

# Rabbi Benjamin's Buttons Educator's Guide

## Introduction:

*Rabbi Benjamin's Buttons* is a delightful tale of a joyous, friendly Rabbi as he engages with his community. The community opens up their doors, welcomes him to their homes, and he too, opens his heart and "buttons" to some traditional Jewish cuisine.

*Rabbi Benjamin's Buttons* invites students to explore a variety of core Jewish values, such as welcoming guests, acts of loving kindness, gratitude, and caring for the earth. It also reflects how the Jewish holidays can facilitate opportunities to engage in mitzvot and to help bring people together. At its very core, this story reflects community as a foundation for Judaism.

**COMMUNITY IS A  
FOUNDATION OF JUDAISM**

**BIG IDEA**



## Enduring Understandings:

1. *The use of food or meals has been one means to facilitate the creation of community.*
2. *The strength of a Jewish community can be determined by the Jewish values reflected in the behaviors and characteristics of its members.*
3. *The continuous cycle of Jewish holidays, each having their special holiday foods, brings people together around the table, building community.*



This guide has been designed to provide some ideas for activities to make the themes and values of *Rabbi Benjamin's Buttons* come alive to your students. Modify, adapt, or use them for inspiration. The hope is to enjoy the book and enhance the learner/listener's experience.

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Educator



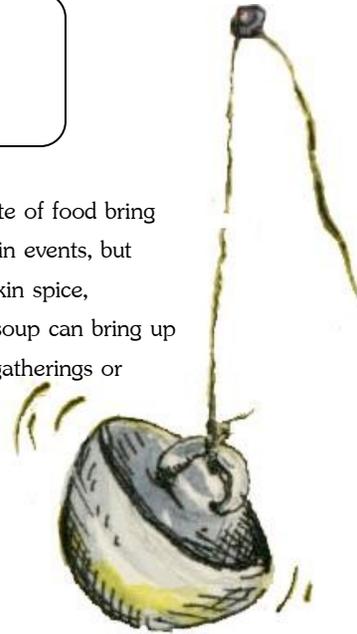
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EU 1: *The use of food or meals has been one means to facilitate the creation of community.*

Many events are remembered by the traditional foods that are associated with them. This is not limited to just Jewish holidays, but to many different occasions. The activities here are designed to have students realize their connection or association of certain foods with particular events.

A few examples of this in American culture would include cake and ice cream conjuring up images of birthdays, turkey, gravy and stuffing conjuring up images of Thanksgiving, and chicken wings, chips and dip, and hot dogs bringing up images of Super Bowl parties.

Not only does the taste of food bring up memories of certain events, but often smells of pumpkin spice, popcorn, or chicken soup can bring up memories of special gatherings or events as well.



## ACTIVITIES

### CREATE YOUR OWN EVENT

1. Use pictures, objects, or discuss the following foods: cake & ice cream, peanuts and Crackerjacks, popcorn, soda and candy, watermelon, hamburgers, hot dogs, and potato salad.
2. Ask if these remind anyone of specific events. They may come up with birthday parties, baseball games, movies, and July 4th.
3. Together you will design your own special event. This can be organized to be done in whole group, teams, or individually. Things that can be created include, but are not limited to:
  - Type of Event—Party, Celebration, Holiday, Other
  - Invitations—Written, Email, In Person
  - Guest List—Who should be invited, i.e. friends, relatives
  - Activities—What will people do during the event
4. After the event has been planned, ask what kind of memories people should have from the event. These could include the taste of food, smells, conversations, activities, or other ideas.

4. Glue the images of the foods and the memories onto the vest.
5. Finish off with four buttons.

### MY NOSE KNOWS

1. Choose four different foods that have very distinctive aromas. Each can be put in a tissue box or other container so that they can easily be smelled but not so easily seen.
2. Students should focus on taking a few sniffs of each container so they can either share, draw or write about what images the aroma conjures up. Is it sitting around the table at Grandma's house? Is it the noisy school cafeteria?
3. Bring in an herb or spice that may be unfamiliar to the group. What feeling or sense does that new scent inspire?

### RBB MEMORIES/FOOD COLLAGE VEST

1. Either individually or in a group, brainstorm a list of foods and memories from events in students' lives.
2. Collect pictures, print from the computer, draw, or cut out from magazines images which remind them of the food and the memories the food represents.
3. Using a paper grocery bag, tear the bag along the seam. Shape the bottom of the bag into a collar by first cutting out a circle to fit around the neck. Cut two holes on the sides for arms.



**RABBI BENJAMIN'S JOURNEY VEST ACTIVITY  
CAN BE FOUND AT THE END OF THIS GUIDE.**

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EU 2: *The strength of a Jewish community can be determined by the Jewish values reflected in the behaviors and characteristics of its members.*

“Be first to greet your fellow human being; invite him to your joyful occasions; call him by complimentary names; do not give away his secrets” –Menorat ha-Ma’or

Rabbi Benjamin and each of the families demonstrated different Jewish virtues. These virtues, also known as “Middot” are intended to provide a moral compass. They

date back to the Mishnah and Talmud and act as a guide or definition of what it means to be a “good” or “virtuous” individual. They combine values, characteristics, traits, and behaviors of one who is righteous or virtuous.

There are many Middot that the members of the synagogue on Walnut Street reflect. Explore these in the story and bring them to life for your students.

## ACTIVITIES

### MIDDOT VALUES

1. All Israel is Responsible for One Another—*Kol Yisral Aravim Zeh le'Zeh*
2. Love Your Fellow Jew—*Ahavat Yisrael*
3. Acts of Loving Kindness—*Gemilut Hasadim*
4. Appreciation/Gratitude—*Hoda'ah*
5. Welcoming Guests—*Hahnasat Orhjim*
6. Community—*Kehillah*
7. Taking Care of the Body—*Shmirat Haguf*
8. Care for the Earth—*Shmirat Ha'Adamah*
9. Friendship—*Yedidut*
10. Making the Right Choices—*Dereh Eretz*
11. Courage—*Ometz Lev*
12. Joy—*Simchah*
13. Good Heart—*Lev Tov*

### AL SHLOSAH DEVORIM

The world stands on three things; on the study of Torah, on service/worship, and on Acts of Loving Kindness—*Gemilut Hasadim*.

1. Give students inflatable globes, beach balls, balloons, or some other item that inflates into a sphere.
2. As the story is read, students will inflate their globe with one breath for each Act of Loving Kindness done in the story.
3. Can the students fully inflate the globe by the end of the story? Were they able to get their world to “stand”?
4. Could it be that what inflated Rabbi Benjamin's vest was not all the delicious food he ate, but the Acts of Loving Kindness?
5. What other Middot would you identify with Rabbi Benjamin in addition to Acts of Loving Kindness?

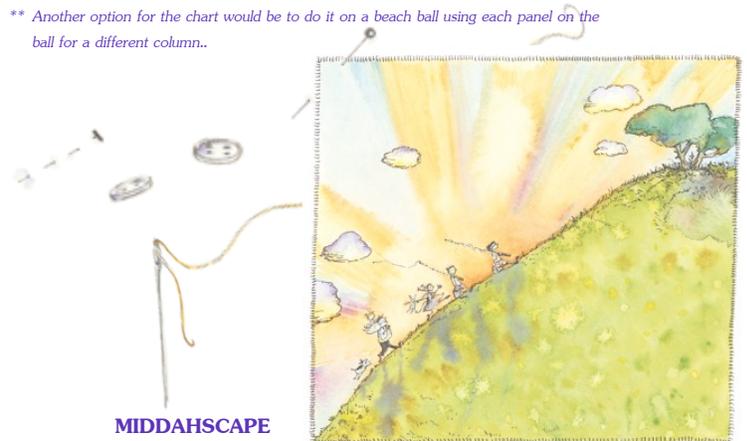
### MIDDOT CHARTS

Create a Middot Chart\* to highlight examples of Middot from the story so students can practice and incorporate them in their daily lives.

1. Identify 4 Middot from the story and create a three column chart\*\*. Title each column: **Middah, Rabbi Benjamin, and IRL (In Real Life)**.
2. As a group or individually, fill in the examples from the story for each Middah. For example, for “Appreciation/Gratitude—Hoda'ah,” the congregation gave a gift to Rabbi Benjamin, a holiday vest.
3. Students can fill in their chart over the week with examples of these Middot from their daily lives or they can fill in ways in which they hope to complete the Middot in the near future.

\* This activity can be extended into a long term project such as a journal or an index box with colored cards for students' real life Middot examples..

\*\* Another option for the chart would be to do it on a beach ball using each panel on the ball for a different column..



### MIDDAHSCAPE

1. Have students each pick out their favorite Middah.
2. On a sheet of paper, write the Middah somewhere on the page.
3. Paint, color, use crayon, and fully cover the page in design.



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**EU 3:** The continuous cycle of Jewish holidays, each having their special holiday foods, brings people together around the table, building community.

The Jewish holiday cycle begins with *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish New Year. As the Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar, the English or Gregorian date changes, but is always in the Fall. Each holiday is designed to occur in its particular season, each season filled with holidays.

**Fall:** Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simḥat Torah

**Winter:** Hanukkah, Tu B'Shevat, Purim

**Spring:** Pesach, Shavuot

**Summer:** Tisha B'Av, Selichot

Families celebrate these holidays in

many different ways. Some in the home with family and/or friends, some at synagogues, some in community centers, and some by small token gestures such as eating an apple dipped in honey or a piece of matzah.



## ACTIVITIES

### HOLIDAY FOODS BINGO

1. Use pictures, stuffed versions, or actual holiday foods such as apples and honey, etrog jelly, latkes, gefilte fish, sweet potato pie, matzah ball soup, charoset, and other foods that may be associated with different holidays in the community.
2. Have students sort the foods into the appropriate holidays. Some foods may be used more than once. For instance, matzah ball soup may be common at three or four holidays.
4. Have students create a BINGO game board with the word "OCHEL," the Hebrew word for food. In each of the five boxes below, students fill in the spaces with one of the holidays.
5. Cards are then made with the food items and one of the letters, O—C—H—E—L.
4. When a food is "called," students choose one holiday under the column that is affiliated with that holiday.

2. Is the recipe influenced by the family's culture or country of origin? Mexican Jews, Pilipino Jews, Yeminite Jews, and American Jews will likely have variations of "traditional" holiday foods.
3. Create a cookbook of holiday recipes.

### HOLIDAY GATHERINGS

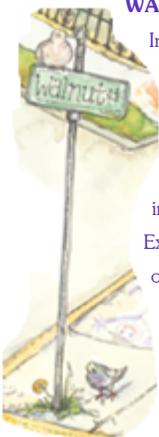
In *Rabbi Benjamin's Buttons*, the holidays were a time when the community came together around meals. This led to a very tight vest for Rabbi Benjamin. In the end, he found ways to Care for His Body—*Shmirat HaGuf* by doing activities in preparation for the holidays.

1. Create a Holiday Chart with the following categories: Holiday, Gathering—Celebrate, Gathering—Eat, Gathering—Active.
2. For each holiday, list ways to celebrate the holiday. It can include where this would occur, what the celebration would look like, and with whom.
3. List ways to get together around food opportunities.
4. List ways to get together in preparation for the holiday, during the holiday, or after that involve physical activity.

### WALNUT STREET COOKBOOK

In *Rabbi Benjamin's Buttons*, each family had a recipe they used at the holidays that they shared with the congregation. Many of these recipes are handed down through the generations. Some have Jewish roots which may be influenced by "Ashkenazic" or European ancestry and some may be influenced by "Sephardic" or Spanish/Middle Eastern ancestry. Explore some of the recipes in this story, in your congregation, or in your community.

1. Have a parent come in to share a family recipe. Where did the recipe come from? Where did the family ancestry come from?



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## JOURNEY VEST

1. Divide the left side of Rabbi Benjamin's vest into four sections with one section not having a button, and one section having two buttons. (See picture)
2. During the first half of the story, events are described around the holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, Hanukkah, and Passover.
3. Have students fill in each of the four sections with words, phrases or pictures to describe the holiday celebrations. These can include the foods eaten, the "release" of buttons, and people involved. Students may want to include specific holiday objects or symbols in each section that represent each of those holidays.
4. On the right side of the vest, divide the vest again into four separate sections. This time, students may choose to draw the divisions in any way they wish. (See picture 2)
5. In the second half of the book, the story describes the events as they occur with the different families. Label each of the four sections with one of the four families being the Hoovers, Bergmans, Muchniks, and Goldwassers.
6. In each of these sections, students can write words, phrases, draw pictures, symbols, or images that represent the activities the families did with Rabbi Benjamin. This could include symbols for the holidays associated with the activity.
7. When vests are completed, have students retell the story using only their vests as their guide to the events and order of the story.
8. Variations could include letting a student tell only one section of his/her vest, followed by another student telling one section from his/her vest. The goal would be to see if the story could be retold by the class. It could include retelling the entire story as written, or it could include the students inserting themselves into the story and retelling it as if they were one of the families.



Picture 1



Picture 2



# Rabbi Benjamin's Journey Vest

