

High School Lesson Plan - Exploring Diverse Hanukkah Narratives

Topic: *Megilat Yehudit* and *Megilat Antiochus*

Objective: Students will explore diverse Hanukkah traditions, focusing on Sephardic narratives, and compare them to Ashkenazi traditions to deepen their understanding of Hanukkah's themes and historical sources.

Materials Needed:

- Copies of translated excerpts from [Megilat Yehudit](#)
- Copies of the Hanukkah story from the [Gemara \(Talmud\)](#) and [text of Al HaNissim](#)
- Chart paper or whiteboard for brainstorming and group work
- Markers or pens

Lesson Outline:

1. Introduction: Hanukkah Traditions and Their Origins (10 minutes)

- **Opening Discussion- this can either be done as a class, or in small groups**
 - Ask: *What are some traditions your family follows during Hanukkah?*
 - Ask: *How old do you think those traditions are? Where do you think they come from?*
- **Highlight the Diversity of Hanukkah Celebrations:**
 - Share examples of how Hanukkah traditions differ across cultures (e.g., foods, songs, customs).
 - Explain that the events of Hanukkah occurred after the Tanakh was completed, so our sources come from rabbinic, historical, archaeological, and traditional origins.
 - Share Rabbi Yosef Messas's teaching: *Family stories and traditions passed down are as important as written sources.* Emphasize how this idea reinforces the home as the center of Hanukkah celebrations.

2. Introducing Sephardic Narratives: *Megilat Yehudit* and *Megilat Antiochus* (20 minutes)

- **Brief Background on Sephardic Jews:**
 - Originated in the Iberian Peninsula, later dispersing to the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and elsewhere.
 - Sephardic Hanukkah traditions include storytelling and reading texts like *Megilat Yehudit*
- **Exploring *Megilat Yehudit*:**
 - Distribute translated excerpts of [Megilat Yehudit \(story of Yehudit\)](#).
 - Ask:



- *Have you heard this story before?*
- *What is Yehudit's role in the narrative?*
- *How does this story differ from other Hanukkah stories (like the oil or the Maccabean wars)?*
- *What themes—courage, miracles, resilience, faith—does it share with other Hanukkah stories?*

3. Comparing Narratives: Small Group Activity (20 minutes)

- **Divide Students into Groups:**
 - Assign each group to compare Sephardic narratives (*Megilat Yehudit*) with Ashkenazi traditions (Gemara's story of the oil and the Maccabean wars).
- **Guiding Questions for Comparison:**
 - What are the main similarities and differences between the stories?
 - How do the themes—light, miracles, courage, resilience, community—appear in each narrative?
 - How does each story reflect its cultural or historical context?

4. Sharing Findings and Discussion (15 minutes)

- **Presentations:**
 - Each group presents their comparisons to the class.
- **Class Discussion:**
 - Highlight key takeaways about how different Jewish communities interpret Hanukkah's messages.
 - Ask: *What do these diverse traditions teach us about the meaning of Hanukkah?*

5. Optional Activity: Debate (10 minutes)

- **Debate Prompt:**
 - Which narrative (Sephardic or Ashkenazi) most strongly conveys the messages of Hanukkah? Why?
 - Assign students to different sides and have them spend a few minutes preparing their arguments and then presenting to the class.
 - Encourage them to think about the narratives, but they can also be creative and bring in other information, like Sefardi Chanukah foods (sfenj, bumuelos) vs Ashkenazi chanukah (*sufganiyot*, latkes) foods

Wrap up with a reflection on how multiple narratives can coexist and enrich the holiday.

Source: [New Light Shed on Sephardic Sources for Hanukkah Heroes](#) by Ty Alhadeff (UW, Sephardic Studies)