



Unpacking A Tale of 5 Balloons

Topic

Hebrew, Israel, Israeli children's literature, Challenge and Response

A Note About Grade Levels and How to Use This Lesson:

This lesson takes the classic Israeli picture book סַעֲשֵׂה בַחֲמִישָׁה בָּלוּנוֹיִם (*A Tale of Five Balloons*) and offers different ways to approach reading it depending on the age and ability of the students. At its most basic level, likely for students in **grades 1–5**, it can be read as a story to learn basic Hebrew vocabulary. On a deeper level, for students **up to grade 8**, it can be used as a vehicle to discuss feelings of loss and disappointment. On an even deeper level, for students in **grades 6–12**, it can be used as an allegory to access Israeli culture and delve into issues connected to war. Choose the level that best fits the abilities and goals of the class.

Background for Teachers of All Levels/Ages

A Tale of 5 Balloons is an Israeli children's book that was written in 1974 by Miriam Ruth and illustrated by Ora Eyal. It became an instant classic upon publication, and it remains extremely popular to this day. With its themes of disappointment and loss, the book is used in therapy to work with kids who are coping with loss. At more than 900,000 copies sold, it is the best-selling Hebrew picture book of all time, and it continues to sell more than 35,000 copies per year. It has also been translated into Arabic.

As mentioned in the previous section, this book can be read on different levels. This lesson will approach these levels from the classic Jewish exegetical method of PaRDeS, which posits four approaches to understanding a text. Each level delves into the story in a progressively deeper way; so, depending on the students' ability to comprehend and interpret, appropriate activities can be used that make this a meaningful book for different ages:

- **פְּשָׁט Peshat**—Straightforward meaning: Who are the characters in the story? What did they do? What happened to them? How do they feel about what happened?
- **דְּרָשׁ Derash**—Interpretation: Why do the characters act the way they do? What motivates them? What might have happened before the story began? What might happen after the end of the story? Why do the characters feel the way they do?
- **רֵמֵז Remez**—Hinted meaning
- **סוֹד Sod**—Secret meaning
- What does this story say about the human condition? What is the connection to the society and time in which it was written? How can this story help people to deal with deeply felt emotions related to loss/trauma?

[Note: While *Remez* and *Sod* are two levels of the PaRDeS approach of interpreting text, the difference between them is often subtle. For this series of activities, *Remez* and *Sod* are combined to create a broader palette from which to draw exegetical opportunities.]



Unpacking A Tale of 5 Balloons

פֶּשֶׁט Peshat

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Understand an Israeli children's book in Hebrew
- Expand their Hebrew vocabulary
- Imagine what happens next in a story

Materials needed

- The book *מְעֵשָׂה בְּהַחְיֵשָׁה כְּלוּנִים* (*A Tale of Five Balloons*); if this book is not in your organization's library, check with a local Jewish bookstore, ask an Israeli family living in your neighborhood, or search online. A version with the full text but limited pictures is available [online](#). Note that this book is only available in Hebrew.
- Optional Materials:
 - Red, blue, purple, green, and yellow balloons
 - Audio recording devices
 - Collage materials: Magazines, safety scissors, glue, paper, etc.
 - Cards with words that appear in the book (available as separate download)

Technology needed (Optional)

- [Read along narration](#) with accompanying illustrations from the book
- Toontastic (available for free on iOS and Android)

Description of Activities

Read the story in Hebrew. To ensure that students understand the basic plot of the story, make sure to read with expression and sound effects.

- Balloon Option: Hand out balloons of each of the five colors from the story. As each balloon pops, students who are holding the corresponding colored balloon pop their balloons. Students holding red balloons can let them fly away at the end.

Discuss the basic storyline. What do the children receive at the beginning? What happens to the balloons? How do the children feel as each balloon pops? How do they feel at the end when the red balloon flies away?

Focus on vocabulary from the story. Choose one or more group of common words [Note that all words are listed in the form in which they appear in the book]:



Unpacking A Tale of 5 Balloons

- Colors: Divide the class into five groups, one for each color in the story. Each group collects pictures/items that match their color and they make a collage or sculpture in their color.
- Popping and Windy Sounds: Students create audio dictionaries for בּוֹם (Boom!), טראַח (Trahh!), יצא פּוֹטְזֵט (hitpotzetz, explode!), נִקְרָע (nikra, Torn), נִפְּי (nipei'ah, blew up a balloon), נִשְׁפָּח (nashvah, blew)
- Feelings: Students create their own emojis for שִׂשׂוֹן (sassion, joy), תִּצְטָא'עִיר/י (titzta'eir/i, be disappointed), סָמַח (samah, was happy), פֶּחַד (pahdah, was afraid),
- Actions: Play Simon Says (or Shimon Omer) with commands for רָץ (ratz, ran), קָפַץ (kafatz, jumped), זָרַק (zarak, threw), טָפַס (tafas, caught), הִתְכַּוְּעַף (hitcofeif, bent down), גִּלְגַּל (gilgelah, rolled), שָׂרָח (sartah, scratched), הִבְכָּח (hibkah, hugged), נִפְּנַף (nifnefu, waved)
 - Technology Option: Students use Toontastic to create animations for the words.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Read the story in English translation but intersperse the reading with Hebrew words such as colors and balloon popping sounds.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Ask students to read the book to the class.
- Students write/or illustrate the epilogue to the story. Where does the red balloon fly from Alon?



Unpacking A Tale of 5 Balloons

דרש Derash

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Discuss what it means to feel loss/disappointment
- Share experiences of loss/disappointment

Materials needed

- The book *מְעֵשָׂה בְּחַמִּישָׁה בָּלוּנִים* (*A Tale of Five Balloons*); if this book is not in your organization's library, check with a local Jewish bookstore, ask an Israeli family living in your neighborhood, or search online. A version with the full text but limited pictures is available [online](#). Note that this book is only available in Hebrew.

Technology needed

- [Read along narration](#) with accompanying illustrations from the book (Optional)

Background for Teachers

The story can be read as an allegory for loss and disappointment and was written as a way to talk to kids about loss as well as dreams and hopes. Miriam Ruth has said:

"הבלונים הם חלומות והחלומות מתנפצים. רק אחד נשאר: הבלון האדום. ואני לא יודעת איפה הוא. הרוח נשאה אותו, תרתי משמע, והוא ממשיך לרחף. לאן שהרוח תישא אותי, לשם אגיע."

"The balloons are dreams, and dreams shatter. Only one remains: the red balloon. I do not know where it is. The wind blew it. Not just literally. And it continues to hover. Where the wind will carry me, there I will go."

(retrieved from ["שלום שלום בלון אדום" - איורים בעקבות 'מעשה בחמישה בלונים'](#) Feb. 5, 2019)

Ora Eyal's illustrations bring life to the story and provide opportunities for analyzing, processing, and reflection. Some possible approaches include:

- Why were certain colors picked for each balloon?
- How do the different kids react to the loss of the balloon?
- Where are the adults in the story?
- Point out the use or lack of use of the string that is attached to the balloon and ask what it can mean.

The book presents an opportunity to open discussion in the classroom about loss and disappointment and to promote empathy for each other. This can be used after a specific event that takes place or as a tool to create a safe space in class. Remember to



Unpacking A Tale of 5 Balloons

think about which students in the class might have a particularly difficult time with discussions about loss and to be prepared for students to share personal narratives that might be difficult or disturbing for others in the class to hear.

Description of Activities

Read the story in Hebrew. In order to make sure that students understand the basic plot of the story, make sure to read with expression and sound effects.

Discuss the meaning of the story. Some possible opening questions include:

- What do you feel the story is about? [Note that each child is disappointed by the popping of their balloon but that, by the end, they are each able to wave goodbye to the red balloon.]
- What does each balloon represent?
- With which character do you most identify? Why?

To further discussion, consider using the questions posed in the Background for Teachers.

Consider sharing a short story of loss you experienced. (Note that modeling vulnerability can be important for building trust.) Ask students to write about their balloon that popped. Allow time to share if anyone chooses to do so.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Read the story in English translation but intersperse the reading with Hebrew words such as colors and balloon popping sounds.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Ask students to read the book to the class.
- Students write their own story about loss in Hebrew.



Unpacking A Tale of 5 Balloons

רמז Remez

ת"ד Sod

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Engage with Israel through a cultural lens
- Interpret an Israeli children's story as a metaphor for the Yom Kippur War
- Reflect on how art can help one deal with personal tragedy

Materials needed

- The book *תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּחַיִּיטָה כְּלוֹנִים* (*A Tale of Five Balloons*); if this book is not in your organization's library, check with a local Jewish bookstore, ask an Israeli family living in your neighborhood, or search online. A version with full text but limited pictures is available [online](#). Note that this book is only available in Hebrew.

Technology needed

- [Read along narration](#) with accompanying illustrations from the book (Optional)

Background for Teachers

At its most hidden, this book can give insight into the reality of Israeli society after the Yom Kippur war.

The 1973 war caught Israel off guard and had an impact on the society on many levels. After the 1973 war there was a change of government (Likud supplanting Labor in the 1977 elections), a change in economic politics, and influence in the culture (music, films etc). The book *A Tale of Five Balloons* came out in 1974 and gave the children of Israel, many of whom lost a member of their family in the war, an opportunity to deal with loss and grief; for these reasons the book became an instant bestseller. By examining this book through this lens, we can see the way Israeli society tries to deal with loss and conflict.

The class can be shown a film that explains the beginning and the outcome of the war.

A short explanation on the Yom Kippur war

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4z2SD3iAEk>

Two longer documentaries dig deeper into details of the war. While they are probably not for a classroom setting, they can be helpful in preparing to speak with the class.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9rhXhdZHg>



Unpacking A Tale of 5 Balloons

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMASeFZ6STo>

Description of Activities

Read the story in Hebrew. In order to make sure that students understand the basic plot of the story, make sure to read with expression and sound effects. If students are particularly adept Hebrew readers, they can read the story out loud themselves.

Discuss:

- What do you think is the message of the story?
- What does the story have to say about loss?

Show the class the [video](#) that gives the background about the Yom Kippur War.

Explain that, when *A Tale of Five Balloons* was released shortly after the Yom Kippur War, a large part of its popularity came from it helping Israelis deal with the trauma and loss they felt from the war.

Discuss how a book, and this book in particular, could have such a palliative effect on an entire society. Some leading questions include:

- How might the themes and details in this book relate to the specifics of losing loved ones during the Yom Kippur War? To feeling less safe after the shock of the war?
- Can you think of examples of Israeli behavior that can be linked to trauma?
- Based on the book how do you feel Israelis deal with trauma?

You can follow up the class by letting them explore the changes in attitude in Israeli society regarding trauma through these different organizations:

[NATAL: Israeli Trauma and Resilience Center](#)

[METIV: Herzog Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma](#)

Ask:

- How do these organizations help people deal with trauma today?
- What seems similar to how people dealt with trauma in 1974? What seems different?



בְּלוֹן

נִרְחֹק

אֶדְדוּם

כְּחֹל

צְהוּב

סְגוּל



מִתְנָה

הַנֶּשֶׁמֶשׁ



רוּחַ



הַיְלָדִים

הַעֲנָנִים



בוּרָא

טַרְאָח

הַתְּפוּצָץ

נְקִירַע

נִיפֵת

נִשְׁבָּה

שִׁשּׁוֹן

תַּצְטַעֲרֵי

שִׁמַּח

פְּתֻדָּה



רָץ

קָפֵץ



זָרַק



תִּפְס



הִתְכוּפֶה



גִּלְגְּלָה



שִׁרְטָה

חִיבָקָה



נִפְנָפוּ