



Jewish American Heritage Month for Teachers

May is Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM)—a time to commemorate the more than 350-year history of Jewish contributions to American society. We believe education about Jewish identity and the contributions of Jewish Americans is a critical antidote to the rampant antisemitism the Jewish community is experiencing today. We are calling on Bay Area teachers to recognize JAHM and use it as an opportunity for education about and celebration of the vibrant history of Jewish Americans.

To support you in bringing JAHM to your classrooms we've provided a list of possible lessons, activities, and resources. Regardless of your content area, or the lesson topic you choose, we recommend beginning your lesson with an introduction to JAHM and Jewish Americans.

Introductions to JAHM by Grade Level:

- **Lower Elementary:** In May, the whole country participates in what is called Jewish American Heritage Month. It's a time when we learn about the Jewish people—a group with a long history, beautiful traditions, and many contributions to the world and to America. People who are Jewish might celebrate holidays like Hanukkah or Passover, and they come from all kinds of backgrounds. In the United States, many Jewish Americans have been artists, scientists, leaders, and helpers who made a big difference.
- **Upper Elementary:** Every May, we celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month. It's a chance to recognize the history, culture, and amazing contributions of Jewish Americans. The Jewish people are part of a global community with ancient roots, rich traditions, and a strong sense of identity. Jewish Americans have shaped many parts of our society—from music and sports to science and justice.
- **Middle School:** May is Jewish American Heritage Month, a time when we honor the heritage, culture, and achievements of Jewish Americans throughout history. Judaism is both a religion and a cultural identity (this is called an Ethnoreligious group) with deep roots going back thousands of years. Jewish Americans

have faced challenges and discrimination, but they've also thrived, contributing to art, activism, science, education, and so much more.

- **High School:** This month, we observe Jewish American Heritage Month, which recognizes the deep contributions and diverse experiences of Jewish Americans throughout U.S. history. The Jewish people have a rich and complex identity, shaped by faith, culture, history, and resilience. In the U.S., Jewish Americans have played vital roles in civil rights, science, literature, public service, and more—often overcoming systemic antisemitism and social challenges. As we focus on a Jewish hero today, we'll explore how their identity and values informed their work. This is an opportunity not only to learn history, but to reflect on how culture, faith, and heritage shape individual paths—and how marginalized communities have contributed profoundly to the American story.

Art:

To celebrate JAHM in art classes, study the lives, works, and techniques of Jewish American artists. After some research or background learning, the students can then create their own art utilizing similar techniques, styles, and themes.

- Judy Chicago (1939-): Feminist visual artist, multimedia
- Morris Louis (1913-1962): Painter
- Diane Arbus (1923-1971): Documentary/Street Photographer
- Margaret Bourke-White (1904-1971): Photojournalist
- Alex Bradley Cohen (1989-): Painter
- Will Elsnor (1917-2005): Cartoonist
- Art Spiegelman (1948-): Graphic Novelist (Read *Maus* by Art Spiegelman)
- Iris Gottlieb: Illustrator (Read *What Jewish Looks Like* by Natasha Díaz and Liz Kleinrock, and illustrated by Iris Gottlieb)

Physical Education:

In PE, consider studying the biographies, achievements, and sports of Jewish American athletes. The students could then engage in related physical activities or games inspired by those athletes' disciplines, techniques, and values.

- Aly Raisman (1994-): Olympic Gymnast, Victim's Advocate (Read *From My Head to My Toes* by Aly Raisman)
- Mark Spitz (1950-): Olympic Swimmer
- Hank Greenberg (1911-1986): Baseball
- Sandy Koufax (1935-): Baseball
- Sue Bird (1980-): Basketball

Math/Science:

Exploring the biographies, discoveries, and contributions of Jewish American scientists, mathematicians, engineers, and technologists is a great way to bring JAHM into math and science classrooms. Students could then conduct experiments or create projects that reflect similar principles, methods, or areas of research.

- Albert Einstein (1879-1955): Physicist
- Jonas Salk (1914-1995): Medical Researcher
- Larry Page (1973-) and Sergey Brin (1973-): Founders of Google
- Heidy Lamarr (1914-2000): Actress and inventor
- Ruth Handler (1916-2002): Inventor of Barbie
- Judith Resnik (1949-1986): Astronaut

- Gertrude Elion (1918-1999): Scientist
- Estée Lauder (1908-2004): Businesswoman

Social Studies:

Social Studies students can examine the history, impact, and civic engagement of Jewish Americans throughout U.S. history. Have students analyze primary sources, discuss key historical events, or research the role of Jewish Americans in shaping social movements and public policy. Another way to bring Jewish American history to social studies is to have students study important moments or time periods in Jewish American history, such as immigration waves, civil rights involvement, or cultural milestones. Activities could include analyzing sources, creating timelines, or researching individuals and events that helped shape American society.

Historical People:

- Ruth Bader Ginsburg (1933-2020): Supreme Court Justice
- Louis Brandeis (1856-1941): Supreme Court Justice
- Elie Wiesel (1928-2016): Activist, Nobel Laureate, Holocaust Survivor
- Lillian Wald (1867-1940): Nurse, Humanitarian
- Gloria Steinem (1934-): Journalist, Political Activist
- Judith Heumann (1947-2023): Disabled Rights Activist
- Dianne Feinstein (1933-2023): Senator from California
- Barbara Boxer (1940-): Senator from California
- Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932): Equity Activist
- Rose Schneiderman (1882-1972): Labor Union Activist
- Bernie Sanders (1941-): Senator from Vermont

Historic Events:

- Explore this timeline in Jewish American history from 1492 and on.
- Look at waves of Jewish immigration to the U.S. from around the world.
- Explore Jewish American Involvement in the Civil Rights Movement

English:

In English, consider reading books by or about Jewish Americans that highlight their stories, culture, and experiences. Students can take part in author studies to learn more about Jewish American writers and what inspires their work. They can then respond through writing, drawing, or discussion, and even create their own stories or poems inspired by the works or lives of the Jewish Americans they learned about.

Another option for inclusion of JAHM in English Language Arts is bringing in books about Jewish Americans and Jewish Culture. Links for book recommendations are also included below.

Poets/Songwriters:

- Irving Berlin (1888-1989): Songwriter, Score Composer
- Emma Lazarus (1849-1887): Poet
- Bob Dylan (1941-): Singer, Songwriter
- Matisyahu (1979-): Orthodox Reggae Artist and Singer
- Shel Silverstein (1930-1999): Author, Poet

Authors:

- Judy Blume (1938-): Author - Read *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* or *Are You There, God? It's Me Margaret.*)
- Elie Wiesel (1928-2016): Author, Professor, Holocaust Survivor - Read *Night* (9th grade and up)
- Ezra Jack Keats (1916-1983): Author - Read *The Snowy Day*
- Maurice Sendak (1928-2012): Author - Read *Where the Wild Things Are*
- Art Spiegelman (1948-): Arthur, Cartoonist - Read *Maus* (Middle school and up)
- Daniel Handler (a.k.a. "Lemony Snicket") (1970-) - Read *A Series of Unfortunate Events*
- Natasha Díaz: Author - Read *Color Me In*
- Liz Kleinrock: Author - Read *What Jewish Looks Like*
- Caroline Kusin Pritchard: Author - Read *The Keeper of Stories*

Playwrights and Actors:

- Stephen Sondheim (1930-2021): Composer, Lyricist
- Daveed Diggs (1982-): Broadway Actor, Singer, Songwriter
- Heidy Lamarr (1914-2000): Actress and inventor

Book Recommendation Lists:

- 11 Books to Read During National Jewish American Heritage Month: PJ Library
- Jewish American Heritage Month Library Materials: American Jewish Committee
- Picture and Chapter Books to Celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month: ADL

Additional Teacher Resources:

- How to Celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month in Class: Newsela
- Institute for Curriculum Services: Jewish Americans lesson plan
- Facing History and Ourselves: Navigating Jewish American Identity lesson plan and a Being Jewish in the United States reading
- Library of Congress: Jewish American Heritage Month
- National Archives: Jewish American Heritage Month
- PBS: Lesson plans for The Jewish Americans by David Rubin video series and The Journey of the Jewish Americans documentary clip