

Hanukkah in a Bag: Parent's and Teacher's Guide

What's in the kit:

Activity	*What students do*
The Story of Hanukkah	Listen to a narrative of courage and the miracle of light.
PJ Library Cultural Book Reading	Age-appropriate literature highlighting cultural traditions and reinforcing shared values.
Dreidel Game	Play a hands-on game with meaning and movement. Each student can keep 1 dreidel, 5 tokens, and 1 instruction card. There are sets of 25.
Creative Reflection	Draw, write, or craft suggestions to reinforce learning.
Hanukkah Decoration	Each kit comes with a decoration for the classroom or school front office.

How the Program Works:

Parents or teachers can use this plug and play kit. Choose your presentation length.

10–15 minutes (recommended)

1. Read The Story of Hanukkah and Hanukkah 101
2. Read *Hanukkah Cookies with Sprinkles*
3. Introduce the dreidel game

30 minutes (extended)

1. Read The Story of Hanukkah and Hanukkah 101
2. Read *Hanukkah Cookies with Sprinkles*
3. Lead a short discussion
4. Play dreidel and/or do an extension activity

Why we created it:

Too often, Jewish children do not see their traditions represented in classroom celebrations. Hanukkah in a Bag builds bridges of understanding in San Antonio's schools by helping parents and teachers share Jewish culture confidently and positively. When families share their stories, children learn about the things that bring us together. You're not just teaching about Hanukkah. You're helping shape a generation of compassionate learners who can be sparks of goodness in the world.

Resources and Support:

Resource	*Link*
Jewish Federation of San Antonio	https://www.jfsatx.org/jcrc/for-educators
PJ Library Hanukkah Hub	pjlibrary.org/hanukkah

Questions? Contact:

Elizabeth Goldberg, Ph.D., Jewish Federation of San Antonio; GoldbergE@jfsatx.org; 210-302-6921

How did it go? We'd love to hear how your Hanukkah presentation went and how we can improve. Please fill out our quick post-presentation survey. Thank you! Survey link: https://bit.ly/HanukkahInABagFeedback

Common concerns Q&A:

Why teach Haunukkah?	It outshines hate. 1 in 4 Jewish students have experienced antisemitism at school (ADL, 2021) and 45% of Americans can't name a single Jewish holiday. Education stops ignorance before it becomes hate.
Is this allowed in public schools?	Yes. Cultural education is a required part of the K–5 social studies TEKS. Teaching about Hanukkah is like teaching about Diwali or Kwanzaa.
Does it meet the TEKS?	Yes. See the TEKS table in Lesson Part 2.
What if I don't teach Jewish students?	This lesson is for every class and explores universal themes of freedom, perseverance, identity, hope, and kindness.
What if I'm new to Hanukkah?	The kit has everything you need. Parent volunteers and Jewish Federation of San Antonio staff can present or train teachers to use the kit.

Parent planning checklist:

☐ Schedule your presentation for early November through December.

☐ Reach out to the teacher early using the email template below and emphasize the TEKS.

☐ Check with the teacher before bringing snacks and ask if they would like the short or extended presentation. Each kit comes with 25 sets for the dreidel game, let us know if you need more supplies.

☐ Bring Hanukkah in a Bag materials and a photo ID - you will need it to get into the school.

☐ Leave the Hanukkah decoration for the classroom or front office. Gift each child a dreidel and dreidel game sheet to take home. Parents can either keep the kit, use it in another classroom, or gift it to the teacher.

Email template: Parent communication to teachers

Subject: Request to teach a TEKS-based Hanukkah lesson to your class

> *Dear [Teacher's Name],*
> *I'm [Your Name], parent of [Child's Name] in your [grade] class. Through PJ Library and the Jewish Federation of San Antonio, I'd love to share a free Hanukkah education kit designed for public school classrooms.*
> *The kit introduces students to Hanukkah as part of our community's cultural traditions. It builds understanding, kindness, and respect for how families celebrate in different ways, while meeting TEKS standards for literacy and social studies. It includes a storybook, dreidels, simple activities, and a ready-to-use lesson plan.*
> *You can choose what works best for your class:*
> *- I can visit and teach a short (10–30 minute) lesson.*
> *- I can demonstrate and leave the kit for reuse.*
> *- You can use the kit on your own.*
> *Please let me know your preference, and we can arrange a time for me to present or bring you the kit. I look forward to sharing this with you and your students.*
> *Warm regards,*
> *[Your Name]*
> *Parent Volunteer*



Lesson Part 1: Hanukkah 101

Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday that celebrates freedom and the rededication of the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Below are activities you can do to teach about Hanukkah.

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."*
If a map is available, show students where Israel is. Explain that the story happened more than 2,000 years ago.

Step 2: Read the story aloud

Read The Story of Hanukkah (next section) slowly and clearly. Pause to ask questions, such as:

- *"Why did the Maccabees hide in the hills?"*
- *"How do you think they felt when they were told they could not practice their own traditions?"*

Step 3: Discuss and reflect

Invite students to share their thoughts. Use any of these conversation starters:

- *"What does light symbolize in this story?"*
- *"How can one small light make a big difference?"*
- *"Can you think of a time when you had to be brave or stand up for something?"*
- *"Why is it important for people to be free to celebrate their traditions?"*

Step 4: Hands-on activity (choose one or more)

- **Dreidel game:** Teach the rules with the kit's dreidels and play one round together.
- **Hanukkah songs:** Play this https://bit.ly/HanukkahPlaylist while students play dreidel or do activities.
- **Candle art:** Students color or build their own menorah pattern with paper or craft sticks.

Step 5: Wrap up

Say: *"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. How can you bring light into your classroom or community?"*

The Story of Hanukkah (*Read Aloud to the Class*)

A long time ago, more than two thousand years ago, the Jewish people lived in the land of Israel. Their land was ruled by a foreign king named **Antiochus** (an-TAI-uh-kuhs), 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 (the Jewish 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** (MA-kuh-beez), led by a man named **Judah Maccabee**. To stay safe, they fled to the hills, where they hid and made plans to win back their freedom. 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 **Holy Temple in the city of Jerusalem**, they found that the Syrian Greek armies had tried to destroy it. The Jews cleaned it, rebuilt it, and wanted to relight the **menorah** (muh-NAW-ruh), a golden lamp that stood for light, hope, and connection.

They found only **one small jar of oil**, just enough to keep their Holy Temple 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** (hah-noo-KEY-yuh). Each night, they light one more candle until all eight are shining bright. Menorahs are often placed where others can see them, like a front window at home or even a shopping mall, to remind people to **be a light in the world**. This is why Hanukkah is often called the Festival of Lights.

Families also eat foods cooked in oil, like **latkes** (LAT-kuhs) (potato pancakes) and **sufganiyot** (soof-gaa-nee-OWT) (jelly doughnuts), to remember the little jar of oil that burned for eight days. Other customs include singing songs, sharing stories, and playing the **dreidel** (DRAY-dl) game. A dreidel is a spinning top with Hebrew letters that stand for “a great miracle happened there.”

The holiday of **Hanukkah** (HAH-nuh-kuh) reminds us that **a little light can make a big difference**, that courage and hope can overcome even the darkest times, and that we should never stop standing up for the right to be true to ourselves.



Image from PJ Library



Lesson Part 2: Cultural Book Reading

Book	*Hanukkah Cookies with Sprinkles* by David Adler
Read-aloud video	Watch on YouTube (10:03): https://bit.ly/ReadAloudHanukkahCookieswithSprinkles
Themes	Generosity, compassion, community
Jewish value	*Chesed* (kindness): helping others with a full heart

Step 1: Discuss before reading:

Help students connect the story to their own experiences.
Ask: *"What does it mean to help someone?"* Invite students to share a time they helped a friend or stranger.

Step 2: Read aloud

Read the story aloud and show the pictures to build listening skills.
Say: *"Now I'm going to read the story aloud. Listen for how Sara helps Mr. Berger and how she gets others to help out as well."*

Step 3: Discuss after reading

Invite students to share their thoughts. Use any of these conversation starters:

- *"Sara found a way to help Mr. Berger, but she didn't do it alone. Why do you think it was important that Sara included her friends, teacher, and family?"*
- *"Though he needed help, Mr. Berger had a lot to offer others. What does that teach us about people?"*

Guide students to see that kindness is something everyone can do, no matter how big or small the act.

Extension activities:

- **Write or create:** Have students draw or write about a time they helped someone, alone or with others.
- **Hanukkah cookie craft:** Have students draw cookies in Hanukkah shapes like menorahs or dreidels and decorate them with glitter "sprinkles." Have them think about who they would share their cookies with.
- **Tzedakah (tze-da-KAH) charity project:** Sara got her class involved in feeding the hungry. Have students discuss a project they could do to help their own community.

Exit ticket ideas:

Grades K–2

- Draw or write one new thing you learned about Hanukkah and one question you still have.
- What was your favorite part of the story?

Grades 3–5

- How is Hanukkah similar or different from holidays your family celebrates?
- What does “bringing light into the world” mean to you?

TEKS alignment:

Grade	***ELA***	***Social Studies***
Kinder	ELA.K.5.E, ELA.K.9.E	SS.K.10, SS.K.11.A&B
1st	ELA.1.6.E	SS.1.1.B, SS.1.14.A
2nd	ELA.2.6.E	SS.2.12.A&B
3rd	ELA.3.6.E	SS.3.1.A, SS.3.2.A, SS.3.10.A&B
4th	ELA.4.6.E, ELA.4.8.B&D	SS.4.17.A
5th	ELA.5.6.E, ELA.5.8.D	SS.5.21.A

Common Questions Kids Ask:

Don't know an answer? That's fine. Tell students you'll look it up and follow up with the teacher later.

Question	***Answer***
Is Hanukkah the Jewish Christmas?	No. Both holidays happen in winter, but they celebrate different things. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. Hanukkah celebrates religious freedom and the rededication of the Jewish Temple.
Why does Hanukkah last eight nights?	The oil in the Temple was only supposed to last one day, but it burned for eight days!
Do Jewish people get presents for Hanukkah?	Some families give small gifts, but gifts aren't the main tradition. The focus is on lighting candles, playing games, and eating special foods together.
Why do we spin the dreidel?	Long ago, when Jewish people weren't allowed to study Torah (the Jewish Bible), they pretended to play dreidel if soldiers came by, to hide what they were really doing.
Why do we eat latkes?	Latkes and other foods cooked in oil remind us of the tiny amount of oil that lasted eight days in the Temple in Jerusalem.
How do you spell Hanukkah?	*Hanukkah* is a Hebrew word meaning dedication. When it is transliterated into other languages, it can be spelled many different ways. Ex: *Chanukkah, Channukah, Chanuka, Janucá, etc.*



How to Play Dreidel



Supplies:

Dreidel

At least 10 tokens per player (tokens can be any small item — dried beans, chocolate coins, pennies, etc.)

To set up, distribute the tokens evenly among the players.

Arrange yourselves in a circle. Have each player put one of their tokens into the center — the "pot."

Now take turns spinning the dreidel. When it lands, the letter facing up will tell the player what to do:

Nun: Nothing. Don't take from or add to the pot.

Gimel: All. Take all of the tokens from the pot.

Hay: Half out. Take half of the tokens from the pot.

Shin: One in. Add one token to the pot.



Anytime the pot is emptied, each player puts one token back in before the next person spins. As players run out of tokens, they're out — and the last person remaining is the winner!

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Draw the candles on the menorah

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