



Lesson Ideas to Integrate Jewish Representation for Purim

Greetings, Educators!

According to the Association for Middle Level Education, “Research shows that representation in the classroom not only boosts feelings of belonging but also supports a positive school environment, where students feel more confident and achieve more” (Reginal, 2021). This guide offers simple and California State Standards-aligned ways to include representation of Jews and Judaism during late February and early March, helping you enrich your classroom with fresh perspectives and traditions!

Purim is a time to remember standing up for what you believe in, being brave, and thinking cleverly! The holiday’s origin story combined with its modern celebrations give you a picture of the overall impact of the holiday. **If your school does “spirit week” or “spirit days,” a costume day near Purim would be a wonderful way to integrate Jewish American culture into your school week!**

The Purim Story

The story of Purim takes place in Persia during the 5th century BCE. It begins in Shushan the capital city where the ruler, King Ahasuerus, was ending a 180-day party celebrating his rule. To end this extravaganza, the king held a week of smaller parties in which he requested that his wife, Queen Vashti, dance in front of his friends to show off her body to them. She refused his request and was executed.

This left the King in search of a new queen. At the recommendation of his advisors, the King decided to hold a beauty contest across his empire to decide whom to marry. Among the contestants was a reluctant participant named Esther.

Esther was convinced to join the beauty contest by her cousin and pseudo-parent Modechai. Her natural beauty and grace won favor with the King and she was selected to be the new Queen. Mordechai advised Esther to hide her Jewish identity for her own safety,- and she did.

Soon after Esther became queen, a high-ranking minister, Haman, rose to power and demanded that all prostrate themselves before him. Mordechai refused due to his Jewish religious principles which dictate not to bow down before false idols, and drew Haman’s ire.

Fueled by hatred, Haman devised a plan to annihilate the Jewish people and secured King Ahasuerus's approval, setting the date for the massacre. When Mordechai learned of this, he urged Esther to intervene, despite the danger of approaching the king unsummoned. At Mordechai's insistence, Esther agreed to act, requesting that the Jewish community in Shushan fast for three days to support her endeavor. Courageously, Esther approached Ahasuerus, who granted her audience and accepted her invitation to a private feast with Haman.

During the feast, Esther invited the king and Haman to a second banquet, heightening Haman's pride. That night, the king, unable to sleep, reviewed the royal chronicles and discovered Mordechai's earlier act of loyalty in foiling an assassination plot. Ahasuerus decided to honor Mordechai publicly, much to Haman's humiliation. At the second feast, Esther revealed her Jewish identity and exposed Haman's plot to annihilate her people. Enraged, the king ordered Haman to be hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordechai. This marked the beginning of a dramatic turn of events, leading to the salvation of the Jewish community in Persia and contributing to a legacy of resilience still celebrated today.

The Celebration of Purim

The most important aspect of the Purim celebration is the reading of the Megillah (scroll) of The Book of Esther. This is often chanted in Hebrew in a synagogue. During the reading, the congregants "boo" or shake groggers (rattles) over the sound of Haman's name. Jewish people also give to charity, deliver gifts of food to friends, family, and those in need, and partake in a festive meal.

Modern celebrations have grown to include Purim spiels, which are theatrical and humorous performances often retelling the story of Esther or teaching about the morals of the story. Many schools or synagogues will put on carnivals for kids and families. Wearing costumes and having parties to celebrate Purim is popular for all age groups. In Israel, adults celebrate at clubs and street parties.

Purim Themes

One way to integrate new cultures into your current curricula is through a focus on common themes. Universal and unifying ideas can be used to help students find a common ground with a new culture and are an opportunity to use the new cultural content to explore familiar ideas. Below are some of the themes of Purim:

- Triumph of Good over Evil
- Disguises and Costumes
- Creative Thinking and Cleverness

- Resilience/Persistence
- Resisting Antisemitism and Bigotry
- Bravery
- Celebrating/Frivolity

Symbols of Purim

In addition to the lessons suggested within this document, you may find it fun and helpful to bring in physical symbols of Purim. The use of realia in the classroom increases student engagement and can support their exploration of a new culture.

Masks and Costumes

Because Esther had to hide her identity, it has become tradition to wear costumes in celebration of Purim. Simple lesson integration ideas here include sharing masks from multiple cultures and crafting masks as a class. (See the end of this packet for mask templates/coloring sheets.)

Hamentashen

Hamentashen are filled triangle cookies that are a traditional food for Purim. The shape of the cookies are said to represent the shape of Haman's hat, his ears, or even the dice that were used to determine the would-be execution date of the Jews. These cookies can be filled with fruits, poppy seeds, chocolate, or even completely unique ideas like pizza hamentashen! Eating or making these as a class is a delicious way to bring Jewish culture into the classroom. You can make them from scratch with a [recipe](#) or even use store bought sugar cookie dough and jam.

Grogger

A grogger is a noise maker or rattle used during the retelling of the Purim Story. Jews use it to make loud noises and drown out the sound of Haman's name. You could [make them](#) as a class and use them either in the retelling of the Purim story or even with a story your class is familiar with!

English Language Arts (ELA) Integration

Grade	Standard	Lesson Ideas
Pre K		<p align="center">Lesson Plan Overview</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Share with the students that there is a Jewish Holiday coming up called Purim and give the children some background on its history and how it is celebrated. 2) Read a story related to Purim. 3) Do a Purim-related craft, song, dance, or other fun activity. (Coloring masks would be especially fun with this age group.) <p align="center">Nonfiction Text Suggestions</p> <p><u>It's Purim Time</u>, Latifa Berry Kropf</p> <p align="center">Narrative Text Suggestions</p> <p><u>The Purim Superhero</u>, Elizabeth Kushner <u>The Mystery Bear</u>, Leone Adelson</p>
K-2	<p>Reading Literature 1-10</p> <p>Reading Informational Texts 1-10</p>	<p align="center">Lesson Plan Overview</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) At the start, let students know that there is a Jewish holiday called Purim coming up/happening and give them some background information. You might use a short video (links available below) or summarize it on your own. 2) Do a group reading of a story or nonfiction text that is about Purim. 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 Purim as a backdrop to the other events it would be helpful to also do a reading of an informational text about Purim as well. 3) Do a Purim-related craft, song, dance, or other fun activity. This age group can get more adventurous with mask making as well as making their own sound makers. <p align="center">Narrative Text Suggestions</p> <p><u>Queen Vashti's Comfy Pants</u>, Leah Rachel Berkowitz</p>

<p>3-5</p> <p>Reading Literature 1-3</p> <p>Reading Literature 10 (if student read)</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Lesson Plan Overview</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) At the start, let students know that there is a Jewish holiday called Purim coming up/happening and give them some background information. These students can explore introduction resources on their own, reading the story of Esther or watching the short overview videos. 2) After the students get a basic understanding of the holiday, explore a related narrative as a class. You can use this text to continue to study narrative elements you are already learning about. These stories can be used to study characterization, theme, or story structure. This allows you to integrate Jewish culture into what is already being done in your classroom. 3) A stand-alone lesson idea is included below. <p style="text-align: center;">Narrative Text Suggestions</p> <p><u>Esther Didn't Dream of Being Queen</u>, Allison Ofanansky <u>The Story of Queen Esther</u>, Jenny Koralek</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lesson Suggestion</p> <p><u>Not for All the Hamantaschen in Town</u>, Laura Aron Milhandler (This story is inspired by The Three Little Pigs. In a fun stand-alone lesson, study how different authors can use the same characters and story elements to explore different ideas and plots. After studying a few versions of the Three Little Pigs story, work as a class or in small groups to have students write their own version.)</p>
<p>6-8</p>	<p>Literature: All</p>	<p>The Common Core State Standards for ELA recommend that Literature in middle and high school should be selected from a range of genres- including DRAMA. Given the importance of theatrics and entertainment in the celebration of Purim, studying and performing a play or skit is an incredible way to honor the holiday.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lesson Suggestion</p>

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Introduce the holiday of Purim to the class. In these older grades, having students do individual or small group exploration through informational resources (see below) will allow for a quick and engaging review of the holiday. You might consider doing a KWL chart or other quick organizer to help process information. 2) After the students get a basic understanding of the holiday, lead the students into focusing on the theatrical elements of the holiday: Purim spiels/Plays/Costumes. Even elements inside the story of Esther itself are theatrical: the beauty pageant and saving the reveal of Esther's identity for a party as examples. 3) Inspired by this theme, have your class do Readers Theater. As a class or in small groups, read and prep skits to be lightly performed as a class. These skits could be related to the holiday, something you are studying in class, or purely for the practice of reading dramas. 4) Take some time to do a read through of the plays. 5) After each group has had time to read through at least once on their own, get the groups standing up and acting out their parts for the second reading.
9-12	<p>Literature: All</p> <p>Writing Standards 3 and 10</p>	<p>The Common Core State Standards for ELA recommend that Literature in middle and high school should be selected from a range of genres, including DRAMA. Given the importance of theatrics and entertainment in the celebration of Purim, studying and performing a play or skit is an incredible way to honor the holiday.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lesson Suggestion</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Introduce the holiday of Purim to the class. Review the Esther story with them (either by summary or video) and then have the students do a five-minute search to discover the meaning of "Purim spiel." For Teachers: It is a fun skit or parody of the Purim story to teach its lessons in a theatrical way. Many examples are available on YouTube.

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) Have students share their definition of Purim spiel in a class discussion. Discuss the theatrical elements of the holiday: Purim spiels/Plays/Costumes. Even elements inside the story of Esther itself are theatrical: the beauty pageant and saving the reveal of Esther's identity for a party as examples. 3) Discuss parody in music, film, and literature that the students may be familiar with. 4) Inspired by this theme, have your class write and perform parodies of popular media that teach some kind of moral, similar to the goal of a Purim spiel. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Have students get into small groups. b) Each group must select an audience for their piece, as well as source material to parody that would resonate with the selected audience. c) The group must select a moral message to teach their target audience. d) The group must write and perform/record their parody. 5) In closing, ask students to explore the value in exploring/teaching morals through humor and the value of parody as a tool in creating media.
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Additional Resources

Resources for Adult Learning:

[Purim from Reform Judaism.org](#)

[Purim from Chabad.org](#)

Videos/Movies:

[The Purim Story in 4 Minutes](#), BimBam (4 minutes, 4th Grade +)

[What is Purim? An introduction to the Jewish holiday](#), BimBam (5 minutes, 3th Grade +)

[An Encanto Purim](#), The Maccabeats (All Ages)

[What is Purim](#), Inside Edition (6th grade +)

[The Story of Purim](#), Mayim Bialik (6th grade +)

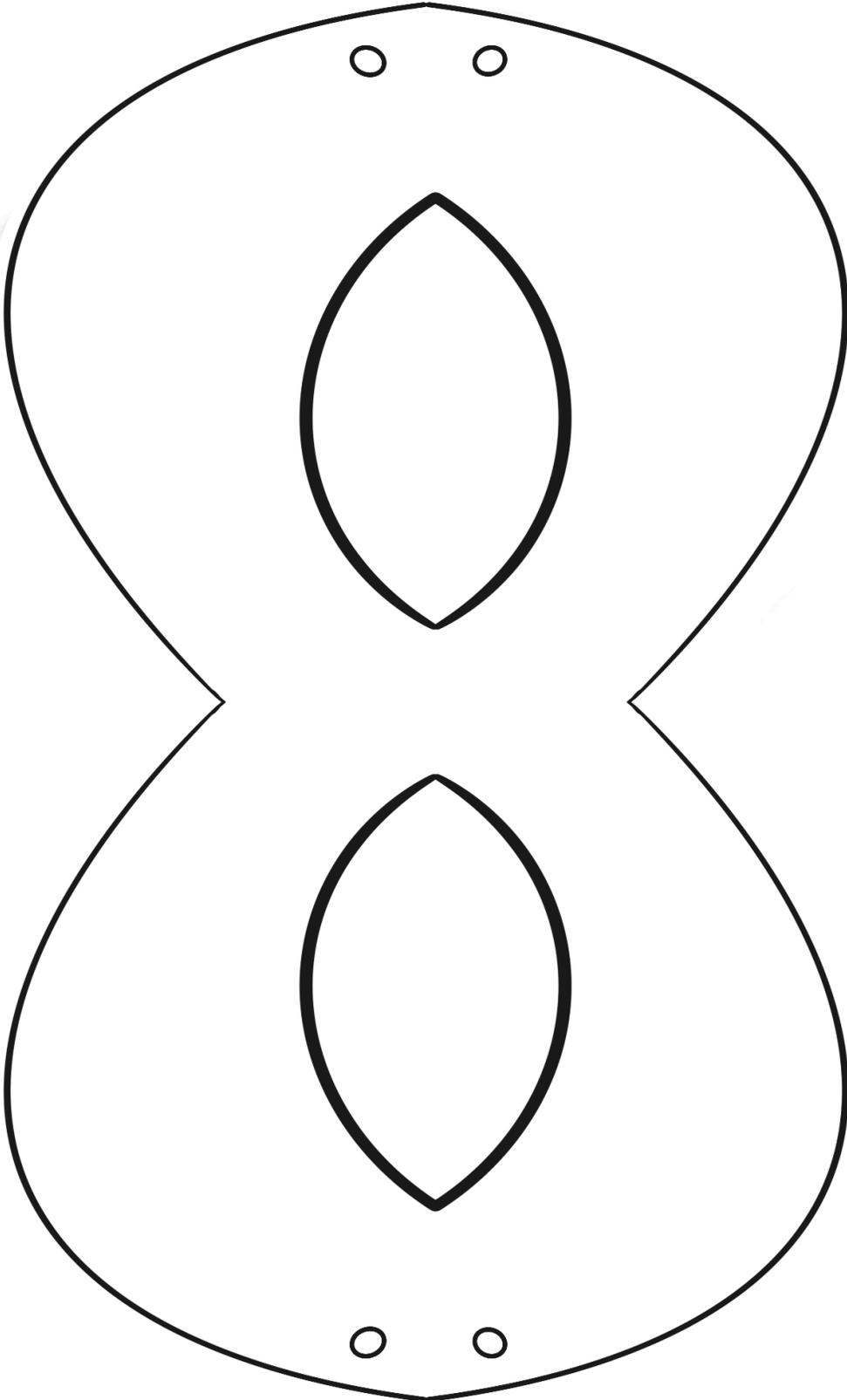
Additional Classroom Resources:

[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

Purim Mask Templates



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