

# JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL FACULTY

## STATED GOALS AND PURPOSE

Jewish American Heritage Month is about celebrating the contributions of Jewish Americans to the wider story of American history and culture. This includes those who have made contributions in the arts, science, food, theater, politics, and many other areas of American life. While Judaism is a religion, it is also a people, and as a result Jews all over the world are bound together by a shared history and culture. Over the course of this month, we encourage schools to incorporate the stories and achievements of Jewish Americans into their teachings, in the same way they celebrate the cultural and historical months of other peoples who have helped shape the rich fabric of this country.

In a time of rising antisemitism, research shows that helping Jews feel pride in their Judaism and exposing others to Jewish joy is one of the best ways to combat this hate. This month is not about Israel and Gaza, the war, the conflict, politics, or the Holocaust. Instead, it is a way for the larger community to learn about and celebrate the contributions of Jewish Americans and to teach pieces of the Jewish story that are often ignored. By providing these resources, we hope to make it easier for schools to have these conversations with their students and to help their Jewish students feel seen and supported.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

We aimed to eliminate long hours of research and planning for busy faculty and administrators. We believe we have curated the best materials, websites, and resources for your use in planning and teaching in Jewish Heritage Month. In this document you will find:

- [A link](#) to generate a customizable pre-populated email that parents can send to their children's teachers and school administrators to help initiate the conversation and planning for Jewish Heritage Month. If you experience problems with the first link, you can copy and paste the content of the letter from [here](#).
- **Curated resources** from trusted organizations.
- **Supplemental materials** that offer creative and engaging activities, along with resources, that are organized developmentally (for elementary, middle and high schoolers).

## HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

BEFORE DECIDING WHAT OR HOW TO TEACH JEWISH HERITAGE, WE ADVISE DISCUSSING YOUR GOALS WITH FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION. THIS WILL HELP YOU SIFT THROUGH THIS LENGTHY LIST OF RESOURCES WITH PRECISION.

- Why is it important to teach Jewish Heritage in our school?
- What are our goals? What do we want our students to learn, experience or know as a result of our teaching?
- What are the most important aspects of the American Jewish experience we want to highlight?

AFTER DIALOGUE AND GOAL SETTING, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO CHOOSE LESSONS OR ACTIVITIES FROM THE CURATED RESOURCES OR SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS THAT ALIGN WITH YOUR GOALS.

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## BEFORE YOU BEGIN: THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF TEACHING JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

- DON'T decontextualize Jewish Americans, their history, culture, language, experiences. DO incorporate these things into the larger curriculum, all year round if you can! This helps to reinforce that Jews are part of the larger world culture and specifically the American society/culture.
- DON'T teach without little or inaccurate information. This is not a time to learn on the fly or just wing it! DO utilize the great resources from AJC, ADL, ISC or even talk to local clergy or synagogue educators. Go into the lesson prepared to give a full and thoughtful picture of whatever aspect you are teaching. There are even parents and staff in your school community who would love to be helpful.
- DON'T only teach about the Holocaust and antisemitism. There is so much more to Jewish life than simply this and teaching only about these things will not help combat the stereotypes and negative rhetoric. DO teach about these things when talking about hatred of other groups or in a historically appropriate setting, but not during Jewish American Heritage month!
- DON'T focus only on low hanging fruit like food or holidays. The Jewish people have a rich heritage, culture, language and story! DO use these things as entry points for talking about richer, more thoughtful parts of Jewish life or individual Jews who have contributed to American society.
- DON'T use this as time to debate the Israeli/Palestinian conflict or antisemitism. DO spend time celebrating Jewish culture, history, religion and the beauty of the Jewish people. This is a time to focus on the positive aspects.
- DO reach out to one of the creators of this resource if you are unsure about how to proceed, and we would be happy to guide you.

## CURATED RESOURCES

### [WHAT IS JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH?](#)

This is a great place to begin. Familiarize yourself with how this important month became part of American history as well as the goals and intentions behind its inception.

### [9 IDEAS FOR TEACHING JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH](#)

This is an excellent resource for faculty. Not only does it contain curated resources for faculty, and various activities for students of all ages, but it also has an extremely helpful “pre-planning” guide with tips to keep in mind while crafting your lessons. Most importantly it lists Common Core Anchor Standards as well as CASEL’s SEL Competencies that are met when using their suggested activities/lessons.

### [JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH RESOURCES](#)

Great list of resources with links to help further your research or study. Resources include a list of Jewish museums, Government sources (like the Library of Congress or National Archives), and important Jewish publications.

### [UNDERSTANDING JUDAISM AS PART OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE](#)

Learn more about the different denominations of Judaism, a glossary of useful terms, observances and rituals, lifecycle events, and the Jewish calendar of holidays.

### [GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED SITE FOR JEWISH HERITAGE MONTH](#)

The Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum join in paying tribute to the generations of Jewish Americans who helped form the fabric of American history, culture and society. You will find virtual events, poster collections, the history of Jewish American Vets, and more.

### [JEWISH HERITAGE MONTH QUIZ FROM THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE](#)

Great for middle to high school students to see how much they already know!

### [WHO ARE THE JEWS?](#)

Concise explanation of the Jewish people; their history, their culture, their religion and which regions of the world they hail from.

### [A SHORT GUIDE TO JEWISH RELIGION AND CULTURE](#)

intended to help foster a more inclusive community that offers you tools for communicating with Jewish students and scheduling events in and around Jewish holidays. It includes:

- A glossary of useful terms and concepts
- An easy-to-follow guide to the Jewish calendar, including holiday-specific greetings, and dates for Jewish holidays for 2023, 2024 and 2025.

### [STAND-ALONE LESSON PLAN \(GRADES 6–12\) ON JEWISH AMERICANS](#)

This lesson examines the bonds that unite Jewish Americans as an ethnic group and the rich diversity that exists within the community. In addition, students will deepen their understanding of the multifaceted nature of identity across groups. *(Includes a slide deck.)*

## **STAND-ALONE LESSON PLAN (GRADES 6-12) ON THE JEWISH RELIGION**

Students will discover key aspects of Judaism, such as primary holidays, denominations, places of worship, the coming-of-age ceremony, and more.

## **PBS CLASSROOM RESOURCES FOR THOSE HOPING FOR MORE DEPTH VS. BREADTH (GRADES 6-12)**

Designed for immediate use, these lesson plans and curricular materials — which adhere to national learning standards — contain video segments from The Story of the Jews with Simon Schama, comprehensive instructions for classroom implementation, printable student handouts, links to online resources, and suggestions for extension activities to enhance your students' reading, viewing, and appreciation of Jewish history.

## SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

There are numerous ways to engage elementary school students and families in Jewish American Heritage Month, both inside and outside of the classrooms. This will allow both Jewish and non-Jewish students to engage with Jewish history, culture, and people and their contribution to American history.

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### MUSEUM VISITS

We are lucky to live in a place with access to some of the best Jewish museums in the world. Elementary school students may be particularly interested in:

- [The Jewish Museum](#)  
The Jewish Museum has numerous exhibits and resources for classes to visit, either virtually or in person and museum educators to support classroom teachers in planning their visits.
- [The Tenement Museum](#)  
At the Tenement Museum, students can step into the immigrant story and learn about the history of New York and immigration in an immersive environment, either in person or online.
- [The Museum at Eldridge Street](#)  
At this museum, students can learn about the story of Jewish immigration to America in an immersive way, in a beautiful and historic environment. You can find more information here:

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### BOOKS

- [The PJ Library](#) is a wonderful resource for books. You can sort by age and by topic, so if you are looking for books that feature Jewish characters and Jewish experiences to add to your library, this is a great place to start.
- The award-winning *All-of-a-Kind Family* books are a classic series depicting life on the Lower East Side through the eyes of a Jewish family with five daughters.
- *The Boston Chocolate Party* tells the story of Jews in the chocolate trade at the time of the American Revolution.
- *I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark* is the story of the trailblazing Supreme Court Justice. The book also explores how her Jewish identity informed her work and her life.
- *The People's Painter: How Ben Shahn Fought for Justice with Art* by Cynthia Levinson is a lyrically told, exquisitely illustrated picture book biography of influential Jewish artist and activist Ben Shahn.

- *Gittel's Journey* by Leslea Newman tells an Ellis Island story.
- *Jalapeno Bagels* by Natasha Wing shows the diversity of the Jewish community.
- *Always an Olivia* by Carolivia Herron tells the story of a Sephardic Jewish family in America.

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## JEWISH FOOD

- [The Museum at Eldridge Street](#) (see above) runs food tours of the Lower East Side
- Ask Jewish parents in the class if they would be willing to share traditional foods with the class, either by cooking together or bringing something in. Although people often associate foods like bagels, and matzah balls with Jewish foods, remember that the American Jewish community is diverse and include foods from across the Jewish cultural spectrum.
- Connect with [the Jewish Food Society](#) for recipes, programs, and resources.
- Bake challah: teachers or families can buy the dough and students can learn about braiding and shaping the bread. Then, get whatever toppings you would like, including raisins, sprinkles, chocolate chips, and more. Whatever makes it fun and engaging for students.
- Host a Shabbat dinner or other holiday celebration and eat the traditional foods for that moment.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL

As middle school students navigate having multiple classes and multiple teachers, we encourage each teacher in each subject area to think about the ways they can incorporate Jewish American History month into their curriculum. If there are overlaps between subject areas, that's even better!

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### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

- Graphic Novels and Comic Books: Stan Lee has a comic book empire and created many of the amazing superheroes we know today. In addition, his comic books are also reflective of the [American Jewish experience](#). Will Eisner published what is considered to be the first graphic novel in 1978, elevating comics books to a more “respected” literary genre.
- Poetry: Emma Lazarus is best known for her poem *The New Colossus* which can be found at the base of the Statue of Liberty. Not only can you take a trip to see it (maybe working with a social studies teacher and also traveling to Ellis Island), but you can also learn more about the origin of this poem and have students write their own poetry that gives us a glimpse into their family story and American identity.
- Check out this curriculum and project from [the American Jewish Historical Society](#).

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### MATH & SCIENCE

- Study not only Albert Einstein’s theories and scientific achievements but who he was and how he came to this country. Did you know that Einstein, a German citizen, was in the U.S. when Hitler came to power and decided not to go back to Germany?
- Inventions: This might seem rather silly and common place today, but when Levi Strauss placed rivets on his blue jeans, it was [revolutionary](#)! Strauss determined that these rivets would make the jeans stronger. Test out the rivets and other options to strengthen the jeans so they can’t be ripped apart using what Strauss had in his day.
- Major breakthroughs/accomplishments: There are many [Jewish Nobel Prize winners](#) particularly in the areas of Math and Science. For many of them, their upbringing and Jewish value of inquiry and education helped them to get to where they are.

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### SOCIAL STUDIES

- Immigration: Take a trip to Ellis Island/the Statue of Liberty. Learn about the immigrant experience and discuss why so many Jews came to this country in the late 1800s and early 1900s. What was happening around the world to make Jews want to come to America? How is this similar or different from the reasons people come to America today? You can also examine the treatment of immigrants at that time and whether it has changed for today’s immigrants.

- Jewish in NYC: Head downtown to the [Eldridge Street Synagogue](#) and learn about life for American Jews after they came through Ellis Island. This historic synagogue was built during the increased immigration of Jews and while it is now in the heart of Chinatown, it wasn't always!
- Supreme Court: Both Louis Brandeis and Ruth Bader Ginsburg were supreme court justices and were Jewish! Both presided over many significant cases that have impacted our country. Study their cases and think about how their experiences as Jewish Americans might have impacted their thinking about the law in these cases.



## HIGH SCHOOL

During Jewish Heritage Month, you can integrate Jewish contributions to American history, culture and society through subjects like English, History, and the arts. Below, you will find some creative and interactive ideas that will encourage students of all backgrounds to learn more about the Jewish people.

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### FOCUS: HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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#### ACTIVITIES:

Group Project ideas (a way to forge community, inspire and engage)

- Create a photo montage outlining a piece of American Jewish History
- Produce a podcast interviewing “Historical Jewish Figures”
- Craft a movie review that highlights/recalls Jewish history. Have the students research how accurate the film was in comparison.
- Create a mock newspaper from a particular time highlighting a Jewish contribution/person from history alongside other historical moments (giving students context).
- Historical figure fair: Have students research a Jewish historical figure and present their work via speech/video/photographs.

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#### RESOURCES:

##### HISTORICAL FIGURES:

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- [7 Inspiring Jewish Americans Throughout History That Kids Should Learn About](#)
- [10 Jewish Americans Who Changed History](#)
- [These 9 Jewish Politicians Helped Shape U.S. History](#)

##### AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY:

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- [PBS’s The Jewish Americans](#): Students can scroll to any period of notable Jewish history in America (e.g., immigration, assimilation, education and philanthropy, etc.)
- [This set of lesson plans](#) that draws from the PBS series *The Jewish Americans*, explores immigration, identity, contribution, assimilation, discrimination, change, and confrontation. The plans may be used for a deeper examination of the ways Jewish life fits into U.S. history. The set may also frame comparative research of non-Jewish immigrant experiences.

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### FOCUS: LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

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## ACTIVITIES:

After assigning a book/multiple books for students to read:

- Have the students design a theme park based on the book. From the layout of the park to the rides, to the characters — everything should be inspired by the work.
- Character Instagram: Have students create a fictitious Instagram account for one of the Jewish characters in the book. Ask students to think about language used by characters, what they might want to post/share/who they would follow, who might be following them...
- Create a podcast episode about the book including an interview with the Jewish author. Try to help students understand the importance of digging into their Jewish identity to learn more about the book/piece of literature.
- Design a new book cover for the novel/piece of work. This would include the biography sleeve!
- Create a Spotify playlist that elevates the theme, plot, characters in the book.
- Create a children’s book based on the main character and lessons learned from the novel.

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## RESOURCES:

- [100 Must-Read Works of Jewish Fiction](#)
- [Poems of Jewish Faith and Culture](#)
- [The Jewish Book Council: New Reviews and Editor’s Picks](#)

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## FOCUS: JEWISH PEOPLE

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## ACTIVITIES:

- “Who am I?”: assign each student a region/country from where Jews immigrate.
- Ask students to imagine they were a new immigrant to America and decided to open a restaurant to ensure their food/culture wasn’t lost once here. Have them create a restaurant name and menu highlighting the culture/food/language of a country Jews immigrated from.
- Assign students to research how people identify as Jewish: culturally, racially or religiously. Ask them to research and present how their “Jewish individual might tackle a particular American holiday. For example: how might your assigned “Orthodox Jewish person” celebrate the Fourth of July? Helping students understand the varieties of ways Jews differ and navigate American life.

- Hebrew: Have students create a Travel Guide for a first time visit to Israel. What common words should they know (taxi, directions, ordering food, etc.)? What sites should they visit in Israel?
- Invite a Jewish educator to teach one interactive Lesson using the [Total Physical Response \(TPR\) methodology](#).
- Visit two or three different synagogues to learn more about the various Jewish religious expressions (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist).

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#### RESOURCES:

- [Jewish Immigration to America](#): The size and character of the American Jewish community has been defined by the 3.5 million Jews who have emigrated since the 17th century.
- [Hebrew Through Movement](#): a language acquisition strategy in which students learn Hebrew by hearing and responding to Hebrew commands.

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#### FOCUS: CULTURE

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#### ACTIVITIES

- Visit Jewish museums (or museums featuring Jewish artists)
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- Have students research a Jewish artist and their art to eventually create a community mural. When complete, have students explain some background info (most important: if/how their Jewish identity influenced the work)
- Visit a Jewish deli after watching [Deli Man](#) to learn more about this important part of Jewish culture/identity. Or schedule a lunch at an Israeli restaurant — teach the kids how to order the drinks/one part of the meal. Ask the owner to reflect with the students on the food/culture of their establishment.
- Choose a Jewish musical artist/composer: Have the student create a quiz/trivia/kahoot game to help the other students in the class get to know their musical artist.
- Group documentary: Have the students create a short documentary outlining a Jewish actor/musician/artist.
- Film review: create a podcast, article, video reviewing a film that attempts to capture an aspect of Jewish culture (food/people/religion/art).

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## RESOURCES:

- [10 Most Famous Jewish Artists and Painters](#)
- [Yeshiva University Museum](#) is located in the heart of New York City's Chelsea neighborhood in the Center for Jewish History. One of the foremost Jewish research and cultural institutions in the world, CJH is home to five partner organizations: American Jewish Historical Society, American Sephardi Federation, Leo Baeck Institute, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and Yeshiva University Museum.
- [The Jewish Museum](#) features art, culture, history, and more!
- [10 Movies Showcasing the Best of American Jewish Life.](#)
- [25 Essential Jewish Movies](#)
- Or see some more of our favorite [Jewish movies here.](#)

## CURATORS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

These resources have been vetted and curated by Rabbi Melissa Buyer-Witman from Temple Israel of the City of New York, Rabbi Rebecca Rosenthal from Central Synagogue and Rabbi Rena Rifkin from Stephen Wise Free Synagogue. They are not only rabbis, but also educators who work with students of all ages. Please feel free to reach out to these rabbis at the contact information below.

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