



Parent Toolkit for Jewish American Heritage Month

Information pulled from the Jewish Federations of North America JAHM Toolkit

May is [Jewish American Heritage Month \(JAHM\)](#), an opportunity to recognize the culture and history of the American Jewish community and the significant contributions of Jewish Americans to American society.

Celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month can include engaging in educational initiatives, hosting cultural events, and taking part in activities that highlight the rich history and contributions of Jewish Americans, with an eye towards fostering greater understanding, appreciation, and inclusivity within our society.

Background

History of JAHM

Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM), established by a Presidential proclamation in May 2006, honors and celebrates the contributions of Jewish Americans to society. During this month, we are reminded that discrimination against Jewish people—or any group—undermines the core principles of justice, inclusion, and liberty that define the American identity, making antisemitism inherently anti-American. JAHM offers a chance to celebrate the rich diversity within the Jewish American community while reflecting on its significant impact on society. It fosters education and awareness, promoting a deeper understanding and appreciation of Jewish American culture among people of all backgrounds. Through events, discussions, and activities, JAHM encourages community engagement and brings people together to celebrate shared values of inclusivity, tolerance, and respect. Additionally, JAHM provides an important platform for outreach and collaboration in the fight against antisemitism and other forms of hate.



[Influential Jewish Americans](#)

[Here](#) you can access printable posters on some amazing Jewish Americans we are highlighting this year to share with partners in your community. We invite you to showcase these printable posters in your classrooms, offices, break rooms, and community spaces. This is a great way to highlight these individuals and foster broader community awareness.

For additional Jewish Americans of note, see [Introducing the Forward 125: The American Jews who shaped our world](#) (December 23, 2022).

Sample Parent Letter

Dear Principal XXX,

I hope this email finds you well! I am reaching out as a parent of a Jewish student in X grade at X school to make sure you are aware that May is Jewish American Heritage Month.

Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM) is an opportunity to recognize the culture and history of the American Jewish community and the significant contributions of Jewish Americans to American society.

Celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month can include engaging in educational initiatives, hosting cultural events, and taking part in activities that highlight the rich history and contributions of Jewish Americans, with an eye towards fostering greater understanding, appreciation, and inclusivity within our society. The Weitzman Museum of Jewish American History has the following webpage dedicated to resources for educators of all ages to mark the month: jewishamericanheritage.org/educator-resources.

There are many ways to help your Jewish students feel seen this month, including:

1. Posting to social media or sending out a community-wide email with a message about the Month
2. Creating a school-wide display with information about influential Jewish Americans and their accomplishments
3. Highlight books or lessons with modern Jewish American protagonists



JAHM is a meaningful opportunity for educators across the country to engage with members of the community and I hope you will join with me in recognizing and celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month this May.

We have countless other resources available and I look forward to working with you to create a more inclusive school environment for all of our students.

Sincerely,
XXXXXXXXXX

Educational Resources

JAHM provides a wonderful opportunity to educate students about the significant contributions of Jewish Americans and the importance of diversity and inclusion. We encourage educators to explore lesson plans created by Jewish organizations, available for a range of grade levels. These resources are designed to engage students and deepen their understanding of Jewish history, culture, and values. By incorporating these lessons into your curriculum, you can help foster an environment of respect and appreciation for the diversity that strengthens our communities.

[Institute for Curriculum Services](#)

- [Lesson plan](#) on Jewish Americans for Grades 6-12.
- [Lesson plan](#) on Jewish immigration to the US for grades 6-12.

[Prizmah](#)

- [Resources](#) on antisemitism for schools and students.

[Virtual Exhibits on American Jewish History](#)

- American Jewish Historical Society [Emma Lazarus Project](#).
- Weitzman National Museum [virtual tours and online exhibitions](#).



Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History

- Send [this](#) letter to the public libraries in your community to engage them in JAHM.
- Send [this](#) letter to public school administrators in your community to engage them in JAHM.
- Resources and toolkit [for educators](#) to use in their classrooms and for professional development.

Additional educator resources:

- [Videos, articles and additional classroom resources](#) on Jewish Americans by UnPacked for Educators
- [Nine ideas for teaching Jewish American Heritage month](#) at all grade levels from the Anti-Defamation League
- [Celebrating and Affirming Jewish American Kids](#) from Nickelodeon and the USC Shoah Foundation
- [Children's book recommendations](#) on Jewish Americans by grade level from PJ Library
- [Project Shema's JAHM program](#) on how Jewish stories are inherently American stories.
- Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History's JAHM [commercial video](#), available for sharing.
- Jewish Federations [book list collection](#) organized by grade level and includes books that celebrate various aspects of Jewish identity and Jewish historical figures, along with a list of Jewish authors who write both fiction and nonfiction on Jewish identity and other subjects.

Sample Programming for Schools

1. **Guest Speakers** – Invite local Jewish community members, rabbis, educators, veterans, business executives, or Holocaust survivors to speak about their experiences and contributions to society.
2. **Cultural Exploration** – Teach students about Jewish customs, foods, holidays, and traditions (e.g., Shabbat, Passover, Hanukkah). If possible, organize a classroom celebration or activity related to these traditions. Consider the diversity of food and traditions that Jewish immigrants from around the world brought to the United States.



3. **Book Readings & Discussions** – Introduce age-appropriate books by Jewish authors or about Jewish history. Follow up with class discussions on what makes the book Jewish, and how the story and experiences in the book are the same or different from other American stories. Themes may include tolerance, overcoming adversity, justice, heritage and inclusivity.
4. **Oral History Projects** – Assign students to interview a Jewish community member or research first-hand accounts of Jewish American experiences.
5. **School-Wide JAHM Display** – Organize a hallway or library display featuring Jewish American figures, books, and historical moments.
6. **Social Media Awareness Campaign** – Have students create educational social media posts about Jewish American history and contributions.
7. **Field Trips** – Connect with your local Jewish or Holocaust museum to visit and learn about topics related to Jewish American heritage, such as immigration, religious traditions, overcoming adversity, philanthropy, and activism. Or, go on a virtual field trip to the American Jewish Historical Society's [Emma Lazarus Project](#).
8. **Film Screening** – Show age-appropriate films or documentaries about Jewish American history, culture, or significant Jewish figures, followed by a reflection or discussion on themes of identity, resilience, and cultural heritage.
 - a. Kids films: *Fiddler on the Roof*, *An American Tail*, *Hand in Hand*
 - b. Young Adult/Adult films: *Crossing Delancey*, *Keeping the Faith*, *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Keeping Up With the Steins*, *Funny Girl*, *The Fablemans*
9. **Organize a community service project** – Such as a volunteer day at a local food bank to support low-income Jewish families or a visit to a Jewish senior center or retirement home to engage with and assist community members in need. Reach out to your local Jewish Federation to learn about volunteer opportunities in your area.



History of the Jewish American Community

So what does it mean to be Jewish? in the words of Rabbi Yehiel Poupko of the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago: “Jews are a family that became a faith that stayed a family.” Jewish tradition has religious, cultural, historical, culinary, linguistic, social, and ethical aspects. Not all members of our Jewish family believe or practice in the same way, but we all care about each other – wherever we are and whatever branch of the family we are from. It means that Jews from Morocco care about Jews from China and Jews from Israel care about Jews from America (and vice versa). Familial connection and diversity of that family are strengths that have helped us remain a vibrant and living tradition for nearly four millennia.

Jews first came to what are now the United States before we were even a country. Jewish refugees from what is now Brazil fled the Portuguese and their renewal of the Inquisition against the Jews in their colonies as early as the 17th century. These [Sephardic Jews came to New Amsterdam \(the Dutch colonial precursor to New York City\) by boat in 1654](#), but were kept offshore by the antisemitic governor of New Amsterdam, Peter Stuyvesant. Only after their coreligionists in the Netherlands intervened did these Sephardic Jews disembark and begin putting down roots.

The Jewish population remained rather small in the newly founded United States until the 1820s, with Jews settling in northeastern cities like New York and Philadelphia and southern cities like Charleston and Savannah. When [German Jews began to immigrate](#) in search of opportunity, many settled in New York and became successful in business and contributed socially and philanthropically to the United States. These immigration patterns shifted as pogroms and antisemitism in Eastern Europe and Russia increased; the growth of railways and steam-powered boats along with open immigration laws enabled [2.5 million Jews](#) to come to the United States between 1880 and 1924.

These Eastern European Jews were poorer and more poorly educated on average than their German and Sephardic predecessors but rapidly acculturated, adding greatly to American culture, society, business, politics, labor organizing, civil rights and feminist movements, and higher education. Some scholars have suggested that these Eastern European Jews conformed



to German Jewish ideals and institutions – joining education, hard work, family, and social progress with Jewish tradition, practices, and values.

Yet Jews in America eventually came up with specific practices, prayer books, and norms. They have risen in every area of American life, showing a unique combination of a love of country and a sense of unique belonging in the Jewish family of families. With nearly 7.5 million Jews in America today, we celebrate some who have made transformational contributions to the country they call home.