



Ethnic Studies Lesson 6B: Jewish American Secularism

TOPIC:

JEWISH AMERICAN HISTORY

GRADE LEVELS:

11-12

TIME:

1½ HOURS

California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

Themes:

1. Identity
2. History and Movement

Values and Principles:

1. Cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).
2. Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by providing a space to share their stories of success, community collaboration, and solidarity, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth.
3. Center and place high value on the precolonial ancestral knowledge, narratives, and communal experiences of Native People/s and people of color and groups that are typically marginalized in society.

California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)**

Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; summarize complex concepts, processes, or information presented in a text by paraphrasing them in simpler but still accurate terms.

(RI.11-12.2)

Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):

History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)

Lesson Purpose

Students will research Jewish American faith and secularism and its impact on American culture.

Essential Questions

How has American Jewish faith and secularism impacted American culture?

How has life changed for Jewish Americans in the United States over the last 350 years?

Materials

[Unpacked: A Jewish American Tale: The Jewish Story](#)

[Pew Research Center: Jewish Americans in 2020](#)

[Pew Research Center: Jews in US are far less religious than Christians and Americans overall](#)

[Pew Research Center: 10 key findings about Jewish Americans](#)

[Pew Research Center: Jewish attitudes towards Israel](#)

[Unit 6 KWL Chart](#)

Vocabulary

xenophobia

anti-Semitism

Johnson-Reed Act

secular

pogroms

Sephardic

Israel

Ashkenazi

Mizrahi

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, ask students what *secular* means and why Jewish Americans may have moved into aspects of secular life in America. As a class, watch [Unpacked: A Jewish American Tale: The Jewish Story](#) (video 7 minutes, 49 seconds). As students watch, have them take notes on what aspects of American life led Jewish Americans to move towards or away from their Jewish identity, American identity, or Jewish American identity. Watch the first 2 minutes and 15 seconds of the video and work as a class to fill in aspects of Jewish American culture in the three spheres of identity. Stop the video frequently to review vocabulary. As a class, have the students watch the remainder of the video and take notes on the shared document.
- When students have finished watching the video, have each student meet with a partner to review their notes. As a class, have pairs share their notes on the shared document.

Step 2:

- Ask students what they already know about Jewish American secular culture. Help students understand that even though a large percentage of American Jews do not attend religious ceremonies regularly, their shared culture stems from their religion. Break students into four groups in order to move through four stations. Student groups should take about 15 minutes per station and should create a classroom expert poster on one of the following areas of culture: 1) Food, 2) Holidays and Events, 3) Religious Observance, and 4) Attitudes towards the Country of Israel. As students move through

the stations in order to find information on their expert area, they should be careful to cite the source of their information. (In longer articles, students should focus on the available graphs for condensed information.)

- [Pew Research Center: Jewish Americans in 2020](#)
 - [Pew Research Center: Jews in US are far less religious than Christians and Americans overall](#)
 - [Pew Research Center: 10 key findings about Jewish Americans](#)
 - [Pew Research Center: Jewish attitudes towards Israel](#)
 - [My Jewish Learning: Mizrahi Jews](#)
- When students have completed their posters, have the class walk the room gallery style and put sticky notes with their questions on the posters. As a class, have groups present their posters.

Step 3:

- As a class, ask students this lesson's questions, "How has American Jewish faith and secularism impacted American culture?" Also ask this unit's question, "How has life changed for Jewish Americans over the last 350 years?" Make note of what was learned on this unit's KWL chart, along with additional questions.

Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

As time allows and for homework, have students watch [5 Mind-Blowing Differences Between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews](#) (video 8 minutes, 26 seconds). As students watch, have them take notes to answer the question, "What aspects of Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewish culture have become part of the fabric of American culture?"

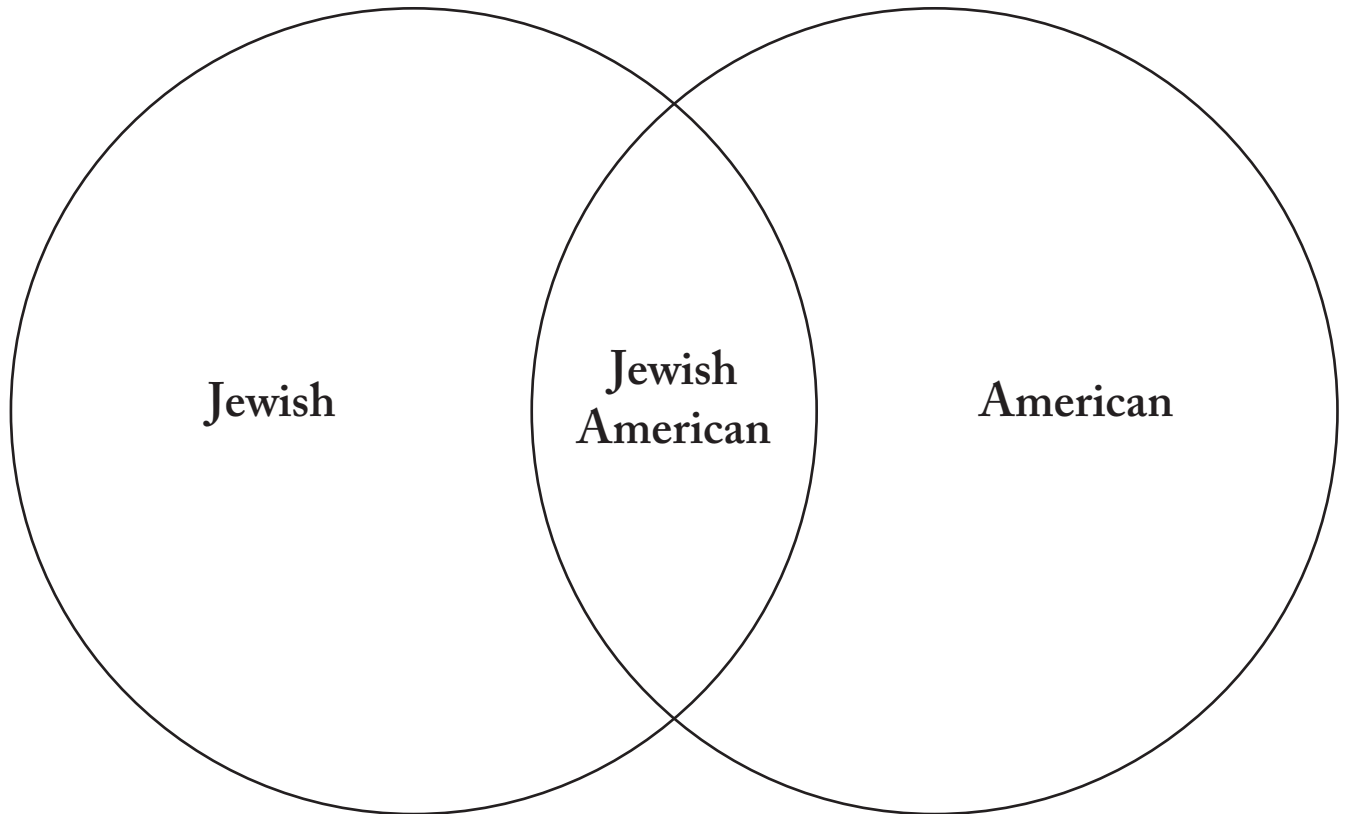
Additional Readings and Resources

Ginsberg, Benjamin. *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State*. University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America: A History*. Basic Books, 1981, 69-99.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES: America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

Ethnic Studies 6B: Jewish American Secularism



Ethnic Studies 6A: KWL Chart

KNOW

WONDER

LEARNED

<p><i>What do we think we already know about this topic?</i></p>	<p><i>What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.</i></p>	<p><i>After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.</i></p>