

2. One long table should be set up in the front of the room for the Beit Din
3. Each table should be prepared ahead of time with all necessary materials.

Textual Materials:

Each team is issued an invitation that reads:

Welcome to Mishnah Impossible!!! You and your team members have been invited to take on this challenge. If you choose to be a part of this important mission you and your team will construct a sukkah. You will need to read the sheet first that tells you what makes a Sukkah kosher. Then together.....read your Mishnah and decide first if you have been asked to build a kosher or a non-kosher Sukkah!!! Be ready to give reasons for why your Sukkah is or is not kosher!

Then get busy! Build the Sukkah your Mishnah describes with the supplies on your table. Tonight you will need to bring this Sukkah to a Beit Din(a group of three rabbinic judges) and tell them why you built your Sukkah in this manner. They will decide if you portrayed it accurately.....and if they agree with you about whether it is Kosher or not!!!!

Write a mishnah for your teams wish for a Sukkah for our time. What are the things that are most important for your Sukkah and what makes it kosher in your terms.

Good Luck in this mission.

Texts for use in this activity:

Each team will receive the following basic text:

Building a Sukkah

The Sukkah is a temporary structure created for Sukkot. It must be erected in the open air under the sky, not in a room or under a tree. It consists of four walls and a removable covering. The covering the "Skahk" must be of material that grows from the soil, has been detached from the ground and cannot be defiled. The Skahk must be loose enough so that one can see the sky. Technically, two complete walls and part of a third will satisfy the requirements for a Sukkah.....but it is customary to have four walls. The Sukkah should not be more than 30 feet high because it would then cease to be a temporary structure. It should be at least the size of 26 square inches.

Some people build a Sukkah in their houses by having a removable ceiling in one room.

Each team will work from one of the Mishnayot listed below. They should receive their Mishnah on a slip of paper with no other explanation. It will be up to them to work from this Mishnah.

Mishnah 1:2

If one make his Sukkah under a tree, it is as though he had constructed it inside of the house. If one Sukkah were above another the upper Sukkah is valid and the lower Sukkah is invalid. R. Judah says if there are no occupants in the upper one, the lower one is valid.

Mishnah 2:2

If one prop up his Sukkah with the legs of a bed, it is valid.

Mishnah 2:3

If one build his Sukkah on the top of a wagon or on the deck of a ship, it is valid and they may go up into it on the festival. If on the top of a tree or on the back of a camel, it is valid.

Mishnah 2:4

If one construct the Sukkah between the trees and the trees form it sides, it is valid.

More than one team can get each slip. It is fun to see how different teams interpret these same Mishnayot!!!!

After the teams have completed their building they should write an explanation that supports what they have done and attach the Mishnah to it, as well.

Additionally, if they have written a new “Mishnah” for their team they should include it, and tell why they have highlighted this issue.

Beit Din:

Each team will come before the Beit Din(made up of older students, teachers or parents) and explain their Sukkah and the reasons that they have built it as it is.

Everyone is a winner in this effort. The Beit Din is really there as a source of commendation and acknowledgement of their accomplishment. They should get a certificate of “Kashrut” for the completion of this task!!!!

Refreshments to follow, of course!!!!

Finally the Sukkot should be displayed prominently with their explanations for all of the community to enjoy and learn from.