



Hanukkah In A Bag: Parent & Teacher Guide

Hanukkah in a Bag: Parent & Teacher Partnership Packet

Overview

This guide equips parents and teachers with a structured, ready-to-use resource to bring Jewish representation into classrooms. The program includes lessons, scripts, and TEKS-aligned content to help children of all backgrounds learn about Hanukkah in an inclusive, age-appropriate, and engaging way.

Purpose and Vision

The *Hanukkah in a Bag* initiative was created to build bridges of understanding and belonging in San Antonio's schools. Too often, Jewish children do not see their traditions represented in classroom celebrations. This program changes that—by empowering parents and teachers to share Jewish culture confidently, positively, and in ways that fit the classroom environment.

Our purpose is both **educational and relational**:

- To **educate**: Teach students about Hanukkah as a story of courage, light, and freedom that aligns with core educational goals around diversity and empathy.
- To **inspire**: Encourage parents to step into schools as proud representatives of their families and heritage, modeling inclusion and confidence for their children.
- To **connect**: Create meaningful classroom experiences that help students of all backgrounds appreciate different cultures while seeing themselves as part of one community.

When families share their stories, children learn about the things that bring us together. By volunteering, you're not just teaching about Hanukkah—you're helping shape a generation of compassionate learners who understand and celebrate humanity and heritage

Quick Reference Guide

Audience: Elementary classrooms (Grades K–5)

Length: 15–45 minutes (adaptable)

Purpose: Cultural education, literacy integration, and empathy-building

Key Themes: Courage, Light, Freedom, Representation

Program Partners: PJ Library San Antonio, The Jewish Federation of San Antonio, The Holocaust Museum of San Antonio

Core Activities:

1. **Story of Hanukkah Reading** – A narrative of courage and the miracle of light.

2. **PJ Library Book Reading** – Age-appropriate literature reinforcing shared values.
3. **Dreidel Game** – Cultural play experience with meaning and movement.
4. **Creative Reflection** – Drawing, writing, or crafting to reinforce learning.

Key Messages to Share:

- “Jewish families celebrate Hanukkah in many ways—there’s no one right way.”
- “Hanukkah is a celebration of light, courage, and community.”
- “We can all bring light into the world through kindness and understanding.”

Classroom Ready Tips:

- Bring *Hanukkah in a Bag* materials and check school policies on snacks and candles.
- Coordinate with the teacher early—November is best!
- Keep focus on learning and curiosity, not religious observance. Emphasize Jewish heritage and cultural traditions (Resource #2).
- End with a reflection question: *How can you bring light into your classroom or community?*

How to Talk About Hanukkah

- Focus on **light, courage, and hope** — universal themes that everyone can relate to.
- Share that Hanukkah celebrates **rededication** and **freedom of faith**. It's not a "Jewish Christmas" — it's a story about identity, perseverance, and bringing light into dark times.
- Encourage questions and curiosity. Children learn best when adults model openness and wonder.

Language Tips for Teachers & Families

- **Instead of:** *"Do you celebrate Christmas or Hanukkah?"* **Try:** *"What holidays or traditions are special to your family?"*
- **When reading books, note:**
"Jewish families celebrate Hanukkah in many different ways — some light candles, some sing songs, and some make delicious foods like latkes."
- **Always emphasize** that within Jewish life — there isn't one "right" way to celebrate

Recommended PJ Library Books

Grades K-5:

1. *Is It Hanukkah Yet?* by Chris Barash
2. *Mrs. Greenberg's Messy Hanukkah* by Linda Glaser
3. *Antlers with Candles* by Chris Barash

Each story can spark conversations about **helping others, keeping traditions alive, and celebrating heritage/culture.**

Pronunciation Guide for Key Terms

- **Hanukkah** (HAH-nuh-kuh) — the Jewish Festival of Lights
 - **Hanukkiah** (hah-noo-kee-AH) — the 9-branched menorah used for Hanukkah
 - **Shamash** (shah-MAHSH) — the helper candle
 - **Dreidel** (DRAY-dul) — spinning top (Yiddish)
 - **Sivivon** (seh-vee-VOHN) — spinning top (Hebrew)
 - **Maccabees** (MACK-uh-beez) — the brave Jewish fighters
 - **Latkes** (LOT-kuhs) — fried potato pancakes
 - **Sufganiyot** (soof-gah-nee-OHT) — jelly donuts
-

Common Questions Kids Ask

Q: Is Hanukkah the Jewish Christmas?

A: No. While both happen in winter, they celebrate different things. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, while Hanukkah celebrates religious freedom and the rededication of the Jewish Temple.

Q: Why does Hanukkah last 8 nights?

A: The oil in the Temple was only supposed to last one day, but miraculously burned for eight days!

Q: Do Jewish people get presents for Hanukkah?

A: Some families give small gifts, but gift-giving isn't the main tradition. The focus is on lighting candles, playing games, and eating special foods together.

Q: Why do we spin the dreidel?

A: Long ago, when Jewish people weren't allowed to study Torah (the Jewish bible), they would pretend to play dreidel games if soldiers came by, hiding what they were really doing.

Conversation Starters for Classrooms

- "What does light mean to you?"
- "Can you think of a time you were brave?"
- "How can one small light make a big difference?"
- "Why is it important for people to be free to celebrate their traditions?"

Encourage children to share personal stories about kindness, courage, or family celebrations.

For Teachers and Community Leaders

- Use PJ Library's **Parent & Teacher Kits** to incorporate stories, crafts, and values-based discussions in classrooms and libraries.
- Create opportunities for students to share family traditions through storytime or show-and-tell.
- Partner with local Jewish organizations (like **PJ Library San Antonio**) to access ready-to-use lesson plans and materials.

Important Notes

- Frame activities as learning about cultures and traditions, not requiring participation in religious practices
- Remember that not all Jewish students celebrate Hanukkah — some families may have different traditions or levels of observance.
- Avoid making assumptions about which students celebrate which holidays.

Closing Message

Hanukkah reminds us that **light, courage, and community** can overcome darkness. By sharing stories, we honor resilience — and empower children to be sparks of goodness in the world.

How the Program Works

There are three ways parents can participate:

Option A: Parent-Led Lesson

Parent volunteer teaches the full lesson while the teacher observes and assists. Students learn directly from parent.

Best for: Parents wanting personal engagement and seeking direct impact.

Option B: Demonstration Model

Parent volunteer demonstrates the lesson, then leaves the complete kit for the teacher(s) to use. *Best for:* Building teacher capacity and reaching multiple classrooms.

Option C: Hybrid Approach

Parent volunteer teaches once, leaves the kit, and encourages the teacher to reuse it. *Best for:* Combining personal engagement with lasting classroom use.

Email Template for Parent Communication with Teachers

Subject: A Simple Way to Bring Light and Learning to Our Classroom

Dear [Teacher's Name],

I'm [Your Name], parent of [Child's Name] in your [grade] class. Through **PJ Library**, the **Jewish Federation of San Antonio**, and the **Holocaust Memorial Museum of San Antonio**, I'd love to share a **free Hanukkah Education Kit** designed for public school classrooms.

This program introduces students to Hanukkah as part of our community's rich cultural traditions. It encourages kindness, curiosity, and respect for how families celebrate in different ways—all while meeting TEKS standards for literacy and social studies.

The kit includes a storybook, dreidels, simple activities, and a ready-to-use lesson plan. You can choose whichever option works best for your class:

- I can visit and teach a short (15–45 minute) activity.
- I can demonstrate and leave the kit for reuse.
- Or, you can use the *Hanukkah in a Bag kit* independently.

This short, engaging lesson helps students see that learning about one another builds understanding and connection. It's designed to be easy, inclusive, and joyful for everyone involved.

Warm regards,

[Your Name]

Parent Volunteer | PJ Library San Antonio

Recommended Timing

Best: Early to mid-November

Good: Late October or first week of December **Avoid:**
Testing Days

Scheduling earlier allows Hanukkah to stand on its own and prevents December scheduling conflicts.

Quick Presentation Formats

15-Minute Version (Essential)

- Read the Story of Hanukkah and Traditions (Appendix A and B)
- Play the dreidel game briefly.
- Students take dreidels home.

30-Minute Version (Recommended)

- Read the Story of Hanukkah and Traditions (Appendix A and B)
- Read a PJ Library book.
- Facilitate brief discussion.

45-Minute Version (Full Experience)

- Read the Story of Hanukkah and Traditions (Appendix A and B)
 - PJ Library book and reflection.
 - Optional menorah demonstration.
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Classroom Directions for Teachers or Parent Volunteers:

The Hanukkah Story and Traditions

Step 1: Introduce the Story

Say: “Today we’re learning about Hanukkah, a Jewish holiday that celebrates freedom and the courage to be true to what you believe.”

Show students where Israel is on a map if available. Explain that the story happened over 2,000 years ago.

Step 2: Read the Hanukkah Story Aloud To Students

Read the expanded story slowly and clearly. Emphasize key words like *freedom*, *light*, and *miracle*. Pause occasionally and ask simple comprehension questions, such as:

- “Why did the Maccabees hide in the hills?”
- “How do you think they felt when they saw the oil last for eight days?”

Step 3: Discussion and Reflection

After reading, invite students to share their thoughts: (talk, read, talk, write)

- “What does light symbolize in this story?”
- “Can you think of a time when you had to be brave or stand up for something?”

Step 4: Hands-On Reinforcement

Choose one or more of the following:

- **Dreidel Game:** Teach the rules using the dreidels provided in the kit. Play one round together.
- **Candle Pattern Art:** Have students color or build their own menorah pattern using paper or craft sticks.
- **Story Reflection:** Younger students can draw the menorah or Maccabees; older students can write a short reflection on the theme of courage.

Step 5: Wrap-Up Message Conclude

by saying:

“Hanukkah reminds us that even when things feel difficult, small acts of courage and kindness can keep the light shining. Each of us can bring light into the world through our actions.”

Class Directions for Teachers, Parents, and Volunteers—PJ Library Book

Each lesson below follows the **Discuss–Read–Discuss–Write** literacy framework, connects to **Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)**, and highlights a **Jewish value (middah)**. Every plan includes teacher-ready prompts, activity directions, and an optional art or reflection extension.

Book: *Mrs. Greenberg’s Messy Hanukkah* by Linda Glaser

Themes: Friendship, generosity, inclusion

Jewish Value: *Chesed* (Kindness) — Helping others with a full heart

TEKS: ELA.K.6.B, SS.K.12.A, SS.1.13.A, SS.2.14.A

Discuss (Before Reading)

Help students connect to the story and activate their own experiences. Ask: “*What does it mean to help someone?*”

Encourage students to share a time they helped a friend or neighbor.

Read

Help students build listening comprehension skills and pay attention to story details by reading the story aloud, showing pictures.

Say: “*Now, I’m going to read the story aloud. Listen for how Rachel helps Mrs. Greenberg and what happens when things get messy!*”

Discuss (After Reading)

Help students deepen their understanding of the story and discuss the lesson of the story. Ask: “*Why do you think Mrs. Greenberg was happy even when things didn’t go perfectly?*” “*What does this story teach us about helping and kindness?*”

Guide students to understand that kindness matters more than perfection.

Write / Create

Help students reflect and express the story’s theme in their own words or drawings. Ask students to draw or write about a time they helped someone, even if it was challenging.

Extension Activity

Messy Hanukkah Latke Craft:

Use tissue or construction paper to make “latkes” on paper plates. Discuss how helping can be joyful and a little messy.

Book: *Is It Hanukkah Yet?* by Chris Barash

Themes: Anticipation, family, tradition

Jewish Value: *Hachnasat Orchim* (Welcoming Guests) — Preparing with love and excitement

TEKS: ELA.1.6.A, ELA.2.7.B, SS.1.13.B, SS.2.14.B

Discuss (Before Reading)

Help students connect to the story and activate their own experiences. Ask: “*What holidays do you look forward to and how do you get ready?*”

Read

Help students build listening comprehension skills and pay attention to story details by reading the story aloud, showing pictures.

Say: “*Listen for clues about how the family prepares for Hanukkah.*”

Discuss (After Reading)

Help students deepen their understanding of the story and discuss the lesson of the story. Ask: “*Why does waiting make something feel special? What are your favorite family traditions?*”

Write / Create

Help students reflect and express the story’s theme in their own words or drawings. Students make a “Countdown to Light” paper chain—each link lists one way to bring light or kindness each day.

Extension Activity

Paper Chain of Light: Students build an eight-link chain for the eight nights of Hanukkah, writing acts of kindness on each link.

Book: *Antlers with Candles* by Chris Barash

Themes: Discovery, creativity, understanding differences

Jewish Value: *Kavod* (Respect) — Appreciating others’ ways of celebrating **TEKS:**

ELA.3.7.B, ELA.4.6.A, SS.3.16.A, SS.4.15.B

Discuss (Before Reading)

Help students connect to the story and activate their own experiences. Ask: “*Have you ever seen something unusual that made you curious?*”

Read

Build listening comprehension and attention to story details. Say: “*Notice how the animals react to the candles and what they learn.*”

Discuss (After Reading)

Deepen understanding and discuss the lesson of the story. Ask: “*What does this story teach about understanding other people’s traditions?*”

Discuss how curiosity can lead to respect and friendship.

Write / Create

Help students reflect and express the story’s theme in their own words or drawings. Students write a “light letter” explaining one of their own family traditions to someone new.

Extension Activity

Animal Light Collage: Students combine nature and Hanukkah imagery (antlers, stars, candles) to celebrate diversity.

Extensions Teachers Can Do After Parent Presentation

For younger students (K-2):

- Draw one thing you learned about Hanukkah today
- What was your favorite part of the story?

For older students (3-5):

- Write one new thing you learned and one question you still have
- How is Hanukkah similar to or different from holidays your family celebrates?
- What does "bringing light into the world" mean to you?

Contact and Support

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Appendix A: Hanukkah 101

What is Hanukkah?

Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday that celebrates freedom and the rededication of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem after it was attacked in the 2nd century BCE. That is over 2, 200 years ago!

The Story of Hanukkah (Read to the class)

A long time ago — more than two thousand years ago — the Jewish people lived in the land of Israel. But their land was ruled by a foreign king named **Antiochus**, who was part of the **Syrian Greek Empire**.

King Antiochus wanted everyone in his kingdom to believe and act the same way. He made unfair laws that stopped the Jewish people from practicing their traditions. They couldn't study the Torah (bible), keep Shabbat (the sabbath), or light their sacred candles.

But a small group of brave Jews refused to give up. They were called the **Maccabees**, led by a man named **Judah Maccabee**. Even though they were outnumbered and had very little equipment, the Maccabees fought for their right to be Jewish — and they **won!**

When the Maccabees returned to the Jewish **Holy Temple in Jerusalem**, they found the Syrian Greek armies had tried to destroy it. They cleaned it, rebuilt it, and wanted to relight the **menorah** — a golden lamp that symbolized light, hope, and connection.

They found only **one small jar of oil** — just enough to keep the menorah burning for one day. But something amazing happened: that little bit of oil lasted for **eight whole days!**

Every year, Jewish families celebrate by lighting a special nine-branched menorah called a **hanukkiah**. Each night, they light one more candle until all eight are shining bright. Families also eat foods cooked in oil, like **latkes** (potato pancakes) and **sufganiyot** (jelly doughnuts), and play the **dreidel** game — a spinning top with Hebrew letters that stand for "A great miracle happened there."

Hanukkah reminds us that **a little light can make a big difference**, and that courage and hope can overcome even the darkest times.

Appendix B: What are some Hanukkah traditions?

The major tradition of Hanukkah is lighting candles on a special menorah or hanukkiah.

Lighting a Hanukkah menorah (hanukkiah in Hebrew) is the most central part of the holiday, which is why Hanukkah is known as the Festival of Lights.

The original menorah in the Hanukkah story had seven branches, but the menorah we light on Hanukkah has nine branches — one for each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, and an additional one for the *shamash*, the helper candle used to light all the other candles.

Other Hanukkah activities recall the story and celebrate the freedom that the Jews experienced upon the Maccabees' victory.

Those activities include the spinning of the dreidel (spinning top) that has the Hebrew letters Nun, Gimmel, Hay, and Shin on it, each side standing for *Nes Gadol Haya Sham* (Hebrew for "a great miracle happened there"); and foods fried in oil, like latkes and jelly donuts, remind us of — well — oil!

During Hanukkah, families:

- Light the candles and recite blessings.
- Sing traditional songs and share stories.
- Play the **dreidel game**—a spinning top with Hebrew letters that stand for “A Great Miracle Happened There.”
- Eat foods fried in oil, like **latkes** (potato pancakes) and **sufganiyot** (jelly donuts), to remember the miracle of the oil.

Appendix C: Coloring



Jewish Federation
of San Antonio



Library & PJ
OUR WAY.

Happy Chanukah!



Dreidel Game

 nun	Do nothing
 shin	Put one in the pot
 hay	Take half of everything in the pot
 gimel	Take everything from the pot



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Appendix D: Reading Guides

READING
GUIDE

A GIFT for JEWISH CHILDREN and their families.



MRS. GREENBERG'S MESSY HANUKKAH

Written by Linda Glaser

Illustrated by Nancy Cote

While her parents are busy with errands, Rachel visits her neighbor, Mrs. Greenberg. Making latkes together, Mrs. Greenberg is exhausted and Rachel is worried about the terrible mess.

Jewish holidays are traditionally times when family and friends spend time together, sharing traditions and making memories. From start to finish, *Mrs. Greenberg's Messy Hanukkah* is holiday lesson in kindness and consideration.

In this story, Rachel is eager to have family visit and enjoy the latkes she remembers from past celebrations; Mrs. Greenberg jumps at the opportunity to visit with her young neighbor; Rachel's parents don't hesitate to help clean the messy kitchen and stay to share a meal with their elderly neighbor.

In *Mrs. Greenberg's Messy Hanukkah*, Jewish values shine through in so many ways—in Rachel's awareness of Mrs. Greenberg's loneliness and in Mrs. Greenberg's patience with Rachel, for example. Share with your children the ways in which your family chooses to give pleasure to others at holidays and other times—by something as simple as visiting an older person living alone, giving a gift of a plate of warm latkes to someone unable to cook for him/herself, or offering to decorate a shelter or hospital lounge for the holiday—and then involve your children by making it happen!

HANUKKAH LATKES

Most Jewish celebrations have a food component symbolic of the holiday. On *Hanukkah*, latkes and other foods cooked

in oil remind us of the tiny amount of oil that lasted eight days in the restored Temple in Jerusalem.

Recipes for *latkes* are generally simple, and may be passed down from generation to generation—some employing savory onions, others using *matzoh* meal, etc. Contemporary cooks have taken *latkes* to new levels by using less common ingredients, such as sweet potatoes or even zucchini! Commonly, latkes are served with sour cream or applesauce. Whatever your tastes and preferred ingredients, involving your children in cooking is a spectacular means of instilling wonderful and lasting holiday customs.

* The transliterated word *Hanukkah* can be spelled in many different ways—including *Chanukkah*, *Channukah*, *Chanuka*, etc. PJ

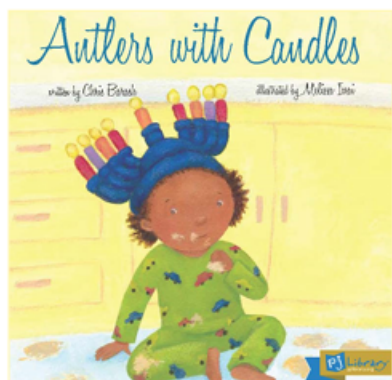
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Antlers with Candles

written by
Chris Barash

illustrated by
Melissa Iwai



{ How do holidays bring warmth? }

Wintertime Warm-Up

Hanukkah falls in the Hebrew month of *Kislev* (late November–December), when the days are shortest. Lighting the Hanukkah menorah (in Hebrew, a *hanukkiah*) for each of the eight nights of the holiday reminds us of the Maccabees’ miraculous victory as they stood up like candles against the darkness of oppression. It also warms our hearts and lights up our homes. The family in this book shows us the coziness of Hanukkah with plenty of warm moments – eating fried foods as a reminder of the miracle of the oil (latkes, anyone?), playing dreidel, and singing songs. Who cares if the sun sets early? It just means another night of Hanukkah cheer is here.

HANDS ON!

Make a Shiny Menorah Poster



Supplies

Aluminum foil
Marker
Scissors
Glue
Poster board
Glitter pens/paint/glue



Help your child place both hands side by side on a piece of foil. Position the hands so that the thumbs overlap. Trace around the hands with the marker and cut them out as one continuous piece. Glue the tinfoil hands onto a piece of poster board. Each finger serves as a “candle” on your menorah (the two thumbs make one candle – the shamash). Use some glittery art supplies, like glitter pens, paint, or glue, to create a flame on top of each “candle,” then place your poster in your window to help decorate your home for Hanukkah.

Spread the Light

One can learn about Hanukkah rituals by looking closely at the family in this book. When they light their menorah, they put the candles in starting from the right. But don’t be fooled! As you add an additional candle for each night of the holiday, always light the newest one first, lighting from left to right. They also use the *shamash* – the helper candle – to light all the other candles. The shamash is kept separate in some way, often sitting higher than the other candles. Finally, the family has a collection box for *tzedakah* (Hebrew for “justice,” but often used to mean charitable giving) placed nearby as a reminder to spread the light of Hanukkah to those in need. To learn more, visit pjlibrary.org/antlers.

I Have a Little Dreidel...

When the little guy in this book spots a “funny, pointy” block, his dad explains that this is a dreidel (*sevivon* in Hebrew). A dreidel has a different Hebrew letter on each of its sides that help us play a well-known Hanukkah game. If a spinning dreidel falls on *gimel*, the player takes all of the pot, which is often chocolate *gelt* (coins), pennies, or buttons, as in this book. *Hey* means you take half of the pot. You’re out of luck if you get a *nun*; you don’t take anything. And *shin* means you have to put a piece of gelt (or a penny, or a button) back in the pot. The dreidel’s letters stand for *nes gadol haya sham*, which is Hebrew for “a great miracle happened there” – “there” meaning ancient Israel. (If you’re friends with a moose, be sure to explain that it isn’t “moose gadol haya sham”! He might think this holiday is all about him.)

TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR KIDS

CAN we learn something from a mess?

HOW can Hanukkah customs help other people?

WHAT things can you do year round to help light up someone’s day?



IS IT HANUKKAH YET?

Written by Chris Barash

Illustrated by Alessandra Psacharopulo

Small children can't always tell when a holiday is near, but there are telltale hints. This story runs through many clues that Hanukkah is nearing – and the excitement builds with each one.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, is considered a minor Jewish holiday when compared to some others, such as Rosh Hashanah and Passover – yet it is a favorite for many. Arriving on the 25th of the Jewish month of Kislev and lasting for eight days and nights, Hanukkah falls during late fall or early winter, and offers welcome joy and brightness to a dark time of year.

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem in the second century BCE. The ancient land of Judea had been under Greek rule, and a small band of Jews known as the Maccabees had risen in rebellion. Amazingly, the Maccabees eventually won the war, but when they returned to the Temple, they found it desecrated and the *ner tamid* (eternal lamp) unlit. There was only enough oil to keep the lamp lighted for one day, but miraculously, the light continued to burn for eight days – the length of time it took to procure more oil.

During Hanukkah, Jews around the globe light the *hanukkah* (Hanukkah menorah), eat traditional foods cooked in oil, such as crispy *latkes* (potato pancakes) and *sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts), and play *dreidel* (a game that uses a four-sided top with a Hebrew letter on each side). Most importantly, people gather with loved ones and enjoy the miracles of freedom and family.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

For young children, the sensory experiences of a holiday often take on more meaning than its history and larger significance – and anticipating its arrival is definitely part of the fun. In this book, the child pieces together clues that Hanukkah is coming by the appearance of decorations, the scent of cooking latkes, and of course, the anticipation of Hanukkah candles flickering in the hanukkah.

Include your child in Hanukkah preparations. Young children can help make simple decorations and wrap gifts for loved ones (with a little assistance). Lighting the hanukkah is not a job for little ones, but children can be encouraged to sing along with the blessings as well as with popular Hanukkah tunes. Teach your child the basic rules of the dreidel game – instructions are easily found online – which can be played with small items such as raisins, sunflower seeds, or wrapped chocolate *gelt* (a Yiddish word meaning money).

Then there's food! Children can help scrub potatoes for latkes (traditionally eaten with applesauce and/or sour cream) – and most will happily eat *sufganiyot* for dessert! Whatever your Hanukkah celebrations, include your children as much as possible. This helps build excitement for the holiday and memories that will last a lifetime.



