

LESSON PLAN

The Jewish Community in the U.S.

Essential Question: *Who are the Jewish people in the U.S.?*

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-1	2-5	40 minutes	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

Many people in the U.S. do not know a great deal about the U.S. Jewish community. Depending on where you live and whether you interact with Jewish people regularly, you may know a lot or very little. According to a 2020 Pew Research Center survey, an estimated 2.4% of adults in the U.S. are Jewish, which is a slight increase from Pew's survey in 2013 which showed that U.S. Jews were 2.2% of the total adult population. This lesson plan provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the Jewish community and dispel misconceptions and assumptions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore what they already know about the Jewish community and what they want to know.
- Students will understand more about Jewish people and the Jewish community in the U.S.
- Students will reflect on their insights and learnings, challenging or dispelling misconceptions and assumptions about the Jewish community in the U.S.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- [Types of Jews: Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi and More](#) (Video, 1 min., 40 sec., My Jewish Learning)
- [What Does It Mean to Be Jewish?](#) (Video: 4 min., 3 sec.)
- [KWL Chart](#) (one copy for each student)
- [4 Sentences](#) (one copy for each student)
- [10 key findings about Jewish Americans](#) (Pew Research Center)

[**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



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

community
Conservative
culture
demographic
diverse
ethnicity
identity
intermarriage
multiracial
Orthodox
partisan
population
Reform
religious
stereotype
traditional

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: KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned) Chart

Distribute a [KWL Chart](#) to each student. Explain that the KWL Chart is a way to organize what we already know (K) about a topic or issue, what we want to know (W) about that topic, and what we learned (L) about the topic. Explain that as we go through the lesson, students will fill in different parts of the chart. Tell students that there will be different points in the lesson where you will invite them to add to their KWL charts, but they can do so anytime.

? What does it mean to be Jewish?

1. Show the short video, [What Does It Mean to Be Jewish?](#) After watching, engage students in a brief discussion by asking: *What did you notice? What do you wonder?*
2. Share some or all of this information about what being Jewish means:
 - 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.
 - Share this quote from *My Jewish Learning*, “Jews disagree about many things, and how to designate the Jews as a whole is one of them.”
3. To explore this point further, share the short (less than 2 min.) video [Types of Jews: Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi and More](#). Tell students to focus less on the words and more on the images of what they see. Explain that although the video references the diversity of Jewish people worldwide, these categories also reflect the diversity of Jewish people in the U.S. After watching, ask students: *What did you learn that you didn't know before?*
4. Ask students: *From what you've learned so far, what does it mean to be Jewish? What do you know about the Jewish community in the U.S.? Why do you think it might be important to learn about people from*

different cultural, religious, racial or other identity groups?

5. Ask students to take out their KWL Charts. Invite them to put some of the information they might already know about the Jewish population in the U.S. in the “K” (Know) column. Then have them put information they just learned from the video and the introduction about the Jewish population in the U.S. in the third column marked “L (Learned).” Since this is the beginning of the lesson, they will not have much to add here but add as they progress throughout the lesson.
6. Then ask students: *What else would you like to know? What questions do you have about Jewish people in the U.S.?* Have some students share their thoughts verbally and ask all students to record a few of their questions in the second column marked “W” (want to know).



Let's Take a Survey

1. Explain to students that we are going to learn more about the Jewish community in the U.S. by reading a survey that was done by Pew Research Center. Before learning the results of the survey, we are going to ask ourselves some questions and then later compare them to what we learn in the survey.
2. Invite students to take out paper and a pen/pencil and respond on the paper to the following questions that will be read aloud. They don't have to share their answers with anyone—the answers are just for them and to compare later to what they find out. Read aloud the questions as follows:
 - What percentage of the U.S. population do you think Jewish people are? Explain/remind students that percentage is the part of the whole, so if you said that Jewish people are 50% of the U.S. population, that would mean you think half the people in the U.S. identify as Jewish.
 - *What race do you think most Jews are? Remind/explain that race can include the following races: White, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latin American, Asian American, or Native American or Indigenous.*
 - How many Jews who identify as Jews of color do you think there are? Do you think there's been a decrease or increase of Jews of color in recent years?
 - What percentage of Jewish people think there is more antisemitism than there was 5 years ago? (define antisemitism using your own definition or ADL's definition of “the marginalization and/or oppression of people who are Jewish based on the belief in stereotypes and myths about Jewish people, Judaism and Israel.”)
 - What percentage of Jewish people say that caring about Israel is either “essential” or “important?” to what it means to be Jewish?
 - What percentage of Jewish people do you think engage in cultural activities like cooking Jewish food, sharing holidays, etc.?
 - How many Jewish people do you think are married to a partner who is not Jewish?

Reading Activity:

1. Explain to students that now we are going to learn more about the Jewish community in the U.S. by reading a Pew Research Center study.
2. Distribute the article, [10 key findings about Jewish Americans](#) to all students and give them 10-15 minutes to read it silently or read aloud together with students taking turns to read. As an alternative, have students read for homework the evening before.

[Note to Teacher: As an alternative to reading aloud, divide students into pairs or triads and give each pair/triad one of the 10 sections. Have them read and discuss their section together and then have each pair/triad report back to the whole class what they learned.]

3. After reading and sharing, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:
 - What did you learn by doing this?
 - What is one piece of data that surprised you?
 - What is one fact or data point that did not surprise you?
 - What information or data challenged your thinking the most?
 - What is your biggest takeaway from this activity?
 - How is knowing this information helpful? Are there down sides to knowing this information? Please explain.
 - Have you ever read a demographic survey about people in your identity groups? What did you learn?
4. After this discussion, ask students to compare how they answered the questions on the survey before reading the Pew Survey and now. Invite students to self-reflect (think to themselves silently) using the following questions:
 - How close were your answers to the results of the survey?
 - Which answers were close to the survey? Which were far apart?
 - How would you describe what you thought or knew before compared to what you know and think now?
5. Invite students to add to their KWL Charts, in sections W (what I want to know) for more questions they have and L (what they learned).
6. On a piece of paper, have students complete some or all of the following 4 sentences, or use the **4 Sentences** handout provided:

The most important thing I learned is _____

What surprised me the most is _____

What surprised me the least is _____

One question is still have is _____

[Note to Teacher: Remind students that they should be careful not to perpetuate stereotypes about Jewish people and the Jewish community while completing this task. Sometimes sharing something surprising or a misconception about a group of people can lead to unfair assumptions and stereotypes. Explain that while stereotypes are perpetuated in our world in many ways and therefore it is difficult avoiding taking those stereotypes into our world views, it is also important that we challenge those assumptions, misconceptions and stereotypes and not share them aloud as they can cause harm.]

7. Invite students to read aloud at least one (or more, if they want) of their responses.

Writing Activity

Invite students to take one of the statements/prompts they wrote from the last activity and have them select one upon which to elaborate. They can start with the sentence prompt and then write a paragraph or two that explains more about their thinking related to the prompt, what they learned that contributes to this thinking and

anything else they want to share. Depending on how much time you have allotted for this lesson, you can have students start the writing and complete it for homework, or use class period to complete it.

[**Note to Teacher:** Instead of a paragraph or two, they could alternatively write a letter, poem or social media post.]

Closing



Invite students to share something from their KWL chart that was particularly important, compelling or meaningful to them.

Extension Activity Ideas

1. Engage students in reading and discussing the Executive Summary or select sections of the [Beyond the Count: Perspectives and Lived Experiences of Jews of Color](#) which is an intersectional account of American Jewish life. The report explores how the ethnic, racial, and cultural identities of Jews of Color (JoC) influence and infuse their Jewish experiences.
2. Have students dig deeper into the study they read during the lesson by reading some or parts of Pew's [Jewish Americans in 2020](#). You can divide students into small groups and have each group take a section of the report to explore more deeply and share as a presentation to the class, or have students reflect on the report by writing an essay or created a PowerPoint or Google slides presentation.
3. Have students read some of the questions that Pew Research Center developed for the survey and as a class, come up with survey questions to ask students in their school about demographics in general, not about Jewish identity. This will help them understand how surveys are constructed and some of the pitfalls.

Additional Reading and Resources

- [2023 PRRI Census of American Religion: County-Level Data on Religious Identity and Diversity](#) (Public Religion Research Institute)
- [Beyond the Count: Perspectives and Lived Experiences of Jews of Color](#) (Jews of Color Initiative)
- [Jewish Americans in 2020](#) (Pew Research Center, May 11, 2021)
- [Jewish Population by Country](#)
- [Jewish Identity](#) (Pew Research Center, October 1, 2013)
- [World's Jewish population hits 15.8 million, on eve of Rosh Hashanah](#) (The Times of Israel, October 2, 2024)

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. R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. R7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
Writing
W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. 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.
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. 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.

KWL(Know, Want to Know, Learned) Chart

Know	Want to Know	Learned

4 Sentences

The most important thing I learned is

What surprised me most is

What surprised me least is

One question I still have is