

LESSON PLAN

Notable Jewish Americans

Essential Question: *Why is it important to learn about notable, important and accomplished Jewish Americans?*

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-1	2-5	40-60 minutes (Can be done in 2 parts with student research in between classes)	Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language.
6-8	9-12		

[**Note:** This lesson plan is part of a collection of [lesson plans on Jewish American Heritage Month](#). Lessons can be taught sequentially or each lesson can be taught as a standalone lesson.]

LESSON OVERVIEW

One way to celebrate and commemorate Jewish American Heritage Month, or other similarly themed months, is to highlight and honor notable or accomplished people from that identity group. While honoring individual accomplishments should not be the only way to commemorate a themed month, focusing on important and notable people is useful in a variety of ways. Learning about notable Jewish Americans helps to tell U.S. history and the Jewish community's role in U.S. history. It can illuminate challenges and opportunities faced by Jewish Americans as a group. Perhaps most importantly, studying accomplished Jewish Americans can help to dispel stereotypes and provide role models and representation to others in the Jewish community. This lesson plan provides an opportunity for students to learn more about important, notable, famous and accomplished Jewish Americans, challenge their assumptions and potential stereotypes about the Jewish community and dive deeper into a notable Jewish American person of their choosing.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will share notable Jewish Americans they already know and reflect on to what extent they know none, some or many notable Jewish Americans.
- Students will learn about more Jewish Americans by looking at photos, watching a video and researching.
- Students will explore in depth one notable Jewish American and present what they learned to their classmates.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- [Notable People Categories](#) (one copy for each student)
- [Notable Jewish Americans](#) (to project on board/screen)
- [Answer and Information Key](#) (for teacher use only)
- [StandWithUs Celebrates Jewish American Heritage Month](#) (Video, Stand with Us, 4 min., 20 sec.)



Web Related Connections

LESSON PLANS

[9 Ideas for Teaching Jewish American Heritage Month](#)

[Celebrating Jewish American Heritage: Lesson Plans for Learning, Reflection and Connection \(includes 6 Middle School Lesson Plans\)](#)

Other Resources:

[Awareness to Action](#)

[Jewish American Heritage Month Resources](#)

[Resources to Address and Challenge Antisemitism](#)

[Films About the Jewish Experience: Classroom Toolkit](#)

Key Words

accomplished
activism
diversity
famous
important
notable
representation
stereotype
visionary

[Note to Teacher: You may or may not know the religious and cultural background of the students in your classroom. If you have students who are either Jewish or have Jewish heritage in your classroom, don't assume that those Jewish students are knowledgeable about or interested in Judaism or the Jewish experience. Your students will probably have a range of thoughts and feelings about Jewish American Heritage Month – pride, embarrassment, interest, annoyance, excitement, boredom—or they may not think much about it at all. Be mindful not to put Jewish students in the role of being the “authority” on Jewish American people, history, religion or culture. Avoid asking or expecting any one Jewish student to speak for all Jewish people or students. When discussing the Jewish experience or antisemitism, always keep in mind that those conversations can inadvertently cause harm to Jewish students, despite your intent being the opposite. Keep that in mind as you plan and reinforce [classroom guidelines](#) for safe, respectful and inclusive environments. It is also important to acknowledge that Jewish people as a group are more diverse than many people realize or understand. This diversity is reflected in Jewish people's ethnicity, race, culture, immigration history, religious observance, LGBTQ+ identity, and language. You might consider sharing some of this with your students.]

? Introduction: Why Learn about Notable Jewish Americans?

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: *What does it mean to be notable, important, accomplished or famous?* Elicit or explain each of the words as follows:

Accomplished: *A person who has done or achieved good or important things.*

Famous: *A person who is well known.*

Important: *A person with power, influence or authority.*

Notable: *A person who deserves notice or attention.*

2. Then ask students: What are the different ways or fields (areas of work) that people can be notable, important accomplished or famous? Elicit a list that may include some or all of the following:

Academic	Elected Official	Spiritual Leader
Activist	Historian	Social Media Influencer
Actor	Inventor and Entrepreneur	Teacher
Artist: Performing Artist and	Musician	Tech Leader
Visual Artist	Podcaster	Writer—novelist, poet,
Athlete	Public Service Worker	journalist, playwright, etc.
Celebrities/Entertainer	Scholar	
Business Person	Scientist	

3. After brainstorming a list, distribute a copy of the [Notable People Categories](#) handout to each student. Invite them to add other categories to the handout that were shared.
4. Then ask students: *When we are learning about a group or community of people, why do we focus on notable, accomplished, famous or important people? Why is it important that we acknowledge and learn about notable Jewish Americans?* Elicit their responses and add these reasons if not already noted:
 - Helps to tell U.S. history and Jewish American people's roles in U.S. history.
 - Helps to understand the challenges and opportunities faced by Jewish Americans throughout U.S. history.
 - Dispels stereotypes about Jewish people and challenges the idea that one group of people, in this case Jewish Americans, has certain skills, interests and accomplishments and not others.
 - Provides role models and representation to those who identify as Jewish and provides inspiration for them to pursue their interests, hopes and dreams.

5. Next, share that sometimes during Jewish American Heritage Month (or other themed months like Black History Month, Women's History Month, etc.), we focus only on famous or notable people. Ask students: *What are the advantages of focusing on famous or notable people? What are the disadvantages of focusing solely on notable and famous people during these months?*
6. Invite students to turn and talk with someone sitting nearby and share with their partner their response to this question: *Can you name any famous, accomplished, notable or important Jewish American people? Who are they?* Then reconvene the class and allow students to share some names but keep this section brief. If they can't name any or can only name a few, ask students: *Why do you think we can't name any or very few notable Jewish Americans?*
7. Then ask: *Can you name any famous, notable and accomplished people from your own identity group?* Have some students share their responses.

☆ Notable Jewish Americans

1. If you haven't done any of the previous lessons and/or if you think your students need more information about what it means to be Jewish, share some or all of the following information:
 - Being Jewish typically means being connected in some way to the religion of Judaism, as well as shared Jewish traditions, ancestor/family history, values, history and culture.
 - While Judaism is a religion and many Jewish people practice Judaism, there are also Jewish people who may not engage in religious observance or they may identify as secular (not religious), or atheist (do not believe in the existence of God). Some Jewish people may practice other religions in addition to Judaism.
 - Being Jewish is a cultural experience and identity as well as a religious one. Jewish people are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language and national origin. Some Jewish people feel more connected to the cultural aspects of being Jewish, some feel more connected to the religious aspects, and some Jewish people feel connected to both or neither.
2. Share some or all the images of [Notable Jewish Americans](#) (don't share their names at first) by projecting their photos one at a time, on the board or screen. After sharing each one, ask students if they know who the person is and why they are notable, important or accomplished. Ask students to reflect on whether they knew the person was Jewish or not. Then share more information about each person that is included in the [Answer and Information Key](#).
3. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - As we looked at the images and noted who each person is, what did you notice? What do you wonder?
 - How many of these notable Jewish Americans did you know? Not know?
 - Why do you think you knew all, most, some or none of them?
 - Do you know who they are but didn't know they are Jewish? Why do you think that is?
 - What did you learn by doing this?
4. Watch the video, [StandWithUs Celebrates Jewish American Heritage Month](#). Engage students in a discussion by asking:
 - What other notable Jewish Americans did you learn about?
 - Why do you think the video focused on three areas in which Jewish Americans have made contributions: (1) social activism, (2) cultural diversity, and (3) arts and sciences?
 - As the narrator says, Jewish American Heritage Month is an opportunity to foster understanding, promote inclusivity and honor the enduring legacy of Jewish Americans. How does learning about notable Jewish Americans meet those goals?
 - What notable Jewish Americans do you want to learn more about?

5. Optional (if time permits): Engage students in doing a “Quick Write” (could also be done for homework) that is a writing response to one of the prompts above. This means they will have a short amount of time (suggested: 5-7 minutes) to write as much as they can in response to one of the prompts above. Have some students share their Quick Writes.

Research Project

1. Explain to students that they are going to work alone or in pairs to identify a notable Jewish American, learn more about them and present what they learned with the class.
2. First, as a class brainstorm a list of names of notable Jewish Americans that students know. You can start with the list from the photo activity, video and add any others. Have students take out the **Notable People Categories** handout or project on the board, and add additional people. If you allow phones or other devices in your classroom, allow students to do some research in class.

[Note to Teacher: Remind and convey to students that Jewish American people are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language and national origin.]

3. After brainstorming and compiling a preliminary list, have students interview their parents, family members and friends, asking them for additional suggested names. Students can also continue to do their own research (library and online) and can use some of links below to get started:
 - [Amazing Jewish Americans](#) (American Jewish Committee)
 - [The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women](#) (Jewish Women’s Archive)
 - [250+ Jewish Celebrities and Cultural Icons](#) (IMDb)
 - [43 Celebrities Who I’m Somehow Just Finding Out Are Jewish Even Though I Thought I Knew All The Famous Jewish People](#) (BuzzFeed)
 - [Lists of American Jews](#) (Wikipedia)
 - [The 25 Greatest Jewish Athletes of All-Time](#) (Bleacher Report)
 - [Introducing the Forward 125: The American Jews who shaped our world](#) (The Forward)
4. After compiling a long and comprehensive list of names, have students (alone or in pairs) pick a person they want to learn more about. Encourage students to consider all the categories to avoid having the majority of students choose entertainment and celebrity figures, which young people are sometimes overly drawn to. Encourage students to choose figures from history as well as contemporary people. As they conduct research on their selection, provide a few guidelines about what they should learn and share about their person, at minimum:
 - Why is this person notable, accomplished, important or famous?
 - What was their childhood like and how did that influence them as an adult?
 - Why is this person important in U.S. history? Why is this person important in Jewish American history?
 - Is being Jewish part of their story? Why or why not?
 - Why did you choose this person?
5. Give students options for presenting what they learned about the person they studied. Their learning can culminate and be shared in a variety of different projects as follows.
 - Write and perform a short skit about the person. (Note: If students choose to perform a skit about the person, caution them not to reenact traumatic experiences from the person’s life, which could be harmful to the student performing the skit or others in class.)

- Write diary entries from their person's point of view.
- Create a portrait (including a short blurb) of the person.
- Write and deliver a speech/eulogy about the person.
- Write an original speech that the person might give.
- Write a short biography.
- Create a sculpture of the person, using clay, wood, metals or found objects.
- Create a timeline of their life, including photos, images and short blurbs about each time period.
- Create a PowerPoint or Google slides presentation about the person.
- Write a picture book (for young children) about the person.
- Create a collection of sample social media posts or videos about the person.
- Write and act out an interview with the person.

Provide enough time for students to complete their research projects and then designate a day(s) where students will present their projects and what they learned or engage students in a gallery walk where they move around the room and learn about each other's projects.

Closing

Invite students to share one notable Jewish American person that they want to know more about, based on the presentations.

Extension Activity Ideas

1. Engage students in continuing to develop a list of notable Jewish Americans and consider doing a display or slide show for the whole school to introduce them to the range of people in the U.S. who identify as Jewish, either during Jewish American Heritage Month or another time in the school year. You can also invite students to choose additional notable Jewish Americans to learn about and compile a list with short blurbs about their chosen people.
2. In addition to having students share their projects on their notable Jewish Americans with the class, arrange for a school-wide assembly or event where students can share their projects with the rest of the school.
3. Engage students in a discussion about how to transfer what they learned from this lesson to other themed months that focus on people from other marginalized identity groups (e.g., Black History Month, Native American Heritage Month, Women's History Month, Arab American Heritage Month, etc.) and consider engaging in similar projects focusing on those identity groups and communities.

Additional Reading and Resources

- [43 Celebrities Who I'm Somehow Just Finding Out Are Jewish Even Though I Thought I Knew All The Famous Jewish People](#) (BuzzFeed)
- [250+ Jewish Celebrities and Cultural Icons](#) (IMDb)
- [Amazing Jewish Americans](#) (American Jewish Committee)
- [Introducing the Forward 125: The American Jews who shaped our world](#) (The Forward)
- [Lists of American Jews](#) (Wikipedia)
- [The 25 Greatest Jewish Athletes of All-Time](#) (Bleacher Report)
- [The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women](#) (Jewish Women's Archive)

Common Core Anchor Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. R7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
Writing
W2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. W8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate. L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

Notable People Categories

Academic

Activist

Actor

Artist: Performing Artist and Visual Artist

Athlete

Celebrity/Entertainer

Business Person

Elected Official

Historian

Inventors and Entrepreneur

Musician

Podcaster

Public Service Worker

Scholar

Scientist

Spiritual Leader

Social Media Influencer

Teacher

Tech Leader

Writer-- novelist, poet, journalist, playwright, etc.

Notable Jewish Americans

1.



Photo credit: Steve Petteway

2.

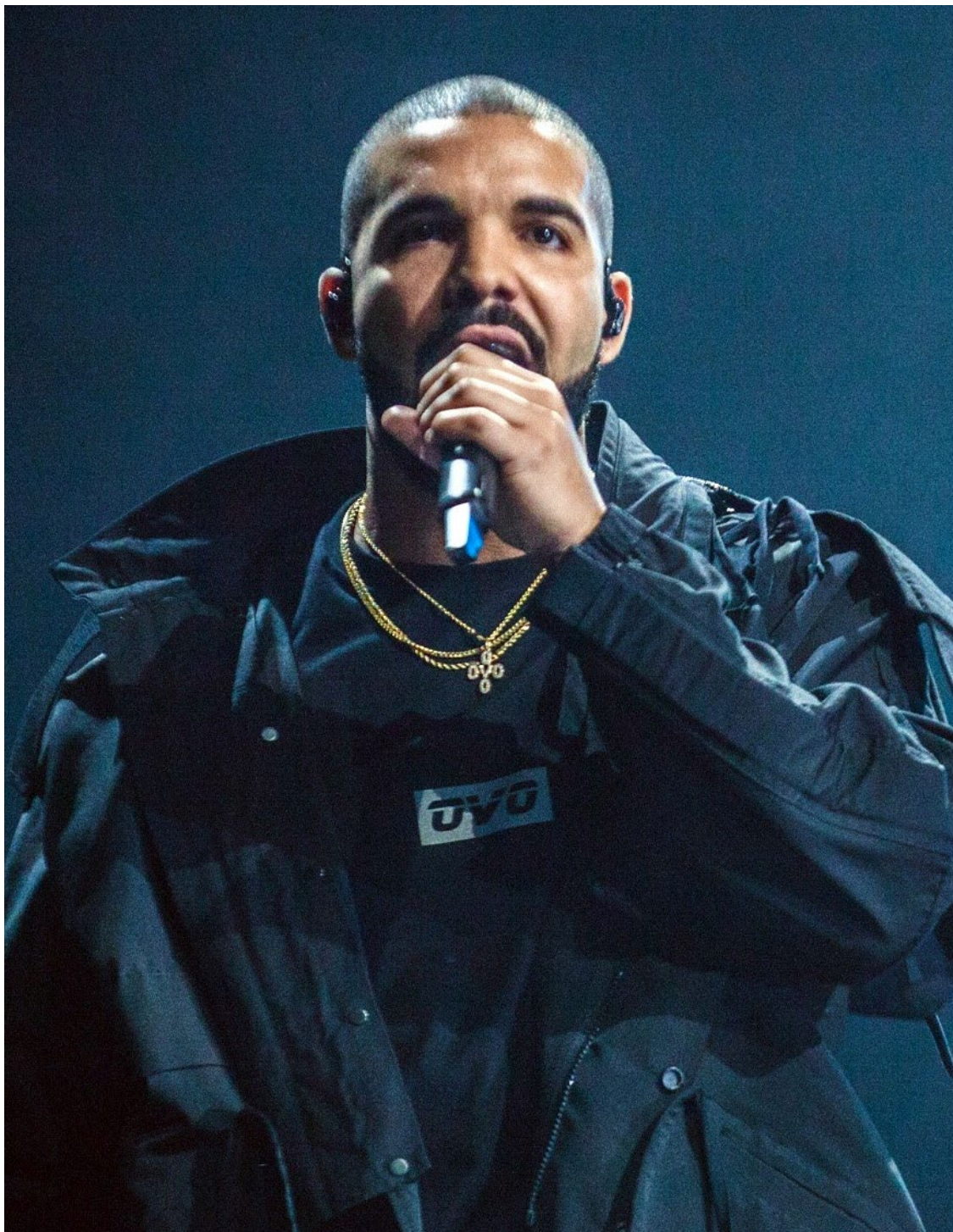


Photo credit: The Come Up Show

3.



Photo credit: Carl Lender

4.



Photo credit: Elena Ternovaja

5.



Photo credit: Luke Ford

6.



Photo credit: Fernando Frazão/Agência Brasil

7.



Photo credit: Cameron Smith

Answer and Information Key

(For teacher to share aloud—not to be distributed)

1. **Ruth Bader Ginsburg** was an American lawyer and jurist who served on the Supreme Court of the United States from 1993 until her death in 2020.[3] She was nominated by President Bill Clinton and was the first Jewish woman and the second woman to serve on the Court.
2. **Drake** is a rapper, singer, and actor. As a figure in popular music, he has been credited with popularizing R&B sensibilities in hip-hop artists. Gaining recognition by starring as Jimmy Brooks in the teen drama series *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, Drake began his recording career in 2006. Among the world's best-selling music artists, with over 200 million units sold, Drake is ranked as the highest-certified digital singles artist in the U.S.
3. **Judy Blume** is an American writer of children's, young adult, and adult fiction. She began writing in 1959 and has published more than 26 novels including *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, *Deenie* (1973), and *Blubber*.
4. **Adam Sandler** is an American actor and comedian. He was a cast member on the comedy series *Saturday Night Live* from 1990 to 1995. Sandler is a comedic actor famous for his goofy, sometimes childish humor. Some of the roles he's known for include «The Waterboy,» «Happy Gilmore,» «Billy Madison,» «You Are So Not Invited to My Bat Mitzvah,» and «Grown Ups» and he was a voice actor in the animated film «Hotel Transylvania» and others.
5. **Montana Tucker** is an American dancer, singer, and social media activist. She uses her platform to address social issues such as body image, bullying, Israel, antisemitism, and the importance of Holocaust remembrance. Her interest in Holocaust education stems from her family history—her grandparents survived Auschwitz.
6. **Aly Raisman** is a retired American artistic gymnast and two-time Olympian. She was captain of both the 2012 «Fierce Five» and 2016 «Final Five» U.S. women's Olympic gymnastics teams, which won their respective team competitions.
7. **Doug Emhoff** is a lawyer who served as the Second Gentleman of the U.S. from 2021 to 2025. Married to the 49th U.S. Vice President, Kamala Harris, who was the first woman in the role, and the Democratic Party's nominee for President in the 2024 U.S. presidential election. Emhoff was the first Second Gentleman in the U.S. and was also the first Jewish spouse of a U.S. Vice President.