

# Jewish Identity: Many Layers

 45 min

 GRADES 6-8

## LESSON PLAN

### LENS/DOMAIN

Jewish Identity

### SUBJECT

Diversity

### TOPIC

Jewish Peoplehood

In this lesson, students will explore what Judaism is, who the Jewish people are, and how identity can be noticeable, hidden, and shaped over time.

## Enduring Understandings

- Jewish identity has more than one part (religion, culture, community, history, values, traditions).
- Jewish people are diverse (different backgrounds, places, races, cultures, and ways of practicing).
- Identity is layered and can change over time, across places, in response to safety, through the lifecycle, and beyond.

## Essential Questions

1. What is Judaism?
2. Who are Jews / the Jewish people, and how are Jews diverse?
3. Who determines identity (me, others, community)?
4. How do the parts of our identities that are noticeable to others or known only when shared affect us? How do these parts of us impact the perceptions people have?

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## Readiness

 10 MIN

[The provided slideshow](#) will take you through the Readiness, Input, and Output activities for your students to follow along.

The Readiness section provides an opportunity to activate your students' prior knowledge and connect to their lived experiences. To begin, ask students to reflect on their identity and the communities that they are part of (slide 3). The following slide (slide 4) asks students to reflect on their prior knowledge of Jewish people.

Provide each student with a copy of the "[NOTE Chart: Jewish People & Jewish Identity](#)," graphic organizer. Instruct the students to work on them as you go through slides 3 and 4. All of the resources from this lesson can be found in [this folder](#).

## Input

 20 MIN

**(Introduce new content through short presentation + guided discussion)**

Judaism and Jewish culture can mean different things to different people. Slides 6-15 provide some background information on what Judaism is, what connects the Jewish people, and some of the customs that make up the Jewish people. Speaker notes are available on the slideshow to help guide you.

Remind students to continue adding to their charts.

The next section, slides 16-20—including a brief film on slide 19—are meant to show the diversity of the Jewish community. Jews come from all over the world and encompass different races and cultures.

Slides 21-23 are meant to build on your students' ideas about how people talk about their Jewish identity. With examples from Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Jonathan Sacks, these quotes showcase the different ways people express their Jewish identity. How do these different perspectives add to your students' understanding of Jewish peoplehood?

Provide students a few minutes to add to their charts.

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### Output

 15 MIN

(Students respond, reflect, and show understanding)

Provide students with the [iceberg worksheet](#). Explain that only a small part of an iceberg is above the waterline, while most of the iceberg is beneath the surface. Tell students that like icebergs, some parts of identity are noticeable to others, while other aspects of their identity are known only when we share them.

Explain to your students that they will be filling in the worksheet with aspects of one's identity that are noticeable and some that are known only when shared with others. For this activity, students can choose to focus on their own identity, an imaginary student's identity, or a celebrity's identity.

This lesson plan has been adapted from resources by the [Institute for Curriculum Services](#) and [the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History](#).

### Add-on Exit Slip or Museum Prep Question (if students are visiting 48 Jews exhibition)

Direct students to write one question they still have about either Jewish identity or their own identity:

- "After today's discussion about identity, I am curious about..."
- "A question I'd like to ask a family member or friend about identity is..."
- "When I visit the exhibit, I want to find out..."

### TEACHER TIPS:

**Pre-teach key vocabulary** such as identity, culture, tradition, diversity, visible, hidden, stereotype, and community.

**Explain early** that Jewish identity is not one-dimensional and can include religion, culture, history, traditions, family, community, and peoplehood.

**Video link:** the video is embedded on slide 19. If you prefer a safeshare.tv video to YouTube or have trouble with the embedded link, please find the safeshare.tv link in the presentation notes.

**Before the exit slip,** ask students to name one way their thinking changed or expanded to help them synthesize the lesson.

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### TEACHER TIPS (continued):

*If stereotypes or overgeneralizations arise*, redirect briefly and move on.

**The goal of this lesson is to build understanding of Jewish identity**, not to center stereotypes. You do not need to shut down every response immediately, but you do need to revisit and **clarify anything misleading before moving on**. This part of the lesson works best when students feel safe to think out loud while also being guided toward accuracy. **Name the issue, reset the tone if needed, and return students to the lesson content.**

### Examples of redirection:

- “Let’s shift from assumptions to evidence from the lesson.”
- “That language is not accurate or respectful, so let’s reset.”
- “Our goal today is to learn about Jewish identity, not to focus on stereotypes.”

### WISCONSIN MODEL ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

#### *For Social Studies:*

##### *SS.Inq 1.a.m:*

*Formulate open-ended questions for further research within one or more disciplines. Rationale: Students begin with identity reflection, prior knowledge, and lingering questions, and the exit slip asks them to generate a question they still have.*

##### *SS.BH1.a.m:*

*Identify patterns such as culture, prior knowledge, family, peers, school, communities, and personal interests that influence a person’s identity and development. Rationale: This lesson is fundamentally about how identity is layered, shaped by community and context, and not always visible*

#### *For English Language Arts:*

*SL.6.1 / SL.7.1 / SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing one's own clearly.*

*Rationale: The lesson is built around reflection, guided discussion, and responding to ideas about identity and peoplehood.*

*L.6.6 / L.7.6 / L.8.6 Acquire and use grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases. Rationale: Students are working with discipline-specific vocabulary such as identity, diversity, culture, traditions, community, and peoplehood.*

*W.6.2 / W.7.2 / W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly. Rationale: The iceberg worksheet and exit slip ask students to explain aspects of identity and reflect on understanding, though this is a lighter fit than speaking/listening. We suggest you attach this standard to this lesson only if you require students to write complete sentences, not single-word labels.*