THE TEACHING GUIDES

Teaching the Youngest Grades

One lesson, one theme, or a year · Free, ready to teach · Grades K–5

Start at your size. One lesson tomorrow: the featured lesson, Where Did the Synagogue Come From?, grades 3 to 5, forty minutes. One theme: six to choose from, each with a ready-to-teach lesson, a shelf of verified books, and labeled outside resources. The year: nine lessons laid across a scope and sequence at teachjewishhistory.org/modules-k5-scope-and-sequence.

Every lesson is built for classrooms and also works at a kitchen table with one child. Each words-to-know card ends with a note for families. Every page opens as a clean, print-ready PDF, so handouts are one click.

THE STORY SO FAR, FOR YOU

Five sentences of background for you, the teacher. The K–5 lessons themselves introduce Jewish life and culture the way the early grades introduce any people. The hatred is not a K–5 subject, and the program says plainly what belongs at this age and what does not: teachjewishhistory.org/k5.

1. The Jews are a people, with a faith, a language, and a calendar, more than 3,000 years old. /topic-who-are-the-jews

2. Their homeland is the Land of Israel, where their two Temples stood in Jerusalem. /topic-land-of-israel · /topic-temples

3. The diaspora spread Jewish communities across the world, before and after the Second Temple fell in the year 70, and some always remained in the land. /topic-diaspora · /topic-continuous-presence

4. Wherever they lived, they kept the same book, the same calendar, and the same hope of return. /topic-sacred-texts · /topic-calendar

5. The hatred they met kept changing its reasons, faith, then money, then race, but the target never changed. /topic-adversus-judaeos · /topic-nazi-synthesis

Before you teach: the ground rules

Teaching about a tradition in a public school is settled ground. Public schools teach about religion as history and culture, not as practice. The Supreme Court drew that line in 1963, in Abington School District v. Schempp. The working rule: academic, not devotional. The class studies a tradition and does not practice one. The lessons are built that way: a holiday is explained, never observed.

What belongs at this age, and what does not. The Holocaust itself is not the subject here. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gears its own teaching materials to grade six and above, and the state commissions whose guidance reaches the early grades start with foundations. Where rescue stories reach the upper elementary grades, the entry point is people helping people, never the camps.

What the commissions ask for. A 2026 federal review found that 42 of the 50 states and D.C. require Holocaust education through academic standards or state law, most of it aimed at middle and high school. Several reach the elementary grades, among them New Jersey, Illinois, Oregon, and Texas. The commissions' early-grade guidance starts with understanding difference, prejudice, and respect. The Texas commission lists introducing Jewish identity among its elementary themes, so that later Holocaust instruction has ground to stand on. The full section: teachjewishhistory.org/k5.

THEME 1 · Who are the Jewish people?

Jews are a people and a civilization, with a shared history, language, homeland, and culture, not only a religion. Families who look different and live in different countries all belong to one global people. A good first answer to "what is a Jew?" is "a member of a very old people," before it is about belief at all.

> **One People, Many Faces** · grades K–5, in two tracks · thirty-five to forty minutes.
> teachjewishhistory.org/modules-people-teacher-guide

THEME 2 · What is Judaism?

The tradition dimension: the Torah as a handwritten scroll, the synagogue as a gathering place, the rhythm of a week that ends with Shabbat. Taught the way the curriculum already teaches any tradition, through what people do and the places they gather, not doctrine.

> ★ **Featured lesson · Where Did the Synagogue Come From?** · grades 3–5 · forty minutes. The fullest lesson, and the right first one. Print: Words to know, Timeline cards, Inside a synagogue.
> teachjewishhistory.org/modules-temple-and-first-synagogues-teacher-guide

> **A Shabbat Table** · grades K–2 · thirty-five minutes · the weekly rhythm, taught through what families do. teachjewishhistory.org/modules-shabbat-teacher-guide

THEME 3 · What do they believe and celebrate?

Best taught as what a child can see and mark: the holidays across the year (Rosh Hashanah, Hanukkah, Passover, Purim), each with its own foods, objects, and stories. A holiday is visible in a classroom before a single belief needs explaining. The values come in Theme 6.

> **The Jewish Year** · grades K–2 · forty minutes · the holiday wheel, with matching handouts.
> teachjewishhistory.org/modules-jewish-year-teacher-guide

THEME 4 · Jewish communities around the world

Jewish families have lived in Iraq, Yemen, Morocco, Ethiopia, India, Spain, Poland, and the United States, each with its own foods, music, and dress. Seeing that range shows children one people spread across the whole world, not a single image.

> **Jewish Communities Around the World** · grades 3–4 · forty minutes, with a map handout and community cards. teachjewishhistory.org/modules-communities-teacher-guide

> **Three Voices, One Country** · grades 3–5 · forty minutes · the American chapter of the story, with a decode-the-timeline handout. teachjewishhistory.org/modules-america-teacher-guide

THEME 5 · Stories, foods, music, and words

The lived culture a child can taste, hear, and say: folktales, challah and latkes, klezmer and Sephardi song, and the Hebrew and Yiddish words that have entered English. A sensory doorway the youngest students can walk through.

> **Stories, Foods, and Words** · grades K–5 · forty-five to fifty minutes, in three stations.
> teachjewishhistory.org/modules-stories-teacher-guide

> **Your Name in Hebrew Letters** · grades K–5, in two tracks · thirty-five to forty minutes · the alphabet as a doorway, with a write-your-name handout. teachjewishhistory.org/modules-hebrew-teacher-guide

THEME 6 · How Jewish people try to live

Mitzvot, good deeds that are also commandments. Tzedakah, giving as a kind of justice rather than charity. Chesed, kindness no one can repay. Tikkun olam, the idea that the world is ours to help repair. Many of these are values children meet in other traditions too, which makes them a natural place to begin: a familiar idea in an unfamiliar community.

> **Doing Good: Jewish Values** · grades 3–5 · forty minutes · the ideas, lived through action.
> teachjewishhistory.org/modules-values-teacher-guide

> **What the site adds TO YOUR EARLY GRADES**
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> This program introduces Jewish life the way the early grades introduce any people: a synagogue, a Shabbat table, the holidays, communities around the world, the words and stories a people carries with it.

What Teach Jewish History is

It's ready. Nine planned lessons with handouts, words-to-know cards, and book lists.

It fits. The space K–5 social studies already gives to world cultures and communities, with no new instructional time.

It's solid ground. Built the way public schools teach about any tradition.

It's free, with no logins and no ads.

Do I need background?

No. The story so far on page one is your background, each lesson guide says what to say, and every words-to-know card defines its terms. If you can lead a read-aloud, you can teach these.

If a parent asks

The class studies a tradition and does not practice one. The rule is public, on the program page.

The classroom toolkit

- **The scope and sequence.** The nine lessons laid across a school year. teachjewishhistory.org/modules-k5-scope-and-sequence
- **Handouts and words-to-know cards.** Every lesson's printables, linked from its guide, each card ending with a note for families.
- **The book shelves.** Verified books for every theme, from folktales to All-of-a-Kind Family, each listed on its theme at teachjewishhistory.org/k5.
- **The Museum.** Manuscripts, coins, and objects, each credited to the institution that holds it. One object, projected, opens a class. teachjewishhistory.org/museum
- **Virtual Field Trips.** Visits to historic sites and Jewish quarters, from your projector. teachjewishhistory.org/field-trips
- **The Incident Record.** Documented antisemitic incidents of the contemporary era, each entry ending with its record: a verdict, a plea, or an official finding. teachjewishhistory.org/incident-record
- **When symbols and hate enter the classroom.** The K–5 page holds a section for the day hate symbols show up, with ADL's grade-banded lessons. teachjewishhistory.org/k5

Where teachers already go

The program names the strong K–5 materials established institutions provide. They include the Institute for Curriculum Services (free, standards-aligned lessons on Judaism and ancient Israel), PBS LearningMedia (video and lesson resources), and Holocaust Museum Houston's Young Upstanders toolkit for upper-elementary themes of kindness and standing up (preview for fit). Each is linked, and labeled by what it is, at teachjewishhistory.org/k5.

The six themes need no new instructional time. They map to the elementary frameworks most states use, with New York's K–8 Social Studies Framework as the worked example on the program page.

Find your way on the site

Home · teachjewishhistory.org
The K–5 program, the six themes in full · /k5
The Curriculum Gap, why the site exists · /curriculum-gap
Table of Contents, the whole site on one page · /table-of-contents
For Teachers, the guides, a self-paced course, and registration for updates · /for-teachers

The chapters, unit by unit

Each chapter on this shelf can anchor a lesson for the older grades. For you it is background: the full story behind the six themes, one chapter at a time. The K–5 lessons named above are their own pages, written for young children.

Unit 1 · The Jewish World · /section-1
Who Are the Jews? · The Land of Israel · The Continuous Jewish Presence in the Land · The First and Second Temples · The Synagogue · The Sacred Texts · The Calendar & the Cycle of the Year · Ritual Objects and Material Culture · The Jewish Life Cycle · The Diaspora

Unit 2 · Communities Across the World · /section-2
A Connected People · The Jews of Iraq · The Jews of Iran · The Jews of North Africa · The Departure from MENA · The Jews of Spain and the Sephardic World · The Jews of Poland and Lithuania · Soviet Jewry · American Jewry · Ethiopian Jewry, Beta Israel · The Modern State of Israel

Unit 3 · The Evolution of Antisemitism · /section-3
Adversus Judaeos · The Blood Libel · The Ghetto System · The Expulsions · The Racial Turn of 1879 · The Russian Pogroms · The Protocols Forgery · The Nazi Synthesis · The Dhimma · The Eastward Turn · The Terror Record · Contemporary Antisemitism

Unit 4 · The Holocaust Era · /section-4
The Years Before the Killing · Aktion T-4 · The Nazi Ghettos · The Camp System · The Einsatzgruppen · The Holocaust in the Middle East and North Africa · Jewish Resistance & Rescue

Unit 5 · Jewish Contributions · /section-5
Across the Fields · Rashi · Maimonides · Joseph Karo · Moses Mendelssohn · Levi Strauss · Emma Lazarus · Samuel Gompers · Theodor Herzl · Albert Einstein · The Founders of Hollywood · Jonas Salk

Unit 6 · Memory, Responsibility, and Today · /section-6
Liberation and the Displaced Persons · The Postwar Trials · Hannah Arendt · Postwar Restitution · The Memory Architecture · Nostra Aetate · Holocaust Denial and the Response · The Afterlife of the Image · The Hatred That Outlived the War

Teach Jewish History (teachjewishhistory.org) is a free online textbook of Jewish history and the history of antisemitism, built from primary sources. It was built to close a gap: in many standard textbooks, the Jewish people appear in the ancient world, then reappear more than two thousand years later as victims of the Holocaust, a history with no in-between. The K–5 program is where the closing begins: children meet a living people and its culture first, at the same age their classrooms introduce other peoples. If you teach one lesson, tell us how it went: education@teachjewishhistory.org.

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