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Standing Up to Hate:

A Hanukkah Lesson Plan from the Montana Jewish Project

Note: This lesson plan was created to accompany kits that were sent to 50 Montana fourth-grade classrooms. These kits included a menorah, candles, a set of 6 dreidels, an instruction sheet on how to play dreidel and the book *The Christmas Menorahs*. The lesson can be conducted even without these items. The lesson plan can be found on the Montana Jewish Project website. Download it to make clicking through the links easier.

Essential Understanding: People across cultures share commonalities. We should recognize similarities and celebrate differences. We should work together to make sure everyone is accepted. Jews have lived in Montana since the very first non-Indians arrived in the state. They are our neighbors.

Activity Description: Students will explore how individuals can take action to oppose bullying and intolerance by listening to and then discussing a story based on a real incident that occurred in Billings in 1993, when neo-Nazis threw a brick through the window of a Jewish family displaying a menorah. Community members organized a campaign to place menorahs in windows all over town, making a powerful statement against intolerance and for religious liberty. (Much of this lesson is adapted from a lesson plan included in the Montana Historical Society's *Coming to Montana: Immigrants from around the World* footlocker. That lesson, in turn, was adapted from a lesson plan originally written and posted by the Center for Education in Law and Democracy.)

Time: 50 to 90 minutes

Objectives

At the conclusion of the lesson students will

- Recognize that sometimes people are singled out or bullied because they are different.
- Recognize that an individual and the community have a responsibility to stand up against bullying.
- Recognize that everyone can make a positive difference.

Materials

The Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate

Menorah, candles, and dreidels (optional)

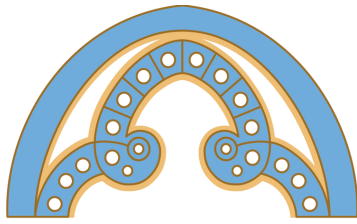
Paper and pencils/pens

Teaching Note: If you do not have access to the book *Christmas Menorahs*, you can find videos of people reading the book aloud on YouTube.

Pre-lesson Preparation

Review curriculum material your school has collected on preventing bullying or some of the resources listed here:

- "Bullying Prevention and Intervention," <https://www.newton.k12.ma.us/Page/162>
- "The Bully and the Bystander," <https://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/the-bully-and-the-bystander/>
- "Bullying Basics," <https://www.learningforjustice.org/professional-development/bullying-basics>



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Procedure

Step 1: Write Your Way In (3 minutes)

Ask students to take out a pencil and their writing journals, or a sheet of paper, and date it. Then, let them know that they will be thinking hard and writing for three minutes nonstop, as soon as you say, “Go!” You will be using a timer and they must keep on going, not lifting their pencils until the three minutes are up. If they are stuck for what to write next, encourage them to write, “I am thinking!” until they think of more to say. Create a sense of urgency! For this exercise, they should not be concerned with their spelling, etc. They should just think and pour out their thoughts on paper.

Provide students with the following prompt: “How would you feel if someone told a mean joke about your family, your tribe, your race, or your religion?”

Start the timer and say “go.” When the timer goes off at the end of three minutes, tell students to draw a line where they stopped and to save their paper.

Step 2: Discuss Differences and Bullying

Remind the class that we are all similar and different from one another. Emphasize that differences are what make us interesting. Point out how boring the world would be if everyone was exactly the same. Discuss the fact that sometimes people are bullied because of their differences.

Lead your students in a thoughtful discussion of bullying. Remind students that bullying is never okay.

Ask students what can be done to stop bullying.

Talk about the role of bystanders in bullying. Most people are not bullies, but if they don’t speak or do something to try to stop bullying, then they are complicit.

Talk about why people don’t act.

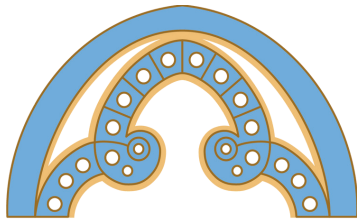
Brainstorm ways that students can act safely (including reporting incidents to trusted adults).

Tell your students that sometimes people are bullied because of cultural differences, like religion.

Tell them that you are going to read them a story based on an event that actually happened in Billings in 1993.

Step 3: Introduce The Christmas Menorahs

Tell the students the title of the book the class will be reading and ask if they find anything unusual in the combination of words.



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Pass around a menorah if you have one. Ask students to guess what it is and what it is used for. Point out the picture on the cover and explain that it is a symbol of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. (**Note:** not all menorahs look like the one on the book's cover. However, they all hold nine candles. Eight candles represent the eight days of the holiday. The ninth candle is set apart. It is the "helper candle," used to light the other eight.)

Read the subtitle to students and ask them to speculate on what the book might be about. Point out that the dedication of the book gives a clue as to what town is referred to in the subtitle.

Step 4: Read and Discuss

Read *The Christmas Menorahs*, then hold a class discussion. (You may want to read the "Introduction" to the class **AFTER** you read the story rather than before.)

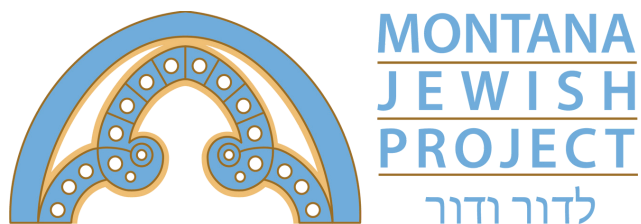
Possible Discussion Questions

- a) Why do you think someone threw a rock into Isaac's home?
- b) What do you think Isaac's mom was talking about when she said, "These terrible people keep threatening and threatening..."? Why won't she tell Isaac what she means?
- c) What did Isaac want to do in response to the rock? Why did his parents disagree? If you were Isaac's family, would you have taken down your holiday decorations? Why or why not?
- d) Why do you think Isaac said he didn't want to be a pioneer? Do you think it is hard to be a pioneer? How does being a pioneer help a community?
- e) How did Isaac's mom decide to let people in Billings know what happened to the Schnitzer family?
- f) What happened at the town meeting called by Chief Inman and Margaret MacDonald? Why did Mrs. MacDonald tell the story of King Christian of Denmark?
- g) Isaac told his class the story of Hanukkah. What does Hanukkah celebrate? How is the meaning of Hanukkah related to the issue the town of Billings faced?
- h) What story did Teresa tell the class? Do you think Teresa's actions in defending her classmate are the actions of a good citizen? Why or why not?
- i) How did Isaac feel when he saw the menorahs in windows all over Billings, including the sign in Teresa's window? What do you think the menorahs say about the citizens of Billings?
- j) What would you have done if you were in Billings at the time? Would you have encouraged your family to display a menorah? Why or why not?
- k) Many people in Billings chose not to be passive bystanders. How did their actions make a difference?

Step 5: Write Your Way Out (three minutes)

Ask students to retrieve their "Write Your Way Ins." Tell them they will be writing below the line they drew earlier for this next three-minute nonstop writing period. Tell students that they are going to do another quick write, writing nonstop from the moment you say "Go!" until the timer goes off.

Provide students with the "Write Your Way Out" prompt: "What will you do if you hear anyone teasing, joking, or talking in a mean way about someone else's family, race, tribe or religion?"



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Extensions

1. Discuss the First Amendment. Explain that our freedom to practice whatever religion we believe in—or no religion at all—is guaranteed by the Constitution, specifically by the First Amendment, which is part of the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution right after the Constitution was adopted to protect the rights of the people from the government. However, having a constitutional right to freedom of religion does not mean that all the people in the United States accept different religions. Thus, circumstances like those in the book sometimes arise.
2. With students, make a list of people in the story who were good citizens. For each person listed, write an action that person took that shows he/she is a good citizen. For example, Mrs. Schnitzer informed other people of events in their town, Chief Inman and Mrs. MacDonald organized a town meeting, and so on.
3. Teach your students how to play dreidel, a traditional Hanukkah game. Have them play in groups of three to five. (Find instructions in the kit and at <https://pjlibrary.org/PJLibrary/media/PJ-Library/blog/2020/How-to-Play-Dreidel-printable.pdf>.)
4. Make a list of questions you have about Judaism (the Jewish religion), Jewish history, or Montana’s Jewish history. Brainstorm where you can find the answers. Myjewishlearning.com/article/introduction-to-judaism/ is a good resource. To learn more about Jewish history in Montana, visit the “History page” at Montana Jewish Project (montanajewishproject.com) and scroll down for a timeline of major events).
5. Tour the oldest synagogue in Montana, Temple Emanu-El in Helena, to learn more about the history of Jews in Montana. Visit the Montana Jewish Project website (montanajewishproject.com) to arrange a tour.