



**JCRC**  
BAY AREA

## **Bringing Chanukah to Your Child's Classroom**

Hello Parents!

As December approaches, we find ourselves in a season of celebration. For many families, it's also a time to think about ways to share our unique traditions and perspectives with the broader community. December is an excellent opportunity to bring the richness of Chanukah into your child's classroom, fostering understanding and appreciation for Jewish culture.

This guide provides practical and creative ways to introduce Chanukah to kids. With activities and ideas tailored for different age groups, you can help enrich your child's learning environment while sharing the joy and traditions of Judaism.

This year, Chanukah begins on the evening of December 25, 2024.

### **Section One: Asking the Teacher**

The first thing you will need to do is contact your child's teacher. Here is a template you can use:

Dear [Teacher Name],

I hope this message finds you well! As the holiday season approaches, I wanted to reach out and express my interest in sharing a special Chanukah activity with [Child's Name]'s class. Our family is Jewish, and I thought it might be a wonderful opportunity to share some of our cultural traditions with the students.

I would love to [briefly describe the activity]. The activity can be tailored to fit the students' schedule and interests and will take approximately [time estimate]. Please let me know if this would be possible and if there are any guidelines or restrictions I should keep in mind to ensure this fits seamlessly with your classroom plans. I'm happy to coordinate with you on timing and details to make this a smooth and enjoyable experience for everyone.

Thank you for considering this request! I look forward to hearing from you and hopefully bringing a bit of Chanukah joy to the classroom.

Best wishes,

[Your name], [ Student Name]'s Parent

## **Section Two: Activity Recommendations by Age**

### **Preschool (2 Years - 4 Years)**

With this age group, keep activities short, simple, and engaging. More in-depth activities might be appropriate if you are given a significant amount of time (45+ minutes).

- Read a short Chanukah story
- Listen to and sing a Chanukah song for kids like “Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel”
- Taste foods related to Chanukah
- See and touch a menorah and dreidel (playing dreidel may be too advanced for this group)

### **Kindergarten through Fourth Grade (5 Years - 9 Years)**

Older students will be able to engage more deeply than their younger counterparts.

- Read and discuss a Chanukah story
- Connect a craft or additional activity to the story if you have more time
- Sing/listen to Chanukah songs (this can come from a larger selection than the ones for younger students)
- Taste and/or make foods related to Chanukah
- See/touch a menorah
- Learn to play dreidel

### **Fifth Grade through Middle School (10 Years - 14 Years)**

Getting and keeping the attention of tween/teen students can be a challenge. Make sure their level of maturity is reflected in your planning.

- Share the Chanukah story through a presentation, video, or book (being read a story might be considered juvenile depending on the group)
- Make and/or eat Chanukah foods
- Learn to play dreidel and play a tournament (while listening to Chanukah music if you'd like)

### **High School**

Partner with your student and one of their teachers to plan an activity that your child can lead for their classmates. There may also be a Jewish Student Club that could lead activities or have an information table for the whole campus. As the parent, your primary role should be to support your student's plans while ensuring they use reliable and unbiased resources for their preparation and presentation.

### **Section Three: Chanukah Overview**

Chanukah, which means "dedication," commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 165 BCE, metaphorically celebrates faith, freedom, and perseverance, emphasizing the importance of cultural identity and religious liberty.

In Jerusalem over 2,000 years ago, a group of Jewish fighters (called the Maccabees) stood up against a powerful king and his army. The king, Antiochus, wanted the Jewish people to stop practicing their religion and follow his Greek customs instead. He even took over their holy Temple and used it for things the Jewish people didn't believe in.

The Maccabees fought hard and, even though they were a small group, they won. After their victory, they cleansed and repaired the Temple so they could worship there again. But when they wanted to light the menorah (a special lamp that was supposed to stay lit all the time), they could only find enough pure oil to keep it burning for one day. It would take eight days to make more oil.

Then something amazing happened. That small amount of oil lasted for eight whole days. This was considered a miracle, and is one of the reasons why Chanukah is eight days long.

To remember this event, Jewish families light a special menorah called a chanukiah during Chanukah. Each night, they light one more candle until all eight candles are glowing on the last night. They also celebrate by eating foods cooked in oil, like potato pancakes (latkes) and jelly doughnuts (sufganiyot). Other festivities include songs, games and playing with a spinning top called a dreidel.

Chanukah is a time to remember standing up for what you believe in, being brave, and celebrating miracles!

### **Section Four: Lesson Plan Outline**

1. Introduce yourself and your student
  - a. Briefly describe your reason for visiting: To share some of your culture with the class
2. Provide a brief background on Judaism and your family
  - a. This could include where your family comes from, where you go to synagogue, languages spoken at home and more!
  - b. Show a map or other visual aids
3. Explain what Chanukah is and why it is meaningful to your family in particular, and to other Jewish people on a larger scale
  - a. Make it engaging with photos, videos, and more!
  - b. This is a great spot for reading a story book for younger children. Book recommendations can be found below

4. Do a hands-on activity that will engage the students in students in the cultural topic
  - a. Teach a simple song or dance
  - b. Learn and play dreidel
  - c. Have students learn to say or write phrases related to the topic in your home language (Hebrew, Russian, German, Yiddish, Ladino, and more)
  - d. Allow students to explore artifacts from Judaism (menorah/chanukiah, dreidels, latke, sufganiyot, gelt, and more)
  - e. Make and/or taste traditional foods (if allowed and feasible)
  - f. Do a thematic art or writing project
5. Close out your visit with some final thoughts
  - a. Share a treat with the class and, while they eat, have students share something they learned
  - b. Leave time for final questions and answers
  - c. Thank the students and teachers for having you as a visitor

### **Section Five: Teaching Dreidel- For Parents**

#### **Supplies**

- One dreidel per group of students
- Items to use as playing chips/tokens like beans, gelt (chocolate coins), math manipulatives, loose crayons or other classroom supplies. Usually 15-20 per student
- One “How to Play Dreidel” (below) page per group or posted on the whiteboard/projector

#### **Setup**

- Divide the class into groups of three to six people. Groups can be slightly larger if needed
- Provide each student with an equal number of tokens with which to play the game.
- Give each group one dreidel and directions

#### **Directions**

- Preview the history and Jewish cultural significance of dreidel (see page 2 of this document)
- Preview the game meaning for each Hebrew letter on the dreidel
- Read the directions as a class/to the class
- Lead the class in watching one group play a “test game” where you walk the group and class through each turn until the round is over (someone got a Gimmel and the pot/kitty is emptied)
- Instruct the groups to begin playing and circle the room to support

## How to Play Dreidel

- Letters on the Dreidel: The symbols on the sides of a dreidel are Hebrew letters. Each letter corresponds to an action in the game
  - Shin (שׁ): Put one token into the pot/kitty
  - Nun (נ): Take none of the tokens. Lose none of your tokens
  - Hay (ה): Take half the tokens in the pot/kitty
  - Gimmel (ג): Winner! Take all of the tokens in the pot/kitty
- Get into groups of three or more. Make sure each person has tokens or game pieces. A popular choice is Chanukah gelt (chocolate coins)
- To decide who gets to play first, each person should spin the dreidel. The person with the highest spin gets to start the game. Shin is the lowest, then Nun, Hay, and finally Gimmel is the highest
- Before the first round can begin, each player must put one of their tokens into the “pot.” People will add to and draw from the pot throughout the game
- The player who is starting the game spins the dreidel. The dreidel will fall and land with one of four letters facing up
  - If Gimmel (ג) is facing up, the player wins the round and takes all the tokens from the pot as their winnings and the game play begins again with everyone putting in a token
  - Hay (ה) is facing up, the player gets half of the tokens in the pot. If there is an odd number of tokens in the pot, round down. The dreidel is then given to the next person to spin
  - If Shin (שׁ) is facing up, the player must take one of their own tokens and add it to the pot. The dreidel is then given to the next person
  - If Nun (נ) is facing up the player does nothing, and the dreidel is given to the next person
- The round is over when someone gets Gimmel or there is only one token left in the pot. At this point the group begins again with putting one token into the pot to start the next round
- Once someone is out of tokens, they can continue to spin until they get Shin and cannot put one in or they cannot put in the starting token—after that they are “out.” If they are able to win tokens before getting out they can continue to play as normal

**Section Seven: Books and other Lesson Recommendations**

Grade	Lesson Ideas
K-2	<p>Do a group reading of a story or nonfiction text that is about Chanukah. Focus on engaging the class with a lively reading and connecting with the narrative. While this is not a history lesson, if you select a book that presents Chanukah as a backdrop to the other events it would be helpful to also do a reading of an informational text about chanukah as well.</p> <p align="center"><b>Narrative Text Suggestions</b></p> <p><i>Queen of the Hanukkah Dosas</i>, by Pamela Ehrenberg  <i>When Mindy Saved Hanukkah</i>, by Eric A. Kimmel  <i>The Eight Knights of Hanukkah</i>, by Leslie Kimmelman  <i>Sammy Spider;s First Hanukkah</i>, by Sylvia A. Rouss</p> <p align="center"><b>Nonfiction Text Suggestions</b></p> <p><i>Holidays Around the World: Celebrate Hanukkah: With Light, Latkes, and Dreidels</i>, by Deborah Heiligman</p> <p align="center">-</p>
3-5	<p>Reading stories is still a great option for this age group- but make sure the book is for a slightly older audience. These stories can also be used to study grade level topics like characterization, theme, or story structure if you and the teacher would like to partner on a Chanukah lesson that also reflects the content being learned in class.</p> <p><i>A Donut in Time: A Hanukkah Story</i>, by Elana Rubinstein  <i>A Horn for Louis</i>, by Eric A. Kimmel</p> <p align="center"><b>Lesson Suggestion</b></p> <p><i>Little Red Ruthie: A Hanukkah Tale</i>, by Gloria Koster</p> <p>By these grades, many students are already familiar with at least one version of Little Red Riding Hood. This could be a particularly fun story to use for introducing Chanukah to a class because of that previous connection.</p>

6-8	<p>With this age group, using a combination of videos, articles, and activities (rather than picture books) will be the most age appropriate way to share about Chanukah with the class. To summarize the story of Chanukah, use a short video like the one available <a href="#">here</a> (PJ Library: <i>The Story of Hanukkah</i>) or for older students: <a href="#">here</a> (HISTORY Channel on Youtube, <i>History of Holidays: Hanukkah</i>).</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teach the kids to play dreidel (see instructions in this packet) and give them time to play.</li> <li>● Listen to Chanukah themed covers of popular songs by bands like the Maccabeats on youtube.</li> <li>● Make latkes with the class - <a href="#">recipe</a></li> </ul>
9-12	<p>At the high school level, your student should be empowered to lead this lesson and activity in front of their classmates. As you support your student in their planning, pay special attention to what they find important and valuable to share.</p> <p>It would be helpful for them to share about their relationship with Judaism and to the holiday of Chanukah as well as be able to speak about the holiday in a more general sense.</p> <p>Your student should have one or two goals for their presentation and should focus on meeting those goals through a combination of listening activities and hands-on activities for their classmates.</p> <p>As the parent, your primary role should be to support your student’s plans while ensuring they use reliable and unbiased resources for their preparation and presentation.</p>

**Additional Resources for Integrating Jewish Representation in December**

**Resources for Adult Learning**

[History of Chanukah](#), ReformJudaism.org  
[The Chanukah Story](#), Chabad.org

**Videos/ Movies**

[What is Hanukkah?](#) BimBam (4 minutes, 4th Grade+)

[Sesame Street: Happy Hanukkah from Elmo and Friends](#) (4 Minutes, Preschool-K)

[How to Play Dreidel](#), My Jewish Learning (1st Grade+)

History of the Holidays: [Hanunkah](#) (3rd Grade+)

Latke Recipe - [Hanukkah](#), The Maccabeats (All Ages)

## **Music**

[The Maccabeats - Candlelight - Hanukkah](#) (reviews the story of Chanukah)

[The Dreidel Song \(I made it out of clay\)](#), Shaboom!

[Oh Hanukkah](#), The Maccabeats

[Puppy for Hanukkah-Daveed Diggs](#), DisneyMusicVevo

[Five Little Latkes](#), Shira Kline (Hand song for Preschool-K)

[Hanukkah Playlist](#), Spotify (They have many.)

## **Additional Classroom Resources**

[Calendar of Major Jewish Religious Observances](#), JCRC Bay Area

[Best Practices for Home Culture Sharing in Classrooms](#), JCRC Bay Area

[Chapter Books Celebrating Jewish Life and Culture](#), San Francisco Public Library

[Children's and Middle Grade Books That Mirror the Diversity of Jewish Communities](#), PJ Library