Maccabees: From Ancient Heroes to Modern Identity

The Maccabees are more than historical figures. They personify the hopes, struggles, and values of generations of Jews. By exploring their diverse portrayal, from religious symbols to icons of Zionist strength, learners will examine how Jewish peoplehood and identity are constructed, maintained, and redefined over time.

Examine how the depiction of the Maccabees' image evolved from ancient warriors to modern symbols of Jewish strength, identity, and peoplehood.
Watch the movie about the Maccabees.

Analyze the portrayals of the Maccabees throughout Jewish history and complete the worksheet.

- Why do you think the Maccabees were portrayed differently in the different eras (e.g., as religious leaders vs. modern athletes)?
- How do the visual symbols of the Maccabees shape your perception of Jewish strength?
- What is the value of associating an ancient rebellion with modern institutions like the IDF or sports?
- How does the shift from religious to nationalistic portrayals change the core of Jewish peoplehood?
- How do the various portrayals of the Maccabees throughout history affect your Jewish identity?

Using one of these outlines, learners create a visual representation of their Maccabee, incorporating symbols, clothing, objects, colors, or other details that represent the traits they have chosen.
Learners will also write 3–5 sentences explaining their choices, how their Maccabee connects the values of the ancient Maccabees with Jewish life today, and why these values are meaningful to them.

Their Maccabee should have:

- At least one trait associated with the ancient Maccabees, such as resilience, courage, or faith.
- At least one modern-day Maccabee trait that reflects Jewish pride, Jewish identity, or a sense of Jewish peoplehood.

Primary Sources in This Lesson

- Map of the Battles of the Chaukah War
- Pictures of the Chaukah War
- Chanukah
- The Conquest of Jerusalem by the British
- Maccabi – the Eighth Conference
- Reflective Maccabee Poster
- Tal Brody Played for Maccabi Tel Aviv
- Tailors' Synagogue Stained Glass Window