

THE PASSOVER VS. FOURTH OF JULY DEBATE

Lesson plan for adults

This lesson plan is part of a larger Go & Learn lesson entitled “The American Jewess on Liberation and Freedom,” which can be found at

<http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/mar06/>.

Many communities have an annual “Latke-Hamantaschen Debate,” at which two experts on history, Jewish culture, and humor debate the relative merits of each traditional food and its significance for Jews and Americans. Along these lines, this lesson plan proposes a Passover-Fourth of July Debate, in which teams can argue the relative significance of each holiday for American Jews. You may want to set aside two sessions, one for the debate preparation, and one for the actual debate. Alternatively, you could ask participants to read the materials ahead, and then prepare points and implement the debate in one session.

To begin, read the featured document together – an excerpt from the Editorial in the April 1897 issue of *The American Jewess* – with your class. (The text can be found on the website listed above.) Then split into two teams, assigning one side as the Fourth of July team and one side as the Passover team. Hand out the resources and questions below. Allow each team enough time to research its topic and construct its argument. You may want to invite friends, families, or other adult learners to watch the debate. Design the debate structure (how many minutes per side, etc.) and assign someone to enforce this structure through his/her facilitation. This facilitator may want to ask questions of each side, based on the suggested questions below, or simply allow each side to present a more free-form persuasive argument on the merits of its assigned holiday. Encourage debaters to bring props, costumes, songs, or anything else that will enliven the activity!

Resources for the preparation of arguments:

1. For background on the meaning of Passover, see the Overview essay on the main page of this edition of *Go & Learn*.
2. For an example of a Latke-Hamantaschen debate, see the archived articles from Swarthmore College:
http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/org/daily/archive/spring_2002/20020321.html
3. For a discussion of the benefits and challenges of freedom for Jews in the United States, see “Freedom: The Promise And The Challenge” by Samuel G. Freedman:
http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history_community/About_Jewish_History_Community/ThemesTO/AmericanFreedom.htm
4. For an essay on “Passover Themes and Theology,” see:
http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Passover/TO_Pesach_Themes.htm
5. A selection from the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the consent of the governed.

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and

organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes; and accordingly all Experience hath shewn, that Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the Forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long Train of Abuses and Usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a Design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future Security...

6. The 10 Commandments:

First Commandment (Exodus 20:2): I am the Lord Your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Second Commandment (Exodus 20:3-6): You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall not make for yourself any graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of any thing that is heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them, for I, the Lord Your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

Third Commandment (Exodus 20:7): You shall not take the name of the Lord Your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.

Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11): Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lord Your God, in it you shall not do any manner of work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man-servant, nor your maid-servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day. Wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy.

Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:12): Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord God gives you.

Sixth Commandment (Exodus 20:13): You shall not murder.

Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20:13): You shall not commit adultery.

Eighth Commandment (Exodus 20:13): You shall not steal.

Ninth Commandment (Exodus 20:13): You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:14): You shall not covet your neighbor's house, nor his wife, his man-servant, his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's.

Questions to consider:

1. How does each holiday define freedom?
2. What are the symbols of liberation in each holiday?
3. How do you understand the metaphor of the silkworm in the *The American Jewess* editorial?
4. What is the Editor's argument in favor of American Jews continuing to celebrate Passover?
5. What does it mean for liberty to "become a blessing and not a curse"? What does the Editor suggest we must do for this to happen?
6. In what ways are American Jews indebted to God and America for our freedoms?
7. Which is more celebratory: parades and fireworks, or the Passover seder?
8. Which form of celebration does a better job of transmitting the messages and histories of these events of liberation from one generation to the next?
9. Which of the received texts following from these events (the Ten Commandments and the Torah after our Exodus from Egypt, and the Declaration of Independence from 1776), are more compelling?
10. In what ways does each text characterize freedom?

11. Which creates a freer society: *rights*, like those in the Declaration of Independence, or *responsibilities*, like those in the 10 Commandments?
12. If you had to celebrate just one of these holidays, which would it be, and why?

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