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# TEACHING ABOUT JUDAISM

In this lesson, students will explore Judaism's beliefs, behaviors, and experiences of belonging.

## Essential Questions

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- What is a religion?
- How can we explain religions as systems of belief, behaviors, and experiences of belonging?

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will be able to:

- Articulate and give examples of Judaism's systems of belief, behavior, and experiences of belonging.
- Explain some of the significant changes to Judaism over time.
- Reflect on their personal systems of belief, behaviors, and experiences of belonging.

## Materials Needed

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### MULTIMEDIA

- [Google Slide Deck: Teaching About Judaism](#)
- [Virtual Tour](#) of a Synagogue
- [Virtual Museum](#)
- Video: [Ancient Israel](#)

### HANDOUTS

- "Getting Ready To Learn" Handout
- Scaffolded Graphic Organizer
- Exit Slip

# Lesson Plan

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION

Teaching about religion in the classroom can be intimidating—and even controversial. However, the use of an academic framework can help support quality classroom instruction about religion. This lesson uses the nationally recognized College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, published by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). The C3 Framework promotes an academic approach that encourages the following best practices:

- Promoting awareness of religions, but not promoting student acceptance of any particular religion
- Studying about religion, but not advocating for or against the practice of religion
- Exposing students to a diversity of religious views, but not imposing any particular view
- Educating students about all religions, but not promoting one over another or denigrating any religion”<sup>1</sup>

## 2. BEGIN WITH OURSELVES

In this lesson, we will be using the ‘3 Bs’ to define religion: beliefs, behaviors, and experience of belonging. Before jumping directly into Judaism, it can be helpful to begin with a brief exploration of students’ personal 3 Bs.

Emphasize that there is no obligation to disclose private information. Students should only express opinions or beliefs that they feel comfortable sharing.

Make it clear that whether we practice a religion or not, we all have beliefs, we all exhibit behaviors that express those beliefs, and we all experience feelings of belonging that are related to our beliefs. Reiterate that these don’t necessarily need to be religious beliefs. For example, you can believe in the importance of family. A behavior that reflects this belief is always having dinner together. A feeling of belonging happens when everyone is at the table, sharing their thoughts and experiences.

Have students answer the following questions:

- What is a belief that you have?
- How do you express this belief through actions or behaviors?
- When or where do you feel a sense of belonging related to this belief?

Here are two options for working through this exercise with the class:

- **Option 1:** Set up this activity using a digital tool (such as Padlet). Students can participate either virtually or in the classroom, with the results projected on a smartboard.
- **Option 2:** Place three poster-size sheets of paper around the room, with the prompts written at the top. Have students move around the room and fill in their responses. Then review together as a group and discuss the commonalities, differences, and insights.

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<sup>1</sup> College, Career & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards. NCSS.  
<https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/c3/c3-framework-for-social-studies-rev0617.pdf>

### 3. DEFINING THE TERM 'RELIGION' USING THE 3 Bs

The term 'religion' can be difficult to define because it covers such a wide range of human activity. Draw on the prior knowledge and experience of your students by asking them how they would define 'religion.' Then, ask them to consider their answers in light of the definition below. You will find slides with the definition in the **Google Slide deck**.

While there is no universally accepted definition of religion, there are "working" definitions that scholars have developed as a way to approach the topic in an accessible and academically appropriate way. For this lesson, **religions** are considered to be systems of:

- **BELIEF**, which can be related to a deity or deities, or it can be about truths that a community holds about human nature or the world in which it lives.
- **BEHAVIOR**, which includes practices and rituals that can range from prayer and dietary rules to engaging in acts of kindness.
- **BELONGING**, which is about community. Since ancient times, what we call 'religion' has created a sense of communal identity and being part of something larger than oneself.<sup>2</sup>

### 4. PRE-LEARNING DISCUSSION

As you prepare to teach your students about Judaism, it's helpful to engage learners by asking questions and preparing them cognitively. This will also assist your students in processing and retaining new information.

- **Option 1:** Using the **"Getting Ready To Learn" Handout**, engage students by activating prior knowledge and exploring their areas of interest. You can use the ["Think/Pair/Share"](#) model to generate conversation between students.
- **Option 2:** Have a more informal, **brief class discussion** around the questions: What are your sources of knowledge? How reliable do you think those sources are? What about Judaism would you like to know more about?

### 5. TRANSITION TO JUDAISM

In this lesson, students will learn about Judaism's systems of belief, behaviors, and experiences of belonging. Move through the slides in the **Google Slide deck**, which provide an overview of each of these categories, providing students with a baseline of knowledge as well as a broader context for their learning. You can have students fill out the **Scaffolded Graphic Organizer** to help keep track of the information they are learning.

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<sup>2</sup> The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History added the SUPPLEMENT: Religious Studies Companion Document for the C3 Framework in 2017, pp. 92-27. <https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/2017/Jun/c3-framework-for-social-studies-rev0617.pdf>.

## 6. VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP

Tell students that you are going on a virtual field trip to a synagogue. Share or project the following website with students: <http://bit.ly/SynagogueDiagram>

Students can collaborate on their own Jamboard, researching what they might find in a synagogue: [https://jamboard.google.com/d/1O6M4vFtnFm8zNwSCg6xpYqd\\_KMnYuUUt2rtsoeG\\_ebw/edit?usp=sharing](https://jamboard.google.com/d/1O6M4vFtnFm8zNwSCg6xpYqd_KMnYuUUt2rtsoeG_ebw/edit?usp=sharing)

You can also use this activity as an opportunity to reinforce the '3 Bs' by having students discuss whether each item in the synagogue is related to belief, behavior, or belonging. Answers may vary, but the discussion will enrich the learning.

## 7. LEARNING ACTIVITY: CREATE A VIRTUAL MUSEUM

Students can create a "virtual Judaism museum" using this template: [Virtual Museum](#)

## 8. CONCLUSION:

Revisit the "Getting Ready To Learn" handout or class discussion. What did students learn about Judaism? What questions do they still have?

### Questions for discussion:

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- **Question 1:** What are some important events in Jewish history that shaped the development of Judaism? How did Judaism become "portable" after the destruction of the Second Temple?
- **Question 2:** What systems of behavior in Judaism did you learn about that were new or interesting to you? What are some beliefs that are important in Judaism?
- **Question 3:** The observance of Jewish holidays and practices gives Jews a feeling of belonging to the Jewish people and to a tradition that stretches back more than 3,000 years. What are some examples of experiences of belonging in Judaism?

## Pre-Learning Discussion

<p><b>HOW DO I KNOW?</b></p> <p>What are your sources of knowledge? (For example: school, TV news, books, family, friends, etc.)</p> <p>How reliable do you think those sources are?</p>	<p><b>WHAT DO I WANT TO LEARN?</b></p> <p>What about Judaism would you like to know more about?</p>

## Scaffolded Graphic Organizer

### LESSON INTRODUCTION:

1. What is the birthplace of Judaism?
2. Why was the destruction of the Second Temple significant in the development of Judaism?

BELIEFS	BEHAVIORS	EXPERIENCES OF BELONGING
What are <b>two texts</b> that are considered sacred in Jewish tradition?	What are 2 examples of <b>Jewish rituals or practice</b> ?	What are some places in the world, other than the U.S., <b>where Jews live</b> ?
What are the 3 major <b>denominations</b> of Judaism in the U.S.?	What are the <b>High Holy Days</b> ? Why are they important in Jewish tradition?	What is a Jewish <b>place of worship</b> called?
What does " <b>Jews of no religion</b> " mean in the chart?	What does <b>Passover</b> celebrate?	What is the Jewish <b>coming of age</b> event that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood? How is this event observed?
What are 3 examples of Jewish <b>ethical teachings</b> ?	What do the 8 days of <b>Chanukah</b> represent? How is the holiday celebrated?	What type of <b>calendar</b> does Judaism follow?  What ancient <b>language</b> is an important part of Jewish worship and study today?

**Reflection questions:** What did you learn about Judaism that was most interesting to you? Were you able to connect any aspects of Judaism's '3Bs' with your life?

## Exit Slip

1. Why was the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem an important event in the development of Judaism?
2. What are some of the different denominations of Judaism? How do they differ from one another?
3. Provide one example of a *system of belief*, one example of a *behavior*, and one example of *belonging* in Judaism.