

Hanukkah or Chanukah, the Jewish Festival of Lights

Sometime in December

The Jewish festival of Hanukkah, or Chanukah, is also called the Festival of Lights. It lasts for eight days and usually occurs in December, although in some years it may start in November. It commemorates not only the triumph of the Maccabees over the great army of the Syrian king, Antiochus IV, in 165 B.C., but also the universal message that all people have the right to be free.

After the Jews had won their battle, they went to their temple and found that the Syrians had brought in statues of their own gods. The eternal light had been allowed to go out. The Jews rekindled the light, but they had only enough oil to keep it burning for one day, and it would take eight days for a messenger to get more oil. The miracle of Hanukkah is that the oil kept burning for eight days, long enough for the messenger to return with more. Jews use a candleholder called the *menorah* to symbolize this miracle. It holds nine candles. One, the *shamus*, is used to light the others. They stand for the eight days that the oil kept burning.

Hanukkah is celebrated by lighting the candles of the menorah, playing games of chance with a spinning top called a *dreidel*, and eating special holiday foods such as potato pancakes called latkes. Children often receive a gift on each night of Hanukkah in addition to Hanukkah *gelt* (money). This gelt sometimes consists of chocolate wrapped in gold foil to look like money.



Making It Work

Invite a parent of one of your students to give a Hanukkah party in your classroom. This can be very simple or very festive, but it should include at least one traditional food, some gelt, and a chance to play the dreidel game.

If no parent is willing or able to give a party for you, you can easily give one yourself with the help of a Jewish delicatessen. Gelt can be purchased everywhere in its little net bags. A student in your class will probably know how to play the dreidel game, but if not, directions can be found on page 91

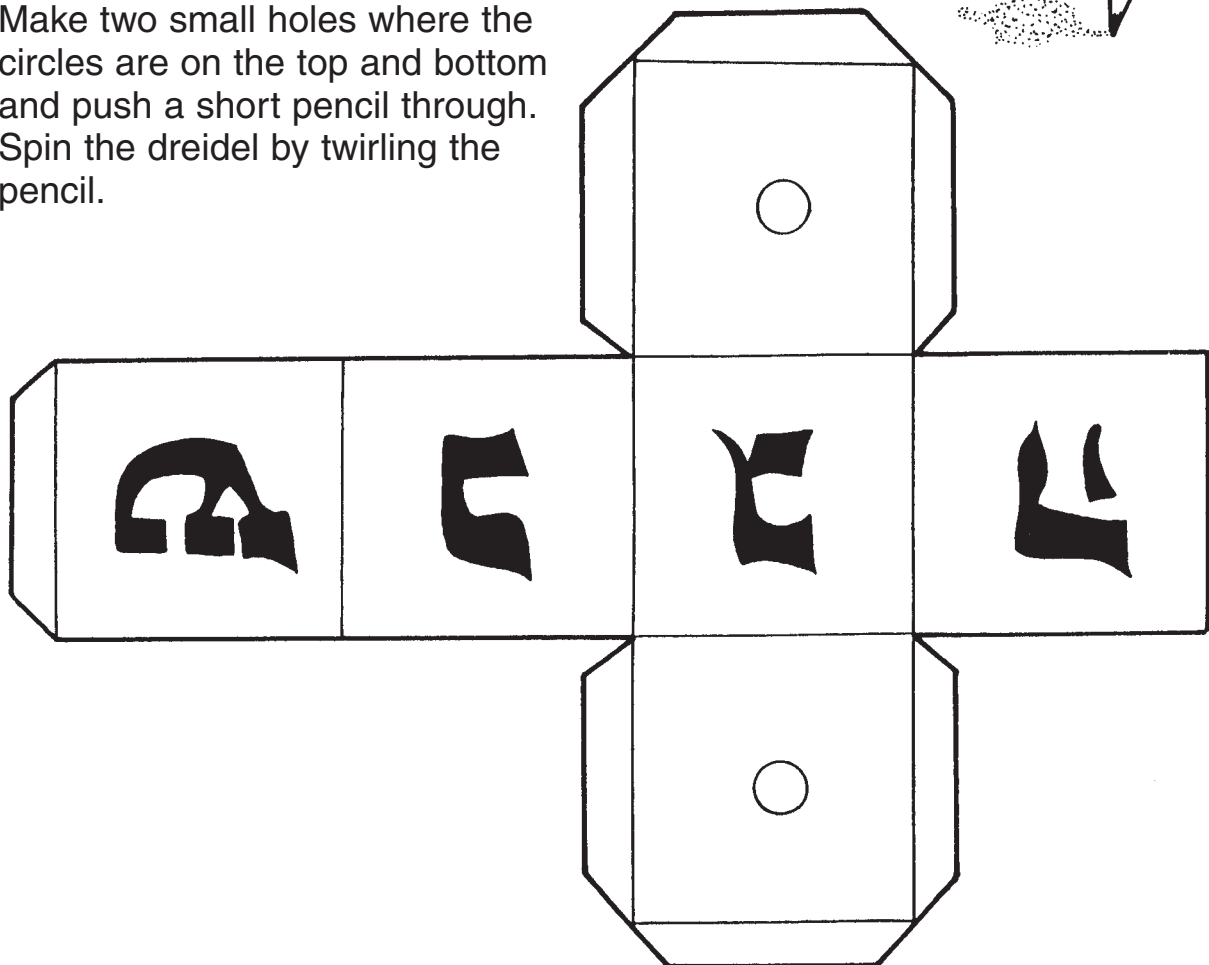
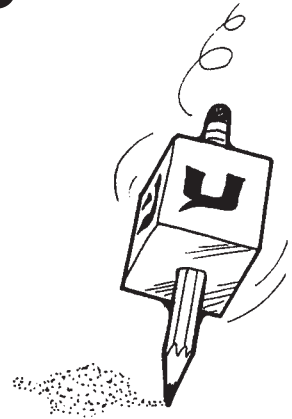
Buy inexpensive plastic dreidels for your students or have each student make his or her own. (See page 91.)

Beautiful Hanukkah cards can be made easily. Fold blue paper into a card shape. Lay the cut-out shape of a candle on the front of the card. Lightly sponge thin white tempera paint over the entire front. Carefully lift away the candle. Allow to dry and write a message inside. (See page 92.)

The Dreidel Game

Making a Dreidel:

1. Cut out the dreidel along the solid lines.
2. Fold along the dotted lines and glue or tape together so you have a box shape.
3. Make two small holes where the circles are on the top and bottom and push a short pencil through. Spin the dreidel by twirling the pencil.



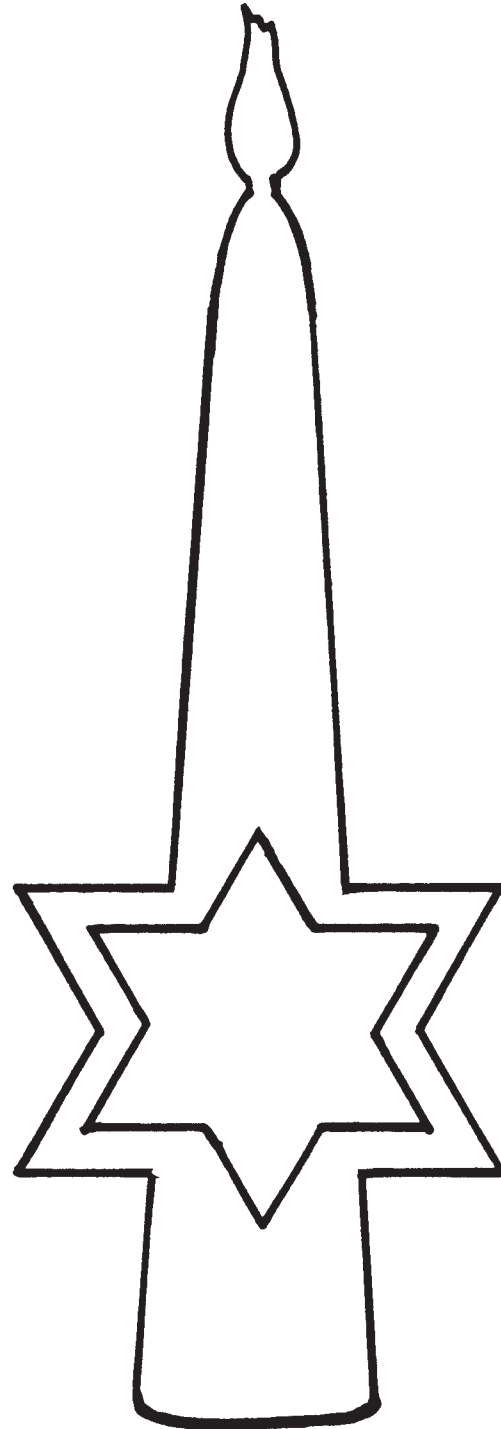
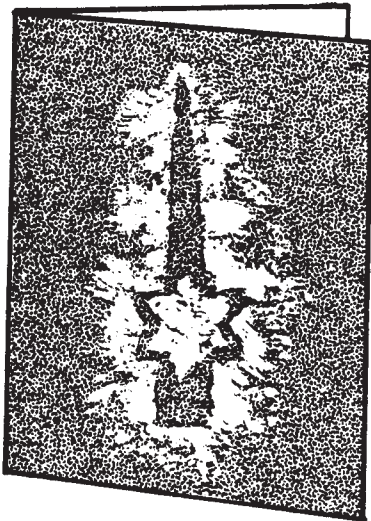
Playing the Dreidel Game:

The dreidel is a four-sided top. Each side has a Hebrew letter on it: *nun*, *gimmel*, *hay*, and *shin*. These four letters stand for the Hebrew words that mean “a great miracle happened there.” The players sit in a circle. Each player receives an equal number of tokens (buttons, nuts, gelt) and puts five from his or her pile into the center. Everyone takes turns spinning the dreidel. The letter on top when the dreidel stops spinning tells what to do. *Nun*: Do nothing. *Gimmel*: Take the center pile. *Hay*: Take half the center pile. *Shin*: Give half of your pile. Players who lose all of their tokens are out. The last player with tokens is the winner.

Making a Hanukkah Card

Materials:

- blue construction paper
- candle pattern
- white tempera paint
- paintbrush or sponge



Directions:

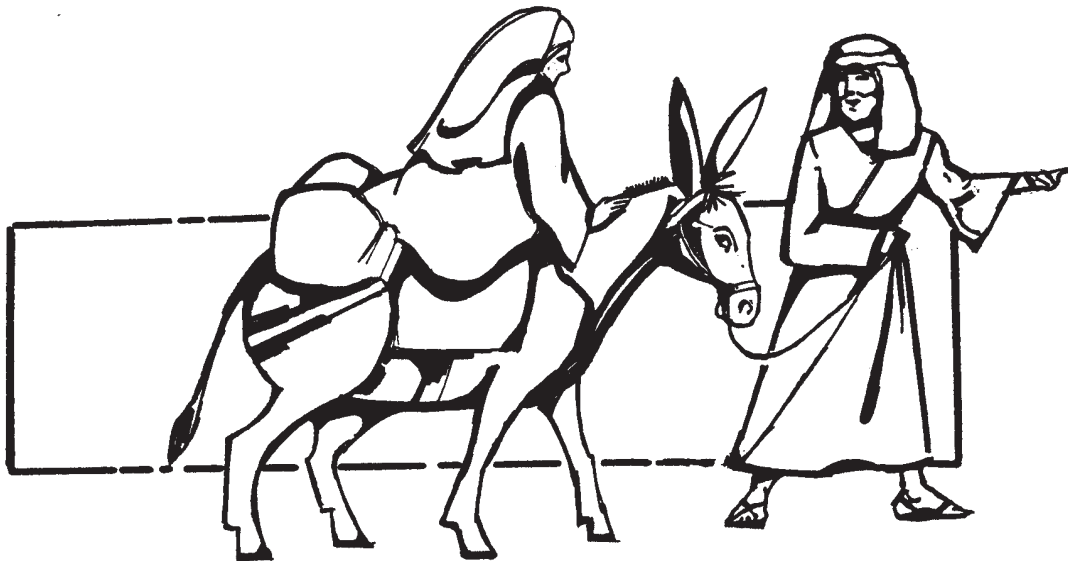
Cut out the candle. Place it on the card. Sponge thin white tempera over and around the candle. Carefully remove the candle shape. Write a message inside the card.

Las Posadas, Mary and Joseph's Search for Shelter

December 16 through 24

Processions called Las Posadas are held on the nine nights before Christmas both in Mexico and in Hispanic communities elsewhere, particularly in the United States. Posada means a lodge or an inn, and these processions represent the Holy Family's search for lodging in Bethlehem long ago. People either dress as Mary and Joseph or carry nativity figures of them, as they go from house to house asking for a place to spend the night. Over and over they are told that there is no room for them. Each night, however, one home has been designated as the place where they are welcomed and a party follows. The last Posada is on Christmas Eve, and people often end the night by attending midnight mass.

Children play a big role in the Posadas, and in Mexico, children make piñatas. Piñatas are hollow figures of animals or well-known storybook characters. They are filled with small toys, candies, and coins and hung on a rope that can be raised and lowered. The children take turns being blindfolded and trying to break the piñata with a long stick or bat as an adult raises and lowers it. When someone finally breaks the piñata, everyone scrambles for the treats.



Making It Work

Have a Posadas celebration at school. Invite several other classrooms to take part and have a procession that goes from room to room asking for lodging. End the procession in your own classroom, where you have left some students to act as the welcoming committee, and have a party complete with one or more piñatas.

Ask students to share their own experiences with Posadas. Where do they take place? What kind of food is served at the parties? Who is chosen to act the parts of Mary and Joseph? Have they ever had a Posadas party in their home?

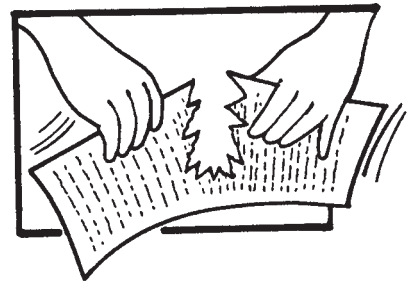
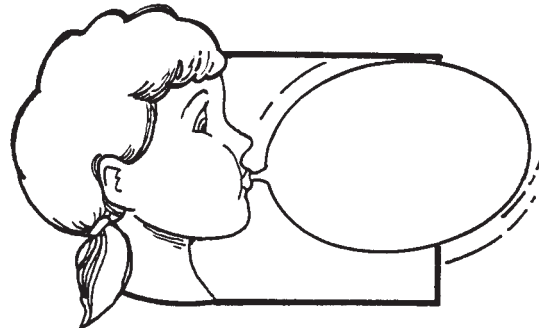
Have students make piñatas to be used for your Posadas party or to take home for decorations. Students might want to make a piñata and fill it with small treats as a present for a younger brother or sister. A piñata also makes a dramatic gift container for an adult. (See directions for making a piñata on page 102.)

Making a Piñata

Start to make your piñata a week or more before your party to allow plenty of time for it to dry.

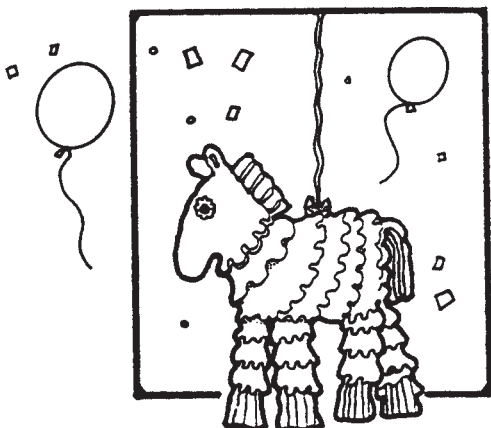
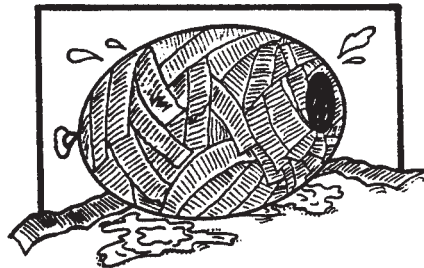
Materials:

- a large balloon
- newspaper
- flour and water paste (equal parts)
- glue
- poster paints
- other decorations like paper streamers and glitter
- string
- lots of wrapped candies, small toys, and coins



Directions:

1. Cover a work area with newspaper. You can use a table or the floor.
2. Blow up the balloon and tie it securely.
3. Tear newspaper into strips about 2 inches (5 cm) wide. Dip each strip in the paste, draw it between two of your fingers to wipe off excess paste, and smooth the strip around the balloon. Repeat until the whole balloon is covered with newspaper strips.
4. Let the papier-mâché covered balloon dry. Then repeat the whole process twice to make a strong piñata that will hold a lot of goodies.



5. When the papier-mâché is completely dry, pop the balloon inside with a pin. Cut a hole, about 5 inches (13 cm) in diameter, in the top of your piñata. Remove the balloon. Fasten string to either side of the hole to make a handle.
6. Paint and decorate your piñata. Fill with your choice of treats or use as a gift box.