

LESSON PLAN

What Is Jewish American Heritage Month?

Essential Question: *Why do we celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month?*

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

Jewish American Heritage Month, which takes place every year in May, is an annual recognition and celebration of the history, achievements, contributions and culture of Jewish people and the Jewish community in the United States. On April 20, 2006, then-President George W. Bush first proclaimed May as Jewish American Heritage Month. All the U.S. Presidents since then have made annual proclamations to designate the month. This lesson plan provides an opportunity for students to learn more about Jewish American Heritage Month and its purpose and explore ideas for commemorating the month in their school and community.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand the purpose and history of Jewish American Heritage Month.
- Students will reflect on the importance of commemorating Jewish American Heritage Month.
- Students will explore ideas for celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- [Jewish American Heritage Month, May 2006 Proclamation](#) (on webpage, to be projected) or [Jewish American Heritage Month Proclamation, 2006](#) (as a handout, to be projected or copies distributed to each student)
- [Jewish American Heritage Month--World Jewish Congress](#) (Video, 1 min., 39 sec.)
- 4 pieces of chart or large paper distributed around the classroom with the following words: (1) Learn, (2) Celebrate, (3) Commemorate, (4) Honor
- Magic Markers
- [Persuasive Letter Organizer](#) (one copy for each student)



Web Related Connections

LESSON PLANS

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

[Antisemitic Incidents: Ally, Advocate and Activist](#)

[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

activists
celebrate
commemorate
contributions
culture
heritage
honor
identity
liberty
persecution
religious pluralism
stereotypical

[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: What is Jewish American Heritage Month??

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: *Have you ever heard of Jewish American Heritage Month? What do you think it is? Have you heard of other months like this (commemorative/themed months) and if so, what?*
2. Share some or all of the following basic facts about Jewish American Heritage Month:
 - Jewish American Heritage Month is an annual recognition and celebration of the achievements, contributions and culture of Jewish people and the Jewish community in the United States.
 - In April 2006, President George W. Bush first proclaimed May as Jewish American Heritage Month. The announcement followed urging by the Jewish Museum of Florida and South Florida Jewish Community for a celebration of Jewish Americans and Jewish American Heritage.
 - Similar resolutions passed unanimously, first in the House of Representatives in December 2005 and later in the Senate in February 2006.
 - Since then, annual proclamations have been made by all the subsequent U.S. Presidents.
 - The month of May was chosen due to the highly successful celebration of the 350th Anniversary of American Jewish History in May 2004, which was organized by the Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History.
3. Read aloud the [original proclamation](#) that declared May as Jewish American Heritage Month. If you want to read it aloud or print out for students to read, use the [Jewish American Heritage Month Proclamation, 2006](#) handout. Then read aloud this excerpt from the 2024 proclamation by President Joe Biden.

“In 1654, a small band of 23 Jewish refugees fled persecution abroad and sailed into the port of modern-day New York City. They fought for religious freedom, helping define one of the bedrock principles upon which our Nation was built. Jewish American culture has been inextricably woven into the fabric of our country. Jewish American suffragists, activists, and leaders marched for civil rights, women's rights, and voting rights. Jewish American scientists, doctors, and engineers have made scientific breakthroughs that define America as a land of possibilities. They have served our Nation in uniform, on the Nation's highest courts, and at the highest levels of my Administration. As public servants, artists, entertainers, journalists, and poets, they have helped write the story of America, making it — as Emma Lazarus' poem on the Statue of Liberty states — a home for the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

4. Watch this short video: [Jewish American History Month](#) and engage students in a brief discussion after watching, eliciting what they learned.
5. Engage students in a discussion by asking:
 - As you learned more about Jewish American Heritage Month, what did you notice? What do you wonder?
 - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
 - Why is it important to focus on specific identity groups during themed/commemorative months?
 - Can you remember if you ever learned about Jewish history or Jewish people in history?
 - In what ways is Jewish history in the U.S. part of American history?
 - Do you think learning about the history of bias and oppression (antisemitism) should be part of Jewish American Heritage Month?

☆ How Should We Celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month?

1. In order to explore ways to celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month, project and share (or allow students to use their phones, if phones or other devices are allowed in your classroom) by looking at some of these webpages, that share specific suggestions:

- [5 Ways to Celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month](#)
- [14 Ways to Celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month](#)
- [Jewish American Heritage Month Ways to Celebrate](#)

Examples could include: visit a Jewish museum online or in person, read literature by and about Jewish people and the Jewish experience, learn about Jewish cooking and cuisine, learn about issues and current events that impact the Jewish community, listen to Jewish music, etc.

2. Ask students: *How have we recognized other commemorative/themed months (e.g., Native American History Month, Women's History Month, Black History Month)? What are some ways to recognize Jewish American Heritage Month?* Begin brainstorming a few ideas but keep the brainstorming brief.
3. Place the chart paper with the four words (Learn, Celebrate, Commemorate, Honor) around the classroom. Elicit what each of the words means and define as follows.

Learn: To gain knowledge or understanding.

Celebrate: To observe in a special or festive way.

Commemorate: To call to remembrance, to remember with a ceremony.

Honor: To treat with admiration and respect.

4. Invite students to move around the room and share their ideas on each of the chart papers about how, during Jewish American Heritage Month, we can learn, celebrate, commemorate and honor Jewish people, accomplishments, history, and culture throughout the month of May. Explain that they can include ideas for what we can do in our classroom, school as a whole, and community. If they can't think of specific ideas, remind them about ideas we saw on the websites and suggest that they reflect on other themed months and apply that to the Jewish experience. Provide time for them to move around the room and share their ideas. When completed, provide time at the end to read what everyone has recorded on the sheets.

5. If time permits, have students choose one of the four papers to stand near and when situated, have the students choose one of the ideas and discuss how they would make this idea happen in their classroom or school.
6. Engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:
 - What was it like to do that?
 - As you moved around the room and read all the ideas, what did you notice? What did you wonder?
 - What did you learn?
 - Should these ideas only happen during JAHM? Should they also happen throughout the year? Please explain.
 - What is the purpose of celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month?



Writing Activity: Persuasive Letter

1. Explain to students that they will now write a persuasive letter about honoring Jewish American Heritage Month.

[**Note:** You could provide alternative ideas for a persuasive letter in case they don't agree with themed months.]

They can write a letter to their parents, the school (teacher, counselor or school administrator), community (mayor or city council) or someone else. The goal of their letter should be to encourage that person or institution to recognize Jewish American Heritage Month in some way.

2. Distribute a copy of the [Persuasive Letter Organizer](#) to each student. Explain that the template will help them organize their thoughts and ideas before they write the letter. Review the organizer and explain the different parts of the letter, which includes:
 - Who I Am Sending My Letter To
 - Opening Statement
 - Why I Think or Feel This Way
 - Reasons (they can include 1-3 reasons)
 - Closing Summary and Request
3. Have students start working on the Persuasive Letter Organizer, giving them five minutes to start the process. Make sure they have time to at least write a draft of their opening statement. They can complete the letter for homework.

Closing

Invite students to share their opening statements for their letters or something else they plan to include in their letter.



Going Further: Extension Activity Ideas

1. Explore the ideas generated in the "How Should We Celebrate JAHM?" activity. As a class, discuss the ideas in more detail and depth and then engage in a process to choose (consensus, voting, etc.) one or two. Then come up with an action plan to implement one or more of the ideas for something you can do at school.

2. Have students finalize their persuasive letters and send them out. Keep track of and share their responses.
3. Invite students to explore [children's books that focus on Jewish people and the Jewish experience](#). Then have them read aloud and discuss a few of those books with students in younger grades (elementary school) during Jewish American Heritage Month.



Additional Reading and Resources

- [Jewish American Heritage Month](#) (National Archives)
- [Jewish American Heritage Month](#) (Jewish American Heritage Month)
- [Jewish American Heritage Month](#) (American Association of School Librarians)
- [Jewish American Heritage Month: A Commemorative Observances Legal Research Guide](#) (Library of Congress)
- [What is Jewish American Heritage Month?](#) (American Jewish Committee)

Common Core Anchor Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
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. 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.
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.

Jewish American Heritage Month Proclamation, 2006

When the first Jewish settlers came to this land, they sought a place of promise where they could practice their faith in freedom and live in liberty. During Jewish American Heritage Month, we celebrate the rich history of the Jewish people in America and honor the great contributions they have made to our country.

As a nation of immigrants, the United States is better and stronger because Jewish people from all over the world have chosen to become American citizens. Since arriving in 1654, Jewish Americans have achieved great success, strengthened our country, and helped shape our way of life. Through their deep commitment to faith, family, and community, Jewish Americans remind us of a basic belief that guided the founding of this Nation: that there is an Almighty who watches over the affairs of men and values every life. The Jewish people have enriched our culture and contributed to a more compassionate and hopeful America.

Jewish American Heritage Month is also an opportunity to remember and thank the many Jewish Americans who defend our ideals as members of the United States Armed Forces. These courageous men and women risk their lives to protect their fellow citizens and to advance the cause of freedom. By helping to bring the promise of liberty to millions around the world, they lay the foundation of peace for generations to come.

NOW, THEREFORE, I GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim May 2006 as Jewish American Heritage Month. I call upon all Americans to observe this month with appropriate programs and activities that honor the significant contributions Jewish Americans have made to our Nation.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twentieth day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirtieth.

Persuasive Letter Graphic Organizer

Student Name:

Who I am Sending My Letter To (Parents, Principal, Mayor, Someone Else):

Opening Statement About Jewish American Heritage Month:

Why I Think or Feel this Way:

Reason #1

Facts. Quotes, Experiences, Examples

Reason #2

Facts, Quotes, Experiences, Examples

Reason #3

Facts, Quotes, Experiences, Examples

Closing Summary and Request: