

Hanukkah

Sometime Between Late November and December

Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday. It is also spelled *Chanukah*. The celebration lasts for eight days. On this holiday, people remember the rededication of the second temple in Jerusalem. According to Jewish history, the Jews fought against oppressors and regained control of Jerusalem. This is called the Maccabean Revolt.

Hanukkah is known as the “festival of lights.” Legends say that there was only enough oil to last for one night, yet the oil in the lamps lasted for eight days. An important part of the celebration is the menorah. It holds nine candles. Each family places their menorah in the window for all to see. Children receive presents and play games. Everyone eats traditional foods.



Summary of Activities

Reading: Literature

The Dreidel Game—fictional story with comprehension questions

Reading: Informational Text

Festival of Lights—nonfiction passage with a writing activity

Writing

Hanukkah Traditions—activity in which students write about family traditions

Speaking & Listening

Learning About Hanukkah—Have students write questions they would like to ask an “expert” about Hanukkah. Invite someone from a local Jewish synagogue or school to your class. Encourage students to write considerate questions.

Vocabulary: blessing, conquered, dedicated, dreidel, gelt, Jewish, latkes, menorah, miracle, oppressors, revolt, tradition



Name _____

Date _____

The Dreidel Game

Directions: Read the story. Then answer the questions.

Dorit gathered around the dreidel with her brothers and sister. The spinning top's wood surface was smooth from many years of use. Every year, her father made sure the painted letters were still easy to read. He sanded the bottom so the top would spin smoothly.

They got ready to play. Everyone put in a coin. Today, they were playing for pennies. That didn't seem quite as exciting to Dorit as the way her friend Hannah played it. In Hannah's family, they played for chocolate coins.

Dorit hoped for good spins on her turns. She wanted to win this year, even if the winner wouldn't keep much. She took her first turn. The top landed with the letter "gimel" facing up. What a lucky start! This letter stood for "all," and she got to take the whole pot. It was so early in the game; she only won four coins.

Everyone put another penny in to start a new pot. Dorit's brother Samuel spun. The letter "nun" faced up. He groaned. This letter stood for "nothing," and nothing would happen. He did not get to take any money from the pot.

Isaiah spun next. Dorit watched carefully to see how the dreidel would land. It landed on "hei." This letter stood for "half," and Isaiah took half of the pot. She sighed. At this rate, the game would take all night.

How would the dreidel land on Sarah's turn? The letter "shin" faced up. That meant everyone had to put a coin in the pot. They would have to keep playing until one person won all the coins.

The smell of latkes frying distracted Dorit. Her hands felt clumsy as she spun the top for her next turn. It landed on "shin." Everyone put a coin into the pot. Her stash from the beginning of the game had dwindled now to just one or two coins. Oh, well, it was just a game. At the end, the winner had to divide the pot evenly anyway. That was tradition.

1. What happens when the dreidel lands with the letter "hei" facing up?
 - a. The player gets to take all the coins in the pot.
 - b. The player gets to take nothing from the pot.
 - c. The player gets to take half of the coins in the pot.
2. What happened when Dorit got distracted on her turn?
 - a. She ate some latkes.
 - b. Her hands felt clumsy when she spun the dreidel.
 - c. She lost all her coins.
3. Describe how tradition affects the outcome of the game.



Name _____

Date _____

Festival of Lights

Directions: Read the passage. Then complete the activity.

At Hanukkah, Jews remember the time when they dedicated the second temple again. The temple stood in Jerusalem.

At one time, Alexander the Great had conquered many lands. He had taken over the Jews. He said people could continue to practice their religion. The Jews kept their religion, but they blended in with the Greek culture.

Later, another ruler came to power. He did mean things to the Jews. He put a Greek priest in the temple and did other unholy things. He would not let them practice their religion any longer. Two groups joined together to revolt against this bad treatment. They succeeded, and the Jews dedicated the temple again.

Candles burned in the temple during the ceremony. They were in a holder called a menorah. Oil was needed to keep the candles burning. The candles were supposed to burn every night. There was only enough pure oil left for one day. It would take eight days to get new oil ready for the menorah. A miracle happened. The oil lasted for eight days and kept burning until there was new pure oil ready.

This holiday celebrates the miracle of the oil, not the victory. Jews do not celebrate war. Every year, they light the menorah in remembrance. It has nine candles. There is one candle for each of the eight days the oil burned. The ninth candle is called the servant candle. It is used to light the other candles. It stands at a different height than the other candles. On different nights, various blessings are said over the candles. One blessing is a prayer. Another blessing gives thanks for the miracles the ancestors experienced. A third blessing gives thanks for reaching this time of year again.

Families place their menorah in the window for all to see. This command has been handed down to Jews through the years. It says to let everyone know about the miracles. Jews celebrate that light came out of darkness in many different ways.

Activity: Think about good things that have happened in your family. Write one or more blessings or words of thanks about these good things.



Name _____

Date _____

Hanukkah Traditions

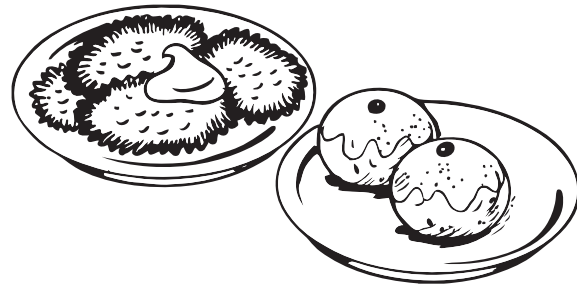
Directions: Read the passage. Then complete the activity.

Jewish culture has many traditions. Families hand down their customs and beliefs from one generation to the next. One Hanukkah tradition is lighting the menorah. The menorah holds eight candles. Each candle stands for a day the oil in the temple burned miraculously. A ninth candle is used to light the other candles. As families gather around the menorah, they may sing songs.

At first, the dreidel had a serious purpose. At one time, it was against the law to study the Jewish Torah. The men would keep a dreidel handy. If an official came around, they would pretend to play with the dreidel. The letters on the dreidel stand for words that form a phrase. It says that a great miracle happened there. The letters also stand for words that tell how to play the game.

Many celebrations have traditional foods. During Hanukkah, Jews eat fried foods. This stands for the oil that burned. A common food is latkes, or potato pancakes. There are many ways to make and eat this food. In Israel, people eat jelly doughnuts that have been cooked in oil.

People often give gifts to children. This might be a small amount of money, known as "gelt." Some believe this tradition comes from the time after the revolt. At that time, Jews could make their own coins. This tradition symbolizes Jewish independence. Today, people often give one another gold foil-wrapped chocolate coins.



Activity: Think about how these traditions are similar to or different from things you do with your family. Write about traditions your family keeps for special holidays.
