

Yom Kippur Lesson Plan

Personal Responsibility, Forgiveness, and Renewal

Grade: 4th-8th grade, can be adapted for High School

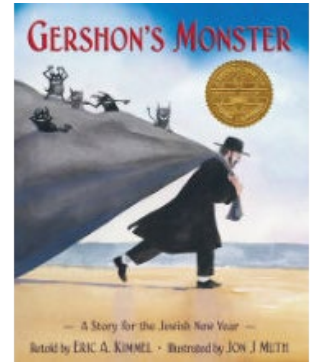
Using PJ Library Book: *Gershon's Monster* by Eric Kimmel



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Learning Goals and Objectives:

- Students will analyze *Gershon's Monster* as a story of avoiding responsibility and the consequences that follow.
- Students will connect the story's themes to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur — especially the practices of *teshuvah* (repentance), asking forgiveness, and making changes in the new year.
- Students will reflect on their own actions and identify ways to repair mistakes and start fresh.



Structure / Activity:

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Teacher asks: “What do we do during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to start the year fresh?”
- Collect student responses (e.g., saying sorry, apologizing, reflecting on mistakes, making new goals).
- Introduce the book: “Today we will read a story about someone who didn’t take responsibility for his mistakes, and what happened as a result.”

2. Read-Aloud or Partner Reading (15 minutes)

- Read *Gershon's Monster* together.
- Pause to ask comprehension questions: Why do you think Gershon avoided responsibility? What happened when he tried to get rid of his mistakes? How did he finally learn his lesson?

3. Discussion (10–15 minutes)

- Guide students through connections:
 - How does Gershon’s story connect to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?

- Why is it important to own up to our mistakes rather than “sweeping them away”?
- What do Jewish traditions teach us about apologizing and repairing relationships? (*Teshuvah*, *selichot*, forgiveness).

4. Activity: Teshuvah Reflection Stones (15–20 minutes)

- Give each student a small stone or paper cut-out of a stone.
- On one side, write or draw a mistake they’d like to let go of this year.
- On the other side, write or draw something they can do to repair or improve moving forward.
- Create a class “Teshuvah Path” by placing the stones in a line to represent a journey toward forgiveness and renewal.

5. Closing / Reflection (5 minutes)

- Teacher summarizes: “Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur remind us that we all make mistakes, but Judaism teaches us that what matters most is taking responsibility, apologizing, and trying again. Gershon almost waited too long to learn this lesson, but we can choose to learn it now.”
- Optional: End with the *Shehecheyanu* blessing to mark the gift of starting anew.

Materials Needed:

- Copy of *Gershon’s Monster* (PJ Library edition)
- Small stones (real or paper cut-outs)
- Markers or pens
- Large paper or space on floor to arrange “Teshuvah Path”

Accommodations / Modifications: *For all learners to participate*

- Allow oral responses instead of writing.
- Provide sentence starters for reflection (e.g., “This year I want to let go of...”, “This year I will try to...”).
- Offer extra time and small group discussion.
- Use visuals (illustrations from the book, sample Teshuvah Path).