

PUMP UP THE JAHM: JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

-A 30 MINUTE LESSON-

Did you know that May is a month designated for highlighting and celebrating Jewish American heritage and contributions to American culture? Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM) is a time to explore the incredible journey of Jewish Americans, from their arrival on our shores to their lasting impact on everything from medicine to civil rights. Students will be surprised and inspired as they discover the vibrant threads of Jewish American culture woven into the fabric of our nation.

Essential Questions

- How does celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month contribute to a deeper understanding of American history and a more inclusive society?
- How can we use the knowledge gained from celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month to create a more inclusive and respectful learning environment for all students?

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Acknowledge the importance of celebrating heritage months
- Understand what makes Jewish Americans an ethnic group
- Recognize the significance of Jewish American Heritage Month
- Develop a new or deeper appreciation for Jewish Americans and their contributions to society

Materials Needed

- [Pre-Instruction Student Self-Assessment](#) (you will be instructed to make a copy)
- [ICS Jewish American Diversity Fact Sheet](#)
- [Jewish Americans: Identity, History, and Experience Fact Sheet](#)
- [Highlighting Jewish American Contributions](#)
- Video: [Jewish Peoplehood: Collective Belonging](#) by The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education (Note: The video was produced for a Jewish student audience, so it uses pronouns like “us” and “we,” which may be confusing to your non-Jewish students, however, it is an excellent and brief explanation of what Jewish peoplehood means, which is an important concept for all students to understand.)
- [Rubric: Jewish American Heritage Month Flyer](#)
- [Post-Instruction Student Self-Assessment](#) (you will be instructed to make a copy)

Lesson Plan

1. PRE-LEARNING STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

Have students complete the [Pre-Instruction Student Self-Assessment](#).

2. PROVIDING CONTEXT

About Heritage and Histories Months

To establish context, explain to students that in the United States, we dedicate specific months of the year to recognize and celebrate the diverse cultures and histories of various ethnic and marginalized groups. These Heritage Months aren't just about holidays or special events, rather they're a chance to delve deeper into the stories and contributions of these groups to American history and culture. They offer a focused spotlight on the richness and complexity of our nation's past, present, and future.

These celebrations offer more than just historical facts. They provide valuable opportunities for exploring our unique identities and cultural backgrounds, and to learn about and appreciate the experiences of others. Understanding different perspectives helps us build bridges, break down stereotypes, and create a more welcoming and informed community. It's about recognizing that American history isn't a single story, but a collection of interwoven narratives that have shaped who we are today.

About Jewish American Heritage Month

Explain that this lesson will focus on one of those unique heritages and histories - Jewish Americans.

The United States Department of State explains,

"In 2006, President George W. Bush declared May Jewish American Heritage Month to celebrate and recognize the millions of Jewish people who call the United States home. America has long been a safe haven for religious diversity, where members of any faith can freely practice their religion. A significant number of Jewish Americans are the descendants of Jews who fled not only discrimination and persecution but also, in the case of many European Jews, genocide at the hands of the Nazis and their allies in the 1930s and 1940s. Notwithstanding shameful resistance to Jewish immigration during World War II by personnel at the Department of State and other parts of the U.S. government, America became a refuge for millions of Jews and is now home to approximately one third of the world's Jewish people. Each May, we pay tribute to the many contributions Jewish Americans have made, and continue to make, to the United States, including Supreme Court Justices and Nobel Prize winners. As the world witnesses a rise in global antisemitism, the United States stands with the diverse American Jewish community and celebrates its rich and varied cultures and long history."

3. UNDERSTANDING JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD TO CELEBRATE JAHM

In order to celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month, or JAHM, it is important to understand the concept of Jewish peoplehood.

- a. Explain to students that while Judaism is a religion, Jews are not only a religious group. They are a people. The concept of Jewish peoplehood means that Jews share a sense of collective identity and belonging like a big, extended family with a long and complex history. This peoplehood is built on shared historical experiences, values, traditions, and a connection to their ancestral homeland, Israel. For thousands of years, Jews have maintained a sense of unity through their culture,

language (Hebrew), and a shared narrative that includes both triumphs and struggles. This sense of peoplehood is a core part of what it means to be Jewish, connecting individuals across the globe and through generations.

- b. Show [this video](#) and have the students jot down key takeaways as they are watching.
- c. Provide students with the ICS [Jewish American Diversity Fact Sheet](#), the [Jewish Americans: Identity, History, and Experience Fact Sheet](#), and the [Highlighting Jewish American Contributions](#) to review and highlight or jot down information that stands out to them.

4. ACTIVITY

Using the information they learned from the video and the fact sheets, students, either independently or in small groups, should create a flier (handmade or digital on Canva or similar platform) to promote celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month.

The flier should include:

- A creative title that signifies the celebration of Jewish American Heritage Month
- A short explanation about when Jewish American Heritage Month is and the significance of the month (when it began, why it was created, etc.)
- Brief but informative text that highlights key aspects of your learning about Jewish peoplehood that would excite other schools to celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month. Consider including things like:
 - images, illustrations, or symbols that represent what was learned about Jewish peoplehood from the video and fact sheets (these can be hand drawn or found on the Internet)
 - a key Jewish American and their impact
 - an important contribution(s) made by Jewish Americans to society
 - One or more cultural/religious traditions, practice, or beliefs

Note: You may want to consider using [this rubric](#) to score the flyers.

5. LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Have students complete the [Post-Instruction Student Self-Assessment](#).