

## Teaching About Jewish Holidays

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### Overview

In this lesson, students will read about Jewish holidays, label images with holiday names, and play a game to reinforce their knowledge of the key characteristics of each holiday.

This resource includes:

- 1) A lesson plan
- 2) A student reading and worksheet
- 3) An answer sheet
- 4) Instruction sheet and cards for an educational game

### Goal

- 1) Students will be able to briefly describe eight Jewish holidays.

### Materials

Each student will need:

- 1) *Jewish Holidays*
- 2) *Images of Jewish Holidays*

Each group of 3-4 students will need:

- 3) A set of cards for *Memory: A Jewish Holiday Matching Game* (cards should be cut out from the card sheet before class)

The teacher will need:

- 4) (Optional) - transparency of *Instructions for Memory: A Jewish Holiday Matching Game*

## Instructional Design

### Part I: Jewish Holiday Reading and Worksheet

- 1) Distribute *Jewish Holidays* and *Images of Jewish Holidays*.
- 2) Have students read *Jewish Holidays* and fill in the blanks on *Images of Jewish Holidays* with the name of the holiday to which the image corresponds. You may have students work individually or in mixed-ability pairs. Inform the students that you will ask them how the images connect to the holidays. Alternatively, you may read the information while students follow along. This enables you to check for understanding and to provide support to ensure full comprehension. This may be valuable for younger learners and for English language learners.
- 3) After students have filled in *Images of Jewish Holidays*, go through the correct answers. Have student volunteers share their answers and explain how the images connect to the holiday (e.g., a student should identify the answer to #1 as Passover. The first image shows something cracker-like and the description of Passover talks about matzah, a cracker-like bread. The second image shows an elaborate dinner with some sort of special book by each plate and the description of Passover mentions a special religious text that is used during an elaborate dinner).
- 4) (*Optional additional questions about the Jewish calendar - this is also a good opportunity to check/reinforce correct pronunciations*) Ask students:
  - a. The Jewish Sabbath is on Saturday. So, why do Jews begin celebrating Shabbat on Friday night? (because Jewish days begin at sunset)
  - b. If the calendar says that the first day of Chanukah is December 22, when do Jews begin celebrating Chanukah? (the night of December 21)
  - c. Which of the holidays are in autumn? (Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot)
  - d. Which are celebrated in spring?, (Passover, Shavuot)

### Part II: Memory: A Jewish Holiday Matching Game

- 1) Ask students, “Memory is a game where there is a set of face down cards that you turn over two at a time trying to find pictures that match. Who played Memory when you were younger?”
- 2) Inform the class that they are going to play a game very much like Memory except instead of matching identical pictures they will match the name of a holiday with its description.
- 3) Read the instructions listed on the next page and make sure everyone understands the game. You may also want to display it as an overhead transparency.
- 4) Pass out a set of cards for each group. Tell students that pronunciations are written under the names of the holidays. Encourage students to help each other pronounce the words correctly during the game. Tell students that they have \_\_\_ minutes for the game (10 minutes recommended).



## Instructions for Memory: A Jewish Holiday Matching Game

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- 1) Shuffle cards and lay them out face down in a 4x4 grid.
- 2) The first player picks two cards and turns them over so everyone can see them.
- 3) Read the cards aloud.
  - a. If the cards have the name of a holiday and its matching description, the student takes the cards, scores a point, and picks again.
  - b. If the cards do not match, turn the cards face down again *without moving them* and the next player picks two cards.
  - c. The cards do not match if:
    - i. Both are the names of holidays.
    - ii. Both are descriptions of holidays.
    - iii. The name of the holiday and description of the holiday do not match.
  - d. Pay attention when the other players are turning over cards. It is easier to make matches if you remember where other cards are.
- 4) When all the cards have been removed, reshuffle them and play again.
- 5) Whoever scores the most points by the end of the activity wins!



## Jewish Holidays

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Jewish holidays are “holy days” with religious importance. Many are great celebrations with special foods and traditions, but they are not simply vacation days. All Jewish holidays begin at sunset *before* the date they are listed on most calendars. This is because a Jewish “day” begins and ends at sunset, rather than at midnight. The dates of Jewish holidays are different each year. This is because a year in the Jewish calendar does not have 365 days like the secular, or non-religious, calendar. But, Jewish holidays always fall in the same season.

There is a wide variety of religious practice among Jews and Jews celebrate holidays in different ways. This worksheet does not list all Jewish holidays, only eight of the most important ones. These include: the Sabbath, which is a weekly day of rest; the two High Holy Days (Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur); the three pilgrimage festivals when the ancestors of the Jews used to travel to the Temple in Jerusalem (Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot); and two of the minor holidays (Chanukah and Purim).

There are a many ways to spell the names of Jewish holidays because their names were originally written in Hebrew, not English. There is a pronunciation guide next to the name of each holiday in the descriptions below. To use the pronunciation guide just sound out the word in the parentheses. The part in bold is the part of the word that is stressed. For example, the pronunciation guide for *computer* would be *kuhm-pyoo-ter*.

**Shabbat** (shah-baht), the Jewish **Sabbath**, is observed from sundown on Friday until nightfall on Saturday each week. It is a day of rest when Jews are supposed to focus on things other than work and material concerns. The holiday begins with a prayer over lighting candles. The candles are often held in two beautiful candlesticks. Then prayers are said over wine and a special braided bread, called *challah* (**khah**-lah, the *ch* is pronounced like *Lo**ch*** Ness Monster or *Ba**ch***). After these prayers, families eat a special meal and some sing traditional songs. Shabbat is the most frequently mentioned holiday in the Hebrew Bible and many Jews see it as the most important holiday. In part, this is because of the importance of celebrating a day of rest every week. This idea of a weekly day of rest is an important Jewish contribution to the world and is one of the origins of our modern weekends.

**Rosh Hashanah** (rohsh hah-shah-nah) is the Jewish **New Year**. It usually occurs in September or October. During the prayer service, a ram’s horn is blown to symbolically “wake-up” the congregation to think about how they can lead better lives. It is customary to eat apples and honey on these days as a symbol of a wish for a sweet new year. Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance which end on Yom Kippur. During this time, Jews reflect on their actions during the past year, seek forgiveness from those they may have upset, and think about how they can improve in the year to come.

**Yom Kippur** (yohm ki-poor), the **Day of Atonement**, is the most solemn holiday in the Jewish calendar. It is devoted to fasting and prayer and marks the end of the Ten Days of Repentance when Jews ask for forgiveness from other people and from God. A ram’s horn is blown to mark the end of the fast which lasts from sundown to nightfall the following day.

**Sukkot** (soo-koht) is the weeklong fall harvest festival that commemorates the Jews’ journey to freedom in the Land of Israel after living in slavery in Egypt. During this migration, Jews lived in tents rather than houses because they were traveling. To commemorate this, Jews build a temporary structure (*sukkah*) in which they eat and, if possible, sleep. These structures are often decorated with fruits and vegetables and covered with leaves and vines. Sukkot begins 15 days after Rosh HaShanah.



**Chanukah** (**khah-noo-kah**, the *ch* is pronounced like Loch Ness Monster or Bach; *Hanukah* is acceptable if you can't make the sound), the **Festival of Lights**, occurs in December. It commemorates the survival of Judaism after an emperor outlawed Jewish practices and tried to force Jews to worship idols. It is observed in Jewish homes by lighting candles in a special candleholder called a *menorah* for eight nights, beginning with one candle and adding a candle each night. According to Jewish tradition, this represents a miracle that happened when Jews rededicated their Temple in Jerusalem. Even though there was only enough lamp oil in the temple for one day, the oil lasted for eight days. In America, giving gifts at this time is common.

**Purim** (**poo-reem**) remembers the foiling of a plot to kill the Jews in ancient Persia. It is a celebration that usually occurs in March. The biblical Book of Esther which recounts the story is read aloud in the synagogue. People come dressed in masks and costumes. They cheer the heroes and boo the villains during the reading. A special triangular cookie with fruit filling is often eaten during this holiday and friends exchange gift baskets. Giving money to the poor, which is important throughout the year, is especially important at this time.

**Passover** is the **Festival of Freedom** that celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. In Hebrew it is called *Pesach* (**pay-sahkh**, the *ch* is pronounced like Loch Ness Monster or Bach), but many American Jews call it Passover. This weeklong holiday usually occurs in March or April. Families join together in an elaborate ritual meal and use a special religious text to retell the struggle of the Jewish people to gain their freedom and to celebrate the cause of freedom for all. According to tradition, when the Jews fled Egypt there was not time for the bread they were preparing to rise, so they took the unleavened bread in their escape. Jews therefore eat unleavened cracker-like bread called *matzah* instead of normal bread during the week of Passover.

**Shavuot** (**shah-vo-oht**) commemorates the giving of Jewish law. According to tradition, God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses at Mount Sinai on this day. This holiday usually occurs in June. Young children are often given small replicas of the Torah scroll, the most sacred Jewish text, to symbolize the beginning of their journey of learning about their religion. Many Jews also celebrate this holiday by staying awake all night to study.

## Images of Jewish Holidays

Each image on this page represents a Jewish Holiday. Read "Jewish Holidays" and then write the name of the appropriate holiday above each image.  
Every holiday will be used once.

1) \_\_\_\_\_



5) \_\_\_\_\_



*What  
can I do  
better?*

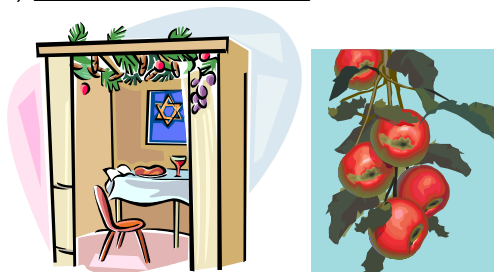
2) \_\_\_\_\_



6) \_\_\_\_\_



3) \_\_\_\_\_



7) \_\_\_\_\_



4) \_\_\_\_\_

*Please  
forgive  
me.*



8) \_\_\_\_\_





### Answer Sheet: Images of Jewish Holidays

1) Passover



5) Rosh HaShanah



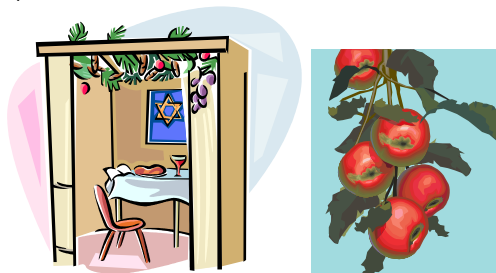
2) Shabbat



6) Chanukah



3) Sukkot



7) Shavuot



4) Yom Kippur



8) Purim



**Card Sheet for Memory: A Jewish Holiday Matching Game**


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|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Shabbat</b><br/>(shah-baht)</p>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>A weekly day of rest when Jews focus on non-material things</b></p>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rosh HaShanah</b><br/>(rohsh hah-shah-nah)</p>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Jewish New Year which is not only a celebration, but also a time to reflect on how you can do better</b></p>                                       |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Yom Kippur</b><br/>(yohm ki-poor)</p>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Day of Atonement when Jews fast and ask forgiveness for their sins; the most solemn day of the Jewish year</b></p>                                 |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sukkot</b><br/>(soo-koht)</p>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The fall harvest festival that commemorates the Jewish migration from Egypt to Israel</b></p>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Passover</b></p>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The eight day Festival of Freedom that celebrates the deliverance from slavery with a special meal and by only eating bread that has not risen</b></p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Shavuot</b><br/>(shah-vo-oht)</p>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The commemoration of the giving of Jewish law</b></p>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Purim</b><br/>(poo-reem)</p>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>A celebration of the survival of the Jews in ancient Persia that involves retelling the story with cheering, booing, and costumes</b></p>              |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Chanukah (or Hanukah)</b><br/>(khah-noo-kah, or Hah-noo-kah)<br/>[the ch is pronounced like <u>Loch</u> Ness Monster or <u>Bach</u>]</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The eight day Festival of Light that celebrates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem with lighting candles and giving gifts</b></p>             |