

JEWISH GRANDPARENTS NETWORK

Hanukkah Discovery Kit

**For Grandparents
and Their Families**

By Jonathan Shmidt Chapman



Welcome to your Hanukkah Discovery Kit. This interactive guide is designed especially for grandparents and grandchildren (ages 3 to 8) to use together — either in person or at a distance. The kit offers ideas and activities to bring the Festival of Lights to life through play, imagination, simple [STEAM](#) projects, and hands-on discovery. You can do all of the activities in order or choose those that are most appropriate for your family and for the ages of your grandchildren.



The Hanukkah Discovery Kit is divided into three sections, each focused on a different aspect of the holiday:

- 1 Shine Your Light — The Story of Hanukkah:** Discover the story behind the festival of Hanukkah and learn about the theme of finding courage when you are faced with a challenge.
- 2 Celebrate Hanukkah — Customs and Rituals:** Learn more about the customs of Hanukkah and the ways they illuminate the meaning of the holiday, from spinning the dreidel to lighting the *hanukkiyah*.
- 3 Be a Maccabee — Standing Up for Your Values:** Connect the story of Hanukkah to the world today. Explore the themes of standing up for what you believe is right and advocating for freedom for everyone.

We'd love to hear about your experience using this kit. Send your stories and feedback to info@jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org.

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1 Shine Your Light

The Story of Hanukkah

Hanukkah (literally “dedication” in Hebrew) is the Jewish Festival of Lights, celebrated each winter for eight days beginning on the 25th day of the month of Kislev. The holiday commemorates the rededication of the Holy Temple after it was desecrated by the Greek army in the second century BCE. The Greek king tried to force the Jewish population to abandon their beliefs and religious practices. A small group of Jewish rebels, led by Judah Maccabee, stood up to the Greek army and successfully won their freedom to practice Judaism. According to the Hanukkah story, a single jug of olive oil they used to relight the Temple menorah miraculously lasted for eight days.

Hanukkah is one of many winter holidays around the world that feature celebrations filled with light, warming the world during the darkest and coldest part of the year. Each winter, families adorn houses and trees with lights for [Christmas](#); clay lamps shine outside homes in honor of [Diwali](#); and candles are lit to honor ancestors in observance of [Kwanzaa](#).



Grandparents can prepare for Hanukkah by considering these questions:

- Who brings light into your life?
- In what ways have you brought light into the world since this time last year?
- How can you find ways to connect to the Hanukkah holiday with your grandchild beyond giving presents and lighting candles?

Help grandchildren get ready for Hanukkah by choosing from these questions:

- What makes you “light up” like the Hanukkah candles? What activities, hobbies, or interests excite you that you like to share with other people?
- How can you share the traditions your family has for the holiday celebration with your friends and your community? How can you learn more about their traditions too?
- In what ways are Hanukkah traditions similar to other traditions your friends and community celebrate?

The Story of Hanukkah

On Hanukkah, we commemorate the story of the Maccabees, a tale that teaches us about resilience against adversity and the importance of freedom for all. There are many interpretations of the historical origins of Hanukkah and how modern-day observance has evolved. You can learn more [here](#).

Bring the adapted story below to life with your grandchild as a way to explore these themes through imaginative play. Read or tell your grandchild the story whether you are together in person or at a distance.

One day, long ago, a man named Judah Maccabee was walking through the marketplace when he suddenly heard a big announcement from the Greek king, Antiochus: "I order the Jewish people to no longer celebrate their holidays, tell their stories, or follow their traditions!" Judah saw the Greek soldiers knocking down the precious objects inside the Jewish Holy Temple. The beautiful menorah, which usually shone brightly with light, was trampled on the ground.

Judah ran home to his village to tell everyone what he saw. The Jewish people were hiding in their homes, afraid to show their true selves in public. They even invented a game called dreidel that they could play to fool the Greek guards if they were caught telling Jewish stories from the Torah. "This isn't right — we should be allowed to be whoever we want to be; this is our home too. Everyone deserves the right to be free," Judah thought.

Quietly in the night, Judah tried to convince the Jewish people to join his quest. One by one, the people joined him. They became known as the Maccabees. They paraded down the street in protest, raising their voices together. Alone they were afraid, but together they were strong. The Maccabees made the Greek king change his mind, and they took back their Temple.

After raising the menorah, they found there was only one small jug of olive oil left. This jug of oil would keep the candles burning for only one night, and it would take over a week to make more oil. But a great miracle happened — the light stayed burning for eight nights. Judah learned that if we join together in community, we can face any challenge. Everyone deserves to be free to shine their unique light for the whole world to see.

Questions to ask about the story:

- Why is it important for everyone to be free to be who they want to be?
- In what ways have you or anyone you know been like a Maccabee?

Hanukkah Box Puppet Theater

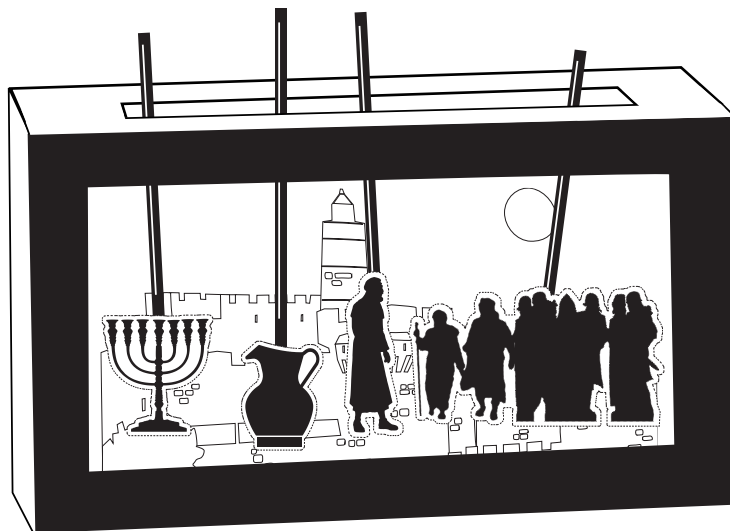
Bring the story of Hanukkah to life using paper puppetry and your imagination.

Materials:

- Hanukkah Story Puppet Template
- Hanukkah Story Puppet Theater Backdrop
- Shoebox or cardboard box
- Scissors, tape
- Crayons or markers
- Wooden chopsticks, craft sticks, or straws
- LED flashlight (the light on a phone will work)

Instructions:

1. Print out a copy of the Hanukkah story puppets on page 7. Print a copy of the backdrop on page 8 and attach it to the inside back of the box.
2. Cut a long horizontal slot across the top of the box.
3. Color the puppets and props, and cut them out. Attach a chopstick, craft stick, or straw to the top of each puppet with tape, so that the puppet is at the bottom of the stick.
4. Feed the puppet through the slot in the top of the box, so that the puppet stands on the bottom of the box. Hold the stick from above the slot. Practice moving the puppets around the “stage,” and create voices for each of the characters.



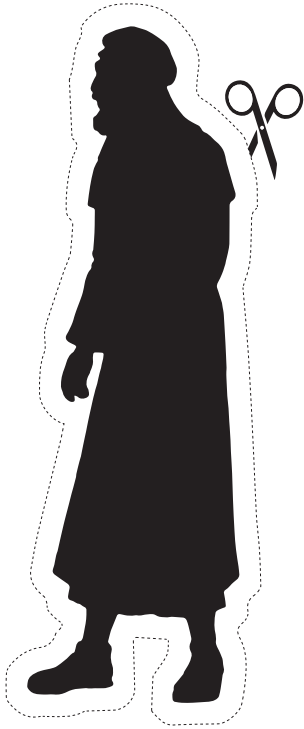
Hanukkah Box Puppet Theater *(continued)*

5. Now bring parts of the story to life using the puppets. For example:
 - Greek King Antiochus knocks over the menorah puppet and says, “The Jewish people can no longer celebrate their holidays!”
 - Judah Maccabee runs through the city saying, “We need to stand up for what’s right!”
 - The Maccabees parade through the city saying, “Everyone should be free to shine their light and be who they want to be.”
 - The jug of oil is poured to light the menorah (you can use the flashlight from above the slot in the top of the box to shine a light on the menorah).
6. Experiment with adding sound effects and music to help bring the story to life. Try using different pieces of music or different instruments to underscore the drama of your show.
7. Decide who will play each character. If you choose, the grandparent can read the story aloud again while the grandchild enacts it with the puppets. Or perhaps a parent or sibling would like to be the narrator.
8. Once you have practiced, invite other family members or friends to watch your puppet show.

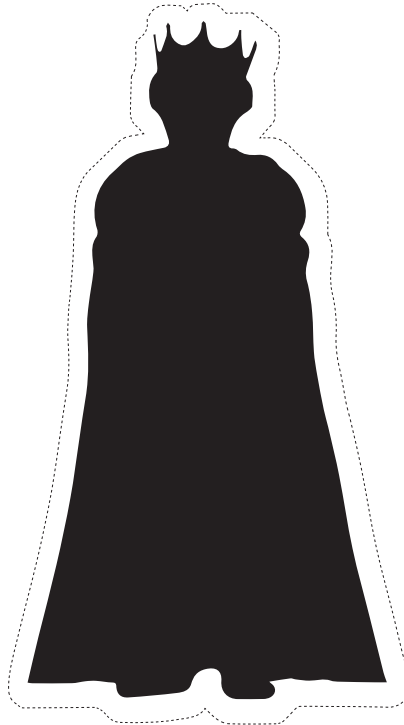


For grandparents at a distance, use FaceTime or Zoom in creative ways. One person can manipulate the puppets on-screen while the other performs the voices. You can use the device screen as the stage, with puppets entering and exiting in and out of frame. You can also play with characters getting bigger and smaller based on how close they are to the screen.

Hanukkah Story Puppet Template



JUDAH MACCABEE



GREEK KING ANTIOCHUS



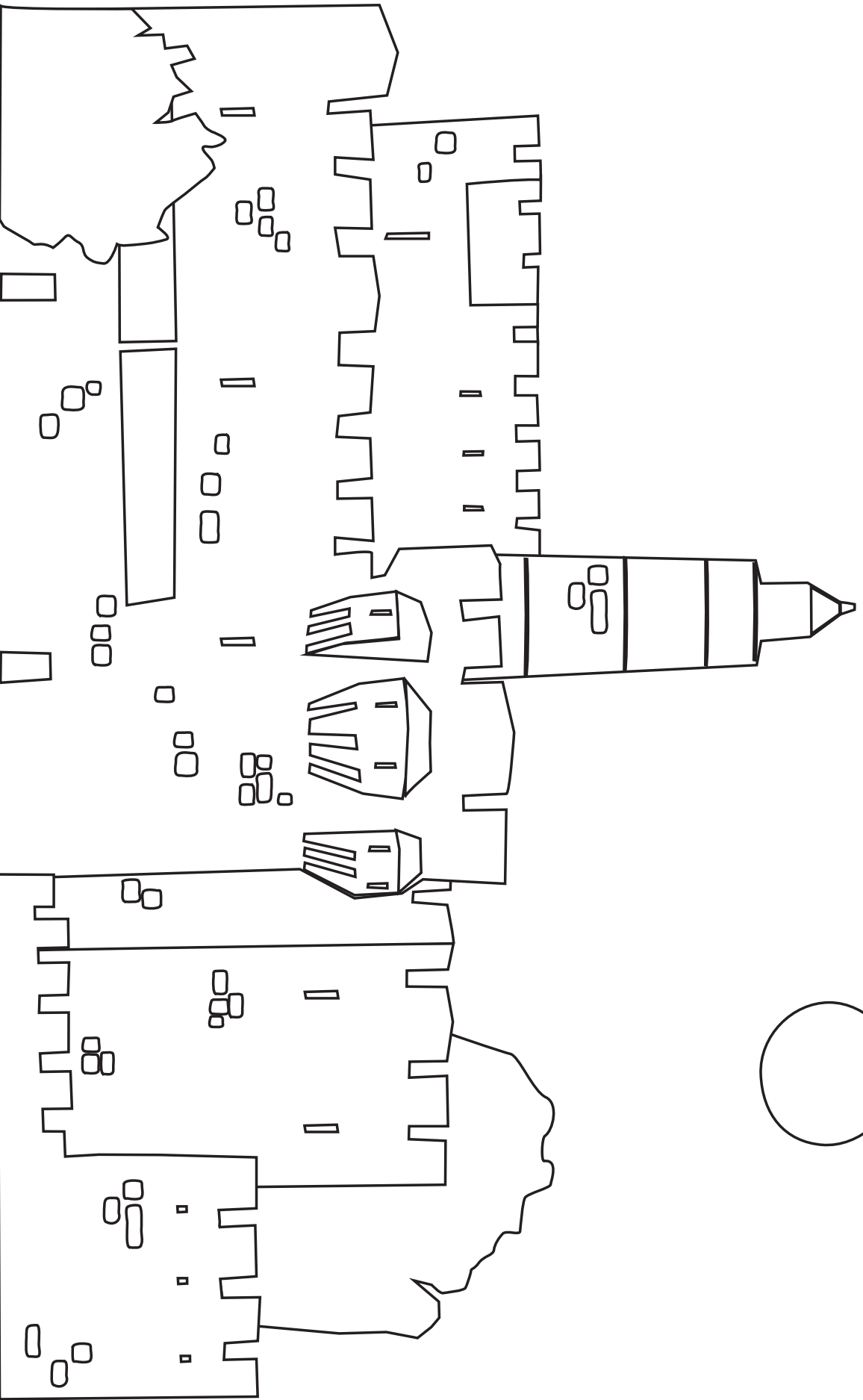
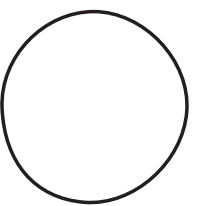
TEMPLE MENORAH



JUG OF OIL



MACCABEES



Hanukkah Story Puppet Theater Backdrop

Create a Tissue Paper Lantern

Bring the story of Hanukkah to life using paper puppetry and your imagination.

Materials:

- Glass or plastic jar
- Glue
- Paint brush
- Strips of tissue paper (various colors)
- Small flashlight, candle, or tea light

Instructions:

1. Using the paint brush, cover the outside of the jar with a layer of glue.
2. Carefully attach strips of tissue paper to the jar. Overlap the strips at the edges so that they cover the jar.
3. Gently brush glue over the pieces to seal them and let the glue dry.
4. You can put a small flashlight, candle, or tea light inside the jar and illuminate the lantern you've created.



Search for the Light

1. Decide who will be the hider and who will be the seeker in search of the lantern.
2. Hide the lantern somewhere in the house while the seeker closes their eyes.
3. Once it is hidden, the seeker must find it. The hider can use clues to help the seeker; for example, "You are getting warmer!" if the seeker gets closer to the lantern, or "Your shoes are pointing toward it!"
4. When the seeker finds the lantern, they can say, "I found the cup of oil!"

2 Celebrate Hanukkah

Customs and Rituals

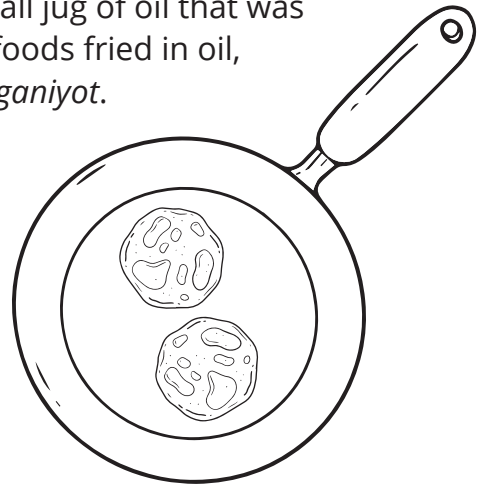
We commemorate the story of Hanukkah through a variety of customs and rituals.

- **Lighting the Hanukkah Menorah (or *Hanukkiyah*):** In honor of the Temple menorah staying lit for eight nights, we light a nine-branched menorah called a *hanukkiyah* (the ninth candle is called the *shamash*, “helper candle”) We add one candle each night for eight nights (starting on the right and adding a new candle each night to the left; we light the new candle first), increasing the light throughout the holiday.

Find a guide to lighting the *hanukkiyah* [here](#).

- **Frying Latkes in Oil:** To remember the small jug of oil that was used to light the Temple menorah, we eat foods fried in oil, including potato latkes and jelly donuts *sufganiyot*.

- **Playing Dreidel:** We play this game to commemorate that it was used as a way for Jewish people to distract the Greek soldiers from realizing the Jews were studying Torah. We play the game with a spinning top, each side featuring a Hebrew letter: *nun*, *gimel*, *hay*, and *shin*. The letters are an acronym for the Hebrew phrase “*Nes gadol hayah sham*,” meaning “A great miracle happened there.”



Find a guide to playing dreidel [here](#).

- **Giving Gifts:** Some people share gifts with friends and family on Hanukkah to increase our joy and spread it throughout our community. Many families extend this tradition to providing gifts for those in need and engaging in acts of community service.

[See](#) how Israelis celebrate Hanukkah.

Here are some activities to help you explore the Festival of Lights with your grandchild:

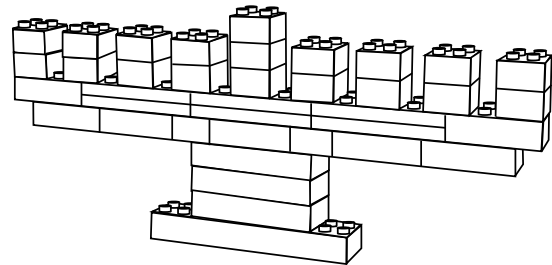
Menorah Maker Challenge

Build your own *hanukkiyah* to explore your creativity together.

Materials:

Choose from the following items.

- Building blocks or Legos
- Tin foil
- Newspaper, masking tape



Instructions:

1. Together, look at the shape of a *hanukkiyah* (either an actual one in front of you or an image online). Ask your grandchild: *What do you notice about the shape of the hanukkiyah? How many branches does it have?*
2. Now, create your own sculpture of a *hanukkiyah* using the building materials. You can create one sculpture together or make them separately and compare.
3. Alternatively, you can choose to use edible ingredients (pretzel rods, marshmallows, cheese sticks, graham crackers) to construct your sculptures, and then you can eat parts of the *hanukkiyah* when you are done.



If you are at a distance, create your sculptures concurrently out of frame. Play music or chat while you build. When you are done, present them to each other by sharing them on the screen. Tell each other how you feel about your creation.

Root Vegetable Latke Fry

1. Try making latkes using several different root vegetables such as potatoes, yams, carrots, beets, or parsnips. Use a single ingredient for each batch of latkes. Here are some [instructions](#) on how to cook your latkes.
2. Now, lay out the latkes and separate them based on the different root vegetable ingredient.
3. Close your eyes or use a blindfold, and try each latke variety. Ask your grandchild: *Which one is your favorite? Can you guess what each one is made of based on the taste alone?*

Find creative Hanukkah recipes [here](#).

Dance the Dreidel

Bring the game of dreidel to life as a movement game.

Materials:

One or more dreidels

Instructions:

1. Look at the four Hebrew letters on the dreidel: נ (*nun*), ג (*gimel*), ה (*hay*), ש (*shin*).
2. Together, create a unique dance move for each one of the letters. (For little ones, you can also lie down in the shape of the letter.) For example, you might gallop for *gimel* or hop for *hay*.
3. Once you have rehearsed your four movements, play the Dance the Dreidel game. Spin the dreidel. Do the dance move corresponding to the letter that is face up on the dreidel once it stops spinning.
4. Now you can add the corresponding dance move cumulatively with each spin. Your dance will get longer and longer, and harder to remember (for example, *nun, nun, shin, gimel, gimel*). See if you can remember the whole dance.
5. Add music to make it a dreidel dance party.



If you are at a distance, create your dance moves together on the screen. Then, have your grandchild spin the dreidel and show you which letter it landed on by doing the dance move. You can copy their movements through the screen so that you are both dancing the dreidel together.



Give the Gift of Being Together

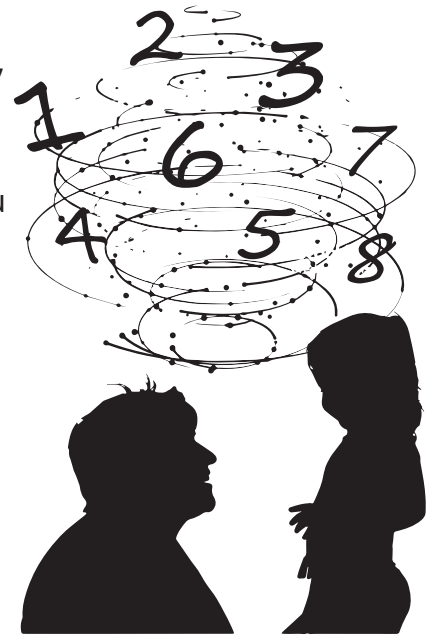
Plan a series of shared experiences as gifts for each other. Decide on activities you can do together over the course of the holiday (or even on one night celebrating together). These could include learning new games, reading books, going on a nature walk, or playing dress-up. If you like, create a coupon or ticket for each activity, and surprise each other with each new gift experience.

Increasing Joy Together: Eight Nights of Hanukkah Grandparent Challenge

On Hanukkah, we start by lighting only one candle on the first night of the holiday. Each night, we add a candle to symbolize that our joy increases over the course of the eight nights.

Use this game to increase the joy of Hanukkah by connecting with your grandchildren.

1. Dedicate five minutes to talk to your grandchild every night of Hanukkah, either in person, or by phone or video chat. Ask the parents to schedule a convenient time each night.
2. For each night of the holiday, do an activity that matches the number of candles that you light that evening.
3. Below we provide examples. You can use these or make up your own series of challenges with your grandchild!
 - On the first night of Hanukkah, have a dance party and come up with some dance moves to **ONE favorite song**.
 - On the second night of Hanukkah, tell each other **TWO jokes** to make the other person laugh.
 - On the third night of Hanukkah, share **THREE compliments** with each other, offering things you love about the other person.
 - On the fourth night of Hanukkah, each collect **FOUR favorite objects** from around the house, and share why they are your favorites.
 - On the fifth night of Hanukkah, each think of **FIVE favorite places** in the world, or places you want to visit.
 - On the sixth night of Hanukkah, make **SIX different animal noises** for each other and try to guess the animal.
 - On the seventh night of Hanukkah, do **SEVEN jumping jacks** to get your heart pumping.
 - On the eighth night of Hanukkah, create your own challenge for **EIGHT joyful things to do together**.



3 Be a Maccabee

Standing Up for Your Values

Explore universal themes of Hanukkah that impact our world today: standing up for what you believe is right and advocating for freedom for all people.

Activities to explore the power we have to be Maccabees in our communities:

Free to Be:

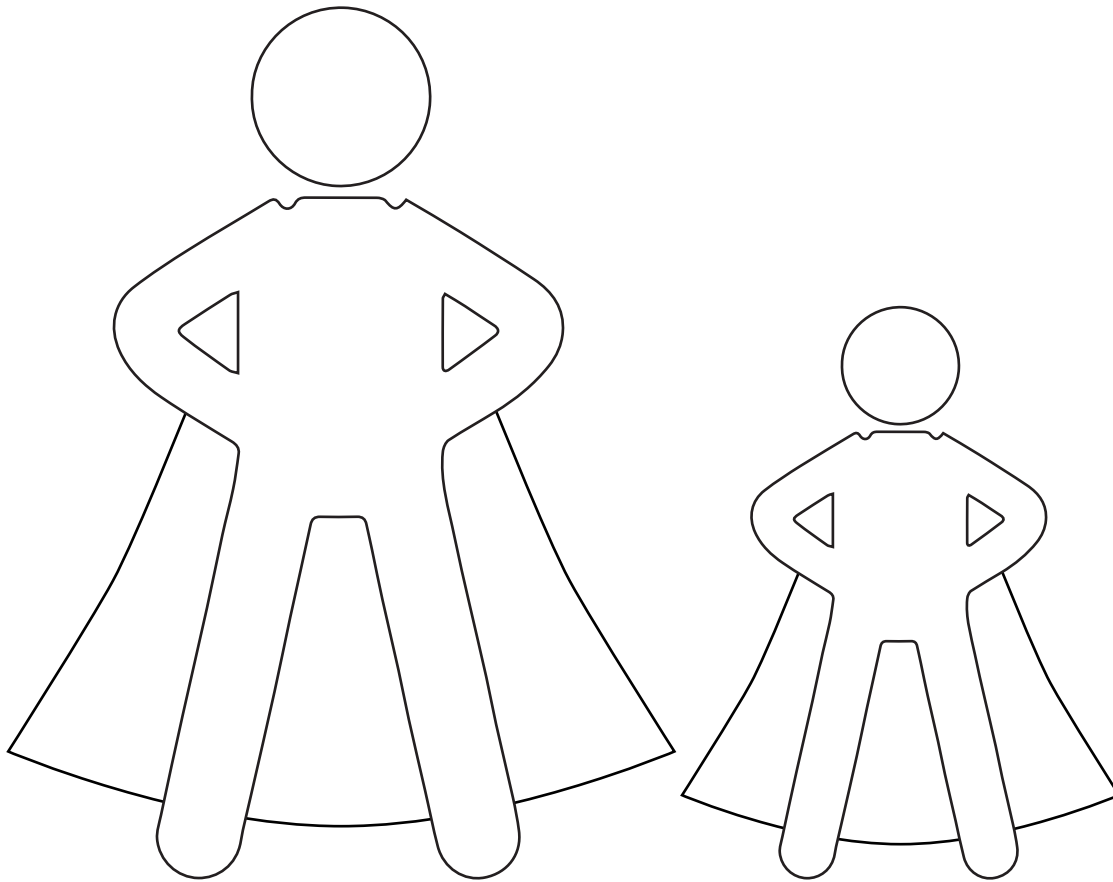
1. Talk to your grandchild about the concept of freedom. Ask: *What do you think it means to be free? What happened to the Jewish people in the Hanukkah story when they lost their freedom? How does it feel when freedom gets taken away?*
2. Share a few key freedoms that you value, in language appropriate to your grandchild's age (for example, the right to vote, the right to practice our religion, the right to wear the clothing we want in public). You can explain that freedoms can sometimes be taken away from groups of people and how some rights were different when you were their age — and are still not available in many places in the world today. You can also share ways that we can stand up for others; for example, if you see someone being mean to a friend, say something to a parent or teacher.
3. With your grandchild, design a sign with a symbol or message about freedom; for example, "We believe that everyone should be free to be who they want to be." Create the message together. Draw pictures around your message. Hang your sign up in your home where your family and friends can see it.

I Am a Maccabee:

Judah Maccabee was a kind of superhero. Ask your grandchild who their favorite superheroes are (for example, PJ Masks, Spiderman, Rainbow Rangers). Using the template on the next page, design your own Hanukkah superhero characters.

1. Complete the Superhero Template on the next page. Design your superhero costume in the silhouette on the template.
2. Find items from around the house to create your superhero costume in real life. Play together to bring a Hanukkah superhero adventure story to life at home. Let your grandchild be the superhero, and you can be their trusty sidekick.
3. Have a conversation about how Judah Maccabee was a superhero, and discuss the ways you can be more of a superhero in your own life.

Be a Maccabee — Create Your Superhero Characters



GRANDPARENT

GRANDCHILD

What is your superhero name? _____

What are your unique talents? _____

Whom do you protect? _____
