

Follow-up Discussion and Activities

- Students can conduct research to determine the Jewish populations in countries around the world and record this information on a world map.
- Students can create a time line that describes the steps of the founding of Israel. See *Israel: The Founding of a Modern Nation* by Maida Silverman (Dial Books for Young Readers, 1998) as a starting point for research.
- Encourage students to learn more about the Holocaust (see "A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust" at the following Web site: fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust/default.htm as an excellent resource). Using this information, students can write newspaper articles that describe what happened during the Holocaust.
- Students can research different Jewish holidays, such as Sukkot. Using this information, they can write reports that describe what happens in certain countries during various holidays.

Suggested Resources

- Penney, Sue. *Judaism*. Heinemann Library, Chicago, IL; 2001.
- Yolen, Jane. *Milk and Honey: A Year of Jewish Holidays*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, NY; 1996.
- www.uri.org/kids/world_juda.htm
This clear and informative Web site offers information about the celebrations, sacred places and basic beliefs of Judaism. Helpful teacher resources are also provided.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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COMPLETE LIST OF TITLES

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| • WHAT IS BUDDHISM? | • WHAT IS ISLAM? |
| • WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY? | • WHAT IS JUDAISM? |
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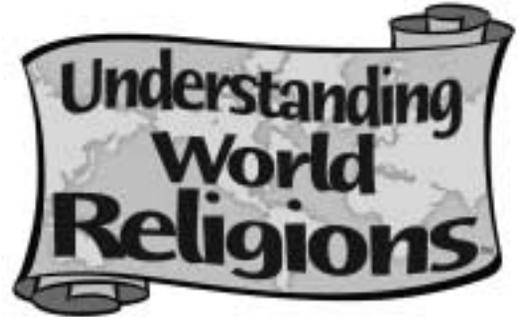
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What is Judaism?

Grades 4–7

About 14 million people around the world practice the religion known as Judaism. Jews trace their history to a man named Abraham, who they believe lived in the lands of the Middle East about 4,000 years ago. Jews believe that there is only one God, making Judaism the oldest major monotheistic religion. Jews follow God's law as a guideline for living their lives, which is found in their holy book called the Torah. Jewish families have many special traditions, like worshipping in their local synagogues, and celebrating important holidays like Rosh Hashanah.



Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in Public Schools

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Educators widely agree that religion plays a significant role in history and society. Failure to understand the basic symbols, practices and concepts of the major world religions makes much of history, literature, art and contemporary life unintelligible. Clearly, study about religion in public schools is an important part of a well-rounded education.

At the heart of this agreement about the importance of teaching about religion are three major principles:

1. The Supreme Court has repeatedly made it clear that study about religion (as distinguished from religious indoctrination) in public schools is constitutional.
2. The study of religion is tremendously important if students are to be educated about history and culture.
3. Public schools must teach about religion objectively or neutrally; their purpose must be to educate students about a variety of religious traditions, not to indoctrinate them for or against any religion.

If it is important for public schools to teach about religion, how should this be done? The answer to the “how” question begins with understanding that the public school’s approach to religion is academic, not devotional. This means that classroom discussions concerning religion must be conducted in an environment that is free from advocacy on the part of the teacher. Students may express their own religious views, as long as their comments are relevant to the discussion. *Public school teachers are required by the First Amendment to teach about religion fairly and objectively, neither promoting nor denigrating religion in general or specific religious groups in particular.*

Here are some basic guidelines for teaching about religion in a public school classroom:

- **Teach through attribution.** When discussing religion, teachers can guard against injecting personal religious beliefs by teaching through attribution (e.g., by using such phrases as “most Buddhists believe...” or “according to the Hebrew scriptures...”).
- **Be fair and balanced.** Study about religion should take place within the appropriate historical and cultural context. Decisions concerning how much to discuss religion and which religions to include in the discussion should be determined by the academic requirements of the course being taught. The First Amendment doesn’t require “equal time” but it does require sound educational reasons for decisions about when and how particular religions are included in the curriculum.
- **Avoid role-playing.** Recreating religious practices or ceremonies through role-playing activities should not take place in a public school classroom. Such activities, no matter how carefully planned or well-intentioned, may unconstitutionally involve students in religious practices. Moreover, recreations may unwittingly mock or, at the very best, oversimplify the religious meaning or intent of the ritual. Use audio-visual resources to introduce students to the ceremonies of the world’s religions. *(Continued)*

- **Use scriptures in context.** Students need to recognize that, while scriptures tell us much about the history and cultures of humankind, they are considered sacred accounts by adherents to their respective traditions. Religious documents give students of history the opportunity to examine directly how religious traditions understand divine revelation and human values. These religious accounts should always be placed in their historical and cultural contexts. Alert students to the fact that there are a variety of interpretations of scripture within each tradition.
- **Use guest speakers carefully.** Teachers should consult their school district policy concerning guest speakers. If a guest speaker is invited, care should be taken to find someone with the academic background necessary for a scholarly discussion of the religion being considered. Religious leaders may be a resource, but only if they understand the academic nature of the assignment. A better option might be religious studies faculty from local colleges or universities.
- **Respect the rights of students.** Teachers should not solicit information about the religious affiliations or beliefs of students. Students may choose on their own to express their religious views during a class discussion or as part of a writing project or art activity. This is appropriate as long as it is relevant to the subject under consideration and meets the requirements of the assignment.

Understood properly, and carried out with sensitivity, the challenge of teaching about religion in public schools is an exciting opportunity for enriching the curriculum by helping students to understand the role of religion in history and society — and the importance of religious liberty to building one nation of many peoples and faiths.

Vocabulary

Note: People from different regions of the world may have different religious practices and beliefs; they may also use different terms and have different pronunciations. As a result, this video may reflect disparities in pronunciations and religious beliefs across various regions.

Judaism — A religion practiced by about 14 million Jews worldwide. Judaism is considered to be the first major monotheistic religion.

monotheism — The belief in one God.

Ten Commandments — According to Jewish belief, God’s laws that were given to Moses, and which provide Jews with guidelines for living.

Diaspora — The scattering of Jews all over the world.

anti-Semitism — Discrimination most commonly against Jewish people.

Torah — The sacred writings of the Jewish religion.

Talmud — A collection of interpretations of the Torah.

synagogue — Also known as temple or shul, a Jewish place of worship.

Sabbath — A day of rest and worship observed by Jews from Friday evening to Saturday evening.

cantor — The person who leads songs and prayers at Jewish worship services.

rabbi — Jewish religious leader.

kosher — Following special dietary laws taken from Hebrew scripture.