



Ethnic Studies Lesson 6A: Jewish American Identity

TOPIC:

JEWISH AMERICAN HISTORY

GRADE LEVELS:

11-12

TIME:

1½ HOURS

California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

Themes:

1. Identity
2. History and Movement

Values and Principles:

1. Cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).
2. Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by providing a space to share their stories of success, community collaboration, and solidarity, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth.
3. Center and place high value on the precolonial ancestral knowledge, narratives, and communal experiences of Native People/s and people of color and groups that are typically marginalized in society.

California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)**

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text. (RI.11-12.4)

Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)**

Analyze the historical development and impact of Jewish American culture, including its origins, traditions, and contributions to American society. (7.10)

Lesson Purpose

Students will determine what they know about Jewish American origins and culture.

Essential Questions

What do we know about Jewish Americans' origin and culture, and what do we want to learn?

How has life changed for Jewish Americans in the United States over the last 350 years?

Materials

[TED-Ed, The five major world religions](#)

[Judaism 101](#)

[Unpacked, The History of Jewish Life in America](#)

[WORKSHEET](#)

[My Jewish Learning](#)

[Jewish Virtual Library, American Zionism](#)

[International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism: Who Is a Jew?](#)

[Unit 6 KWL Chart](#)

Vocabulary

Judaism	diaspora	anti-Semitism
orthodox	Treifa Medina	Yiddish
secular	kosher	Shabbat
nativists	Torah	Zionism
Johnson-Reed Act	Sephardic	

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, present the [unit 6 KWL chart](#) to the class. Ask students what they already know about Jewish American history in the US. What do they remember about previous videos shared in this course about the formation of the Jewish religion? Replay, from minutes 2:24 to 4:19, [TED-Ed, The five major world religions](#) (video 11 minutes, 9 seconds) to remind students about the Jewish faith, or Judaism. After watching the video, note what students already know about Jewish Americans and what questions they have and would like to pursue as well on this unit's KWL chart.
- Have students watch [Unpacked, The History of Jewish Life in America](#) (video 7 minutes, 59 seconds). As students watch, ask them to take notes on what aspects of Jewish American identity are based on religion, nationality, or culture/ethnicity. Show students this week's shared [WORKSHEET](#). Watch the video together as a class for the first 1 minute and 37 seconds. On the shared worksheet, help students see that Jewish identity in the first 200 years of US history came from many different lands, including Brazil, Germany, Poland, and others, and fighting on behalf of their new country, America. They also

would have liked to build a synagogue—a symbol of their religion. Let students continue watching the video and taking notes on the shared table. Stop the video frequently to review the lesson’s vocabulary.

- When students have finished watching the video, have them pair up with one other student to review their notes and continue adding to the shared worksheet. When students are done sharing, as a class, discuss what aspects of Jewish American culture are religious, based on a nation, cultural/ethnic, or other.

Step 2:

- Break students into four groups and have them go through the following stations for about fifteen minutes at each station. As students go through a station, have them look for evidence that highlights Jewish identity as a religion, nation, or culture/ethnicity. Have students continue to take notes on the shared WORKSHEET and be careful to cite their sources.
 - [Judaism 101](#)
 - [My Jewish Learning](#)
 - [Jewish Virtual Library, American Zionism](#)
 - [International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism: Who Is a Jew?](#) (video 3 minutes, 14 seconds)
- When students have completed their stations, as a class, have groups share their notes. Help students to see that American Jewish identity is complicated, has a long history, and is constantly changing.

Step 3:

- As a class, ask students this lesson’s questions, “What do we know about Jewish American culture, and what do we want to learn?” Also ask this unit’s question, “How has life changed for Jewish Americans over the last 350 years?” Make note of what was learned on this unit’s KWL chart—along with additional questions.

Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

As time allows and for homework, have students select an individual from [American Jewish Committee: Amazing Jewish Americans](#). As students select an individual, they should write a long paragraph on how this individual exemplifies Jewish American identity.

Additional Readings and Resources

Bernstein, David E. *Classified: The Untold Story of Racial Classification in America*. Bombardier, 2022.

Glazer, Nathan, and Daniel P. Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*. M.I.T. Press, 1963.

Kedourie, Elie. *Nationalism*, 4th ed. Wiley-Blackwell, 1993.

[Library of Congress: From Haven to Home: 250 Years of Jewish Life in America](#)

Sowell, Thomas. “Are Jews Generic?” In *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*. Encounter Books, 2005, 65-110.

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America: A History*. Basic Books, 1981, 69-99.

Sowell, Thomas. *Migrations and Cultures*. Basic Books, 1997, chap. 6, 234-308.

Thomas SowellTV. “The Cultural Habits That Contribute to Jewish Success.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXn2eD34Jnw&t=39s>

Thomas SowellTV. “The Hatred behind Jews, Igbos, and Chinese Explained.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-GWzzBm4ixQ&t=48s>

NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES: America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

Ethnic Studies 6A: KWL Chart

KNOW

WONDER

LEARNED

What do we think we already know about this topic?

What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.

After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.

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Ethnic Studies 6A: Jewish American Identity

IDENTITY FROM	EXAMPLES
<p>Religion/Faith Practices</p>	
<p>Culture and Ethnicity</p>	
<p>Nationalism—American, Zionist, Country of Origin (Europe, Africa, Asia)</p>	
<p>Other</p>	